

The Aussie Family program at UniSA

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Abstract

The University of South Australia has found its International students report dissatisfaction with the degree of interaction they achieve with their host community. International students are often not able to form friendships with local students or become involved in the general community, despite seeing these objectives as desirable. The Aussie Family program at the University of South Australia aims to address this dissatisfaction directly. The program is open to all commencing International students, and matches participants with an Australian family which the students meet at a reception lunch, and then again privately for a meal in the family's home, and/or a social, sporting or tourist activity. The families have so far been drawn from the University's staff and continuing local student community. This study finds that in a high proportion of cases relationships formed in the Aussie Family program are ongoing, and that there are good indications that the program is meeting its aims in increasing International students' confidence in interacting with Australians. Furthermore, this study suggests that the program can be linked to improving International students' 'sense of connectedness' with their host community, shown by recent research to be a key indicator of their welfare.

Key Words

International students, community interaction, intercultural

Introduction

The Aussie Family program is a UniSA initiative to foster greater social interaction between International students and their host community. International students are matched in pairs to participating staff members and local students, who act as hosts. The hosts' families/households are encouraged to be involved. International students and their host families meet at a reception lunch, where they get to know each other. At this reception, participants are asked to arrange to meet again in their own time, for a meal in the family's home, and/or a social, sporting or tourist activity. No further commitment is required of hosts. An ongoing supportive relationship is certainly welcomed, however there is a recognition inherent in this program that such a relationship is best left to happen naturally. An important part of this study was to determine to what extent this happens.

The Aussie Family program is a response to the fact that International students at UniSA have reported comparatively low levels of satisfaction with the degree of interaction they achieve with Australians (*2004 Student Experience Questionnaire*, pp. 6, 14). The Aussie Family program seeks to equip International students with the intercultural skills to achieve improved levels of interaction, as well as with the opportunity to build on the relationship with their host family. This study shows that a significant proportion of participants agree that the program has helped their confidence in interacting with Australians. A particular regret of International students is that they 'never see inside an Australian home'. The Aussie Family program seeks to address this regret in a very direct way.

This study also contains evidence consistent with an interpretation that the Aussie Family program improves International students' 'sense of connectedness'. Research has shown a correlation between a 'sense of connectedness' and International student welfare, that extends

to students' academic performance. While not conclusive, the data presented here support the claim that through the Aussie Family program, International students are able to achieve a greater 'sense of connectedness' and thus to derive maximum benefit from their stay with us.

The Aussie Family program at UniSA is now in its third iteration. It is continuing to evolve, and this study will be used to inform a report which will lead to its further development. See appendix 1 for details of the three iterations.

Background

Numerous studies have found that International students desire greater levels of interaction with local students than they are able to achieve (see e.g. the studies listed in Chalmers & Volet 1997, p. 93).

In a survey of International student experiences of Australian higher education, Hellsten (2002, p. 7) also found that International students expect the host community to be caring and supportive. Not only that, they felt that community support would bring about improved academic performance as well (Hellsten 2002, p. 6). More examples of studies showing community integration to be related to academic success are listed by Maza Duerto (2004, p. 135).

A recent comprehensive report on International student welfare commissioned by a Melbourne university identified a 'sense of connectedness' as a key predictor of welfare (Rosenthal, Russel & Thomson 2006). Because this finding is of key importance to the current study, it will be looked at in a little more detail. By 'sense of connectedness' is meant 'having caring, supportive people who know [the students], listen to them and give them help when needed.' (Rosenthal, Russel & Thomson 2006, p. 3) The nature of this support, however, goes beyond standard student service provision:

The aspect of connectedness that students are most in need of is that supplied by people who care about them at a personal level. They indicate they have reasonable access to people who can provide information and related types of help. What they lack is contact with people who know them as individual human beings, who care about them personally and with whom they can talk at a personal level. (Rosenthal, Russel & Thomson 2006, p. 7)

The study found that a 'sense of connectedness' was a good statistical predictor of positive perceptions in all areas of the students' lives, including academic progress (Rosenthal, Russel & Thomson 2006, p. 5).

The report recommends that improving International students' 'sense of connectedness' will be linked to benefits in a wide range of welfare issues (Rosenthal, Russel & Thomson 2006, p. 7). In practical terms it identifies the means of achieving this as 'social mixing with co-culturals and with Australians, belonging to organisations and capacity to contact a caring family at will' (Rosenthal, Russel & Thomson 2006, p. 3), but states further that:

Connectedness can be strengthened through contact with either co-culturals or Australians, however increasing the amount of contact with Australians would bring with it many additional benefits for international students (Rosenthal, Russel & Thomson 2006, p. 7).

Barker et al. (1991, p. 8) had already in 1991 recommended linking International students with local students or host families as a way of improving learning outcomes.

In 1997 the University of Newcastle initiated an International Student Care Program, whereby volunteers from the local community, as well as domestic students are matched with International students and required to meet regularly on a social basis (Gresham 2003). In evaluation, International students most commonly used the words 'care, concern, help, support, advice, sharing, listening and suggesting' (Gresham 2003, p. 29) in describing their relationship with their hosts.

Organisation of the Aussie Family program

Both the 2005 pilot scheme and the first semester 2006 Aussie Family program ran along similar lines:

Recruitment of hosts and International students

In the first week of semester, emails were sent to all eligible International and local students, inviting them to participate in the program, and directing them to the online registration form (see appendices 6 and 7). At the same time, an article was included in the regular weekly all-staff email, inviting staff to do the same (see appendix 8).

In the first semester 2006 program, eligible International students were those who had commenced at UniSA since the pilot version. Local students eligible to be hosts were Australian permanent residents who had completed at least one semester at UniSA.

For the 2005 pilot program a selection was made from the commencing International students who applied, and all hosts were UniSA staff members.

For the second semester 2006 Aussie Family program (the current iteration), the requirement that International students be commencing students was loosened. The reason for this is discussed in the conclusion.

Hosts and International students were given a two-week period to register. For the first semester 2006 Aussie Family program it quickly became clear that the supply of hosts was much greater than needed. Additional efforts were therefore made to encourage more International students to apply. These included a follow-up email, posters, and the creation of a website (<http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/learningconnection/student/international/aussie-family.asp>) to direct enquiries to. As a result, sufficient International students were recruited to match the number of hosts.

The organizer experienced some difficulty in recruiting hosts for the current iteration (second semester 2006), which calls into question the sustainability of recruiting hosts solely from the university's staff and student community. In the end, after additional recruiting activities were undertaken, enough hosts were recruited to satisfy demand.

Legal issues

For the first semester 2006 Aussie Family program all applicants were required to indicate that they were over 18, and that they had read and understood a carefully-worded disclaimer stating that they acknowledged that participation was not a requirement of their employment or studies at UniSA.

In addition, all local students applying to be hosts were required to give permission for their program directors to be asked whether they knew of any reason which would make the student in question unsuitable for participating as a host in the program. This was duly followed up on, although in a few cases program directors refrained from commenting, on the grounds that they did not know the students well enough.

For this reason, this process was changed for the second semester 2006 iteration to allow students to nominate any UniSA staff member, or an employer or community leader.

Matching

International students were 'matched' in pairs to hosts on the basis of requested nationality or language, program, campus, interests, age, gender, family unit, and residential address. International students could either apply as a pair, or were placed into a pair with another International student. This was to make contact with the host less intimidating for the International students, and to allow for the fact that a certain number of students inevitably would not turn up at the reception.

Staff members were matched in such a way as to avoid situations in which a conflict of interest could arise, e.g. coming from the same school.

This matching process is extremely time-consuming. For the pilot, with 23 hosts and 45 International students, matching took a few hours. For the semester 2006 program, with 72 hosts and 160 International students, matching took the best part of a week. It can be seen that the relationship between the number of participants and the time taken for matching is nonlinear.

International students had been asked to write a paragraph by way of introduction. This was forwarded to the student's host, as well as, with the student's permission, the student's email address, so that the host could make email contact before the reception, in order to encourage the student to attend. The International students were also informed of the name of their host. Both parties were provided with guidelines on what to expect. See appendices 9 and 10.

Reception

For the first semester 2006 Aussie Family program, all participants were required to attend a lunchtime reception at which hosts and International students first met. This was in the form of a catered barbecue lunch in a function centre, hosted by the Chancellor of UniSA. Hosts were encouraged to bring their families. For the pilot, a similar reception was held, but was not compulsory.

Hosts and International students found each other by way of a seating plan, by which matched combinations were seated at the same table, and name-tags.

It was decided that attendance at the reception be mandatory, based on the experience of the pilot program. Allowing participants to organize their own first meeting was not reliable, and International students who attended the reception without their host felt left out.

As the reception took place at a function centre some distance from the city centre, buses were provided for International students from one of UniSA's city campuses.

The food catered for Muslim students with carefully labelled Halal choices. To encourage Muslim students to attend, no alcohol was served or sold. Beef and vegetarian options were also available. On the basis of the experience of the first semester 2006 reception, more vegetarian options were provided in second semester, and all meat (not just Halal meat) was clearly labelled.

A prayer room was also provided for Muslim students.

At the reception, hosts were asked to make arrangements with their International students to meet 'for a meal in their home, and/or a tourist, sporting or social activity.'

The reception also functioned as a celebration of UniSA's multicultural population. It was strongly branded by the presence of UniSA corporate banners and posters, and given a very high profile by the presence of the Chancellor and the Executive Director and Vice President: International and Development, both of whom briefly addressed the participants. Before the speeches, there was a short ice-breaker to get hosts and International students talking.

Results of the July/August, 2006 surveys

Between July 28 and August 13, 2006, all participants in the 2005 pilot and the first semester 2006 program were given the opportunity to provide feedback in the form of completing an online survey. This represented the view of participants 11 months after the launch of the pilot, and 3 months after the launch of the first semester 2006 program. See appendix 1 for the participation rates. See appendices 2 – 5 for the surveys used.

The following is a summary of the results. As attending the reception was a requirement of participation in the first semester 2006 program, the surveys of those who indicated they did not attend the reception were ignored.

Suitability of match

Of the International students who responded, 100% from the pilot and 71% from the first semester 2006 program either agreed or strongly agreed that they were placed with a suitable host family.

Of the hosts who responded, 100% from the pilot and 95% from the first semester 2006 program either agreed or strongly agreed that they were placed with suitable International students.

Level of contact

From the 2005 pilot, 4 out of 7 hosts (57%) reported some ongoing contact, including email contact, and meeting for coffee or a meal. None reported regular contact, and 3 reported no contact anymore.

From the 2005 pilot, 6 out of 9 International students (67%) reported some contact (2) or regular contact (4), including emails, coffee and dinner. Three reported no contact anymore.

From the first semester 2006 program, 93% of hosts reported that they had met at least once (the 'requirement' of the program) by the time of the evaluation, including 53% who had met at least twice, and 33% more than twice.

From the first semester 2006 program, 71% of international students reported having met at least once, with 41% having met at least twice, and 16% more than twice. A further 8% had made arrangements to meet, 6% had made contact but no arrangements to meet. Fourteen per cent, 7 out of 49, had had no contact since the reception.

The differing results from the two surveys of first semester 2006 participants may provide some information about skewing in the samples. More hosts (93%) said they had met at least once than International students (71%). This could reflect a tendency by hosts who had not carried through their commitment to the program not to complete surveys, perhaps due to a sense of guilt. The student figures may be more accurate, since the taking up of contact was the responsibility of the hosts, hence students would not feel a sense of guilt if this did not happen. On the other hand, students, as 'customers', may be more likely to participate in the survey if they wish to complain.

Reasons for no contact

Hosts from the 2005 pilot who no longer have contact with their students made the following comments:

'[The first student] always sounds pleased to hear from us, but we don't have a lot of interests in common. I felt more in common with [the second student] and I thought he enjoyed the contact. I'm surprised he hasn't been in touch.' [This host still has contact with one student]

'Don't know- they stopped responding to emails and phone calls'

'I think that if the students had needed to contact me they would have, but they were both very independent and I have left it to them.'

'one moved back to China, the other had a strong network here'

'I had two students – both seemed well-settled and I suspect therefore not too much interest in developing the relationship.' [This host still has email contact with the students]

International students from the 2005 pilot who were not satisfied with the level of contact with their host made the following comments:

'I hope we can contact with each other'

'Unfortunately, due to university and work commitments I have been unable to keep contact with my Host family but would have liked to have still maintained regular contact.'

'No contact anymore; only one barbecue although the family promised several trips'

Hosts from the 2006 program who had had no contact since the reception made the following comments:

'It was difficult to find mutually suitable times to meet up ...'

'I called and invited them out but they didnt attend'

'One of the students was really strange and we perceived him to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Thus we did not arrange another meeting'

'... he sent a voice message to the effect that he didn't feel like it (going on the agreed sight seeing trip), because he was having a lie in.'

'I was placed on a table with 6 students, the other family(s) had not turned up. I was told by staff there that they would email me the details of the other students as I felt sorry for them so that I could arrange to have them all over for a BBQ. This never happened and I have no idea who they are. ... I feel for the kids who were placed with me either before or on the day. I imagine they feel as isolated and left out as I do. I did not contact the originals as I had said that we would all get together as a group ... Since then I have had major surgery so this has taken up a couple of months ...'

'... there has been limited time to really connect since the reception. ... I know personally that this semester got alot busier than i initially thought it would. It also

seems to take a long time to come to an agreement about when to meet, due mainly to communication barriers. ... The main reason for this has been clashing timetables and the fact we were at different campuses. But also there is a difficulty with communication mediums. There is ... a heavy reliance on email and mobiles, both of which i have limited access to.'

'I have met one student 3 times since reception and will meet them again, but the other have had email contact but never met as student was not able to find appropriate time.'

International students from the 2006 program who had had no contact since the reception made the following comments:

'was invited to go crabbing but did not go'

'... since my aussie family didn't show up at the reception and we lost contact.'

For the cases in which students received no further contact from their hosts after the reception, it could be argued that intervention in the form of reminder emails may be necessary. On the other hand, it may be that there is a valid reason for no contact taking place; perhaps the host realizing involvement is an overcommitment, or the host simply not feeling comfortable with the students, for whatever reason.

Clearly there needs to be a strategy for dealing with the situation where hosts (and International students) do not turn up at the reception. The existence of this problem also lends weight to the argument that International students should have more than one opportunity to participate in the program.

Form of and satisfaction with the social contact

The participants took part in a range of typical social events from barbecues to walks or drives to attending sporting events. Hosts from the first semester 2006 program indicated that where further contact took place, in 69% of cases it included at least one activity in their home. International students from the 2006 program indicated that where further contact took place, in 66% of cases it included at least one activity in the host's home. This consistency is reassuring.

From the 2006 program, 93% of hosts described the social activities they had organized as a success, and 79% of International students described them as enjoyable.

Benefits to students

For the purposes of this analysis, we have classified students' comments into one or more of the following categories: 'positive social experience', 'local knowledge' and a 'sense of connectedness'. In order to categorize a comment as showing a 'sense of connectedness' rather than merely a 'positive social experience' we looked for indicators of bonds of a relationship, rather than just a polite or friendly encounter.

Of the students from the 2005 pilot, 6 out of 9 (67%) spontaneously identified states of mind related to a 'sense of connectedness' as a benefit of participating:

'Makes me feel good, that I know some aussie family.'

'I could feel the concern my Host Family had about me and I benefited from this concern.'

'Having a contact with someone'

‘... made me feel like part of the family and made me feel more at home.’

‘increased connection’

‘they’ve been interested in what we had to say and were very caring’

The other two students to respond to this question indicated a ‘positive social experience’ and ‘local knowledge’ as benefits respectively.

This contrasts with feedback from the first semester 2006 program, in which students and hosts had first met only three months prior to the survey being undertaken. Spontaneously identified benefits were much more likely to refer to a ‘positive social experience’ and ‘local knowledge’ than a ‘sense of connectedness’.

Of the 30 students who responded and have had further contact with their hosts, 9 (30%) identified a ‘sense of connectedness’ as a benefit:

‘The relationship between me and my Aussie Family has benefited me in a way that I got to know different family with different background ...’

‘It’s been a wonderful relationship with all the members, despite the vast differences in terms of culture, race, language and background.’

‘They have provided an excellent source of support ...’

‘... was opened to many opportunities to other activities in the community.’

‘They are really nice and kind~~they provide the best things for us and I really enjoy getting along with them’

‘Actually, my host is the first local friend here thank to Aussie Family Program. I can not imagine how suitable she is for me. She is at the same age with me and has studied in Beijing where I come from for 1 year. So we can communicate easily because she can understand the situation especially the difficulties I have. That understanding which I really need makes me feel kind of relaxed, although sometimes I can not express myself clearly.’

‘build my confidence to interact with local people’

‘we have regular contacts with each other, they helped us a lot ... we thought of meeting each other when ever possible to strengthen the relationship’

‘we(me and the other participant) had a bbq at their house. even though I’m a muslim, they are really concerned and made all-halal bbq. it was wonderful and out of expectation.’

Fourteen (47%) identified a ‘positive social experience’ and 13 (43%) ‘local knowledge’ as benefits.

A future study might reveal whether the difference between the pilot and the first semester 2006 program in identifying a ‘sense of connectedness’ as a benefit is due to the difference in the time elapsed since the first meeting, or to the fact that the hosts were different (staff members in the 2005 pilot, and mostly local students in the first semester 2006 program).

From the 2005 pilot, 5 out of 9 (56%) either agreed or strongly agreed that the scheme helped their confidence in interacting with Australians outside the classroom, with the rest neutral. Four out of 9 (44%) either agreed or strongly agreed that the scheme helped their confidence in interacting with students in the classroom. Six out of 8 (75%) either agreed or strongly agreed that the scheme helped them settle into their life as a student at UniSA.

From the first semester 2006 program, 48% either agreed or strongly agreed that the scheme helped their confidence in interacting with Australians outside the classroom. Forty-seven percent either agreed or strongly agreed that the scheme helped their confidence in interacting with students in the classroom. Thirty-five percent either agreed or strongly agreed that the scheme helped them settle into their life as a student at UniSA.

There is a reassuring consistency in the proportion of International students identifying a 'sense of connectedness' and help with settling into their life as a student as benefits: 30% and 35% respectively for 2006 participants, versus 67% and 75% respectively for 2005 participants.

Again, it remains to be seen whether the quite significant differences between the two iterations are due to the difference in the time elapsed since the first meeting, or to the fact that the hosts were different.

Benefits to hosts

Hosts most often identified benefits to themselves and their families, including their children, as gaining knowledge of other cultures and enjoying intercultural interaction. Many also derived satisfaction from simply being able to help someone. Some also identified greater awareness of the adjustment issues facing international students as a benefit. Other benefits included:

'... our new friends are good role models for my children.'

'It was beneficial for me as my student was from [country] and as I study [language] we could converse in english and [language] and learn from one another.'

'Let other friends see that i have a professional commitment outside of normal work practices.'

'Certainly took me out of my comfort zone and stretched my thinking.'

Negative experiences

It is worth looking at the comparatively small number of negative experiences in more detail, to ascertain whether they are an inevitable product of such a program, or reflect a systemic fault.

Negative experiences seem to be related to a breakdown in the matching process, either a match identified as inappropriate or students being 'adopted' because their hosts did not turn up at the reception.

Unhappy hosts report the following:

'I'm not sure of the matching process, but while we dealt with it, my students were not suitably matched to me. We went to extraordinary lengths to make the day a success which it was in their eyes - but did put a lot of pressure on us. ... I had 2 students, but had 5 people who ended up coming along on the day. It was full on, dietary requirements were very strict, went to a lot of effort to accommodate them, asked them to bring something them selves but they didn't. They didn't make a whole

lot of effort - was an exhaustive day and am thinking twice about volunteering this year.'

'I met with one student, the other did not arrive at the agreed meeting place and after I left a message on voice mail, he sent a voice message to the effect that he didn't feel like it (going on the agreed sight seeing trip), because he was having a lie in. ... 2 mature aged men of a faith that may well be uncomfortable with my family of 2 single women was doomed to fail. I flagged this with the project manager at the start of the program. ... [There needed to be] more cultural sensitivity around the appropriateness of matching 2 Muslim men with a single mother and teenage daughter. Clearly this was a problem for the international students. I was very disappointed with this matching. I appreciate that doctoral level students were matched with like level students, but this was at the cost of cultural sensitivities.'

'I was placed on a table with 6 students, the other family(s) had not turned up. I was told by staff there that they would email me the details of the other students as I felt sorry for them so that I could arrange to have them all over for a BBQ. This never happened and I have no idea who they are. ... I feel for the kids who were placed with me either before or on the day. I imagine they feel as isolated and left out as I do. I did not contact the originals as I had said that we would all get together as a group ...'

Unhappy international students reported the following:

'My matched aussie family didnt turn up on the reception day after several checks were made by d uni staff that she was goin to b late. Was paired with another family in d last min but it was too much for her to handle cos there were 5 students under her. Therefore interaction wasn't as good as expected which wasn't due to her shortcomings.'

'The only thing I want to focus is on that the family which are host should not be far from the reach of student. Because the problem of further communication or further meeting arises. No one can go or meet one another.'

'was invited to crabbing but did not go ... initially thought that aussie family are australians but ... the people i met were mostly immigrants and previous international students, it will be good to have more australians as host.'

'Students should have a say in the selection process, they shouldnt just be selected because in my case there was a big generation gap.'

Clearly something needs to be done about the issue of hosts (and students) not turning up at the reception. The logical solution might appear to be to have a certain number of hosts on standby. However it seems unfair to invite hosts to the reception on the off chance that they will be assigned a student (who may or may not be a 'suitable' match). An alternative would be to follow up on the match after the reception and ensure a first meeting takes place at a later time. This would involve relaxing the requirement that participants must attend the reception. It is also quite possible that students or hosts who feel they have been poorly matched decide not to attend the reception (the hosts receive some details of their students in advance). This can be overcome by better matching.

'Inappropriate' matches are currently hard to avoid. The matching process, despite being extremely time-consuming, takes only a few, superficial factors into account. A particular problem is caused by having to match all the hosts who apply with all the international students who apply. Towards the end of the matching process, the matchings will inevitably

become less and less 'suitable'. One way around this may be to have a much larger pool of hosts, who understand that they may not be picked in any given round of the program.

It may be that the best that can be hoped for in the case of a bad match, is that the students will try again in a future round of the program (assuming this possibility is available to them). Encouragingly, several of the students with negative experiences did express support for the program in principle:

'it is a really good program for international students'

'But i still do like the whole idea n wud encourage d new students 2 join'

'Thank you for the nice intentions.'

'Keep it up ... Did enjoy the reception, hope I can meet an Aussie family 1 day.'

Correlations

For students in the 2006 program, there was a moderate correlation between the host being perceived as 'suitable' and the level of contact (0.52). There was a small correlation between level of contact and confidence in social interaction with Australians (0.36) and an even smaller correlation between level of contact and confidence in classroom interaction (0.25). There was also a moderate correlation between level of contact and feeling that the program had helped in settling into student life (0.45). There was also a weak correlation between level of contact and identifying a 'sense of connectedness' as a benefit of participation (0.28).

There were too few respondents from the 2005 pilot for meaningful information on correlations.

Conclusion

In the majority of cases (57% - 67%), ongoing contact existed in some form 11 months after the initial meeting of the 2005 pilot. Furthermore, within three months of the initial meeting, of the first semester 2006 program, in 71% - 93% of cases a meeting had taken place, and in 41% - 53% of cases participants had gone beyond the 'requirements' of the program, and met privately more than once. These are good indicators that many ongoing relationships do arise as a result of the Aussie Family program. Furthermore, two thirds of the time social contact includes an activity in the host's home, which shows that the program is meeting this important aim.

With regards to the aim of providing International students with interaction skills, around half the International students indicated that the program improved their confidence in dealing with Australians, either in (47% - 56%) or outside (44% - 48%) the classroom. Although in itself a good result, this may indicate that the Aussie Family program should only be considered as one component in the provision of services with these aims.

It is also very encouraging that 11 months into the program, 67% of respondents identified sentiments related to a 'sense of connectedness' as a benefit of participation. Because the sample size was small, further investigation of this will be needed. It is nevertheless promising that only three months into the first semester 2006 program, 30% of International students spontaneously identified a 'sense of connectedness' as a benefit. A 'sense of connectedness' has been identified by research as a key predictor of welfare in all areas of life, including perceived academic progress.

The Aussie Family program therefore appears to be meeting its aims in assisting International students to interact with their host community, and thereby satisfying a need expressed by the students, as well as contributing to their wellbeing.

This study has also provided invaluable feedback on the functioning of the program itself. Further refinements in the Aussie Family program will need to take into account the following factors:

1. Consideration needs to be given to how to recruit larger numbers of hosts. The supply of hosts has so far been restricted to the UniSA community. By the nature of the program, a 'successful' match could mean a commitment for a number of years. Hosts may also consider involvement a one-off, or may wish to have a break before participating again. The word 'family' in the program's name may also put off potential hosts from non-traditional households, or students who do not consider their family part of their student life.
2. Recruiting exactly the right number of hosts to allow for a 2 to 1 matching of international students is difficult. Furthermore, having to match all International student applicants with all host applicants inevitably means some matches are less suitable than others. Poor matching results in negative experiences for participants. A possible solution to this is to recruit a larger pool of hosts who understand that they may not be assigned a student in any given iteration of the program.
3. Because of the inevitability of matches not working out, or relationships not continuing, International students should have multiple opportunities to participate in the program. This, again, translates into a need for a larger pool of hosts.
4. A strategy needs to be put in place to cater for the fact that there will always be a certain number of hosts (and International students) who do not turn up at the reception. Possible strategies include removing the obligatory status of the reception and putting more administrative assistance in place to ensure that students and hosts actually meet; changing the structure of the reception completely, e.g. holding a series of smaller events instead; or having a certain number of unmatched hosts on standby at the reception.

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Appendix 1: Details of the three iterations

1. *The pilot ('Host Family Scheme'), second semester, 2005*
Launched: Reception, Adelaide Zoo rotunda, August 28, 2005
Hosts: 23 UniSA staff members
International students: 45 applications accepted
Evaluated July/August, 2006
participation rates in evaluation:
 hosts: 30%
 International students: 20%

2. *Aussie Family Program, first semester, 2006*
Launched: Reception, the Shores Function Complex, April 8, 2006
Hosts: 61 local students, 11 staff members
International students: 160
Evaluated July/August, 2006
participation rates in evaluation:
 hosts: 60%
 International students: 31%

3. *Aussie Family Program, second semester, 2006*
Launched: Reception, the Shores Function Complex, August 27, 2006
Hosts: 48 local students, 22 staff members
International students: 145
Not evaluated yet

Appendix 2: Questions to 2005 hosts (staff members)

1. Please respond to this statement: The international student(s) I was placed with in the Host Family Scheme was/were suitable for me.

strongly agree – agree – neutral – disagree – strongly disagree

2. What level of contact do you still have with your international student(s) from the 2005 Host Family Scheme?

- No contact anymore
- Some contact
- Regular contact

3. Please describe this contact (e.g. sending emails, meeting every couple of months, etc.), if any:

4. Do you have any comments about this level of contact (e.g. reasons for no contact)?

5. Please describe the ways in which your relationship with your international student(s) has benefited you or a member of your family, if at all:

6. Please include any comments about how the Host Family Scheme can be improved (including organisationally):

7. Any other comments?

Appendix 3: Questions to 2005 international students

1. Please respond to this statement: The Host Family I was placed with in the Host Family Scheme was suitable for me.
strongly agree – agree – neutral – disagree – strongly disagree
2. What level of contact do you still have with your host family from the 2005 Host Family Scheme?
 - No contact anymore
 - Some contact
 - Regular contact
3. Please describe this contact (e.g. sending emails, meeting every couple of months, etc.):
4. Are you satisfied with this level of contact?
5. If you are not satisfied with the level of contact, could you explain why you are not satisfied?
6. If you are not satisfied with the level of contact, could you suggest reasons why think contact has not been at the level you desire?
7. Please respond to this statement: Having participated in the Host Family Scheme I am more confident about interacting with Australians outside the classroom.
strongly agree – agree – neutral – disagree – strongly disagree
8. Please respond to this statement: Having participated in the Host Family Scheme I am more confident about interacting with Australian students in the classroom.
strongly agree – agree – neutral – disagree – strongly disagree
9. Please respond to this statement: Participating in the Host Family Scheme helped me settle into my life as a student at UniSA.
strongly agree – agree – neutral – disagree – strongly disagree
10. Please describe the ways in which your relationship with your host family has benefited you, if at all:
11. Please include any comments about how the Host Family Scheme can be improved (including organisationally):
12. Any other comments:

Appendix 4: Questions to 2006 hosts (staff members and local students)

1. Did you attend the reception on April 8?

- Yes
- No

2. Please respond to this statement: The international student(s) I was placed with at the reception on April 8 was/were suitable for me.

strongly agree – agree – neutral – disagree – strongly disagree

3. What has been the level of contact with your international student(s)?

- I have met with my international student(s) once since the reception.
- I have met with my international student(s) twice since the reception.
- I have met with my international student(s) more than twice since the reception.
- I have not met with my international student(s) since the reception, but we have made arrangements to do so.
- I have had contact with my international student(s) since the reception but we have not made arrangements to meet again.
- I have had no contact with my international student(s) since the reception.

4. If you have had no contact with your international student(s) since the reception, could you give the reasons?

5. Please describe the social activity/ies you have had (not including the reception):

6. Please respond to this statement: I would describe the social activity/ies as a success.

strongly agree – agree – neutral – disagree – strongly disagree

7. Please describe the ways in which your relationship with your international student(s) has benefited you or a member of your family, if at all:

8. Please include any comments about how the Aussie Family program can be improved (including organisationally):

9. Any other comments:

Appendix 5: Questions to 2006 international students

1. Did you attend the reception on April 8?

- Yes
- No

2. Please respond to this statement: The Aussie Family I was placed with at the reception on April 8 was suitable for me.

strongly agree – agree – neutral – disagree – strongly disagree

3. What has been the level of contact with your Aussie Family?

- I have met with my Aussie Family once since the reception.
- I have met with my Aussie Family twice since the reception.
- I have met with my Aussie Family more than twice since the reception.
- I have not met with my Aussie Family since the reception, but we have made arrangements to do so
- I have had contact with my Aussie Family since the reception but we have not made arrangements to meet again
- I have had no contact with my Aussie Family since the reception

4. Please respond to this statement: The social activity/ies I participated in with my host family (not the reception) was/were enjoyable.

strongly agree – agree – neutral – disagree – strongly disagree

5. Please describe the social activity/ies:

6. Please respond to this statement: Having participated in the Aussie Family program I am more confident about interacting with Australians outside the classroom.

strongly agree – agree – neutral – disagree – strongly disagree

7. Please respond to this statement: Having participated in the Aussie Family program I am more confident about interacting with Australian students in the classroom.

strongly agree – agree – neutral – disagree – strongly disagree

8. Please respond to this statement: Participating in the Aussie Family program has helped me settle into my life as a student at UniSA.

strongly agree – agree – neutral – disagree – strongly disagree

9. Please describe some ways in which your relationship with your Aussie Family has benefited you, if at all:

10. Please include any comments about how the Aussie Family program can be improved (including organisationally):

Appendix 6: Recruitment email to all commencing international students

Subject: Aussie Family Program

Dear commencing international student,

Now that you've arrived in Adelaide and begun studying at UniSA, you may wish to meet and get to know some Australians. Here's your chance.

The 'Aussie Family' program will match you and another new international student with an Australian family. You will meet this family at a reception lunch hosted by the Chancellor of UniSA, Mr David Klingberg, AM, on Saturday, April 8, 12 noon – 2pm at the Adelaide Shores Function Complex (corner Hamra Ave. and Military Road, West Beach). This family will then invite you to share a meal in their home, and/or accompany them on a social, sporting or tourist activity.

You can apply by yourself or with another commencing international student. Please note, you must be over 18 to participate. You must also be able to attend the reception lunch if you wish to take part.

If you are interested in participating then you can apply [here](#). The deadline for registration is Wednesday, March 15.

I encourage you to take this opportunity to find out about the Australian way of life.

Appendix 7: Recruitment email to continuing local students

Subject: Aussie Family Program

Dear Student,

Over 1000 international students have arrived in Adelaide since the beginning of the year to commence studies at UniSA. Most will spend several important years of their lives here. In the past, many had little or no social contact with the Australian community, and the majority never saw inside an Australian home.

UniSA has launched the 'Aussie Family' program to help turn this around. If you decide to participate in the program as a host, you will be matched with a pair of commencing international students. You will be invited to a reception lunch hosted by the Chancellor of UniSA, Mr David Klingberg, AM, on Saturday, April 8, 12 noon – 2pm, at the Adelaide Shores Function Complex (corner Hamra Ave and Military Road, West Beach).

At this reception lunch you will meet your assigned international students and be asked to invite them either into your home for a meal with your family, and/or to accompany you on a social, sporting or tourist activity. An ongoing relationship with your international students is not an expectation of this program, although it is certainly encouraged if it develops naturally.

The program was run as a pilot (referred to as the 'Host Family Scheme') in the second half of 2005. In the pilot, UniSA staff members played the role of hosts. Due to the success of this pilot, the program is being run in 2006 in an expanded form, as the 'Aussie Family' program, offered to all commencing International Students, with UniSA staff and continuing local students being invited to participate as hosts.

To participate in this program as a host, you must be over 18, and you must be a continuing local student at UniSA, i.e. not a new student and not an international student yourself. You can apply [here](#). The deadline for registrations is Wednesday, March 15.

For further information, please contact [Christopher Bridge](#) on 8302 1537.

Appendix 8: Recruitment article in all-staff email

Aussie Family program

The 'Aussie Family' program is a UniSA initiative in which Australian families volunteer to spend a few hours in a social context with commencing UniSA International Students. In 2005, this scheme was run as the very successful 'Host Family Scheme'. The project is intended to redress the disappointment that many International Students express at not feeling part of the Australian community while they are here.

In 2006, all UniSA staff and all continuing local students are invited to participate as hosts. To circumvent students expecting advantage from meeting staff socially, academic staff will not be matched with students from the same school.

The 2006 program will be launched with a reception lunch hosted by the Chancellor of UniSA, Mr David Klingberg, AM, on **Saturday 8 April, 12.00-2.00pm**. The reception lunch will be held at the Adelaide Shores Function Complex (corner Hamra Ave and Military Road, West Beach).

If you would like to host a couple of commencing international students for a meal in your home and/or a social, tourist or sporting activity, AND you are available to meet your students at the reception on Saturday, April 8, 12-2pm, then please register [here](#). The deadline for registrations is **Wednesday 15 March**.

For further information, please contact [Christopher Bridge](#) on 21537.

Appendix 9: Information for participating international students

1. Who is my host?

Your host is someone who would like to meet you, as a new international student, to make you feel welcome in Australia, and share information with you about Australian culture.

It is important to understand that your host is a volunteer. He or she is hosting you because they want to. Hosts do not receive any financial support from the University. If your host takes you somewhere which requires paying, they may be happy to pay for you. But it is polite to ask, 'Would you like me to pay for myself?' You can check this when you make plans. If you think you cannot/do not want to pay, it is okay to let your host know and make alternate plans.

2. What do I need to know about meeting my host?

Make sure your host knows if you have any dietary or religious requirements. You can be sure your host will do their best to meet these requirements. You should also make sure your host knows about your busy study times, or when you are fasting (e.g. in Ramadan).

If your host invites you to his or her home, the most important thing is not to be embarrassed to ask questions. Your host is aware that things are different where you come from, and will be only too happy to explain how we do things in Australia. In Australia it is normal to bring something to eat or drink if you are invited to someone's house. Make sure you ask, 'Would you like me to bring something?' A simple thank-you email/phone call is also a nice gesture after your activity.

Always respond to an email or phone call. It is considered rude not to do so. If you cannot accept an invitation, please let your host know immediately. Most people have very busy schedules and plan activities well in advance so it is important always to reply.

3. What can I expect from my relationship with my host?

This depends on you and your host. Sometimes, hosts and students become good friends, and exchange e-mails, phone calls and meet many times. In other cases there is much less contact.

You need to be aware that time is an important factor. If your host has a very busy lifestyle or a very demanding job, then he or she simply won't have as much time to spend with you as other hosts may.

When we have asked hosts how they felt about the students they have hosted, the reaction has always been very positive. You can be sure that your host is interested in meeting with you. But you do need to understand that your host will always have many other priorities.

E-mail is an excellent way of staying in touch with your host. You can be sure that your host will be interested to hear how you are getting on. If you wish, you can send them a greeting for festivals (e.g. Easter or Christmas, if they celebrate these, or New Year, etc.).

Do not expect too much from your host. The hosts in the scheme are offering their time and their friendship. Do not expect them to help you find a job, correct your essays or help you apply for permanent residency. If you are having real difficulties, there are many people employed by UniSA professionally to help you. If you are unsure of who to turn to, please ask an International Student Adviser at the Learning Connection office on your campus.

4. What do I do if I feel my host is making unreasonable demands of me?

There may be times when you need to say 'no' to your host. Different cultures, and indeed different groups within cultures have different expectations about what is a 'normal' social activity. If your host invites you to a place or an activity that you are uncomfortable with, tell

them politely but firmly that you do not want to participate. Likewise, if your host behaves towards you in a way that you are uncomfortable with, tell them politely but firmly that you do not want them to behave in that way.

If you want to speak to someone about any issue you have with your host, ask for an International Student Adviser or a Counsellor at the Learning Connection office on your campus.

5. Contact numbers

If you have any questions, comments or problems at any stage of the Aussie Family program, please feel free to contact:

Christopher Bridge

Community Liaison Officer: International Students

tel. 8302 7045

Christopher.Bridge@unisa.edu.au

For emergencies please contact Campus Security on the numbers below. They will be able to contact the appropriate UniSA staff member 24 hours a day.

City West 8302 0000

City East 8302 2222

Mason Lakes 8302 3333

Magill 8302 4444

Appendix 10: Information for hosts

1. What do I do if I can't understand the student?

If the student's spoken English is not that good, they will probably be aware of it, and will be looking for opportunities to improve it. Treat that as something understood by both sides and don't get embarrassed or pretend to understand if you don't. Tell the student clearly that you don't understand, and don't be shy to ask them to repeat it until you do, perhaps breaking it down into chunks. Most students will appreciate being corrected, or told how something is usually expressed in English. Show that what the student is saying is important to you, and that you want to understand. Give the student time to speak! We are often embarrassed by pauses, but the student may simply be putting a sentence together in their head.

2. What do I do if the student can't understand me?

Colloquial Australian is a long way from the English taught in schools around the world. If you can see the student is having difficulty understanding you, then – it sounds obvious – try to speak more clearly. That means pronounce every letter, as if you were reading the news. It will make a big difference to your student's understanding. Secondly, try not to use slang. That sounds obvious, too, but we often don't notice how much slang we use in everyday speech. Try monitoring what you are saying, constantly asking yourself: is this likely to be understandable to the student? Be patient with yourself; this can be a difficult skill to master.

3. What do I do if conversation runs dry?

Including friends and family when you meet your international students will mean the centre of attention and the focus of conversation won't always be on the international students. That will take a bit of pressure off them. An almost endless source of conversation is comparing cultures: what's a wedding ceremony like, what do you have to do to get your driver's license, what do you usually have for breakfast, how long is the working day, how many people live in your house, how is the schooling structured, etc. Non-native English speakers will also happily speak about their language, and what it was like learning English.

Don't assume that an age difference between you and your international students is a problem. Many international students come from cultures in which it is quite normal to have friendships with people from a different age-group.

4. What do I do if my student has special dietary/religious requirements?

Make sure you find out if your student has any special dietary or religious requirements. You can discuss this at the reception. International students are asked to specify any such requirements in a message you receive when you are matched.

Most Muslims will only eat halal food. If you'd like to invite your international students over, but you've never cooked halal before, think of it as a challenge! Firstly, your student will be only too happy to explain what halal means. Usually it is enough to buy your meat from a halal butcher (for example in the Adelaide Central Market, Shop 46, in the arcade section). The actual cooking process is the same, as long as the halal meat doesn't come into contact, or share the same fat or cooking surface as non-halal meat. Halal excludes pork of any kind (e.g. ham, bacon). Why not ask the student to help you prepare the meal, to make sure you're doing it right? Halal sausages are readily available, and make a great barbecue. Cook them on foil to rule out contact with residues from non-halal meat. Muslims do not drink alcohol (and it cannot be used in cooking, either). Strict Muslims cannot come into contact with dogs. Don't forget, when you are planning an activity, that strict Muslims need to pray five times a day. Consult them on how to fit that in.

People from a Hindu or Buddhist background do not eat beef. Some are completely vegetarian.

Let your international student know that it is okay for them not to eat certain things, and encourage them to ask questions. Both of these may be considered rude in some cultures.

5. What do I do if I feel my student is making unreasonable demands of me?

The international students are given information similar to what you are reading, making sure they know that you are volunteers, that you receive no financial support from the University, and that you are simply offering your time and friendship. If the student makes demands you find unreasonable, you need to make it clear that you are unable to help. For example, you are not expected to help the student find employment, or proof-read their essays, help them apply for permanent residency, or anything else that you are not comfortable with. You can refer the student to an International Student Adviser at Learning Connection on any campus for assistance.

6. Contact numbers

If you have any questions, comments or problems at any stage of the Aussie Family program, please feel free to contact:

Christopher Bridge

Community Liaison Officer: International Students

tel. 8302 7045

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For emergencies involving an international student, please contact Campus Security on the numbers below. They will be able to contact the appropriate UniSA staff member 24 hours a day.

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