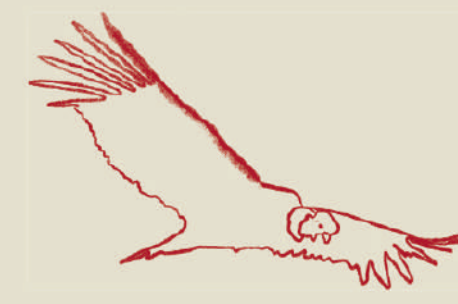
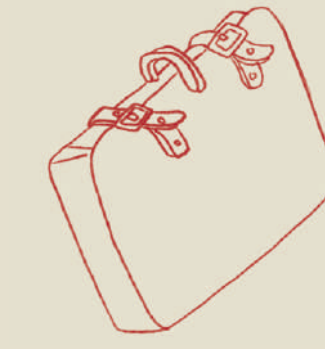




# the sweetest memory



MACQUARIE University



## Engaging and empowering low-SES students from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds while celebrating our shared humanity

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### A BOOK OF EMOTIONS

*The Sweetest Memory* is a book of collaborated recipes, memories and artworks shared by students of low-SES refugee or asylum seeker backgrounds, alongside members of the University's community of professionals and academics. Through the book, students were engaged in a learning community and empowered via story-telling to foster a sense of belonging to the University. The creative outcome reflects our shared humanity.

*"The message of inclusivity - everyone has a story to tell and all are worthy of our attention."*

*Participating Student*

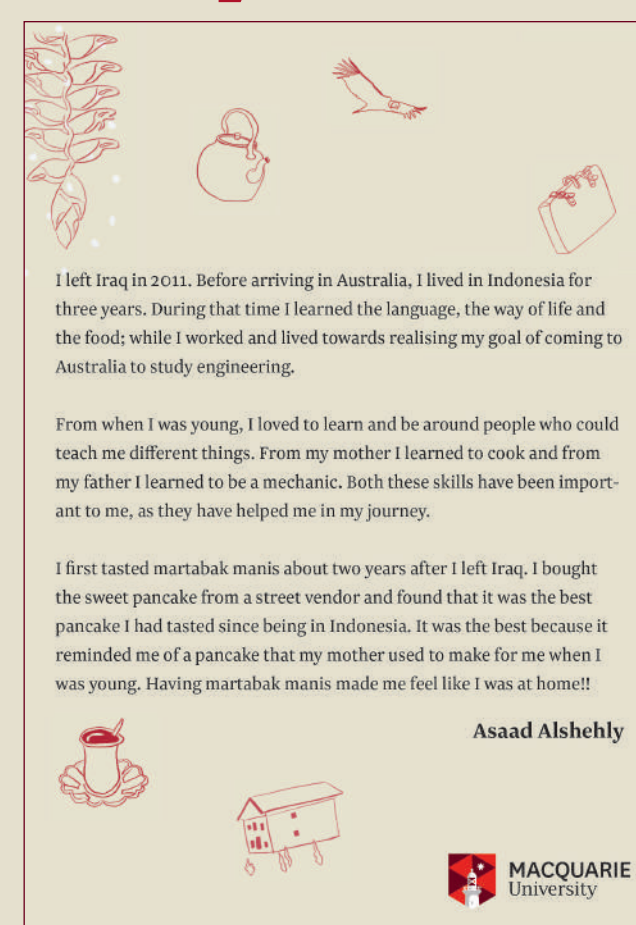
### BELONGING TO A LEARNING COMMUNITY

Low-SES students from refugee or asylum seeker backgrounds participated in a learning community that created *The Sweetest Memory*. Students expressed emotional connection with the central theme of the book relating to our shared humanity, via:

#### Visual art



#### Written recipes and memories



Kahu (2013) reflects that emotional connections associated with learning communities have "the potential to have a much more profound influence upon students and society than merely content learning."

*The Sweetest Memory* empowered students to narrate and share personal memories that created exchanges of understandings and built a sense of social inclusion and belonging. Belonging reinforces Askham's (2008) view that "emotional intensity (is) attached to the experience of learning."

### OUR SHARED HUMANITY

Underrepresented or disadvantaged students often report feeling isolated from the learning environment. Many academics, including Thomas (2002) identify institutional habitus as creating socio-cultural barriers for students who do not share similar backgrounds with 'traditional' cohorts.

*The Sweetest Memory* offered an inclusive platform for participating students to share, "construct and assimilate knowledge through a reciprocal process", that helped "humanize the learning environment" (Zhao and Khu 2004).

Celebrating our shared humanity encouraged students to realise common perspectives and values that raised their confidence and sense of empowerment as individuals, belonging to the whole.

*"Focus on the prior experience of students from refugee backgrounds bring to their learning, focus on their strengths"*

*Participating Academic*

### References

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- Karimshah, A., Wyder, M. Henman, P., Tay, D., Capelin, E., & Short, P. 2013. Overcoming adversity among low SES students: A study of strategies for retention. *Australian Universities' Review*, The, 55(2),5.
- Thomas, L. 2002. Student retention in higher education: The role of institutional habitus. *Journal of Education Policy* 17: 423-42
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### AWARENESS OF FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

Karimshah et al (2013) identify financial hardship as the most challenging stressor for disadvantaged students that can negatively affect low-SES student confidence, well-being and academic engagement.

Financial hardship is experienced by many students of refugee or asylum seeker backgrounds and can compound other stresses they may feel when navigating settlement and identity-shaping in communities, including university learning environments.

*The Sweetest Memory* gently raises awareness of the challenges faced by people forced to flee in search of safety. Proceeds from book sales go towards the Refugee Financial Grant to help alleviate financial hardship experienced by many students studying at the University who are of refugee or asylum seeker backgrounds.

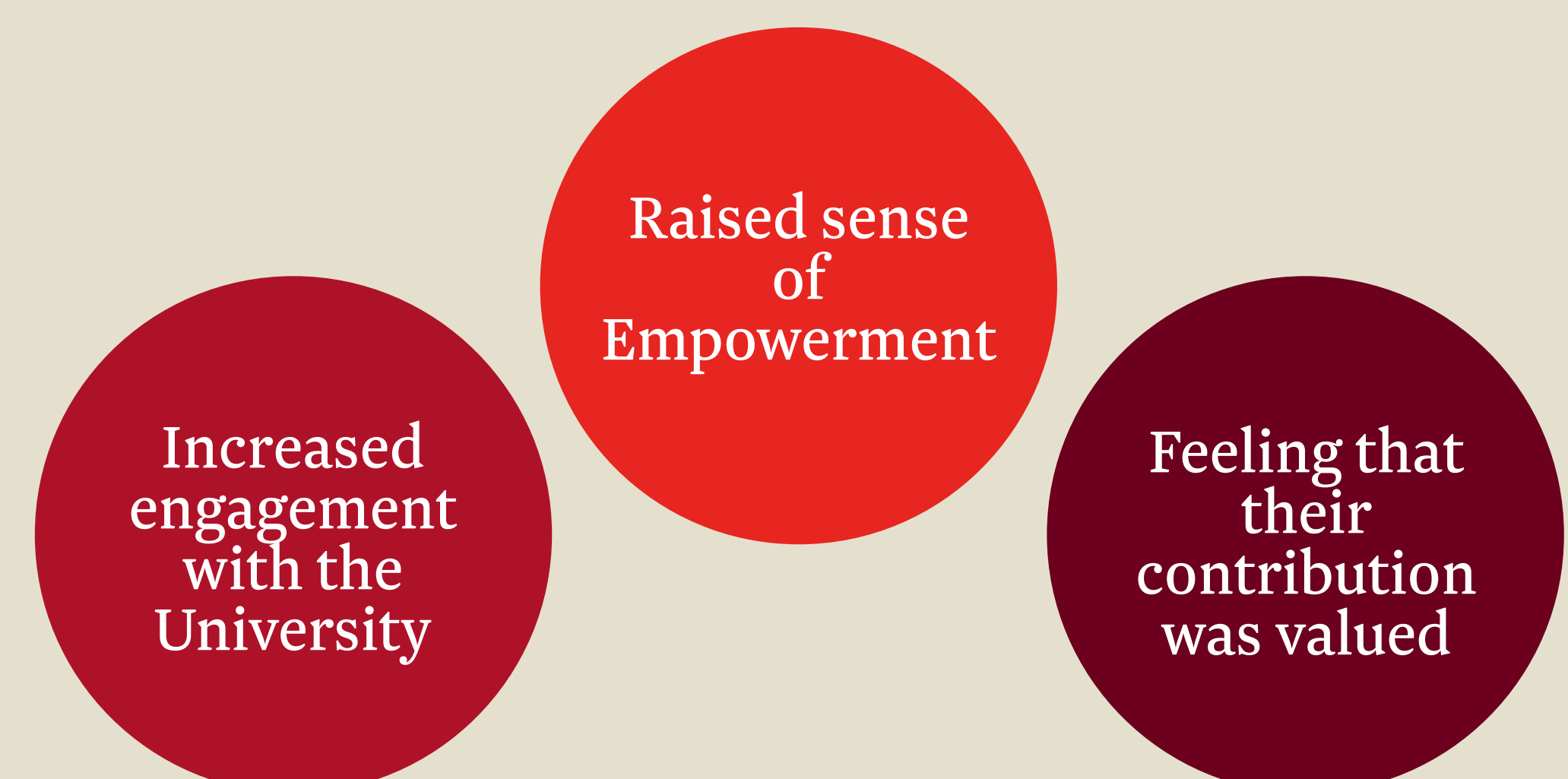
*"Knowing my university is getting involved in this issue makes me proud"*

*Participating Student*

### OUTCOMES

#### *The Sweetest Memory* Engagement Numbers

Over 100 students	8 Partner schools
38 University academics and professionals	Raising the awareness of over 400 members of the University community



Student sentiment on what participating in *The Sweetest Memory* meant for them

**"Recognise yourself in he and she who are not like you and me"**

**Carlos Fuente**