



Project Report

Cultural Awareness Training for ACT Women's Services

August 2010

Report on Completion of the CIT funded project *Cultural Awareness Training for ACT Women's Services* (including Project Evaluation)

Introduction

The Women's Centre for Health Matters Inc. (WCHM) is a community-based organisation which works in the ACT and surrounding region to improve women's health and wellbeing. WCHM believes that the environment and life circumstances which each woman experiences affects her health outcomes.

WCHM has a particular focus on groups of women who are, or are at risk of being, marginalised or socially isolated, and uses social research, community development, advocacy and health promotion to:

- Provide women with access to reliable and broad ranging health-related information which allows informed choices to be made about each woman's own health and wellbeing; and
- Advocate to influence change in health-related services to ensure responsiveness to women's needs.

Background

Humanitarian and refugee entrants from Africa, the Middle East and South East Asia comprise increasing numbers of new and emerging communities recently settling in the ACT. They are often more visibly different in appearance and culture to more established migrant groups and may face more immediate barriers to effective settlement and racism.¹ New and emerging groups are defined as being small in number, newly arrived, and are more vulnerable than established communities as they often lack established family networks, support systems, community structures and resources, and have poor English language skills.²

Cultural competence is extremely important for any individual or organisation seeking to foster constructive interactions between members of different cultures and to operate professionally and effectively within a multicultural context.³

While ACT women generally are better educated, have higher incomes and housing standards than women nationally, research commissioned by WCHM highlighted the fact that ACT Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) women are experiencing increased social, cultural, political, and economic marginalisation, and an overall reduced standard of living which is impacting on their health and wellbeing⁴. Recurrent themes have emerged from these studies identifying significant factors which influence barriers to how these women access and interact with services and information.

¹ FECCA, 2009, *New and Emerging Communities Policy Statement*.

² *ibid*

³ Ethnic communities' Council of Victoria, 2006, *Cultural Competence Guidelines and Protocols*.

⁴ Sarah Maslen, 2008, *Marginalised and isolated women in the Australian Capital Territory*, WCHM; Canberra.

Ethnic groups which are particularly vulnerable are those who have entered under the Humanitarian Program, as they are usually highly traumatised, and often have little or no English skills. This contributes to the magnification of a variety of complex support needs and issues for these women, with the additional risk of them falling through gaps in service provision.

Meeting the communities growing expectations and being responsive to changing community needs is a challenge for all community services and government agencies. Feedback on service quality and issues around access, especially for vulnerable groups, are an integral part in the evolving nature of community services.

Following on from WCHM research report findings (Brewer 2009)⁵ that ACT services who work with CALD women need to be more sensitive, skilled, and well informed about issues facing women from new and emerging cultural groups, WCHM hosted a forum for ACT service providers to discuss the next steps required in moving forward with the findings of the research. Two key priorities were identified that needed addressing –

- *The Need for Cultural Sensitivity*

While broader cultural awareness training available in Canberra was important, what ACT services really wanted was culture-specific information about the groups they were most likely to encounter in their work, especially with regard to information about emerging new communities.

- *Discrimination/Racism*

It was also widely agreed that CALD women continue to face discrimination and racism. One of the main reasons identified was the small number of CALD women in leadership roles, which led to a lack of positive role models for other CALD women in the community.

Project funding was provided by CIT under its Community Skills /Training Support Grant.

Aims and Outcomes of the Project

Drawing on the identified needs from WCHM's research and consultations with ACT services, the project aimed to address two identified priority areas by ACT service providers and multicultural organisations working with CALD women by:

- Building the cultural capacity of ACT service providers by presenting cultural awareness training with a specific focus on gender differences and the needs of women from new and emerging cultural communities in Canberra; and
- Developing the capacity of identified women within the CALD community, providing them with useful skills such as public speaking, and the development and delivery of training sessions.

⁵ Rebecca Brewer, 2009, *Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Women in the ACT: Barriers and Enablers to Achieving Social Connectedness*, WCHM, Canberra

The overall project outcomes were:

- Staff of the ACT women's services who participated would have a sound knowledge of southern Sudanese and Mon communities in Canberra. They would be particularly aware of the specific issues facing women in these cultures, which will allow them to better meet the needs of the people they support;
- The CALD women trainers from these communities would have the knowledge and skills to develop and deliver training on their cultures to the broader ACT community, and be spokeswomen for cultural understanding in our community; and
- The expansion of the project for a sustained approach to enhance the cultural competency of ACT service providers' interactions with CALD communities.

Partnerships and Stakeholders

The project was undertaken in collaborative partnerships with the Multicultural Women's Advocacy ACT, the Women's Service's Network, and the Canberra Institute of Technology.

The project was funded under the CIT Community Skills/Training Support Grants, and it was anticipated the project would, in addition to the project aims, strengthen the community involvement between CIT and the ACT community. For many migrant women settling in Canberra, the CIT is often their 'first point of contact' with the service system through the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). While Canberra has a wide range of services available to CALD women, they are often unaware that these services even exist. In fact 'unfamiliarity with available services' was considered one of the most crucial issues facing CALD women in Canberra. This means that CIT is in a unique position to improve the social connectedness of these women by forming solid partnerships with the community sector.

A range of service providers and multicultural organisations provided input on identifying the new and emerging cultural groups, and, to ensure that the cultural awareness training met their needs, they also identified essential culture-specific information. Companion House also provided important links into the CALD communities.

A reference group comprised of key stakeholders from local community and government services providers was also established to:

- Provide expert knowledge, experience and information in the development of the project and its content;
- Create a plan for informing key stakeholders of the project;
- Assist WCHM to identify and link to possible emerging communities and service providers;
- Provide feedback on the approaches being considered and the design of the main elements of the project; and
- Monitor the project implementation and results.

Members of the reference group included

- WCHM Executive Director – Marcia Williams
- WCHM Project Officer – Robyn Taranto
- Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) Training Consultant – Serena Ann
- Multicultural Women’s Advocacy ACT (MWA) – Elena Sione, Jelena Serna, Riitta Palasrinne and Agnes Miller
- ACT Office for Multicultural Affairs (OMA) – Rebecca Glasgow
- Women’s Health Service (WHS) – Deborah Colliver
- Companion House – Vesna Golic
- YWCA Housing Support Unit – Taryn Hocking

Methodology

In line with the broader strategic direction of WCHM research, significant emphasis was placed on recording the personal stories and ‘lived experience’ of the women, so as to best represent their needs and experiences.

Narratives or stories of lived experience are a part of everyday life as people share their experiences with others, negotiate their meaning and assess the next step for action. Stories of lived experience can *provide insights into how forced migrants seek to make sense of displacement and violence, re-establish identity in ruptured life courses and communities, or bear witness to violence and repression*⁶. Listening to stories honors the oral traditions of many cultures and hence a very appropriate method for the women to deliver the training. It allows the suffering and issues of social isolation to be shared, to become visible, present and embodied.

For the CALD women this meant a great deal of reflection as they needed to ‘step outside’ their experiences and culture, and assume the perspective of an external observer. This was necessary for them to be able to revisit various conflict situations, which at times was a difficult process for them. Over time, they found words to express their experiences and were facilitated to condense the stories into a concise and informative narrative.

Support was embedded throughout the training to ensure the needs of the women were met. The project was professionally facilitated jointly by CIT and WCHM to work with volunteer refugee women to create and deliver training modules about their culture and experiences as a refugee settling in Canberra.

CIT provided a staff member, Serena Ann, as a training consultant to this project for up to 3 hours per week over the project implementation. Serena Ann had a professional background in development and delivery of cultural competency training and of work with refugees. She worked closely with the WCHM Project Officer on the training design and content and once the trainee participants were recruited, supported training sessions as required.

⁶ Marial Eastmond, *Stories as Lived Experience: Narratives in Forced Migration Research*, *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol 20 No 2, 2007

This was a unique program based on the lived experiences of the women which encouraged them to be advocates and leaders for their communities, and to also deliver gender-sensitive information to ACT services to assist them to engage with their communities, and to create improvements with effective strategies for building the women's capacity to access support services that meet their needs.

Project Implementation

Implementation of the project involved 5 phases:

- Consultation
- Recruitment
- Collaboration with CIT
- Program Development with Women
- Piloting the training to Service Providers

Consultation

Service providers were invited to identify the new and emerging cultural communities to be targeted for the project and also women leaders in these cultural communities who would be suitable for the project.

The second stage involved service providers identifying the specific content about the emerging cultural groups that they were most likely to need in order to provide appropriate services. This involved a range of approaches including facilitating a workshop and ongoing communication with various services and organisations as required.

A workshop was conducted with 19 service representatives where the participants agreed on the priority CALD groups for this project (Southern Sudanese, Mon and Karen Burmese), and culture-specific information needs for different sectors (e.g. domestic violence providers versus a health service). A comprehensive list of topics was generated from this, with four underlying themes, (the four C's):

- **CULTURE** - Country of origin, ethnic diversity, religion, social and traditional family structures, health and education
- **CONFLICT** - The political conflict that lead to leaving their homelands
- **CAMPS** - Life and issues in refugee camps
- **CANBERRA** - The community in Canberra, settlement considerations and challenges including language and communication, women's health, education and employment.

The Reference Group confirmed the outcomes of the consultation process.

Building collaborative relationships with service providers during this consultation process was helpful to identify culturally appropriate channels to engage with the CALD communities. For example, initial consultation with Companion House helped the Project Officer identify relevant community leaders and negotiate cultural attitudes and views in seeking their assistance

in the project. Companion House also provided guidance with the recruitment processes.

The service providers who engaged in the consultation process, particularly the workshop, expressed enthusiastic support for the project aims, and an eagerness for the training to be available for rollout as soon as possible. Many of the attendees present at this workshop subsequently attended the pilot presentation in July.

Recruitment

The success and sustainability of the project relied on the CALD women's commitment to the training module development, their skill suitability and their future availability for any further rollout. Additionally, to address intergenerational issues, the project aimed to recruit both a younger and an older woman from each CALD group.

WCHM linked with Companion House, who offered their assistance and support to help identify and invite women to participate. We would like to especially acknowledge Hongsar Channaibanya for his enthusiasm for the project and for connecting WCHM with both the Mon and Karen women, and James Mayen for his assistance with the Sudanese women. As a result of their efforts we were able to recruit seven women to participate—three from Southern Sudan, and two from each of the Mon and Karen communities.

The women were engaged in the project as WCHM volunteers and in recognition of the time and knowledge they contributed to the program development, each woman received gift vouchers and transport reimbursements.

The women had varying levels of education—English and other community services qualifications from CIT; and Sudanese qualifications in Psychology, pre-School Education, Business and Accounting.

The women were expected to gain the following benefits:

- Developing skills such as public speaking and presentation
- Ability to design training sessions
- Practical training skills and experience that can be shown for future employers
- The capacity to deliver ongoing cultural sensitivity train to service providers
- Improving the contact of their community with the types of services their community accesses

Of the eight women who volunteered to participate in this project, only two (one Sudanese and one Mon woman) completed the full program, which included presenting the pilot training sessions to service providers.

With the Sudanese women, one had to return unexpectedly mid-way through the training to Sudan for family reasons and had to withdraw. The second Sudanese woman attended 11 of the 18 training sessions, but also experienced unexpected family situations which prevented her from completing the program.

Of the two Mon women participating, one withdrew due to work and family reasons.

All three Karen women were unable to complete the program. One woman obtained fulltime work which impacted on her availability. The elder Karen woman withdrew due to her commitments to her full-time English studies and her very active role within her community, which involved numerous activities for fostering links between the Karen and wider ACT communities (for which she had received a Harmony Day Community Leadership Award). The third Karen woman had to return unexpectedly to a Thai border refugee camp for emergency family reasons.

This result highlights the complexity of lives for refugees in their ongoing settlement experience as they negotiate complex health and lifestyle adjustments, the high priority for them of the needs of their families both in Canberra and in their homelands, and the competition for their time to engage outside of their communities.

Also concepts of time in many cultures are very different to our Western views and flexibility was required to adapt training schedules and meetings to reflect this while at the same time being mindful of the project timeframe. The learning from working with the CALD women is that flexibility and understanding are required to adapt to and embrace the particular life situations and commitments of the CALD community.

Despite the fact that many of the women did not complete the full program, there were still many learnings for the individual women. For example feedback from the Karen woman who withdrew towards the end of the program was about the new strengths she gained and new ways of supporting women in her community:

“By working with other women from other cultural background and have similar experiences inspire me to develop my skills, gain different techniques to deliver presentation”

“I’m more involved in women’s groups and I feel like this is part of my duty to do”

Collaboration with CIT

The WCHM Project Officer conducted initial background research into refugee issues generally and specific research relating to the project’s identified cultural groups. This research informed the theoretical components of the program content and development, and a resource-kit for service providers.

The CIT Project Officer worked closely with the WCHM Project Officer to develop a training schedule for the CALD women. The training schedule had several key components:

- Personal and group empowerment activities to build a sense of group and belonging - it was important to initially build a sense of safety and trust so the women could build on their self esteem and confidence to share stories of their experiences, and to draw out issues for advocacy and common narratives
- Encouraging participants to take ownership over their own learning and participation by reflecting on and establishing their own goals and objectives for the training
- Providing facilitators with information about any skills training needed by the women early in the program so that these could be delivered as they developed the training content
- Understanding of various training modes - this included communication and presentation skills to support clarity and confidence about the women's personal presentation styles
- Provision of an overview of the Community Services sector - by understanding the roles and responsibilities of ACT service providers would have two key benefits-
 - Introduce the women to the types of services they are likely to deliver training to
 - Provide information about services which they may be able to pass on to others in their communities, thereby increasing their leadership capacity
- Strategies to identify core and secondary information for the Mon, Karen and Sudanese groups to meet service provider information needs, and then prioritise to develop a training session.

Program development with the women

The delivery of the training program to the CALD women had to be negotiated to meet the competing commitments of the women. All the women were involved in providing varying levels of support to their community members. As their religion plays a vital part in their everyday lives and attending to church or temple duties and functions was a high priority for some, these personal commitments were respected in all negotiations throughout the project. In addition to this, two of the seven women were engaged in full-time English studies at CIT, and three were working part-time.

With these constraints it was necessary to deliver training on weekdays for the Sudanese and on a Sunday for the Mon and Karen group. This approach proved beneficial in overcoming the otherwise logistical difficulties with the program, as well as accommodating the need for culturally specific activities for some of the program development.

All training was delivered at WCHM's offices in Pearce over a four month period and were conducted in a series of 4-5 hour workshops for each group held 1-2 times weekly depending on availability of the women. In all, there

were 18 sessions conducted with the Sudanese women and 15 sessions with the Mon and Karen women.

The structure of the training for the women involved covering communication and presentation skills theory and practice, and logistics on how to move forward with the project development. The sessions began with identifying issues followed by an informal chat, then allowing the women to write down key information which was followed by the Project Officer facilitating shaping the text with them. A range of topics were covered in depth, such as their culture and traditions, political conflict leading to refugee status, life in refugee camps, the journey to Canberra, and their resettlement experiences and challenges. There was a particular focus of women's health and needs, language and communication issues, education and employment challenges, and the barriers their communities face in accessing services in the ACT.

It was important to foster trust and rapport with and among the women from the beginning, and to maintain a genuinely respectful and non-judgemental attitude within the groups. This then provided a safe space for the women to explore and share their many personal stories which were then woven into the presentation content.

Throughout this process, the women were mentored to develop their skills and confidence as trainers; to develop leadership qualities; to encourage them to achieve their fullest potential and personal goals; and to foster supportive relationships both within the organisation, with the other participants, and to expand their networks outside of their communities. The women were given support with transport, and when necessary, the Project Officer would meet with them in a more convenient location. These factors encouraged their continued engagement with the project.

The women provided positive feedback to this mentoring process, for example, one woman is now doing mentoring in her own community as a direct result of participating in this program. This is evidence of the volunteers' growth in confidence and capacity to embrace how they can contribute to their community in ways they previously had not imagined.

Examples of comments from the women who completed the program included:

- New networks and information about service providers - *"I learnt how service providers work with communities like my Mon community. I have made contact with 10 new service providers"*
- New strengths gained - *"Confidence – I now speak more confidently because I know what I am talking about. I have a stronger commitment to let the service providers know about my community and help them solve the problem that will come through their workplace".*
"Confidence, 90% increase. Now I can speak anywhere, I am not

afraid of talking. I understand now that others want to help, from the responses to my presentation. I know they want to listen to me, that makes me confident to speak”

- *New ways of supporting women in their community - “Now I want to meet with our community especially women and talk with them about different services and help them to know which services they can go to”*
- *Other skills or learning gained - “I learnt how to join from one topic to another, how to link information, how to develop a training program. I feel I reached the level that I can talk in public with service providers about our culture. I developed how to manage time for presenting and how to summarise important points to meet timeframes”
“How to concentrate on main points. When I talk I look at people, before I couldn’t look at people’s faces when talking. This makes me more confident. First I afraid, now when they look at me, more connection. How to analyse different topics. How to know my story and speak clearly. To make friendship with other women, easier than before. Before not easy to make friends. Able to put information what I need to present to the service. Now I know the connection between the subjects.”*
- *Comments on the overall project - “Everything that I wanted to achieve (for my goals) I have achieved. Because of this trainer, she has qualifications and skill to train bicultures and she did it step by step to help us manage our activities. Also we developed trust between us and the trainer. In the end I did achieve, I am very happy now. , I feel I have the responsibility to let service providers know about our culture and the challenges facing us, especially the women”
“I’m not scared anymore, wherever I go”*

Piloting the training to Service Providers

Separate Sudanese and Mon pilot training sessions were delivered to ACT services to assist with advice and feedback to pilot the training and ensure that it met the identified needs of providers before the future roll out to ACT services. The Sudanese session was held at WCHM on 14th July and the Mon presentation was held on 15th July 2010.

Both sessions were for 3 hours and eleven representatives from a diverse range of services attended, along with 5 staff members from WCHM.

The presentation was facilitated by the Project Officer and co-presented with the cultural trainer. Resources were also handed out for feedback on usefulness and relevance for the service providers. These included -

- pre-reading community profiles
- Mon/Sudanese ‘What would help’ checklist
- From the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) :
 - Fact Sheets:
 - Refugee and Humanitarian Visas
 - Australia’s Refugee and Humanitarian Program

- Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS)
- Pre-departure Medical Screening (PDMS)
- Translating and Interpreting Service
- Settlement Grants Program
- Eligibility for Settlement Services

The training for service providers was designed to raise questions about how ACT services are perceived by the CALD communities, and to stimulate service provider consideration of solutions to those questions by providing them with more information about the specific needs of their clients.

Listening to the lived experiences of the women was the strongest part of feedback from providers who attended the pilot training, and the attendees felt they could share these stories with colleagues.

Evaluation findings

The key findings and achievements were:

- The increased capacities and confidence of the women. For the women who provided the final feedback they acknowledged they met their personal goals for the project:
 - Increased confidence to speak with others, both within and outside of their communities
 - Increased skills for developing and presenting a training session about their culture and experiences as a refugee woman in Canberra
 - Increased confidence to present and share their knowledge on an equal basis
 - Time and self-management skills
 - Exposure to other organisations to increase their networks
 - The ability to transfer what they learnt to their communities, and be a mediator between their community and service providers
 - Increase in their understanding of the community services sector and the diversity and roles of service providers
- The rapport developed with the women and the Project Worker to negotiate and address any emerging project issues, including any relevant personal issues that would impact on their participation.
- The development of strong partnerships with other organisations was key to the success in identifying the target groups and training content for service providers, and providing feedback on the pilot training.
- For the service providers who attended the Pilot Presentation the strongest feedback was about the power of listening to the lived experiences of the women to help them understand better the issues in delivering appropriate services.
 - “... the subtleties came through that would not come up with only written material”*
 - “Very powerful”*
 - “The personal approach takes the information to a more ‘experiential’ understanding”*
 - “..the lived experience is always more meaningful and stays with you”*

“Not only add value but relevance as well, because of authenticity and honesty of the presenter”

“It gives more depth to experiences by these communities, and helps you have a better understanding of the experiences they have had”

- Overall, the majority of service providers found the relevance of the training to their work ‘very useful’ to ‘useful’.

“The information was well presented. A consistent, logical flow linking the historic and the present day experience of the Sudanese community members in the ACT”

“Fantastic – really fills in gaps of understanding”

“Information about different cultures is so important so service can tailor their own service to be appropriate

- There was unanimous confirmation from all attendees that they would recommend their colleagues attend the training as well. There was a strong emphasis that the training would be valuable to deliver to government agencies as well as community service providers.
- The pilot did demonstrate that the content could be presented within a 3-hour timeframe, however feedback was very strong indicating they wanted more time for questions and to explore practical strategies the services could adopt.
- The ‘*What would help*’ handout developed in the women’s words was well received as a useful resource for providers to take away with them:
“The presentation and handouts articulated the issues faced by women as a refugee and in Australia”

How the Project added value to WCHM

Working closely with community representatives and building understanding of cultures and issues faced by women in these cultures.

- More specific information on Sudanese, Mon and Karen cultures, particularly in relation to issues around women, their roles, expectations and needs
- Insight into the needs of Sudanese, Mon and Karen women which enabled WCHM to instigate other projects that address their needs and gaps in unmet service provision
- Develop new networks into the communities via the participating women
- This provides the opportunity for ongoing partnerships with both the women and their communities to engage with future WCHM projects, e.g. the CIT audio/visual Sudanese DVDs; proposed peer support project.
- Strengthened partnerships with organisations such as Companion House who supported the recruitment process for the CALD women. They also provided advisory support in the initial stages of the project
- Ongoing support of individual women to have a voice within their own community as well as the larger ACT community

Education and training is a relatively new area for WCHM, so the project developed our skills to undertake similar work in the future.

- With the completion of the training of the women to be cultural trainers, the organisation now has the capacity to facilitate the rollout of the training to service providers, and to maintain support for the women to deliver the training
- This project provided a model of training using lived experience of the women, thus integrating the voices of women from those communities into the mainstream
- The project provides a unique model for gender-based and culture-specific training to be delivered in a way that creates equal dialogue between the cultural community and the sector, and promotes mutual respect on both sides

Service Providers training provision to and an increased connection between women's services and the needs of CALD women.

- The project has generated an awareness of the needs of the Southern Sudanese and Mon communities and an awareness, openness and motivation from service providers about the outcomes of the project
- Cross sectoral awareness amongst service providers of the recognition to form partnerships and not silos, e.g., working collaboratively to identify specific cultural training content to address gaps in information needs of the sector.

Project Achievements and Learnings

Achievements

As a result of this project a program for cultural awareness training for either the Southern Sudanese or Burmese Mon communities is now available as an opportunity for ACT community service practitioners (such as family support workers, refuge workers, health workers and emergency service workers) to listen to the lived experiences of women and which is aimed to help them better understand the issues in delivering more culturally sensitive services to these communities in the ACT and how to work more effectively with them.

For the participating CALD women the project was able to build on their capacities and confidence to be trainers. This was identified in their final feedback acknowledging their personal goals for the project were met by:

- Increased confidence to speak with others, both within and outside of their communities
- Increased skills for developing and presenting a training session about their culture and experiences as a refugee woman in Canberra
- Increased confidence to present and share their knowledge on an equal basis
- Time and self-management skills
- Exposure to other organisations to increase their networks
- The ability to transfer what they learnt to their communities, and be a mediator between their community and service providers
- Increase in their understanding of the community services sector and the diversity and roles of service providers

The rapport developed between the women and the Project Officer enabled a respectful pathway to negotiate and address any emerging project issues, including any relevant personal issues that would impact on their participation.

The development of strong partnerships with other organisations was key to the success in identifying the target groups and training content for service providers, and providing feedback on the pilot training.

Learnings - What could have been done differently?

Impact of Funding Delays on Project Timeframe

Delays in obtaining grant funds (till November) created setbacks with recruitment of the Project Officer, and this impacted on the progress of the project due to the unavailability of many services over the December/January period which created tighter project deadlines. If there are delays in funding approval this should be taken into account with the project commencement date so that the full length of the project schedule is included.

Recruitment of CALD women

A key learning was really about the great complexity of the lives of the women and the pressures on them. Most of the women had been in Canberra for several years and yet the demands from issues that arose for them as refugees were still pressing, such as language; employment; and family issues resulting from cultural shifts impacting on traditional family structures and values. This project aimed to ensure a sustainable project outcome by recruiting two women from each ethnic group, allowing for any impact on the ability to continue commitment and also to address intergenerational issues.

Another learning is the recognition that culturally appropriate avenues for recruitment protocols is a relatively complex process and may take longer than anticipated, and a realistic timeframe needs to account for a 4-step recruitment process which involves –

- first consulting the key stakeholder organisations who are in touch with those communities
- second, consultation with community leaders
- third, those leaders approaching people in their communities to find out availability
- fourth, interviewing the women to determine suitability and availability for participation in the project.

Implementation of a training schedule

There was an information overload for the women at the beginning phase due to presenting the theoretical component covering communication and presentation skills, and the overview of the community services sector. For a more balanced approach to theory and cultural content input from the women, adjust the theoretical components to be covered over a longer timeframe in a tandem approach alongside the women's development of the program content.

Outcomes for CIT

CIT is the key institution that refugees are engaged with to gain the opportunities of education and training for successful inclusion into Australian society. NGOs like Companion House and others such as CatholicCare are clearly supportive of this process as are other training and education institutions. CIT, however, is the most significant instrument for social inclusion because it can offer the women options for a vocational path and a tertiary path. What we have found from project inputs from the women is that they see CIT as the key link in that respect.

Discussions arose in the course of the project implementation on issues affecting these particular refugee communities. Where these discussions related to refugee needs for training and education and their participation in CIT courses, it was possible to explore these issues for identification to the CIT staff member to feed back:

- CIT already has a profile in the Sudanese, Mon and Karen communities mainly through English languages classes. What arose as an issue was a need for more specific services for refugees, once having a modicum of English language, to enter education and training pathways, stay in them, and to direct themselves through these pathways appropriately where these opportunities lie through CIT courses. Women from all three communities identified their own needs in this respect, but particularly identified the negative impacts on themselves and their children. Some of these impacts included their male youth and older males dropping out of English classes and not furthering their education. This was mainly due to a loss of confidence and status they experienced on arrival with changes in their role in relation to their community.
- In the refugee Mon, Karen and Sudanese communities there has been an issue of young people of high school age facing serious barriers to acquiring education and training in Canberra, due to either no prior education or such limited prior education that they cannot join in high school classes. The method of placement the project participants described was that these youth undertake English classes for 6 months, then are placed in high school at the age level they would expect to be had they proceeded as usual through the education system. Still not fully fluent in English and without even the basics of education, numbers of them flounder. The women gave examples of such young people, particularly males, who find it demoralizing and exit having lost confidence and motivation for education and training and being unable to work in anything but unskilled occupations. CIT does provide courses for such youth such as *Access 10*. However, the women spoke of the delays in learning about such training and education options for their children and themselves, and the difficulty for them with getting help to find a pathway through the necessary training, and subsequently to securing jobs.
- Another gap identified by the women concerned what may be basic information to many Australians relating to health and coping with problems such as drinking and gambling which was not known to them. It was suggested that one way to get more information to refugee students was to use the avenue of weaving this type of information throughout the Certificate IV courses in English, rather than presenting this information

mostly at the commencement of their English training and at a time when they understood little and were overwhelmed by their multiple and complex settlement adjustments. By this time refugees may have sufficient English to understand material presented around, for example health promotion information and the various community services available to them.

Possible strategies identified for CIT to consider were:

- English classes to expand the focus from everyday life skills to also incorporate bridging language and skills for vocational courses at CIT
- Greater integration between departments, e.g. English, to include programs with childcare and parenting, cooking, health, media, ICT, etc.
- CIT to seek more partnerships with NGOs to mentor English language students in specific vocational areas, e.g. aged care, disability, community development
- Specialised bridging courses for technical language e.g. Health and community, and possibly more advanced course to support medical terminology for nursing, etc.
- Increase CIT liaison with refugee students on matters of current and further training, by methods such as
 - Mentoring in vocational pathways and guidance
 - Regular in-class presence informing of options and support addressing needs such as
 - Centrelink hour requirements 19hrs/20 hrs. We are informed by women they do not know they can ask for a letter for Centrelink to cover their full-time obligations
 - Connecting them to other parts of CIT outside of the language area so they can get a broad sense of the possibilities for training while they work as well as fulltime training
 - Revisit some of the key needs throughout the course as their English improves and they are not overwhelmed with dealing with their immediate settlement issues and challenges

Conclusion

Since the completion of the pilots, WCHM has been rolling out the modules and the permanent Community Development Worker and the Mon and Sudanese presenters have co-facilitated four training sessions for service providers with attendees from a range of service providers including Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT, Relationships Australia, the Domestic Violence Crisis Unit, the AFP and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. The participants were charged to attend and the presenters were paid as facilitators.

Feedback from participants has been positive, with unanimous confirmation that they would recommend the training module to their colleagues. WCHM is currently developing a plan for expansion of the program to other ACT services including the Emergency Services. And we are also looking at other

sustainable options for presenting the information including compiling a booklet with the stories and solutions detailed for providers.