AWCODA Guide for African-Australian Youth Mentoring
PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

Project coordinator
Paul Mabior Garang
Project Coordinator AWCODA

Elders
Paul Mabior Garang
Ajak Deng Biar
Ayii Atem Dak
Dabora Alakil Kuir
Joseph Garang Juac
Joseph Ajak Akec Ajak
Atem Ajang Jok
Aguin Majak
Atem Kuol Atem
Deng Kuol Atem
Prissy Akuch Deng

Young people
David Deng Aleer
Amira Ngor
Akoy Manyok
Thomas Ngor Manyang
Deng Ajak
Madol Makuol

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

David Barton
CAMS Worker
Mercy Family Services
Toowoomba

AUTHOR
Wendy Richards

PUBLISHED BY
Awulian Community Development Association Inc.
St Stephens Uniting Church, Neil Street, Toowoomba
info@awcoda.com.au
www.awcoda.com.au
© Awulian Community Development Association Inc. 2012

ISBN 978-0-646-57596-4

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written consent of the copyright holders.
Foreword

The focus of the Awulian Community Development Association (AWCODA) Big Brother Youth Mentoring Project has been on building strength, skills and engagement among young African-Australians from the South Sudanese community who have settled in south-east Queensland.

South Sudanese young people are often left out of mainstream community development activities because of a lack of skills on their part and the wider community’s reluctance to embrace different cultures. Our young people face post-settlement challenges such as poor self-concept, social isolation, adverse home and life events, crowded rental households, disrupted pathways to employment and education and socialising within limited networks.

AWCODA strongly believes that our community needs the capacity to deliver structured support through activities that are relevant to these post-settlement challenges. The project’s aim has been to develop this capacity and provide this support within our community.

The AWCODA Big Brother Project began with a training program in focus group methodology for community elders. We then used this methodology to explore young people’s perspectives on post-settlement issues and to develop a model for youth mentoring appropriate for our culture, values and practices. We concluded by designing a mentoring program through which elders could support those of our young people who are at risk of disengaging from work and education and whose needs are our community priority.

We have documented our project in the form of a guide in the hope that the lessons we have learned will be of benefit to other African-Australian communities.

AWCODA’s web presence (www.awcoda.com.au) has supported our program of early intervention into the challenges faced by our youth with sales of our book Walking to Freedom and bookings for our AWCODA Speakers Bureau. The website will also be used to develop technology skills among our young people.

The capacity to respond to our young people’s post-settlement issues is vital at this point in our community’s settlement history. Helping our young people deal successfully with these issues will increase their access to services, employment and the wider community. It will help us build community cohesion through re-engaging our youth, foster leadership among their ranks and enable us to respond more effectively to their emerging needs. It will also use the knowledge, resources and skills that we have developed since arrival in Australia.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to those who have supported us in this project, in particular, Multicultural Affairs Queensland, Mercy Family Services Toowoomba, Toowoomba Regional Council and Page One Editing and Publishing. Special thanks go to the many members of the South Sudanese community who contributed to the success of the project.

We look forward to working closely with our young people as they embark on the journey of building new lives in a new place and we hope our guide helps other African-Australian communities face the many challenges of settlement for their youth.

Paul Mabior Garang
Project Coordinator AWCODA
1 July 2012
About this guide

The aim of this guide is to share our experiences in developing a framework for youth mentoring within the Awulian community with other organisations who are also working to support young people from refugee backgrounds in the broader African-Australian community. There is little research or guidance in youth mentoring in Australia on models and practices that would work within the diversity of African-Australian cultural contexts. We also recognise that many of the settlement challenges young members of the Awulian community face are shared by their peers within other African-Australian cultures. A funding commitment and key aim of our project was to document the process we undertook into a resource to help others concerned about these issues and to begin a discussion about how we can work together across our communities to support our young people in meeting the challenges of settlement.

Part A of the guide discusses some of the issues and frameworks used within mainstream youth mentoring and offers insights into how these might be improved to take into account the refugee African-Australian context. It concludes with a summary of the model developed by AWCODA as an outcome of the Big Brother Project, which could be used and adapted within other African-Australian communities.

Part B records the various activities undertaken during the project, in particular the use of focus group methods, the discussions and reflections that arose during the project workshops and the conclusions that were drawn as community elders worked to develop a youth mentoring model and program that would suit South Sudanese cultural values and community practices as well as help its members connect with the wider society.

Acknowledgements

The Awulian Community Development Association would like to thank Multicultural Affairs Queensland for its support in funding the AWCODA Big Brother Youth Mentoring Project. We also thank Mercy Family Services Toowoomba for supporting us with funding for the production of the guide. We especially valued the time, energy and commitment of the many South Sudanese community members from Toowoomba and Brisbane who were the project’s participants, as well as Paul Mabior Garang’s work in coordinating the project. We thank in particular the Queensland African Communities Council and the African YouthCAN Project youth mentors in the Toowoomba region for their support. Thank you also to David Barton, CAMS Program, Mercy Family Services Toowoomba, and Roberto Garcia, Local Area Multicultural Program Toowoomba Regional Council, for mentoring and facilitating the project from its inception. Special thanks go to Wendy Richards, Page One Editing and Publishing Toowoomba, for documenting our work and writing our guide. We would also like to thank Anna Brumpton, Toowoomba Youth Service, and Russ Brown, Youth Housing and Reintegration Service Toowoomba, for sharing their expertise as youth workers with us, and in particular, Scott Harrison, Surf Life Saving Queensland, for introducing our community to water safety and the beauty of Queensland’s Mermaid Beach.
Contents

Foreword i
About this guide ii
Acknowledgements ii

PART A
Developing a Model for African-Australian Youth Mentoring
• Settlement challenges facing refugee youth 1
• Mentoring: an age-old tradition 3
• Views and reviews of youth mentoring 3
• AWCODA youth mentoring model 4

PART B
AWCODA Big Brother Youth Mentoring Project
1 Project design and methodology 8
• Aims and purpose 8
• Participants 8
• Outcomes 8
• Stages and activities 9
2 The project in action 10
• Elders focus group 10
  Reflections 16
• Youth focus group 17
  Reflections 23
• Developing a youth mentoring model and program 25
  Reflections 26

About the Participants 29
About AWCODA 31
Bibliography 32
Developing a Model for African-Australian Youth Mentoring

Settlement challenges facing refugee youth

For all young people migrating to a new country, achieving independence entails successful negotiation of two simultaneous transition processes: a transition from one culture to another and an interrelated transition from childhood or adolescence to adulthood (Coventry et al. 2002, p. 2).

The Darling Downs South Sudanese community has been settling in Toowoomba and its region for a little over ten years, arriving since the early 2000s as humanitarian refugees under the Australian Government’s refugee and humanitarian resettlement program. During this time, the community has met a range of challenges associated with building new lives after many years in displaced persons camps in countries such as Kenya and Uganda and the dislocation and dispossession of two decades of civil war. The immediate priorities for new settlers and their families were obtaining housing suitable for larger families, securing employment that would sustain households here but also support remittances to relatives overseas and ensuring that children and young people were successfully participating in local education systems.

In recent years, South Sudanese community discussion and debate within the region has turned to the particular challenges faced by young people within the community and the need for strategies to support them in making the transition into adulthood in a new and complex culture. Although there is currently little definitive data on the numbers of refugee young people in the region, for the South Sudanese community, young people are now a significant cohort within their ranks. The community recognises and celebrates young people’s successes and achievements, in particular in education, while their strengths and attributes, such as resilience, focus and a determination to achieve, are valued and respected.

Within the community, however, concerns have also been raised about the difficulties young people face and the effect this has on their capacity to build a strong self-concept and realise their potential as young adults. Young people can disengage from education and learning, not fully understand the Australian legal system nor be aware of the implications of issues such as debt acquisition, alcohol and drug use, drink driving, driving without a licence and failing to meet financial contracts. They can also struggle to acquire the skills and experience needed to gain entry into the workforce. Community elders are also concerned about the impact of racial discrimination that young people can encounter at school, in the workplace and within the wider society.

---

1 It is estimated that there are at the time of writing around 2,000 South Sudanese living in the Toowoomba region (David Barton, personal communication, 21 December 2011).
2 The Sudanese community generally has been one of the fastest growing groups in Australia and primarily through humanitarian entrants. In the 2002–03 financial year, Sudan was the top source country for this category of entrant (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2007).
3 In a 2002 study commissioned by the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme, it was estimated that there were between 16,000 and 20,000 refugee young people living in Australia (Coventry et al. 2002, p. 2).
4 The term ‘young refugee’ has been used elsewhere to refer to people aged between 12 and 25 years who share common refugee experiences defined as ‘exposure to political, religious or intercultural violence, persecution or oppression, armed conflict or civil discord that incorporates the following basic elements: a state of fearfulness for self and family members, leaving the country of origin at short notice, inability to return to the country of origin, and uncertainty about the possibility of maintaining links with family and home’ (Coventry et al. 2002, p. 1). While the definition of ‘refugee experience’ encompasses the experiences of the young people who are the focus of this project, the age range here is slightly narrower, defined by the Awulian community as 13 to 25 years.
At the same time, young people are entering Australian culture at a rate and in ways often significantly different from their parents, causing intergenerational tensions within the family and conflicts in expectations. This is compounded by differing levels of English language acquisition and fluency, altering family dynamics as young people take on the role of elder when interpreting documents and liaising with others on behalf of their parents and families. It is further compounded by their location within an emerging community which does not yet have established and effective community infrastructure or structured links with and pathways into mainstream society.

It can sometimes be assumed that refugee young people’s experiences as refugees are the same as their parents, simply because they are within a refugee family. Yet their parents’ cultural memories and practices can be grounded in a time and place before dispossession, when daily life and tradition were intact, while their own childhoods and early adolescence can have been framed within refugee camps or transit camps, awaiting resettlement, in a situation where traditional ties, structures and practices have been all but completely disrupted.

Young refugees’ experiences can include the trauma of involvement in or witnessing acts of violence and torture. Loss of family members or separation from them, with extended periods of waiting to be reunited, can also characterise their lives prior to resettlement.

The experiences of Toowoomba’s South Sudanese community and their young people are consistent with those identified in research on refugee youth and resettlement. Issues of concern for refugee young people were documented by the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) in 2009, following a series of national youth consultations and a review of current literature. Key themes of concerns relating to refugee youth identified in the literature by RCOA included education and training, police and legal issues, racism and discrimination, as well as housing, employment, financial and family issues.

The RCOA project also canvassed issues from among refugee youth themselves, in a series of focus groups with youth from a range of refugee communities, including representation from the South Sudanese community (the largest group, at 65 per cent; RCOA 2009, p. 5). These young people prioritised issues they wished to see addressed for refugee youth, the top five of which were education and training, housing and homelessness, employment and money problems, family issues and accessibility of services (RCOA 2009, p. 17).

Refugee young people’s capacity to advocate for themselves within the wider society is affected by complex and interlinking factors. The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) identified barriers to participation that are not experienced by their Australian-born peers. These include a lack of awareness of Australian structures and systems, the pressure of priorities and responsibilities associated with settlement, limited skills in English language and literacy, fears around engaging with government agencies and policies, lack of confidence and cultural expectations around participation (CMY 2007, p. 9).

It has also been noted that the needs of refugee young people have rarely been the focus of research or policy development in their own right, instead being subsumed within analyses and discussions of migrant and refugee experiences or of young people in general (Coventry 2002, p. 1). This makes it difficult for community development projects, such as the one documented here, to draw on expertise and experience obtained elsewhere in designing and implementing a community initiative tailored to the needs of youth within a refugee community.

In developing the AWCODA Big Brother Project, elders within the Awulian community considered the possibility of adopting youth mentoring as a strategy for addressing youth support needs. Mentoring can bring about positive change for young people by drawing on the social capital of other people, their experience, skills, aptitudes and networks, to build a positive relationship through which the young person can be guided and inspired.

---

5 For a full list of the issues identified in research literature by the Refugee Council of Australia, see RCOA 2009, pp. 15–16.
Mentoring: an age old tradition

The origins of mentoring trace back to Greek mythology. Before taking leave for the Trojan Wars, Odysseus asked his friend Mentor to stand in for him as father to Telemachus, Odysseus's son, and, in his absence, give the young man advice, protection and friendship. Mentor had many of the attributes that contemporary mentoring requires—'patience, wisdom, selflessness and willingness to engage in a long-term relationship … with the protégé' (McDonald 2002, p. 26). Their relationship would enable Telemachus to develop into a fit successor to his father as King of Ithaca.

Modern-day mentoring occurs in many forms and a diversity of funded programs has proliferated across sectors such as education, community development, family services and the justice system to address the needs of children, young people and adults for guidance and support. Mentoring can be planned (as part of a structured and supervised mentoring program), incidental (as an offshoot of an existing relationship, such as pupil–teacher) or natural (as the outcome of a relationship between two people with a particular affinity or shared connection).

The mentoring role has also attracted a wide variety of descriptions, including ‘teacher, trainer, role model, protector, sponsor, counsellor, coach, cognitive coach, adviser, broker, referral agent, advocate, guide, ally, catalyst and savvy insider’ (McDonald 2002, p. 22), leading to a degree of ambiguity about its processes and boundaries.

Mentoring programs can be based in a wide array of settings, including the mentored person’s community, school, religion, workplace or online (as in e-mentoring, to overcome problems of isolation and distance).

Views and reviews of youth mentoring

The Australian Youth Mentoring Network defines youth mentoring as a process which ‘provides a structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support and encouragement’. The New Zealand Youth Mentoring Network includes the outcome of the process in its definition of mentoring as a relationship in which a young person is ‘supported in growth towards adulthood and the capacity to make positive social connections and build essential skills is increased’ (Youth Mentoring Network n.d., p. 9), noting also that, compared with mentoring of adults, ‘mentoring children and young people is more developmental, changing according to the needs and interests of the young person that become apparent over time’ (p. 6). The Victorian Government casts mentoring as a ‘helping relationship’ between a ‘younger person … and an unrelated, relatively older, more experienced person' with the aim of increasing the capacity of the young person to 'connect with positive social and economic networks to improve their life chances' (Department of Victorian Communities 2005, p. 6). The Australian Youth Mentoring Network clarifies that the mentor is ‘not a replacement for a parent, nor are they a counsellor or teacher. They are a sounding board and confidant to the young person’.7

A review of US mentoring literature concluded that the features of a successful youth mentoring scheme included screening prospective mentors; matching mentors and youth; training; supervision; support for mentors; structured activities for mentors and youth; parental support and involvement; frequency of contact and length of relationship (Hall 2003, p. vi). Australian and New Zealand literature also argues that the processes of recruiting, training and supporting mentors, for engaging young people as mentees and for supporting and monitoring the relationship are crucial to mentoring’s success (Griffiths et al. 2009). Within the mentoring relationship itself, Rhodes (2007) and Rhodes and DuBois (2006) point out that the bond between the mentor and mentee, the characteristics of the mentor, consistency in contact, the duration of the relationship and its connections with others in the young person’s life, such as parents or peers, contribute to its outcomes.

---


Writers and researchers in the field of mentoring have canvassed the factors that can undermine a program’s efforts. Hall, for example, noted that a mentoring program could be unsuccessful if there were a mismatch between the values of mentors and mentees, untrained mentors and a lack of congruence between the mentoring scheme’s aims and the mentees’ needs. A lack of clarity around whether the mentor is to act on behalf of the mentee or of an ‘authority’ can also cloud the mentoring relationship and its chances of success (Hall 2003, p. vi).

Researchers have also investigated the factors within the mentoring relationship which can contribute to failed outcomes and even cause harm. These can include incompatibility in personality or interests, poor mentoring skills, irregular contact, a short mentoring period, weak emotional bonds, insensitivity to the youth’s needs and few links with the youth’s social network (Rhodes et al. 2006, p. 5).

However, irrespective of differing definitions, settings and mentoring models, the literature in Australia and overseas generally agrees that at the heart of successful mentoring is the trusting relationship that develops between the mentor and the mentee.

**AWCODA youth mentoring model**

During the AWCODA youth mentoring project, participants observed that, for refugee youth, Western culture can be ‘lonely, inactive and exclusionary’, especially in the period immediately following arrival, encapsulating the magnitude of the challenge they face in entering into a radically new way of life.

At the same time, while Western models for youth mentoring can offer a basis for youth support within refugee communities, as presently conceived they fail to embrace many of the realities of resettlement. These models are generally set within Western definitions of family, kinship responsibilities, youth culture, associated legal frameworks, community expectations and program delivery by government and non-government agencies. A key aim of the project, therefore, was to examine the models currently used in mainstream mentoring programs from the South Sudanese community’s perspective to develop an approach that would suit its cultural context but also enable elders and families to tackle some of the structural and inter-cultural problems that faced them and their youth.

As the project unfolded, the elders reflected on the issues that would need to be addressed in developing such an approach. Traditional ways of youth mentoring were no longer possible as many of the social and kinship structures, cultural practices and physical spaces that had operated within village life in South Sudan were no longer available to the community. However, the role of elder and the relationships this enabled between older and younger people still functioned within the community and offered a strong, viable and culturally accepted base from which to develop and manage a youth mentoring program.

At the same time, it was recognised that aspects of the traditional definition of ‘elder’ had been altered through displacement and resettlement and that these redefinitions had to be taken into account. The gap between elders and young people’s experience of ‘youth culture’ and the contrast between Western and traditional South Sudanese approaches to adolescence, especially for those elders whose childhoods were in village life prior to the outbreak of civil war, were also recognised as a cultural divide within the community itself.

The elders believed strongly that parents’ engagement with and participation in the mentoring program would be central to its success, as well as a means of building social capital across the community that could in turn support its youth. Thus a key element of the AWCODA youth mentoring model was active inclusion of parents in the aims of the mentoring program, the mentoring processes that were to be used and, importantly, its mentoring activities. It was felt that including parents in activities would increase their skills, familiarity and confidence in engaging with mainstream Australian culture and, in particular, youth culture and help address some of the cultural divisions within families. A reassuring outcome of the project’s discussions was the commonality in ideas for helping young people that were expressed by both older and younger participants.
These reflections and insights formed the backdrop to the final step in the project, which was to arrive at a consensus about the approach to take in designing an effective and culturally welcomed youth mentoring program. As part of this process, five mentoring models currently available within mainstream services and in youth work in particular were explored:

1. One-to-one mentoring: one adult mentor is matched with one young mentee
2. Group mentoring: one adult mentor works with a group of up to four young mentees
3. Team mentoring: a number of adult mentors working with small groups of young people, with up to four young people per mentor
4. Peer mentoring: one young person acts as a mentor for another young person
5. E-mentoring: one adult connected with one young mentee via the Internet (Sawrikar et al. 2008, n.p.)

The focus in this process was on the advantages and disadvantages of one-to-one and group mentoring, as these had the most immediate relevance to the community’s need for youth support via mentoring. One-to-one mentoring is the most commonly used model in youth mentoring: it can facilitate the development of a close, trusting relationship with ‘room to grow’ and can empower young people through the sense of ownership they can develop over the relationship and the course it takes. For refugee young people, this model can also connect them with an older person from outside their community who can increase their access to wider opportunities, especially in education and employment. Like all the mentoring models, one-to-one mentoring requires careful matching, which depends in turn on a sound knowledge and understanding of the mentee and their potential mentor.

However, cultural unfamiliarity with and thus possible wariness of one-to-one mentoring, as well as the work required in the matching process, can make one-to-one mentoring less suitable for some refugee communities. The model also often involves a relationship between an adult and young person who did not know each other beforehand, a circumstance that is less likely in close-knit extended kinship populations such as the South Sudanese community in the Darling Downs region. One-to-one mentoring programs may also impose an additional resource burden on a community that is already stretched by the demands of settlement and may not have within itself a wide enough pool of suitable and available mentors to draw on.

Group mentoring can provide mentees with ‘empathy, social, emotional and academic support’ and a sense of belonging, especially if they are from the same cultural background (Sawrikar et al. 2008, n.p.), thereby helping them negotiate cultural challenges. The group mentoring model also places fewer demands on a community in recruiting and training adults as mentors and then supporting them in maintaining the mentoring relationship. Group mentoring can be highly sociable, which can appeal to young people, and for refugee youth from collectivist backgrounds can provide a greater sense of safety. As an approach, group mentoring can also build self-advocacy and youth leadership, create social networks within and across communities and reduce isolation, as well as strengthen participation through shared experiences (Sawrikar et al. 2008).

The preference within AWCODA was to develop a group mentoring model that would bring about the advantages outlined above. More importantly, however, such a model would sit more easily within the community’s cultural frameworks and present a less culturally uncomfortable prospect for parents and families. Group mentoring could also be situated appropriately within the traditional communal responsibilities of elders and operate as a natural extension of their existing relationships with young people.

A key related preference in developing a youth mentoring model was that mentoring would be by adults drawn from within the South Sudanese community, termed ‘same-race’ mentoring in the literature.

---

Sawrikar et al. note that, while there are few examples of team and peer mentoring models in use with refugee youth, they ‘should not be ruled out as effective models’ for young African-Australians as they offer friendship, which is an important need among ‘refugee and migrant youth in Australia’ (Cassity 2005) (Sawrikar et al. 2008, n.p.). For a useful discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of all five models, see Sawrikar et al. 2008.
Same-race mentoring has the advantage of similarity in background, experiences and culture that can facilitate a close and trusting relationship. On the other hand, cross-race mentoring can facilitate access to a wider social and cultural world. Research comparing the benefits of same-race with cross-race mentoring of youth has found few differences in the outcomes and effectiveness of the two approaches and that overall the research findings are inconclusive (Mentor/National Mentoring Partnership 2007; Sawrikar et al. 2008), suggesting that ‘matching on race may not be a critical dimension of a successful mentoring relationship’ (Mentor 2009, p. 12).^9

While acknowledging that successful mentoring results from multiple skills, attributes and characteristics of both mentor and mentee and not racial or ethnic background alone, for the elders within AWCODA matching with mentors drawn from outside the community would not address a wider issue—that the difficulties faced by young people within the community are inevitably and crucially linked with the difficulties facing their parents as refugee settlers. Failing to recognise this interconnectedness would produce a mentoring model that was individuated and with little traction on these underpinning issues and thus less likely to build capacity in youth support within the community generally.

Importantly from a community development perspective, it was also felt that a model based on cross-race mentoring would not bring much-needed skills into the community in working with young people in the context of a new society with differing social expectations and practices. Cross-race matching would also separate the concerns and difficulties experienced by young people from those of their parents, when feedback from the community was that communication and common understanding of how to deal with these problems were at the heart of the solution. While cross-race mentoring might increase the social capital of the individual mentee, it does not offer the possibility, as does same-race mentoring, of increasing the collective social capital of the community as a whole. Therefore the AWCODA model is community-based in its approach and makes active connections between the needs of the individual mentee and those of the family and the community as a whole.

It was also important for the mentoring program to not be based on a ‘deficit’ model, which can imply that young people and their families are failing to meet some undefined benchmark for success (Philip & Shucksmith 2005). The elders believed that the community’s long built-up reserves of resilience, strong family and kinship ties and traditions of mutual support were valuable personal and communal assets that could underwrite the program’s success. The community’s elders and parents had also accumulated skills and experience in successful settlement that would in turn benefit young people. A program using mentors drawn from outside the community would fail to acknowledge these assets and be unable to tap into them.

Finally, the elders also believed strongly that an effective youth mentoring model should include self-management, in which the mentoring program would be devised, administered and overseen from within the community itself. This would help build greater capacity for youth work in the long term and establish links and pathways with local youth services that included the role of elders and the concerns of parents.

In conclusion, the AWCODA Big Brother Project was able to develop through focus group workshops involving elders and young people an understanding of the options and possibilities for youth mentoring that could be used within the community to support young people dealing with the many challenges following settlement in Australia.

From these exercises, discussions and reflections, a model and practice for youth mentoring were devised that contained the following elements:

- group mentoring, where one or more mentors work with a small group of young people, building on the high level of sociality already within the South Sudanese community
- mentors drawn from within the community rather than from outside, who are trained in mentoring and associated community development techniques such as focus groups and workshop facilitation

---

^9 Following a review of mentoring literature, Hall noted that overall there are mixed views on ‘what basis the [mentoring] matching should be made’ (2003, p. 6).
• an overlay of the mentoring role on the existing role of elders, to maximise acceptance of mentoring within the community, as well as increase elders’ skills in approaches used within contemporary mainstream youth work

• parents’ involvement in the program and its activities, to help bridge divides that are opening up between young people and their families and develop common understandings of settlement problems, while building on the cultural strength of the South Sudanese tradition of collective guidance for children

• mentoring activities that enable both young people and their parents to take part in the wider Australian community, to increase access to mainstream culture and the confidence to participate in it

• management and delivery of the program from within the community through its own community organisation structures, rather than by outside community or welfare service providers

• assistance from outside the community via youth services and agencies specialising in refugee settlement advocacy and support

• an overarching community development approach that recognises the need to build skills and experience in youth work within the community for sustainable and long-term provision of culturally relevant youth support.

The challenges faced by South Sudanese young people and their families are complex, interconnected and demanding. The same complexity can be found when the community undertakes to develop ways to help and support its youth. The Awulian community elders who participated in the Big Brother Project hoped that by adapting and combining elements of mainstream youth mentoring with traditional South Sudanese culture, the program would enable the community to meet these challenges and support young people and their families as they build new lives in a new part of the world.
AWCODA Big Brother Youth Mentoring Project

1 PROJECT DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Aims and purpose

The purpose of the AWCODA Big Brother Project was to build capacity within the South Sudanese community in the Toowoomba region to mentor and support South Sudanese young people in dealing with issues they face following their settlement in Australian society.

The principles underpinning the Big Brother Project were that it would:

- work within the oral traditions of the South Sudanese community
- involve community training in youth mentoring techniques and strategies used in the Toowoomba region
- adapt selected youth mentoring strategies to ensure that they were culturally relevant
- involve South Sudanese young people in identifying the issues they needed help with
- be documented into a guide to enable the training and strategies developed through the project to be transmitted further within the African-Australian community.

Participants

Eleven members of the Awulian community in Toowoomba and Brisbane were nominated to undertake training and development as youth mentors.

The project was managed by Paul Mabior Garang, Project Coordinator AWCODA and member of the Awulian community settled in south-east Queensland. Project development was supported by David Barton, Community Action for a Multicultural Society (CAMS) for the South West Region. David Barton and Roberto Garcia, Local Area Multicultural Program (LAMP) with the Toowoomba Regional Council, assisted in delivering the project’s activities. The project also sourced support from regional youth services and Surf Life Saving Queensland.

Outcomes

The AWCODA Big Brother Project aimed to achieve the following outcomes.

- South Sudanese community elders graduate as youth mentors with skills and understanding in focus group methodology and structured youth mentoring strategies.
- South Sudanese young people take part in activities with skills in dealing with post-settlement issues identified by themselves and their mentors as priority issues.
- The South Sudanese community develops closer links with youth support networks in the Toowoomba region.
- A resource is developed which captures the process for use within the wider African-Australian community.

The CAMS and LAMP programs are multicultural community development and advocacy programs funded by Multicultural Affairs Queensland and, in the case of LAMP, jointly by the Toowoomba Regional Council.
Stages and activities

The project was conducted over five stages between September 2011 and March 2012.

Stage 1 Elders focus group

One day workshop in which elders nominated as youth mentors:
- are trained in facilitating a focus group through practical application
- identify key issues facing youth from the community’s perspective
- prioritise these into key areas for the project to focus on
- identify South Sudanese youth for participation in youth issues focus group (Stage 2) and in the first youth mentoring activity conducted by the project (Stage 4).

Stage 2 Youth focus group

One day workshop in which elders nominated as youth mentors:
- facilitate a youth issues focus group with South Sudanese youth using techniques learnt in Stage 1
- enable youth to identify issues from their perspective, with priorities for the project to focus on.

Stage 3 Developing a youth mentoring model and program

One day workshop in which elders:
- learn about strategies and techniques used in youth mentoring
- focus on the ‘how’ of youth mentoring
- understand which activities do and do not work with youth and why
- develop links with regional youth services for future support
- finalise key issues to be the focus of youth mentoring
- develop culturally relevant activities and exercises to mentor youth as part of an ongoing youth mentoring program
- arrange resources, timetabling, facilitators and venue for first youth mentoring event under the program.

Stage 4 Introductory youth mentoring event

One day event in which:
- Awulian community members undertake first mentoring activity with South Sudanese young people to begin the mentoring program
- South Sudanese youth enter as participants in the program.
2 THE PROJECT IN ACTION

Stage 1 Elders Focus Group

Stage 1 of the Big Brother Project was a training session in focus group methodology for community elders via a workshop held on a Saturday to enable members who were working or studying to attend. The workshop was held at the Mercy Family Services Toowoomba and was facilitated by David Barton, regional CAMS worker.

The project manager, Paul Mabior Garang, welcomed participants and opened the workshop by outlining the project’s approach, in particular the focus on oral traditions in conducting the project, development by the group of culturally appropriate strategies for supporting South Sudanese youth and the steps for seeking input from youth and from local youth workers.

The facilitator, David Barton, began the workshop by describing the focus group methodology that the workshop would use and invited participants to take part in the day’s activities in Dinka, their first language, and/or English.

The workshop involved six focus group activities in which participants explored the characteristics and issues of youth within their community to develop an agreed understanding of the young people they were dealing with as mentors and how they could approach the issues these young people faced. As the activities progressed, the participants also learned about focus group methodology through practical experience.

By training the participants in focus group techniques in a workshop that itself was a focus group, the training session drew upon the oral tradition of question and answer and group debate and agreement. It was also believed that the focus group methodology would enable members of the community, in particular young people, to discuss issues and problems more freely and openly.

ACTIVITY 1

Who are our youth in Toowoomba?

- What ages are they?
- How many are there?
- Have they just arrived?
- Have they been here for a while?
- Are they in employment?
- Are they studying?
- Are they living at home?
- Are they living independently?

The first activity focused on the characteristics of the young people within Toowoomba’s South Sudanese community. The purpose of the activity was to describe the young people that the elders would be designing and delivering mentoring activities for later in the project.

The group agreed that this description would be based on their experience and perception of their community as there was little data and research on South Sudanese young people in the Darling Downs region.

Who are our young people in Toowoomba?

- A ‘young person’ is a person in the age range of thirteen to twenty-five years.
- There may be from two to three hundred young people in the South Sudanese community in Toowoomba.
- Some have been in Australia since 1996 while some have arrived recently. The majority may have arrived between 2001 and 2006.
- Only a very small percentage came to settle in Toowoomba as unaccompanied minors.
The majority are studying at school, TAFE or university.
Most of those of post-school age (i.e. seventeen-plus years) are unemployed.
The thirteen to fifteen-year-olds would be living at home, regardless of gender.
Irrespective of their age, girls would be living with their parents or carers according to South Sudanese tradition.
It was acceptable for young men past school age to live independently.
There are some young men in the seventeen to twenty-five year age range living in group houses, that is, without parents, carers or older members of the community.

The second activity asked participants to nominate the problems that they believed were being faced by the young people they had just described.

There was a strong consensus among participants about a core group of problems facing youth. The points raised were not ranked in terms of the degree of the problem or its effect.

The group concluded that the problems facing young people flowed from their cultural position as refugee African youth: they were caught between two cultures and must somehow learn to manage both.

Problems young people face

- South Sudanese youth do not have the financial resources available to mainstream youth.
- There are few or no social activities that are relevant to them as refugee African-Australian youth.
- There are strong cultural differences between them and their mainstream community peers.
- They are under peer group pressure from the wider society and locally from African and non-African friends about how to behave.
- They experience bullying at school and in the workplace.
- English is not their first language and they can have strong accents that make communication difficult. Local English speakers are not used to African-language accented English, compared with, for example, French or German-accented English.
- They can experience family poverty if no-one in the family is in employment.
- They can encounter racial discrimination at school and at work.
- Getting a job is very difficult as they can be caught in a wedge of being unable to gain work experience to compete in a job market which requires applicants to demonstrate their previous experience.
- They do not understand Australian laws or the principles underpinning them, especially in the areas of contracts, tenancy, employment, driving, drug and alcohol consumption and sexual consent.
- Intergenerational conflict often occurs around differing values and norms within the family.
- They may have little or no respect for South Sudanese traditions, especially if these are not relevant to their lives as young Australians from a refugee African background.
- Those young people who arrived as unaccompanied minors have a particular set of problems to do with not having ongoing parental support.
• Young men can be provoked into violence by non-African-Australian youth as they do not know how to handle provocation in ways that are culturally appropriate here.
• Western culture is fast, complex, demanding and confusing.
• They have difficulty explaining themselves and their actions and needs to the police, employers and the education system.
• Alcohol consumption is a problem. Those young people, generally young men, who drink excessively do not respond to their elders’ views about alcohol and how to drink responsibly.
• Driving without a licence and drink driving are not understood as serious offending behaviours.
• Young people can find it hard to participate in school culture when they are older than the rest of their classmates because of lost years of schooling in refugee camps.
• Social rejection and exclusion are a common experience at school: being excluded from social interaction or not being chosen by classmates to be part of a team or group work or being chosen last.
• Young people, and young men in particular, have difficulty using self-restraint in a new culture which prizes personal freedom. At the same time, they resist the restraints imposed on them by their parents and elders, especially if these seem to be at odds with Western cultural freedoms.
• Some experienced trauma during the Sudanese civil war and have mental health problems as a result.

ACTIVITY 3
What are the top five problems that young people face?

The third activity focused on compiling a list of five key areas in which young people were experiencing problems and then prioritising these as areas in which young people most needed support.

Participants discussed the detailed list of problems identified in the previous activity to condense these into a summary list.

Top five problems
• Unemployment and under-employment
• Managing communication with African-Australian and non-African-Australian peers, community and family elders, the police, employers and teachers
• Dealing with racial discrimination
• Ignorance or confusion about Australian laws
• Managing cultural differences in the home, at school, in the workplace and the wider community

ACTIVITY 4
What are the causes of the problems that young people face?

The purpose of the fourth activity was to identify the causes of the problems that participants had nominated, within the top five problem areas.

1 Unemployment and under-employment
• Lack of access to job agencies
• Discrimination by employers who do not want to consider an African-Australian job applicant
• Employers’ perceptions and preferences around other cultures’ work ethic when assessing job applications
• Lack of entry level work experience needed to gain initial employment or better employment
• Lack of a contemporary Western work ethic and not engaged sufficiently with peers or family members who are employed to develop one
• De-motivated from seeking work through lack of success in finding work in the past

2 Communication
• Strong and entrenched cultural differences in communication styles and protocols between African- and non-African-Australian communities, including non-verbal communication such as eye contact
• Poor English language skills and low literacy levels when they first arrive and for some time after
• Lack of confidence in non-African-Australians’ patience and willingness to communicate with heavily accented speakers
• Lack of confidence in their ability to engage in written English, hence a tendency to not respond to written communications such as emails
• Difficulties overcoming shyness
• Not knowing how to present ‘the self’ in Australian social and work situations
• Not knowing how to manage anger when they are being provoked by non-African-Australians into responding inappropriately
• Frustration at not being easily understood by non-African-Australians
• Being caught in a cycle of being de-motivated to communicate with the wider community through continued social exclusion because of poor communication skills

3 Racial discrimination
• Restrictions in gaining access to places frequented by youth, such as night clubs
• Lack of acceptance on a personal level by non-African-Australians
• Effect of different skin colour on other people’s responses to them
• South Sudan’s lack of acceptability or desirability as a country of origin compared with other countries of origin, especially those with strong economic ties with Australia such as China
• Lack of experience in complying with dress codes for differing situations, such as in the workplace or in social settings outside the South Sudanese community
• African-accented English not as acceptable, familiar or desirable as other forms of English as a second language (such as the English spoken by a French or German speaker)
• Community stereotypes about youth compounded by stereotypes about race
• Lower education levels than other groups of youth within the community

4 Australian law
• Not enough structured orientation to Australian laws following settlement
• Differing definitions of guilt and innocence and how these are proved legally in Australia and South Sudan
• Differing cultural definitions of discipline within the family and of children by their parents and elders, especially discipline through physical force
• Differing cultural definitions of who is responsible for the child: ‘In the Sudan, we say you treat every child as your child.’
• Inability to comprehend or respond to the Western jurisprudence system administered by independent legal professionals, compared with the immediacy of law administered by village and family elders in South Sudan

• Differing approaches to solving problems through discussion and mediation and associated time frames: ‘The court system here is so slow. In the Sudan, we can sit down and solve a problem with our youth straight away.’

• Lack of education or commonplace understanding of the law among parents and family members to support young people in engaging with the legal system

• Entering into financial contracts, such as lay-by and hire purchase arrangements, to buy or acquire the items their non-African-Australian peers have without understanding the consequences of defaulting or the impact on debt of accumulating interest

5 Cultural differences

• Having to live in two cultures at once, especially as these cultures do not always understand each other, have significant differences and can be mutually hostile

• Confusion caused by the cultural conflict between lessons and values learnt at school and those learnt and adhered to at home

• Confusion over contrasting and competing Western and South Sudanese definitions and practices around personal freedom

• Cultural differences in establishing intimate personal relationships—being unable to talk about ‘boyfriends’ and ‘girlfriends’ in the home, bring a boyfriend or girlfriend home to meet their parents or stay over at a boyfriend or girlfriend’s place

• Tendency to abuse freedom in the belief that freedom means ‘I can do whatever I like and you can’t stop me’

• Misunderstanding Western notions of abuse and domestic violence and claiming abuse is occurring in the family to avoid parental discipline

ACTIVITY 5

Youth mentoring in South Sudan

• How would we help our youth with these problems in the South Sudan?

• Can we help them here in the same way? If not, why not?

The purpose of this activity was to reflect on approaches for supporting youth used in South Sudan and whether these approaches could be used in the Australian context.

Participants outlined the ways in which youth problems traditionally would be addressed in South Sudan. These discussions also identified a number of difficulties in using these methods outside of South Sudan’s social and cultural structures.

In South Sudan, children traditionally were grouped into ‘age mates’ between seven and thirteen years of age and in these groups were helped to understand how to behave by their parents and grandparents through practice, example and storytelling.

Between fourteen and eighteen years of age, boys were sent to live in cattle camps with their age mates and a small group of elders. Girls remained with their families, especially their grandmothers, to develop skills in child rearing, cooking and managing a household in an extended family structure of one husband and multiple wives.

In the cattle camps, adolescent boys learned leadership, team building, family and community protection and the law and began shaping their identity as young adults.
Within the camps, boys were responsible for caring for the cattle and were taken on trips for hunting and fishing by their elders. They were taught how to hunt food game such as antelope and buffalo, as well as the lion; hunting a lion demonstrated personal bravery. They underwent a series of rites of passage, many of which involved tests of physical strength, courage and skill. Wrestling was the most common sport and an important means of developing their masculinity as young men who would ultimately be responsible for the safety of their families, the village and the clan, as well as their livestock. Cattle raids and localised wars with other clans were common and adolescent boys were prepared for this with skills in fighting.

The youth developed a leadership structure among themselves based on levels of activity, initiative and physical skill. Respect as an emerging leader was gained through solving problems, being able to persuade opinion through debate and rhetoric and physical skills such as running, wrestling and hunting. ‘We focused on what people were good at, like telling stories or hunting.’

The elders living with them in the cattle camps mentored them in learning how to manage problems among themselves through group discussion and agreement. If the problems the boys encountered required counsel and mediation or an interpretation of traditional law, they were taken to the elders for a solution. Transgressions were punished through practices such as beatings or fines of cattle, which were matched to the seriousness of the misdemeanour. Physical discipline was practised and could be carried out by any male adult deemed to be an elder.

As young men, the cattle camp also gave them the space to be prepared by their elders in how to identify potential wives, how to approach them with this possibility and to negotiate the dowry and marriage systems of the clan.

Many of these social structures and cultural practices were lost during the displacement of the Sudanese civil war or could not be practised fully in their traditional form once families and individuals were forced to live in refugee camps.

These structures and practices are also difficult to replicate in the Australian community. They can have little relevance to young South Sudanese-Australians, especially those who have been settled for a number of years. Traditional arrangements of young boys and girls into age-based cohorts, which are fundamental to the transmission of culture, are cut across by Western definitions of age cohorts, particularly in relation to education. Some of these practices, such as physical punishment, are unacceptable culturally and illegal under Australian law. The traditional practice of separating young people by gender for different forms of social and personal development is no longer possible. The separate spaces of the village and the cattle camp, and the long period of time spent in these spaces, also cannot be reproduced.

Participants identified those approaches and activities that could be used in the Australian context and would also be culturally relevant to the South Sudanese community settled here.

Western culture was described as ‘lonely, inactive and exclusionary’ for young South Sudanese who have arrived after many years as a displaced person in a refugee camp. Therefore, the focus of an approach for engaging young people in the community would be on group events that involved physical activity and the opportunity for discussion, mentoring and behaviour modeling by their elders.

**Activities to help young people**

- Organise community activities such as sporting, dancing and fishing
- Engage them in activities that could also lead to employment, such as basketball or volunteering in childcare
• Form a youth group focusing on building relationships between African and non-African youth
• Develop a community space where activities could be held and their African cultural background could be reinforced, valued and celebrated
• Obtain access to a recording studio to record songs that were relevant to them and encourage an interest in the music industry
• Engage young people in storytelling to build on their African cultural value system but also to address contemporary issues
• Establish a homework club to help them remain engaged with the school system
• Organise trips to local events, activities and sites
• Help young women explore possibilities for work in the fashion industry
• Set up a camp with overnight stays to give extended time for mentoring and structured skill development activities

Reflections

Following the workshop, the elders reflected on key themes that had emerged from the first day’s activities.

While a number of social structures, cultural practices and physical spaces were no longer available to the community as vehicles for supporting and guiding young people into adulthood, the role of elder and the relationship of elder to young person, especially the uncle–nephew and aunt–niece relationships, still operated strongly and provided a clear, acceptable and viable foundation on which to build a structured mentoring process.

However, the definition of an elder, when a person would become an elder and who that role would engage with, had been redefined somewhat during displacement and resettlement. The age range of the elders participating in a project such as this was broader than traditional parameters and the practice of each cohort dealing with the one immediately below it (‘the juniors’) could not operate here. Via the project, elders in their late thirties would be engaging with young people who would traditionally have responded more to the guidance of elders in their mid-twenties, that is, the cohort immediately above them in the age hierarchy, not those higher up in the age rankings.

The definition of an elder for the purposes of the project had also been broadened as there were fewer people available in the community to take up that role. The elders recognised that these cultural redefinitions were an essential part of constructing a process that combined Western and South Sudanese approaches and thereby would enable them to effectively support young people grappling with mixed cultural imperatives.
Stage 2 Youth Focus Group

Stage 2 of the Big Brother Project was a focus group held on a Saturday at the Mercy Family Services Toowoomba with young people from the South Sudanese community living in Toowoomba and the Brisbane basin. The youth focus group was facilitated by community elders who had participated in Stage 1 of the project. The workshop was also supported by Toowoomba’s CAMS and LAMP workers.

The purpose of the focus group was to work with young people to identify the issues they faced from their perspective and to set priorities for mentoring youth in the community. The focus group also built on the facilitation skills and techniques the elders had gained from Stage 1 of the project.

Twelve young people agreed to take part in the focus group. However, some were unavailable on the day because of family members’ shift work commitments and transport difficulties.

The activities replicated those of the Stage 1 focus group, to gain an understanding of young people’s perspectives on youth issues and problems but also to compare these with those held by the community elders.

### ACTIVITY 1

What do you know about South Sudanese young people?

**Who is here**

- How many young South Sudanese live here in Toowoomba?
- Are there the same number of young men and women living here?
- How many have just arrived?
- How many have been here for a while?

**Age definition of youth**

- What age do you have to be to be called a ‘youth’?

**Jobs for youth**

- How many do you think have a job (full-time or part-time)?
- What types of jobs can you get?
- How many cannot find a job?

**Youth and studying**

- How many young people are studying?
- In high school?
- In TAFE?
- At university?
- What percentage do you think speak English well?

**Living arrangements**

- How many young people are living at home?
- How many young people live on their own?
- How many share a house with young people?
The first activity focused on the characteristics of young people within Toowoomba’s South Sudanese community. Like their elders in the first focus group, the participants acknowledged that there was no clear information within the community about the demographics of young people and that their answers were only an impression.

- ‘We like to have fun!’
- ‘We reckon that there are about five hundred young people in Toowoomba.’
- There are ‘more boys than girls’.
- ‘They would come from around a hundred families.’
- Most of them (‘about seventy per cent, maybe up to ninety per cent—just guessing’) have been here for at least two years.
- A ‘youth’ is a person in the age range of fourteen to twenty years.
- Young people get jobs in places like McDonalds and Hungry Jack’s; some are doing traineeships.
- ‘I’d say about fifty per cent can’t find a job.’
- ‘A hundred per cent would be studying as they’re all in high school—except if they’ve left school!’
- If some ‘drop out’, they will do so in Year 10. ‘Black kids have strict parents so you can’t drop out. Your parents won’t let you.’ ‘But some don’t listen to their parents and wake up in the morning and don’t go. If you keep doing that, they’ll say to you then you have to find a job.’
- Toowoomba is ‘good for school because there are fewer distractions—only Grand Central’.
- Truancy is ‘easier in Brisbane. No-one knows you because it’s so big and they don’t know where you are. Your parents don’t go into the city and so can’t see you aren’t at school. But in Toowoomba where can you go? Grand Central. Your parents can find you in Grand Central!’
- ‘There might be ten to twenty per cent at TAFE and maybe ten per cent at uni.’
- ‘Boys drop out of uni because they like money these days. They want a job. Girls are into fashion and all that. Girls have a long-term view of a career.’
- ‘It’s easier for boys to get a job. And boys don’t get pregnant.’
- All young people ‘speak English OK’.
- ‘All of them would be living at home except if they were older. Then some leave to get jobs or go to uni. If they leave it’s because they need to be close to something, like a job.’
- Of those young people not living at home, all would live in share accommodation. ‘You wouldn’t be living by yourself, it costs too much by yourself. And anyway at eighteen you go clubbing and to parties so all of them would share.’ ‘You share with people you know, not with strangers.’

ACTIVITY 2

What problems do you think these young people face?

The second activity asked participants to nominate the problems they believed young people were facing.

The participants made a comprehensive list of the problems facing youth that they were familiar with as young people within the community. The points raised were not ranked in terms of the degree of the problem or its effect.
**Relationship with parents**

- ‘African parents are very strict.’
- ‘They won’t give you time to talk about what you’re doing, like school and stuff.’
- ‘They won’t listen to you. They think things aren’t good for you, like parties or playing games at night. Leads to you sneaking out through the window!’
- ‘Sometimes kids don’t listen to their parents either.’
- ‘Some parents are good. Some understand you and will listen to you. If you have a good relationship with them, it’s better.’
- ‘The father can be out late drinking. Then he comes home drunk and starts a fight with the mother. Always a fight about money—on Friday night.’

**Family structure**

- ‘Kids can be waiting for their parent to come from overseas. The other kids at school always ask, where’s your mum, your dad?’
- ‘Some have a parent who died in the war so there’s only one parent. Or dead brothers and sisters.’
- ‘Some kids are living here with no parents.’
- ‘In some families, the parents have no job or dad is an alcoholic.’
- ‘The family could be breaking up. We don’t call it divorce, we call it separation. The father leaves and the mum is left to do everything.’

**Problems at school**

- ‘At school, you can get left out of groups. Depends on the kids. If you’ve got friends in the group, it’s OK.’
- ‘You’re a new kid, like you’ve just arrived, you just sit there and don’t talk.’
- ‘If you hate the kids, you sit in the group and don’t say anything.’
- ‘Sometimes assessment includes group work and it’s hard if you can’t participate. How can you be assessed?’
- ‘If you have a good teacher, it’s OK.’

**Privacy**

- ‘There’s no privacy! We all have to share our room. You want your own space.’
- ‘You can’t study because it’s too crowded and noisy.’
- ‘Too many big families … kids have to all fit into the one room.’
- ‘African people, they dob on you. They’re like spies, man. You get seen doing something and they tell your mum. So you have to go into the city where they can’t see you. There’s no freedom to just do things.’
- ‘In African culture, kids are everyone’s responsibility.’

**Money**

- ‘The biggest problem? Money! Some have it, some don’t.’
- ‘Parents won’t give you money, especially if the thing costs a lot. That can lead you to steal things.’
- ‘If the parents don’t have a job, your needs are last. They must pay for other things first.’
Police

- ‘They stereotype people as a black person and they think they have to keep their eye on them—and security guards at clubs, they do it as well.’

Racism

- ‘It’s the big one!’
- ‘We get bullied at school because we’re black.’
- ‘We get called “monkey”, “gorilla”, “dumb black kid”.’
- ‘It makes you angry and fight. You won’t put up with teasing. If you walk away, they call you “chicken”. Are you going to be scared?’
- ‘You get pissed off and take your anger out on someone.’
- ‘It’s random; not all Australians are racist.’

Peer pressure

- ‘You get pressure to do things, like bad friends who make you drink.’
- ‘And smoking!’
- ‘Kids do stupid things to be known, to be popular, get attention...to be cool.’

Alcohol

- ‘Young people here drink.’
- ‘Some people think when they’re high, they’re cool. So you have to go and join their drinking group.’
- ‘Girls drink here. In Sudan they can’t drink. No way!’

Fighting

- ‘Some kids go to parties and want to show how strong they are. They start fighting and end up in juvie [juvenile detention].’
- ‘Fighting and alcohol go together. You can end up in jail with a criminal record and can’t get jobs.’
- ‘You can end up in a fight trying to back up your friends.’
- ‘First you separate them and tell them to calm down.’
- ‘Guys fight and then a few days later they’re friends. If girls fight, it goes on longer.’
- ‘Fighting? All depends on the issue. Girls fight over boyfriends. Boys can compete for a girl but they can still talk to each other or just ignore each other. Girls gossip about each other.’
- ‘Yes, we’ve been in fights because of racism. At school, in the city.’

Employment

- ‘Not having a job. Some are jobless and broke’.
- ‘It’s hard to get a job when you’re not qualified and you don’t have experience. So you don’t get a good resume.’
- ‘Employers aren’t interested in you.’
- ‘Sometimes it’s just laziness. Not wanting to get a job.’

Stress and depression

- ‘...because all these things are linked, one thing leads to the next thing.’
Holidays, ‘doing things’ and ‘going places’

- ‘You want to do something on holidays but you can’t because your parents stop you. Parents won’t travel or go anywhere and they don’t have the money.’
- ‘You go to school on Monday and say you’ve been to Dream World on the weekend when you haven’t.’
- ‘Parents won’t let you go with someone else if they don’t know who you’re going with.’
- ‘It’s part money and part that parents won’t go themselves. And if the kid doesn’t have a job, how can they save for holidays?’
- ‘Parents won’t let you out of the house. They won’t even give you a lift round to a friend’s place.’
- ‘They won’t come to school things like sports or other things we’re in, like if we’re doing a performance.’

Financial obligations to family overseas

- ‘It’s hard to earn enough money for the family here but also to send some overseas to others in the family.’

Gender relations

- ‘Having kids at a young age, at sixteen. Boys know how to run away. That leaves a young mother with no money.’
- ‘How do you tell your mum and dad you want to have a girlfriend?’

Tradition and culture

- ‘We grow up in a Western world but we’re restricted by our parents because we’re Dinka.’
- ‘We’re between the two, between black and white.’
- ‘We like new technology, like iPhones.’
- ‘Talking about Africa all the time can be boring, man!’

Language

- ‘Language isn’t a problem for kids. But if your parents can’t speak English you have to help them.’

ACTIVITY 3

Please choose the top 5 problems you think young people face, in order of importance.

The third activity asked participants to choose the top five problems from the lists they had formed and to rank them in order of importance.

Considerable debate took place as the participants struggled to summarise their lists and prioritise the issues they had nominated. They initially argued that all problems were being experienced throughout the community of young African-Australians and that all of them should be considered. They agreed that many problems were linked to common underlying causes, such as racism, financial pressures within the family and cultural differences, making it difficult to separate out individual problems as more important. Like the elders who took part in the focus group in Stage 1, the participants concluded that many of the problems facing young people were based in their experiences as African-Australian youth living across two cultures.
**Top 5 problems facing young people**

- Racism experienced in school, among wider peer groups and in the community generally, such as taunts about skin colour and exclusion or reluctant inclusion in group activities at school and in the community.
- Gaining access to meaningful and sustained employment beyond entry level positions in fast food chains and mass market retail outlets such as Coles and Woolworths.
- Alcohol, and to a lesser extent, drug use, the pressures to participate in this, the consequences of poorly managed consumption and parental attitudes to its use.
- Fighting as a response to racism, but also as a result of overcrowding in households struggling with financial demands and cultural differences around space allocation and resources suitable for young people, such as iPhones, laptops and television.
- Stress as a consequence of family expectations around education, employment and adherence to traditional cultural norms.

**ACTIVITY 4**

What do you think are the causes of young people having problems?

The fourth activity asked participants to identify the causes of the problems they had outlined. The participants argued that the causes of young people’s problems were already implied in the lists of problems they had made under Activity 2 and 3: that racism and family struggles with money, employment and cultural difference were at the heart of young people’s problems. Some problems were experienced outside the family in the wider community, such as fighting in response to racist taunts and peer pressure to conform, while others occurred inside the family, such as in intergenerational differences around Dinka and mainstream Australian culture.

**ACTIVITY 5**

Help for young people in Africa

- Back in Africa, how did the community help young people?
- How did young people help themselves?
- Can you solve problems the same way as you did in the past?
- If not, why not?

The fifth activity focused on strategies that young people might have used in South Sudan to help themselves with problems they faced.

The participants identified strategies for self-, peer- and community-based help from memories of their lives in Africa. Most of these strategies reflected their experiences as children born in or growing up in refugee camp life.

**Activities to help young people**

- ‘You’d back them up when they needed help.’
- ‘Sometimes in the camp you’d have to steal things to help people.’
- ‘You’d have to guide them home safely.’
- ‘You shared food.’
- ‘Here it’s easier.’
The final activity asked participants to identify ways in which young people could be helped by their community with the problems they encountered.

The participants compiled a list of community and family interactions and activities that they felt would make a difference in how they dealt with youth issues.

**Activities to help young people**

- ‘Understand us better.’
- ‘Try to listen to our thoughts and agree with us.’
- ‘You need parents to be involved with their kids on the weekends. Not just going to the Gold Coast but talking and checking up that everything’s OK.’
- ‘Hold a barbecue with your kids.’
- ‘Do more family activities on the weekend, like barbecues. Some white kids talk about what they did on the weekend and you haven’t even been to Dream World. Or you go there and then they say to you, oh, yeah, I did that in primary school.’
- ‘Go to the park and play games with the kids.’
- ‘Man, we need a fund raiser for money to do things!’
- ‘Parents should help their kids get involved in sport. Get into sport with them. Basketball is good!’
- ‘Kids need a youth club.’
- ‘And a homework club!’
- ‘Go to the movies with your kids and their friends.’
- ‘Go shopping together in the city.’
- ‘We could go camping.’ ‘But can girls go camping?’

**Reflections**

After the conclusion of the focus group, the elders discussed the insights they had gained into youth culture within their community, how it included both South Sudanese and mainstream cultural norms and how this differed significantly from their own experiences of coming into adulthood.

In both Stage 1 and Stage 2, a focus group activity had explored the ways in which young people were mentored and supported in South Sudan, to identify the practices that could be used and adapted within the new Australian environment. The elders reflected on the gap between their own and the young people’s experiences of group support and community engagement with young people in village life prior to the Sudanese civil war. The traditional activities and cultural practices they had engaged in as adolescents living in cattle camps or with their extended families in the village were markedly different from those engaged in by young people who had grown up in refugee camps. The young people had less experience of the structured age-cohort practices in which children were guided and coached by those older than them in the ways of Dinka village life and their community responsibilities and relationships.

The focus group also highlighted the extent to which contemporary Western societies include a ‘youth culture’ which differentiates itself from the concerns and activities of adults, creating a separate identity for young people at that period in their lives. Traditional Dinka culture does not include such a separation.
in culture and identity for its youth, making this phenomenon a cause of intergenerational tension and concern within resettled South Sudanese families as both parents and young people engage with a different construction and practice of ‘youth’.

The young people in the focus group were comfortable with communicating in English and dealing with Western technology, such as computers and video games, and were interested in ‘things that other kids are interested in—sport, music, fashion!’ For the elders, it seemed that communicating in English, which they had identified as a possible problem for young people during the elders’ focus group, might not be as great a concern as first thought. However, differing levels of English language fluency within the family had been identified by them and the young people as an issue that affected family relationships, with children often acting as interpreters for their parents, which changed family power dynamics. Young people were facing pressures generated by intergenerational dynamics within the family around culture, resources and expectations, as well as by wider responses to them as African-Australian youth.

The elders affirmed the commonality in ideas for engaging with youth that they had raised in their focus group in Stage 1 and those suggested by the young people themselves in Stage 2. They felt the youth focus group had enabled the young people to speak more openly about the problems for young African-Australians and had given them, as elders, greater insight into the circumstances surrounding these problems, the role that family dynamics played in these and how to develop strategies for mentoring.

For the elders, a strong theme that was emerging from the project thus far was that mentoring youth in a culturally appropriate way that built on their South Sudanese cultural roots but also enhanced their capacity to live in mainstream society depended as much on working with parents as it did on working with the youth themselves. A key theme underpinning the interaction between young people and adults within the home was that both were experiencing difficulties in engaging with mainstream culture, regardless of age or gender, and that recognising and helping both sides with this engagement would be necessary for a mentoring program to be effective.

The elders also discussed possibilities for using the focus group technique to explore other issues within the community, as well as to bring parents and young people into a structured discussion of youth and family issues that facilitated and supported openness on both sides.
Stage 3 Developing a Youth Mentoring Model and Program

The final in the Big Brother Project’s three program development workshops focused on the models and methods for youth mentoring. Participants from among the community’s elders worked through three sessions:

- a discussion with local youth workers on issues in working with disengaged youth
- based on these insights, developing a consensus within the group on approaches that would work with youth from within their community
- a presentation on designing and managing a youth mentoring program, including the role of the mentor, planning a mentoring program, matching mentors and mentees and monitoring mentoring relationships.

Session 1 Working with youth

In the first session, Anna Brumpton, Toowoomba Youth Service, and Russ Brown, Youth Housing and Reintegration Service Toowoomba, outlined a range of techniques and scenarios that youth workers use and encounter when working with young people at risk of disengaging from family, education and the community. The discussion considered broader contextual issues such as changes in recent decades in the legal frameworks surrounding children’s rights and safety, in gender roles within Australian culture and in youth culture (including notions of ‘freedom’, ‘respect’ and ‘entitlement’), financial and social pressures on families, the impact of digital media within households on family behaviours and expectations, the effect of the youth allowance on family dynamics and the role of peer pressure in young people’s choices and behaviours.

The discussion also explored the principles of working effectively with young people, in particular understanding the needs behind certain kinds of behaviours and from there working out strategies for enabling those needs to be met in positive, appropriate and strengthening ways. Scenarios raised from the group’s experiences within the community were used to discuss the principle of rewarding valued behaviour rather than punishing unwanted behaviour. The role of clear and effective communication between parents and young people was canvassed with examples of effective ways of encouraging trust and safety. The discussion explored the pressures experienced by youth living across two cultures and set this against mainstream youth culture notions of freedom, rights and access. Strategies for effective rule setting that would balance allowing young people control over their time, activities and finances with encouraging responsibility for the consequences of their choices were also considered. A key message from the discussion was that, irrespective of culture, young people who are at risk of disengaging have ‘a huge need in there somewhere that you must reach and understand before you can get anywhere with them’.

Session 2 Implications for youth mentoring within the community

During the second session, facilitated by Roberto Garcia, Toowoomba Regional Council Community Development, participants worked on a summary of the ideas and insights that the earlier discussion had generated for them and how these would mesh with traditional ways of parenting and engaging with youth in the community.

The group concluded that the takeaway messages came under the rubric ‘parents in action’, which could equally be applied to elders working with young people:

- Communication that enabled young people to feel safe, trusted and valued was key to understanding each person’s dreams, needs and pressures.
- Honest and sympathetic communication would enable both sides–adults and young people–to work out responses to situations that were appropriate within South Sudanese culture but also enabled participation in Australian culture.
• Rewards and incentives were a more effective way of encouraging valued behaviours than punishment; the challenge was to work out as parents and elders the rewards and incentives that would suit both cultural contexts.

• Young people needed practical support in developing skills such as anger management, budgeting, handling peer pressure, focusing on goals and communicating their needs.

• Strong and supportive relationships between parents and their young people also required honesty about expectations, limits and rules, as well as what the family could support within its income and the many demands on family finances.

• Being involved in young people’s activities (such as sporting events), supporting their education (for example, with homework or at school events) and holding family outings (in particular, low cost activities such as barbecues, picnics, movies and sports) were important means of keeping families connected.

• Keeping young people engaged with their families and the community was not about ‘giving them things so that they could keep up with other kids’: it was about knowing in detail and genuinely appreciating what they dreamt of, were dealing with and needed help with.

• Helping young people stay grounded within their South Sudanese culture without making this culture a source of restrictions, frustrations and misunderstandings was an important element of keeping them engaged.

• At the same time, welcoming young people’s friends from outside the South Sudanese-Australian community into the home and being patient with the cultural differences they bring would help young people bridge the two cultures they live in.

As a summary, participants agreed that parents and elders in action meant:

- listening
- talking
- appreciating
- participating
- rewarding.

Session 3 Developing a model for a youth mentoring program

The final session, presented by David Barton, CAMS Worker, Mercy Family Services, outlined frequently-used approaches within the wider community to designing and managing a youth mentoring program. These included the mentoring role and its skills, expectations and boundaries, tips for being an effective mentor, planning a mentoring program within a community, matching mentors and mentees, the role of parents, planning the first meeting, arranging follow-up and ongoing meetings and monitoring the mentoring relationship.

Reflections

AWCODA Big Brother Youth Mentoring Model

At the conclusion of the session, participants explored the applicability of mainstream youth mentoring practices to their community and within their culture. A number of issues emerged that shaped the mentoring model that participants agreed would be the basis for their work in the future under the Big Brother Project.

A commonly used mentoring model matches a mentor and mentee who have had little or no contact prior to engaging in mentoring and who form a one-to-one relationship. This requires careful matching by the program’s coordinator using information collected about those who volunteer to be mentors.
and the young people who take part in the program as mentees. The elders argued that the one-to-one model of mentor and mentee with little or no prior relationship would be difficult to adopt as the South Sudanese-Australian community is deeply interconnected with extended family relationships and ties. It was also possible that a structured one-to-one mentoring relationship might cut across these family connections. This would be further complicated by the fact that structured mentoring programs are not a familiar concept within African culture. Thus a preferred model would be group mentoring, in which one or more elders would engage with a group of young people for activities during which mentoring could naturally take place. This model would also be consistent with the traditional practice of elders having responsibility for a number of young people in their development into adulthood. The groups would be based on gender, which was culturally appropriate, and arranged according to location, given the dispersal of the community across the Toowoomba and Brisbane regions.

The elders emphasised the importance of engaging parents in the activities of the program. This was connected with the additional priority of holding activities that would help families engage with wider community practices, such as family outings in public spaces. This would increase parents’ skills in and familiarity with local culture and thereby enable easier communication with their young people about their experiences and concerns. This approach would also address some of the issues raised during the focus groups about young people wanting more activities with their parents on weekends and more freedom to engage in youth activities by themselves once their parents were comfortable with the nature of these events. Holding low-cost activities in which families as a whole could take part also recognised the financial struggles that many families faced which prevented them from acquiring those items that young people desired, such as iPods and X Boxes, which caused tensions within the family.

The group recognised that confidentiality was a pre-requisite for a successful mentoring relationship. Privacy and confidentiality had been raised earlier in the two focus groups, when the South Sudanese community’s strong ties and communication channels were discussed in the context of young people’s freedom to move unobserved within the wider community and the traditional communal responsibility for children in which ‘every child is your child’. Participants felt that confidentiality within a mentoring relationship, in a close-knit refugee community heavily reliant on its members for connectedness and support, would be of great concern to young people and their families. Perceptions and concerns about confidentiality would need to be taken into account as much as the actual practice of it.

Thus the mentoring model devised by the elders as the outcome of the Big Brother training and focus group program was group based, in which community elders would act as mentors for groups of young people identified as being at risk of disengaging. The model was also community based, in that it would provide a structured way in which parents and whole families could take part, as a way of addressing some of the wider cultural and social engagement problems that the community as a whole was facing. Within this model, the focus would be on helping young people and their parents communicate more effectively about the issues they were dealing with, increasing skills within the community in understanding the differing perspectives on life in Australia of older and younger family generations and facilitating greater access to local family customs and practices as part of engaging with the wider community.

**Introductory mentoring activity**

The training program concluded with arrangements for the first mentoring activity, which would introduce the AWCODA Big Brother Program to the local South Sudanese community. The elders selected an iconic Australian activity—a day at the beach—as the focus of this first event.

Many families within the community had not seen the sea before, been ocean swimming or had the opportunity to spend time on a beach engaging in the kinds of recreational activities that are possible in this environment. Young family members were aware of the place of beach and surf culture in Australian life through the stories of their peers at school about weekends and holidays at places such as Queensland’s Gold and Sunshine Coasts. For many families, access to these kinds of experiences was inhibited by time (especially where parents were engaged in shift work), money and cultural unfamiliarity.
To increase families’ skills and confidence with beach activities and culture and to give them a base upon which to share activities in the future with their young people, the elders also arranged with Surf Life Saving Queensland for an introduction to water safety for all participants in the activity.

The program’s first event would also include another popular Australian family activity, a picnic in a park beside the beach, with sports and games for the young people.

By including the whole family in this first Big Brother Program event and introducing families to two activities that are central to Australian mainstream culture, it was hoped that mentoring groups would be formed with parents’ support and parents would feel included in the program’s aims. It was also hoped that developing familiarity with these aspects of Australian culture would help families engage with confidence in them in the future.

The first Big Brother Program event was held at Mermaid Beach in Queensland in March 2012, with over fifty adults, young people and children attending. The outing included a trip to the beach which for many was their first encounter with the ocean, a barbecue, sports and games and an introduction to water safety by Surf Life Saving Queensland.
About the Participants

ELDERS


The Awulian community elders who instigated and took part in the AWCODA Big Brother Project were born in the south of Sudan during the seventies and eighties, arriving in Australia between 2001 and 2006 after many years in refugee camps such as Kakuma in northern Kenya. Originally settled in Toowoomba, Queensland, the community now lives on the Darling Downs and in the Brisbane Basin. Since settling here, all have completed high school and are now enrolled in, or about to complete, a university or TAFE qualification. All are working, two have begun buying a home, and all are active in community projects to support newly settled Sudanese and African-Australians, as well as family and community members in South Sudan. Some have returned to visit family in Kenya or South Sudan, many of whom are still in refugee camps. Some have brought family members to Australia and many are establishing new families here.
Six young people took part in the AWCODA Big Brother Project: five boys and one girl, ranging in age from fourteen to eighteen years. All were at school either in Toowoomba or Brisbane, with the older participants just completing Year 12. Some were in part-time employment in fast food outlets such as KFC and McDonalds. They have been living in Australia for on average ten years. None were born or had their early childhood in their home villages as their parents and extended families were displaced during the Sudanese civil war. All were born in other locations within southern Sudan or in displaced persons camps such as Kakuma in Kenya, from where they were resettled as humanitarian refugees in Australia. None arrived as unaccompanied minors.

Half of the participants had lost their father as a result of the Sudanese civil war. All were living at home in Toowoomba and Brisbane, with half living in female-headed single parent households. The average household size was six residents, including adults and children. All were living in households where adults were in full-time, part-time or casual employment, mostly shift work in processing plants such as meat works.
AWULIAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

The people of the Awulian community have kept in close contact since settling in south-east Queensland. We began coming here in 2001, as refugees from the war in Sudan, with most of us now living in the Brisbane basin and in regional centres such as Toowoomba, Queensland.

As new settlers arrived, we wanted to get together to talk and be updated about our family and friends here and overseas. We also wanted to help our community adjust to life in Queensland, as we had been helped by our friends.

We formed the Awulian Community Development Association to raise money for clinics, schools and clean water in South Sudan. We held a youth conference in Toowoomba, attended by over two hundred delegates from the Awulian community around Australia. Support from the Queensland Gambling Community Benefit Fund helped us obtain office equipment for community presentations and for our administration. We also held an open day in Toowoomba for the local community to share our stories.

Since then, we have published a collection of memoirs, *Walking to Freedom*, with the help of Multicultural Affairs Queensland and the Queensland Gambling Community Benefit Fund. Multicultural Affairs Queensland has also generously supported us in setting up a speakers bureau, through which young Awulians give presentations on their life experiences at local high schools. Our website, www.awcoda.com.au, enables our community to stay connected and also helps us with online sales of our book.

Some of the younger people within our community born in refugee camps and lacking family networks were having difficulty adjusting to life here. We have now completed a project funded by Multicultural Affairs Queensland to develop a program of youth mentoring by elders and social and cultural activities for young people and their families to support them in settling into their new lives.

In our recent community projects, we have been grateful for support from Multicultural Affairs Queensland, Gambling Community Benefit Fund and Mercy Family Services Toowoomba, as well as from the Toowoomba Regional Council, Page One Editing and Publishing, and in particular, the regional CAMS worker, David Barton, and Roberto Garcia, the region’s LAMP worker.

We feel that, as new settlers, we are growing stronger as a community and more secure in our identities as African-Australians, through our projects and our work with our members and our friends in the wider Queensland community.

Paul Mabior Garang
Project Coordinator AWCODA


McDonald, J 2002, *Mentoring, an Age Old Strategy for a Rapidly Expanding Field: A What, Why and How Primer for the Alcohol and Other Drugs Field*, National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction, Flinders University, SA.


