Welcome to our Psychology and Cultures
APS Interest Group (PCIG)

Our committee members are:
Jasmine Sliger: Convener and Secretary
Trisha Carter: Co-convener and Treasurer
Yan Kho: Newsletter Editor
Isabel Stepanik: Professional Development Officer
Nigar Khawaja
Bernadette Wright
Wendy Li

Letter from the National Convener

Dear Members,

Sorry for the delay in sending this newsletter as we are operating at half strength. Dr Wendy Li is on sabbatical and our treasurer Trisha Carter will be away until the end of the year. So we are sending you a short newsletter. We are desperate for help around the country so that if you know someone who could lend a hand and come onto the committee, we would all appreciate it. Just contact me at jsliger@isa-intl.com.au.

We rarely look at leadership in psychology as we are all bogged down with our administrative tasks …as I have always said “the work is a joy”. It is all the other things that can affect you that are a pain!!! Things like Medicare reports, call-backs to General Practitioners, chasing psychiatrists for feedback on your clients/patients, looking for mental health programs for clients, finding good reading for them and you etc. If however you can rise above this to see the forest for the trees, you will see the land of cross-cultural leadership in psychology.

Cross-cultural leadership aims to understand how individuals of different cultures interact with one another. One can never assume that a psychologist who is successful in one country will automatically be successful in another country.
In organisational settings, we see how cross-cultural leadership plays out. The international professional/executive is a competent leader who among other things is able to motivate people and has the patience to form and work in cross-cultural teams. In Australia dealing with intercultural teams also requires patience, an ability to tolerate ambiguity, tolerate complexity by managing many variables, including understanding the geopolitical issues that affect a given culture that we are dealing with. It is also understood that if you could work with a given cultural group ten years ago, are you current enough to work with the population now? Are you willing to study up or get a cultural informant to help you see the in/outs of what is going on presently for that particular cultural group. This is the challenge of cross-cultural work. Continually being a learner and extending yourself enough to understand. Once you work proficiently with colleagues and clients interculturally and cross –culturally, you can adjust to difficult environments quickly and work with colleagues, employees and clients who are of other cultures. Your world view and values adjust and housed in the ethics of this profession, you begin to naturally think ahead in complex terms.

Part of your own professional development is also giving back to the profession by being a mentor to mental health colleagues who decide to work temporarily in the refugee arena. This is another form of professional development in that it increases your leadership competencies, gives you exposure to an alternative caseload, it exposes you to issues facing welfare practice in the developing world (i.e. with limited resource environments) and of course a chance to grow cross-cultural competencies.

As you all know the Psychology and Cultures Interest Group has been actively involved in a pilot project with Australian Volunteers International (AVI). The project has a lot to do with developing leadership competencies and as we are continuing the pilot, we thought it would be timely to have a webinar with a mental health panel of mentors, mentees and Dr Peter Young, a psychiatrist and former Director of Mental Health Services with International Health and Medical Services (IHMS). Dr Young was compelled to give evidence into a national inquiry into children in immigration detention centres. This webinar will broadly cover mentoring but also the leadership competencies needed of psychologists today. It will be held on Thursday November 5th from 12-1pm (Eastern Daylight Saving Time or EDST), with the cost at $20. For those in the eastern states, we want to make it a lunch opportunity for your office or group to spend time on some valuable PD time. We will send you the link to join the webinar in due time. This webinar will be audiotaped so that you can replay it again in future. I look forward to seeing you there.

Warm regards to all,

Jasmine Sliger
The Supervision Space

by Jasmine Sliger

I recently did a masters training in supervision and it reminded me that the principal goal of supervision is to know where you are at in terms of your competencies and to maintain competent professional functioning while safeguarding client care. It is important to know what you need in supervision at any given time. I am a member of various supervisions both group and individual in both my endorsements. As you become more experienced, the supervision spaces change. There are a few supervision spaces you can expose yourself to depending on the issues that need to be discussed (Hewson 2014):

1. There is the passive space where the outcome is solutions and the supervision role is of supervisor and student
2. There is the evaluation space where the outcome is assessment and the supervisor role is examiner and examinee
3. There is the active space where the outcome is collaborative solutions and the role of the supervisor changes and both parties become interactive thinkers
4. There is the role of reflective space where the outcome is mindful discovery where the supervisor role is more of facilitator to explorer
5. There is also the supportive space where the outcome is settled and the roles of supervision are colleague to colleague.

The important thing to accept and understand is: what do you need now? Some colleagues stick to the supportive space where it is cozy sometimes; where these spaces can be like being in a colleagues lounge room with your slippers on. It is supportive but not necessarily challenging. The supervision relationships that you have has more an impact on the success of the process of supervision than any other factor. It is important to be in the learning zone where you are actually out of your comfort zone and thinking about things deeply. As you continue to be in a trusting learning zone, then you can grow this learning zone and respect others’ views more, have a more flexible and curious approach, develop an empathic and non-judgmental attitude and a validating and encouraging approach.

The joy of supervision is being with a group where you know that you are growing and that you are reflecting on the important issues that you deal with in your sessions. I highly recommend Mark Donovan’s course (through the APS Institute). All the participants in my class loved his style of teaching.

If you have any supervision issues that you wish to share or ask; feel free to drop me a line.
Participating In the Mentoring Program Was Powerful: The Perspective of a Mentee Recently Posted to Zarqa Refugee Camp in Jordan.

By Mathilde Parta

I was thrilled to find out that I was going to partake in the pilot mentor program set up between Australian Volunteers International (AVI) and the Australian Psychological Society (APS). I remember at the time feeling excited and nervous to be uprooting my life. I was off to work as a Creative Therapist Trainer at Zarqa Refugee Camp in Jordan, in the Middle East. It seemed so far away from Australia and it was hard to anticipate exactly what I was getting myself in for. Knowing that I was going to be assigned a mentor gave me an anchor in Australia, some support, and a place of holding in the unknown.

My Mentor rang me just before I was about to leave, and I remember I was racing around getting the last things organised. It was hard to focus in that moment with all that was going on. The mentoring program had just started and they rushed my application to get me it. Even in such a stressful situation she was able to elicit just enough conversation to establish a grounding connection. She responded promptly to my request to supply the information we had just talked about in writing, and to say a little bit more about herself in an email. That was so helpful as I was not able to take much in at that moment. I knew, that after I had settled down in this foreign country, that I would be able to absorb it all. I would have what I needed when I was ready to focus on my assignment, and begin this new mentoring relationship. This was very comforting for me.

From then on we established connection and the mentoring journey began. We met on Skype once a week and scheduled the sessions for the same day every week; early in the morning before I left for work. I really looked forward to these sessions every week and it settled me to know that she would be available regularly. She guided the process and we moved forward. The focus was always to address what was up for me in that moment. It was not a supervision space so I was free to concentrate on my needs rather than that of the organisation I was working for, or the staff I was training. I really liked this and really needed this. At the beginning and to some degree throughout the journey, the general political situation, the oppressive nature of society and the huge cultural change was impacting me significantly. These were pressing issues for me to be supported with.

For me it was a difficult start at Zarqa Refugee Camp as the community based organisation I was working for, really was not ready for me. Further to this they were in a financial crisis and the program I was meant to be working for, was being threatened due to the withdrawal of international aid funding. Those were the most difficult times as there was little engagement with my role and in my assignment from people in the Camp, and I had nothing to do. There were times I felt like giving up. I remember it was at those exact times that this mentor would challenge me to really step up, and to take actions to make things happen. It was really hard for me and I knew it was the only way to go forward. Her coaching and support gave me courage, and I did manage to take these very difficult actions forward. Not only did she give me courage and strength, but she validated my feelings in this struggle. She put them in perspective and shared her knowledge. She
brought with her significant experience as she had supervised other volunteers working in a similar capacity as me, within the international aid and development sector. In the end I achieved significantly in this assignment and felt very proud of what I did. I also learnt much about myself and about my work.

What can I offer to new mentees preparing to go on assignment, and those joining this wonderful mentoring program?

As with any relationship, it is definitely worth spending some time to build that relationship and to share as much information about yourself to your mentor before you leave. Also ask for this in return. My mentor and I swapped resumes and both wrote a summary of the work we did, our career focus, and the skills and knowledge we had acquired. I would really advise any mentee to take a nice diary, and some art materials to start a written or visual diary. This mentor had so much to offer me in terms of what to think about before I left, and this helped me upon arrival in my new host country. I certainly followed her guidance and lead to get the most from her support and wisdom. It is really important to organise regular calls (preferably at the same time each week), once you get settled in country. Don’t delay setting up these calls. I would also recommend having a professional supervisor as well as a mentor. This frees space for you to focus on your needs in the mentor session. At the beginning there is a lot to process when arriving in a new culture, things that may not even be related to your work. Lastly enjoy the journey. It is a beautiful reciprocal learning process.

I would like to thank my mentor for her time and dedication to this mentoring program. I would also like to thank the APS for hosting it and the AVI for organising it. It is a valuable project and I am grateful for having had the opportunity to participate in it.

Mathilde Parta
Art Therapist, Holistic Counsellor, Social Worker, Well-Being Workshop Facilitator
mathilde@innerdiscovery.com.au
www.innerdiscovery.com.au
IAIR (International Academy of Intercultural Relations) Conference: A Report

By Nigar G. Khawaja

The IAIR biennial conference (28 June to 2 July, 2015) was held this year at Bergen, Norway. Approximately 250 researchers and scholars, who work in the area of acculturation, participated in the event. The conference was hosted by academics from the Schools of Psychology at Oslo and Bergen Universities. Professor David Sam from Oslo University, inspired by the sad events of July 22, 2011, where over 70 innocent people were massacred in the name of fighting against multiculturalism in Europe, defined the theme of the conference as “realizing the potential of cultural diversity". Participants were from a range of disciplines and 44 different countries. Psychology was the most prominent discipline, with a high number of social psychologists and a few clinical and developmental psychologists. There were also some sociologists, educationists and communication experts. There were 215 presentations in multiple streams. As it is difficult to cover all of the presentations, the following sections highlight the vital messages of the key note presenters and the main points of the presentations on acculturation.

Professor Young Kim, in her presidential address, emphasized the significance of working and researching together as a multidisciplinary team. She emphasized that “acculturation process is very complex” and has to be understood from multiple angles. Jim Sidanius, in his key note, focused on the recent racial conflicts in US. He reviewed the role racism played in imprisonment and capital punishment. Using data from the US, he demonstrated how African Americans are exposed to more severe legal punishment than the Americans from European descent. According to his analyses, compared to the dominant society, an average African American has a much higher chance of 35% of being imprisoned in his/her lifetime. Dr. Prosser, who received the “life time achievement award”, highlighted how the distribution of languages has changed over the years. After English the languages spoken mostly in the world at the second, third and fourth level are Chinese (Mandarin/ Cantonese), Arabic and Indonesian. He with his expertise in social media and communication pointed out that more than 5 billion people are now linked via internet. Although the merit is faster communication, the safety of the social media is far from perfect. He warned that exploitation and hacking are going to increase in social media. Dr. Verkuyten presented his research on the struggle between the minority Muslims and the majority Europeans over political power. His data indicated that the majority accepts minority leaders if they are part of the larger political parties, but they do not like seeing minority leadership emerging as a separate unit. The majority fears that the minority will safeguard their own rights and not work for the larger society. Dr. Nicholas Rule, from Canada was the recipient of the early career award. He has published 40 papers in the last 5 years after his PhD. Dr. Rule uses experimental psychology to understand the neuropsychological basis of cross-cultural psychology. Using high level laboratory based methodology, he identified that the amygdala, which is considered to be involved in fear responses, is also involved in social perception. He compared Canadian and International (Japanese) students and found that the 2 groups interpreted situations differently and different parts of the brain were involved. He hypothesizes that there may
be neurological differences in the brains of people from different cultures.

Another very strong feature of the conference was the symposium and presentations on “acculturation”. All the prominent acculturation theorists, such as John Berry, Collen Ward, Seth Schwartz, Saba Safdar, Gru Sandal and Jan Peiter van Oudenhoven critiqued the current acculturation theories and identified gaps in the literature. The emerging data has not supported the U or J curve use to explain the acculturation of migrants. The research taking place globally indicates that acculturation is a very complex multidimensional process. The experience of all migrants vary. Their adjustment also differs and depends extensively on their personality, resilience and personal strengths and qualities. Secondly, the reaction of the host society also plays an important role in the acculturation of the newly arrived. The conclusion of these presentations was that it would be beneficial to conduct longitudinal studies to better understand the process of settling over a longer period of time. Further, the conclusion points to the importance of comparing multiple groups as the collective migrant groups comprise very diverse entities. Thirdly, it is necessary to also emphasize working with the dominant societies, in order to raise their receptivity towards cultural and ethnic diversity, to increase the chance of positive intergroup relations.

Finally, Bergen is a beautiful Nordic city built on seven mountains. The city consists of many 10th-14th century buildings. These are magnificent churches, palaces and forts. The rest of the city blends in well with these historical buildings. The wooden 5-6 storey high Nordic houses are fabulous. Being at Bergen is like stepping back in time. The city is close to Norway’s famous fjords. The locals are very warm and friendly. A smaller conference was ideal for brainstorming ideas, networking and establishing new friendships. There were excellent social events organized. On the first day of the conference, the Mayor of the Bergen city invited the delegates to a feast in a 12th century palace. The conference dinner was at the top of the Fløyen Mountain. In short, even though Norway is so far away from Australia and requires a long painful 30 hours plane ride (one way), it was worth it. The next conference is going to be in New York, in June 2017. Please put the date in your diaries.

Nordic Houses
City View

12th Century Palaces
Fjord