

LEAP

(Learning, Education, Aspiration, Participation)

Macquarie Mentoring



MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY



Progress Report 2011-2012

LEAP Macquarie Mentoring

Supporting high school students from refugee backgrounds



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A message from

Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Social Inclusion
Professor Gail Whiteford

Macquarie University's social inclusion unit prides itself on giving people a chance to benefit from a higher education, study at university and flourish in their chosen field. The LEAP Macquarie Mentoring program does just this for high school students from refugee backgrounds.

The LEAP Macquarie Mentoring program is a cornerstone initiative of the Social Inclusion agenda. Not only has the program gone from strength to strength over the past two years, but the mentors and mentees that have participated so far have grown together, learnt together and shared their journeys with each other. We cannot take the power of experience for granted, nor can we forget the potential that sharing these experiences have for those students that may not have had the chance to hear about university before.

In two years the program has seen over 170 mentors and 300 mentees benefit from the strong bond that is the mentoring relationship. I believe that this mentoring program tackles the uneven playing field that is higher education, and opens up opportunities for high school students from refugee backgrounds to pursue, participate and succeed in their educational futures.

I look forward to sharing the mentors' and mentees' journey through the program over the coming years and share in their confidence and joy that university and accessing a higher education is in fact possible, achievable and more accessible than ever before.



A message from

Manager, Widening Participation

Ruth Tregale



In a chance meeting just over two-and-a-half years ago, one of our students at Macquarie University, who had come to Australia as a refugee from Sierra Leone in 2004, told us that one of the most defining moments in his educational pathway had been the encouragement and inspiration of his English teacher at his High School in Western Sydney. Muhammad had felt so motivated by this particular teacher, that he had become determined to study hard and progress to university. He told us that he now had a dream of being able in some way to go back into high schools and motivate other students from refugee backgrounds to succeed in education.

Out of this conversation, the seeds for the LEAP Macquarie Mentoring program were sown. With the valued support of our partners at the NSW Department of Education and Communities Multicultural Programs Unit, and with the enthusiastic and dedicated input of students from clubs and societies representing various cultural groups across campus, after six months of planning and training our first group of excited student mentors travelled out to schools in Term One, 2011.

Today, two years later, it is with an incredible sense of pride and awe that I look back at the amazing work that our student mentors have been doing in the schools, and I am fortunate to have had the opportunity at first hand to meet many of the school students from refugee backgrounds who have told us how much they have benefited from the program.

The Macquarie Mentoring program has become a cornerstone of our LEAP programs, engaging with schools and communities to ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds also have the opportunity to access and succeed in higher education, and I look forward to seeing the program continue to grow from strength to strength in the years ahead.

A message from

Refugee Student Programs, Multicultural Programs
Unit, Department of Education and Communities
Jane Wallace



The Department of Education and Communities really values the partnership it has developed with Macquarie University through the Refugee Mentoring Program. Students from refugee backgrounds in high schools face significant challenges: settling into school in Australia, making friends, learning English well enough to succeed in their studies and finding out about possible post-school options.

Schools provide lots of support for students however teachers never have enough time to give every student the time they need. The mentoring program really complements the support schools can provide.

Each week, the mentors visit the refugee students in their schools. They talk to the students, take an interest in them, discuss possible options and help them work out their goals. They help them with study and organizing assignments and research skills. The high school students gain confidence through the relationships they develop with the mentors. The mentoring program helps restore young students' hopes for their future.



Background

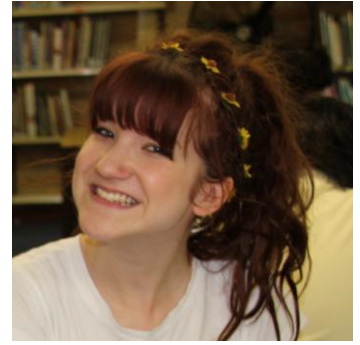
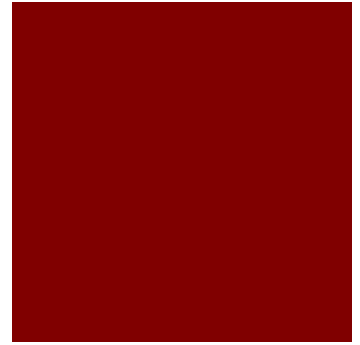
The refugee experience and schooling

Many school students from refugee backgrounds have experienced significant disruption to their education and have had little or no schooling prior to enrolment in an Australian school. As a result, they face great challenges in education and training. Many struggle emotionally and practically to acquire the language, literacy, cultural knowledge and everyday skills required for academic success at high school and progress to tertiary education.

Access to, and participation in, higher education bestows a huge advantage on a student entering the competitive Australian job market, both in terms of earning potential and through the building of social capital. This is especially important for people from refugee backgrounds, to be comfortable and integrate into Australian society. However, many students from refugee backgrounds and their families have little access to and knowledge of the range of higher education options available, and possess limited social capital, knowledge and confidence to navigate the maze of vocational and educational pathways in Australia. The result is that disproportionately low number of students from refugee backgrounds are currently studying at Australian universities.

As part of its plan to reform the Australian higher education system, the Federal Government aims to increase the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds participating in higher education. An important means to achieving this has been projects undertaken by universities in partnership with other stakeholders, including schools and communities.

The LEAP Macquarie Mentoring program for students from refugee backgrounds is one such partnership, recognising the need for ongoing support of targeted refugee high school students to enable and support their successful transition into higher education.



Social Inclusion and Outreach Strategy

As part of Macquarie University's Social Inclusion Plan, the first goal is to build a more diverse student population. One of the ways to achieve this is to map and coordinate outreach and mentoring programs within Macquarie University, as well as expand and develop new programs with disadvantaged schools. The LEAP Macquarie Mentoring program for students from refugee backgrounds achieves both of these aims. In promoting and developing this mentoring program further, it will meet the Social Inclusion Principles for Australia.

Australia's Social Inclusion Principles

1. Reduce disadvantage
2. Increase social, civil and economic participation
3. Give a greater voice combined with greater responsibility
4. Build on individual and community strengths
5. Build partnerships with key stakeholders
6. Develop tailored services
7. Early intervention / prevention
8. Build joined-up services and whole of government(s) solutions
9. Use evidence and integrated data to inform policy using locational approaches
10. Planning for sustainability

Outreach at Macquarie University

Throughout the planning and implementation of the mentoring program it was essential that there remained a focus on the lived experience of refugees and the barriers high school-aged young people experience in school and their everyday life.

In doing so, various Macquarie University students and student groups from a variety of backgrounds were consulted regarding their experiences, ideas and views of the program.

In addition to this, various stakeholders including the Department of Education and Communities remain an integral part of the successful day-to-day running of the program.



Aakifah Suleman is responsible for coordinating the everyday running of the LEAP Macquarie Mentoring program and ensures that mentors are trained, prepared and effectively supported throughout the program. She is a qualified occupational therapist who has a professional background in refugee settlement. Aakifah has brought a unique perspective to the mentoring program and deeply values the right to engage meaningfully in one's education. She actively works to uphold the right to higher education for young people from refugee backgrounds and believes in the great impact a socially inclusive environment can have for this group.

Mohammed Bangura was one of the students who played an integral role in the development of the mentoring program as well as shaping the role of the mentor. Mohammed came to Australia as a refugee from Sierra Leone in June 2004 aged 17. His schooling in Sierra Leone was ended by the civil war when Mohammed was in year 9. In Australia, he attended the Marrickville Intensive English Centre and went on to successfully complete years 10-12 at Ashfield Boys High School. It was his English teacher at Ashfield who encouraged him to consider university, an option that would not have been available to someone from his background in Sierra Leone. Mohammed has now completed a Bachelor in Economics and Finance at Macquarie University and is currently undertaking a Masters degree.





About the program

Aims, objectives, structure

The LEAP Macquarie Mentoring program aims to:

- Develop confidence, resilience and agency
- Develop study and research skills
- Raise aspirations towards further study
- Develop an awareness of school and university cultures in the Australian context
- Make decisions regarding appropriate educational pathways

Each week mentors develop, build upon and work towards mutually defined goals with their mentees.

The program's structure remains needs-based but provides the structure mentors need to be well supported throughout the semester.



Weeks 1-3

Objective

Personal goal setting

Types of activities

1. Overview of program
2. Mentors' stories
3. Student narratives
4. Subject mapping
5. Goal setting

Expected outcomes

1. Ability to identify areas for development and set goals
2. Personalised learning plan for each student



Weeks 4-6

Objective

Skill building

Types of activities

1. Study skills
2. Time management, task setting skills
3. Peer support networks
4. Information literacy: e.g. search engines

Expected outcomes

1. Improved information literacy, ICT and research skills
2. Increased tertiary efficacy



Weeks 7-9

Objective

Informed decision making

Types of activities

1. Campus visit
2. Career research strategies
3. Exploration of pathways / UAC website
4. Macquarie students' stories
5. Reflection

Expected outcomes

1. Knowledge of relevant information sources
2. Research skills
3. 'Demystification' of university
4. Understanding of educational pathways
5. Development of realistic educational aspirations

About the program

On-campus events

University Experience Program

Even before the commencement of the LEAP Macquarie Mentoring Program, the University Experience had been on Macquarie's agenda. Campus visits provide the high school students with an opportunity they may not otherwise have; to learn more about university life and explore a campus for the first time. Being surrounded by Macquarie University's beautiful scenery and visiting the various faculties proves to be an eye-opening experience for many of the students participating in the LEAP Macquarie Mentoring program.

"...it gives you some perspective of what uni life is like and also how it works and how you can settle into the uni."

The aim of these campus visits are extensive, but have an overarching view to increase awareness, knowledge and promote greater participation in one's future learning. By visiting Macquarie University's North Ryde campus, the university experience is 'demystified' and familiarises students and their parents/carers with the learning environment and campus facilities. It is a fun day out for students and provides positive experiences on which to build future aspirations of further study. Student development is also supported through campus visits with practical learning components such as participatory workshops and faculty activities that promote active engagement in what the university has to offer.

84% of students who visited the campus had **changed their ideas about university**

95% of students would **recommend the experience to other students**

87% could **imagine studying at Macquarie University**



About the program

On-campus events

University Experience Program

As part of the program for the day, the high school students are treated to an array of activities to build their knowledge, capacity and aspirations to engage in higher education. Inspirational speakers share their stories of a journey to Australia and the opportunities that were and are still becoming available in a country where education is valued, encourage and accessible.

To engage students in a fun and active way, and to pay tribute to the multiculturalism of the group and the university, a West African drumming group performs. The drummers' skills are far reaching and have been passed on from generations before them. Mali and his group are from Guinea and Senegal and have a special flare for capturing their audience's undivided attention.

An integral part of the university experience day is to explore Macquarie University's North Ryde campus. For many students, this was the highlight of their day. Mentors take small groups of students around campus visit key faculty buildings and major facilities such as the gym and aquatic centre, library, biological sciences and ancient history museums. During the tours, mentors share their personal experiences of life at university; the benefits as well as their challenges in meeting the demands of a university degree.

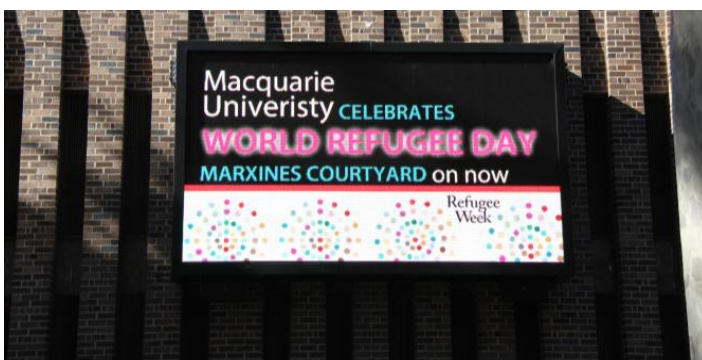


About the program

On-campus events

Refugee Week 2011 and 2012

Refugee Week and World Refugee Day arise every year and the LEAP team celebrates. In the last two years a free barbecue has been held on campus for all staff, students and passers by. The barbecue, sharing of food and conversation aims to raise awareness of the issues faced by refugees and asylum seekers on a global level. Interested students are invited to consider participating in the LEAP Macquarie Mentoring program, but at the least people walk away feeling more informed and aware of the international refugee situation that Australia has a duty to respond to. These events have been held on campus at a time when refugee and asylum seeker policy have become a controversial and emotive issue. Animated discussions, sharing of experiences and understandings will hopefully lead to local action that will contribute to more positive and rights-based solutions.



About the program

On-campus events

Mentor celebrations



At the end of each semester, the LEAP team congratulates and acknowledges the tireless efforts of its mentors in assisting students from refugee backgrounds to realise their potential, reach their goals and make a better future for themselves and their families. This celebration is not only an opportunity for mentors to see each other as a group and exchange experiences, but also to acknowledge the immense contributions the mentors have made to widening participation at Macquarie University.

“[The program has] given me a holistic view of the world and connected me with like-minded inspirational people.”

“Personally, I learnt more about their experiences and how it has affected them. They've taught me the importance of community and citizenship. It has also given a greater culture experience which has allowed me to appreciate diversity more.”

The schools

LEAP Macquarie Mentoring runs from various schools in Western and South Western Sydney regions



Miller Technology High School

With over 83% of the students attending Miller Technology High School being from non-English speaking backgrounds, the size of groups participating in the LEAP Macquarie Mentoring program have always been substantial. Led by a passionate teacher, Ms Suzanna Romic, her class was always ready and excited to be part of the mentoring sessions each week. With the majority of students from Arabic speaking backgrounds, the mentors were always willing to learn a few words in Arabic. A total of 79 students from Miller Technology High School have benefited from the mentoring program to date.



Evans High School

Evans High School's diversity displays the potential the students within it possess. Ms Bridget Sarris, deputy principal of the school, has been an ongoing support to the students and the mentors throughout the program. Ms Fiona Halliwell and Ms Sonja Rajic provided mentors invaluable background information, tips and strategies to ensure the most productive and meaningful sessions. The teachers ensure that all mentors are provided the appropriate information as the program progresses. Evans High School has had some 80 students participate in the mentoring program so far.



Bankstown Senior College

The only senior college involved in the program so far, Bankstown Senior College teaches some of the most motivated adult students in Sydney. Mentoring at this college introduces a new dimension and way of mentoring as compared to the other schools. Students are always very warm and welcoming at this college and the mentors thoroughly enjoy their time during sessions. Bankstown Senior College has had 79 students participate in the LEAP Macquarie Mentoring program.

The schools

LEAP Macquarie Mentoring runs from various schools in Western and South Western Sydney regions



Blacktown Boys High School

With continually diverse and engaging groups of students, it is no wonder that LEAP Macquarie Mentors enjoy themselves at Blacktown Boys High School. Mentors have developed lasting relationships with the students, built upon the school and university experience. Thanks to the ongoing support of Ms Pushpa Lal, 46 Blacktown Boys High School students have had the opportunity to participate in the mentoring program.



Blacktown Girls High School

The energy the Blacktown Girls High School's students bring to the mentoring sessions is something to be admired. With a wonderful coordinating teacher, Ms Karin Harrison, the girls arrive with eagerness that makes the mentors' tasks that much easier. 34 students have been mentors at Blacktown Girls High School to date.



Condell Park High School

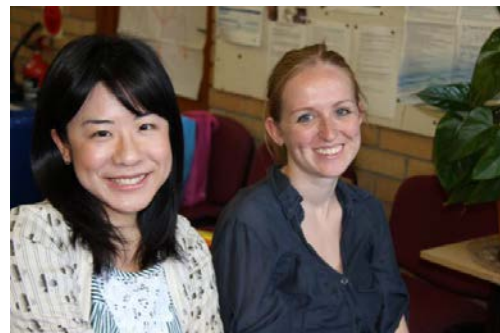
The latest school to join the LEAP Macquarie Mentoring program, Condell Park High School is a lively and highly diverse. With many other programs running at the school, Ms Stephanie Kougious recognizes the benefits of this program to her students. A total of 20 students have been supported during the first semester of 2012.

2011

Key facts and figures

The LEAP Macquarie Mentoring program commenced in Semester 2, 2011. Throughout the year 79 LEAP Macquarie Mentors visited five different partner schools across West and South Western Sydney. The mentors built strong relationships with 160 mentees across these schools and worked with them to raise their knowledge, skills and aspirations towards future educational pathways.

	Semester 1		Semester 2	
School	Mentors	Mentees	Mentors	Mentees
Miller Technology High School	7	21	9	19
Evans High School	8	21	11	19
Blacktown Girls High School	4	9	6	12
Blacktown Boys High School	6	10	8	13
Bankstown Senior College	10	15	10	21



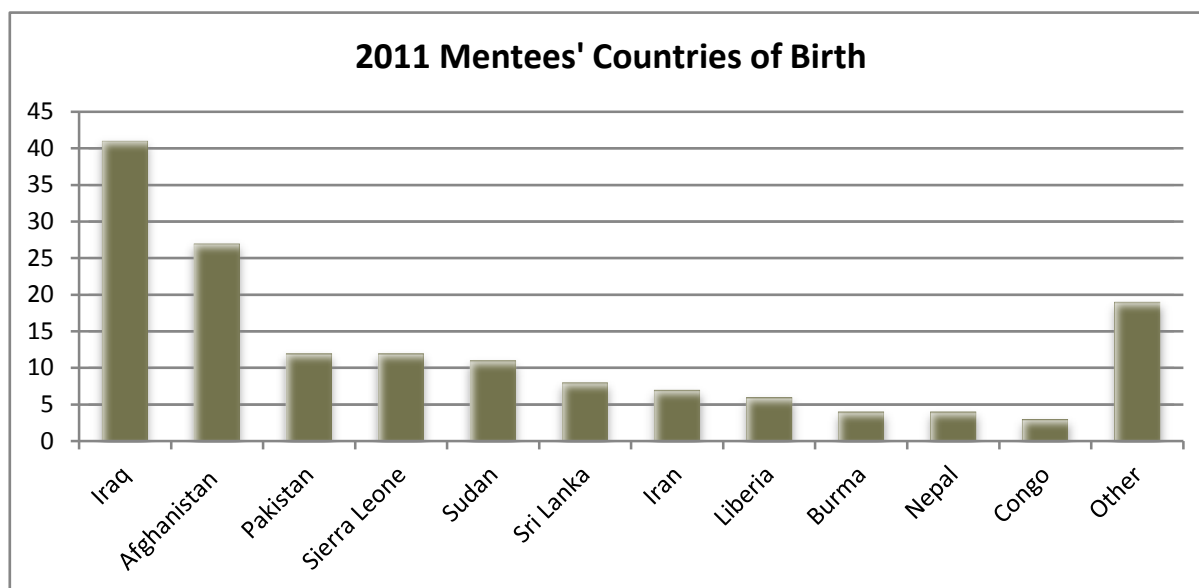
2011

at a glance



The mentees

Students participating in the LEAP Macquarie Mentoring program have the choice to nominate themselves to be involved, or may be recommended by their teacher to participate. The diversity of each group of students emphasises the importance of dedicated mentors that tailor their support to the specific needs of the student group. This diversity enriches the mentoring experience and allows a cultural exchange that further facilitates the relationship and skill building as they progress over the semester. The graph below depicts the diversity in countries of birth of the student mentees:



"...before I attended this program I wasn't confident in my [choice of] career. After I attended the mentoring program I got [the] confidence and also I chose the course which I'm going to do at university." (student from Evans High School)

"[the program] make me feel that I can do anything possible in life so that I can achieve my goals." (student from Blacktown Girls High School)

"He [my mentor] changed my mind because I thought English language is very hard and I can't learn it, but when I [was] introduced [to] him I noticed he came here just one year ago and I thought I can do it too." (student from Bankstown Senior College)

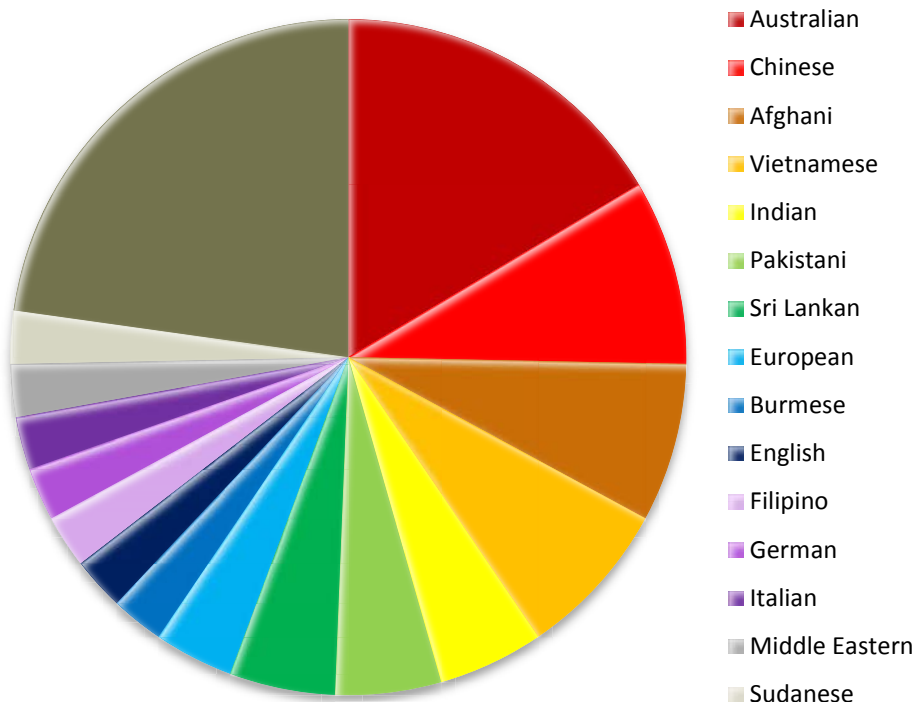
2011
at a glance



The mentors

Mentors participating in the LEAP Macquarie Mentoring program are from various faculties throughout Macquarie University. The LEAP team seeks out mentors that have a genuine interest, passion and motivation to be part of this unique support program. Mentors also have related experience with regard to mentoring and/or working with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The program aims to take advantage of the lived experiences of our mentors and channel these experiences to reach the aims of the program. Mentors are encouraged to share their experiences of high school and university to dispel the misconceptions some mentees may have about their future.

**Cultural Backgrounds of 2011 LEAP
Macquarie Mentors**



2011
at a glance



Mentors have their say

Alexandra Walker

I am now in my third and final year at Macquarie University, studying a Bachelor of Arts in Development and Cultural Change. I had previously been visiting refugees in Villawood Detention Centre, where I was exposed to the extreme suffering and horrible traumas people had gone through overseas. I began looking for a practical way in which I could help refugees settle into Australia. This is when I became involved with The Refugee Mentoring Program, which reintegrated my desire and motivated me to become more involved in helping the youth and refugees of Australia.

The Refugee Mentoring Program has been an invigorating and positively amazing experience. I was able to assist high school students in realising their dreams and how to reach them, whilst helping them to become more actively engaged with their learning. I was told by a year 11 student from Afghanistan, "Every time you come to see me at school I realise I can make it to university." This has not only put my life into perspective but has made me realise that one person can make a difference.



Patrick Ubonsuwan

I'm currently in my penultimate year of Master of Actuarial Practice and have finished HSC in year 2007. As I was an international student myself, I could closely relate to this program and sense that there is a great degree of urgency needed to fill the gap for student refugees to transition into the Australian education system.

This mentoring program has not just provided an excellent platform of support to those students but also enabled me to deeply appreciate what I currently have. Through this program I have developed my interpersonal skills in which I have successfully translated into real life, in fact I have recently scored several job offerings.

With only just a couple of hours a week from your university schedule, I could proudly say that I have contributed to the community and most importantly have gained invaluable experience in dealing with my mentees. By the end of the program I have developed strong bond with my mentees and was able to touch their inner feeling with my poem about HSC experience. From an actuarial point of view, I can confidently say that this program is priceless.



2012

Key facts and figures

2012 saw the continuing enthusiasm, passion and motivation from both the mentors and mentees alike. It has been another successful year with 95 mentors supporting a total of 178 students from the various high schools across Western and South Western Sydney.

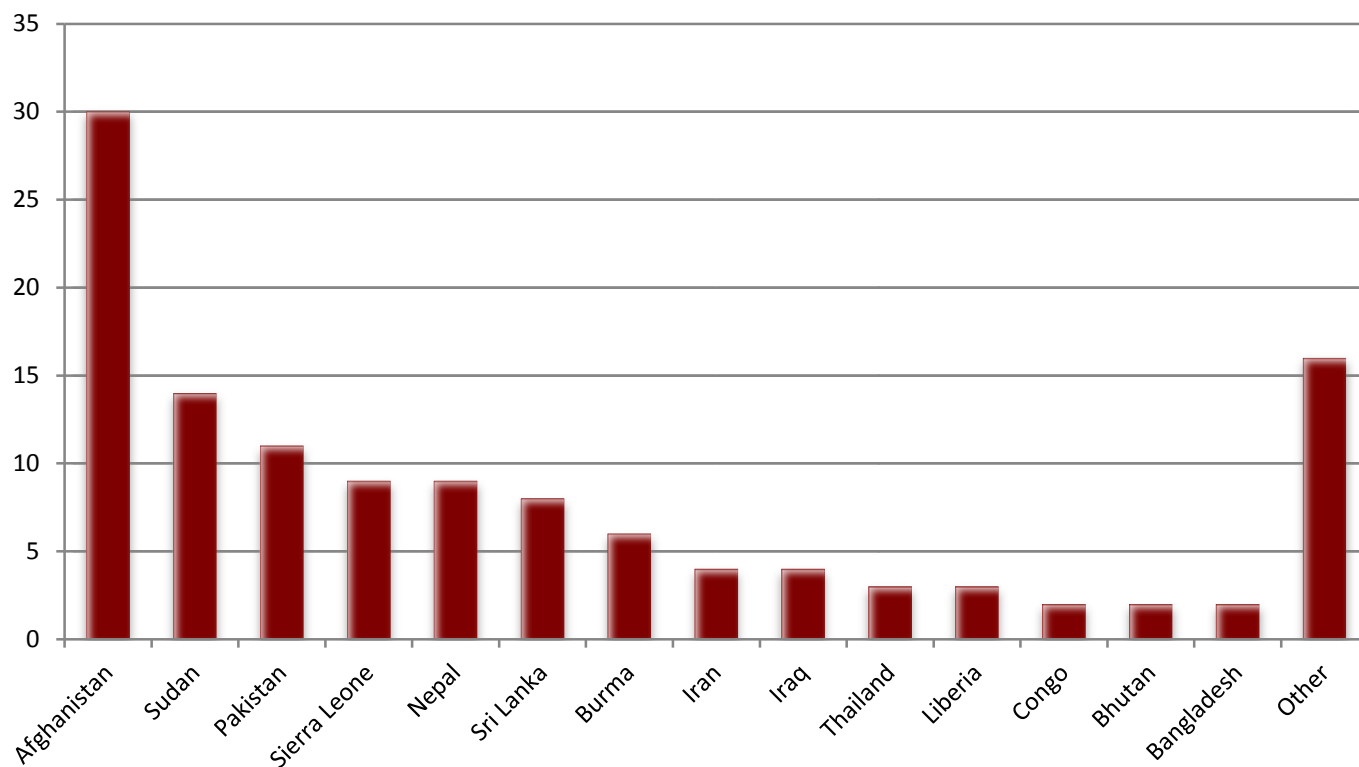
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Miller Technology High School	11	19	9	20
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Blacktown Girls High School			8	13
Blacktown Boys High School	6	10	8	13
Bankstown Senior College	12	27	12	16
Condell Park High School	10	20		



2012
at a glance



2012 Mentees' Countries of Birth



"I wasn't sure about what am I going to do in my life and now I have ideas of what am I going to be and what [I] am going to do thanks to all mentors." (student from Evans High School)

"The good thing was that we could talk openly about anything that there was someone to help and listen to you. I was also grouped with friends and with someone with similar interests." (student from Condell Park High School)

"I am confident with this program and I learnt a lot to help with my study. Now I know about my future I want to complete my study. I appreciate my mentor for his help." (student from Bankstown Senior College)

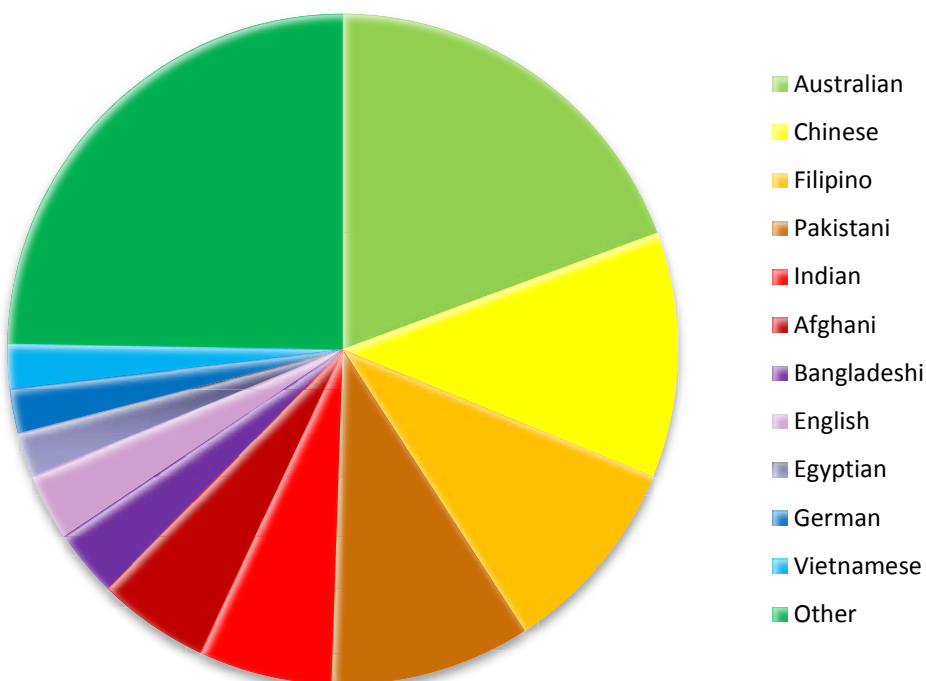
"This program has made me happy because it is serious and it also gave me a lot of tips for my future and that makes me feel good. I like it because I know what I should do to get to uni." (student from Blacktown Boys High School)

2012
at a glance



The mentors

Cultural Backgrounds of 2012 LEAP Macquarie Mentors



Tiger Webb

I'm studying for a Bachelor of Arts with a major in Linguistics. I'm in my second year and I completed high school in Australia at North Sydney Boys High.

Refugees and asylum seekers make sacrifices I can barely comprehend for the chance to take part in life experiences I take for granted every day. The LEAP Macquarie Mentoring program offers students a chance to help people from refugee backgrounds – I jumped at the chance. I loved the program.

My mentees seemed for the whole term to view me as just another interchangeable school-related adult, but on the last week of visits they hung back at the end nervously to ask if I would be back next semester. It was a wonderful feeling, to have made a difference to them – I still have the notes they wrote thanking me up on my wall.

2012
at a glance



The mentors

Jacqueline Gerodias

I am currently in my second year of studying a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Commercial Law with a Bachelor of Commerce majoring in Human Resources at Macquarie University. I finished high school in 2010 and I was fortunate enough to be selected as a Social Justice Leader, which is where my interest and support for people who are refugee and asylum seekers began.

I believe that as global citizens we are all responsible and accountable for the welfare of others in particular refugees fleeing their homes because they face turmoil. My experience as a mentor of two high school refugee girls gave me insight into their lives and the difficulties and prejudice they faced. The program and I encouraged the girls to attain their desired future careers and teach them study skills that would help them attain their goals. The girls even encouraged me when I had doubts about my study choice and gave me the opportunity for self-reflection. The program was a great experience and it helps each of those students in small but significant ways.

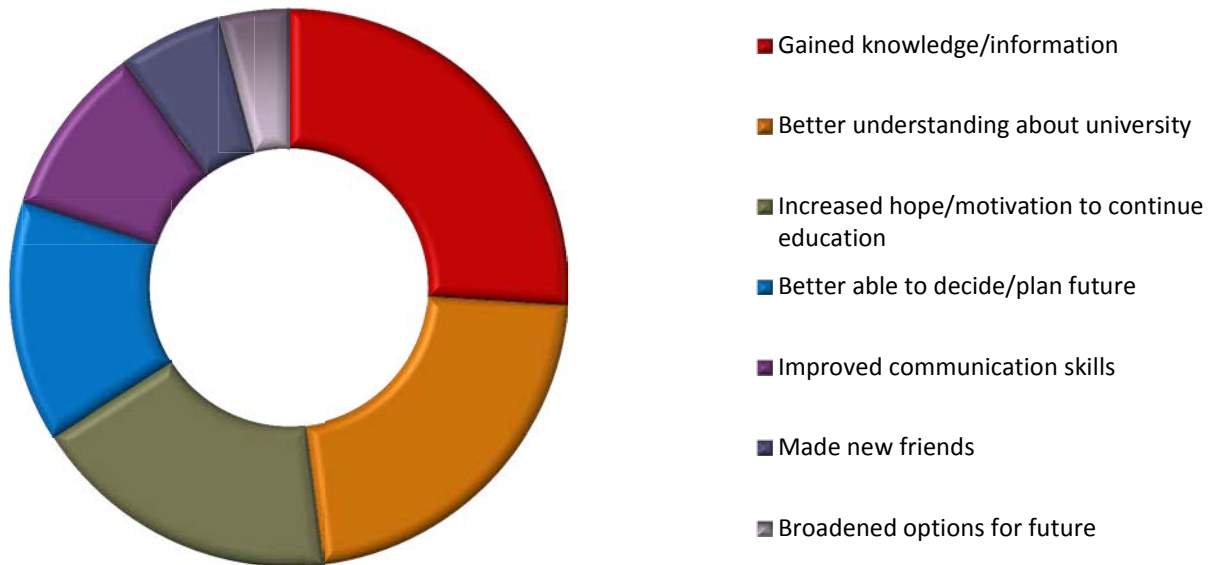


Our journey so far...

Outcomes

The success of the pilot program in 2011 was evident from the overwhelming interest from schools and teachers to continue the program, as well as the positive feedback from mentees and mentors. Various forms of evaluations were conducted including questionnaires, informal feedback and structured feedback sessions. Below is a depiction of the key outcomes for mentees involved in the program in its first year.

Key outcomes of LEAP Macquarie Mentoring



31% of students whose plans have changed since participating in the mentoring, said they were now going to aim to apply for University

27% said they were going to change their career aspirations towards something they were more interested in

19% of students said their view of future prospects had broadened

23% are now going to study and work harder to improve their academic outcomes

Looking forward

The past two years have been an exciting time for the LEAP team. The LEAP Macquarie Mentoring program has brought a new dimension to the Widening Participation agenda at Macquarie University, and is raising awareness among staff and students about the issues refugees and asylum seekers face in their everyday lives in Sydney. Now that these national issues are becoming more pronounced in our everyday encounters with the media and have become an urgent issue to address, we hope that students of Macquarie University find the mentoring program to be empowering not only for themselves, but for the high school students whom they are supporting.

Looking forward and planning for the future, the LEAP team plans to expand and develop the program to meet the needs of the greater Western and South Western Sydney regions.



“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has”

Margaret Mead (1901-1978)



LEAP Macquarie Mentoring



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