



**BRIDGING INTENTIONS TO ACTION:
MAXIMISING THE IMPACT OF
THE REFUGEE CAMP IN MY NEIGHBOURHOOD TOUR**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Understanding the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees is vital for fostering empathy and inclusivity. The Refugee Camp in My Neighbourhood (RCIMN) initiative, launched in 2014, offers immersive tours led by guides with firsthand refugee or asylum seeker experience, providing participants with valuable insights into the refugee journey upon arriving in Australia. A partnership between University of Technology Sydney (UTS) scholars, RCIMN, and the UTSBUILD program led to a pilot study evaluating the tour's social impact on student participants.

To assess the tour's effects, the study employed a mixed-methods approach, including pre- and post-tour surveys, focus group discussions, interviews, and a 3-month post-tour survey. Key findings indicate a significant shift in participants' understanding, sympathy, and acceptance of refugees. Participants also expressed a greater willingness to support refugees, although challenges in translating intentions into actions were noted.

In addition, the study identified two distinct participant personas: the 'Curious Learner' and the 'Engaged Advocate', representing different levels of engagement and empathy towards refugee issues.

To broaden the tour's impact and foster a more active and committed participant base, strategies are proposed:

- Contextualise refugee issues with global challenges to enhance relatability.
- Ensure tour inclusivity through dedicated inclusion efforts.
- Use diverse locations and outreach strategies to include broader audiences.
- Collaborate with corporations for tour inclusion in their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs.
- Implement education programs in primary and high schools to expand tour impact.
- Provide clear, actionable post-tour instructions.

- Develop a curated database of refugee-related resources for deeper understanding and engagement.
- Create a social media account with regular updates on refugee news and stories.
- Gather participant feedback for ongoing improvements.

The study's findings underscore the significance of immersive, experiential learning opportunities like the RCIMN tour in fostering empathy, understanding, and advocacy for refugee issues. It also highlights the importance of ongoing support and guidance to translate intentions into meaningful actions.



INTRODUCTION

The global refugee crisis presents a significant humanitarian challenge, with over 30 million individuals forcibly displaced by the end of 2022 due to conflict, war, persecution, human rights violations, economic and political crises, and climate change-induced extreme weather events (UNHCR, 2023¹). The journey of asylum seekers and refugees is fraught with hardships and risks, and their pursuit of safety and stability does not end upon reaching a host country. They often encounter additional challenges, including discrimination, racism, and power imbalances.

Understanding the lived experiences of asylum seekers and refugees is crucial for fostering a society rooted in empathy and inclusivity. In this context, the Refugee Camp in My Neighbourhood (RCIMN) initiative, launched in 2014, offers immersive tours led by guides who have firsthand experience as refugees or asylum seekers. These tours provide participants with a glimpse into the journey of refugees upon arriving in Australia.

In partnership with RCIMN organisers and the Beyond UTS International Leadership Development (UTSBUILD) program, the UTS scholars conducted a pilot study to evaluate the social impact of the RCIMN tour on student participants. Employing a range of methods, including pre- and post-tour surveys, focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and 3-month post-tour surveys, the study aimed to:

1

Assess the change in perception and attitude towards refugees resulting from participation in the RCIMN tour.

2

Assess the effectiveness of RCIMN tours in fostering empathy towards refugees among participants.

3

Provide recommendations to RCIMN organisers on how to enhance the short- and medium-term social impact of the tour on participants.

¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2023). Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2022. <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2022>

OVERVIEW OF THE REFUGEE CAMP IN MY NEIGHBOURHOOD TOUR



Since its inception in 2014, RCIMN has had a pivotal role in educating communities about refugee experiences. Grounded in the real-life stories of asylum seekers and refugees and guided by individuals with firsthand experience of asylum and refuge, RCIMN has become a symbol of empathy, awareness, and community engagement.

The initiative offers a unique, immersive experience where the public is invited to join a 3-hour tour that simulates the journey of an asylum seeker or refugee, starting in a refugee camp overseas and concluding in Australia. This journey demonstrates the steps taken by refugees, complemented by interactive activities to engage participants.

RCIMN aims to increase support for refugee community members, enhance community understanding of human rights, raise awareness about refugee and humanitarian issues, challenge stereotypes, and deepen understanding of the challenges faced by refugees during resettlement.

Situated in the Whitlam Institute within Western Sydney University, RCIMN has attracted thousands of visitors, including school and university students and professionals from various educational and occupational backgrounds.

By actively seeking feedback from participants, RCIMN is committed to evaluating its impact and ensuring alignment with its core aims and objectives. Since its establishment, this feedback has been invaluable in assessing the influence of RCIMN on participants' perceptions of refugee experiences.

STUDY PARTICIPANTS

The study participants consisted of UTS students who had enrolled in the RCIMN tour through the UTSBUILD program which is an extra-curricular program at UTS aimed at developing global leaders and engaged global citizens. The program offers interactive workshops, inspiring speakers, experiential activities, and endorsed online courses focusing on significant global issues. Students can tailor their program experience by participating in various activities and earning points.

The RCIMN tour was one of the experiential activities available to UTSBUILD students in August 2023. Students received information about the tour, including its purpose, date, and the option to register their interest.

They were also informed about the current research project. While participation in the study was encouraged, students were assured that choosing not to take part would not impact their UTSBUILD membership, points, or eligibility for the tour. As a token of appreciation for their involvement in the study, students were given the option of receiving gift vouchers or having donations made to refugee charities on their behalf.

The student participants in the tour, recruited through UTSBUILD, represented various academic disciplines and backgrounds, reflecting the diversity of the UTS student population, and included both domestic and international students. For detailed demographics of study participants, refer to Appendix 1.



A MIXED-METHODS & MULTI-PHASED APPROACH

To evaluate the impact of the RCIMN tour on student participants, a mixed-methods approach, blending quantitative and qualitative methods was utilised. This approach aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the tour's immediate, short- and medium-term impacts on participants' perceptions and attitudes toward refugees.

The evaluation consisted of three phases:

PHASE 1

PRE- AND POST-TOUR SURVEYS

Surveys were administered to students just before they embarked on the RCIMN tour and then again immediately after the tour concluded. The aim was to capture the immediate impressions and changes in understanding that are directly tied to the tour experience. To accurately follow the progression of each student's journey while maintaining their anonymity, participants were assigned unique identifiers. The pre-tour survey (31 respondents) set the baseline for participants' initial knowledge and attitudes towards refugees, and the post-tour survey (25 respondents) sought to capture any immediate shifts.

PHASE 2

FOCUS GROUPS & INTERVIEWS

To gather in-depth insights into participants' experiences of the tour and unpack their reflections in a more nuanced way, focus group discussions and individual interviews were conducted within one month after completing the tour. The structure of these discussions was informed by the early findings from Phase 1, providing a platform for participants to share their personal narratives and reactions to the tour.

Through individual interviews and a collective session that brought together seven participants for an engaging 84-minute discussion, this phase offered rich, qualitative insights into the transformative journey of the student participants. These sessions were recorded, professionally transcribed, and analysed to extract key themes and variations in the participants' perceptions and attitudes.

PHASE 3

THREE-MONTH POST-TOUR SURVEY

To evaluate the medium-term impact of the tour on participants, a follow-up survey was conducted 3 months after the tour. This survey aimed to determine whether the changes observed in students' perceptions and attitudes were transient or had endured over time.

This phase was instrumental in understanding the longer-term effects of the tour. It offered a comprehensive view of how the experience may have led to lasting changes in views towards refugees, as well as any sustained actions or engagements in support of refugee communities. The survey received responses from nine participants.



This section presents key findings derived from various phases of the study. Firstly, it provides insights into the transformative effects of the tour on participants, as evidenced by pre- and post-tour surveys.

These transformations include a deeper understanding of refugee issues and higher levels of sympathy, a decrease in perceiving refugees as a threat, and a greater appreciation for cultural diversity.

The subsequent section focuses on participant engagement, highlighting changes in their intentions to take action as demonstrated by the pre- to post-tour surveys. However, this section also reveals a challenge in translating intentions into actions, as the 3-month post-tour survey shows a discrepancy between participants' initial intentions and their actual behaviour. Finally, drawing on data from all phases of the study, two distinct personas that encapsulate tour participants are presented, offering a comprehensive insight into the tour's impact on different participants.

INSIGHTS

1

THE TRANSFORMATIVE EFFECTS OF THE TOUR

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The pre- and post-tour survey data provided insights into the transformative effects of the tour, highlighting significant shifts in understanding, sympathy, and cultural acceptance among participants.

1.1 ENHANCED UNDERSTANDING OF REFUGEE ISSUES AND INCREASED SYMPATHY LEVELS

The tour deepened participants' understanding of the challenges faced by refugees. Following the tour, the percentage of participants demonstrating high levels of sympathy towards refugees rose from 40% to 75%, suggesting a deepened understanding and compassion. This shift indicates that the tour effectively humanised the refugee experience for participants.

However, participants also noted, both before and after the tour, a prevailing negative attitude towards refugees in Australia, highlighting a potential disparity between their personal attitudes and perceived societal views.

1.2 DECREASE IN THE PERCEPTION OF REFUGEES AS A THREAT

The proportion of participants agreeing that refugees pose a threat to Australian values decreased significantly from 45% before the tour to 15% after the tour. This decrease in the perception of refugees as a threat suggests a shift towards more compassionate and informed viewpoints among participants.

Further, there was an increase in participants advocating for a higher number of refugees to be admitted into Australia after the tour. This shift suggests that the tour fostered a more open and welcoming attitude toward refugees, encouraging a perspective that supports an increased intake of refugees into Australia.

1.3 GREATER APPRECIATION FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Participants' comfort with engaging in interactions with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds improved from 60% pre-tour to 85% post-tour. This increase suggests a broader acceptance and appreciation of cultural diversity among participants, indicating that exposure to the stories and lives of refugees expanded their perspectives on multiculturalism.

Such findings imply that immersive educational experiences like the tour can help alleviate xenophobia and foster a more inclusive society. Participants also expressed a greater willingness to interact and engage with individuals from diverse backgrounds, signifying a shift towards more inclusive attitudes and behaviours.

While pre- and post-tour surveys indicated a shift in participant's intention to take action to support refugees, a survey conducted three months after the tour revealed that many participants had not taken tangible actions despite their initial intentions, as detailed below.

2.1 INTENTIONS TO TAKE ACTION

An analysis of responses from both pre- and post-tour surveys, conducted through a word cloud, revealed notable changes in participants' expressed intentions regarding support for refugees. Before the tour, many participants showed minimal engagement with refugee support efforts, as indicated by terms like "no," "none," and "first" (Figure 1a). However, the presence of terms such as "educating" suggested a willingness to raise awareness. Mentions of "Amnesty International" indicated that some participants leaned towards employing established platforms to provide support.

Following the tour, participants displayed a heightened intention to take action in supporting refugees, as evidenced by the prevalence of terms like "volunteer", "petition" and "letter" in the post-tour word cloud analysis (Figure 1b). This shift suggests a move towards more tangible actions, such as volunteering and advocacy, indicating a transition from raising awareness to actively supporting refugees.

These results demonstrate that the tour not only provided education to participants but also inspired them to consider taking tangible and meaningful actions in support of refugees. The change indicates that RCIMN tours may have instilled a sense of agency and responsibility, prompting intentions to engage in advocacy and direct support for refugees.

2.2 FROM INTENTION TO (IN)ACTION

While focus group discussions and interviews conducted one month after the tour revealed that many participants shared their tour experiences with friends and family, indicating a significant impact of the tour, the results of the third survey, conducted three months after the tour, painted a different picture. Results indicated that despite the initial inspiration to take actions such as volunteering or advocacy, the majority of respondents had not actively engaged in supporting refugees through such actions.

This discrepancy highlights the challenge of translating intentions into actions. Participants cited various causes for not engaging, including lack of time, competing priorities, uncertainty about how and where to start, and a lack of information or resources. These results underscore the importance of understanding the challenges and barriers that tour participants face in translating intentions into tangible actions, highlighting areas for future intervention and support by RCIMN.

“I think...lack of information... it's so much work to look for what you can do and find where to volunteer... I think that would be maybe a first barrier... that makes it hard and a long process”

Figure 1: Responses to open-ended questions (pre- and post- tour surveys)



3 EXPLORING PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVES

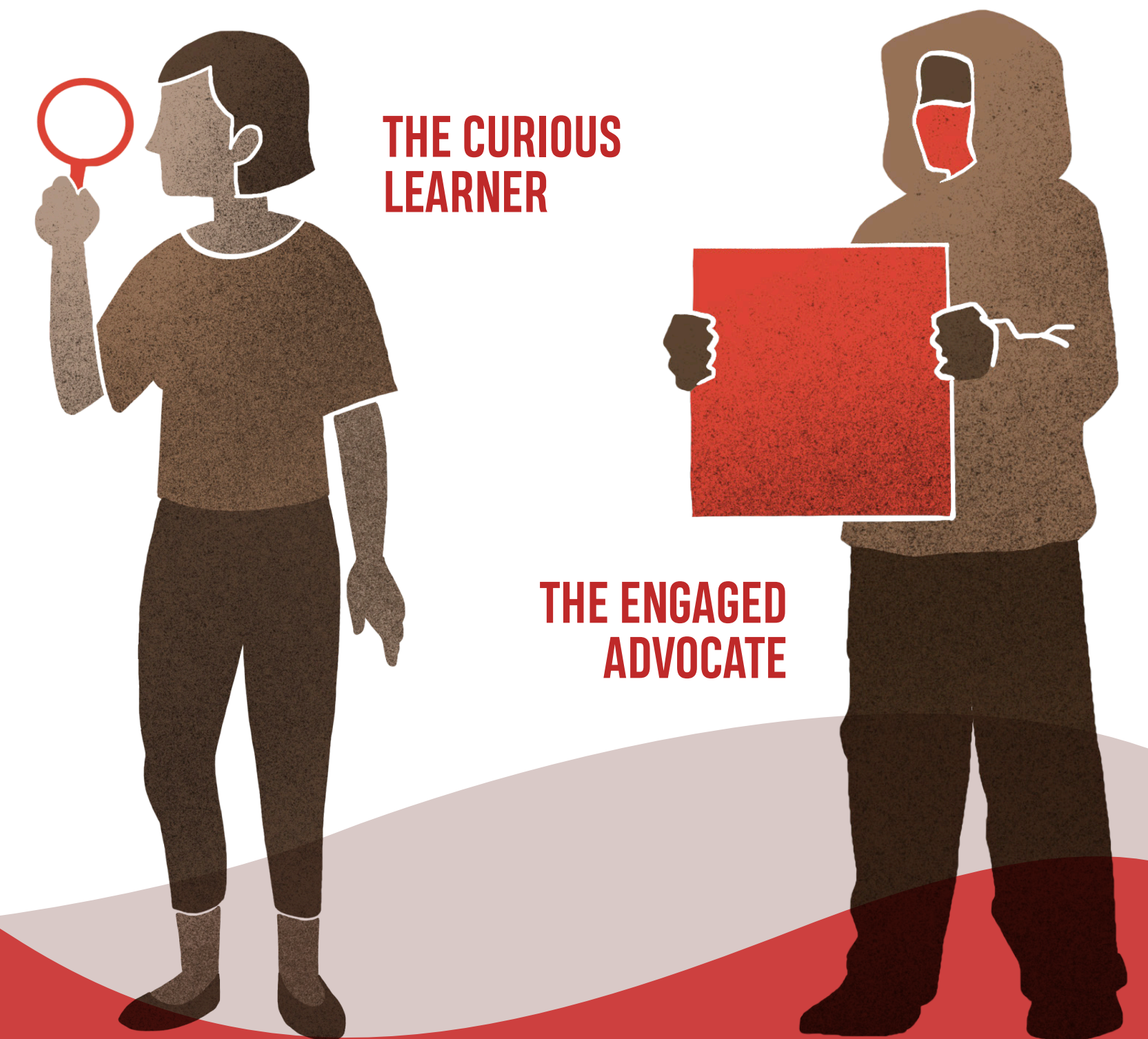
CONTRASTING TWO PERSONAS

To better understand the impact of the RCIMN tour on participants, two distinct personas were developed: the 'Curious Learner' and the 'Engaged Advocate'. These personas represent diverse participant groups with varying levels of engagement and empathy towards refugee issues.

The 'Curious Learner' persona embodies individuals with limited prior exposure to refugee issues but who are open to learning. They approach the tour with a curiosity to understand more about the refugee experience, seeking to broaden their knowledge and awareness.

The 'Engaged Advocate' persona represents individuals with a background or context aligned with advocacy and social justice issues. They are already passionate about refugee issues and actively engaged in advocating for refugee rights. They view the tour as an opportunity to deepen their understanding and strengthen their advocacy efforts.

Comparing the experiences of these two personas provides valuable insights into how the tour impacted different participants. Table 1 illustrates the key differences and similarities in the experiences of the 'Curious Learner' and the 'Engaged Advocate'.



LEARNING & UNDERSTANDING**REFLECTIVE ENGAGEMENT****ACTION & ENGAGEMENT****THE CURIOUS LEARNER****CURIOSITY-DRIVEN LEARNING**

- Shows curiosity and openness to receiving information and knowledge about refugee issues.
- Develops awareness and understanding through experiences, gaining a new perspective on societal and media representations of refugees.
- Begins to comprehend not only individual but also societal and systemic issues linked to refugees.
- Is aware of general issues, but many insights are still new and challenging to process.

EMOTIONALLY REFLECTIVE & OPEN-MINDED

- Reflects on immediate emotional responses to experiences, shaping personal beliefs and foundational understanding.
- Contemplates their own privileges.
- Engages in conversations that challenge preconceptions, leading to a broader perspective.

EMPATHETIC RESPONSE & COLLABORATIVE INCLINATION

- Feels an emotional call to action, responding to the emotional impact of experiences, but still struggling to recognise their own agency.
- Begins to articulate future actions based on newfound empathy, potentially needing guidance or support.
- Expresses a desire to stay involved but may need ongoing triggers for sustained engagement.
- Needs further stimuli to move from intention to act to action

**THE ENGAGED ADVOCATE****PRO-ACTIVE LEARNING**

- Actively seeks opportunities to learn and tackles complex issues, driven by a sense of duty.
- Engages in dialogues to challenge views and advocates for refugees, influencing others.
- Demonstrates perspective-taking skills, imagining what it might be like to be a refugee (ability to distance themselves and think pragmatically).
- Has prior learning experience and/or personal exposure to refugee issues through friends or family.

DIALOGICAL AND INFLUENTIAL

- Draws on personal background to inform advocacy efforts.
- Uses personal values and beliefs to deeply engage with experiences, advocating for refugees.
- Critically comments on societal and systemic issues, leveraging previous experience and knowledge.
- Feels a sense of responsibility to act, driven by empathy, principles, or an understanding of their own privilege.

STRATEGIC & COMMITTED

- Questions policies and norms critically, aiming to address systemic issues and advocate for social justice.
- Takes deliberate steps towards advocacy, with a clear plan to support refugees.
- Works in solidarity with communities and organisations.
- Shows a long-term, sustained commitment to the cause, integrating advocacy into their life's work.

Figure 2: Comparing the experiences of the 'Curious Learner' and 'Engaged Advocate'

STRATEGIES

TO MAXIMISE THE REFUGEE CAMP IN MY NEIGHBOURHOOD IMPACT

To enhance the impact of the RCIMN tour, the following strategies have been developed. These initiatives aim to maintain engagement from both the 'Curious Leader' and the 'Engaged Advocate' personas, recognising that deeper engagement can foster a stronger connection to the cause.

CONTEXTUALISATION WITH GLOBAL ISSUES:

Connect the refugee issue with other pressing global concerns like global warming to make it more relatable. Use statistics or case studies in tour materials to illustrate the impact of global issues on refugee populations. This can appeal to the Curious Leader's desire for a broader perspective and the Engaged Advocate's interest in systemic issues.

LOCATION AND OUTREACH:

Host the tour in central locations and use various venues to reach different audiences. Utilise social media and online promotion to target specific demographics or areas with limited exposure to refugee issues.

COLLABORATING WITH CORPORATIONS:

Partner with corporations to offer the tour at a reduced rate or as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR). This can broaden the tour's reach and foster a more inclusive workplace culture.

EDUCATION PROGRAMS:

Expand outreach to primary and high schools in regions with limited exposure to refugee issues, especially beyond Western Sydney, to broaden the tour's impact. Develop educational modules that align with subjects like history, geography, or social studies. Offer specialised tours for teachers to integrate refugee topics into their curriculum effectively.

CLEAR POST-TOUR INSTRUCTIONS:

Capitalise on the tour's emotional impact to encourage immediate action, such as sharing experiences on social media or signing a petition. Develop an action guide with specific steps, provide a checklist of tasks with clear instructions, or create a volunteer handbook outlining various ways to contribute, including detailed descriptions and initiation guidelines. This can appeal to both personas, encouraging the Curious Leader to take action and the Engaged Advocate to continue their advocacy efforts.

CURATED RESOURCES:

Develop a database of refugee-related movies, documentaries, books, podcasts, and articles to deepen understanding and encourage engagement. Include discussion guides for group viewing sessions, suggesting questions and topics for reflection and dialogue. This can align with the Curious Leader's desire for information and the Engaged Advocate's interest in deepening their understanding.

SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT:

Create a dedicated social media account and maintain regular updates with news and information related to refugee issues. Utilise these platforms to share personal stories of refugees, including success stories of refugee entrepreneurs and profiles of families who have successfully integrated into their new communities. This can appeal to both personas, providing the Curious Leader with new information and the Engaged Advocate with stories to share and amplify.

SEEK FEEDBACK:

Continuously seek feedback from participants to improve engagement. Use surveys or focus groups to gather insights for future enhancements.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Understanding the nuances of this study is crucial for interpreting its findings and guiding future actions. While the study offers valuable insights into the impact of the RCIMN tour on perceptions and attitudes toward refugees, several factors should be considered to contextualise the results.

The survey sample size was relatively small for all three surveys, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. Additionally, participants' self-selection bias could skew results toward individuals already interested in refugee issues. These factors, along with potential biases like self-reporting and social desirability, should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Furthermore, the study's reliance on short- and medium-term follow-up data restricts its ability to assess the tour's long-term impact. Future evaluations with extended follow-up periods would help determine whether the observed impacts are sustained over time.

Recognising these considerations is important for understanding the study's scope and implications. The insights gained from this study have practical implications for educational strategies and policymaking, suggesting that immersive, experiential learning can significantly influence attitudes towards refugees. For the RCIMN tour organisers, these insights underscore the importance of continued evaluation and refinement of the tour to maximise its impact on participants and promote a more inclusive society.

APPENDIX 1

DEMOGRAPHICS OF PRE- AND POST- SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

This section presents the personal characteristics of 18 respondents who participated in both the pre- and post-tour surveys.

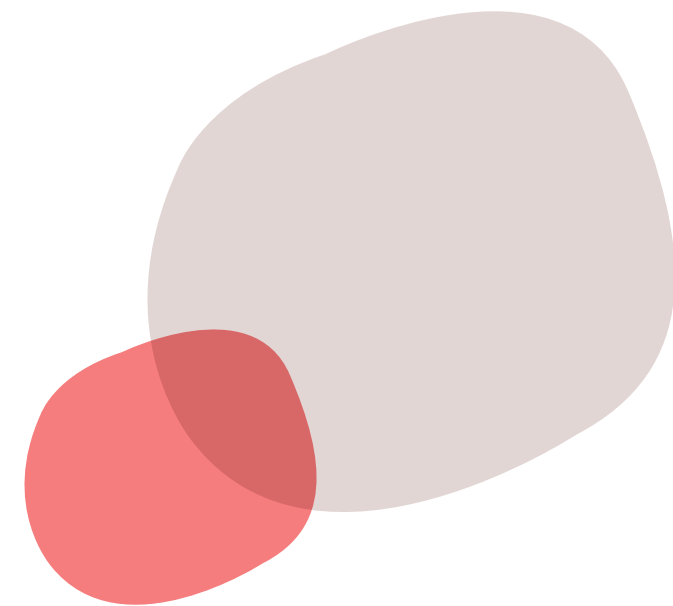
GENDER		ABORIGINAL OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER	
Female	50%	Yes	0%
Male	50%	No	100%
Non-binary/Other	0%		

REFUGEE BACKGROUND		PARENTAL BIRTHPLACE OUTSIDE AUSTRALIA	
Yes	0%	Yes	61.11%
No	100%	No	33.33%

NATONALITY		CULTURAL BACKGROUND		RELIGIOUS BELIEFS	
China	16.67%	East Asian (including Chinese, Japanese)	33.33%	Atheist/none	50%
India	16.67%	South Asian (including Indian, Nepalese)	22.22%	Christianity/Christian	22.22%
Germany	11.11%	European (Including Germany, Lithuania, others)	16.67%	Catholic	11.11%
France	11.11%	Southeastern Asian (Including Vietnamese)	5.56%	Hinduism/Hindu	11.11%
Lithuania	5.56%	Hispanic/Latin	5.56%	Islam	5.56%
Nepal	5.56%	Australian	5.56%	Mixed	5.56%
Ecuador	5.56%	Other/Mixed	11.11%		
Vietnam	5.56%				
Australia	5.56%				

CONNECT WITH US

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