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Bridging the Gap between Police and Refugee Communities

Research Project Brief

The 'Bridging the Gap' project is a follow up on a research run by the Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies (TILES) in 2007-2009. This study raised some issues relating to Police-Refugee relations. While the final report of the research provides a valuable framework for agencies to start enabling better relations with refugees and vice-versa, it does not present stakeholders with examples, tools or ideas to do so. This current project follows stakeholders in the implementation of a Police-Refugee program in the area of Albury-Wodonga, with a focus on Albury Local Area Command (New South Wales Police Force). It has the purpose of documenting actions and tools, in order to make them available to the public.

This research project is *not* an evaluation. As a main outcome of this endeavour, we aim to build a repository of tools and techniques to foster positive relationships between police and refugees. Built like a 'tool kit' with a related 'how to manual', this repository is meant to outline what initiatives have been used to build positive relationships between local police officers and refugee groups, how they work and how they are transferable to other areas throughout Australia and internationally. These tools and examples will be made available to the wider public by way of publications.

This research emerged from discussions that have been taking place since mid- 2009 between Police and refugee groups, discussions which indicated a strong need for building a culture of understanding and reliance. Policing refugees must be based on reciprocity, as demonstrated by a report released by TILES in June 2009¹. However, current efforts to provide a smooth settlement transition for refugees have mainly focused on the provision of information to refugees about the role of police in our society. Research has found that there is also a need to raise awareness of police on refugee issues, especially in relation to preventing confrontational encounters.

An initiative run by the Murray Valley Sanctuary Refugee Group intends to start building bridges proactively, responding to a recent increase in the number of refugees in Albury-Wodonga. Statistics indicate that Albury is the third biggest resettlement area in New South Wales after Sydney and Wollongong. Over two hundred people from Bhutan and forty-five from Africa have settled in the area in the past three years. Whilst Albury-Wodonga has a history of refugee resettlement, the relatively large numbers, the obvious ethnicity of the new arrivals who are mostly in the 20 to 30 years age-group create a specifically vulnerable group with relation to interaction with law enforcement agencies. It is anticipated that there will continue to be groups of refugees arriving.

For further information about the Bridging the Gap research, please contact Dr. Isabelle Bartkowiak-Théron.

¹ Campbell, D., & Julian, R. (2009). *A Conversation on Trust: Community Policing and Refugee Settlement in Regional Australia*. Hobart: University of Tasmania, TILES.