

Evaluation of the Ballarat Industry Mentoring Pilot (BIMP)

Phase 2 Evaluation Report - Participant Experiences

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1.0 Executive summary

This report presents findings and recommendations for Phase 2 of the Ballarat Industry Mentoring Pilot (BIMP) evaluation. The report builds on findings and recommendation presented in the Phase 1 evaluation report. The evaluation of the BIMP was commissioned by Ballarat City Council and undertaken by a research and evaluation team within the Future Regions Research Centre at Federation University Australia.

The BIMP is part of a nation-wide initiative introduced by HOST International and its affiliate, Regional Opportunities Australia in October 2022 to support the settlement and integration of migrants and refugees into Australian society. The BIMP facilitates mentoring processes where migrant jobseekers are paired with industry mentors – the main aim being to assist mentees to position themselves to secure employment in the Ballarat area within their industry.

The Phase 1 evaluation of the BIMP was a desktop review, which examined *inter alia*, the criteria applied in matching local business mentors to migrant job seekers; the theoretical framework and value base shaping the BIMP and international and local benchmarking (where the BIMP was compared to similar initiatives in other OECD countries and also benchmarked against principles and standards articulated in the National Settlement Framework).

The Phase 2 evaluation reports the perspectives and experiences of mentee and mentor participants in the BIMP. These perspectives and experiences were captured from one-on-one semi-structured interviews between BIMP participants and members of the research and evaluation team. One of the participants was a mentee while 4 of the participants were mentors. Due to this numerical imbalance, the data captured from the mentee will be treated as a case study that is limited in its ability to fully represent the views and perspectives of all mentees in the BIMP initiative. The evaluation applies an interpretivist and qualitative lens to explore participants' experiences and perspectives. All Phase 2 interviewees were recruited with the assistance of the HOST International, who provided the BIMP program.

1.1 Key Findings:

The following key findings emerged from the BIMP Phase 2 Evaluation:

1. The mentee described participation in the BIMP as a highly empowering process that helped to address their 'sense of loss' after leaving behind (in their home country) their social networks, language and cultural communities and established professional roles. The mentee also described the BIMP as helping to 'speed up' their process of settling into their new living environment.

2. The BIMP helped the mentee to gain a more 'realistic' understanding of the Australian job market and the role(s) they could fulfill within it. After participating in the BIMP, they were able to adjust expectations and be more flexible about what professional roles they could secure within the local job market.
3. The mentee was highly satisfied with the criteria used to pair them to their local mentor. Additionally, the mentee was highly appreciative of the support provided by HOST International throughout their participation in the BIMP.
4. The mentee indicated their willingness to relocate to the Ballarat region if a 'good' job opportunity could be secured in that region.
5. In response to a question asking them to describe the skills and personal qualities of an ideal mentor, the mentee responded that good mentors are people who genuinely want to help; should be regularly available; be supportive encouraging and be able to assist with practical tasks such as preparing a resume. Effective mentors also need to be dynamic (or able to come up with a new discussion topic every session) and able to adopt a 'soft' approach (i.e. being sensitive to the emotions and needs of their mentee and introducing new content at a pace that is comfortable for the mentee).
6. Overall, the mentee felt more validated and more confident to 'be themselves' and assert their unique personality and cultural background within the Australian living environment.
7. Participation in the BIMP not only led to a job offer for this particular mentee, but it also increased their confidence to apply for other job opportunities elsewhere within the Australian job market.
8. BIMP mentors operate a wide variety of businesses and professional roles e.g. a public relations officer; CEO of a family-owned electronics company; an aged care/home care provider and CEO of an automotive and manufacturing business.
9. Operational challenges highlighted by mentors include finding enough skilled staff to operate businesses effectively; the impacts of Covid 19 and the Global Financial Crisis. In response to these challenges, all mentors highlighted the importance of applying creative and innovative business strategies.
10. Mentors also stressed the need to respond to cultural and demographic transformation within the local environment. All mentors indicated that such socio-cultural changes required radical rethinking of "business strategies, processes, systems and architectures."
11. All mentors shared the broad understanding that the purpose of the BIMP was to assist immigrants from diverse cultural backgrounds to secure employment in the Ballarat region.
12. All mentors expressed satisfaction with the mentee/mentor pairing process. All mentors also expressed satisfaction with the facilitative role fulfilled by HOST International.
13. While generally satisfied with the mentor/mentee pairing process, one mentor observed that a more thorough information-sharing process prior to commencement of the

mentoring partnership would have further improved the quality of their engagement with their mentee.

14. The number of mentoring sessions which mentors were able to provide depended on the unfolding circumstances of their mentees. In some cases, mentoring relationships ended after only one session after mentees secured job opportunities in Melbourne then ended their participation in the BIMP.
15. Some mentors were concerned by the distance from which their mentees engaged in the mentoring sessions, and the low likelihood of mentees relocating interstate even if then secured employment in the Ballarat region. Mentors highlighted the importance of a clear visualisation of supports, including housing provision, that would make it possible for mentees to relocate interstate. They suggested such supports could only be provided by the Ballarat Local Government Authority as a key stakeholder.
16. Mentors clearly appreciated the complexity of decision-making that a mentee would need to undergo before relocating interstate to settle in the Ballarat region. Factors in this decision making would include salary levels in Ballarat; the ability to find job opportunities that matched established professional skills and job security after arriving in the region.
17. Mentors reported using different mentoring approaches and covering various topics during their mentoring sessions. While such variability in mentoring approaches and topics might indicate responsiveness to diverse mentee backgrounds and learning needs, one mentor highlighted the need for a more structured 'mentoring syllabus' and 'template' to guide their mentoring process. This feedback points to the need to *further* strengthen the preparation or training of *all* BIMP mentors.
18. Mentors recognised the strategic importance of attracting skilled immigrants to the Ballarat region to ensure the sustainable growth and economic development of the region.
19. Participation in the BIMP equipped mentors with a deeper understanding of challenges faced by Australian immigrants. All mentors also reported that the experience changed their perception and made them more open or willing to employ migrant employees within their businesses in future.
20. All mentors expressed strong support for the BIMP. They were highly satisfied with the facilitation provided by HOST International. As one mentor put it, "...the BIMP was a really positive experience that I'd hate to see fall by the wayside."

1.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations follow from data gathered during the Phase 2 interviews. These recommendations should be read in conjunction with, but may also modify, some of the recommendations from Phase 1 of the BIMP evaluation.

1. Continue to support delivery the BIMP in line with (and as per broad principles articulated in) the National Settlement Framework (NSF). Based on data provided by the mentee case study, the BIMP has the capacity to empower, validate and raise the self-confidence of migrants settling into the Australian living environment while also helping them to gain a more realistic estimation of the professional roles they could fulfil within the local job market. Data gathered from the mentors show that the BIMP has a significant educational value for mentor participants. It has the capacity to transform their perceptions of migrant job seekers and to make them more open (or willing) to employ migrant job seekers in their businesses.
2. Continue to partner HOST International and other non-Government organisations to sustain and strengthen delivery of the BIMP. Feedback from the mentee and the mentors indicates that all participants were highly satisfied with the pairing process and the supportive and facilitative fulfilled by HOST International. This recommendation aligns with NSF principles that support working partnerships between Local Government Authorities and Community based agencies in delivering effective migrant settlement programs such as the BIMP.
3. Following on from Recommendations 1 and 2 (above), continue to prioritise the 3 key delivery areas highlighted in the NSF (i.e. effective planning, delivery and project evaluation). The BIMP is of strategic importance as it helps to attract skilled migrants to the Ballarat region, ensuring the sustained economic growth and development of the Ballarat region.
4. Continue to support the BIMP as it also has the potential to promote interculturalism and social cohesion within the Ballarat region. As outlined in the Phase 1 report, 'intercultural integration' envisages mutual learning and two-way exchange between cultural groups sharing the same community (Guidikova, 2018). Social cohesion is premised on the ability of "...individuals and groups with different cultures, values, beliefs, lifestyles, and socio-economic resources [living in the same community] to have equal access to all domains of societal life and live together without conflict" (Scheifer & van der Noll, 2017, p. 584). Both the mentee and the mentors interviewed during the Phase 2 evaluation expressed the desire to engage cross-culturally, and to continue to deepen such cross-cultural relationships.
5. Consider future initiatives to support the further training and preparation of BIMP mentors. The mentee participant provided insights into personal and professional qualities that define an effective mentor. Mentors also reflected on their mentoring processes with one mentor highlighting the need for a more structured and guided approach to further strengthen their mentoring effectiveness. Additional investment in mentor support and training is recommended to ensure all mentors are highly effective and prepared to address the individual, learning styles and learning preferences of their mentees.

6. Consider additional strategies to provide broader supports to interstate mentees. As highlighted during the mentor interviews, interstate relocation is a complex and daunting process. Any practical relocation supports (such as the provision of housing) would attract more skilled migrants to relocate to the Ballarat region. Such supports would also align with principles and recommendations articulated in the NSF.
7. Finally, the pattern where some BIMP mentees have not relocated to the Ballarat region (and have found employment in Melbourne, for example) should not be interpreted as a failure of the BIMP initiative. Rather, it should be recognised that the BIMP has several intangible (or unquantifiable) benefits. For example, it has shifted mentor perceptions thus increasing their willingness to employ migrant employees within their businesses in future. Such shifts in attitude prepare the Ballarat region for a more culturally diverse, vibrant and prosperous future.

2.0 Introduction

This report documents Phase 2 of the BIMP evaluation conducted by a research team in the Future Regions Research Centre at Federation University Australia. Phase 1 evaluation was a desktop review that identified the strengths and potential limitations of BIMP, reviewed its broad aims and benchmarked it against similar international initiatives and principles articulated in the NSF. The aim of the Phase 2 evaluation is to capture participant experiences and perspectives in order to garner insights that could further strengthen the BIMP. A particular focus of the Phase 2 evaluation is to gauge the effectiveness or adequacy of the training and support provided to BIMP participants.

2.1 Background and context

The background and context of this evaluation were provided in the Phase 1 report, which outlined a paradox where increasing numbers of migrants settling in the Ballarat region have not translated into a more robust workforce geared to driving economic growth and development in the region (Ballarat Council, n.d.). Thus, the City of Ballarat has partnered with Community Service Agencies (such as HOST International) to address this paradox.

As also outlined in the Phase 1 Report, the BIMP was initiated in October 2022 to support eligible immigrants to secure employment in the Ballarat region through mentoring partnerships with local employers seeking to fill gaps within their workforces. The overarching aim of the BIMP is to provide mentees with unique industry mentoring opportunities designed to lead to 'fast-tracked' employment offers.

3.0 Literature outline

A review of relevant literature was undertaken as part of the Phase 1 evaluation. Key insights, from the literature, are that Australia is transforming into a multicultural society with more than 33% of its population born overseas and 22.2% of households using a language other than English (ABS, 2016). Most immigrants to Australia have settled in major urban areas (Chand & Tung, 2019). However, a growing number are settling in Australia's regional or rural areas (Forrest & Dunn, 2013; Wilding & Nunn, 2017). As shown by recent data, approximately 18% of people living in Ballarat were born overseas (ABS, 2016) – and this population fraction is projected to increase in future (Boese & Phillips, 2017; Dufty-Jones, 2014; Forrest & Dunn, 2013).

The literature survey also compared the BIMP to similar programs introduced in OECD countries such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Germany, Italy, Canada, Austria, Sweden and Finland (Weiss & Tulin, 2021; Jayne, 2010; Mansson & Delander, 2017). These interventions have placed a strong emphasis on building trusting relationships between multicultural job seekers and local business mentors – the hope being that such relationships increase the probability of mentees securing and maintaining employment opportunities in their new living environments (Gower, Jeemi & Dantas, 2022).

Some of the key principles shaping migrant professional mentoring programs were also discussed in the Phase 1 report. These include Human-centred design (Norman & Spencer, 2019), interculturalism (Mansson & Belander, 2017; White, 2021; Guilherme & Dietz, 2015); social cohesion (Scheifer & van der Noll, 2017; Moran & Mallman, 2019) and the application of a multisectoral approach that partners local government authorities with other community-based stakeholders (Gower et al, 2022).

The literature review also highlighted key strengths and challenges faced by migrant professional mentoring programs. It was noted that such programs have the potential to increase cultural, informational, psychological and economic capital and are able to lead to improved wellbeing through education, social connectedness, and access to other resources (Bagnoli & Estache, 2021; Gower et al., 2022). Challenges relate to the insufficiency of these programs as 'standalone' interventions (Gower et al., 2022; Bagnoli & Estache, 2021); differences of expectations between local business mentors and migrant mentees (Gower et al., 2022) and a lack of role clarity and effective mentoring strategies in some local business mentors (Tynewydd et al., 2021; De Cuyper et al., 2019).

Finally, some recommendations for best practice were offered as part of this literature survey, as follows:

- Mentoring programs need to be complemented by other social support interventions in order for them to address the structural of systemic barriers preventing migrants from accessing local job opportunities (Gower et al., 2022; Bagnoli & Estache, 2021).

- It is important to ensure that mentors and mentees have the same expectations (Gower et al., 2022). Having detailed knowledge about mentees is therefore key to the success of mentoring programs (Bagnoli & Estache, 2021).
- Language and communications skills are important and need to be factored into mentoring processes (Steel, Lämsä & Jyrkinen, 2019). Furthermore, disempowering representations of migrant mentees in social discourses need to be addressed (Steel, Lämsä & Jyrkinen, 2019).
- Successful mentoring hinges on quality screening, training, and supervision of mentors (Bagnoli & Estache, 2021; Gower et al., 2022). Additionally, it is very important to provide clear guidelines and frameworks to direct and focus mentoring processes (Bagnoli & Estache, 2021; De Cuyper et al., 2019;).
- Mentors and mentees need to be carefully matched. The matching process should take account of personal outlook and personality factors (Gower et al, 2022; Neuwirth & Wahl, 2017).

4.0 Research Method

The Phase 2 evaluation applied a mixed suit of research methods including qualitative, interpretivist and case study approaches to investigate BIMP mentee and mentor experiences. In-depth and semi-structured interviews were used to investigate participant perspectives and experiences. A particular focus of the investigation was assessment of the quality of the support and training provided to BIMP participants, and how sufficient this preparation was for them to engage in the mentoring processes effectively.

4.1 Data Collection and Analysis

A purposive sampling approach, facilitated by HOST International, was used to identify participants willing to contribute to the Phase 2 evaluation. All BIMP participants (both mentees and mentors) were invited to participate in the phase 2 interviews. In line with protocols approved by the Federation University Research Ethics Committee, interested participants were provided with a Plain Language Statement outlining the purpose of the evaluation and an informed consent form which they emailed back to the principal researcher. One BIMP mentee and 4 BIMP mentors were recruited for the Phase 2 evaluation. The imbalance in mentee and mentor interviewees necessitated the adoption of a case study approach to explore the perspectives and experiences of the mentees. This was in recognition that the views and experiences of one participant it may not necessarily represent the perspectives and experiences of the larger mentee cohort. All interviews were conducted online (via Teams) and each lasted approximately 1 hour.

The following interview schedule was designed for mentee participants:

1. Let's begin with your story, how you came to Australia. Can you tell me a little bit about your journey and how you ended up in the area where you now live?
2. What are some of the challenges you have faced as an immigrant settling in Australia?
3. How did you first hear about the BIMP project? What attracted you to the project?
4. In your view, what are the most important benefits of joining the BIMP?
5. Do you think the process used to pair mentees and mentors in the BIMP was good/effective? How could this process have been done better?
6. How many mentoring sessions have you done so far? Have there been any challenges or difficulties in attending or participating in these mentoring sessions?
7. What are the key things that you have learnt as a mentee in the BIMP?
8. What areas could be improved if the BIMP was provided again in future?
9. What do you think are the greatest qualities of a good mentor?
10. Let's switch gears now. What would you do if you were a mentor mentoring a multicultural job seeker? Why would you do that?
11. What feedback would you like to provide to me, HOST International or Ballarat City Council on the BIMP?
12. Has participation in the BIMP increased your confidence that you can apply for a local job and find a place within the Australia job market?

The following interview schedule was designed for BIMP mentors

1. Let's begin with an overview of the business you run here in Ballarat. When did it start - and what services do you provide?
2. What are some of the challenges you have faced as a business operator in this region?
3. How did you first hear about the BIMP project? What attracted you to the project?
4. In your view, what are the priorities and key outcomes the BIMP?
5. What is your assessment of pairing process that was used to identify mentors and mentees in the BIMP? Do you think this process could have been done better?
6. How many mentoring sessions have you done so far? Have there been any challenges or difficulties in organizing or running the mentoring sessions?
7. What are the main areas that you cover or focus on during the mentoring process?
8. How effective is the mentoring process? What areas would you like to improve in your mentoring?
9. What areas do you think mentees should work on, in order to benefit the most from the BIMP?
10. What feedback would you like to provide to me, HOST International or Ballarat City Council on the BIMP?
11. Has participation in the BIMP made you more open/willing to employ migrant employees in future? If so, how has this happened?

Interview notes (including some direct quotations) were collected and then thematically coded. Such thematic coding of data facilitates thematic interpretation (Kumar, 2010).

5.0 Findings

The following findings emerged from the BIMP Phase 2 Evaluation:

1. For the mentee who volunteered to share their perspective and experiences, the BIMP was

a highly empowering process. It addressed the sense of loss experienced by the mentee who had to make 'a fresh start' in Australia after leaving their home country. Asked what they meant when they referred to a sense of loss, the participant highlighted the loss of their language and cultural communities, forfeiture of their established social networks and loss of their established social position and professional role and status. The participant described the BIMP and helping to 'speed up' integration and belonging within their new living environment.

2. The mentee also reported gaining a more 'realistic' estimation of the professional roles and job opportunities that they could secure in Australia. In a sense, participation in the BIMP helped them to adjust their expectations and become more open (or flexible) about possible job opportunities that they could pursue or consider.
3. The mentee was highly appreciative of the pairing method used by HOST International to attach them to their local mentor. The mentee was also highly appreciative of the support provided by HOST International.
4. The BIMP mentee expressed a willingness to relocate to the Ballarat region if a 'good' job opportunity presented itself.
5. The mentee described the 'ideal mentor' as someone "...who genuinely wants to help". Mentors should be regularly available (e.g. meet their mentee at least once per week); be encouraging and supportive and be also able to assist with practical tasks (e.g. preparing a resume or providing coaching on interviewing skills). Additionally, effective mentors needed to be dynamic (e.g. coming up with a new discussion topic for every session). Mentors also needed to adopt a 'soft' approach, described as being sensitive to the needs and emotions of their mentee and covering new content at a pace that was comfortable for their mentee.
6. Overall, participation in the BIMP enabled the mentee to feel more validated and more comfortable and confident to assert their unique personality, cultural background and professional skills.
7. Participation in the BIMP not only led to a job offer for this mentee. It also increased their confidence to apply for other job opportunities elsewhere within the Australian job market.
8. The BIMP recruited local mentors operating a wide variety of businesses e.g. a communication and public relations officer, a third-generation CEO of a family-owned electronics company; an aged care/home care provider and a COE of an automotive and manufacturing business.
9. BIMP mentors highlighted several operational challenges that businesses in the Ballarat region are facing. These include finding enough skilled staff to operate businesses effectively, navigating the effects or after-effects of the Covid 19 pandemic and weathering the current Global Financial Crisis. Mentors further observed that these challenges call for

creative and innovative business strategies.

10. Mentors also highlighted the importance of responding to cultural and demographic changes occurring within their local environment. As one mentor observed, “Ballarat has transformed over the past 10 years from a parochial ‘neck of the woods’ populated by Anglo-Saxon Catholics and protestants to a more culturally diverse community”. All mentors agreed that such changes called for a radical recalibration of “business strategies, processes, systems and architectures.” The need to rethink business strategies was identified as highly necessary by all of mentors. As one mentor put it, “We were already looking for opportunities to diversify our workforces before we heard about the BIMP initiative. So, we had approached organisations such as Commerce Ballarat; Central Highlands LLEN and MGET to seek support with strategies that would enable us to connect to diverse cultural groups within the Ballarat region”.
11. All mentors shared the common understanding that the overarching purpose of the BIMP is to assist immigrants from diverse cultural backgrounds to secure employment in the Ballarat region. One mentor understood the main priority of the BIMP as “...to help mentees to gain confidence in the area...both in terms of moving to the region and the work that we do” while another mentor expressed disappointment that they had had “...very little engagement with their mentee since the mentee ended up finding a job in Melbourne and then ended their participation in the BIMP.” In both cases, the shared understanding was that the BIMP was primarily geared to attract skilled migrant employees to the Ballarat region.
12. All mentors were highly appreciative of the facilitative role fulfilled by HOST International – and most were highly satisfied with the mentee-mentor pairing process. “I found the staff at HOST excellent. They were responsive, and I think they did their best to try and identify someone who matched what we were looking for.”
13. While all interviewees described mentee/mentor pairing as generally effective and successful, one mentor suggested that a more thorough information-sharing process, prior to commencement of the mentoring sessions, would have further improved the quality of their engagements: “Mentee skills were not very well explained in their CV. Their aspirations didn’t come through their CV. Therefore it was difficult to know beforehand exactly what my mentoring role with this very bright individual would be”.
14. Mentors provided varying numbers of mentoring sessions, depending on the circumstances of their mentees. While most reported providing 3 or more sessions, 2 mentors reported having to stop after only one session since their mentees had secured employment in Melbourne and then decided to end their participation in the BIMP.
15. One mentor was concerned with the distant locations of some of the mentees: “Coming here

from Brisbane or Tasmania would be pretty difficult really. I think we should concentrate on people near or around Ballarat.” Another mentor observed that a clear visualisation of the requirements needed to persuade a mentee to relocate interstate was necessary. They suggested that more robust supports with priority needs such as housing, needed to be put in place ‘as part of the package’ with the help of Ballarat City Council and other stakeholders.

16. Mentors also highlighted the complexity of the decision to relocate interstate in order for mentees to settle in the Ballarat region. Factors to consider included: the salary levels offered by job opportunities in Ballarat; the closeness of matches between mentee skill sets and the professional roles available in Ballarat and job security after arriving in the region. One mentor further described this complexity as follows: “Mentees need to consider whether or not they are keen to come to the regions. Is it a real driver? Do they have a desire to actually be employed in a region? Mentees would benefit from also considering how they can add to the value of an organisation. You take a risk and they take a risk. There is a need to know that both will have added value over time. So, they need to research the organisation and find out about it prior to first meeting.”
17. Mentors used different mentoring approaches and covered various topics during the mentoring sessions. For example, one mentor paid close attention to the mentee’s story: “I asked questions to highlight strengths, values and aspirations. My mentee asked about opportunities and lifestyle in a regional city and was interested in the differences between living in a regional city and Melbourne.” Another mentor focused on the need to adjust employment role expectations to take full advantage of opportunities available in the local job market while yet another mentor focused on ‘self-marketing’ including developing a strong LinkedIn profile. While such variation in mentoring approaches and topics covered, makes sense – given the diverse needs, personalities and backgrounds of the mentees, one mentor suggested that the provision of a mentoring structure or template would be beneficial: “I found the lack of structure interesting. I did follow up with HOST International and they responded to me. I would have liked more direction on how to conduct the mentoring. I was surprised that there was no mentoring framework with key touchpoints.” This feedback is interesting given that BIMP mentors receive a mentors’ handbook that provides a mentoring framework in addition to other resources (e.g. a First Meeting Checklist and a Goal Setting Template). It may be necessary to review the quality of training materials provided to BIMP mentors together with the delivery (or effective ‘uptake’) of these training materials.
18. All mentors recognised the strategic economic importance of attracting skilled immigrant professionals to the Ballarat region. As one mentor observed, “The future growth of regional Australia and cities such as Ballarat hinges on getting the best quality talent to come here – and our ability to use multiple channels and pathways to reach this goal.”

19. Mentors reported that participation in the BIMP gave them new insights into the challenges faced by migrants seeking employment. In the words of one participant: “Hearing the lived experience of new immigrants is very enlightening on how hard it is to get work in specialty areas relevant to a person’s skillset and education. You get an elevated understanding of the issues people are facing.”
20. All mentors also reported that participation in the BIMP has made them more open or willing to employ migrant employees in future. One mentor went further to suggest they had become motivated to also educate their customers to accept culturally-diverse employees in their business. Another mentor reflected that their participation in the BIMP had sharpened their ability to identify what to look for when interviewing migrant job seekers.
21. All mentors expressed strong support for the BIMP and were highly satisfied with the facilitation provided by HOST International. As one mentor put it, “I was pleased with the level of communication with HOST International who were responsive and always closed the loop.” Another mentor described the BIMP as “a really positive experience that I’d hate to see fall by the wayside.”

6.0 Descriptive Thematic Analysis

Several key themes emerged from this evaluation:

All interviewees (the mentee and mentors) experienced the BIMP as both positive and transformative. For the mentee, participation in the BIMP increased self-confidence; clarity on the professional roles they could realistically fulfill within the local job market and the speed with which they could settle into their new living environment (Bagnoli & Estache, 2021; Gower et al., 2022). For mentors, the BIMP fostered a shift in attitude, particularly, a clearer understanding of challenges faced by immigrant job seekers and becoming more open or willing to employ immigrants within their organisations in the future. These experiences cultivated trust and intercultural understanding – a valuable form of social capital (Hazleton & Kennan, 2000) that could translate into stronger social cohesion within the Ballarat community.

The mentoring process also generated thoughtful reflections on personal and interpersonal qualities that ideal mentors should possess; the characteristics of effective mentoring processes and pros and cons of delivering structured (as opposed to unstructured) mentoring programs (Gower et al., 2022; Bagnoli & Estache, 2021). These reflections warrant further consideration and point to the need to better prepare (or train) future BIMP mentors so that the quality and effectiveness of their mentoring engagements is optimised.

The diversity of mentors who participated in the BIMP speaks to the versatility and flexibility of the mentoring program. At the same time, it underscores the reality that notwithstanding

their diversity, contemporary businesses face roughly similar or comparable environmental or operational challenges. Thus, it was interesting to note that almost all local business mentors were *already* open to the idea of participating in the BIMP initiative, with some indicating they were seeking opportunities to recalibrate their business strategies, processes, and systems.

It was clearly established that local business mentors recognise the strategic value of attracting skilled migrants to the Ballarat region in order ensure future business growth and positive social development. Furthermore, all participants (both the mentee and the mentors) were highly appreciative of the supportive and facilitative role fulfilled during the delivery of the BIMP by HOST International. Such positive feedback affirms the strategic value of the partnership between Ballarat City Council and HOST International in delivering and supporting the BIMP.

Finally, mentors were cognizant of the need to broaden the supports provided to BIMP mentees by including critical needs such as housing as this would enable the program to attract more immigrant job seekers (including those participating from interstate) to relocate to the Ballarat region (Gower et al, 2022).

7.0 Recommendations

The following recommendations, reproduced here for easy reference, have been developed from findings of the Phase 2 interviews. These recommendations should be read in conjunction with those developed from the Phase 1 Evaluation.

1. Continue to support delivery the BIMP in line with (and as per broad principles articulated in) the National Settlement Framework (NSF). Based on data provided by the mentee case study, the BIMP has the capacity to empower, validate and raise the self-confidence of migrants settling into the Australian living environment while also helping them to gain a more realistic estimation of the professional roles they could fulfil within the local job market. Data gathered from the mentors show that the BIMP has a significant educational value for mentor participants. It has the capacity to transform their perceptions of migrant job seekers and to make them more open (or willing) to employ migrant job seekers in their businesses.
2. Continue to partner HOST International and other non-Government organisations to sustain and strengthen delivery of the BIMP. Feedback from the mentee and the mentors indicates that all participants were highly satisfied with the pairing process and the supportive and facilitative fulfilled by HOST International. This recommendation aligns with NSF principles that support working partnerships between Local Government Authorities and Community based agencies in delivering effective migrant settlement programs such as the BIMP.
3. Following on from Recommendations 1 and 2 (above), continue to prioritise the 3 key

delivery areas highlighted in the NSF (i.e. effective planning, delivery and project evaluation). The BIMP is of strategic importance as it helps to attract skilled migrants to the Ballarat region, ensuring the sustained economic growth and development of the Ballarat region.

4. Continue to support the BIMP as it also has the potential to promote interculturalism and social cohesion within the Ballarat region. As outlined in the Phase 1 report, 'intercultural integration' envisages mutual learning and two-way exchange between cultural groups sharing the same community (Guidikova, 2018). Social cohesion is premised on the ability of "...individuals and groups with different cultures, values, beliefs, lifestyles, and socio-economic resources [living in the same community] to have equal access to all domains of societal life and live together without conflict" (Scheifer & van der Noll, 2017, p. 584). Both the mentee and the mentors interviewed during the Phase 2 evaluation expressed the desire to engage cross-culturally, and to continue to deepen such cross-cultural relationships.
5. Consider future initiatives to support the further training and preparation of BIMP mentors. The mentee participant provided insights into personal and professional qualities that define an effective mentor. Mentors also reflected on their mentoring processes with one mentor highlighting the need for a more structured and guided approach to further strengthen their mentoring effectiveness. Additional investment in mentor support and training is recommended to ensure all mentors are highly effective and prepared to address the individual, learning styles and learning preferences of their mentees.
6. Consider additional strategies to provide broader supports to interstate mentees. As highlighted during the mentor interviews, interstate relocation is a complex and daunting process. Any practical relocation supports (such as the provision of housing) would attract more skilled migrants to relocate to the Ballarat region. Such supports would also align with principles and recommendations articulated in the NSF.
7. Finally, the pattern where some BIMP mentees have not relocated to the Ballarat region (and have found employment in Melbourne, for example) should not be interpreted as a failure of the BIMP initiative. Rather, it should be recognised that the BIMP has several intangible (or unquantifiable) benefits. For example, it has shifted mentor perceptions thus increasing their willingness to employ migrant employees within their businesses in future. Such shifts in attitude prepare the Ballarat region for a more culturally diverse, vibrant and prosperous future.

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