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**FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS SKILLS
PROGRAM FOR SOUTHERN
SUDANESE YOUNG MEN –
A THERAPEUTIC APPROACH**

Evaluation Report

June 2007

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Indigenous Affairs “Family Relationships Services for Humanitarian Entrants”
Program**

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Family Relationships Skills Program for Southern Sudanese Young Men – A Therapeutic approach

Evaluation Report

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1. Introduction

The Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne) in partnership with the South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre received funding from the Department of Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FACSlA) to develop and implement a program to strengthen family relationships amongst newly arrived refugee families. The program included individual and family counselling, group therapy programs, information sessions and casework services.

As part of this program entitled "Family Relationships Services for Humanitarian Entrants Program", an eight week therapeutic group program was developed and facilitated with Southern Sudanese men to assist them to better understand the impact of settlement on their roles as husbands and fathers within an Australian cultural environment.¹

The men identified that traditional Southern Sudanese role models were no longer appropriate and they needed to adjust their roles and behaviours to better support their families in Australia. Young men were also affected and sought to redefine their role in Australian society.

To further strengthen the community and support their settlement, the Migrant Information Centre developed and facilitated a therapeutic group program targeting unmarried, young men from Southern Sudanese backgrounds to assist them to develop relationship and leadership skills for the future.

This report is an outline, analysis and evaluation of the relationships skills and leadership program for young men from Southern Sudanese backgrounds residing in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria.

2. Background

Traditionally, young Sudanese men learn their role as men and how to resolve family issues from community elders and male relatives. In the village, from an early age, young men sit round the village fire in the evenings with their father, male relatives and village elders eating together solving the problems in the village. These discussions include solving family problems that cannot be solved within the family unit.

This social environment is no longer available to them in Australia. Many families attempt to solve problems that occur in Australia by speaking to male relatives and family elders that have migrated with them and/or by calling relatives overseas. The personal day to day involvement of elders and relatives is minimised through distance and death or loss of important family members and in some instances families find it more difficult to reach a solution that meets the needs of the family as a whole. In addition, the pressures that families experience in their settlement may not be fully understood or appreciated by family elders residing overseas.

This program for young Southern Sudanese men was built on the models developed from two therapeutic programs. The first program was developed and facilitated by the Migrant Information Centre and Anglicare Meridian to support the

¹ The Evaluation Report for this program is available on the MIC's web site www.miceastmelb.com.au/research.htm - "Round Fire" Discussion Group A Therapeutic Group Program for Southern Sudanese Men (MIC: 2006).

settlement of Southern Sudanese youth in 2006 as part of the Settlement Grants Program funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). In the settlement program, young men were encouraged to attend one hour of soccer and one hour of discussion. The discussion focused on refugee and settlement experiences and identified strategies for managing trauma and grief.²

The second program was the men's FACSIA funded "Round Fire Discussion" program mentioned earlier in this report.

The young men who participated in the settlement program were invited to attend the relationships and leadership skills program as well as young men who had more recently settled in the region. Fifteen to twenty young men aged 15 to 25 years attended each week of the eight week program. The majority of these young men had participated in the previous settlement program.

3. Aims and objectives

The aim of this program was to increase young men's understanding of leadership skills and family relationships.

The objectives of the program included to:

- Provide an environment where unmarried Southern Sudanese young men could openly discuss potential issues that they believed would affect their future family relationships in Australia.
- Prepare young Sudanese men for their possible future roles as husbands and fathers, and
- Assist young men to improve current relationships within their existing family such as parents, siblings, uncles, brothers-in-law and cousins depending on who they were living with.³

4. Target group

The program targeted young Southern Sudanese men aged 15 to 25 years who resided in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne.

5. Program description

The program was held after school hours every Wednesday for eight weeks from 4pm to 6.30pm. The day of the week was chosen according to the availability of facilitators and the venue. The program was held at the Mitcham Baptist Church as it could provide indoor soccer facilities, a meeting room and a kitchen to prepare food and refreshments.

The program included one hour of soccer, half an hour for food and refreshments and one hour for group discussions (see Appendix A for a weekly outline of the

² The Evaluation Report for this program is available on the MIC's web site www.miceastmelb.com.au/research.htm - Southern Sudanese Youth Group (MIC: August 2006).

³ Due to the war in Southern Sudan many young people were separated from their parents and as a result, some young men live with relatives such as uncles, aunts and/or cousins. Those under 18 years are supported through the DIAC funded Refugee Minors Program managed by the Department of Human Services.

program). The facilitators were male and they included the Family Relationships Services for Humanitarian Entrants Program psychologist and a Sudanese community development worker.

The program commenced with soccer to encourage attendance as it is a popular sport amongst Southern Sudanese young men. Following the soccer, food was prepared and shared together followed by one hour of discussion. The topics for discussion were based on the facilitator's experience of working with the men's "Round Fire" Discussion Group and from issues identified by the young men throughout the program.

The program was developed using a narrative psychotherapy approach. Young Southern Sudanese men shared their own views and stories of family roles and relationships in the Sudan and in Australia. Opening discussions as well as by introducing selected topics, other narratives were offered to them by the psychologist for their consideration.

The facilitators met prior to each session to review and reflect on the previous session and to plan and confirm what should be covered in the following sessions.

6. Evaluation methodology

The evaluation of this program was developed from a group discussion during the last session and written surveys completed by participants as well as the reflections of the facilitators (see Appendix B for a summary of the written surveys from participants).

Participants were asked to discuss what topic(s) they found most useful, what they learnt from the program and how the program could be improved? Participants were also asked to provide written responses to these questions to ensure confidentiality and encourage openness amongst individuals in the group.

7. Culturally appropriate approaches for therapeutic group programs

Western models of counselling and therapy are not generally understood within Southern Sudanese cultures. In the Sudan people seek assistance and support through the extended family and community elders. As a result, the challenges were to develop a program that:

- Was culturally responsive and encouraged individuals to attend in the first instance and continue to participate regularly throughout the program,
- Met the needs of participants through providing support and guidance, and
- Met the overall objectives and aims of the program.

Although the number of young men who attended each session varied from 14 to 20 participants, a maximum of 20 young men participated in the program. This is a high number of participants for a therapeutic group program. However, the fact that these young men continued to attend regularly indicated that the program was culturally responsive and continued to meet their needs.

From previous experiences with the Sudanese community, the facilitators knew that young men liked to play soccer, eat together and talk. The option of leaving

after the soccer game was discussed. However, almost all chose to stay each week and join the discussion group to talk about family relationships and life in Australia.

The presence of a Sudanese facilitator - community development worker - was crucial in the initial part of the program to enable open exploration of Sudanese cultural understandings and values around sensitive topics such as gender roles. Later on in the program, the non Sudanese facilitator – psychologist – enabled participants to understand more about Australian culture and values that would impact on their relationships in Australia. This provided an essential balance for the use of the narrative approach to this therapeutic group.

Young Sudanese men were able to explore both their own cultural stories around gender issues as well as consider the new social environment in which they now found themselves. The psychologist was the primary facilitator. By using humour and personal disclosure about his own marriage, he was able to build trust with participants. Research has shown that having fun and using humour involves higher cognitive functioning of the human brain in contrast to self-survival mode which uses only the primitive, basic brain functioning.

As the program progressed the young men started to perceive the non Sudanese facilitator more and more as a “wise paternal uncle” – as extended family rather than as a psychologist.

The balance of the Sudanese and non Sudanese facilitators empowered young Sudanese men by giving them appropriate information relevant to their experiences of tensions between two very different mind-sets on gender roles and issues.

8. Program structure and the nature of the group

Punctuality was an issue throughout the program but there were always sufficient numbers of “early birds” (3 to 4) to start playing soccer on time. Soccer served as a “buffer” for latecomers who were able to join the game as they arrived.

The structure of the program of playing soccer at the beginning of each session, sharing a meal and then participating in group discussions was reinforced every week by reminding the young men of the totality of the gatherings – that there was much more on offer than just playing soccer together.

The program structure was needed to help the group participants to engage with each other on many levels. Soccer served as a “warming-up”, non-threatening activity of engagement for the young men so that the group could feel safe and achieve a sense of being a “whole” or a team. This was further supported and strengthened by having a meal together and organising the discussion component of the sessions so that the young men and the facilitators sat together in a circle with a blackboard forming part of the circle.

Knowing that almost all the young men had been through severe trauma earlier in their lives, it was crucial to enforce as much as possible the notion of safety and security. The whole “ritual”- playing soccer, having a meal and group discussion – provided a solid frame for the group to feel safe, secure and focused. To reinforce the sense of safety and predictability, the topics for each session were pre-conceived and introduced up-front.

The facilitators reinforced the safety of the group by reminding participants that the program was an opportunity to play soccer indoors every week with good friends, have a referee, enjoy food, drinks, biscuits and above all, hear new things and acquire new knowledge about very important topics about life in a safe place where they could say whatever they wanted without fear of being criticised. Furthermore, the idea that you could “agree to disagree” no matter how different your views were to another person and play soccer and eat with them was another essential learning for group participants which was constantly reinforced by facilitators.

In addition, even though the young men were asked to actively participate in discussions, there was no need for them to share their personal stories if they did not want to – rather, they could participate in discussions around more generic concepts. The non-threatening approach of building a new narrative, a gentle construction of what it means to be a Sudanese man in contemporary Australia, was employed.

Psycho-education was one of the major tools used. Giving new information about gender rules and issues served as a therapeutic intervention by normalising their experiences of having challenges with new roles and rules. A new psycho-social map for the new psycho-social territory was slowly developed.

9. Discussion topics

Four topics created very active and energetic (at times even aggressive) responses from participants:

- Perfect girls and perfect boys
- How to find the perfect girl
- The purpose of marriage
- The dark shadows of boys and girls

At times verbal fights developed, young men were talking over each other, shouting if necessary and speaking in Dinka⁴ or a mixture of Dinka and English. Usually it took the facilitators a few minutes to calm the situation and take control over emotions (some young men became furious). No escalation of disputes occurred. However, for some participants these outbursts decreased their tolerance for different viewpoints and disrespectful behaviour towards others was often expressed during the sessions.

For example the ideas of some young men that you could marry or even live with a non-Dinka girl was considered by others as a “sin” and treated as “treason” or a “betrayal” of their community. This was best illustrated by two brothers arguing about this issue. One brother was arguing that he would marry a non-Dinka girl to avoid all the fuss of paying a dowry. The other brother became very upset by his attitude and aggressively argued that marrying a Dinka girl is a MUST for every Dinka man since that would be the only way to preserve their culture in Australia.

⁴ A Sudanese dialect.

The same two brothers often expressed very opposite perspectives and viewpoints on issues including the purpose of marriage. It is possible that they were expressing polarised views that existed in their own family of origin.

It could be speculated that the capacity of some young men to tolerate different viewpoints could have been compromised by the trauma they experienced in the Sudan. It does not take much to trigger a self-survival mechanism in all people especially if there is a history of life threatening experiences. In the case of young Sudanese men, there was probably a series of such life threatening situations that imprinted in them a lack of tolerance for the opponent and therefore difference i.e. having an opposite opinion could easily appear as a “threat” that cannot be tolerated and the fight, flight response became activated.

9.1 “Perfect girls and perfect boys”

In the third session young men indicated that for any happy family life, it is important for partners to search for characteristics that would make a good wife or husband.

As a result in the third and fourth sessions, the group reflected on the attributes of the “perfect girl and perfect boy” and developed a checklist for the perfect wife and husband.

The group agreed on the top characteristics that would represent the perfect girl and the top characteristics that would represent the perfect boy. These characteristics were placed in order of importance.

For girls the most important attributes were: a good friend, cooperative, a caring mother, a good partner, a good listener, educated, wise (but not wiser than me) and trustworthy.

The list in order of most important for boys was: responsible, mature, hard working, handsome, respectful to partner, gentleman, noble, intelligent, romantic, rich, having a big penis, educated, able to solve problems, a good listener, a good father and trustworthy.

The young men acknowledged that one of the key factors for the success of marriage is *respect of one another*. As one participant stated, “If you do not respect your partner you will loose her”.

These attributes for both men and women could relate to young people generally regardless of their cultural background. Further, many of these characteristics could contribute to a healthy and safe relationship that could enhance family life.

However, during this exercise, two young men expressed their concerns about married life. They stated that they did not want to marry because of there own father and mother’s relationship:

“We see our parents fighting and insulting one another – so why marry if this is married life?”

They claimed they would prefer to have a white Australian girlfriend that they could eventually live with without getting married.

The majority, however, wanted a traditional Sudanese marriage but with some changes. The high cost of traditional Sudanese marriages was discussed and

many concluded that they wanted a traditional wedding without having to pay a dowry.⁵

9.2 How to find the perfect girl (self reflections)

The issue of how to find and recognise the perfect girl was raised as a major issue in the previous session when the group identified the most important characteristics for males and females.

Participants were then encouraged to self reflect on the most important characteristics for them particularly the top six to seven characteristics so that they could be the perfect partner and have a better chance to find the perfect girl.

To encourage the group to self reflection, the writing of the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu was introduced for general discussion: "Knowing others is intelligence, knowing yourself is true wisdom. Mastering others is strength, but mastering yourself is true power".

The young men were encouraged to explore their own behaviour and attributes to assist them to become the perfect boy so that they had a better chance of marrying the perfect girl. However, this led to participants focusing on their perceptions of what young women wanted in a partner.

Many believed that young women only wanted rich husbands so that they could inherit their wealth when they died. This perception which was generally held by all participants could have been influenced by their experience of marriage in Sudanese culture where the families of the most desired girls for marriage (or the perfect girl) negotiate a high dowry price and only men from rich families can approach them for marriage.

Participants believed that wealth would ultimately influence their ability to find a wife.

9.3 Purpose of marriage

To set the scene for discussion on the purpose of marriage, the idea that everyone in Australia can choose to marry or remain single was raised and acknowledged by the facilitators. Nevertheless to focus discussion on the positive aspects of marriage, the following saying was introduced: "If you travel alone you can probably go faster. But the journey will never be as rewarding, and you probably won't be able to go as far".

Participants were then asked to identify what they believed was the purpose of marriage.

Facilitators then discussed four reasons why people marry:

1. Sexual reasons for a permanently available source of sexual gratification and creation of children
2. Economic reasons to generate more money or wealth
3. Social reasons to meet explicit or implicit social pressures to marry

⁵ Dowries are paid to the bride's family in traditional Sudanese marriages. The amount and nature of the dowry depends on the tradition of the tribe. For example, Nuer and Dinka tribal dowries are paid in cows. In Australia, the price of each cow is approximately \$200.

4. Companionship reasons to search for long term and stable support, care, good advice and emotional warmth.

The group explored these reasons and it was acknowledged that if people only marry for each of the first three reasons then the marriage usually suffers instability as sexual attraction often wanes, each partner could become financially independent and people cared less about what people do and the social pressure disappeared. The need for companionship was raised as the most important reason for healthy, long term marriages.

9.4 The dark shadows of girls and boys

The concept of the “dark shadows of girls and boys” was introduced in session six following discussions on the purpose of marriage. Facilitators felt it was important that participants should know that partners are “human” and each individual has his or her dark side.

To commence discussion on this theme, participants were asked whether they thought it was good for a married man to have a girlfriend whilst he was still married. Some argued that it was not good for a married man to have a girlfriend as it was dishonest to the wife.

Others on the contrary argued that they saw nothing wrong for a married man to have a girlfriend because a girlfriend could help him with problems he may be experiencing in his marriage, for example, she could have sexual intercourse with him if his wife refused for some reason.

Facilitators then asked: “What should happen if the husband refused to satisfy the sexual feelings of his wife. Should she go out to look for another man to satisfy her sexual needs?” Unanimously, the young men condemned a wife that had sexual intercourse outside marriage which is consistent with Sudanese culture.

After further discussion, all participants agreed that there could be valid reasons why either a wife or a husband refused sexual contact with each other including sickness or tiredness. The argument that it was OK for men and not for women to have sex outside of marriage no longer seemed as valid for either partner. The group agreed this behaviour could impact negatively on the marriage.

Participants were then asked to identify the characteristics of the dark sides of men and women in order of importance. These characteristics are detailed below:

Dark side of men	Dark side of women
Not loyal to their partner	Not loyal to their partner
Not respectful	Gold digger
Cheater	Dishonest
Violent	Narrow minded
Aggressive	Not respectful
Showing anger	Drug addicted
Drinker	
Drug addicted	

Facilitators encouraged participants to recognise the dark side in themselves and recommended that they seek assistance from an experienced counsellor to resolve possible behavioural problems.

The purpose of finding out about our shadow traits and consequently dealing with them was to stop possible future destructive fights with partners and to evolve towards more loving relationships with them.

9.5 Thinking outside the box

The concept of “thinking outside the box” was introduced in session seven. The facilitators felt that it was important that participants could consider alternative narratives of their future lives within a new cultural environment.

By introducing young men to new ways of thinking, they could consider new ways of looking at a given situation that included decisions that impacted on their future roles as fathers and husbands.

The young men had not chosen to migrate to Australia and they faced a number of challenges that would impact on their lives through living in a new cultural environment – challenges that might be different from the challenges that they had faced, or would have faced, in their country of origin.

The ability to deal with change varies from person to person and is a direct result of each individual’s psychological makeup, motivation levels and expectations. All participants were influenced by the oral traditions in the Sudan of elders informing young men of what they should do with their lives and whom they should marry as well as Australian culture where young people are encouraged to make their own decisions about marriage and selecting a suitable partner.

The young men were confused about which value system and attitudes applied to them in their lives in Australia – should they maintain traditional values or adopt the perceived values of young people in the new society. Many reported that they felt pressured by their families and community to maintain Sudanese cultural traditions as their families were afraid that they would lose their Sudanese identity.

10. Key Learning

One of the major challenges for facilitators related to the fact that there were significant developmental and educational differences between the young men. Some of the young men were 15 to 16 years of age and they may have been too young to consider the seriousness of the topics. It was noticed by the facilitators that during the sessions they often drifted apart from the rest of the group or started to misbehave by laughing loudly for no apparent reason, talking to the person next to them whilst someone else was sharing his views, playing with mobile phones etc.

It appeared that some young men were lacking education because they could not grasp some concepts which the majority of the young men grasped quickly. The level of English proficiency was also an issue for some participants. Those young men missed out on education during their formative years by living in refugee camps where education was not provided.

Therefore, the decision was made to pitch the discussion to the older young men of 17 to 18 years of age since it was more likely that they would marry sooner than the participants in the younger group.

The group as a whole struggled over some issues usually expressing very polarised views and opinions, for example, living with a girlfriend before marriage, asking parents permission to marry, marrying a non Dinka or non Christian girl. This probably illustrated cultural differences between the given basic imprint of their culture versus new “Aussie rules”.

Another major challenge for facilitators related to disrespectful behaviour towards opponents as well as decreased tolerance for different perspectives and points of view. It could be argued that early traumatising experiences played a role in this behaviour. However, any group of young men could exhibit similar behaviours of openly showing frustration and strong emotions when dealing with different and challenging viewpoints.

Nevertheless, the major success of this group was that the young men did openly discuss sensitive and sometimes “taboo” topics and issues such as having sex before marriage, marrying against parental wishes and this program provided a safe environment in which they could do this.

11. Conclusion

This program for young Sudanese men provided a valuable forum for them to openly discuss relationship issues with their peers in a safe environment. The session and program structure – commencing with soccer, sharing a meal and group discussion - was culturally appropriate and met the needs of the group to explore sensitive issues.

However, from time to time the quality of the discussions suffered because the number of participants varied from 12 to 20 each week and some young men were not “up to speed” because they had missed the previous session and lacked crucial information that was informing the discussion at the session they did attend. In addition, the group was not a closed group which also impacted on the continuity of discussion and it was difficult for facilitators to “discipline” younger member of the group into formal discussion mode (that is respectful listening and not interrupting others).

Nevertheless, the therapeutic impact of the program on young men was evident especially with a few of the older more mature members of the group who on several occasions expressed their deep gratitude to facilitators for exposing them to new ideas and for teaching them “stuff” they had never heard before that would be useful for their future lives.

The majority of participants stated that the activities undertaken in the program were all good and the discussion topics useful. The program assisted young men to become more aware of family problems and to be more open to new ideas. Furthermore the young men requested that the program be extended so that they would continue to have opportunities for ongoing learning.

APPENDIX A - Outline of Weekly Program

Soccer and refreshments

The young men played soccer for the first hour each week and then were given refreshments that they ate together. As the soccer and refreshments followed the same format each week, it is not included in the weekly program description.

Week 1: Introductions & Group Rules

At the first session the facilitators and participants introduced themselves and the facilitators outlined the aims and objectives of the program.

Group rules were discussed and agreed upon.

These rules included:

- Participants should be aged 15 to 25 years of Southern Sudanese backgrounds
- All facilities should be kept tidy and clean
- Participants should be on time as soccer will start at 4pm and finish at 5pm, refreshments will start at 5pm and discussion at 5.30pm to 6.30pm
- Participants should be polite and cooperative with each other
- Participants should be respectful and listen to each other without interruption
- Participants can agree to disagree

Participants were reassured that the program was developed for them and that it provided a good opportunity for them to discuss topics related to family relationships.

Week 2: Role of men and women in Sudan and Australia and the introduction of different viewpoints

The purpose of this session was to discuss the differences in the roles of men and women comparing Sudan and Australia. Two blended images were introduced to illustrate that partners in marriage could have different perspectives on certain issues which each partner thinks is a valid viewpoint.

The first image was a blended image of a horse head and a frog depending on the angle the person looks it could be either picture. The second image was a Gestalt blended image of a young/beautiful woman as well as an old/ugly woman. Depending on the filter people have in their heads depends on one of the images becoming predominant.

Both images were used to illustrate that sometimes in marriage husbands and wives do not see problems and issues in the same way i.e. a wife may see a family's problem as a frog but her husband may see the problem as a horse. The point made was that nobody is either right or wrong – they both have a VALID viewpoint depending on which side you look at the problem so there is no need for arguments. Instead, each partner should try to understand the viewpoint of the other.

The second image illustrated the same point in a more conclusive way. One of the possible explanations given to the young men by facilitators was when a man is in love with his partner she appears very beautiful. However when there are serious problems between them the same woman appears to be ugly.

Week 3: Characteristics of a perfect girl and perfect boy

To encourage the participation of the young men the facilitators asked them to describe the characteristics of the perfect girl who they would like to marry. Approximately 15 characteristics were identified. The top characteristics were caring partner, good friend, cooperative, caring mother, good listener, educated, trustworthy, wise (but not wiser than me), beautiful and respectful.

Participants were then challenged to describe the characteristics of the boy (in this case the perfect boy) that the perfect girl would prefer to marry. After a very lively discussion, there were approximately 13 characteristics identified for the perfect boy. After the facilitators asked the young men to rate the characteristics in order of priority they came up with responsible, mature, hard working, handsome, respectful, gentleman, intelligent, rich, romantic, having a big penis and educated.

Week 4: Self-reflections

Following the previous session where participants identified the top ten characteristics of the perfect girl and perfect boy, the facilitators encouraged the young men to self-reflect and do an honest stock take or internal inventory of their own personalities and characteristics.

Since it is reasonable to expect that any girl who has a lot of the characteristics from the perfect girl list would probably have more than one boy who was interested in marrying her i.e. there could be a lot of competition. Therefore, it is advisable to self-reflect and improve as much as possible to win the love of that girl. The more characteristics from the perfect boy list the young man can exhibit the better chances he has to marry the girl.

In order to assist the young men in their task, the facilitators introduced the sayings: "If you don't program yourself, other people (life) will program you." The purpose was to empower young men by making them aware that they can better themselves if they really want to.

In addition, other sayings were introduced: "Knowing others is intelligence, knowing yourself is true wisdom"; "mastering others is strength, mastering yourself is true power" and "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference."

Week 5: Purpose of marriage

Participants were asked what they thought was important in the last session? They responded that all topics had been relevant especially the consideration of the saying: "If you do not program yourself other people will program you."

The young men were then asked, "What do you think is the purpose of marriage?" According to participants the reasons for marriage included:

- Having children
- To meet social pressures

- Companionship
- Getting rich together
- Having sex

The reasons they provided were acknowledged and some were challenged by the facilitators. For example, women can have children in Australia without being married.

Facilitators raised four main reasons for why people marry for participants to explore:

- Sexual dyad (permanently available source of sexual gratification as well as the creation of children).
- Economic dyad (generates more money or wealth)
- Social dyad (explicit or implicit social pressures to marry)
- Companionship dyad (search for long term and stable support, care, good advice and emotional warmth)

The facilitators then explained that the first three dyads mentioned above usually suffer from instability as sexual attraction often wanes, each partner can become financially independent and people might care less about what a person does so social pressures can disappear. However, the fourth dyad companionship is the one that endures over time.

Another saying “behind every great man, there is always an even greater woman” (which is common to many cultures) was introduced to illustrate the point that it is in the best interest of a husband to assist his wife to become better in any way (great) because she will in return make him greater – the upward spiral.

Week 6: The dark sides of girls and boys

The session began with a discussion of the topics covered in the previous week.

Participants were then provocatively asked to explore the dark sides of human nature that can influence behaviour and impact negatively on partners in marriage. The first question to generate discussion was: “What do you think, is it good for a married man to have a girlfriend when he already has a wife?”

The second question was: “What should happen if the husband refused to satisfy the sexual feelings of his wife, can she go to look for another man?”

After long discussions participants agreed that both men and women have their dark sides or shadows - the less flattering parts of their personalities. They then identified the characteristics of the dark side in men and women.

For men, the dark side consisted of not being loyal, disrespectful, violent, aggressive, angry, excessive drinker, drug addict and cheater. For women, the dark side consisted of not being loyal, dishonest, “a gold digger”, narrow minded, disrespectful and drug addict.

The facilitators encouraged participants to seek assistance and support from experienced counsellors to identify their dark side if it was causing them problems in their relationships.

Week 7: Thinking outside the box

Participants were given an exercise to illustrate how hard it is for people to think differently. They were given a paper containing nine points outlining a box and they were asked to join all the nine dots with four straight lines without lifting their pen off the paper.

After the exercise, facilitators explained the concept of thinking outside the box and encouraged participants to discuss what this could mean in relation to marriages in Australia compared to the Sudan.

In Australia, often young men and women are under constant pressure from their families to marry inside the Sudanese community. Some young men expressed their frustration with this and vowed that they would marry any girl regardless of her nationality and religion if they fell in love with her. However other young men challenged this view vigorously claiming that it is their duty to protect their culture.

Week 8: Evaluation and gift presentations

Week eight was earmarked for evaluation and presentations of gifts to the young men who have either shown talent in active participation in group discussion or shown good skills in playing soccer. In total, ten young Sudanese men received gifts of soccer balls and self-help books.

Participants were then asked to talk about the overall program – what topics they found most useful, what topics they found least useful, what they learnt from the program and how the program could be improved. Participants were also given a written survey incorporating these questions to ensure confidentiality and encourage individual feedback (see Appendix B for a summary of the written feedback).

It is worth noting that one of the young men brought his girlfriend to this session. Since the majority of the young men knew her she was allowed to stay. She was pleased with the energy and engagement of the group and applauded them frequently. She did not play soccer on the court but she played with the young men who were waiting their turn to play outside the court. The fact that she was openly introduced as the young man's girlfriend could indicate that the behaviour of young Sudanese men and women is changing to reflect the more widely accepted of young people within mainstream Australian culture.

APPENDIX B – Summary of Feedback Sheets

Q. 1. How would you rate the discussions? (Please circle your answer)

Excellent (7) Very Good (6) Good (6) Average (1) Poor (0)

Q.2. Was the time and day for soccer and discussions suitable for you?

Yes (19) No (1)

If No, which day of the week and time would you prefer?

- Friday from 3.30pm 7.30pm.

Q.3. Which topic(s) did you find most useful?

- Expectations: How to find a perfect girl (7)
- Purpose of marriage: family relationships (3)
- The dark sides of girls and boys (3)
- All topics were useful.
- I have no idea.
- I did not find anything useful in the sessions.

Q.4. Which topic(s) did you find least useful?

- None (9)
- I do not know (1)
- Purpose of marriage

Q.5. What did you learn from the program?

- I have learned so many things for example that I can do something about my future - I can improve it (2).
- Good communication between partners (2).
- Good communication and thinking outside my box.
- I have to find out good characteristics about the girl before I involve myself in marriage.
- I have learned how to do self-reflection and how to deal with people I do not know. I have also learned some information I did not know before.
- I learned how one can get married.
- Relationship and friendship among us.
- Participating with people and learning to discuss and present arguments.
- I have learned everything covered in the sessions.
- I have learned a lot of useful things – not to give up.
- I have learned that people do not always come from the same framework - what is good to me might be bad to you.

- I have learned how to be in a group and make friends in different environment.
- To be friendly to other people.
- I do not know what I learned from the program (2).

Q.6. Do you have any suggestions how we could improve the program?

- We could improve this program by introducing other topics concerning young men and by introducing other activities besides soccer.
- The time for the program should be extended, as there are many interesting topics to be discussed/covered (2).
- No. What was done was good (2).
- More time should be allocated for soccer (2).
- Make the program for anybody who is interested and not only for the Sudanese.
- Topics should be simple that could be readily understood by participants.
- Let other young men from non-Sudanese backgrounds (migrants & refugees) join the program.
- I have no suggestion (6).

Q.7. Any other comments?

- It was enjoyable and successful sessions.
- I would appreciate if this program could include other young men with migrant or refugee backgrounds.
- I would like a soccer group to be organised so that young Sudanese men could compete amongst themselves.
- The activities undertaken in the program were all good.
- This was the best soccer in our neighborhood.
- No comment (10).