

## **People, Possibilities, Partnerships –international students and their Australian experience**

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This presentation looks at an innovative program of connecting international students and the local community through volunteering. The program came about in response to a number of factors. The International Student Barometer shows us consistently that international students rate their experience of studying in Australia as a positive one, but of connecting with the community as disappointing if not nonexistent. Stereotypes persist of international students, who in turn lack the networks and opportunities to seek realistic and positive engagement opportunities beyond their immediate needs of study, work and survival. The demand for support in the community for volunteers in local neighbourhoods is growing, and international students are eager for ways to engage more deeply with their Australian experience.

La Trobe International Student Services saw a window of opportunity to connect students in early stages of needing assistance with volunteering needs. Partnerships were forged with local Councils, Police, and community groups to link students with the community.

The next stage of this program will look at academic culture and how we as universities can foster better interaction on campus and in classrooms between domestic and international students.

### **Key Words**

Volunteering, Australian experience, building resilience, strengthening approaches, building relationships, strengthening partnerships