



Brotherhood  
of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty

# *Given the Chance*

An evaluation of an employment and education  
pathways program for refugees

Kemran Mestan

March 2008

Brotherhood of St Laurence  
67 Brunswick Street  
Fitzroy Vic. 3065  
ABN 24 603 467 024

Ph: (03) 9483 1183

Website: [www.bsl.org.au](http://www.bsl.org.au)

ISBN 978 1 876250 86 7

© Brotherhood of St Laurence 2008

Apart from fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism, or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission. Enquiries should be addressed to the publisher.

# Contents

Summary	v
1 Introduction	1
2 Methodology	2
3 Literature review	4
4 Demographics	14
5 Becoming engaged in the program	16
6 Mentoring	19
7 Employment training	28
8 Work placements	30
9 Participants' general assessment of Given the Chance	33
10 Employment and education outcomes	35
11 Community strengthening	39
12 Recommendations	44
13 Conclusion	46
References	47
Appendix A Program summary	50
Appendix B Examples of refugee employment assistance	51

## Acknowledgments

Firstly, acknowledgment needs to be given to the Department of Planning and Community Development (formerly known as the Department for Victorian Communities), which showed commitment and foresight in funding the Brotherhood of St Laurence's Given the Chance program and the accompanying evaluation through the Victorian Government's Community Support Fund. The Invergowrie Foundation also generously funded the program.

Over the past three years, numerous people contributed to the report's completion. Martina Boese, initially the primary researcher, made essential input, together with Ainslie Hannan who designed the Given the Chance program. Michael Horn, who became the project manager in 2007, gave vital guidance and support. Deborah Patterson edited the report.

The author is indebted to the Given the Chance team at the Brotherhood's Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC) (Jill Carr, Pretam Kaur, Kay Davis and Jo Tabit) who were of much assistance to the demands of a program evaluation. Other staff members at the EMC (Diana Renner and Sevi Vassos) also helped with information for the drafting stage of the report. Volunteers at the EMC and in the Research and Policy Centre (Susan Porter, Jenny Green, Leah Eisen and Mathew Ferrari) also capably handled various tasks related to the evaluation. The significant work on the literature review of Aicha Fadel, a student who completed a placement at the Brotherhood, must be acknowledged.

A sincere thank you is extended to the mentors and employers who made themselves available for the evaluation. Finally, this report was only made possible by the many refugees who willingly participated in the evaluation, giving this author, and hopefully many readers, more insight into the hardships they face and the strength they show in overcoming obstacles.

## Abbreviations

BSL	Brotherhood of St Laurence
CALD	culturally and linguistically diverse
EMC	Ecumenical Migration Centre of the Brotherhood of St Laurence
GtC	Given the Chance
NGO	non-government organisation
RCO	refugee community organisation
TPV	temporary protection visa

## Summary

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of the Given the Chance (GtC) program, an employment and education pathways program for refugees piloted and developed by the Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC) of the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL). The evaluation was undertaken by BSL Research and Policy Centre staff from January 2005 until December 2007.

GtC develops social, educational and employment pathways for refugees. The literature shows that refugees are a particularly marginalised group in society, who face general as well as specific barriers to employment and social inclusion. In addition to barriers that other disadvantaged groups face, such as lack of appropriate skills, refugees also need to overcome particular barriers such as coping with trauma and having limited social networks. Consistent with recent refugee arrivals in Victoria, the largest group of participants in GtC have fled war-torn Sudan, and less than half of participants have completed 12 years of schooling, although others have qualifications which are not recognised in Australia. Hence, specialised services are required that are designed to assist refugees to overcome specific barriers.

## The evaluation

The evaluation assesses the extent to which the program led to positive employment outcomes and strengthened communities. Specifically, it is guided by two questions:

- Does the GtC model lead to improved employment and settlement outcomes for refugees?
- How do these outcomes contribute to stronger communities?

There were two main data collection methods: a survey and interviews. Seventy participants were surveyed as they entered the program and then 30 people were able to be resurveyed to identify whether the program had affected their life. Twenty-four interviews with refugees, the same number with mentors and 15 interviews with employers were conducted. Interviews focused on whether participants believed the program had successful outcomes.

## Program components

From 2005 to 2007, 220 refugees enrolled in GtC, exceeding the target of 150 participants. Upon enrolment, GtC applies a case management approach, guiding refugees into the following integrated and specialised support services:

### Mentoring

There were 115 refugees who were matched with mentors from the wider community. Mentors volunteered to meet with a refugee at least fortnightly for 12 months, to provide them with personal support, often related to employment. For many refugees mentoring was the most beneficial aspect of the program: they particularly emphasised its contribution to expanding social networks.

### Employment training

Some 76 refugees attended GtC training, which focused on employment skills like job search techniques, resume writing and interview behaviour. Refugees said that their employment-related skills were enhanced, helping them overcome vocational barriers which resulted in improved employment outcomes.

### Work placements

Some 60 refugees undertook a work placement, to promote their understanding of the Australian labour market and work culture, build networks and gain experience. Furthermore, 24 work placements directly resulted in ongoing employment.

## Employment and education outcomes

The high percentage of GtC participants achieved successful employment and/or education outcomes (66%) compared well with CALD participants (not only refugees) in the Job Network receiving ‘Intensive Support customised assistance (58%)’ (DEWR 2007, p.7). The majority of refugee participants aimed to find employment, and 121 participants did so within the period of the study. This is a 55% success rate, comparing favourably with the same Job Network demographic as above, who had a 41% employment rate<sup>1</sup> (DEWR 2007, p.7). Furthermore, CALD participants as a group are much less disadvantaged than refugees in particular, as they do not necessarily face barriers such as surviving trauma that refugees face. The aim of some participants was to commence and complete education or training, either exclusively or in addition to working. GtC was able to assist refugees to achieve this, with 48 (22%) of refugees commencing study. Altogether 147 refugees commenced employment or study. Table S1 summarises key outcomes.

**Table S1 Employment and education outcomes for GtC participants 2005 to 2007**

Outcome	Number	Percentage
Found employment	121	55%
Found skilled employment	64	53%
Found unskilled employment	57	47%
Commenced study	48	22%
Found employment or commenced study	147	66%

n=220

## Community strengthening

GtC contributed to strengthening refugee and wider communities in two ways: by helping refugees become more involved in the wider community and by encouraging the wider community to be more inclusive of refugees. Mentoring, work placements, training and employment expanded social networks, and created new and constructive interactions between refugees and others. However, community strengthening is necessarily limited by GtC’s small scale. Nonetheless, by improving settlement outcomes of individuals, GtC contributes to strengthening refugee and non-refugee communities.

## Recommendations

Eight recommendations arose from the evaluation. It should be acknowledged that the implementation of some depends on the level of resources available.

### Improving project implementation:

- Enhance knowledge management through more formal record-keeping and tracking refugees after completing or withdrawing from the program.
- Better manage refugee expectations.

### Enhancing mentoring:

- Further take into account geographical considerations in matching refugees with mentors.
- Recruit an appropriate mix of mentors through proactive processes, such as direct approaches to professional and trade associations, to enable individualised matching of mentors with participants.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Job Network employment outcome is taken 3 months after participant leaves assistance, whereas the GtC figure is an immediate exit outcome.

**Further developing refugee training:**

- Consider implementing grades of training to meet needs of refugees at different base levels, such as to suit refugees with different degrees of language proficiency.
- Expanding specific skill training (like IT skills) and fully incorporating it into the program.

**Further research:**

- Identify and evaluate other Australian practice models and compare with GtC.
- Measure medium and long term employment outcomes of participants.

## **Conclusion**

The evaluation reveals that GtC improved refugee employment and settlement outcomes for most refugee participants. The program generated tangible benefits (employment and educational opportunities) as well as less tangible benefits (improved cultural understanding) to refugees and the community. Positive outcomes were achieved through case managing refugees, guiding them into a combination of closely integrated components (mentoring, training and work placements), each one essential to refugee social inclusion. For some of the most marginalised people in our community this program has been the difference between social exclusion and successful settlement.





## **I Introduction**

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of the Given the Chance program (GtC), facilitated by the Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC), which is part of the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL). The evaluation, conducted by the Research and Policy Centre at BSL, extended from January 2005 until December 2007, operating concurrently with the program that was funded by the Community Support Fund of the Department for Victorian Communities, (now called the Department of Planning and Community Development). This period of the program followed a pilot that spanned the period 2002 to 2004.

### **Brief description of Given the Chance**

GtC is a program that develops social, educational and employment pathways for refugees. Since refugees face particular social and employment barriers, such as suffering from trauma and displacement, GtC is a specially designed program. It matches participants with mentors from the business, community and government sectors, providing work experience opportunities and customised job search training adjusted to meet the needs of each participant. Refugees often require ongoing assessment and intensive support by professional staff because many are recovering from human rights abuses and decades spent in refugee camps. A multi-disciplinary team, including social workers, is involved in case management and training courses for both refugees and mentors.

### **Aims of the evaluation**

This evaluation assessed the extent to which program interventions led to positive social and employment outcomes for participants. It also investigated the program's effectiveness in promoting social inclusion and community strengthening.

Specifically, the evaluation was guided by two questions:

- Does the GtC model lead to improved employment and settlement outcomes for refugees?
- How do these outcomes contribute to stronger communities?

Some ways that these questions are addressed include:

- Evaluate employment and settlement outcomes for refugees.
- Determine whether GtC enabled improved employment and settlement outcomes.
- Identify key components of the program.
- Document the issues involved in implementation.
- Explore participants' views on the usefulness of support received.

### **Structure of the report**

After the policy context and related research are presented in the literature review, the findings of the report are largely organised according to the different components of the program; each component is described and its effectiveness assessed. Subsequently, the program's overall impact the program on participants' education and employment outcomes, as well as on community outcomes, is appraised.

## 2 Methodology

The research generated quantitative and qualitative data. Initially a literature review was undertaken, focusing on refugee settlement, employment, social inclusion and community strengthening, to present the program's context and allow the GtC model to be compared with international models.

Throughout the program, quantitative data was collected, such as the number of refugees and mentors involved in the program. Additionally, the program model and implementation was continuously documented, mostly from meetings with program staff and examination of program materials.

### Survey

A key source of information for assessing program outcomes was a purpose-designed longitudinal survey. The survey collected the following data from refugees:

- participation in the broader community
- participants' self-confidence, motivation and self-esteem
- the development of work skills
- participants' knowledge and confidence of their skills
- the development of employment and skill pathways
- barriers to employment
- connections to the world of work
- other employment and settlement outcomes.

The survey had two separate stages. Refugees were surveyed when they entered the program, and then as many participants as possible were resurveyed, generally at least 12 months after responding to the first questionnaire. On average 18 months elapsed between the first and second questionnaires.

The reason for surveying participants twice was to identify changes in their lives, and specifically whether GtC had contributed to improving their circumstances. Nonetheless, the first survey itself also provided useful information about the program cohort.

Originally it was envisaged that the survey would be a self-complete format. However, it quickly became evident that better quality responses would be obtained if respondents were assisted in filling in the survey, since some respondents were not proficient in English and were unfamiliar with written surveys.

Seventy one refugees responded to surveys as they began the program. Of those initially surveyed, 30 were able to be re-surveyed. The others could not be contacted, a common difficulty with longitudinal studies especially among relatively mobile populations. Furthermore, to ensure that surveys were filled in correctly it was deemed necessary for the refugee to do this in the presence of a program coordinator, so that the refugee could ask any questions. This further limited options to gain responses in other ways, such as through mail-outs.

### Interviews

The quantitative data was complemented by qualitative data obtained through in-depth interviews with refugee participants, mentors and employers. Twenty-four refugees and 24 mentors were interviewed, as well as 15 employers or representatives from employers in an equivalent role.

Interviews were conducted with participants who had been involved in the program over various durations. Interviews explored the extent to which taking part in GtC resulted in:

- improved understanding and tolerance of diversity
- increased community participation for refugees
- improved understanding between refugees, other community members and employers
- greater social inclusion of refugees
- improved intercultural communication
- the development of work skills
- improved vocational pathways for refugees
- additional benefits to employers, community members and refugees.

The interviews also explored participant views on strengths and weaknesses of the GtC model and possible improvements.

Refugee participants were paid \$35 for participating in interviews and \$15 for responding to each survey. Other interviewees were not paid.

## **Limitations**

As mentioned above, less than half of the initial refugee respondents were able to be resurveyed. However, program records indicate that disengagement from the program usually occurs after refugees achieve their goals. As a result, some of the program's greatest success stories were also the people that were hardest to re-survey and interview, because they were now working and too busy to be interviewed or surveyed. Hence, the findings may understate the impact of the program. An additional limitation is the inherent difficulty in measuring community strengthening outcomes, because the strength of a community is somewhat intangible. Consequently, this evaluation focused more on individuals' increased engagement in the community.

### 3 Literature review

This literature review gives an overview of:

- barriers refugees face when looking for employment and employment assistance
- approaches to overcoming barriers
- needs of refugees for employment assistance
- good practice guidelines for refugee employment assistance
- how community strengthening can promote the social inclusion of refugees.

For refugees fleeing their home countries, reaching a ‘safe haven’ is not the end to their journey. The UNHCR promotes three ‘durable solutions’ to ensure the protection of refugees: voluntary repatriation to home country, local integration in country of asylum, or resettlement in third country (UNHCR 2002). In Australia, the National Population Council (1988) defined settlement as:

The process by which an immigrant establishes economic viability and social networks following immigration in order to contribute to, and make full use of, opportunities generally available to the receiving society (cited by Department of Child Safety 2006).

Labour market participation is considered key to the successful settlement of refugees (Gartrell, Edwards & Graffam 2006; Malual 2004; Mestheneos & Ioannidi 2002; Valtonen 2004; Waxman 1998). Research points out that such participation has a positive effect on the economic and physical wellbeing of immigrants (Khoo & McDonald 2001). Being employed ‘increases both economic and social integration and, for refugees, offers the opportunity to gain self-esteem, to facilitate new social contacts and to learn or improve English language skills’ (Bloch 2004). On the other hand, Valtonen (2004) argues that ‘a lack of employment can be a major causal factor of social exclusion’.

#### Demographic of Victoria’s recent refugee population

From January 2002 to the end of 2006, 16 431 refugees arrived in Victoria. Almost 55% of these came from sub-Saharan Africa, including 40% from Sudan. While this trend has been fairly consistent over the past five years, it may not continue as refugee intake is responsive to changing refugee settlement needs and policy considerations. The second largest group of refugees came from the Middle East (30%), including 14% from Iraq, the second highest source country overall. The third, fourth and fifth countries of origin of refugees to Victoria were Afghanistan, Former Yugoslavia and Ethiopia (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2007).

There were slightly more men than women among the refugees. On average, refugees arriving in Victoria had completed slightly more than 8 years of schooling, though this varied greatly between groups. By far the most common municipality for refugee settlement was Greater Dandenong, with 4045 or 27% of refugees settling there, followed by Brimbank, Hume and Casey.

#### Labour market participation

Labour market participation is important to the successful settlement of refugees. But how are refugees faring in the Australian labour market? Firstly, research shows that refugees are more disadvantaged than other migrant groups. The *DIMIA Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia* (LSIA), which examined the settlement of two cohorts of all immigrants arriving in Australia in 1993–95 and in 1999–2000, showed that of humanitarian migrants (predominantly refugees) arriving in 1999–2000, 75% were unemployed after six months, compared with 21% of immigrants in the ‘preferential family/family stream’. Moreover, 43% of the humanitarian stream were unemployed after 18–42 months, compared with 13% of the family stream (DIMIA 2005).

Secondly, research shows that the relatively small group of refugees with employment are more likely than other workers to experience underemployment. According to Colic-Peisker & Tilbury (2006), refugees in Australia tend to be forced to accept low-status and low-paid jobs, because of labour market constraints. The underemployment of refugees is in line with LSIA data which shows that refugees are consistently the group with the lowest levels of job satisfaction and the lowest average weekly income (Richardson et al. 2004).

The reviewed literature addresses different factors affecting refugees' employment and their coping strategies to deal with barriers to labour market participation. The factors can be categorised into two groups: individual agency and structural barriers.

## **Factors affecting refugee employment**

### **Individual agency**

#### *Personal characteristics*

Individual differences within refugee groups have been noted to affect employability of refugees. Gender is one of them. Research shows that refugee women have lower levels of labour market participation than refugee men (Lamba 2003; Yost & Lucas 2002). The LSIA showed how labour market participation after 18 months of immigration in the 1999–2000 cohort was less than half for female refugees (17%) than male refugees (48%) (Richardson, Robertson & Ilsley 2001). Child-care responsibilities especially for refugee women can limit their options for education or employment, because of cost, unavailability of child-care and unwillingness to leave children with strangers (Bloch 2000 & 2004; Scull 2001). In addition, options for women may be limited by religious and socio-cultural constraints (Bloch 2000).

Age also seems to be a factor, with those aged 40 and over tending to have lower employment rates (Colic-Peisker 2003). Data from the LSIA indicated that in both cohorts employment rates tended to be higher for younger immigrants including refugees (Richardson, Robertson & Ilsley 2001). However, comparing data between cohorts, the influence of age on employability seems to diminish for immigrants, including refugees, in the cohort arriving in 1999–2000 (Richardson et al. 2004). The lower employment rates for older refugees can be due to 'ageist' discrimination in the labour market<sup>2</sup>, the greater language barrier (Colic-Peisker 2003; Richardson et al. 2004) and the unwillingness of older refugees, who tend to be 'more established in their existing careers', to re-train (Bloch 2002b, p.9).

#### *Pre-migration experience*

The difficult pre-migration experience of refugees is another factor affecting refugee employment. Research points out the psychological and/or physical trauma refugees faced in their home countries and when fleeing their home countries (Yost & Lucas 2002). This and the unprepared nature of their resettlement distinguish refugees from other migrants. In the *DIMIA Report of the review of settlement services for migrants and humanitarian entrants* (the Review) the traumatic pre-migration experience is considered the key factor for refugees' disadvantage in the resettlement process (2003). However, other literature suggests that the research by DIMIA overlooked other important factors affecting the resettlement of refugees. According to Taylor, refugees are disadvantaged through 'the decreased availability of post-arrival services' (Taylor 2004, p.23). In addition, successful settlement is influenced by the host country's attitudes towards refugees. For instance, the Review did not address the 'powerful discourses in Australia [about] ... Islam and racism that influence the communities into which people attempt to re-settle' (Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC) 2003, p.14).

---

<sup>2</sup> See paragraph below on structural constraints

### *Human capital*

Human capital is an important determinant of the employability of refugees. Among the main factors are the level of English language proficiency (Bloch 2002b; Colic-Peisker 2003), level of education (Gartrell, Edwards & Graffam 2006; Lamba 2003; Waxman 1998; Yost & Lucas 2002) and work experience in country of resettlement (Bloch 2004; Gartrell, Edwards & Graffam 2006). Research shows that English language competency is the most important form of human capital influencing the employability of refugees. The comparison of the settlement experiences of LSIA cohorts 1 and 2 showed that English language proficiency improved employment rates of immigrants (Richardson et al. 2004). A lack of English language, however, impedes 'the ability to gather information about employment opportunities and to effectively apply for, interview for, and secure one's first job' (Yost & Lucas 2002).

Moreover, 'bereft of English language skills, the clients' understanding of the system, access to services as well as employment opportunities and financial independence are thwarted' (Waxman 1998). In turn, because employment opportunities are limited, refugees are left looking for employment within their own communities or for low-skilled employment, where English language proficiency is less required and it is harder to improve their English (Bloch 2004).

Pre-migration tertiary education may have limited effects on the employability of refugees, because of structural constraints, such as difficulties in recognition of foreign diplomas (Bloch 2004). Furthermore, research shows that failure to recognise foreign diplomas may contribute to the downward mobility of refugees (Colic-Peisker 2003) and impede their integration in society (Mestheneos & Ioannidi 2002). Consequently, refugees are faced with fewer employment opportunities, and are forced into low skilled jobs. According to Ager [cited by (Colic-Peisker 2003)] and Yost and Lucas (2002), the loss of status is especially difficult for professional people who have to accept underemployment and lose their former status. On the other hand, refugees who arrive without even completing primary schooling face a formidable struggle to obtain work at all.

### **Structural barriers**

#### *Discrimination*

Among several structural factors that obstruct labour market participation, some are due to attitudes in the country of resettlement. Firstly, discrimination by employers limits employment opportunities of refugees (Bloch 2002a; Gartrell, Edwards & Graffam 2006; Lamba 2003; Valtonen 2001). Because of discrimination, 'racially and culturally visible migrants are allocated the bottom jobs, regardless of their human capital' (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2006, p.203). Furthermore, 'ageist' discrimination is more likely to affect employment opportunities of older refugees. However, Colic-Peisker and Tilbury point out that 'racism has more impact on one's labour market marginalization than sexism and ageism' (p.223).

#### *Government*

Government refugee policies can also hinder refugee labour market participation (Gartrell, Edwards & Graffam 2006). In Australia, some refugees hold categories of visa that restrict their entitlements, including the right to work, level of income support and access to other funds. Employment assistance to these groups may be limited by these conditions.

Another policy which may hinder labour market participation is resettling refugees in regional and rural areas. According to Taylor (2005) although employment is a reason for moving to regional areas, a lack of services, for example tertiary educational opportunities and English classes, tends to make resettlement and career advancement more difficult. Colic-Pesker and Tilbury (2006) argue that the government's regional resettlement policy contributes to a segmented labour market by creating a refugee employment niche in the 'secondary labour market' with low-status and underpaid jobs.

### *Labour market conditions*

The labour market conditions at the time of arrival in a country can influence access to employment (Bloch 2002b; Yost & Lucas 2002; Valtonen 1999). Valtonen found that employment rates differed between a group of Vietnamese refugees in Finland and two Vietnamese groups in Canada, in part due to labour market conditions at the time of arrival. Developing an understanding of the labour market is essential for refugees to find employment: it allows the individual 'to make a more informed decision of which occupations to pursue immediately and what training programs and careers to consider for the long term' (Yost & Lucas 2002).

The length of residency in the host country is noted to affect the employment of refugees (DIMIA 2005; Khoo & McDonald 2001). The longer refugees are in a country the more networks ties they build (Lamba 2003), the greater their language skills (Bloch 2004) and the greater their understanding of the available assistance services and the labour market in the country of resettlement (Bloch 2004; Richardson et al. 2004).

## **Approaches to overcoming barriers**

### **Approaching assistance services**

Non-government organisations are among the first sources of aid refugees turn to (Lamba 2003). Godin and Renaud (2002) show how non-government organisations (NGOs) providing employment assistance for refugees in Canada have a positive impact: 'NGOs not only enable social integration, they also facilitate the search for information which tends to ease that process' (p119). Such services are contributing to settlement through the integration of refugees in a social network which allows them to build bridging social capital and develop 'weak' ties with mainstream society. They are also providing training which improves refugees' understanding of the labour market and job application and interview skills (Lamba 2003).

The value of accessing assistance services is also shown by Yost and Lucas, who found that Soviet immigrants and refugees to the USA not accessing employment assistance were more likely to be left unemployed a year and over (Yost & Lucas 2002). However, the lack of information concerning refugee assistance services available from mainstream services providers in Australia is one of the problems that impede refugees' access to assistance (Kyle 2004). This may lead to confusion among refugees about the assistance programs that are available and their rights to access them. As noted earlier, limited English language skills may lead to difficulties in accessing assistance services. The limited access of interpreters when refugees need this form of assistance (DIMIA 2003) is an additional barrier (Waxman 1998).

In addition, mainstream refugee settlement services can often overlook refugees' specific needs (Colic-Peisker 2003; Waxman 1998). Waxman argues that 'many refugees have needs distinct from those of other immigrants and other Australians, which must be the focus of appropriate service providers' (Waxman 1998, p.771). Experiences of corruption by government officials in their home countries can leave refugees suspicious and anxious when accessing government service providers (Colic-Peisker 2003; Waxman 1998). Consequently, refugees resort to informal sources by finding employment through the help of their community, family or friends.

### **Using informal support networks**

Refugees try to cope with their loss of human capital and the problems in accessing mainstream assistance services by looking for help in their own communities. They see their own community as a source for assistance and finding employment (Colic-Peisker 2003; Lamba 2003; Tomlinson & Egan 2002; Waxman 1998). Lamba's research on the impact of human capital and social capital on the employability of refugees suggests that a refugee's network ties have more effect on employment opportunities than their individual human capital. Using social capital is a strategy for survival but it is not effective for upward occupational mobility (Lamba 2003). Problem-solving strategies found in one's own family or ethnic communities can have positive employment

outcomes in the short term, but in the long term they can lead to inadequate employment and downward occupational mobility (Bloch 2002a; Colic-Peisker 2003; Tomlinson & Egan 2002).

Downward occupational mobility can be due to pressures from refugees' own communities that encourage people to find any employment, even though it is low skilled, in order to provide for their family, rather than to do further study or hold out for employment more suited to qualifications (Bloch 2002a; Colic-Peisker 2003). In addition, there can be 'an expectation that a community member will accept a prevailing community standard of employment regardless of their personal characteristics and ambitions ('What's good for us is good for you'/'What's good for them is good for me')' (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2006, p.219).

Waxman (1998) adds that this type of network support may lead to inaccurate information and prevent access to available services. This is supported by Cambridge and Williams' research on advocacy for refugees in the United Kingdom, which shows that although social networks are important they can determine 'help seeking behaviour of refugees' (2004, p.106). As a result, refugees can be left without the necessary professional and formal health and social assistance (Cambridge & Williams 2004).

According to Lamba (2003) women tend to be more disadvantaged in terms of social capital, because of ascribed roles within their communities limiting their employment options. Research in Europe shows that refugee women tend to be excluded from information networks in their own communities and this can further their perception of social exclusion (Bloch 2000). The reasons for their exclusion include religious ideology, socio-cultural norms and child-care responsibilities (Bloch 2000).

## **Learning from refugee employment assistance programs**

In this section, learnings regarding effective refugee employment assistance are presented. After general remarks on effective employment assistance to refugees, three different kinds of service delivery are examined and the three different types of services aimed at helping refugees enter the labour force are considered.

### **General learning**

Assisting refugees in finding employment involves more than service delivery. Firstly, it is important to consider the right way of portraying refugees towards employers. Refugees in general want to be viewed, not as refugees, but as 'ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances' (British Refugee Council (BRC) 2001, p.32). On the other hand, promoting refugees' potential contributions to the labour market, for example as new consumers or because of their language and cultural diversity, can be beneficial (Carr 2004; UNHCR 2002). Since no single correct way to portray refugees can be identified, 'differentiating between contexts in which it is advantageous to construct refugees as 'different' and those in which an emphasis on difference may be to their disadvantage' is required (Tomlinson & Egan 2002).

Secondly, service provision requires cross-cultural understanding and a gender-sensitive approach (Bloch 2004; UNHCR 2002). Training service providers on cultural differences and pre-migration experiences will make them sensitive to refugee needs:

It is only through educating and training all practitioners (especially coordinators most in contact with refugees) on cross-cultural and ethical issues that the clients' needs will become more visible to those who can make a difference. (Waxman 1998, p.772)

In addition, using translating and interpreting services is essential to minimise misunderstanding and ensure participation of refugees (UNHCR 2002). Also essential is the acknowledgment of culturally defined methods of finding jobs. Colic-Peisker states that 'using informal channels is a culturally defined way to find a job and other ways are often considered 'unrealistic' and 'a waste



of time' (Colic-Peisker 2003, p.15). Furthermore, 'language or skills training programmes which fail to recognise the diverse needs of women deny them access to a vital resource in the integration process' (Bloch 2000, p.180). Affordable child-care can assist women into employment or in education and training (Bloch 2004; ECRE Taskforce on Integration 1999a; UNHCR 2002)

Thirdly, 'given that some of the barriers refugees face stem from non-employment related aspects of their lives', a holistic approach is vital for service providers to assist refugees in their personal and career development (Bloch 2004, p.30). Establishing partnerships with other service providers in resettlement needs such as housing and language is an important step (Kyle et al. 2004). Service providers also need 'to recognize the diversity of skills, qualifications, literacy levels, English language skills and pre-migration employment experiences that refugees bring and provide services at different levels to reflect the diversity of need' (Bloch 2004, p.31). For instance, offering training on resume writing can be of little use when refugees have limited education and no work experience in the resettlement country (Kyle et al. 2004).

### **Who is responsible for refugee employment assistance?**

The British Refugee Council (BRC) has identified three broad types of refugee employment assistance provider: public sector providers, NGOs and then those particular NGOs that are operated by the refugee communities themselves (BRC 1999).

#### *Mainstream public sector model*

In this model, service provision is mainly organised by the government. Furthermore, there is little distinction between mainstream and refugee assistance services. According to this approach, 'the more special and separate provision is made for refugees, the more they are identified as 'different' and a 'problem': this makes it really hard for them to get jobs because it emphasises their problems rather than their assets' (BRC 1999, p.17). While employment assistance in Scandinavian countries is largely organised around this idea, France and Germany tend to have a more refugee-sensitive approach in their public employment service provision:

So as not to separate refugees completely from the mainstream of the public employment service, while respecting the difficulties that they face, this approach sees it as an appropriate model for the public employment service to have an office or branch in the refugee agencies or their hostels. (BRC 1999, p117)

The current Australian Government policies can be considered an example of this type of employment assistance, because assistance is largely given by mainstream providers. Job Network is the main federally funded service, contracting with a network of private and community organisations to help the unemployed find work (Kyle et al. 2004). Specialist employment assistance for refugees is limited. Programs include Given the Chance in Melbourne, the Migrant and Refugee Employment Program in Queensland (Kyle et al. 2004) and the Australian Refugee Association (ARA) Employment program in Adelaide (RCOA) 2006).

#### *NGO model*

While some countries take a public sector approach, others embed refugee employment assistance in the host community:

This approach sees that the best way to help refugees into jobs is by using the skills and experience of the host community. There is particular value in using those who have recent, direct experience of the labour market, rather than relying on a 'social work approach' to refugee integration. (BRC 2001, p.16)

Non-government organisations (NGOs) are effective at embedding employment assistance in the general community. In the USA, and even more so in Canada, settlement services including employment assistance are provided by non-government agencies. Research on good practice in settlement services in Canada points out that 'experience has shown that non-profit, community-

based agencies are the best equipped to meet the service needs of immigrants and refugees' (Canadian Council for Refugees 1998). According to this research, NGOs providing services to refugees and immigrants are more sensitive to refugee needs and cultural backgrounds and are more cost-effective; and the diversity of approaches between NGOs allows refugees to choose the approach that suits them best (Canadian Council for Refugees 1998; Godin & Renaud 2002).

### *Refugee community-based model*

The refugee community-based model emphasises self-help of refugee communities. In the United Kingdom, refugee community organisations (RCOs) are non-government organisations, mainly organised around ethnicity, culture or nationality, which provide services to refugees and are also managed by refugees themselves (Tomlinson & Egan 2002). The value of service provision by RCOs is that they can empower refugees, because of shared ethnic and cultural background and experiences (Tomlinson & Egan 2002). This shared identity puts refugees in a position to act as mediators between newly arrived refugees and mainstream society (BRC 2001). Furthermore, an RCO 'actively engages the refugee communities in the integration process and empowers them to take charge of their own destiny' (BRC 1999, p.10).

### *Comparing approaches*

In the first approach, mainstreaming services may lead to the social inclusion of refugees in the general community. On the other hand, this model can also overlook refugee-specific needs. Consequently, it can undermine the social inclusion of refugees, as accessing mainstream services will be difficult for them (Waxman 1998). Further, it does not take into account the barriers refugees face, such as discrimination and lack of networks with the mainstream labour market (British Refugee Council (BRC) 2001).

The second model does offer refugees a linkage with mainstream society, access to knowledge from the host community and a better understanding of the labour market (British Refugee Council (BRC) 2001). However, this model may position refugees in a passive role as receivers.

In contrast, the third model does empower refugees by giving them a voice and a direct input (British Refugee Council (BRC) 2001; Tomlinson & Egan 2002). However, research indicates that RCOs lack an extensive network with mainstream employers, so accessing the mainstream labour market becomes more difficult (Tomlinson & Egan 2002). Because RCOs lack an intermediary position between mainstream society and refugee communities and are largely organised on the basis of ethnicity, refugees and their communities may remain excluded and marginalised (Tomlinson & Egan 2002; Zetter, Griffiths & Sigona 2004).

Hence, the literature suggests each model of service delivery has strengths and weaknesses, and a combination of all three is likely to have the best results.<sup>3</sup>

## **Service types**

In national and international examples of refugee employment assistance programs three different areas of services are of particular interest: training programs, work experience programs and/or mentoring. Accompanying all three service areas should be individual case management by assessing language skills, educational and vocational background (Canadian Council for Refugees 1998; Scull 2001; UNHCR 2002). Assessment services are necessary 'to identify client need, assess current abilities, assess prior learning and education, and assist clients in establishing career goals and developing a plan to establish recognition of credentials' (Canadian Council for Refugees 1998). An important component in assisting refugees in their career goals is 'comprehensive information, advice and guidance on education, vocational training and employment opportunities' (ECRE Taskforce on Integration 1999a, p.16).

---

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B for examples of different models in various jurisdictions.

## Training programs

Training offered to refugees should focus on improving job search techniques and learning about customs in the workplace (UNHCR 2002; ECRE Taskforce on Integration 1999a). Job search programs that help refugees find employment by practising interview skills and writing resumes are helpful, because they connect with the labour market and allow 'trainers to engage with refugees as individuals with histories and not as statistics' (Tomlinson & Egan 2002, p.1033). In addition, they address cultural differences in the job search process. This is important because 'methods of job seeking can vary by country of origin and, in some instances, are culturally specific' (Bloch 2002a, p.21). Information about unions and their role and about laws protecting workers in the country of resettlement should be addressed in order to prevent the exploitation of refugees (UNHCR 2002). In general, language assistance is also required (UNHCR 2002). Bloch advocates training programs that address vocational English to improve employment opportunities for refugees (Bloch 2004). Other forms of language assistance such as interpreting services can assist employers with the initial training of refugees and can prevent miscommunication in the workplace (UNHCR 2002).

## Work experience

Even with training, refugees may stay unemployed (ECRE Taskforce on Integration 1999a; Lamba 2003). Bloch (2004) shows that training programs lead to higher employment rates for refugees when combined with work experience. A successful combination consists of experience, language training and job training options (DIMIA 2003). Providing work experience in the form of volunteering, work placements or internships is essential to improving employment opportunities (ECRE Taskforce on Integration 1999a; UNHCR 2002). Work placements offer refugees the opportunity to get acquainted with the work culture in the resettlement country, improve vocational language skills and build references for their resumes (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2003; ECRE Taskforce on Integration 1999a), as well as to 'build networks, and demonstrate their skills and experience' (UNHCR 2002, p.18). Arranging work placements with employers can be facilitated by the government through tax benefits or subsidy schemes (UNHCR 2002); in Australia, however, the lack of wage subsidies inhibits job seekers from non-English speaking backgrounds seeking work experience (Peterson, cited by Kyle et al. 2004).

There are different types of programs offering work placements. On the one hand, some provide temporary work placements with employers in the mainstream labour market. This is mainly done by setting up networks with individual employers. Approaching employers can help change misconceptions about refugees and reduce employer discrimination (ECRE Taskforce on Integration 1999a; Scull 2001).

On the other hand, some programs offer work placements by setting up self-contained cooperative companies. Community enterprises, aimed at benefiting the community rather than merely making profit, are a model that could offer work experience to refugees. An example is the Resources Training Program in Brooklyn, in the US (Bachoo 2004). The Catholic Migration Office in charge of this program has developed four independent companies<sup>4</sup> where refugees and migrants can acquire long-term paid work experience. The services and goods produced provide the trainees' wages and ensure the companies' self-reliance. The program also 'functions as a mechanism to spin off new businesses by encouraging its newly trained managers to start their own businesses' (Bachoo 2004).

Although no research was found comparing the effectiveness of the two types of work placement program, research on a skills audit of refugees in Brisbane (in order to develop an employment program) shows that the second type of employment program demands a bigger budget and the inclusion of a large group of refugees is more difficult in the early stages (Scull 2001). Furthermore, the mainstream program 'has the potential to achieve greater aims by contributing to

---

<sup>4</sup> The companies are Resources Professional Cleaning, Resources Graphic Design, Resources Culinary Arts and Resources Building Maintenance (Bachoo 2004).

the process of raising awareness of refugees and refugee issues in the work place and the community, and hence providing a sustainable long-term impact' (Scull 2001, p.57).

### **Mentoring**

Building networks with employers can be facilitated through linking refugees with mentors in their field (UNHCR 2002). In addition, mentors can offer practical support such as practising interview skills or checking applications. Carr (2004) notes that mentor programs can foster understanding and tolerance by creating bridges between mainstream society and refugee communities. However, for mentor programs to be successful 'it is important to select the 'right' mentors, and support them and their clients with training and on-going support including frequent feedback and evaluation' (BRC 1999, p.9).

### **Community strengthening**

Service providers have an important role in helping refugees in their resettlement by offering employment assistance, but their role also extends to community strengthening and through this promoting social inclusion (Urbis Keys Young 2003). This section examines how services can strengthen community and therefore socially include refugees.<sup>5</sup>

Social inclusion addresses the participation of individuals and communities in mainstream society. It involves participation in informal social networks and access to resources such as employment, housing and education (Mendes 2003). It is also based on providing access to services, in the case of refugees to settlement support services (White 2004). Service providers can promote social inclusion by incorporating refugees' networks into the resettlement process. Lamba argues that 'taking stock of the types of ties that refugees draw upon would allow service providers to integrate these sources of aid into the resettlement process and to focus on improving their effectiveness or reducing their constraining effects' (2003, p.54). These network ties can be strengthened by linking them mainstream labour market networks (Lamba 2003). According to Tomlinson and Egan (2002), service providers can act as an intermediary between refugee communities and the wider society. Consequently, refugees can develop bridging social networks with non-refugee communities.

Community strengthening and the empowerment of individuals should be mutually enhancing. Services can contribute to the empowerment of refugees by involving them in the service delivery (ECRE Taskforce on Integration 1999c). This requires services to 'foster a partnership approach with resettled refugees to ensure that they play an active role in and have a sense of ownership, [for example] of the job search process' (UNHCR 2002, p.190). Greater refugee involvement in searching for jobs 'increases refugee employment and shows refugees as role models' (ECRE Taskforce on Integration 1999b, p.31). In contrast, services which marginalise refugees and view them from a medical perspective (seeing their problems as psychopathological) can produce 'victim mentality' (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2003, p.78). Service providers that 'medicalise' refugee issues can leave refugees passive and disempowered (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2003).

Involving volunteers in mentoring programs can also strengthen community by giving individuals from different cultures and backgrounds the opportunity to meet and building 'cross-cultural understanding, knowledge and tolerance, both in the community and in workplaces' (Carr 2004, p.4). Local volunteers from the host society should be recruited 'as they can act as mediators and friends to refugees, creating and strengthening social networks between locals and refugees' (ECRE Taskforce on Integration 1999c, p.16). Strengthening social networks and empowering

---

<sup>5</sup> For more information on community strengthening, social inclusion and social capital see M Considine 2004, *Community strengthening and the role of the government*, Department for Victorian Communities, Melbourne; J Pope 2006, *Indicators of community strength; a framework and evidence*, Department of Victorian Communities, Melbourne.

refugees will enable successfully settled refugees in turn to offer newly arrived refugees support by acting as role models and becoming mentors themselves.

## **Conclusion**

International and local literature has been reviewed, but while descriptive material exists (see Appendix B), there are few published evaluations of local refugee employment assistance programs. Consequently, it is recommended that further research takes place to evaluate local practice models. However, the literature strongly suggests that refugees are a particularly marginalised group in society, who face general as well as specific barriers to employment and social inclusion. In addition to barriers that other disadvantaged groups face, such as lack of recognised skills, refugees also need to overcome particular barriers such as coping with trauma and having limited social networks. Hence, specialised services are required to assist refugees to overcome these specific barriers. These specialist services should be culturally responsive and involve case managing refugees. Furthermore, although the services may have various administrative structures (operated by government, NGOs or refugee communities), involving local communities is important to strengthening refugees' social capital. In developing refugees' social and human capital, specialised refugee services promote refugee employment and settlement outcomes.

## **4 Demographics**

The following section provides a demographic profile of GtC participants. This is important to help to assess whether it is attracting its target market. It also allows a comparison to be made between participants and the wider Victorian refugee population. Further, comparison is made between the profiles of all participants in the program with those participants surveyed for this evaluation, in order to ascertain whether the survey respondents are a representative sample.

### **Gender balance**

Among GtC participants, a higher percentage has been male (57%) than female (43%). This is despite a nearly even gender divide of refugees settling in Victoria. A possible explanation for divergence is that GtC has an employment focus and refugee women are more likely than men to focus on child-rearing. This is supported by anecdotal evidence collected by staff and mentors. For example, one mentor explained how his mentee had delayed having a baby until she arrived to the security of Australia. In contrast to the higher proportion of male participants, there are more female mentors (54%) than males (46%). This is also to be expected, as women generally figure more highly in volunteer numbers across Australia (Volunteering Australia 2007). This gender imbalance causes some problems in matching people of the same gender, which are further explored later in the report.

### **Level of education**

Participants in GtC appear to be well-educated compared with the general refugee population, with almost half of participants having completed 12 years of schooling, as opposed to about 30% in the general Victorian refugee population (DIAC settlement report March 2007). Furthermore, almost half of participants had done some further study before coming to Australia.

### **Visa status in Australia and country of origin**

More GtC participants had permanent residency (39%) than any other visa category, and 22% had become citizens. The remaining 40% of participants included those with more precarious status, e.g. a temporary protection visa or bridging visa, or did not specify. Surveyed participants' visa status patterns closely matched those for participants as a whole.

The high proportion of citizens among the participants reflects the fact that four-fifths of the participants had lived here for more than two years.

The overwhelming majority of GtC participants were refugees from Africa, Sudan being the leading country of origin, at about 30%. As presented in the literature review this reflects recent refugee migration patterns to Australia (DIAC 2007). However, Middle Eastern refugees were underrepresented in the program, even though the second largest group of refugees that have arrived in Australia are from Iraq. Significantly more refugees in the program originated from Somalia and Eritrea. This reflects refugee settlement in the City of Yarra, where GtC is based, as more Eritreans than Iraqis have settled in the area.

### **Source of income**

Almost half of the surveyed participants had been in some form of Australian employment before commencing GtC. This is consistent with participants having been in Australia for an extended period of time, whereas only five people of the 18 surveyed who had been in Australia less than 12 months had been employed. However, about 45% of survey respondents said that they had been in the job for 12 months or less, with the largest group (nearly 14%) saying that they were employed for one month or less. This is consistent with preliminary research by the BSL that indicates that job insecurity is common for those entering low-paid work (Scutella & Ellis 2007), and as outlined in the literature review, refugees often have little choice but to enter low-paid employment (Colic-

Peisker & Tilbury). The main source of income for just over half the participants was government income support, mostly in the form of the Newstart Allowance.

**Table 4.1 Participant demographics**

Category	% of all participants*	Refugees arriving in Victoria 1996–2006
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	57	51
Female	43	49
<b>Education</b>		
Completed 12 years of schooling	49	30
<b>Visa status</b>		
Australian citizen	22	n/a
Permanent resident	39	n/a
Temporary protection	7	n/a
Other (unspecified)	32	n/a
Previously employed in Australia	49	n/a
Receiving government income support	52	n/a

\* These figures are collected when participants enter the program.

## Conclusion

The demographic of GtC participants differed slightly from the overall refugee population, in terms of gender and education. Overall, the sample of people surveyed fairly closely represented the program as a whole. What is apparent from the demographic information is that in comparison to the Australian population in general, especially in regards to education and source of income, participants in the program are marginalised members of the community.

## **5 Becoming engaged in the program**

### **Refugees entering the program**

GtC is a very inclusive program; the sole entry requirement, is that refugees' English language skills are at conversational level, estimated at Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ASLPR) level 1 to 1.5 or higher. If their language skills require improvement, refugees may be matched with an English tutor before continuing with other aspects of the program.

The inclusiveness of the program is an important ethical underpinning, welcoming people who are not catered well by mainstream employment assistance. Since refugees often learn about the program through word of mouth, it is important that the program has a reputation in refugee communities as being welcoming of all.

However, this inclusiveness can also have negative aspects. A couple of mentors mentioned that their mentees were a long way from being job-ready, were not particularly committed to the program and lacked motivation. One mentor suggested that GtC resources (including mentors) could be more effective if there was a more selective entry process. Balancing success rates with focusing on highly disadvantaged people is an inherent tension of the program. To avoid 'creaming', it appears program staff prudently erred on the side of keeping the program open to highly disadvantaged people.

As recounted in interviews with both refugees and program staff, refugees usually found out about the program through informal channels, such as being told by a friend, rather than through formal channels like referrals from other agencies. This may reflect the dominance of informal networks in exchanging information in many of the refugees' countries of origin. Further reflecting the preference for informal means, refugees would drop into the EMC, rather than make a preliminary enquiry over the phone. It was important for GtC staff to be able to accommodate this. The program initially made greater use of external marketing, such as through posters at relevant agencies, such as Migration Resource centres, as well as through presentations, like at local council events. As it developed, the need for external marketing lessened because information spread through word of mouth. However, the program should continue to apply external promotion so not to neglect those refugees who do not have extensive social networks.

### **Motivations for joining the program**

#### **Refugees' motivation**

Consistent with the objectives of the program, most refugees said they became involved in the program because they were searching for employment; some refugees mentioned specific employment-related goals, such as developing a resume.

Many refugees came to GtC after some experience of the Job Network. Their intake forms suggest that a number were not satisfied with mainstream services and came to GtC for more specialised refugee assistance.

This alignment between the motivations of refugees to find employment and the objectives of the program suggests that GtC was able to represent itself accurately in refugee communities. In interviews refugees explicitly said that they had heard GtC successfully helped refugees find employment.

Four interviewed refugees reported that they were not yet ready for employment, but still wanted assistance with other endeavours, such as studying, applying for courses and making decisions



about their future career directions. These people were also welcomed by GtC, as assisting refugees into education pathways is a program objective.

Finally, for many interviewed refugees learning more about Australian culture was a secondary but still important aim. One refugee said: 'I thought it would be good to be exposed to the Aussie experience'.

### **Mentors' and employers' motivation**

For all interviewed mentors, the underlying motivation for becoming involved with GtC was a desire to help people, as one person said, 'because there was a need'. This corresponds with the top reason for volunteering by Australian volunteers in general (Volunteering Australia 2007). However, there were numerous reasons why mentors and employers chose to participate in GtC over other programs.

Some mentors and employers wanted to help refugees in particular. Many felt that refugees had been mistreated by the Australian government; thus social justice was a strong motivator.

Another common factor expressed by mentors and employers was that the program had tangible outcomes, like helping refugees gain employment. A mentor said it 'seemed like it really worked'. Some mentors specifically mentioned that, in achieving tangible outcomes, 'It was satisfying to 'use my skills and pass on my knowledge'. One mentor mentioned that she enjoyed meeting and talking to people, 'So it seemed like an ideal way to help others'.

Several interviewees had wanted to be more involved in the community for some time, but had not found the right opportunity. For some, this motivation sprang from a desire to do something that was meaningful and important, balancing their 'insular corporate careers'. Other mentors were retired or semi-retired, and thus had more time to be involved in the community. One person said that, in addition to wanting to help people, 'I was looking for activities to improve my retirement'.

In one case, a mentor did not join the program 'out of some great need to help', but he was asked to by a family member. He said if he had not been asked, he probably would not have become a mentor. However, he had then found it highly rewarding. Almost two thirds of Australians who volunteered in the last ten years did so because they were asked to or because they knew someone in the program, whereas only about 5% of volunteers are attracted through the media (Volunteering Australia 2007). Hence, it is worth considering the above mentor's story in finding ways to draw more mentors into the program.

For large employers, participating in GtC often formed part of the company's corporate social responsibility agenda. However, some employers were less altruistic: they needed employees with specific skills and EMC was able to match an appropriate refugee. One employer mentioned that they thought that refugees would be highly motivated and make good workers.

The very practical focus of the program in developing employment and educational pathways is an underlying key attraction of the program for participants, mentors and employers alike.

### **Case management**

Case management is an individualised approach that responds to the needs of vulnerable people over an extended period. Refugees' personal details were collected, their needs assessed and pathways planned. Initially case managers worked with refugees to determine which aspects of the program were most suited to them; this explains why the numbers of participants that did each component are lower than the overall number of participants. Later, more emphasis was placed on integrating all components. Consequently, refugees were matched with mentors and employers once they had undergone some training, and special induction training was developed. On completion of induction, the process of finding a suitable mentor began. Alongside the mentoring,

refugees usually attended employment training; on completing this, case managers worked with refugees to find an appropriate work placement. This was held as an ideal sequence of proceedings, but the availability of work placements, mentors and timing of training sessions meant that it could not always be adhered to. Nonetheless, as the program developed, this sequence, all of which is facilitated through case management, was observed more closely. This was due to taking in refugee participants in batches, rather than commencing the case managed process as refugees came in. It is evident from interviews that case management is a key to the GtC model.

## **Expectations about the program**

Refugees usually had fairly accurate expectations about the program. Some refugees, however, did not know what to expect, joining the program because they heard it could help in some (vague) way. Moreover, others had inaccurate expectations, such as believing they would be assured a job, rather than be offered assistance in finding employment.

Overall, mentors' expectations were accurate. However, some mentors expressed self-doubt about providing the kind of assistance that was expected from them. A couple of mentors from the program's early stages suggested that more attention should be put into managing refugees' expectations, to reduce pressure on mentors. Program staff have since remarked that this issue has been addressed through initiating refugee induction training, highlighting how the program was continually adjusted and fine-tuned.

## **Conclusion**

Attracting refugees, mentors and employers is obviously a vital element in the program; and in respect to this, informal channels of communication generally work well. The program exceeded its initial target of attracting 150 refugees (50 a year) by almost 50%. Furthermore, attracting the appropriate people who are able to benefit from or contribute to the program is also necessary. From the motivations and expectations of participants it is evident that in general GtC attracted the desired clients and partners—that is, refugees who wanted to work, mentors who wanted to help refugees, and businesses keen to employ refugees.

## 6 Mentoring

Linking refugees with mentors from the wider community is a key component of the program. From 2005 to 2007, 115 refugees were matched with mentors from the wider community. Mentors volunteered to meet with a refugee for 12 months at about fortnightly intervals, to provide them with personal support and advice in the context of finding appropriate employment. Given the nature of the program, a lot of support that mentors provided relates to employment, such as help applying for jobs. However, it was common for mentors to offer a wider range of support, though matters requiring professional counselling expertise were handled by case managers. Mentor–mentee relationships developed in their own ways: the mentoring is not rigidly structured and often the support mentors provide depends on the specific circumstances and needs of their mentee.

### Matching mentors and mentees

Refugees are matched with trained and supported voluntary mentors, primarily on the basis of synergy between the refugees' career goals and the mentors' professional expertise, but gender, age and location are all taken into account. The emphasis given to establishing appropriate matches is consistent with the learning derived from other refugee programs (BRC 1999).

Matching pairs in the same occupation (either industry-specific or skill-specific) enhances employment opportunities, as mentors are more able to give helpful advice and use their networks. Mentors generally had a qualification, usually a university degree, so there was a higher proportion of tertiary-qualified mentors than mentees. Hence, although refugees seeking high-skilled employment could usually be matched with a mentor with related qualifications, mentees that were seeking less skilled employment were sometimes matched with mentors working in high-skill areas. However, the 'over-qualification' of mentors did not prove problematic because they were still able to offer relevant advice, guidance and even networks—perhaps through relatives in suitable occupations.

Staff felt matching pairs of the same gender was advantageous because many refugees were more comfortable with a same gender mentor. Mentees often were comfortable with an older mentor because of the mentor's advisory role. Adhering to this guideline was straightforward as mentors were generally older than 40—many were retired or semi-retired—and mentees were usually younger. These norms regarding gender differences and age seniority are consistent with many of the refugees' backgrounds; moreover, these norms are often more pronounced in those cultures.

However, in the interests of promoting positive outcomes the guidelines were applied flexibly. For example, in a few cases, female mentors were matched with male mentees because they were in the same field, and there was no available male mentor in that field. All prospective mentors and mentees were informed about their potential match and provided with the opportunity to accept or reject the match prior to an initial contact. Special care was taken with pairings that do not strictly follow the guidelines. For reasons explained in the demographic section, it appears that the gender imbalance will be difficult to avoid. Nonetheless, two interviews with people from such relationships indicated this was not problematic, giving reason to believe that such matches can work, with appropriate caution.

### Establishing a good match

In interviews, both refugees and mentors affirmed that finding a good match was important to a successful relationship. A good match involved a mentor able to provide significant guidance to their mentee, and build an amicable relationship. Personal characteristics and similar professional interests contributed to a good match. Personal characteristics that seemed common to successful matches were an enthusiasm and commitment from both parties, an eagerness to learn on the part of the mentee and diligence by the mentor.

Nonetheless, numerous mentors commented that ‘it didn’t matter so much’ that their mentee had a different, because much knowledge ‘crosses professions’. Mentors who were not matched with a refugee in the same field accepted that an ideal match cannot be found in every instance.

Stemming from this acceptance no mentor wanted to have more influence in the matching process; rather they trusted that staff in the GtC team were best placed to judge suitable matches. One mentor noted that mentors and mentees could relate to each other as equals if the mentor was not put in the privileged position of choosing their mentee.

Most of the interviewed refugees and mentors felt that their match worked well. Furthermore, in the small number of cases where the relationship did not prosper, such as if they only met a few times, it was generally attributed external causes such as the refugee beginning study or the mentor going overseas. In 2007, for which the most accurate records exist, 30 out of 35 matches endured for the minimum 12 months and were deemed successful by program staff based on their consultation with the matched participants. Hence, it appears that the guidelines used by GtC are working effectively in producing suitable relationships.

### **Duration of mentor–mentee relationships and length of meetings**

Mentor–mentee relationships were diverse. Some pairs met weekly for an hour, and continued in regular contact even after the 12 months suggested by the program staff. Other pairs met frequently in the beginning, but once the refugee felt they had received sufficient support, such as if they found a job, met less often. If the refugee moved into full-time employment or study, then typically meetings became less frequent, partly because the refugee had less time, but also because the aims of the mentoring had largely been achieved.

In most interviews refugees reported that mentors made it clear to them that they were welcome to reinitiate contact with their mentor later. Refugees and mentors almost always reported leaving each other on good terms, although, there was not usually a clear point where they agreed to stop meeting, but rather the relationship petered out. Some mentees reinitiated contact, usually due to their circumstances changing, necessitating further support. This highlights the flexible nature of mentoring support.

### **Participation of mentors**

It is difficult to gauge how long mentors typically remain involved. This is because although many mentors continue close contact with their mentees after 12 months, others may not be in frequent contact, yet still make themselves available for their mentee if required. Mentors are also welcome to contact GtC for any support long after the initial 12 months.

Some mentors stayed in close contact with GtC even after 12 months. Fifteen mentors had taken on more than one mentee, usually consecutively, though some simultaneously mentored several refugees. Mentors with multiple simultaneous mentees had specialised knowledge, such as in IT or applying for medical registration. This aspect of the program was not originally envisaged, but has developed to maximise positive refugee outcomes.

### **Tutoring**

In instances where refugees were not job-ready, they were often assigned a tutor rather than a mentor. Some 14 participants received tutoring. The support tutors provided was much more specialised, often focusing on further developing English language skills. In addition, some refugees greatly benefited from assistance with their secondary or tertiary studies. Hence, tutors were generally used when refugees needed specific personal development before they could begin seeking employment. However, some refugees were assigned a mentor as well as a tutor. Tutors were not intended to be an ongoing support, but helped with specific support needs.

## **General appraisal of mentoring**

The mentors overwhelmingly felt that their expectations about their personal goals were fulfilled by the program. Mentors were generally glad to take part in the program and they found participating in it very rewarding. Numerous ways that they benefited were specified.

Mentors regularly commented that they gained insight into the adverse circumstances of refugees' lives, which increased their admiration for refugees. Most of the refugees were equally admiring of mentors, describing them as 'very good', 'very nice', 'very helpful' and 'very friendly'. One refugee said: 'I don't know about other people, but for me it was pretty much perfect, it worked really well for me'.

A common theme was that being a mentor made them realise how lucky they were and made them more appreciative of their own lives. Mentors could see that someone else's life was much harder than their own. One said it was:

... very grounding when I got lost in the chaos of everything else, to be put back in perspective sometimes and share the life experiences of someone else.

Many mentors and mentees formed strong relationships that lasted after the formal mentoring period had finished. One mentor said:

I was amazed how well I connected with both of these women, we formed strong relationships very quickly and I'm still friends with one of them. I think maybe it was blown up a bit in the induction session how big the cultural differences were.

Through helping refugees, mentors often further developed personal skills and qualities of their own. A few mentors commented that they learned to communicate in simple and clear terms, without being patronising. They also learned how to be flexible, to adjust their assistance to the needs of their mentee. Another frequent remark was that mentors were surprised how much they were able to help: realising they had a lot to contribute lifted their own self-esteem. As one mentor said about the many things he learned from being a mentor: 'It furthered my education in being a human-being'.

The key theme was that being a mentor was a way to help another person that was very personally fulfilling, rather than a sacrifice. For many refugee participants too, mentoring was the most important and beneficial part of the program.

## **Areas of support**

The most common types of support mentioned by mentors and mentees were emotional support, practical support, cultural understanding, education and employment.

### **Emotional support**

Numerous refugees suffered from mental illness often induced from experiencing trauma, torture or displacement. As a consequence, mentors found that one of the most important aspects of their role was to provide emotional support—to be someone refugees could tell their problems, but also to provide hope. Most mentors were able to negotiate the tension between not being a trained counsellor, and still being supportive. Where necessary, issues requiring professional counselling were handled by case managers. Nonetheless, some mentors gave mentees a great deal of emotional support. In an exceptional case one mentor said that he and his wife had become 'second parents' to a refugee; he did not foresee this but was comfortable with it.

Both mentees and mentors said that providing encouragement to refugees was an important contribution of mentors. A key outcome for many of the refugees was enhanced confidence, especially in interacting with non-refugees. A refugee said:

We need encouragement and I got it through Given the Chance. Through my mentor I got plenty of that. Just encouragement. Just that someone to believe in you, because I had a lack of confidence speaking with people.

Building confidence could have a big impact because as a mentor said, often refugees have 'amazing skills' that they have not been encouraged to display, but once they receive encouragement they are capable of accomplishing their goals

### **Practical support**

Some relationships had a lot of emphasis on practical support, that is, assistance with specific tasks and generally navigating Australian society. A number of refugees appreciated having someone whom they could ask about daily hurdles, such as dealing with forms, Centrelink, accommodation and banking. One mentor said it was about giving refugees the tools and knowledge so that they could help themselves. The following comment by a mentor is worth quoting in full:

We are just establishing the home and how to use a washing machine and what things not to put in it, because he wanted to put his good suit in the washing machine. I said to him, 'No, you take it to the dry cleaners' and he didn't know what a dry cleaner was. I explained it and he said, 'Oh I have seen them'. He picks things up very quickly once he knows. But that's all brand new to them. So it is just really conversational stuff. It's not a planned thing, it's just sort of as we go along.

### **Cultural understanding**

Refugees commented that their understanding of Australian people and society was enhanced. For many refugees the mentor provided the only opportunity to gain this because they had few personal relationships with non-refugees. Refugees and mentors commented that refugees appreciated having an opportunity to do things that many other Australians commonly do, such as visiting a café. One refugee said that, through his mentor, 'I understand more how Australians ... understand their culture'.

On developing a trusting and sympathetic relationship with their mentor, it became easier for refugees to do likewise with other community members. One refugee said that her mentor gave her the 'confidence to make friends with Australians ... it became easy'. This sentiment was echoed by numerous refugees. Another said: 'It was hard to make a relationship between me and Australians. But after coming to GtC, it's easy to make everyone my friend'.

At the same time, mentors' understanding of other cultures deepened. One mentor remarked:

I have an appreciation that people do things in a different way; although you see it on television, you don't really apprehend it [sic] until you get to know another person and understand why they do things differently.

A second mentor's comments are highly representative in saying that like most people she usually only formed relationships with people with a 'similar background, culture and value set', and she found it very rewarding, although at first difficult, to form a relationship with someone 'quite different'. This mutual increase in cultural understanding is a key element in creating more harmonious and stronger communities, which is addressed in more detail further in the report.

### **Education**

There were two main ways that mentors helped refugees with education: one was finding and enrolling in courses (discussed in section 10); the second was assisting with their studies.

Mentors were often able to assist with assignments, for example by helping edit essays to improve their written expression. The amount of time mentors made available for refugees differed; however during critical stages of study several mentors and mentees reported meeting a few hours

a week. One refugee, who was meeting his mentor for two to three hours every week during the university semester, said ‘I really needed it’ mainly to ‘get that garbage out of my head that I couldn’t do it’.

## **Employment**

Based on the needs of refugees, some mentor–mentee relationships almost exclusively focused on employment issues. This often involved help with job searching, preparing applications and mentors making contact with employers on their mentee’s behalf.

Some refugees reported that although it could not be expected that the mentor would directly provide employment, if refugees exerted some effort then great benefits came from being mentored, including employment outcomes. Refugees would usually ‘get back what they put in’ as they were required to be actively engaged in exploring vocational pathways, and their mentor would help them.

Nevertheless, in a number of cases refugees gained employment directly through their mentor. For example, one mentor was chair of the board of a company and was able to use his influence to help his mentee gain a position.

Another way mentors helped refugees with employment was providing an opportunity for refugees to practise numerous work-related skills that they learnt in GtC workshops, such as how to communicate on the phone and behave in interviews. Some mentors set up mock interviews with a colleague, so their mentee could practise for an impending real interview. Furthermore, mentors commonly acted as referees for their mentees.

When mentees wanted to work in a similar field, the mentor was often able to pass on knowledge about their industry. For example, one mentee said that his mentor told him about a very useful industry website.

In addition to refugees who found employment directly through their mentor, many others that found employment had assistance from their mentors in other ways. Hence, mentoring was essential to the program’s employment outcomes.

## **Other ways refugees were helped by mentors**

Many mentors focused on assisting their mentee re-evaluate their options through ‘explaining the situation in Australia’, so they could make more informed life decisions. Numerous mentors quickly realised that their mentees needed help clarifying their goals. A mentor recounted that her role largely became helping her mentee form realistic expectations. She said that this was quite difficult, because she had to tell him he was unlikely to find employment in his field of interest, as he was underqualified. Another refugee said his mentor acted as a sounding board about what he wanted to do in Australia.

## **Challenges of mentoring**

Although mentors and refugees were generally positive about the program, participants inevitably encountered some problems, most related to obstacles in developing an effective relationship. In some instances these obstacles were based on the behaviour of mentees or mentors; in other cases they were external.

## **Time constraints**

The most common problem mentors mentioned related to time. For some mentors who worked full-time, finding the time to regularly dedicate to their mentee was one of the hardest aspects of participating in the program. Also, some mentors who lived far away from their mentees acknowledged that it prevented frequent meetings.

Many refugees came from cultures with a different, less precise, understanding of time. Consequently some initial time issues needed working through: for example, mentors would often arrange to meet mentees during their lunch break, so when refugees were late, meetings were shortened. GtC staff foreshadowed these time issues in mentor induction sessions and advised the appropriate way to respond. Also, the importance of punctuality in Australian culture was stressed to refugees. It appears that rather than the program having to adjust, the very process of mentoring helped refugees change their attitude to time. Mentor interviews indicated that such time issues were usually resolved early in the mentor–mentee relationship.

### **Cultural understanding**

Other cultural differences could be challenging too. For example, a mentor found his mentee was excessively polite: the mentee never said no. The mentor commented: ‘To Australians this could be read as insincerity’. In this instance the mentor discussed the issue with his mentee. The mentor said this had no long term effect on their relationship, as the mentee was now more assertive and the mentor more understanding. Since the multitude of cultural differences cannot be covered in the mentor induction sessions, it seems the program staff have adopted the approach of generally informing mentors that there will be cultural differences, providing a few examples, and then being available for further assistance and advice.

### **Mental health and participation issues**

A further challenge for some mentors was that mentoring could be very emotionally demanding. Mentors said that it could be hard to regularly listen to another person’s problems. This applied especially to the traumas that refugees have gone through, but also to their continuing hardships in Australia. This difficulty inevitably arises due to the nature of the program, and it is managed through the training and support provided to mentors

A small number of mentors and mentees mentioned that they were matched with partners that were not fully committed to the program. From mentors’ comments it can be deduced that some refugees were confused about their goals, disheartened and therefore lacked motivation. The motivation of some refugees would ebb and flow, often depending on what else was happening in their lives. Although some mentors could help refugees work past these states, in a few cases the lack of enthusiasm prevented regular meetings occurring. The mentor induction session adapted to this challenge by warning mentors of the possible lack of enthusiasm and advising them not to give up on the relationship, but instead to communicate their feelings and clarify their expectations to their mentee.

On the other hand there were a few instances where interviewed refugees reported that they only met with their mentor a few times, due to the mentor’s conduct. One refugee reported ringing their mentor and not having their calls returned, concluding that the mentor was too busy to be a mentor. This problem could have been rectified through more regular contact from program staff, who then could have matched the mentee with a new mentor.

In overcoming such challenges, mentors’ responses about what they would do differently were revealing. Chiefly, mentors strongly felt that they should assume greater responsibility for the relationship, rather than expect mentees to be consistently as enthusiastic themselves. This applied particularly to organising meetings.

The above challenges cannot be completely avoided. However, the negative impacts can be minimised, by preparing mentors as much as possible before difficulties arise, advising them how to proceed, and providing responsive support. These elements are largely already in place; they merely need to be recognised as key components of implementing an effective mentoring program and continually refined.



## **Supporting mentors**

Before commencing the program, mentors attended a two-part induction workshop. Five of these workshops were held, spread over the duration of the program, on weekday evenings. In these sessions mentors learnt about what they could expect. Talks were given by experienced mentors and mentees, and written material was distributed. Mentors were also given practical advice about how to be supportive, how to build trust, and how to ask questions whilst respecting cultural differences. For example, a couple of mentors remarked that they found it very helpful to know whether they should ask questions about traumatic events.

### **Mentor induction**

Mentors were given printed and verbal information about the cultures where many of the refugee participants originated, and advised on appropriate conduct. For example, various cultures have different norms concerning physical closeness during conversation. In interviews most mentors felt that they were given adequate information and advice about cultural differences. Mentors were also advised how to locate further information to assist them as mentors. Those who joined the program between induction sessions were inducted personally by the mentor coordinator. All interviewed mentors said that the induction was useful, including the written material, and almost none identified any failing of the induction.

### **Network meetings and skills workshops**

In addition to the induction sessions, 12 mentor network meetings and skills workshops were held. These meetings were intended to contribute to the ongoing support of mentors in several ways. Firstly, the meetings aimed to foster a sense of community, so that mentors felt part of something bigger. In demonstration of this, mentors reported they enjoyed meeting like-minded people.

Secondly, the meetings provided an additional avenue for mentors to gain ongoing advice from program staff. Thirdly, the meetings encouraged mentors' networking, so that mentors could provide support for each other and trade stories about mentoring. One mentor said: 'I found it useful; it was good to speak to other mentors who were experiencing similar frustrations'.

Finally, the skills workshops also endeavoured to develop practical skills. One mentor said she found the workshop on interview skills particularly useful, because it enabled her to pass on information to her mentee. Only a minority of mentors attended the network meetings and skills workshops, mainly due to a lack of time, although many mentors regretted not taking part. The mentors that did attend found the sessions rewarding.

### **Assessing the support provided to mentors**

There were mixed reports from mentors about the personal support they received from program staff. A common view articulated by one mentor was that by 'the nature of the assistance we need, it has to be ad hoc'. Once mentors had been warned about likely problems, the best support was to be available to be contacted if problems arose. Although there were monitoring procedures in place, some mentors mentioned that staff from GtC made plenty of contact with them, whilst other reported less contact. A couple of mentors said that they felt a little disengaged, that they were largely left to their own devices. And although there were network meetings, these were not always at convenient times.

Admittedly, some mentors could be difficult to contact. One mentor said that staff were always generous with their time when asked for it, but because it was obvious that they were very busy he was reluctant to ask. He added: 'The program seems to be operating on a shoestring and this is unfortunate'.

## **Conclusion**

Mentoring constitutes a large part of GtC; clearly for many refugees mentoring is the most beneficial aspect of the program. Although different relationships had varying success, refugees overwhelmingly reported mentoring having a positive impact on their lives, improving their settlement outcomes, and as will be presented further in the report, employment outcomes. Mentoring was effective in several ways, but expanding refugees' social networks was especially key to overcoming social and employment barriers. Successful mentoring requires special attention to ensuring that mentees and mentors are appropriately matched, and the current procedures of GtC were shown to work effectively.

However, some inherent challenges of mentoring can be mitigated through anticipatory mentor training. Mentors were generally complimentary about the standard of support they received, although ideally some mentors would like closer attention. Despite the great benefits of mentoring, it should be emphasised that it is just one aspect of GtC, and that successful outcomes are best promoted when the mentoring works in conjunction with the other components of the program.

### **Case study 1: A mentor–mentee relationship**

Fatima<sup>6</sup> arrived in Australia from the Middle East about a decade ago. She was a physician in her homeland, but had great difficulty getting her qualifications recognised in Australia: she was unsure what the exams would be like, so she made a lot of mistakes in her preparations. She heard about GtC approximately halfway through the certification requirements, and thought that it was just what she needed: ‘Each step of these exams I needed a lot of ... support and mental tutoring’.

Fatima was matched with Jane<sup>7</sup> in 2005. Jane had already acted as a mentor for a number of refugees and saw her main task as to help refugees ‘get ... into paid employment as close as possible to the skills that they came to the country with’. However, she adjusted her support to the particular needs of each mentee.

In Fatima’s case, the first goal was to gain her Australian medical licence. Since Jane was on the medical practitioners’ board, she was able to offer much assistance to Fatima in navigating what Jane called the ‘maze which is the medical system’. She set up a mock exam which proved crucial in helping Fatima passing her exams.

Fatima and Jane’s relationship has focused mostly on issues related to career. This was largely why Fatima wanted a mentor:

*Just with looking for a job or how to make my resume or sometimes with preparation for an interview, she advises me how to speak to the employer ... the cover letter for my resume ... and just all the things I’m calling her about. And slowly, I’m gaining confidence that I can do this myself and I’m learning and gaining confidence to become independent.*

The frequency of contact was not rigidly structured, but responded to Fatima’s needs. Sometimes weeks could go by with little contact; at other times, such as when applying for employment, they would speak on the phone every day.

*This is ... a very good thing about mentoring because ... if you’re busy ... nothing needs to happen. But if you have some problem, then very often, she is there. This was something ... new to me. When I was studying ... she was not involved much ... but when I’m complaining to her about looking for a job or I have this or that problem, we speak maybe twice or three times a day, on the phone and if we need to, we meet each other ... I had no idea ... that during weekends or holidays, I can have someone I can contact, with [Jane], I can call her all the time. This is a big advantage of having a mentor.*

Jane was able to help Fatima with finding employment, as Fatima recounts:

*After ... I passed my exam, she encouraged me a lot and she helped me with applications and the Australian system and speaking with people, she helped me a lot.*

With Jane’s assistance, Fatima gained a three-month contract position in a hospital. Subsequently she applied for other jobs and obtained ongoing employment as a doctor.

Jane and Fatima’s relationship has extended beyond the suggested minimum 12 months. They speak on the telephone regularly, and Fatima visits Jane’s home. Jane said: ‘I’m still in contact and I imagine I always will be, it’s like a lifetime friendship’, and Fatima says of Jane, ‘She’s very kind and very keen to help me, so I believe in her and that’s why I discuss my problems with her’.

<sup>6</sup> Not her real name.

<sup>7</sup> Not her real name.

## 7 Employment training

Training in GtC was employment-focused. Early in the course participants were introduced to the Australian employment context. The facilitator then worked with participants to set specific goals, and to develop a 'personal pathway map' planning how to accomplish their goals. The course covered various themes relating to developing specific employment skills. This focus on practical skills such as job searching, interview skills and resume writing is consistent with advice by the UNHCR taskforce (UNHCR 2002). The training also aimed to further refugees' general understanding of Australian workplace culture, as well as covering areas such as occupational health and safety.

Refugees stressed the importance of learning how to source job opportunities, particularly through cold canvassing, which they found more effective than other job search techniques such as using the internet, suggested by Job Network agencies. As one refugee said:

... because they told us about cold canvassing, you know. That is to go to the offices and then you ask if there is any job. All these techniques enabled me to get a job.

The training also aims to help refugees develop life skills for community and employment participation. For example, some refugees may need to develop their self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation and leadership.

GtC staff argued that a beneficial aspect of the workshops was that through group learning refugees could also learn from each other, sharing knowledge, expanding their networks and improving communication skills. This was supported by refugees, who particularly liked the social aspect; a few commented that it gave them a reason to leave the house and speak in English.

Relevant cultural differences, such as regarding communicating with colleagues in the workplace and interview behaviour, were elucidated. The following refugee quote is representative:

This course ... is very important because the techniques which are taught here are very helpful ... When one of us or anybody who attended this course can put them into practice, it is possible that one can get a job.

Refugees' comments about the training were generally very positive. One refugee's comment is particularly illuminating: after beginning GtC she also enrolled in a course at a TAFE with similar aims to the GtC training, but she left and returned to GtC because she felt it was superior. She believed it was more helpful to her because it was 'less formal' and the staff 'really cared', which was reiterated by numerous other refugees.

### Structure of training

The structure of the training has developed over the duration of the program. The training was initially offered as a full-time course, four days a week over six weeks. This proved to be best suited to refugees who did not have child-minding responsibilities, usually men. In mid 2006 it was reduced to a two-day a week, part-time course. This was done to increase attendance as many refugees found it difficult to attend four days a week, since they could not afford child-care. As Table 7.1 shows, there was a very high completion rate of people attending the part-time and full-time courses. However, many people did not embark on the full-time or part-time course, either because initially there was less emphasis on ensuring that participants did every component or because some job-ready participants were quickly matched with employers without extra training.

As for the small number of people who did not complete the course, GtC staff reported that this was for personal reasons. For example, one refugee was suffering from the trauma of having been

tortured and had difficulty speaking in front of a group. Another refugee realised the course was not suited to his needs, as he wanted information on starting a business.

In addition to the extended courses, GtC also organised 'mini-courses' to help refugees prepare for specific jobs with large companies that partnered with GtC to offer a number of jobs. These mini-courses, focusing largely on interview skills, highlight the flexible nature of the program in responding to and developing refugee employment opportunities. As Table 7.1, all those who took part in the mini- courses completed, largely because the courses were run over a single day.

Further to the above training, 63 people received single session one on one training to help them prepare for a specific job. This was usually a job that GtC had a role in sourcing. As is to be expected from short training sessions all people completed them.

**Table 7.1 Course completion, GtC participants 2005 to 2007**

Course type	Number of courses	Number of participants	Number completing course	Course completion rate %
Full-time	2	30	29	97%
Part-time	3	46	42	91%
Mini	39	102	102	100%

## Factors to consider in improving the training

Four factors relating to how the training could be improved were articulated in refugee interviews.

Two refugees commented that a drawback of the course was that there was only one level, so that all refugees were treated similarly, regardless of how long they had been in Australia. The people who made these comments had been in Australia for a number of years and felt some of the teaching was very basic. Since the program is open to participants regardless of the time since their arrival, there may be value in offering training at different levels.

Three interviewed refugees were not fully aware of the workshops—that is, they were not aware of exactly what could be learned from the courses or when they would be run—and some refugees said they had not even heard of them. This suggests that refugees need to be regularly reminded about the training possibilities. Workshops were not more widely advertised because they were very quickly filled, often by people on waiting lists. Program staff reported that if more resources were forthcoming for more workshops, then multiple channels of communication would be used to inform and attract participants.

Two refugees suggested that it would be beneficial to run workshops on generic office skills, such as using a fax, e-mail, computer and a photocopier. Some later participants were given the opportunity to develop these skills through a partnership with the Brotherhood of St Laurence's Group Training Organisation.

One refugee thought the course could be improved if it encouraged more speaking by the participants, rather than listening to someone else. He thought that this was especially important because in interviews and the workplace, refugees would be required to communicate.

## Conclusion

In general refugees spoke positively about the GtC training. They felt that their employment-related skills were enhanced, helping them overcome barriers such as lack of knowledge of cultural norms and therefore resulting in improved employment outcomes. There is no single element in the training that stands out; rather it has been an effective model to teach refugees a combination of skills and explore specific topics. The initial limitation that the training was not sufficiently accessible this was addressed by developing a part-time course, which proved successful in engaging more refugees.

## 8 Work placements

The main aim of work placements is to give refugees experience in the Australian workplace. In addition to refugees learning relevant skills and developing cultural understanding, work placements can be used to strengthen their resumes and gain a reference from an Australian employer. A secondary aim is that work placements could ideally lead directly to employment in the same organisation. Employers usually participated for altruistic reasons, but they often benefited from refugee contributions.

Initially the work placement was referred to as 'work experience', but this was commonly associated with secondary school programs that only operate for a week, and are not geared toward generating employment outcomes. Therefore, the term 'work placement' was substituted and has proven a more appropriate name.

It is generally expected that employers commit to a four week work placement. However, the actual length varies depending on needs of refugees and employers' availability. For example, one employer took a refugee on for three days a week for six weeks, to suit the available space and supervision.

GtC staff negotiate with employers to maximise their clients' learning experience. In some work placements participants receive a small payment, in others they are reimbursed for their travel expenses and occasionally they receive a wage. GtC staff monitor work placements through phone calls, site visits and discussion with participants to ensure that refugees are benefiting from them.

### Employer involvement

From 2005 to 2007, 84 employers were involved with GtC in some way, mostly through offering work placements, but also through offering employment. There was a wide spread of employers involved in GtC, drawn from the public, private and not-for-profit sectors and ranging from major corporations to small family businesses. Represented industries included retail, health, finance, education, manufacturing and the community sector. A couple of the larger employers have taken on a number of participants in periodic 'intake groups', while some other employers mentioned in interviews that they are also seriously considering taking on more participants. Many employers became involved in GtC through a mentor; mentors were either in a position to directly place people or they were able to convince their workplace or personal contact to become involved in the program. Some employers responded to presentations by GtC staff at business events.

In approaching employers, GtC staff do not conceal that their clients are refugees. Rather, following best practice, staff highlight that refugees have been through extraordinary circumstances, and then present the positive traits associated with these circumstances (BRC 2001). For example, in overcoming hardship, refugees are likely to have developed resilience; furthermore, due to the multiple vocational barriers refugees face, on gaining an opportunity to work they are likely to be highly motivated and dedicated.

### Outcomes for refugees

#### Completion rates of work placements

Work placements had a very high completion rate, with only two people from 60 not completing. The number of people obtaining work placements is limited by the ability to find employers willing to offer them; also some participants gained employment before they commenced a work placement. As the program developed it became easier to find work placements because the growing network of mentors and employers could be used to locate suitable work placements.

One of the two instances of non-completion was due to a refugee's personal emergency. In the second instance the employer believed the refugee was unreliable; this case is discussed below. The very high rate of completion of work placements demonstrates a high degree of satisfaction with the placements from both refugees and employers.

### **Refugee development of knowledge and skills**

Refugees reported that work placements were very helpful in developing their knowledge and skills. As one commented: 'The one month I spent there, I really did learn fast'. The work placements often reinforced and deepened learning from training, especially regarding Australian workplace culture. For example, one refugee saw that in Australia it was important to communicate and be friendly to colleagues, whereas in his country of origin the rule was 'Everyone mind your own business'. This supports findings in the literature review, which suggested that for work placements to be most fruitful they need to operate in coalition with other support services, such as training (Bloch 2004, p.20).

### **Gaining employment through work placements**

There was also considerable success in achieving the secondary aim of work placements, as 24 refugees gained employment at the organisation where they did their placement, and some others obtained jobs through contacts they made during their work placement. Seventeen people who completed a work placement went on to find employment elsewhere. The role of the work placement in these last outcomes was not precisely identified, but from some interviews it is clear that many of these refugees found the work placement very useful.

For other participants, the work placement did not translate into ongoing employment simply because the employer had no vacancies. However, in two cases, refugees were informed that they would be contacted if a position became available.

Two employers that offered a work placement and had an available ongoing position, but did not offer it to the refugee, explained that this was because the position did not suit the refugee's experience and expectations.

### **Employers' perspectives**

Assertions by program staff that refugees are often exceptionally motivated were endorsed by employers, many of whom were very impressed with the enthusiasm of the refugees. Employers said refugees showed great commitment to do a good job. In addition, some employers said that they were actually surprised how highly skilled refugees were.

### **Interacting with staff**

Despite some initial apprehension from refugees and employers, refugees appeared to interact well with the staff of the organisations where they were placed. Employers reported that refugees were readily accepted. This was especially so in those workplaces that were already culturally diverse, but it also became apparent from interviews that in workplaces that were culturally homogeneous, employees often made a special effort to be inclusive. The inclusiveness of existing staff was assisted by their being informed about the employer's involvement prior to the refugee commencing the placement.

Moreover, employers reported that many of their staff benefited from interacting with someone with different experiences and from a different culture. One employer commented: 'Without exception these people were wonderful with other people and very warm and made everyone respond better and feel better'. Although several employers reported that initially the refugee participant was very shy, as one said it just 'took some time' for the refugee to feel comfortable and be able to 'joke around'. This suggests that refugees were able to quickly adapt to the social norms of an Australian workplace.

## **Support for employers**

It is clear that effective operation of work placements was greatly assisted by the support of GtC staff. Employers complimented the GtC staff for regularly checking (both in person and over the phone) on the performance of the refugee. This was valuable as refugees felt more comfortable divulging any issues through one of the GtC staff. One employer explicitly remarked that the program could only be implemented if GtC staff provided a lot of support, with forms, procedures and generally being on hand.

## **Learning from work placements**

As is to be expected, work placements led to some learning for employers and GtC staff. The preparation and support staff offered to both refugees and employers were continually adapted in response to feedback.

A problem mentioned by three employers was that refugees were often reluctant to ask for help and admit they did not understand something. However, these problems were soon rectified once it was made clear that there was 'no shame in asking for help'.

In one instance the work placement was not completed because the employer believed the refugee was unreliable. This was because the refugee became ill and was unable to attend on a particular day; they rang up to inform their employer, but did not call again the following day. The refugee believed that the phone call from the previous day was sufficient, as would be the case in his country of origin. This highlights how cultural differences may impact on refugee employment.

The refugee training has subsequently been adjusted to underline the importance of proactive communication in the Australian workplace. Furthermore, the support for business has been enhanced through the initiative called Building Bridges. This is an employer training program that aims to develop the skills of managers and supervisors so that they can successfully integrate refugees into the Australian workplace. It includes informing and advising employers about common cultural norms of many refugee participants. The effectiveness of Building Bridges was not assessed in this study as it commenced in August 2007, when the data collection phase of the evaluation was coming to a close. Nonetheless, the initiative demonstrates the adaptive and responsive nature of GtC.

## **Conclusion**

The work placements undertaken through GtC have proven to be beneficial. In addition to direct employment outcomes, work placements promoted employment outcomes in less direct ways. Work placements also contributed to settlement outcomes (discussed further in the section on community strengthening). Both refugees and employers spoke highly about the work placements. It became clear for work placements to be effective both refugees and employers require adequate support from GtC. Otherwise the work placement aspect of the program is only limited by the ability of GtC staff to find enough placements that suit the needs of particular refugees.



## 9 Participants' general assessment of Given the Chance

### Refugees' perspectives

Most of the interviewed refugees spoke positively about GtC. None regretted participating in the program. Moreover a sizeable number were very complimentary. The following quote is indicative:

I remember the first time I came back from Given the Chance I was so happy, my husband said 'What happened to you today?' because I had been very down. I said '... I have a new family now' ... Sometimes I would be grumpy, and he would say, 'When is your next class?' It was very important to me. It changed my vision of Australia ... They helped me just because I was a human being. No-one helped me like this before.

Many of the refugees praised the program staff. One said that because they were so kind, she came to trust all Australians more and increased her involvement in the Australian community. Another commented that the staff genuine interest in her made her feel 'more positive' and then 'empowered'; she liked the staff so much that she would come into the EMC office even when she did not have a specific reason. A third refugee felt that people at GtC understood her background and could better work with her to find employment. This suggests that for the GtC model to be most effective requires more than the formal components: the way that the staff operate is important too.

When asked what could be improved, refugees commonly responded that they were satisfied with the program the way it was. Some refugees offered that they would be willing to contact GtC again if they were in need of support

However, three interviewed refugees felt they did not benefit from it as much as they could have. This was mainly because they were too busy and it was difficult to find a mutually agreeable time to meet with their mentor. Also, it was difficult for some refugees to attend workshop sessions because they had to look after their children. The limited English of some refugees also proved to be a barrier to benefiting from the mentoring and courses.

A few refugees wished they had found the program earlier, because it could have been more helpful when they first arrived. One refugee remarked that after five years in Australia she felt that she had learned the tough way; now that she needs to stay at home to look after a young child, she is not benefiting as much from the program as she might. This suggests the importance of promotion to attract refugees that have been in Australia for less time.

### Mentors' and employers' perspectives

The great majority of employers and mentors thought that the program was very constructive.

Many mentors were surprised at the extent they were able to help their mentees and also how the mentoring relationship extended to the wider community, affecting family, friends and other refugees. The mentors found it very satisfying to be able to have such a significant positive impact and many recommended becoming a mentor to their friends. As one mentor said:

I think it's a really worthwhile thing and I think that there should absolutely be much more of it than what there is. It's such a small thing that you do ... and yet it has such an impact.

Employers were also enthusiastic, noting that a strength of the program was generating concrete outcomes for refugees, such as gaining employment. Employers were nearly universally pleased with refugee participants, and usually noted the important contribution refugees made to the organisation. One business manager, speaking about the tangible benefits, said:

The program is wonderful. They've got a real gem ... It works, it works. For a fairly minimal amount of money and energy ... it gets people back to work.

## **Conclusion**

In general participants believed that the program has been largely effective; they said it had made a real difference to the lives of refugees. Refugees, mentors and employers were highly complimentary and many believed that the program generated tangible social benefits, such as helping people find employment. However, the less tangible benefits were also emphasised, such as refugees being more trusting of Australians.

## 10 Employment and education outcomes

In terms of employment and education, the majority of refugees (147) who entered the program achieved positive outcomes. This is even when measuring outcomes conservatively, as explained below.

### Measuring outcomes

GtC intake forms were filled in by 220 people. This number is the base for calculating outcomes below. However, it should be emphasised that measuring outcomes in this way generates quite conservative figures.

Nineteen people enrolled in GtC but did not take part in any program components and another 15 discontinued participation within six months. In both instances, the most common reason was a change to their personal circumstances so that the program no longer suited their needs. For example, some participants had children, moved interstate, had health problems or returned to their birth country. Also nine people enrolled in the last six months, and so had not been in the program long enough to measure their outcomes. If all of those people were deducted from the total, 179 refugees participated in the program. Using this modified figure would significantly increase the success rate of the program.

A high proportion of participants (66%) achieved successful employment and/or education outcomes: this compares well with 58% of CALD participants receiving 'Intensive Support customised assistance' in Job Network (DEWR 2007, p.7).

Table 10.1 shows employment and education outcomes, which are discussed further below.

**Table 10.1 Employment and education outcomes, GtC participants 2005 to 2007**

Outcome	Number	Percentage
Found employment	121	55%
Found skilled employment	64	53%
Found unskilled employment	57	47%
Commenced study	48	22%
Found employment or commenced study	147	66%

n=220

### Employment outcomes

Most refugee participants came to GtC with the aim of finding employment. Well over half obtained some form of employment with the aid of GtC. Specifically, 55% of participants gained employment, compared with 41% of CALD participants in the Job Network receiving 'Intensive Support customised assistance' (DEWR 2007, p.7).<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, CALD participants as a group are much less disadvantaged than refugees in particular, as they do not necessarily face barriers such as surviving trauma that refugees face (DIMIA 2003). No recent figures were available of refugee outcomes through the Job Network. On average, 12 months elapsed between entering GtC and finding employment. It should also be noted that the GtC employment outcomes are exit outcomes; further research is required to identify how long participants remain employed.

Moreover, in an open question overwhelmingly the refugees' most common response in the second questionnaire about the biggest change to their life was finding employment.

<sup>8</sup> The Job Network employment outcome is taken 3 months after a participant leaves assistance, whereas the GtC figure is an immediate exit outcome.

## **Quality of employment**

It is important to identify the quality of employment gained, because gaining low-paid work is often not conducive to steady employment (Scutella & Ellis 2007). As can be seen in Table 10.1, more refugees gained skilled (requiring a qualification) than unskilled work. These figures are most encouraging because the great majority of refugees gain employment in low-status positions (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2006), although it should be acknowledged that the level of education of refugee participants in GtC was higher than the general refugee population. A second factor likely to influence better overall employment outcomes was the fact that in 2007, people were more likely to be accepted into GtC if they were qualified to fill the employment opportunities that the program had sourced.

Further evidence that GtC participants gained decent employment is that by the time of the second questionnaire significantly fewer among the refugees surveyed were looking for employment. This suggests that there was a degree of satisfaction with the employment that they had found as they were not trying to change jobs. Moreover, many refugees who secured employment explicitly reported gaining a great deal of satisfaction.

Another measure of the quality of employment is whether the jobs found matched the refugees' skills. Program staff reported that a very high degree of appropriate employment matches, with only four instances where people with formal qualifications were working in unskilled jobs. In all these cases the mismatch has resulted from refugees' lack of English fluency, which GtC is in a limited position to address.

## **Overcoming barriers to employment**

The refugees' most significant barriers to finding employment, identified by them in the first questionnaire of the survey, did indeed align with the foci of GtC assistance. By far the most frequent barrier was lack of work experience, identified by 56% of survey respondents. This supports the key role of work placements in the program. The five next most common barriers (in order) were also each noted by more than 40% of survey respondents:

- I did not know where to look for work.
- I did not know what the employer expected.
- I did not know which kind of work I can get.
- I did not know enough about the workplace.

The above list suggests that the surveyed refugees did not see themselves as victims of social barriers, but rather believed that they could develop their human capital to overcome disadvantage. Even more revealing is that the least three identified barriers all relate to personal impediments: 'health problems', 'lack of motivation' and 'household responsibilities'. This suggests that they believed developing their human capital required the provision of resources, rather than a focus on their character.

Such barriers can be addressed with the kind of personalised support that GtC provides. Indeed GtC does address each of the top barriers, through the multiple channels of the work placement, mentoring and workshops. For example, the barrier of 'not knowing what to expect from the employer' was often overcome through advice from the mentor, as well the experience of work placements, which allowed the participant to apply their learning from the training. The alignment between barriers refugees identified and the support offered largely explains the high success rates.

GtC helped refugees overcome the barriers of not knowing where to look for jobs and how to apply for employment. Even among those who reported still looking for employment in the second questionnaire, the vast majority said that GtC had helped them search and apply for jobs. For example, one refugee had contacted several hospitals and had been offered positions as a result,

while another, who applied for a job advertised in the local paper, believed that the resume she developed and job application skills she learned from GtC were crucial in her getting the job.

### **Employers' experiences of hiring refugees**

Employers reported numerous benefits from participating in the program. One manager said that although initially a lot of investment was required to ensure the refugee understood the procedures, it became 'extremely rewarding' both personally and for the business.

For some employers, GtC helped them gain motivated and reliable staff. As one manager said:

She's very dependable, always willing to do the right thing; and if she did make an error she would always be very conscious of making sure the error wouldn't occur again.

As a result, many interviewed employers said that if future positions became available they would definitely consider hiring more refugees.

### **Challenges regarding employment**

#### *Encountered by employers*

The following challenges raised by employers related solely to those employers that hired refugees as staff, not to employers taking part in work placements. In interviews most employers did not report any problems in hiring refugees, but others raised some issues.

For some employers, lack of fluency in English hindered communication. However, with only a couple of exceptions employers found that this proved surmountable, as refugees quickly picked up local work jargon. In some instances it merely required colleagues to talk more slowly or clearly or have 'a little patience'. GtC can do little more to overcome this problem, as it is an inherent aspect of the program that some participants will not be completely fluent in English; fortunately, it appears that lack of English fluency did not generally prove to be a major obstacle for those refugees that gained employment.

In a few instances employers mentioned refugees could be overly conscientious. One refugee was very worried about making mistakes, and was constantly apologising, but once she gained more confidence she 'fitted in well'. More often, though, conscientiousness was positive, as one manager said about her refugee employee: 'She was very keen to learn and she's since been promoted, so obviously they do see the value there'.

Another issue raised by two employers was that their refugee employees initially lacked initiative. Refugees and employers commented that in the refugees' home countries employees were used to 'being told exactly what to do'. However, as one employer said, that this was overcome by helping them develop as 'self-starters', informing them that they are expected to do what they see needs doing. Furthermore, the refugees' GtC training now emphasises the importance of initiative.

Finally, in one case an employer reported not receiving adequate support from GtC. In this case it was a Job Network provider that found employment for the refugee, and the employer said there was some confusion between the role of GtC and the Job Network provider. It appears GtC staff did not make follow-up contact, which the employer would have liked. This demonstrates the importance of GtC keeping accurate records of participants and support needs.

#### *Encountered by refugees*

The two problems that refugees mentioned regarding their employment involved finding an appropriate match with their employment needs.

Some refugees expressed a desire to work more hours. The level of underemployment is consistent with the increased casualisation of the Australian labour market over the past 20 years. Furthermore, the lowest-skilled workers are most likely to be affected by this trend. Such a large structural issue, however, is beyond the scope of a limited program like GtC to address.

In a few cases, the skills of refugees did not match the positions where they were placed. One refugee was expected to be able to pronounce common but unfamiliar Australian names, which caused him great difficulty.

Some problems relating to refugees' employment are to be expected. Often employers themselves are well equipped to respond to the problems as they arise. GtC staff can play a vital role by regularly checking on refugees in their workplaces and offering support to both refugees and employers, until such a time that both parties and GtC are convinced that refugees are comfortable in the workplace. Furthermore, as described in section 8, GtC has recently developed an employer training initiative called Building Bridges, to improve employers' awareness of issues that may arise in employing refugees.

## **Education outcomes**

The aim of some GtC participants was to commence and complete education or training, either exclusively or in addition to gaining employment. For many of these, education was a pathway to finding more satisfying work. Furthermore, after joining the program some participants' aims changed to incorporate study, usually in consultation with their mentor and GtC staff. Refugees were often advised that the kind of employment they wanted would require further study. As Table 10.1 shows, 48 refugees commenced education or training, and currently 26 refugees are continuing to study.

In interviews many refugees reported that the assistance they received regarding commencing study was very valuable. Many refugees learned from their mentors about study options, and how to apply for and enrol in courses. In addition to navigating the complicated tertiary education system, this preliminary process also involved helping refugees decide what they wanted to study. Refugees often lack knowledge about career pathways, such as the qualification required for particular occupations. One refugee appreciated such assistance from a mentor: 'She helped me get involved with university and have a proper education ...'

GtC was able to assist refugees to achieve the positive settlement outcome of commencing study. There is a clear connection between the attainment of further education and training and employment outcomes (Sweet 2006). Furthermore, through education and training GtC participants are more likely to defy the trend of refugees being 'forced to accept low-status and low-paid jobs' (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury).

## **Conclusion**

GtC resulted in improved employment and education outcomes. This was achieved through the program components working in conjunction, refugees often gained jobs through mentoring and work placements, and the skills and advice that refugees received in training courses as well as from their mentors allowed them to perform well in workplaces. Such a 'holistic' approach is vital to successful outcomes (Bloch 2004). An encouraging proportion of participants found employment or commenced education. In the majority of instances it was the direct intervention of GtC which caused the positive employment and education outcomes. Some refugees were advised to commence education and received support enrolling and studying. Many refugees directly found employment through their mentor or work placement. In a smaller number of instances refugees found employment through their own means, yet many of these people reported that the skills and support they received from GtC were very useful. GtC clearly helped refugees overcome educational and labour market barriers, especially the lack of social networks, experience and unfamiliarity with local cultural norms.

## **II Community strengthening**

GtC contributed to strengthening refugee communities and the wider community in two ways: firstly, by helping refugees become more involved in the wider community; and secondly by helping the wider community to be more inclusive of refugees. This was achieved through the integration of the components of the program: mentoring, employment, work placements and training.

### **Given the Chance's general impact on community strengthening**

For numerous refugees, it was actually community outcomes that were most important. For example, in the case of one refugee, nothing in his life materially changed since beginning the program (he remained a student and did not have employment) but now he felt a sense of belonging to the wider community.

Refugees who live close to others from the same country of origin tend to socialise mostly with those people. Many refugees are members of ethnic associations. This creates a strong sub-community where the members support each other, but does have limitations. One refugee's comments tell a familiar story: 'I only knew people in my community, my family and my friends. I have never been with anyone from the Australian community'. Without weakening refugee communities, GtC has helped 'anchor them into the wider community' so that refugee communities are not isolated, thus building a bridge between communities.

### **How the different program components influenced the community**

#### **Employment and work placements contributing to refugee community participation**

Employment and work placements contribute to refugee community participation, as the workplace is part of the community. Many refugees formed friendships at work, thus widening their social networks. In the first questionnaire only 20% of respondents said they could ask for support from a work colleague during a crisis; by the second questionnaire this had risen to 31%. This was supported by the interview responses. As one refugee said:

When I first came here I did not meet with anybody, because approaching people is very hard. But when I got that job ... it is when I became ... familiar with many people ... When I was working there I was talking to many Australian and also many immigrants. And I created many friends in the workplace ...

There are also less direct ways that workplace participation contributes to refugee community participation. Employment promotes refugee financial security, which enables refugees to join in community activities that cost money. The survey revealed a statistically significant increase in the number of refugees who began to donate money to local community organisations: a doubling from 9 to 18 people. This suggests that once employed, refugees' greater disposable income allows them to be involved in their community. In interviews, refugees reported that on gaining employment they were 'able to do more' relating to community activities.

Furthermore, an individual gaining employment has positive flow-on effects for that person's family, friends and broader community. The obvious benefit is that they have more money to spend on their family and within their community, but it can also help expand the networks of other people in refugee communities. Once one person gains a job, it can open the door to others learning about employment opportunities and job application strategies at the same or related organisations. In addition, the employed person acts as a positive role model.

### **Workshops contributing to refugee community participation**

As explained in section 7, the workshops expand participants' skills and knowledge. By empowering individual refugees, they enhanced the social capital of communities. Individual knowledge could also be shared with other refugees, further enhancing their communities' social capital. In interviews refugees reported learning from each other, and some refugees with older children were able to pass on their recently acquired knowledge. One refugee said: 'I tell my daughter about what I learned, like about how to find jobs and act in interviews'.

### **Mentoring contributing to refugee community participation**

From being mentored refugees gained increased awareness about their immediate and extended community, facilitating their participation. Mentors introduced mentees to events and festivals in Melbourne. As a consequence, refugees became more involved in community activities; and some reported that they informed fellow refugees about the many events that exist. One refugee, whose comments are indicative of many, said:

I've gotten a sense of togetherness. I've also gotten help with the wider community because when you understand the community you get more involved with the wider community.

The European Council on Refugees and Exiles suggests that 'strengthening social networks between locals and refugees' will eventuate if mentors are recruited from the local community (ECRE Taskforce on Integration 1999c, p.16). GtC mentors were recruited from the local community and findings from interviews suggest that social networks between locals and refugees were indeed strengthened. The continuing relationships between refugees and their mentors were the clearest evidence that refugees socialised with new people, but this new socialising also had less tangible effects. For example, one refugee said he gained from his mentor a 'feeling of being more open and knowing how can I connect with people', while another commented: 'It is good to be involved in the society and the community, to be alive'. All of this reduces refugee social isolation, strengthens ties between citizens and as the literature suggested, improves 'cross-cultural understanding' (Carr 2004, p.4).

The increased networking of refugees, strongly linked to mentoring, is further substantiated by survey findings. In the second questionnaire 18 of 30 people reported that they now socialised with either a lot or a few more new people due to their involvement in GtC, while only six people said that they did not. Furthermore, in the same questionnaire 16 people said that there were more people that they were able to contact to ask for any kind of assistance.



### **Case study 2: Refugee community engagement**

Shambu<sup>9</sup> came to Australia to do his masters in horticulture. During his studies, he applied for asylum due to persecution in his country of origin. He struggled to adjust to Australian culture. After completing study he faced unemployment and lacked social networks.

Shambu was matched with a mentor named John<sup>10</sup>, who is a landscape gardener. John wanted to better understand the issues that refugees face by ‘getting involved in a one on one situation... and do something productive’ to help refugees.

Shambu’s highest priority was finding employment. He said John was very helpful in developing skills related to obtaining work. For example, together they did numerous mock interviews.

Shambu became close to his mentor. They regularly spoke on the phone and met up purely to socialise, often having meals at each other’s homes or at restaurants. Shambu said that from the beginning, John ‘made me feel very comfortable’ and he felt welcome to make as much contact as was necessary.

In 2005, Shambu commenced a work placement with a community organisation in his professional field, organised by the staff at GtC. He reported:

*They rang here a lot and came to see me when I was working, almost every week to ensure I was managing well.*

His employers were so impressed with Shambu’s performance that they offered him a further contract to fill the position of a staff member on leave, and later an ongoing position. Shambu now has the ambition to be a tertiary teacher. He says:

*I’m very confident because ... volunteering and working has given me hands-on experience so I’m confident that I have very practical experience. So now it looks I’m on the track to be a teacher which is what I want to do, and I think volunteering really helped.*

As a mentor, John also feels optimistic:

*Every time I see him, I’m reminded that he’s ten jumps ahead of me intellectually and professionally. He’s on his way and just having trouble adapting to Australian culture.*

Thanks to his participation in GtC, Shambu’s social networks have expanded. He says, ‘I got to meet a lot of people and I didn’t think I was alone anymore’. Furthermore, he is involved in the parents’ committee at his daughter’s primary school. He proudly reports that he applied his horticulture skills to improving the garden at the school, impressing many other parents.

John is glad to count Shambu as a friend, and reports with pleasure that Shambu has

*... this great capacity to do really well because of his drive and determination. Like right now I see him running slowly, but once he starts moving quickly, there’s no slowing him down.*

---

<sup>9</sup> Not his real name.

<sup>10</sup> Not his real name.

## **Wider community perceptions about refugees**

There were various reports that people's perceptions of refugees had positively changed as a result of GtC, therefore making the general community more inclusive and harmonious.

Firstly, mentors reported that their own perceptions changed. For example, on being exposed to new ways of thinking, one mentor said:

I think we're very, very fortunate to have a lot of African people coming in. I think they have a lot to contribute to our society actually, yeah.

Secondly, mentors usually introduced their mentee to family, friends and colleagues. A mentor said that she saw how this expansion of refugee networks helped 'build ... a bridge into a new community'. Furthermore, as mentors tell people of their experiences, and then as others get involved or retell the stories, this has a 'snowball' effect, which gradually changes community attitudes. Many mentors said that their associates had become more accepting of refugees.

Lastly, employers commented that having refugees in the workplace could have a positive influence on the community as a whole. Refugees' co-workers were exposed to people from a different culture, contributing to broadening the workplace culture and making it more inclusive. One employer expressed this sentiment in even grander terms by saying: 'The more diversity we get in the workplace, the more open and accepting we will be as a nation'.

## **Limitations of Given the Chance on community outcomes**

Although GtC no doubt improved settlement outcomes for individuals and, through this, contributed to stronger communities, widespread and overt changes to communities cannot occur with a small-scale program. The larger the scale of the program, the greater the impact it is likely to have on communities, so long as the relationship building focus is retained. If the program is expanded or replicated, the above findings regarding the program's influence on increasing community participation and inclusiveness give good reason to believe that it could have widespread community strengthening effects.

A minority of interviewed refugees, however, did not become involved in wider community activities. This was usually because they were too busy, often raising children, studying, working or a combination of those activities. Consequently, they chose to limit their participation in GtC to achieving concrete personal outcomes, such as finding employment. It appears that some refugees, just like some non-refugees, are inevitably less community-minded, or are in a position that makes it difficult for them to be strongly engaged in the wider community. Hence, it is not necessarily a failing of the program that some refugees did not become actively engaged in the community, rather the aims of the program should (and do) reflect the various goals refugees have in joining.

## **Refugees' patterns of community participation**

Although the survey did not show a change over time in the particular ways refugees engage in the community, it revealed what those ways were. In both questionnaires the top five identified ways that refugees participated in their local community were:

- speaking publicly
- organising a meeting with community members
- participating in a community consultation or attended a public meeting
- taking action to solve a local problem
- setting up a community committee.

These items were chosen by refugees from a list of 17 options. In both questionnaires more than 20% of refugees said that they engaged in the above activities, and there was no other activity in which more than 20% of refugees took part. In contrast, the least common community activities were:

- writing to the council
- phoning a 'talkback' radio program
- contacting a member of parliament.

In both questionnaires, less than 5% of refugees reported doing one of these three activities. Thus interviewed refugees mostly tended to engage in the community through working together with other people, such as through committees. This is opposed to individually taking action on community issues, by personally contacting relevant bodies.

## **Conclusion**

A positive settlement outcome is when a person arrives (settles) in a new society and is able to integrate into that society. To integrate is to be included in the various social institutions and participate in numerous social activities, not to be absorbed into Australian society. GtC positively impacted refugees' participation in employment and education which are key social institutions; and paid work and study are important social activities. However, other important social activities include attending community events, socialising with a diversity of people, engaging in local organisations and being involved with the school of one's children.

All components of GtC (including mentoring, training and work placements) contribute to refugee integration. Furthermore, not only does each component contribute, but each component is enhanced when used in conjunction with the others. For example, learning about Australian work culture in the GtC training can advance community participation if the refugee has a chance to implement this learning through a work placement, which is often gained with the assistance of a mentor. The findings demonstrate that neither refugee communities nor the rest of Australian society remain static, but they both learn from each other, and through this mutual learning become more cohesive. Although the impact GtC has on communities is limited in that it largely helps individuals, it is through improving the settlement outcomes of individuals that GtC contributes to strengthening refugee communities and the wider community.

## **12 Recommendations**

### **Program implementation**

#### **Enhanced knowledge management system**

As the GtC program grew, taking in more participants than anticipated, so too did the need for a more sophisticated knowledge management system that would allow up-to-date and detailed records. Improvements (requiring additional resources) would include the following measures:

- Regular contact with refugee participants, mentors and employers would be aided by an organised schedule. The schedule would outline when each person needs to be contacted, ensuring that no-one is overlooked. The frequency of contact will be limited by the resources available.
- It is desirable for participants to continue to be tracked after they complete or withdraw from the program, to facilitate the assessment of longer term outcomes, and refinement of the program. Furthermore, clearly identifying reasons why all participants leave the program would assist the program in responding to refugee needs. To assist with tracking, participants should be informed early in the program of the intention to track their ongoing progress, and formally requested to notify any change of contact details. The duration of tracking will also depend on resources.

#### **Managing refugee expectations**

To minimise unrealistic expectations from refugee participants, it needs to be made clear to all potential participants that the program (especially the mentoring element) offers support in job seeking, not job placement, and that the onus to find employment is still largely up to the individual participant. Although some refugees received more direct employment assistance, refugees need to be informed that this is the exception. Expectations should be managed to avoid disappointing and disheartening results for the refugee, as well as removing unfair pressure on mentors. If too much responsibility is placed on mentors it is likely to reduce the pool of available mentors. [Since the data that informed this recommendation was collected, program staff have informed the evaluator that mentee induction training has been developed to address this point].

### **Mentoring**

#### **Matching mentees and mentors**

In order to promote regular meetings, in matching mentors and mentees even greater consideration should be given to how they will be able to meet. This would include whether they will meet during the mentor's lunch break, whether the mentee will be able to travel to this location, or whether they live in close proximity. To foster more regular contact, it may be worth promoting mentoring opportunities in specific locations where more mentors are needed.

#### **Recruiting mentors**

To recruit an appropriate mix of mentors, GtC staff should consider increasing the use of proactive processes, such as directly approaching potential mentors. For example, existing mentors could be utilised to speak behalf of the program, especially to target professional and trade associations.

### **Refugee training**

#### **Levels of training in workshops**

Grouping workshops into grades should be considered. Lower grades would be for people who require basic assistance, whereas higher grades would be for people who are more job-ready, such

as people who have been in Australia longer. The initial assessment of refugees could be expanded to identify the appropriate workshop grade. However, it is recognised that the implementation of this recommendation requires greater resources.

### **Expanding skills training**

As mentioned in Section 8, some refugees suggested an opportunity to learn basic office skills would be highly beneficial. This was later included in the program, but due to resource limitations only in a minor form. Fully incorporating selected skills development into the GtC model could complement the general employment-related skills currently taught.

## **Further research**

### **Evaluating other practice models**

In order that the GtC model can be compared in terms of effectiveness and efficiency with other models, an environmental scan needs to be conducted for other local practices that have not been evaluated. Then these models require to be evaluated and compared with each other and GtC.

### **Ongoing employment outcomes**

The employment outcomes in this study are based on whether participants commence employment; however, to better measure the success rate of GtC and compare it with other employment programs, it should also be ascertained how long participants remained employed. This requires implementing ongoing tracking of participants as recommended above.

## 13 Conclusion

The evaluation reveals that GtC improved refugee employment, education and settlement outcomes. There was general accord between refugees, mentors and employers that the program generated tangible and intangible benefits to refugees. The following are the key elements of GtC:

- case management
- mentoring
- employment training
- work placements
- close integration of above services.

### **Key elements promoting employment and education outcomes**

With regard to employment outcomes, the high proportion of GtC refugee participants who began working compared favourably with wider results for CALD job seekers. Most participants who gained employment did so through the active support of GtC. In numerous instances refugees gained employment through their mentor or work placement.

In a smaller number of instances refugees found employment with less involvement from GtC, yet many of these reported that the skills and support they received from GtC were highly useful. Most obviously, the training that refugees received, such as job searching and interview skills, helped refugees overcome barriers. Furthermore, refugees reported that through work placements they were able to expand their networks, skills and understanding of Australian work culture.

Positive settlement outcomes were not exclusively achieved through employment assistance; GtC also assisted refugees to commence study. As the literature shows, gaining a qualification is likely to assist refugees gain more satisfying employment, therefore assisting their full social inclusion.

### **Key elements promoting community outcomes**

There was evidence that refugee communities and the wider community have been strengthened. People from different backgrounds have been linked together, largely because the mainstream community became a little more inclusive, and many refugees increased their participation in the general community.

Mentoring contributed to this by promoting communication between individuals from different communities, building the social networks of refugees. Work placements also strengthened the wider community by enabling refugees to participate in it. Also, in workplaces more people from the non-refugee community interacted with refugees, which had the effect of changing perceptions for the better, therefore promoting inclusiveness. Lastly, targeted training helped refugees develop the skills, knowledge and confidence that supported their engagement in the wider community.

Due to the limited scale and resources of GtC, the changes to the wider community are necessarily modest. Only if GtC is greatly expanded will it be likely have general impacts on the community, rather than improving community engagement for individual participants.

Refugees are some of the most marginalised people in the community. Facing unique employment and labour market barriers, such as suffering from trauma and displacement, they require a program specially designed to respond to their needs. Despite its small scale, GtC has made a big difference to the lives of many refugees. An impressive 157 refugees found employment and/or commenced education. For many refugees, Given the Chance has been the difference between social exclusion and successful settlement.

## References

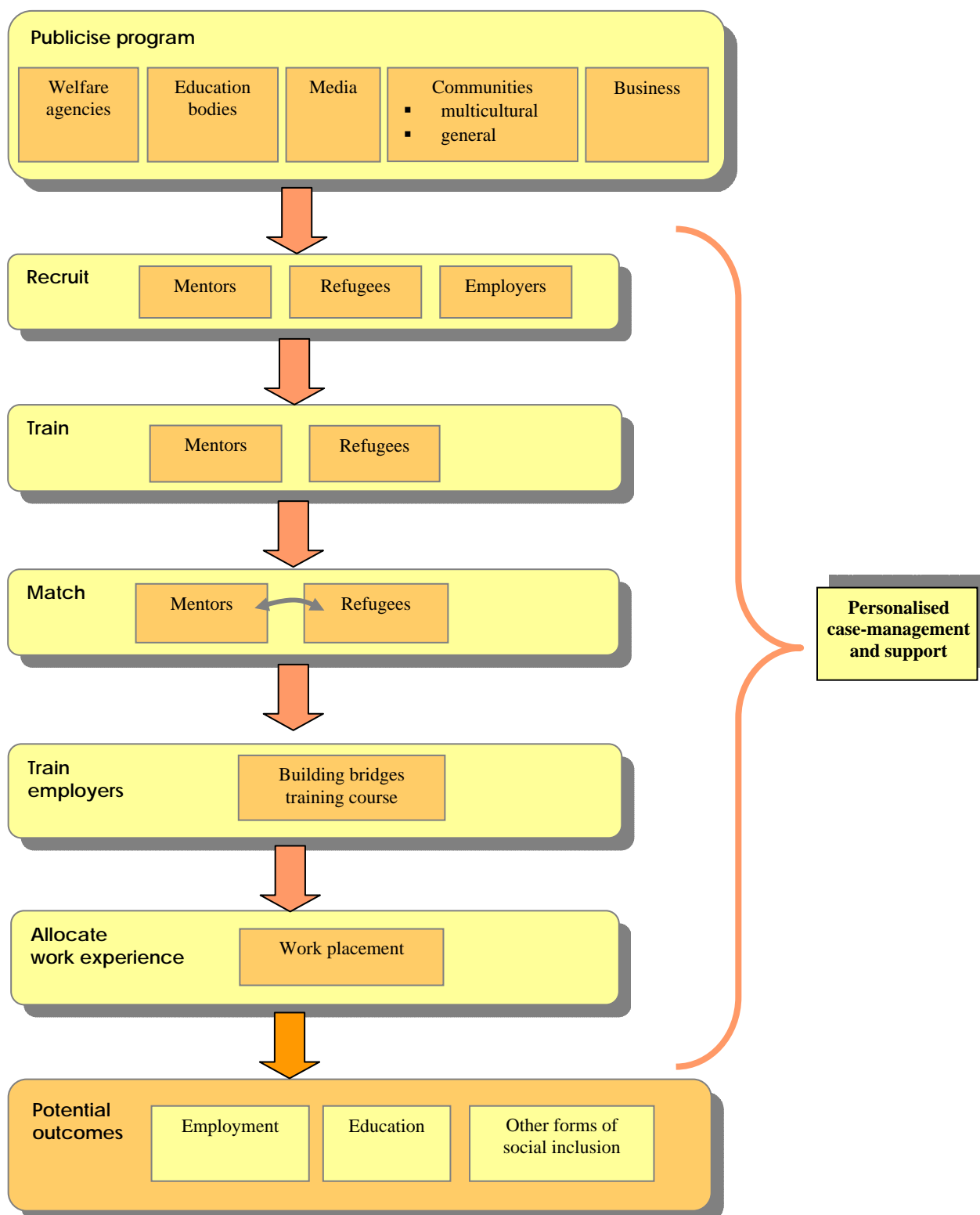
- Bachoo, D 2004, 'Successful job training for immigrants', *Review of Business*, vol.25, no. 2, pp.51–5.
- Bloch, A 2000, 'Refugee settlement in Britain: The impact of policy on participation', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol.26, no. 1, pp.75–88.
- 2002a, *The migration and settlement of refugees in Britain*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, UK.
- 2002b, *Refugees' opportunities and barriers in employment and training*, Department for Work and Pensions, Leeds.
- 2004, *Making it work: refugee employment in the UK*, Asylum and Migration Working Paper 2, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), London.
- British Refugee Council (BRC) 1999, *Developing a refugee employment agenda: report from the expert meeting on refugee employment in Dublin, 11–12 October 1999*, European Taskforce on Integration of Refugees, London.
- 2001, *Refugee employment in Europe*, European Taskforce on Integration of Refugees, London.
- Cambridge, P & Williams, L 2004, 'Approaches to advocacy for refugees and asylum seekers: a development case study for a local support and advice service', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol.17, no.1, pp.97–113.
- Canadian Council for Refugees 1998, *Best settlement practices: settlement services for refugees and immigrants in Canada*, Montréal.
- Carr, J 2004, 'Given the Chance: creating employment and education pathways for refugees', *Migration Action*, vol.XXVI, no. 1, pp.33–40.
- Carr, J 2005 (unpublished), Refugee employment programs, in particular those using mentoring, Churchill study tour report.
- Colic-Peisker, V 2003, *Bosnian refugees in Australia: identity, community and labour market integration*, working paper no. 97, New issues in refugee research, UNHCR, Geneva.
- Colic-Peisker, V & Tilbury, F 2003, '“Active” and “passive” resettlement: the influence of support services and refugees' own resources on resettlement style', *International Migration*, vol.41, no.5, pp.61–91.
- 2006, 'Employment niches for recent refugees: segmented labour market in twenty first century Australia', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol.19, no. 2, pp.203–29.
- Considine, M 2004, *Community strengthening and the role of the government*, Department for Victorian Communities, Melbourne.
- Department of Child Safety 2006, *Working with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds*, Queensland Government, Brisbane.
- Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) 2007, *Labour market assistance outcomes*, DEWR, Canberra.
- Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) 2007, *Settlement data base*, viewed 11 October 2007, <<http://www.settlement.immi.gov.au/settlement/enterSelectReport.do>>.
- Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) 2003, *Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants*, DIMIA, Canberra.
- 2005, *The labour market: summary of findings for LSIA 2*, viewed 31 May 2006, <[http://www.immi.gov.au/media/research/lisia/lisia06\\_8.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/research/lisia/lisia06_8.htm)>.
- 2006, *Annual Report 2005–06*, DIMIA, Canberra.
- ECRE Taskforce on Integration 1999a, *Good practice guide on community and cultural integration for refugees*, Greek Council for Refugees, Athens.
- 1999b, *Good practice guide on employment for refugees*, British Refugee Council, London.
- 1999c, *Good practice guide on vocational training for refugees*, France Terre d'Asile, Paris.
- Ecumenical Migration Centre 2003, 'Reviewing the Review of Settlement Services', *Migration Action*, vol. xxv, no2, pp.12–19.
- Ecumenical Migration Centre 2004, 'Given the chance: cost-effective assistance for refugees', *Brotherhood Comment*, August, p. 11.
- Gartrell, A, Edwards, D & Graffam, P J 2006, *Walk with me: developing employment pathways for refugees with a disability*, Deakin University Employment and Social Exclusion Research Group, Melbourne.

- Godin, J-F & Renaud, J 2002, 'The impact of non-governmental organizations and language skills on the employability of refugee claimants: evidence from Quebec', *Canadian Ethnic Studies Journal*, vol.34, no.1, pp.112–34.
- Hynes, T 2003, *The issue of 'trust' or 'mistrust' in research with refugees: choices, caveats and considerations for researchers*, working paper no. 98, New issues in refugee research, UNHCR, Geneva.
- Kelly, E 2004, *A new country but no place to call home*, Hanover Welfare Services, Melbourne.
- Khoo, S-E & McDonald, P 2001, *Settlement indicators and benchmarks*, Report to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, DIMIA, Canberra.
- Kyle, L, Macdonald, F, Doughney, J & Pyke, J 2004, *Refugees in the labour market: looking for cost-effective models of assistance*, Ecumenical Migration Centre of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.
- Lamba, N K 2003, 'The employment experiences of Canadian refugees: measuring the impact of human and social capital on quality of employment', *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, vol.40, no.1, pp.45–65.
- Malual, M T 2004, *Issues facing young people from Sudan and their community as they settle in Australia*, Anglicare, Sydney.
- Markovic, M & Manderson, L 2000, 'European immigrants and the Australian labour market: a case study of women from the former Yugoslavia', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol.26, no.1, pp.127–36.
- Marston, G 2003, *Temporary protection, permanent uncertainty: the experience of refugees living on temporary protection visas*, Centre for Applied Social Research, RMIT University, Melbourne.
- 2004, 'A punitive policy: labour force participation of refugees on Temporary Protection Visas (TPV)', *Labour & Industry*, vol.15, no.1, pp.65–79.
- Mendes, P 2003, *Australia's welfare wars: the players, the politics and the ideologies*, UNSW Press, Sydney.
- Mestheneos, E & Ioannidi, E 2002, 'Obstacles to refugee integration in the European Union member states', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol.15, no.3, pp.304–20.
- Pope, J 2006, 'Indicators of community strength: a framework and evidence', Department of Victorian Communities, Melbourne.
- Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) 2006, *Australia's refugee and special humanitarian program: current issues and future directions: views from the community sector*, Refugee Council of Australia, Glebe, NSW.
- Richardson, S, Robertson, F & Ilsley, D 2001, *The labour force experience of new migrants*, Report to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Department of Finance and Administration, Canberra.
- Richardson, S, Stack, S, Lester, L, Healy, J, Ilsley, D & Horrocks, J 2004, *The changing labour force experience of new migrants: inter-wave comparisons for cohort 1 and 2 of the LSIA*, Report to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Canberra.
- Scull, S 2001, 'Creative pathways': a skills audit of refugees in Brisbane, Anglicare Refugee and Migrant Services (ARMS), Brisbane.
- Scutella, R & Ellis, L 2007, *Employment retention and advancement of disadvantaged jobseekers*, paper presented at the Australian Social Policy Conference, Sydney, 11–13 July.
- Taylor, J 2004, 'Refugees and social exclusion: what the literature says', *Migration Action*, vol.26, no.2, pp.16–31.
- 2005, *Refugees and regional settlement: win-win?*, paper presented at the Australian Social Policy Conference, Sydney, 20–22 July.
- Tomlinson, F & Egan, S 2002, 'From marginalization to (dis)empowerment: organizing training and employment services for refugees', *Human Relations*, vol.55, no.8, pp.1019–43.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2002, *Refugee resettlement: an international handbook to guide reception and integration*, viewed 22 May 2006, <<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/template?page=publ&src=static/rh2002/rh2002toc.htm>>.
- Urbis Keys Young 2003, *A 'client survey' on the effectiveness of DIMIA funded community settlement services*, DIMIA, Canberra.
- Valtonen, K 1999, 'The societal participation of Vietnamese refugees: case studies in Finland and Canada', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol.25, no.3, pp.469–91.
- 2001, 'Cracking monopoly: immigrants and employment in Finland', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol.27, no.3, pp.421–38.
- 2004, 'From the margin to the mainstream: conceptualizing refugee settlement processes', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol.17, no.1, pp.70–96.



- Volunteering Australia 2007, *The latest picture of volunteering in Australia*, viewed July 2007, <[http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/html/s02\\_article/article\\_view.asp?id=2962&nav\\_cat\\_id=222&nav\\_to\\_p\\_id=50&dsb=6601](http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/html/s02_article/article_view.asp?id=2962&nav_cat_id=222&nav_to_p_id=50&dsb=6601)>.
- Waxman, P 1998, 'Service provision and the needs of newly arrived refugees in Sydney, Australia: a descriptive analysis', *International Migration Review*, vol.32, no.3, pp.761–78.
- White, M 2004, 'Asylum policy in the UK and Australia: a pathway to social exclusion?' *Migration Action*, vol.26, no.1, pp.4–14.
- Yost, A D & Lucas, M S 2002, 'Adjustment issues affecting employment for immigrants from the former Soviet Union', *Journal of Employment Counselling*, vol.39, no.4, pp.153–71.
- Zetter, R, Griffiths, D & Sigona, N 2004, *Refugee community-based organisations in the UK: a social capital analysis*, Oxford Brookes University, Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Oxford.
- Zimmerman, M A 2000, 'Empowerment theory: psychological, organizational and community levels of analysis', in J Rappaport & E Seidman (eds), *Handbook of community psychology*, Plenum Press, New York.

## Appendix A Program summary



## **Appendix B Examples of refugee employment assistance**

### **Public sector working with NGOs**

#### **France Terre d'Asile (FTDA), France**

FTDA is one of many NGOs running reception centres for refugees in France. FTDA has joined forces with the public employment service and with private employers. The public employment service has branches in the FTDA's offices to allow refugees' integration in mainstream labour market, while being sensitive to refugee needs. In addition, FTDA has a partnership with private employers through entering into an agreement with 'employment charters'. By signing the charter large national employers agree to make FTDA aware of job vacancies.

#### **Arbeiterwohlfahrt (AWO), Germany**

AWO is an NGO which has entered into a partnership with the public employment service in Hamburg to provide a refugee-sensitive approach in employment assistance. Refugees who register for public assistance are referred to AWO which assesses their language, educational and work skills and then refers them to the appropriate services or job vacancies.

#### **Emplooi, Netherlands**

This NGO works together with the public employment service and volunteer mentors, called advisers, to assist refugees into employment or vocational training courses. The volunteer advisers are retired business people and assist refugees for at least two days a week in offices of the public employment service called Job Centres. The advisers assist refugees with practical support, such as help with applications and offer their existing contacts in business to help refugees find employment. This is viewed as an effective employment program, getting 500 to 600 jobs a year (Carr 2005, p.9). However, the predominance of white males among mentors can result in paternalistic attitudes toward refugees and does not leave much room for refugee involvement (ECRE Taskforce on Integration 1999a, p.35).

### **NGO models**

#### **Newcomers' Employment Bridge Project, Canada**

This program was established in 1997 by a coalition of local civic agencies serving all newcomers including refugees, with an aim to open doors to potential employers. After a referral by participating settlement agencies, newcomers are given information on available assistance, making contact with employers and obtaining volunteer placements to gain work experience, and are matched with mentors.

#### **Eneas EQUAL II, Spain**

This initiative started in 2001 as part of the European EQUAL<sup>11</sup> projects and ended in 2004. Its success led to ENEAS EQUAL II. ENEAS is based on a partnership between three NGOs—the Spanish Red Cross (CRE), the Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid (CEAR), the Catholic Commission Association for Migration (ACCEM)—and the four government Refugee Protection Centres. The partnership aims to improve equal employment opportunities for people seeking refuge in Spain. In contrast to many other countries, Spain allows asylum seekers to work. The employment assistance provided includes counselling, training and work placements by engaging in partnerships with employers and services, such as day-care centres. The training includes

---

<sup>11</sup> The Community Initiative Programme EQUAL is co-financed by the European Social Fund to promote good practice in eliminating inequalities and discrimination in the labour market. EQUAL projects are based on Development Partnership (DP) between key labour market actors in order to effectively ensure equal opportunities for disadvantaged groups in the labour market.

modules on job search techniques and vocationally relevant training programs, provided by qualified partner agencies, and results in recognised qualifications. Such qualifications improve asylum seekers' access to skilled work and are also useful even if people are repatriated to their country of origin.

### **Refugee Education and Training Advisory Service (RETAS), United Kingdom**

RETAS is an NGO offering refugees and asylum seekers advice, employment training, mentoring and work experience in the community sector. Their main focus is the health professions and an important aspect is help with the re-qualification of refugee doctors. The two-week employment training focuses on job search techniques, interview skills and information on the UK labour market. Advice is offered during drop-in sessions, by telephone or through home visits for people who have difficulty in accessing services, such as women and people with disabilities. Mentoring is done by professional people two days a week, with groups or individual refugees. The mentor program is based on the Dutch EMPLOOI version, but involves refugees and people from ethnic minorities as mentors (ECRE Taskforce on Integration 1999a). Asylum seekers who are not allowed to work in the UK are not eligible, however, for the training, mentoring and work experience. Other services include a five-day course for refugees wanting to start their own business and training for service providers working with refugees.

### **Community Service Employment (CSE) program, USA**

CSE started in 1998 through an initiative of the US Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). The program was developed for refugees with low English-language proficiency, a limited education and no work experience in the US. It was designed to give employers an incentive to hire unemployed refugees and provide work experience and on-the-job training. Wage subsidies covering 100 per cent of the salary were paid for up to 12 months or until the end of the on-the-job training. The different NGOs operating CSE programs were responsible for securing job placements, assessing refugees' skills, offer job readiness training (for example employee' rights, vocational English) and matching refugees' skills with appropriate work placements.

## **Refugee community-based model**

### **Haringey Refugee Consortium (HRC), United Kingdom**

The Haringey Refugee Consortium, based in North London, shows how refugee community-based organisations, working in partnerships with public employment services, vocational training and employers' organisations, can offer adequate assistance to refugees. Their services include career and vocational advice, English language courses and job skills training. Vocational courses have included dressmaking, IT, mini-cab training, child-minding and interpreting/translating. Courses are designed to deal with needs and skills of refugees, and through partnering with vocational training institutions, the training courses are accredited. Access to the free courses is facilitated by providing free child-care and covering transport costs.