



# Welcome to Alice Springs: Directory for Refugees and Migrants

Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia, Alice Springs, Northern Territory

The project involved the production of a directory to meet the information needs of newly arrived migrants and humanitarian entrants settling in Alice Springs.

The Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia has been working with newly arrived migrants and refugees in Alice Springs for over 22 years. A longstanding need had been identified for information specific to its clients' needs. The task involved simplifying and consolidating existing information and filling information gaps to create a user-friendly and targeted directory about Alice Springs for refugees and migrants.

The Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia is supported by funding from the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship under the *Settlement Grants Program*. The directory was produced as part of this program.

## Identifying a need

Refugees and humanitarian entrants are given general information about Australia before they arrive in the country. They are invited to attend the Australian Government's pre-embarkation *Australian Cultural Orientation Program*, which the International Organization for Migration runs for the Australian Government.

While this pre-arrival information is useful, it is not specific enough to give new arrivals to Alice Springs a good understanding of such a remote and isolated region as Central Australia, where the conditions are different to those in big cities.

Refugees and other new arrivals to the area need information about weather in the desert and the types of clothing needed. They need relevant and helpful information about local culture, local employment, schools and health services and how to access the local real estate market. They also need more detailed general advice about mainstream services, resolving legal issues, and their rights and responsibilities.

## Consulting the community and relevant organisations

The Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia carried out informal face-to-face consultations with clients and the community. Newly arrived and already settled refugees and migrants were asked what they would like to see in the booklet and what sort of misinformation existed. Consultations also took place with community organisations and government agencies.

## Producing the directory

Research was undertaken to identify diverse sources of information about living in Alice Springs. The information found was scanned to identify the differences between settling in Alice Springs and settling in other parts of Australia, such as the remoteness and isolation. Information gaps were filled and the directory was written in plain English. A designer was contracted to advise on the format of the directory and to ensure it was user-friendly. Alice Springs' mayor, Fran Kilgariff, formally launched the directory at a well-attended event, and it has been broadly promoted and distributed.

## Achievements

The migrant community has enthusiastically embraced the directory. Clients have been referring the directory to their friends and relatives when they arrive in Alice Springs. It has also been popular in the general community and both the Council and Library have requested multiple copies.

The community settlement coordinator at Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia, Marguerite Baptiste-Rooke, said:

A client from Zimbabwe came to the office and said that he had been using the booklet virtually every day. His family was looking for houses and a school and had been using the directory as a little Bible.

The Chair of Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia, Michele Castagna, said:

The directory has served its purpose by meeting identified gaps in information and the feedback from the clients has been very positive. They have especially liked the specific information about Australian culture, traditions and the use of Australian slang.

## Challenges

The main obstacle that Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia faced with the project was the limited funding available. Financial constraints meant not enough copies of the directory could be printed in order to respond to the growing demand or to be able to place copies at the airport, the Council or doctors' surgeries where the target audience would be most likely to pick them up. The quality of the map included could not be improved because of the limited funding.

Financial constraints meant the directory needed to be kept short and could not be translated into different community languages. If someone was unable to understand its content, they needed to ask a member of their ethnic community fluent in English to translate for them, or use the free interpreter service provided by the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

## Suggested improvements

There have been requests for the inclusion of more information on several issues, including social justice, rights and consumer protection.

## Key factors in the project's success

Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia consulted the community and really listened to their clients and addressed their needs. The Chair, Michele Castagna, said:

We listened carefully to what clients had said they wanted in a book. We selected the topics based on their requests. It was a proactive response to needs.

From experience, Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia realised it needed to provide information about the Australian culture because understanding culture has an enormous impact on successful settlement. For instance, when asked to 'bring a plate' to a party or barbecue, some refugees and migrants were bringing empty plates because they had no idea that they had been asked to bring some food.

A particular incident that occurred locally inspired the section on clothing and culture. Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia's community settlement coordinator, Marguerite Baptiste-Rooke explained:

When one of the newly arrived refugees was given a pair of satin pyjamas, she did not know that you wear those clothes to bed. She thought that you wear them to go out. So she went out to the school fair in pyjamas and a scarf. She looked great but...

## Key messages and advice for setting up a similar project

Information in any similar directory needs to be specifically targeted to clients' needs and local circumstances and should build upon what is already available. The Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship's website contains information about the different states and territories in Australia, and this information should be consulted first to avoid duplication. Its *Beginning a Life in Australia* booklet is available in 37 community languages as well as English at [www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/settle-in-australia/beginning-life/index.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/settle-in-australia/beginning-life/index.htm).

It is essential to prioritise information, to avoid information overload and to make the resource as practical as possible to respond appropriately to a client's needs. Using colours and illustrations and user-friendly maps make the publication more accessible.

Information on Australian culture, traditions, language, and colloquialisms should be a major part of any similar publication. This information will vary across different regions in Australia.

Project-specific funding should be sought in order to avoid financial problems and to effectively cover demand.

Local directories are very useful and it would be easy to replicate this project in small rural towns or even in local suburban areas.

## Organisation contact details

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## Profile > Akush

**Akush** comes from Sudan. She was forced to leave Sudan with her siblings and parents because of her father's political work.

Akush left her home for Egypt when she was eight years old and was fortunate not to have lived through Southern Sudan's civil war. She was born in Khartoum where the family had moved because of her father's work as a politician and only heard about the war from her parents.

Akush and her family lived in Egypt for 10 years. The Australian Government resettled the whole family in 1998. Akush has seven brothers and sisters.

Akush had a difficult time when she arrived in Australia. She is the eldest child and had to repeat high school. Eventually, she had to leave school to start work. According to Akush:

It was not an easy experience. I came as a young person and I was expecting to have a better and easier life in Australia, but it was the opposite. My stay in Australia has meant struggle. I had to give up a lot of my childhood to live as an adult at a very early age.

Akush arrived in Alice Springs two years ago looking for new opportunities and a job. She has finished her Business Marketing Diploma and has now found a job. She lives happily in Alice Springs where she believes there are better opportunities. Her family is still in Melbourne.

When she arrived in Alice Springs, she received an invitation to the launch of the directory for refugees and migrants and attended the event. Akush has found the directory very useful. She said:

The nicest thing about it is the people's part of it. It tells us more about multicultural society. We all have different backgrounds, cultures and expectations. This directory is not only helpful for new arrivals; it could even help the wider Australian community to understand better.

Akush would like to see more about Australian slang in the directory and a section on employment counselling to help people who are having difficulties in their job.

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