

TIBETAN COMMUNITY CONSULTATION REPORT

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Foreword

STARTTS is pleased to present the first STARTTS Tibetan community consultation report. The consultation was part of STARTTS annual community consultation program. STARTTS believes that community consultations are an essential tool to improve STARTTS services and our relationships with refugee communities.

STARTTS has developed a relationship with the Tibetan community and this community consultation aimed to increase the cooperation between Tibetans and STARTTS and improve Tibetans' access to STARTTS services.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Tibetan groups for supporting this process and for involvement on the day of the consultation.

Jorge Aroche

Chief Executive Officer
STARTTS



The Tibetan Situation and Tibetans in Exile

During its 2000 years of written history Tibet has endured many tumultuous periods, sometimes functioning as an independent entity and others ruled by powerful Chinese and Mongolian dynasties. For much of this time the geographical territory of Tibet has been disputed between China and Tibet and boundaries between the two have changed many times. In 1950, when the current Dalai Lama was in his mid-teenage years, the People's Liberation Army of China began to invade the territory of Tibet.

Despite attempts at negotiations, peace agreements, and pleas to other nations (none of which responded), by 1959 the invasion was almost complete. The Dalai Lama's life was at risk and His residence was being attacked and shelled. Although He was reluctant to do so, He fled Tibet at the urging of his own people who, He recognised were dying while trying to protect Him. Since escaping to India over the Himalayas, He has lived in Dharamsala and it is there that the Tibetan Government in Exile is based. The community of Tibetans in exile in both Dharamsala and Mysore in Karnataka, South India, has expanded since 1959. Tibetans have duplicated Tibetan monasteries in India and these now house many thousands of monks (*Tibet the Hidden Country*, von Bruck, M. in *Exile as Challenge: The Tibetan Diaspora* 2004 eds Bernstorff, D & von Welck, H. , Orient Longman PL) .

Since 1950 it is estimated that of an original population of around six million, one million Tibetans have died (through fighting, imprisonment, torture, illnesses, etc). The majority of temples and their contents (statues, paintings, holy texts, etc) have been destroyed and the Tibetan identity, language and culture have been eroded. Now, most contemporary maps do not depict Tibet as a separate nation or territory; schools and employment are Chinese-language based; millions of Chinese have migrated into what was formerly known as Tibet; natural resources such as minerals and water have been mined and dammed; and images of the Dalai Lama are still banned. (Tibet Information Office, 2015 <http://tibetoffice.com.au/tio-australia>)

Since 2006 the Chinese government has implemented large scale programs to rehouse a majority of the rural population of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and, in parallel, has accelerated relocation and sedentarization of nomadic herders in the eastern part of the province. Between 2006 and 2012 more than 2 million people were moved into new houses or rebuilt their houses and the rehousing program is continuing. By 2013, ninety percent of the nomadic herders were rehoused (*They say we should be grateful: Mass rehousing and relocation in Tibetan areas of China*, Human Rights Watch June 2013). The rehousing program has resulted in a major restructuring of Tibetan society as people, formerly with a poor but stable livelihood, are pushed into the uncertainties of the cash economy (HRW June 2013).

Although the Chinese government asserts that the relocation and rehousing has been voluntary, Tibetans report that they see the remodelling of their villages as assisting the government's control over their lives as they already face sharp curbs on political, religious and cultural freedoms (HRW June 2013).

In 2012 the Chinese government introduced a pervasive new security system throughout the TAR which significantly increases surveillance and monitoring of "special groups" in the region –former prisoners, nuns and monks and those who have returned from exile in India, among others. The monitoring includes the establishment of 600 new police stations and volunteer brigades known as "Red Armband patrols" in Tibetan areas. (*China: Alarming New Surveillance, Security in Tibet* Human Rights Watch March 2013).

Since the brutal crackdown on the peaceful protests of 2008 the level of surveillance and monitoring of people's everyday lives remains high. There is little indication that the Chinese

government will accommodate the aspirations of the Tibetan people for greater autonomy. Instead, the efforts to refashion rural Tibetan society continues and Tibetans suspected of being critical of economic and political policies are regularly targeted and accused of “separatism” and other crimes. (HRW March 2013)

Hundreds of thousands of Tibetans have fled Tibet and continue to do so, leading to a substantial Tibetan diaspora throughout the world. Now, there are generations of Tibetans who were not born in Tibet and who have never seen their cultural homeland.

Why Tibetans leave Tibet

Tibetans continue to make the dangerous journey through the Himalayas to Nepal and then on to India, although the numbers have decreased because of the Chinese crackdown on the peaceful protests of March 2008. Tibetans leave Tibet because they can't freely study their language and practice their religion. There are government restrictions on celebrating significant Buddhist anniversaries and there is a lack of encouragement for the study of the Tibetan language. The national curriculum is taught in the Tibetan language only in primary school. Over the last decade, around 30% of Tibetan refugees were children and students seeking a Tibetan education in exile. (International Campaign for Tibet www.savetibet.org, 2015)

As noted above, political dissent is strictly prohibited and many Tibetans leave Tibet to avoid arrest and persecution on political charges. In order to curtail dissent and ensure compliance with Chinese policies, Tibetans who are politically active can be jailed and suffer physical abuse and torture. Following the harsh crackdown on the March 2008 protests, violations by the Chinese security forces continue including disappearances, wrongful convictions and imprisonment, persecution of families and the targeting of Tibetans suspected of sympathising with the protest movement. (*I saw it with my own eyes: abuses by security forces in Tibet 2008-2010* Human Rights Watch July 2010)

These events are historical as well as ongoing, with obvious potential to have an injurious impact upon Tibetans' collective and individual identity and psychological well-being. The effects of state-sanctioned persecution and invasion, suppression of political and religious freedom, the threat of torture, imprisonment and being 'disappeared' have an understandable impact upon collective and individual psychological health, which can be reasonably expected to continue long after physical safety has been secured. Such events have a high potential to lead to, and retrigger, conditions such as anxiety, anger, grief and trauma.

Tibetans in Australia

Between 1991 and March 2015, 775 Tibetans arrived under the Humanitarian stream of Australia's migration program. Of these 626 settled in NSW and 174 in Victoria. 2014 saw the largest number of arrivals with 194 Tibetans settling in NSW (*Australian Government Department of Social Security Settlement Database* March 2015). At the time of the 2011 census 995 people in Australia recorded their ancestry as Tibetan (The People of Australia: statistics from the 2011 census, Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2014). Priority is given to former political prisoners and their families who are chosen by the Administration of the Tibetan Government in Exile and interviews are conducted by the Australian High Commission in New Delhi. Those chosen arrive in small groups every few months. In Sydney, the majority of Tibetans live in Dee Why and surrounding suburbs. When the first Tibetans came to Sydney they settled



in Dee Why. Others joined them and those who initially moved to western Sydney moved to Dee Why as they found it too hard to travel to visit other Tibetans. In March 2011 a small number of families moved to Newcastle and the Newcastle Tibetan community has been slowly growing since then, taking advantage of cheaper rent and employment opportunities. They have formed the Tibetan Community Association of Newcastle.

Key Tibetan organisations in Australia

The Tibet Information Office (TIO) in Canberra is the official agency of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Established in 1993 its main function is to create a better understanding of the situation in Tibet and draw the attention of world public opinion to the plight of the people of Tibet. The TIO represents Tibetan Affairs in Australia, New Zealand and South East Asia including supervising overall arrangements for His Holiness the Dalai Lama's visits to these countries and helps advance and aid Tibetan culture and Tibetans living in these regions.

(<http://tibetoffice.com.au/tio-australia>)

The Tibetan Community of Australia (New South Wales) represents the interests of Sydney's Tibetans assisting humanitarian arrivals with housing and a range of settlement and other services. These include providing recreational and sporting activities; running Tibetan language classes for children; organising events for major Tibetan festivals such as Losar (Tibetan New Year) and the birthday of the Dalai Lama; raising awareness of, and educating the Australian public about the situation in Tibet. (<http://tibetancommunity.org.au/aboutus>)

The Australian Tibet Council (ATC) works to promote the human rights and democratic freedoms of the Tibetan people. The ATC undertakes a range of campaigns and advocacy work including support for negotiations between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government to reach a resolution to the Tibet situation; promotion of religious and cultural freedom and human rights, particularly in the case of Tibetan political prisoners; and the protection of the Tibetan environment. The ATC works with the Tibetan Information Office to help organise parliamentary delegations to Dharamsala and visits to Australia by Tibetan leaders. The ATC holds an annual advocacy day at which Tibetans and their supporters meet with parliamentarians, share their perspectives on the situation in Tibet and focus on imprisoned Tibetans needing help.

(www.atc.org.au)

His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama

Since the 1300s, Tibet's temporal and spiritual/religious rule has been held by the position of the Dalai Lama. "Dalai" means "ocean" in the Mongolian language ("gyatso" in Tibetan), and "Lama" is the equivalent of the Sanskrit word "guru," or "spiritual teacher". Put together, the title of Dalai Lama is literally "Ocean Teacher," meaning a "teacher spiritually as deep as the ocean". The person identified for this role is regarded a living Buddha and an emanation of the Bodhisattva of Compassion: Bodhisattvas are believed to be enlightened beings who have chosen to continue to be reborn in order to alleviate suffering in others. The Bodhisattva of Compassion is known as 'Chenrezig' in Tibetan and 'Avalokiteshvara' in Sanskrit, and both names are used interchangeably. The current Dalai Lama is the fourteenth incarnation of this position. (Central Tibetan Administration www.tibet.net)

In March 2011, the Dalai Lama proposed changes to the exile charter to remove his position of authority within the organisation and devolve his political power to the elected leader. This made the Chief Minister (Kalon Tripa) the highest ranking office holder. Lobsang Sangay was elected to the position and in a speech in 2011 has emphasised the importance of seeking a peaceful, non-violent resolution to the Tibet issue. Supporting the Dalai Lama's call for a "Middle Way" approach, Sangay notes that China has established the "one country, two systems" mechanisms

in Hong Kong and Macau and that this mechanism would provide for “genuine autonomy for Tibet within the framework of the Chinese constitution.

(<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/08/dalai-lama-political-successor-india>)

Tibetan commemorative events

Losar, the Tibetan New Year, is the most important festival in the Tibetan calendar. The first three days of Losar are the most important, although festivities continue for 15 days. It is mainly celebrated over a period of 3 days in late January or February, according to the Tibetan calendar. The celebration of Losar can be traced back to the Tibetan pre-Buddhist period (127 BC – 629 AD). At that time Tibetans were followers of the Bon religion, and held a spiritual ceremony every winter. During the ceremonies, people burnt a large quantity of incense to appease local spirits, deities, and protectors. Later this religious festival developed into an annual Buddhist festival. Losar is celebrated with prayer, food and music featuring traditional instruments like the dranyen (Tibetan lute). In addition, the Tibetan Community of Australia organises an annual festival in Sydney to observe the Dalai Lama's birthday on 8 July.

Offering Western-style Counselling to Members of the Tibetan Community

“My religion is simple. My religion is kindness.”
His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama

Historically, Tibetan Buddhist faith and practice have been a fundamental element of Tibetan national, community and individual identity. Understandably, those working with the Tibetan community may feel that in order to work effectively they must have at least some familiarity with Tibetan Buddhist principles and practices and the ability to transfer these to the counselling process. Though this is not necessarily the case, this section aims to outline some things that are either helpful or definitely important to know when working with Tibetans at either the individual- or community level.

The Incorporation of Buddhist-based Principles and Practices into Contemporary Western-style Counselling

People who live in accordance with Buddhist principles and practices do so with the motivation to enhance the positive, and remediate the negative qualities of their body, speech and mind. Thinking or any other mental/emotional activity is regarded as an action and therefore as an aspect of one's behaviour. Consequently, a person can be as troubled by their own thinking and emotional responses as by a physical action or expression that they regret.

The efficacy and transferability of traditional Buddhist meditative and other practices are now being affirmed and further informed by scientific research in the field of medicine and psychology. For example, neuro-imaging techniques and immunological studies have shown improvements in brain plasticity, affect regulation, mood states and physical health in both experienced and novice meditators over time. (*The Neurobiology of Mindfulness* Treadway, M & Lazar, S 2009)

Some of the techniques commonly used by STARTTS' counsellors can be linked to a number of ancient Buddhist practices. For example: mindfulness-based approaches; visualisation; breathing exercises for the regulation of physical and emotional responses;



cognitive restructuring; perspective taking; and sense and meaning making.

The empirically successful mindfulness-based approaches of Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) (see Recommended Resources) have as their basis the Buddhist meditation techniques of 'Shamatha', which means 'calm abiding' and 'Vipassana', meaning 'insight.' Also, Compassionate-focused Therapy incorporates, amongst other things, compassion-related imagery in the treatment of trauma, shame-based disorders and depression.

Therefore, such standard and more contemporary treatment methods can be regarded as culturally appropriate and effective in the support of Tibetan people, whether or not the counsellor offers them as part of an overtly Buddhist framework.

A Note on Generational Change

As mentioned above, traditionally Tibetan Buddhist faith and practice have been a fundamental, non-negotiable aspect of Tibetan identity. However while still the case for the majority of Tibetan people, regardless of age or where they were born, some younger Tibetans may be less religious and may have a more political framework for their views, focus and identity. These views may be expressed overtly or may be reserved in order to avoid criticism from family members or within the Tibetan community, but will likely influence the context of any personal issues or stressors that a person is experiencing.

A Note on the Use of Colour

Tibetan Buddhist iconography is highly symbolic and each aspect of an image is likely to represent a specific quality or meaning. Certain colours convey or represent particular psychological states or actions, and therefore incorporating these colours into, for instance, breathing practices (visualising white or blue in-breath with black coloured out-breath), may enhance their efficacy when working with Tibetan people. Namely:

COLOUR	ASSOCIATED WITH THE QUALITY OF:
White	Purification
Yellow	Generosity, abundance
Red	Freedom from craving, greed, self-centredness
Green	Action, energy, dynamism
Blue	Power, transformation
Dark blue/black	Negativity, defilement, wrathfulness

A Note on 'Mindfulness-based Self Compassion'

Mindfulness-based Self Compassion (MBSC) is another, more recent approach within the mindfulness-based field. To put it simply, MBSC is based on a Buddhist approach that focuses one's practice on the potential benefit for oneself primarily, in the first instance, so that one is able to then assist others more usefully as a consequence ('Hinayana').



This can be seen as contrary to the approach upon which Tibetan Buddhism is based ('Mahayana') which is motivated to dedicate all of one's good fortune to others primarily in the first instance, and oneself only later. Therefore while interest in MBSC is growing, it is possible that MBSC-focussed practices may not be familiar to or comfortable for Tibetan people.

The Importance of De-stigmatising Counselling

As with many, if not most, of the cultures with whom STARTTS works, anything to do with mental, emotional or psychological health is a highly sensitive matter. Consequently if a person is known to have some psychological troubles, elevated distress or to be receiving counselling they may be labelled as "crazy" and subsequently stigmatized. Therefore, regardless of all the above, arguably the first and most important thing that a counsellor or supportive person must do is to destigmatise the counselling process, perhaps by framing it in a non-medical way or describing it in terms that promote "mind training" or overall personal development.



STARTTS Services to the Tibetan Community

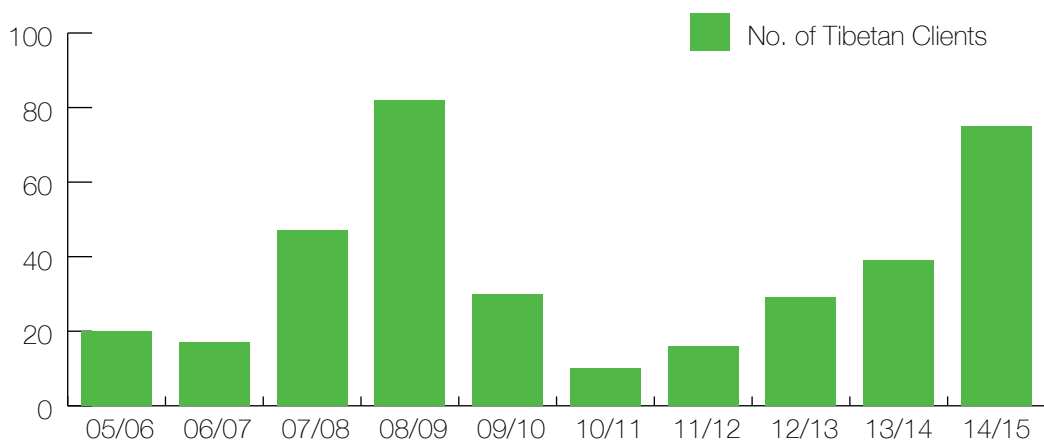
STARTTS is a not-for-profit charity and has been providing services to refugees since 1988. The organisation does this by helping individual refugees and families recover from their experiences, working with refugee community groups to foster empowerment and self-determination, and supporting other organisations and individuals working with refugees.

Refugees often experience multiple levels of trauma which impact across all areas of their life and community. In recognition of this, STARTTS provides a holistic range of services which have evolved in response to the needs of our clients. The services include: culturally appropriate counselling and therapy (for individuals, families and groups); group work, including self-support groups, health education and other activities; psychiatric assessment and treatment, physiotherapy, therapeutic massage and acupuncture; pain management and exercise groups; activities for young people, including camps, excursions and Capoeira; referral and case management, community liaison and consultation; community development projects; training of mainstream service-providers in awareness of refugee issues and strategies to work with this client group; research and evaluation.

Counselling

STARTTS offers short and long term trauma counselling. Depending on the clients' needs, the exact length of counselling and the time it takes varies. Clients can be referred at any time following arrival. There are no restrictions related to Visa class in terms of accessing counselling. These services are particularly sensitive to refugee and humanitarian issues as well as individual and cultural expressions of psychological distress. Furthermore, the counselling is confidential and can be conducted by either a bi-cultural or generalist therapist with many having a refugee background themselves. At present, STARTTS provides counselling through an outreach service in Dee Why. In July 2015 a two session group assessment of Tibetans who were on the waiting list, was held in Dee Why. Clients were given information about STARTTS, assessed and were offered the opportunity for individual counselling or to join a therapeutic group.

Below is a graph representing the number of referrals of Tibetan clients to STARTTS from 2005-2015.

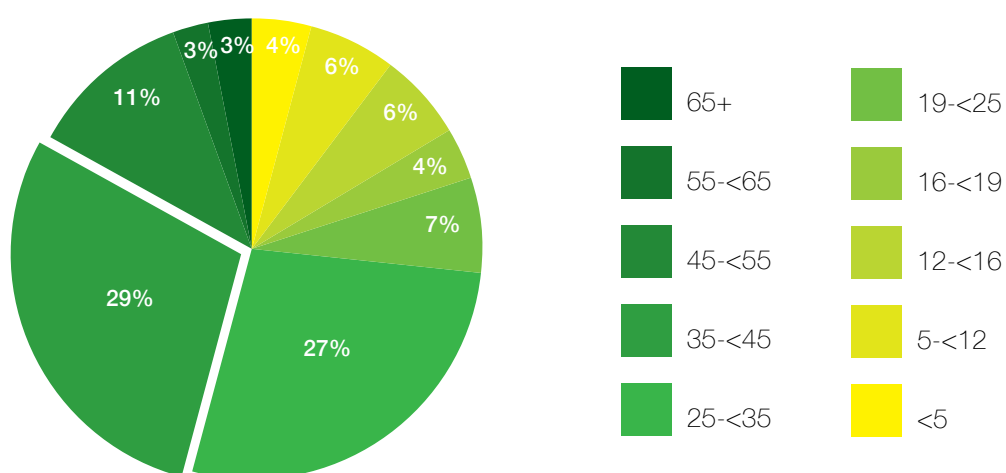


The next table represents the ratio of male to female Tibetan clients referred to STARTTS. Of the 365 clients seen by STARTTS from financial year 2005-06 to 2013-15, a slight majority were male.

FY	Male	Female	Unknown	Total
05/06	12	8	0	20
06/07	5	12	0	17
07/08	28	18	1	47
08/09	41	40	1	82
09/10	19	11	0	30
10/11	5	5	0	10
11/12	7	6	3	16
12/13	14	15	0	29
13/14	15	18	6	39
14/15	47	28	0	75
Total	193	161	11	365

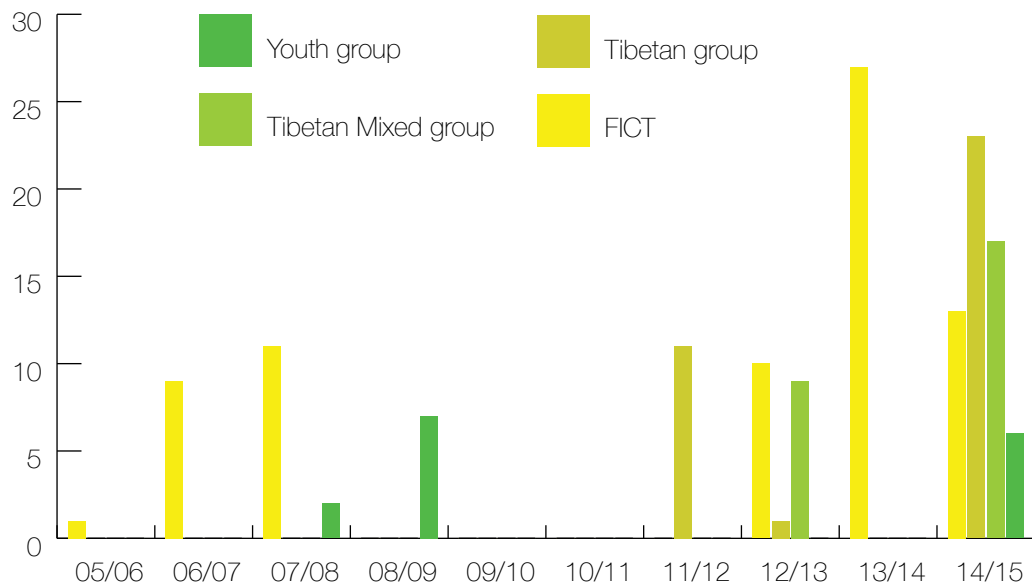


The following graph illustrates the age composition of all Tibetan clients seen by STARTTS. The largest groups were in the 25-35 and 35-45 age groups.



No. of Clients

This graph illustrates the number of Tibetan clients who participated in groups.



Families in Cultural Transition

Families in Cultural Transition (FICT) is a group-based, psychosocial education program that aims to assist refugees and people from refugee-like backgrounds to anticipate and manage their settlement and changing family dynamics during the period of cultural transition. It is one of STARTTS foundation programs that has assisted groups over many years to increase their social connections and understand Australian systems and way of life.

FICT is run by two trained bi-cultural facilitators in the community language of the participants. The bi-cultural facilitators bring participants from their community together to take part in the FICT sessions in community locations. Each module is three hours long and is delivered at a time and place to suit participants. The ten modules cover practical, conceptual and emotional issues that refugees are likely to face as they make the cultural transition to life in Australia. The modules are: Introduction and Settlement, Support Services, Money, Trauma and Healing, Families, Children, Gender, Youth, Employment and Enjoying the New Environment.

The STARTTS FICT team has trained 3 Tibetan FICT facilitators and supported 12 Tibetan FICT groups since 2011. All were mixed gender groups and were held in Dee Why.

Each program is evaluated using the Most Significant Change qualitative methodology. Participants are asked about changes that have occurred for them as a result of their participation in FICT, and Tibetan participants mentioned a number of positive changes. Participants reported that attending a FICT group gave them a better understanding of child rearing in Australia, including ways to discipline children without corporal punishment; understanding of their rights as an employee; and a range of practical skills for functioning in Australian society.

Therapeutic groups

The STARTTS group counsellor runs therapeutic groups for Tibetan refugee clients. The group aims are to provide: a safe place for clients to come and meet together to rebuild a sense of trust and openness; acquisition of culturally appropriate coping mechanisms to assist in symptom reduction for stress, anxiety and depression; development of social connections between participants to combat isolation and ease settlement. Two groups have been run, the first was a mixed gender group and the second a women's group. The latter group is being run in conjunction with a Dance and Movement therapist. This group aims to assist newly arrived Tibetan women to decrease physiological effects of torture and trauma through dance and movement and to increase connectedness and learning strategies that enhance wellbeing.

Youth program

Tibetan young people have accessed STARTTS' Youth Program for specific activities. In 2009 and 2013 STARTTS assisted Tibetan youth to participate in soccer tournaments in Canberra and Sydney. STARTTS also assisted the Manly Community Centre to run a camp for Tibetan youth in 2011 by training the Tibetan youth worker and volunteers.

A community capacity building workshop on strategic planning and leadership training for Tibetan youth was held in 2011 with assistance from STARTTS, who organised the trainer.

Community development

Since 2009 the Tibetan community has requested support from STARTTS to assist with a variety of activities. These include a project planning meeting with service providers and assistance with a grant application used to purchase office equipment. In 2008 and 2012 legal assistance was provided by the STARTTS lawyer for Tibetans who were arrested outside the Chinese consulate.



The Consultation

The STARTTS approach to consultation is defined as a range of processes where STARTTS seeks the views, opinions and input of a refugee community on torture and trauma related health and settlement issues. It is also about STARTTS' services and programs and how STARTTS can continue to provide relevant and appropriate services to the refugee community consulted. Consultation can describe a range of processes, from giving information to the community, to participatory decision-making.

As practiced at STARTTS, community consultations are an ongoing process, rather than a series of isolated events. Consequently, STARTTS utilises a number of formal and informal community consultation and participation strategies. Formal community consultation involves organising a gathering of key community leaders, STARTTS clients and former clients, community members, and other interested individuals.

When the formal consultation takes place, STARTTS staff present an overview of the service and facilitate discussions with the community, focusing on their experiences of trauma, their understanding of counseling, their needs and strengths, and how STARTTS services can be made as appropriate as possible. Finally, a plan of action is decided upon by STARTTS in conjunction with key members of the community, based on the discussion during the consultation. The plan of action will be implemented by STARTTS and/or other relevant stakeholders. This plan is usually disseminated to all participants, thus ensuring transparency and accountability to the service users.

Purpose of Consultation

The purpose of the Consultation is to ensure that STARTTS' services are accessible and equitably provided to communities through:

- STARTTS developing a relationship and building trust with the community
- STARTTS developing a knowledge base of the community including needs, priorities, issues, strengths, resources, culture, structure, understanding of counselling and mental health
- increasing the community's awareness of STARTTS and other relevant services
- identifying potential training needs for STARTTS staff
- identifying potential STARTTS staff recruitment needs
- identifying barriers of access to STARTTS services
- identifying future directions for engagement with the community – for example, further consultations, projects, strategies, and development of an action plan.

Goals of the consultation

The goals of the consultation were to:

- provide information on STARTTS' services and how they have worked with Tibetan individuals, families and communities
- formally document feedback about STARTTS and channel that into future planning
- explore the Tibetan community's perceptions about trauma, its consequences, and appropriate treatment and rehabilitation strategies
- explore and document any other issues significant to the Tibetan community.

Planning methodology

An initial meeting was held with the President and members of the Tibetan Community Association (TCA) in April 2014 to discuss the proposal for the consultation. Due to heavy TCA workloads it was decided to hold the consultation later in the year. The date of 1st November was decided on, and two Tibetan FICT facilitators with good community connections personally invited people to attend the meeting. All community leaders and service providers were personally invited to attend.

Tibetan community consultation

The consultation was held on Saturday 1st November at St David's Church in Dee Why and was attended by 70 people. The first section of the consultation provided an outline of STARTTS services as follows:

- Lachlan Murdoch- overview of STARTTS services to the Tibetan community
- Gordana Hol Radicic – counselling with the Tibetan community
- Sonam Wangmo - FICT program

The second section of the consultation involved breaking the larger group of participants into small groups: community leaders (in English), youth group (in English), men's group and women's group (in Tibetan). The groups discussed the questions attached to the report in Appendix 1. Small group discussion was followed by feedback to the large group and supper. The section below outlines the themes that emerged from the small group discussions.



The Themes

Knowledge of STARTTS services in the Tibetan community

Generally there was a lack of knowledge about STARTTS services expressed at the consultation. Of those who did know about STARTTS, it was either through FICT or, in some cases, through attending counselling. This reflects the two services most consistently offered by STARTTS in the Northern Beaches. In some cases there was confusion about the role of STARTTS and where its funding to provide services to the Tibetan community is from. The consultation provided the opportunity to clarify these issues. The services that are better known by the community in the Northern Beaches are Multicultural Health and the Manly Community Centre.

Some of the comments made by participants are listed below:

“ If we don't know about it, how can we access it?

Individuals are referred to you, but you need to do more on the community level (community leader)

When all that is offered is counselling, that is not really enough. To understand Tibetans better you need to talk to the community.

We don't know about STARTTS but would like to know more about what you do. ”

The consultation was seen by the community leaders as a good first step to better communication between STARTTS and the community. Their suggestions were straightforward:

“ Listen to what the community says. You STARTTS have already started to communicate to the community. You have ideas from today so regular meetings would be useful. ”

Understanding of counselling

In discussion around this issue of counselling a number of people spoke about a Buddhist approach to counselling. One community leader acknowledged that STARTTS counsellors working with Tibetan clients understood and incorporated Buddhist approaches into their counselling sessions.

“ People have been through tremendous pain. Buddhist counselling helps. With mental health problems the Buddhist way helps.

We have a Buddhist approach to counselling. It is very important. Some external issues are easy to solve but more internal is more difficult.

The idea of the interconnectedness of physical and mental health was raised by some participants and that when people are well they are able to help others.

The Tibetan word for health implies both physical and mental “the whole person”. When of healthy mind and body you can be of service better. ”

There was general consensus that a western style of counselling was an unfamiliar concept to Tibetans, and that typically back in India or Tibet many people would go to the monastery or nunnery for advice when they have emotional problems. Others spoke of seeking advice from elders or family members, although the latter avenue was not available to those with no family here. Other concerns around individual counselling were the importance of confidentiality, and the stigma associated with needing counselling.

“ Tibetans tend to be private and shy to discuss personal issues. ”

Some participants noted that a lot of Tibetans are ex-political prisoners and suffered torture in prison. They have experienced trauma and many of the symptoms are ongoing.

Suggestions for services and activities STARTTS could run with the Tibetan community

All groups had ideas about the types of services and activities STARTTS could provide for the Tibetan community.

There were a number of suggestions for practical help and advocacy that included facilitating access to community venues for cultural activities, a bus to take children to the community school in Narrabeen, tutoring in English for their children, help with learning to drive including advocating to have the driver's licence test translated into Tibetan, how to use public transport, assistance with getting citizenship, and help with dealing with the problem of false birthdates on official documents.

“ Many people have the wrong age on their travel documents. People want to correct this but it is hard to change because we don't know how to change it. ”

Another issue is citizenship - can we advocate at a higher level, as now we have a larger broad based community. ”

A number of the suggestions were related to employment and included assistance to have overseas qualifications recognised; help with a skills audit to identify what skills exist among Tibetans and how to enable transition to work; and a move away from the current aspirations around cleaning and kitchen hand work to more diversified possible employment opportunities.

“ We would like practical workshops- it is good to have focus groups, however what is missing is training on practical skills. We have so many talented carpenters - how do we use their skills? ”

My daughter is aspiring to finish her nursing course started in India. However her skills are not recognised here. There is lots of red tape to get recognitions. We come here with lots of hope but get disheartened. ”

Other suggestions included community building ideas around a social network (a mothers' group was suggested), a music singing project, STARTTS holding regular meetings with the community, and further support for the Tibetan youth group. A mentoring course for Tibetan



young people was mentioned as a successful example of a community development project. It has been operating at Brookvale TAFE and is training Tibetans about their responsibilities and their culture. Ongoing funding is needed to expand the project. The Tibetan young people are talented guitar, mandolin and flute players and would like the opportunity to play at community events.

Settlement challenges in Australia

A significant issue raised was around family reunion and it was spoken about as a “heartbreaking issue” for people who said they couldn't be happy and feel settled until they were reunited with their children. It was described as a major mental health issue for people who left their adult children in India or Tibet.

“ ***Some of us had to leave our children in India when we came here (because they had reached adulthood). This is heartbreaking for us and we can't be happy until they are here with us.*** ”

A number of participants were newly arrived in Australia and were dealing with a variety of post arrival stresses. Education, jobs, finances, family issues, and many areas of emotional stress were all raised as concerns. The high cost of rent was mentioned in the men's group as a major issue of concern.

Learning English is an issue for both parents and children - there was concern that children were falling behind in school because their English wasn't good enough to keep up with others in their class.

As outlined previously finding employment was of major concern to some participants, and there was considerable discussion in the women's group about the types of work that were available to Tibetans living in the Northern Beaches, and the desire to have people's existing skills such as carpentry used. Some people mentioned that it is difficult for educated Tibetans to find work in their field, and for those wanting to study the cost of university fees was a disincentive for them.

Ways of coping

People mentioned ways they cope at both a community and individual level. The Tibetan community is small and tight knit.

“ ***People are there for each other, when something bad happens or if it is a happy occasion. We celebrate and help each other - physically, financially, spiritually.*** ”

The Tibetan Community Association helps people when they first arrive and if they are unable to help, they refer people to relevant organisations.

At an individual level people mentioned a number of coping strategies.

“ ***We read the Dalai Lama's book and listen to the Dalai Lama's teachings when we have emotional problems.*** ”

Meditation and Buddhist practice helps.

We would go to the temple to pray to Buddha when we were in India or Tibet but here we have no temple or monastery. ”

Youth issues

The youth consultation began with a process of reflection, using a series of cards in which young people chose a card that reflected their personal strengths and spoke to that. Using the cards again, the group discussed what they see as the strengths of the community.



The facilitator asked the youth group about their spare time activities and what they would like to achieve in the future. The young people's current interests included: creative writing, drawing, basketball, football, debate, repairing electronic goods, drama, filming, movie education, creative thinking, painting, cycling, and swimming.

Among their future goals were to develop their musical talents as Tibetan musicians and singers, and to run a workshop to promote peace using a particular methodology called "dialectic riglam".



Recommendations

Issue	Recommendation	Responsibility	Timeframe
Need for community building activities eg. mothers' group, music singing program, learning to drive etc.	STARTTS to employ a part time Tibetan worker to be based in Dee Why Co-operate with Manly Community Centre	CEO to approve Community Services Coordinator to manage the worker	2016
Need for psychosocial education	Continue to run FICT groups	FICT team	Continuing
Need for therapeutic groups	Continue to run therapeutic groups	Group Counsellor	Continuing
Finding employment/using existing skills	Undertake a skills audit of the community Expand STARTTS Enterprise facilitation program. Develop innovative employment related projects Explore relationships between local jobactive and Tibetan community Find out if jobactive need more information about Tibetans and provide this if needed via the package below.	Tibetan worker Community Services team and Manly Community centre	Ongoing following employment of Tibetan worker
Understanding of Tibetan clients' issues	Develop training package for service providers Presentation on Tibetan issues at a STARTTS staff meeting	STARTTS Training team in collaboration with Tibetan Community of NSW	



Practical help and advocacy	Assist Tibetan organisations to write funding submissions Assist Tibetans to rectify incorrect documentation	Tibetan worker Policy Officer	Ongoing following employment of Tibetan worker
Youth group requests	Liaise with Tibetan youth group	Tibetan worker supported by STARTTS Senior Youth Project Officer	Ongoing following employment of Tibetan worker
Capacity building of Tibetan organisations	Ensure Tibetan community can access CiCT	CiCT Project Officer	2016



Appendix 1

Questions for adult groups

1. STARTTS Services

What do people in your community think about STARTTS?

When are people referred to STARTTS, and why?

What happens after people are referred?

Are there any barriers to people from your community being referred to STARTTS, and if so, what do you think they are?

How can STARTTS remove or reduce those barriers?

What aspects of STARTTS' work is your community satisfied with, and why?

In what ways can STARTTS improve its services to your community?

What additional services or activities do you suggest STARTTS could provide to support your community?

How can STARTTS work more effectively with _____ community organisations?

2. Counselling

In your community, who helps people when they experience sadness or when they do not feel well emotionally?

How would you describe counselling?

How can we explain counselling so that members of your community understand it better?

How can we change what we do so that it is more appropriate for the community?

What is health?

What is mental health?



3. Community issues relevant to STARTTS

What do you perceive to be the greatest strengths within your community?

What are some of the difficulties torture and trauma survivors in your community are experiencing at the moment?

How has the community tried to address these difficulties?

Apart from STARTTS, are there other agencies working with the community to address these issues? If so, which agencies and what are they doing?

Which of these strategies have worked most effectively, and which have not?

How did your community's strengths help with those difficulties?

What can STARTTS do to help with the community's initiatives?

If everything was well with your community, how would you know? What would you see? How would people interact? What resources would there be within the community?



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