

## Helping to manage Mentee doubts

Our experience from working as your EMPOWER team is a daily learning process, as we gain more and better quality of knowledge from you, our EMPOWER Mentors. This partnership works both ways, and it is not surprising that with your help we are encouraged to adjust – change as necessary – the format for mentoring through presentations, our website, and EMPOWER workshops.

Presently, we share the burden of difficult life conditions due to the Coronavirus crisis. Although this means that for a while, following national medical advice, we are unable to meet in person, it does not prevent us from looking ahead and building on the very promising relationships that we have already formed. Most of all, we can all maintain our personal and group strengths by continuing to communicate in the spirit of what has been achieved so far – leaving no one behind. The day will come when the EMPOWER activities will ‘bear good fruit’ for our Mentees, and of course, for our Mentors, as your dedication to mentoring other women migrants represents a very special skill set.

Below please find two sets of questions and answers which we hope will help you to enjoy useful conversations with your mentees. This exercise concerns our Employment Skills workshop contribution. We have learned from you that **some** - just a small number – of mentees have said that they are not interested in seeking employment and therefore see little value in attending/engaging in employment skills workshop activity/output. The sample questions provide clues to judge doubt among Mentees; and the sample answers are suggested forms of response you might find helpful to both find out more about any individual mentee doubts, and to develop a positive conversation to improve mentee confidence. You are encouraged to add more questions and possible answers to suit the particular relationship you have developed/are developing, with your mentee(s). Main points to keep in mind as you read on:

1. The content of our workshops, the conversationally engaged community, and mentor support are all parts of what we call social networking. Increasing a migrant woman’s understanding of Australia’s work culture is itself valuable in helping to bring about social inclusion, while reducing the risk of long term social isolation.
2. The existence of the workshop does not create the expectation that mentees should actively seek employment. It simply opens up the possibility of becoming an employee in Australia,

and leaves our mentees with the choice. Some may save what they learn from the workshop so that they have a head-start if circumstances change at a later time. Or they may pass what they learn, on to to close family members and friends.

3. A considerable amount of research shows that those refugee women who have or plan to have children are very – very – keen to ensure that their offspring receive the best possible education and opportunities Australia can offer. Unfortunately, the social capability gap (language, culture, resistance to change) between children and the migrant parents who have not sufficiently adapted to life here by the time their children are in high school, can too often create an unwelcome divide as children approach adulthood.

### **Mentee's question #1**

I am not sure if I want to be employed. At times it seems too hard to get a job. That put me off. Some of us have partners who are in paid work; and some of us have children to care for. So why should we bother with employment skills mentoring?

### **Mentor Sample answer (starts with a clarification question)**

First, please tell me more about your reason for not wanting to even talk about employment.

The world of work is all around us. When we shop, when we see the doctor, when we take and collect children to/from school, and many more activities in the local and culturally-based communities put us in touch with working people and employer organisations. We sometimes refer to these as 'the fabric' of our society. We cannot manage our lives safely without engaging in this way and if we cut ourselves off from community, our mental health is at risk. By taking time and investing in learning more about Australia's employment culture, we improve our social networking abilities. Social networking is all about building and preserving relationships which have value to individuals and groups. Rather like our employment skills workshop, we know that at some time in the future, preserving these relationships and the knowledge they bring to us will provide choices and the opportunity to obtain help when we urgently need it. So – employment skills knowledge and social relationships – come together as an empowerment for migrant women. When we discuss employment skills we talk about paid and unpaid (voluntary) jobs. Migrant women across Australia have successfully engaged in working as community volunteers for example. In some instances, the respected reputation of a good volunteer may lead to improved opportunities, such as part-time paid employment, or connections which prove helpful for family members. The benefits are almost endless. The advice we offer is 'be inclusive' – mentees helping mentors to help mentees!

**Mentee question #2**

What do you suggest I should say to my family members if they ask why I am bothering with the EMPOWER employment skills workshop?

**Mentor sample answer #2**

You can mention some of the advice just given, but also consider sharing your thoughts about the risk of not taking advantage of this free mentoring support. Sadly it is necessary to think about what will happen to you and your family, if your main income provider suddenly loses their paid employment; or in the sad event that your provider becomes ill and cannot work. It may be helpful in the case of a young family, to treat the workshop as an investment in keeping up with them as they quite quickly adopt much of Australian culture through time spent with school friends.

Please refer to the separate 'short form' version of this to help you focus on key points