



At the Footy match! Go Carlton Blues!

Refugee Services Down Under

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Brotherhood of St. Laurence

Melbourne, VIC, Australia

- Melbourne is the cultural capital of Australia
- Australia is a popular refugee resettlement country accepting, if you compare relative population sizes, as many refugees as the U.S.
- Policy surrounding asylum seekers is currently one of the most controversial issues in Australia
- Refugees and asylum seekers migrate to Australia from all over the world—Liberia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Congo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Burma and many other countries

Field Placement

- I spent four months completing my field placement for the Brotherhood of St. Laurence at their Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC)
- They are a large non-profit with many centres located in Melbourne and the surrounding suburbs
- EMC provides services to refugee communities and asylum seekers. They have family counsellors, community development workers, youth programs and many other services

My Position

- I worked for the Family Service team doing a research/evaluation project focussing on the issues areas of family violence and family breakdown in refugee communities and what services were available to individuals dealing with these issues in the greater Melbourne area
- We wanted to learn why refugee individuals were not accessing available services, and if there were innovative programs seemed effective
- I interviewed 22 direct service employees around the city at different agencies, 19 newly arrived humanitarian entrants, and 10 community leaders who were former refugees that held direct service positions as well as informal leadership roles in their community
- All research was interview-based, gathered and analysed by myself, written up in a large report with recommendations and then presented to my agency and sent out to all participating agencies.

Skills Utilized/Developed

- Increased cultural competency, and the ability to analyse whether a program is culturally appropriate
- Active listening and generative interviewing skills
- Research and evaluation techniques and skills

Classroom Connections

- I took a variety of classes here in the SSW and in the Ford school of Public Policy that would give me the tools necessary for global work
- When I had the opportunity I would tailor my papers and assignments to focus on global issues

Lessons Learned

- We often view other non-western cultural practices as a barrier rather than something we can learn from and combine with our own practices to create innovative and integrated services that are more culturally appropriate and effective
- *“Before dealing with another culture, the key area is to understand that culture, how do they operate, what did they achieve in the past? Did they work and what was their strength? Then you build on their strength and see how far you can go; because from their strengths they will gain confidence, but if you take their weaknesses they will lose that confidence to move on” (Congolese community leader).*



My Uncle, Cousin, Grandma, and myself hanging out on the Great Ocean Road

Career Connections

- I hope to return to Australia and continue to work with refugee communities
- I see a need to bridge the communication gap between those working on policy and programming and those working on the front lines

Advice

- Listen and observe those around you before you jump into your work
- Be flexible, adaptable and willing to try new things
- Don't be afraid to laugh at yourself
- Be humble and open minded

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My beautiful city! Melbourne, Australia

“You need to scratch where the community is itching, and our community is itching in a lot of ways” (Sierra Leonean community leader)