Report
for the Collier Charitable Fund 2015

TransFormation
Christian Leadership Training
for People of a Non-English Speaking Background
About TransFormation

The TransFormation program began at Whitley College in 2003.

It provides training for Church leaders from non-English speaking backgrounds now living in Australia. It combines study, spiritual growth, worship and community experience which are essential in the formation of Christian leaders.

It is designed to help people overcome the obstacles of time, money and language that have previously prevented them from attending existing courses of college study.

Individuals who enrol in the TransFormation program commit to 10 Saturdays per year for 3 years at Whitley College. The program is taught in English but allows time for participants to work in groups with others who speak their own first language. A highlight is a shared lunch, prepared each month by the different churches of the participants. This fosters a strong sharing of different cultures among the group.

Many students who seek enrolment in the TransFormation program have come to Australia as refugees from Burma, Sudan, Liberia, Vietnam and Cambodia. They often are working a variety of jobs to support themselves and their families, whilst undertaking further study in the program.

We consider the TransFormation program an important part of the activities at Whitley College.

Whitley College Faculty and guest lecturers donate their time to support the program. This volunteer support has helped us to maintain the cost of the program at $350 per year.

SUPPORT FROM
THE COLLIER CHARITABLE FUND

In the 13 years that the TransFormation Program has been running, we have seen growth and development in our TransFormation community. This has been in part thanks to the financial assistance of the Collier Charitable Fund in recent years.

In 2015 we have 85 students enrolled in the TransFormation program, for which they will receive a Certificate after 3 years of study. 22 of these students are also enrolled in one or more units of a Diploma in Theology, accredited through the University of Divinity.

Diploma in Theology

The Diploma in Theology is accredited through the University of Divinity.

It involves 8 units of study completed over 4 years. Six of these units are based on the regular TransFormation lectures – held 10 Saturdays a year for 3 years. English for Theology is taught separately on selected other Saturday mornings. The final subject is selected from one of the other Whitley College Biblical subjects.

The majority of participants are refugees from Burma – either Karen or Chin ethnicity. Others are Vietnamese, Filipino, Samoan, and Hungarian.

Diploma units qualify for FEE-HELP assistance, so where possible students have used the FEE-HELP system. However the TransFormation Diploma program is open to students who are not yet Australian citizens or holders of permanent humanitarian visas and therefore are not eligible for FEE-HELP. Those students face an up-front cost of $1,320 for each unit of study while students eligible for FEE-HELP incur a debt of $1,650 per unit (undergraduate units incur a 25% loan fee).

These up-front costs or debts have proven to be a prohibitive barrier to study for many students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In 2015 the Collier Charitable Fund grant has been put toward supporting all TransFormation Diploma students, with students receiving a bursary of between $400 and $820 per unit, so that they are taking on a smaller FEE-HELP debt or are required to pay no more than $400 up-front per unit.

The generous provision of $15,000 by the Collier Charitable Fund has contributed significantly to our capacity to grant bursaries in this way in 2015, providing access to education and qualifications which were previously beyond the reach of many of our students.
Student stories

David is completing his 3rd year of the TransFormation program. In his 1st year, he did extra English studies with a view to enrolling in his Diploma, but he was not able to follow it up at that time.

In 2015, as he is no longer able to work because of ill-health, David has enrolled in 3 Diploma subjects and he hopes to complete his Diploma in 3 years. He has been in Australia for 3 years. He is married with 3 children aged 8, 4, and 3 years. He attends Chin Evangelical Church.

Yo Shu Johnson began his studies in TransFormation in 2007. He completed the 3 years and then his wife Delia began her studies in 2010. By then Yo Shu had decided to commence his Diploma studies and Delia began hers too. So they came to class together with their small baby. Together they have been involved in the TransFormation program for 7 years, which is a major commitment.

All that time the Collier Fund has supported them. Yo shu has a low paid job and also pastors their Karen language church in Laverton. They have 3 children.

Christina and Alvina are from the same Karen Baptist Church and they began their studies in 2010. From a background of minimal English they have worked hard to develop the skills required to complete their Diplomas.

They are refugees who grew up in refugee camps on the Thai Burmese borders and in Thailand.