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**Abstract**

There are few culturally and linguistically relevant resources available to address the needs and experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Australia, even though these groups are considered at greater risk of depression, anxiety and other mental health issues (Shaw, Dorling & Davey Smith, 1999).

*isee-ilearn*, collaborated with *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*, The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI), The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture & Trauma and Melaleuca Refugee Centre to investigate the use of *italk™* concepts with speakers of the Karen (Burma), Sudanese Arabic (North and South Sudan) and Dari



(Afghanistan) languages. The project was made possible through the investment by TACSI. This paper provides an outline of this innovative project's approach and model.

*Key words:* Culturally and linguistically diverse communities, depression, healing, help seeking, stories, Karen, Dari, Sudanese Arabic, Sudan, Afghanistan, Burma, audiovisual resources, culturally relevant resources, [www.italklibrary.com](http://www.italklibrary.com)  
[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) [www.tacsi.org.au](http://www.tacsi.org.au)

## Background

Many members of culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Australia have recently migrated from countries in crisis and are considered at greater risk of depression, anxiety and other mental health issues (Shaw, Dorling & Davey Smith, 1999). Members of these communities may be experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of their prior experiences as well as isolation and exclusion from social, economic and political systems due to resettlement. In 2007, the National Mental Health and Wellbeing Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008) estimated that in a 12 month period, 12% of Australians born overseas experienced anxiety disorders, and 5% experienced mood disorders. The Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASST 2011) reported that the common symptoms of presenting clients (n = 2 734) in 2009/10 were anxiety (88%), traumatic distress (81%), depression (78%) and grief (65%). Furthermore Australians born overseas are attempting to not only reconcile with a complex and potentially traumatic past, they are also adjusting to a resettlement process within the cultures and complexities of a society with which they are unfamiliar.

There are several barriers to accessing adequate health information, services and education (FASST 2011), for example there is a lack of culturally appropriate material and translations are often reported as being too complex and wordy. A temptation for well-meaning organisations is to translate Western concepts into a language without investigating whether the health concepts or beliefs are culturally relevant or understood. The risk is that vital information may be conveyed in a way that is inaccessible, misunderstood or irrelevant.

Currently, there are few culturally and linguistically relevant resources available to address the needs and experiences of newly arrived Australians.

The Universal Stories of Healing from Depression project had three main objectives including to:

1. increase awareness of the nature of depression and options for healing
2. provide increased access to culturally and linguistically appropriate information on depression for people who have English as a second language
3. enhance mutual empathy and understanding between different language groups and the broader community thereby enhancing opportunities for greater understanding, participation and social inclusion

This paper will discuss the first two objectives of the project in regards to the approach used in the production of the stories. The third objective including factors that support and inhibit innovation and The Constellation Model (Surman & Surman, 2008) will be discussed in forthcoming evaluation reports and papers.

## The Project

The tradition of storytelling is one of the earliest forms of education which embodies the language and worldview of each culture. It remains today not only as a form of sharing cultural values and knowledge, but is used by many cultures all over the world to elegantly communicate what may be difficult to understand in the written form. The use of storytelling in many cultures with children is a well recognised example.

isee-ilearn has created an innovative medium for communication – italk™. italk™ is a software package that combines the ancient oral storytelling traditions with contemporary forms of educational technology. The italk™ software enables the development of visual and spoken stories that present important information in the language and worldview of the learner. Each italk™ story is held in the online, multilingual, free italkLibrary. These stories can be downloaded, and/ or spoken into any new language and uploaded for viewing anywhere in the world.

Previously, italk™ has had widespread use amongst Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory, which has increased accessibility within remote communities to topics such as literacy, money management and reducing the harm associated with gambling, using relevant Aboriginal Australian languages and worldviews as a platform for learning.

isee-ilearn, supported by *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*, developed this project to test the utility and transferability of the italk™ communication and education concept among other culturally and linguistically diverse communities within Australia. The stories were developed with Dari speakers from Afghanistan, Sudanese Arabic speakers from North and South Sudan and Karen speakers from Burma. Each of the three stories is also presented in English to provide opportunities for cross-cultural understanding about the experience of depression and healing from diverse worldviews.

The potential of this innovative approach to communication gained national recognition and support as a winner of \$1 million Bold Ideas – Better Lives Challenge run by TACSI. The Bold Ideas Better Lives Challenge put community-led solutions to community-identified social issues to the test.

Representatives from isee-ilearn, *beyondblue* and TACSI formed the Project Team which guided planning and assisted with the implementation of the project. Relationships were also developed with The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (Foundation House) in Melbourne and Melaleuca Refugee Centre in Darwin to establish connections with service providers and community members from the three language groups.

Sharing an understanding of depression in a cross-cultural context is quite complex. The experience of depression is influenced by a mixture of individual and socio-cultural factors. Collective knowledge or guidance in this terrain is largely influenced by culture and health beliefs and is most appropriately conveyed and understood within the context of a person's worldview and language (Bronheim and Sockalingam, 2003; Maher, 1999; Sanchez, Plawecki & Plawecki, 1996; Santiago-Rivera, 1995).

With a cross-cultural context in mind, isee-ilearn used an anthropological approach to explore the nature of depression and the options for healing with each of the three language groups. The approach for seeking each groups' cultural knowledge of how:

- distress is culturally understood and displayed
- information is communicated both non-verbally and verbally in their own language
- to share and articulate their knowledge and perspective with English-speakers. This

provided a meaningful way for people to understand depression as well as ways of seeking help (Bronheim and Sockalingam, 2003; Santiago-Rivera, 1995). The story development process, production and access to the three stories are described in the Results and Discussion section.

The marketing plan has evolved over the span of the project to draw on existing and emerging networks in multicultural health as well as existing networks and marketing strengths of each organisation involved in the project. *beyondblue* included five key areas for disseminating the resource in its various formats such as journals, newsletters and electronic bulletins, media releases, websites and the *beyondblue* resource list following the national launch at the International Unity in Diversity Conference by Senator Kate Lundy, Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. TACSI promoted the stories to social entrepreneurs through social networking sites including Twitter and Facebook. *isee-ilearn*, with support from *beyondblue*, marketed the stories to multicultural groups through community launches in Melbourne as well as national networks linked to peak multicultural organisations.

The evaluation plan consists of three phases. The first phase, commencing in September 2011, involves process evaluation of the development of the stories with the Project Team, service providers and the cultural communities, using the Most Significant Change Methodology (Davies and Dart, 2005). Phases two and three involve quantitative and qualitative assessment of the use and value of the resources conducted at six months (February 2012) and 12 months (September 2012) post dissemination. Evaluation reports will be collated and widely disseminated following phase one and three of the evaluation plan.

## Results and Discussion

This project focused on quality relationships, strengths and learning as key values that underpinned every aspect of project management. Maintaining these values across the

Project Team, key organisations and with community members of the three language groups contributed towards the quality of the stories even though they were produced in short timeframes.

## **Establishing Relationships**

Initial workshops were arranged by isee-ilearn and each of the three language groups in association with Foundation House and Melaleuca Refugee Centre in February and March 2011. Introductions by Foundation House and Melaleuca Refugee Centre were essential to facilitating confidence and trust between isee-ilearn staff and community members. The discussion of issues as sensitive as the experiences of suffering and depression as well as potential paths to healing, required robust relationships with community members founded on cultural strengths and fostering of a mutual learning environment.

Another key element of the project was the establishment of relationships between the Project Team members from isee-ilearn, *beyondblue* and TACSI. Although staff turnover posed a risk to the project timeframes, risks were mitigated by thorough handover of the project and an underlying strength and learning-based approach to Project Team meetings.

## **Developing Relationships with Community Members**

The initial workshops were held at 'organisational' venues such as Foundation House and the Ecumenical Migrant Centre, however, as trust between the community members and isee-ilearn grew, the meetings moved to community member's homes and included sharing traditional foods and music. The numerous previous isee-ilearn projects with Aboriginal community groups, have shown that story telling requires the following attributes to be effective, the:

- story is spoken in the language of the listener/learner.
- story is best told at the appropriate time and desired social setting of the group.
- people developing the shared stories have social time together, such as meals or music, to rapidly learn the multidimensional aspects to their relationships



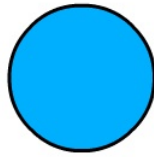
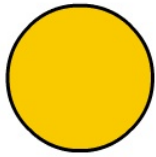
*Figure 1: A workshop session with the Dari speakers from Afghanistan*



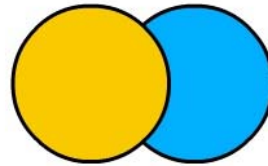
*Figure 2: A shared traditional meal during a session with members of the Dari speakers from Afghanistan*

Employment of these attributes to develop the scripts for the stories enabled isee-ilearn to develop relationships with key members of each of the three language groups. Although these relationships developed independently from the gateway agencies from February to July 2011, the agencies were pivotal for maintaining the presence of trusted interpreters. Preliminary findings of evaluation with the participants attributed the level of comfort and strength of the relationships in such a relatively short period to the style and quality of communication utilised by the isee-ilearn staff .

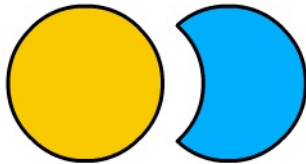
One of the key approaches that isee-ilearn staff use in developing and maintaining cross-cultural relationships has been coined “Beyond the Eclipse” (isee-ilearn, 2002) and is illustrated in Figure 3. This approach has evolved from projects, research and isee-ilearn’s experience in working across cultures for the past 20 years.



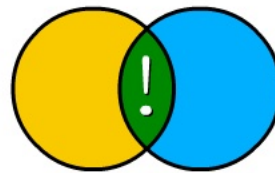
1. Often when one culture meets another ...



2. One becomes eclipsed.....



3. Although the loss for one culture, results in no increase in the other, such a relationship appears to lessen the contribution by one culture. This phenomenon of eclipsing raises the question, “Does speaking and writing in a language that only one party understands create picture three?”



4. The ideal space is that which moves beyond the eclipse and creates a cross-cultural bridge whereby barriers to communication can be resolved and information and experience can travel two-ways to be understood by both cultures. A further question is “Can presenting information in a visual form that can be spoken in any language create picture four?”

Figure 3: Beyond the Eclipse. (<http://www.isee-ilearn.com/mission.html>)

Preliminary feedback from the communities has indicated that they highly valued the story development process and the relationship with isee-ilearn staff. Participants reported that the process created a space to recognise, name, acknowledge and begin to release the suffering associated with their life’s journey. One participant commented that the, “exploring of cultures, sharing cultures were healing conversations, for in Sudan there are many arms of (Sudanese) culture and the conversations (were key) for bringing people together for healing by highlighting values in those cultures and (their) similarities”.

## Developing Relationships within the Project Team

Throughout the project, weekly Skype or teleconference meetings were held between the representatives of isee-ilearn, beyondblue and TACSI to oversee and guide the planning, implementation and evaluation of the project. The meetings were coordinated by the isee-ilearn Project Manager. The use of online and telecommunications assisted with connecting Team members across four states of Australia. The Project Manager and team members also provided feedback and project updates via blogs on the TACSI Bold Ideas Better Lives online workspace.

## The Product “Universal Stories of Healing from Depression”.

“When the musical traditions of Europe and Africa merged in North America we got jazz, the bedrock of our musical traditions of the last 100 years. So what could happen as different cultural views of depression and healing collide with Australian traditions? This question has inspired and driven the team. Throughout this work, we are constantly dropping ideas into one another’s cultures.” (Brocklebank, 2011, personal communication)

The stories of healing from depression were developed to be accessible to service providers and communities in a number of formats. These formats include:

1. DVD for use on televisions or computers.
2. Mobile telephone
3. On line video versions which can be viewed and downloaded on the [www.italklibrary.com](http://www.italklibrary.com)
4. italk™ versions, which can be viewed or downloaded from the [www.italklibrary.com](http://www.italklibrary.com)

The stories in the first three formats run uninterrupted for approximately six minutes each. The fourth format can be viewed on a computer, page by page with both languages available on each page. The latter format provides opportunities for individuals or groups as English speakers and speakers of Dari, Karen or Sudanese Arabic languages to view the story and learn together. The page by page format also allows for discussions to be held at

pertinent points for the viewers. In addition, the italk™ format of the stories can be spoken into a new language and uploaded to the italkLibrary.



Figure 4: Sample image from the Karen Story from Burma in DVD format



Figure 5: Sample image from the Sudanese Story in italk™ version



Figure 6: Sample screen for recording a new language in the italk™ version

## Conclusions and Future Directions

The preliminary results from this project support further research into developing culturally relevant health promotion materials. These findings highlighted the need for better integration between the individual and socio-cultural factors that define the diverse

experiences of depression and encourage culturally appropriate help-seeking behaviours. In addition, the project has also highlighted a greater emphasis for interventions using social and community frameworks to reduce vulnerability to depression in these language groups as well as promote help-seeking behaviour. Further information from the evaluation of the project and the resource will make a valuable contribution to the evidence base for future directions and models to promote mental health and wellbeing with diverse communities within their social structures.

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