

Clarissa tells her anecdotes in segments, allowing time for the Arabic translator to repeat the stories to the people gathered. This is the last in a series of three cautionary tales about car-purchasing.

“So this man took out a loan to pay for a car so he could drive to work, but he didn’t have enough money left to pay for insurance. On his drive home, he swerved to miss a cat and hit the brick fence of a nearby house. The car is a write-off but he still has to make his loan repayments. He cannot afford to pay for the fence so he has been ignoring the letters he receives about it, but they keep coming. When he goes past the fence he sees that it is fixed, so he can’t understand why he is still being asked to pay for it.”

Five Migrant Resource Centre clients are in attendance, expressions ranging from bemused to blank as the translator conveys the story. “Has anyone heard of things like this happening?” Clarissa prompts.

“Worse,” answers a young man on her left.

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If you visit someone else’s home, they will usually do a number of things to make you feel welcome. Your host might offer you a drink or a snack. If you are staying the night you will likely be shown where your bed has been made up, provided with towels, given a brief overview of where items considered essential are located about the house. If you are staying in a place for a prolonged period of time, there might be some sort of welcome meal in your honour. People show you around, offer you their time or help with certain errands, are enthused to show you the sights and see that you enjoy yourself so you can then relay your enjoyment on to others. One cannot speak for all cultures, but in Australian society people who like to think of themselves as polite tend to be wary of wearing out their welcome. When

the initial enthusiasm of a host begins to peter, it is read as an understandable reaction to the burden of entertaining guests and also a sign to move on. This is how welcome traditionally plays out in Australian society, an act or series of acts rather than a process.

But people coming to your community who are migrants, humanitarian entrants and refugees need a process that extends beyond symbolic acts of welcome. They come to Tasmania not as guests, but as new members of the community. There are certain things they cannot do for themselves yet. This might be because of differences between their home country and Australia, or because the life of a stateless person does not prepare them for functioning within the frameworks that regulate Australian society. Is it possible to feel truly welcome in a new place when you carry the indignity and frustrations that come with dependence on others? In order for the act of welcoming to have longevity and effect, it needs to transform the roles of host and guest, as best as possible, into new roles, that of community members that exist in a state of realised mutualism. Established Tasmanians must understand that the strength of the whole is consolidated when each element of society is given the support it needs to thrive. The challenge for our community is how to help facilitate this transformation.

A common lament among the Tasmanians surveyed in the process of writing this essay was that while they would like to take positive action in welcoming migrants to the community, it is hard to know the best way to go about this. This tentativeness is compounded by feelings of hyper-awareness around accidentally causing more harm than good when interacting with people coming from traumatic situations or with cultural sensitivities one might not fully understand. A Migrant Resource Centre staff member offers the following advice as a guide rope – “Be human.” It is with this advice in mind that this essay shall progress, detailing a

handful of the acts of humanity facilitated by the staff and volunteers of the Migrant Resource Centre, and practical ways Tasmanians can participate in transforming the roles of host and guest into roles of a more equal and sustainable nature.

*Adult Drop-in
Mondays, 10am – 3pm*

Adult drop-in sessions allow migrants within the community to access help without the need for an appointment. The spectrum of problems presented by visitors is vast. One woman requires a translator so she can communicate to volunteers that she needs help booking a medical appointment. Another woman is afraid that her husband's planned visit to family in Africa is a plot to leave her there. Without citizenship, the Australian Embassy will not help her get back. A volunteer greets people as they arrive, tries to ascertain what the issue is, and then pairs the client with a volunteer or staff member who will hopefully be able to assist. Some clients need help reading mail that is written in English, others might want information about their legal rights in relation to divorce. While many migrants to Tasmania have the potential to access a level of social services and legal rights they have not been privy to before, the benefits of this are largely barred until they can receive assistance in navigating the bureaucracy.

While some problems need to be handballed to staff members or lawyers, volunteers are often able to resolve issues, particularly administrative ones. In a private room with a series of armchairs and a telephone, a female volunteer calls the Government's Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) so she can better understand the query of a woman who predominantly speaks Farsi. The woman would like to order a copy of a free, Government-published DVD designed to help prepare people for the citizenship test. As the conversation

progresses, the woman's anxieties over a more significant problem emerge.

“She says her greatest worry is that she is illiterate. She cannot read or write in her own language, let alone English. She doesn't know how she will pass the test,” explains the translator over speakerphone.

The volunteer orders the DVD using a Centre iPad, but as they are only available in English it is a cold comfort to the woman. “Some days, it's fast. Other days, you can wait thirty minutes or more for an interpreter,” the volunteer explains. Language-specific classes are offered by the Migrant Resource Centre with the help of an interpreter, including citizenship classes. The woman's name is taken and she is told she will receive the DVD in the mail and will be informed once more citizenship classes for Farsi speakers are scheduled.

If you possess adequate communication skills, you have the potential to assist migrants with administrative tasks that can be a nuisance for native English-speakers but relatively impossible for people with a low level of English – for example, applying for financial assistance through Centrelink. Applying to [volunteer](#) with the Migrant Resource Centre is a similar process to applying for a job, but, “once you're in the tribe, you're in.” If your application is successful, you are able to move from role-to-role as your competencies evolve and vary your time commitments in line with what you are able to offer. Staff ask that volunteers are realistic about their ability to remain involved, because the recruitment process is time consuming and a demand on resources in itself. If you can speak a second language, you can become an accredited interpreter or translator through the [National Accreditation Authority for Interpreters and Translators](#). Once accredited, you can [apply online](#) to become an interpreter with the TIS.

Language tutoring

While supports such as Centrelink and citizenship test resources are designed to support migrants in achieving independence and autonomy, before people are functionally literate such services act as a crutch which, even then, is difficult to access without the help of others. For those people who have little grasp of English upon arrival in Australia, becoming functionally literate is one of the most effective ways they can begin to feel a cohesive connection with Tasmanian society.

When migrants arrive in Tasmania, they are entitled to 510 hours of English language classes as part of the Australian Government's [Adult Migrant English Program](#) (AMEP). Migrants must register for AMEP within six months of arrival, commence classes within 12 months, and complete their studies within five years. While the program provides funded English classes for migrants and aims to be flexible in catering to a diverse cohort, many leave the program still unable to speak English at a level that will allow them to gain employment or navigate administrative tasks. The highest level of accreditation that can be earned through the AMEP is Functional English, with the Department of Education and Training's [2015 AMEP Evaluation Report](#) data showing that from 2013-14 less than a quarter of participants graduated at this level. The individual stories behind these statistics offer some insight into how a program that is effective in theory can yield relatively low educational outcomes. "I went to TAFE, but TAFE is finished now. I still cannot read or write," explains the Farsi-speaking woman via the phone translator, politely exasperated at the hopelessness of ordering a citizenship test preparation DVD that is only available in English. The AMEP's success rates are not reflective of the unwavering effort and dedication of its teachers, but rather of the enormous task of honing a best-practice approach to lifting the English literacy of a diverse

and complex student intake. The results are also telling of the challenges faced by many migrants, especially women, in attending English classes.

The report shows that among humanitarian stream entrants into the program, women are underrepresented. For some women, child birth and child-rearing create a barrier to accessing these language classes. People who are pre-literate in their first language and in English are more likely to enter and leave the AMEP pre-literate. People who have had little opportunity to access education throughout their lives have little concept of themselves as learners, a self-view which hinders progress. Factors including family commitments, appointments with services, seeking employment as priority and being without access to a vehicle may also impede the ability of migrants to enjoy success in English language studies. The frustrations and challenges posed by navigating a new social system remain unalleviated when the development of English language competencies moves slowly. In turn, it is harder for migrants to form networks within the broader community, networks that might mean access to transport, an English-conversation buddy, or employment.

An inability to speak English at a functional level also means an inability to pass the citizenship test. Government-provided practise [questions](#) for the current test are littered with subject specific jargon such as, “What is the name given to the party or coalition of parties with the second largest number of members in the House of Representatives?”, and the current government is [proposing](#) to make the English components of the test more demanding. To pass the test applicants must be able to speak English well, and must also provide evidence which shows that while they were getting their English up to standard, they were also trying to integrate through acts such as holding employment, joining clubs and getting the kids to

school. If the bar continues to be raised and AMEP outcomes are not seeing the majority of migrants reach it, Australia risks creating a political sub-class made up of people who work and are residents for tax purposes, but which have no right to political representation. This removes incentives for politicians to attempt engagement with migrant constituents, a climate which will certainly inhibit the very integration that the test purports to search for.

Native English speakers can help fill the gap that is sometimes left between the expiration or exhaustion of AMEP language instruction and functional English literacy. LINC Tasmania runs Adult and Family Literacy groups designed to improve the reading and writing of people learning English. These groups are largely staffed by volunteers, and if you are functionally literate, a good communicator and flexible, you can volunteer with LINC to help deliver this service to people looking to improve their English. Reaching functional literacy or above in English allows migrants to navigate administrative tasks and access services, decipher public transport timetables, participate in civic life including sitting the citizenship test, hold employment and develop connections with the broader community. These abilities are all essential to new members of the Tasmanian community in carving out lives that allow them to make social and economic contributions. If you are interested in becoming an Adult Literacy volunteer tutor with LINC, information about the relatively simple application process can be found on the [LINC website](#). Previous teaching experience is not a prerequisite.

If you are unable to make a regular commitment to a structured program such as those offered by LINC, forming social connections with migrants to Tasmania creates opportunities for learning through authentic and meaningful English language conversations. Not only this, but forming relationships with established members of the Tasmanian community allows people

new to the country to ask for help with administrative tasks, such as making appointments or reading and paying bills, without the need to travel to the Migrant Resource Centre every time unfamiliar life administration arises. There are a number of programs designed to help foster these valuable social networks between people new to the state and more established members of the community, which encourage social cohesion and also allow migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants to feel supported in gaining independence in their new lives.

The [Welcome Dinner Project](#) facilitates shared meals between established members of the community and new arrivals. The program's website offers more information, and allows you to register as either a host or a guest. There are no expectations placed on participants following the dinners, rather they create an opportunity to make connections that might not exist otherwise. Similarly, people are able to [volunteer](#) with the Migrant Resource Centre in the capacity of building relationships and friendships with new members of the community. The creation of these networks strengthens our social fabric, creating a bridge between new and established community members which allows for the exchange of skills, experiences, culture and benevolence.

Top Gear Driver Mentoring

A female client watches the clock as we wait for a TIS translator to become available. Her next appointment is not for another hour or so, but she will need to leave soon to catch a bus, whether we have resolved her problem or not. Reliance on public transport can be frustrating, especially if you are unfamiliar with English language timetables and moving from appointment to appointment as you try to establish yourself in a new society. Medical and

counselling appointments, job seeking, retaining employment and getting children to school becomes complicated and even more time-consuming without the ability to drive. Some people new to Tasmania will never have had the opportunity to drive before, while others may have been driving for decades overseas only to have that autonomy stripped from them on arrival in a place with different licensing and road rules. If most or all of the people you know are also new migrants, the chances of a friend or family member being in a position to supervise you and provide a car while you learn to drive are slim. Even if people new to the state do have social connections with car-owning community members, the risks associated with allowing an uninsured driver behind the wheel pose a barrier to informal driving lessons. Driving lessons through certified organisations come with a price tag that is prohibitive for many people.

If you would feel comfortable teaching someone to drive, whether it be from scratch or simply familiarising an already experienced driver with Tasmanian road rules, the Migrant Resource Centre's Top Gear Driver Mentoring [program](#) allows experienced drivers to help others learn in Centre provided cars. The cars are insured, automatic and dual-controlled, meaning that instructors can intervene using their own pedals if they believe it is necessary. There is one dual-controlled car available in Hobart and one in Glenorchy, but given the popularity and practical necessity of the Driver Mentoring program, the Centre is hoping to isolate funds to purchase another vehicle in the near future. If you have more money than time, you can also [donate](#) to the Migrant Resource Centre to help staff expand programs such as this in line with demand.

Youth Drop-in

Wednesdays, 3:00-5:30pm

On Wednesday afternoons, in a room looking out across the KGV Oval, you will find young people in an assortment of school uniforms clustered around subject specific tables. In one corner Kerry, a teacher who volunteers after school, is helping some boys in Sacred Heart uniforms with their maths homework. Towards the centre of the room, volunteers Danielle and Cassandra are playing with Scattergories with a group of laughing students from New Town and Taroona High Schools. Towards the door, a pair of girls are working quietly on their English homework. Jonathan and Sera, the Migrant Resource Centre's resident Youth Workers, have created a structured space where young people can congregate to learn in a supportive and social environment. The Youth Drop-in helps students in tackling the challenge of starting high school in a new country, but also offers a welcoming space where young people experiencing similar things can be together once a week.

Youth arriving in Tasmania at school-age are perhaps better poised to form connections with established Tasmanians as they enter the state's education system, but face their own sets of challenges. High school and young adulthood are often littered with moments of self-doubt, confusion and painful awkwardness for most people, let alone those who are entering an unfamiliar education system in an English-speaking country with what may be dramatically different cultural norms to those which they are accustomed. For some young people, particularly humanitarian entrants and refugees, their education prior to arrival may have been sporadic or non-existent. Some of these young people will have no belief in their own capacity for learning. If English is not spoken at home, these young people might not have the ready access to assistance with homework enjoyed by many students from English-speaking

backgrounds. Furthermore, if young migrants' parents are unable to drive, socialising with other young members of the community, whether established or new, becomes less accessible.

The Youth Drop-in buzzes with visitors almost every week, and David and Sera are always looking for volunteers to help cater to this demand. In a dream world, Sera says, they would have more regular volunteers, especially ones who have experience teaching in subject areas such as Maths and English. Assistance with collating resources and assessing different levels of literacy would allow the program to better differentiate and cater to the diverse learning needs of clients. However, anyone with patience and enthusiasm is encouraged to apply, whether experienced in teaching or not.

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New members of the community strive to contribute to the point that they will drive without a license because they are desperate for the dignity of earning an income. Qualified professionals will pick fruit while their qualifications go unrecognised. People will attend digital literacy workshops before they are even literate in English because they want to function independently in a new, increasingly digital society. These people have not come here for dependency on others but because what they want is to finally build a safe life where they can support themselves and their families and add value to the community.

At a local level, the best way to create a voice that speaks for social cohesion and against policies of exclusion is to take positive action. While certain Federal and international policy-makers attempt to foster division and fear that blinds us to the humanity of others, the most effective thing we can do as a community to counter this is to create a success story out of

humanitarian entrant programs. Acts of support and outreach strengthen the fabric of our community and make it resistant to the very chasms in ideology that we are encouraged to be afraid of. Accepting migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants into the Tasmanian community and helping them work towards self-sufficiency is not an act of charity, but an act that helps us grow into a stronger and more resilient society.

For more information on volunteering with the Migrant Resource Centre, email volunteers@mrchobart.org.au or phone 03 6221 0999.