



TEN  
IDEAS  
THREE  
VENTURES:  
IMPROVING  
MENTAL HEALTH  
WITH YOUNG  
SOUTH SUDANESE  
AUSTRALIANS

Delivered by South Sudanese Australian Communities





JOIN  
US

Thank you to the governance group overseeing this work, including South Sudanese Australians, The Department of Health and Human Services, North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network and cohealth. Thank you also to Halakhe Ganyu who has provided mental health advice and counselling services throughout, and to Dr. William Abur whose desktop research also informed this work.

This showcase was co-designed and written in partnership with young South Sudanese Australians and Lucy Fraser and Jess De Campo from The Australian Centre for Social Innovation.

**These ideas and ventures have great momentum, and now we're seeking partners to continue this energy and community. The opportunity is to support cost-effective, shovel ready projects, working with a strong and committed group of young people to make a difference to wellbeing in the South Sudanese Australian communities.**

**If you're interested in partnering with the South Sudanese Australian communities in Western metropolitan Melbourne to deliver and develop these ventures, please get in touch at [hello@ssamind.org](mailto:hello@ssamind.org)**

## CONTENTS

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	7
<u>THE VISION</u>	8
<u>BACKGROUND</u>	13
<u>10 IDEAS 3 VENTURES</u>	12
<u>THE TEAM</u>	22
<u>PARTNERSHIPS</u>	27

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY



Young People of the South Sudanese Australian Community within Western metropolitan Melbourne would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, on which this project and research were conducted.

The young people of the South Sudanese community acknowledge the pain, hurt and suffering experienced within Australia postcolonialism; and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were subjected to crude and racist policies, attitudes and customs postcolonialism.

The young people of the South Sudanese Australian Community acknowledge the young men and women who've been exposed to violence within public and private spaces, within Institutions of Learning and Higher Education, who've been victimised by the State, Judicial and Policing Systems.

The young people of the South Sudanese Australian community acknowledge that racism and hatred have hugely and negatively impacted the lives of young Aboriginal and Torres Islander people, and their Mental Health and Wellbeing.

Young People of the South Sudanese Australian Community acknowledge that sovereignty had never been ceded in Australia, and we extend our efforts and support to the First Nations and Indigenous people in the upheaval of justice and righting wrongs.

The young people of the South Sudanese Community pay their respects and acknowledge the collective efforts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people as leaders and community advocates.

We acknowledge the hard work, labour and love it takes to not only liberate a community, but to educate and support community in autonomy, self-determination and self-actualization.

The youngest Nation in the World and one of the youngest newly migrated communities within Australia, the young people of the South Sudanese Australian Community acknowledge all Communities that are Culturally and Linguistically Diverse and are striving to provide for themselves, families and communities.

We acknowledge that in order to protect our loved ones and or families, we must abandon our homes and livelihoods, embark on dangerous journeys to foreign lands for equal rights and opportunities for generations to come.

The Young People of the South Sudanese Australian Community pay their respects to the Elders within our community who have guided families and young people traditionally.

Most importantly however, Young People within the South Sudanese Australian community thank and are deeply grateful to have been welcomed and afforded opportunities of success within these lands.

We share our deepest sympathies and condolences to the 441+ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims who've tragically lost their lives in custody.

To Elders past, present and emerging of the Kulin Nation, we pay our respects, and extend our respects to Indigenous and First Nations, Nationwide.

WRITTEN  
BY  
AWAK  
KONGER

# INTRO- DUCTION

## INTRODUCTION



2020 has been an unprecedented year with enforced isolation, high unemployment, grief and uncertainty. The impact on mental health has been significant with a quarter of the Australian population experiencing mild to moderate depression and anxiety.<sup>1</sup>

For South Sudanese Australians navigating multiple cultures the pandemic adds additional strain to existing issues, including the impact of racism, mental ill health and suicide, media scrutiny and past and present intergenerational trauma. For many older, and some younger, South Sudanese Australians, mental health is also considered a 'taboo' topic.<sup>2</sup>

**"Mental health is a big issue and sometimes we deny it, which can lead to serious mental breakdowns if left without tackling it," an older South Sudanese Australian told us.**

However, the social interdependence and connection needed to get through a crisis like this isn't new for many young South Sudanese Australians. They were already helping siblings learn at home, mowing the lawn for their parents, mentoring their peers and advocating for a fairer future. The young South Sudanese Australians contributing to this project are creative, smart, hardworking and generous members of our community. They remind us that young people have so much to contribute in improving mental wellbeing and social cohesion.

It's clear that we need to look at community mental health with a new lens, and need solutions that come from, work with and for communities, are cost-effective and have demonstrated value. The resilience and resources already existing in communities must be supported to lead the way to better mental wellbeing.

To help improve the mental health of young people, South Sudanese Australian communities in Western metropolitan Melbourne developed and are currently delivering community led interventions. Together with TACSI these initiatives were supported by cohealth and the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

In partnership, ten ideas were developed to improve wellbeing, with three of these then delivered and evaluated by community members. The three ventures have now been in implementation for five months and are ready to continue delivery.

All three are cost effective to implement, and primed to continue operating online or with an in-person adaptation. In addition they're endorsed by South Sudanese Australians and have young people ready and able to lead them.

This prospectus showcases the resourcefulness of South Sudanese Australian communities and their ideas about how to support their recovery and resilience. It's our hope that continued support is found to enable the communities to lead their own recovery during this uncertain time.

<sup>1</sup> [www.mja.com.au/journal/2020/mental-health-people-australia-first-month-covid-19-restrictions-national-survey](http://www.mja.com.au/journal/2020/mental-health-people-australia-first-month-covid-19-restrictions-national-survey)

<sup>2</sup> [www.sbs.com.au/news/melbourne-s-south-sudanese-youth-say-they-re-sick-of-losing-their-friends-to-suicide](http://www.sbs.com.au/news/melbourne-s-south-sudanese-youth-say-they-re-sick-of-losing-their-friends-to-suicide)

# VISION

THE VISION

Young South Sudanese Australians are proud of the different facets of their identity, and how they've created a unique culture for themselves. The initial wave of first generation South Sudanese Australians are leaving their teenage years (with most migration from South Sudan via refugee camps in Egypt and more in the early 2000s), and they want something better for their younger peers.

**"It's integral to create a safe and familiar space for young people to interact in. That's the only way we can get raw and honest conversations." - Young South Sudanese Australian person**

Many young people want to talk about mental health but don't have permission or avenues for those conversations. Many young people are already using all their energy to support their friends, and need help to keep this up.

South Sudanese Australian communities have bright hopes for their wellbeing and future. The ideas developed and trailed by the communities we believe have potential to contribute to this vision.

**"[I want] to make conversations around mental health so normal. So normal that we don't have to have programs like this unfortunately - just to get conversations started and get people talking about it. I want it to become so normal that you can approach your parents about everyday situations, you don't have to wait till situations get really shitty in order for something to happen." - Young South Sudanese Australian project lead**

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The ideas within this showcase reflect a community-led approach that aims to empower, respect and recognise the capacity of communities to forge their own path to wellbeing.

We also acknowledge the need for systems, politics, the media and broader Australian community to move beyond unhelpful narratives, and instead help create the conditions for the South Sudanese Australian communities to thrive.

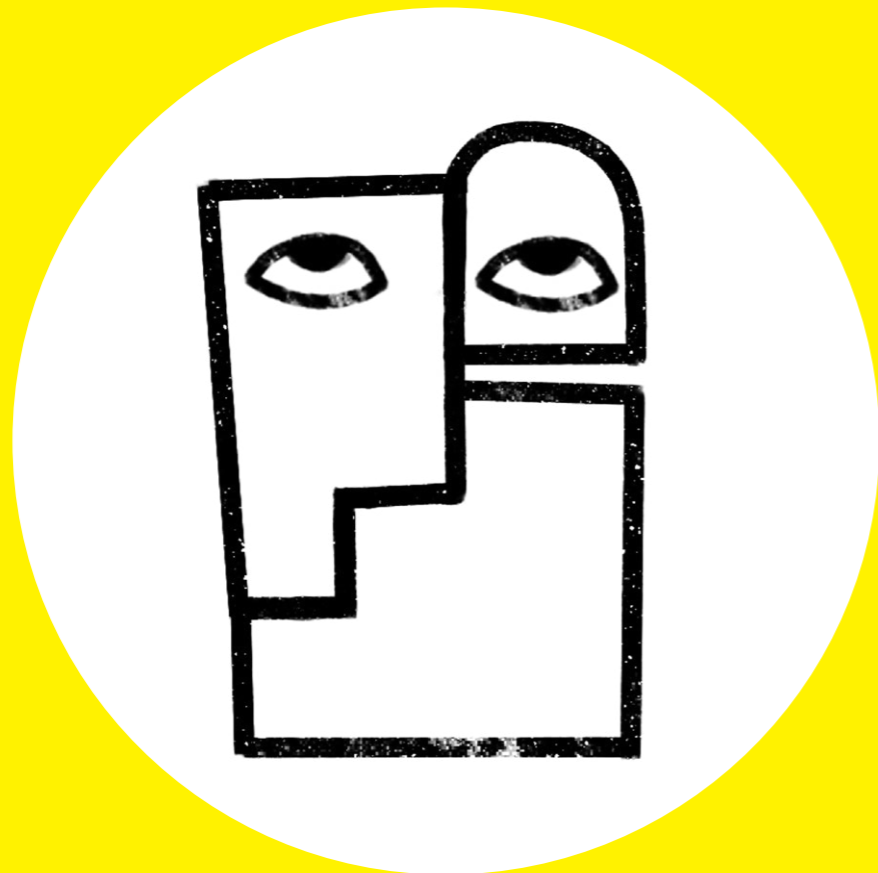
South Sudanese Australian young people shared the following about how the project's collaborative approach worked for them:

"IF WE DON'T COME TOGETHER AS ONE  
AND TALK ABOUT SOCIAL ISSUES AFFECTING  
US AS A COMMUNITY, WE WILL FOREVER  
BE DIVIDED. TACKLING THESE ISSUES  
TOGETHER WILL UNIFY US AND MAKE US  
STRONGER AS A COMMUNITY. WE CAN  
ALL LEARN SOMETHING FROM THE OTHER  
GENERATION."

OLDER SOUTH SUDANESE  
AUSTRALIAN GUEST

"USUALLY WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY  
WHEN OLDER PEOPLE TAKE CHARGE  
OF THINGS THEY HAVE THEIR OWN  
AGENDA AND USUALLY LEAVE OUT THE  
YOUNG PEOPLE. SO WITH THIS NEW  
APPROACH, GETTING YOUNG PEOPLE TO  
LEAD IT AND GETTING OLDER PEOPLE  
TO HELP OUT HERE AND THERE, THAT  
GOT THEIR ATTENTION AND GOT THEM  
TO ENGAGE WITH US MORE."

YOUNG SOUTH SUDANESE  
AUSTRALIAN PROJECT LEAD



## BACKGROUND

Melbourne is home to the largest South Sudanese community in Australia. In 2018, the community experienced increased scrutiny, in a way that South Sudanese Australian Communities and TACSI felt was divisive, racist and harmful.

In response, South Sudanese Australian communities, service providers and government collectively proposed ways to enable the community to thrive. That project resulted in the on-going funding of 'Talk with Me,' a program that connects generations within the South Sudanese Australian community.

**This second project is specifically focussed on improving the mental health of young people, and was catalysed by a tragic string of suicides and stress related deaths in communities in 2018 and 2019.**

Then, in the initial stages of the project, Covid-19 hit, and we had to rethink how to run the project under the new constraints. All three solutions trialled pivoted to be delivered online during Melbourne's first and second lockdown. This required incredible flexibility from the project team and was not without its challenges. Yet the online ventures were all highly engaging for communities and young people spoke about their particular effectiveness in isolation of lock-down.

Looking forward, the team has also developed strategies about how the ideas could be delivered 'in person' when circumstances change.

For each venture, a delivery pack has been designed to support current and future young people and partners.

**"SINCE RUNNING THIS PROJECT WE  
HAVE BEEN HAVING MORE OPEN  
CONVERSATIONS AROUND MENTAL  
HEALTH IN OUR COMMUNITY.  
PERSONALLY I HAVE SEEN A  
CHANGE IN THE COMMUNITY IN  
HAVING CONVERSATIONS MORE  
ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH"  
- YOUNG SOUTH SUDANESE  
AUSTRALIAN PROJECT LEAD**

## 10 IDEAS 3 VENTURES

Three ideas were selected by South Sudanese Australians from the following ten as the most likely to improve mental wellbeing outcomes.

Under the umbrella name "South Sudanese Minds", these ventures moved into delivery with young people leading the way.

View the 3 ventures in focus over the following pages.

### 1. THE CULTURE PARTY

The Culture Party is an event on Instagram Live celebrating South Sudanese Australian talent and simultaneously conducting live interviews with artists about mental health and wellbeing. The first live Culture Party was watched by more than 600 South Sudanese Australian young people.

### MEDIDA & CHILL

Come together in a safe space to share tea and medida (South Sudanese porridge). Share cultural information and do South Sudanese trivia. This program has been trialled with success already by Next in Colour and young people wanted to see it expand.

### OFF THE GRID

Titan Debirioun has run a music program that aims to connect the South Sudanese diaspora. The idea would be to restart and expand this program, helping young people express their identity through music.

### MEN'S DAY SPA

A male-led self-care day: relax and take care, while also learning about managing stress, anger, anxiety.

### 3RD CULTURE CONNECTIONS

Bringing together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and South Sudanese Australian young people to connect and learn from each other's unique experience.

### PARENTS & CHILDREN FILM

Using film to share stories of older and younger generations and break down barriers. A 'day in the life of' film to help generations see life through each other's eyes.

### COOL CULTURE

Fun, social opportunities to learn and practice culture. It could be dancing, theatre in Dinka, wrestling; young people would be involved in the organisation.

### 2. MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING

Culturally safe and informal mental health training for young people. This idea is also about building a network of young people with mental health training who can support each other. We also ran subsidised counselling for young people needing professional support.

### 3. CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN GENERATIONS

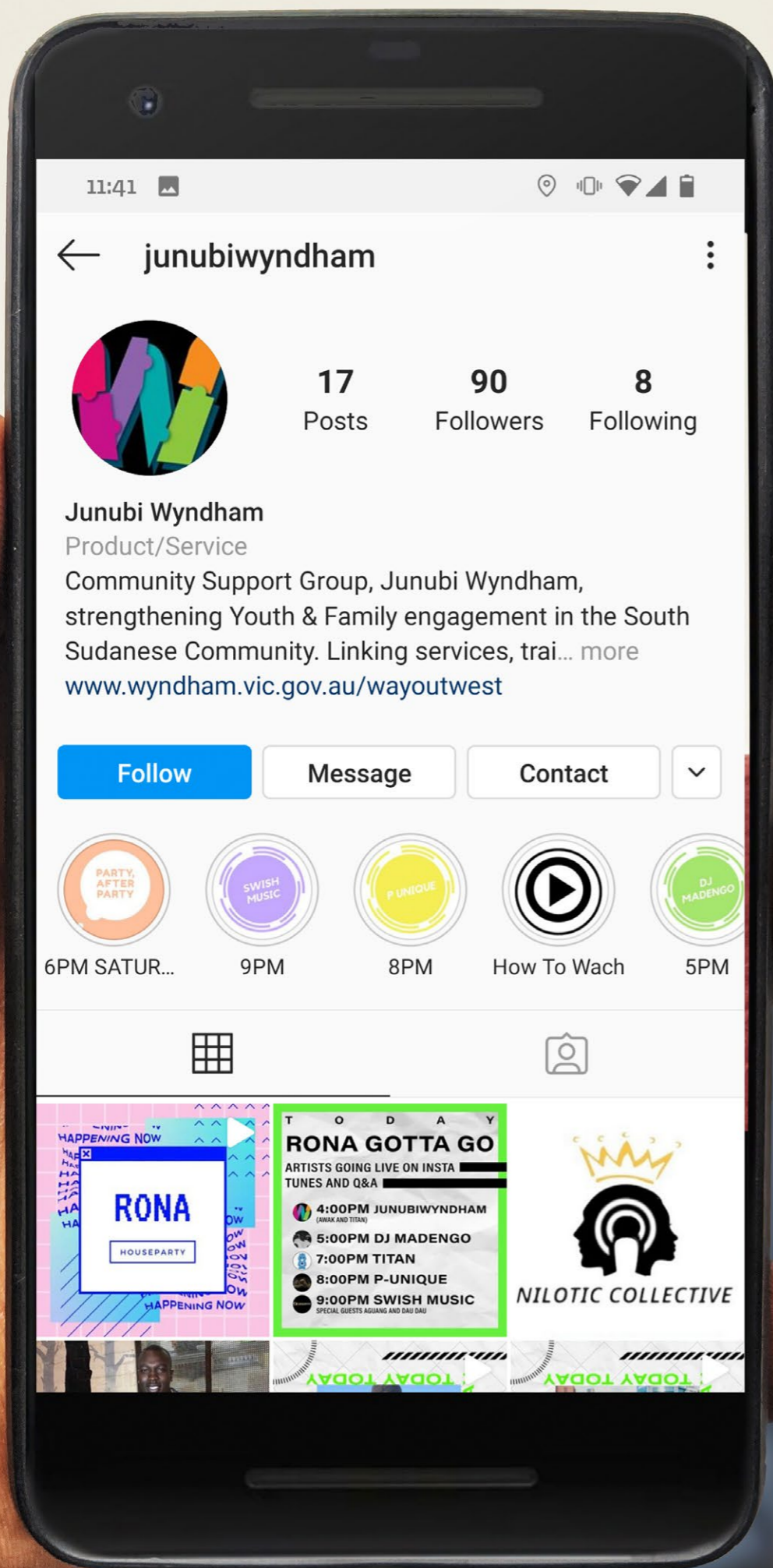
An online platform hosted by young people to open up and facilitate conversations with older South Sudanese Australians about mental health and wellbeing. This idea builds on the existing platform of 'Talk with Me'.

### PAID ROLES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

Recruiting, training and employing young people who have a lived experience of mental ill health to support other young people. Could be running workshops and speaking about their experience, normalising mental ill health within the community.

Are you inspired? [Get in touch](#) to make these ideas a reality and support mental wellbeing.





## VENTURE 1:

# THE CULTURE PARTY

### What is it?

**The Culture Party is an event on Instagram Live celebrating South Sudanese Australian talent. Included are live interviews with artists/guests about mental health and wellbeing. Guests so far have included musicians, comedians, poets, podcasters, psychiatric nurses, advocates and more. The first live Culture Party was watched by more than 600 South Sudanese Australian young people.**

### Why is it important?

The Culture Party is a chance to celebrate the diversity and talent of the community. We heard that success can be narrowly defined in the community, and the Culture Party seeks to profile a broader range of young people. It is a chance to sing, dance, and connect whilst also tuning in to deep conversations about wellbeing, self-care and mental health. Hearing role models share their stories about mental wellbeing has been powerful.

### What's the impact so far?

Each Culture Party has been attended by around 140 South Sudanese people (an estimate of 11.5% of the young South Sudanese Australians in Victoria based on 2016 census data), with a maximum of over 600 people joining to watch more well known artists and a fairly even mix of genders. Over six live sessions (and counting), guests candidly shared their mental health journeys, with audience

members relating to these stories in the chats with robust discussion and comments. Many guests spoke about the challenge of talking openly about mental health, particularly with family, and discussed the key role that close friends play in these personal conversations. When there was a mental health professional on the live, people asked about available support, and shared how hard it was to find a professional that understood the South Sudanese Australian experience.

"People came for the music and stayed for the conversation." - Culture Party host

"Love this conversation, it's something that doesn't get talked about much. I've been trying to find a Black therapist and it's a struggle." - Younger audience member

"The coolest thing about it all - there was no nastiness, no one was a know-it-all, everyone was incredibly supportive. Everyone was chipping in their two cents." - Culture Party host

### How you can help

The Culture Party is seeking support for artists and hosts to continue running on a fortnightly basis, and galvanise the hosts' ideas. Support is also needed to continue the evaluation of the Culture Party to build an evidence base around its impact.



## VENTURE 2:

# MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING

### What is it?

**A few different events, services and activities to provide culturally safe, informal and professional mental health support for young people and their parents. Mindfulness Monday is a regular video conference for young people to check in, reflect on the week and their wellbeing with the support of peers and a counsellor. It provides subsidised counselling for young people needing professional support is another avenue, as well as a growing network of participants who can support each other. These activities lead into the offer of formal suicide prevention training through the LivingWorks Start program.**

### Why is it important?

We heard there's a need to normalise conversations and stories of mental ill health, and also to equip members of the community to support those going through a tough time. We want to give young people and parents the skills and network to support others and connect them to further help as needed. This idea has the potential to create a network of South Sudanese Australians with mental health training, which is a powerful community resource.

### What's the impact so far?

This venture is in the early stages, as it has needed more substantial adaptation to move online. As of October, the team has run two trials of Mindfulness Monday mental health debriefing with Ethiopian Australian counsellor Halakhe Gunyu. Young people told us that the Mindfulness Mondays were 'amazing', and during the first session

people requested that it be held regularly. In these sessions, the professional counsellor was able to offer young people strategies to enhance their wellbeing.

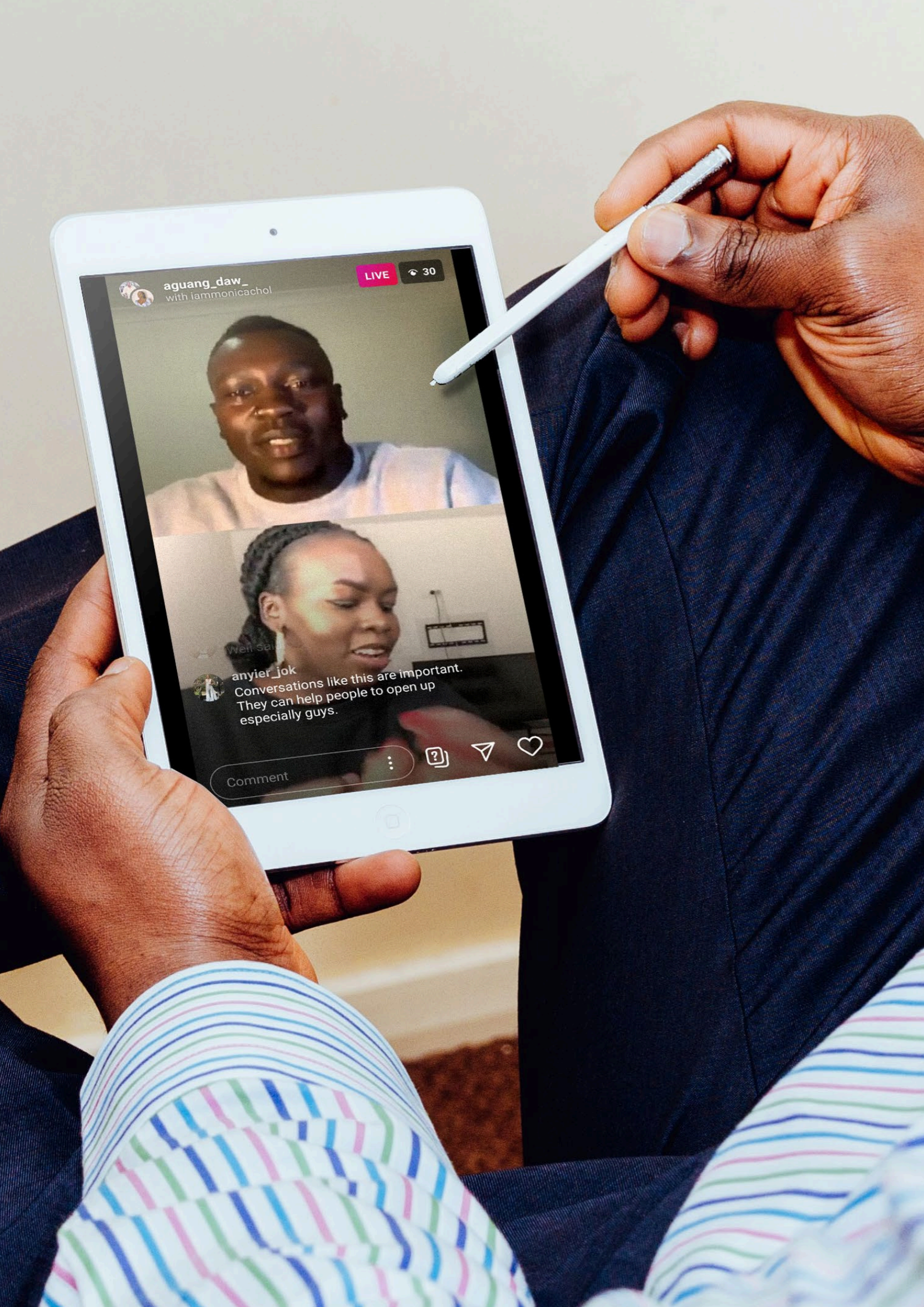
We are now offering 12 free counselling sessions for young people and parents and have established a network for people who have taken part in the mental health training so they can stay in touch and support each other. In other ventures people have shared how hard it is to find mental health professionals and supports that understand the South Sudanese Australian experience, and the free counselling sessions with an Ethiopian Australian or South Sudanese Australian counsellor are in direct response to this feedback.

"It was a transforming conversation. From being caught up in negative fear and anxiety, to sit down and actually reflect on your own life and what's important to you. Often small things, little things you take for granted" - Mindfulness Monday supporting counsellor

"The mood when they joined was low and slow. It was a slow start. I didn't think they had any expectations. The mood was pretty high when people left, they were inspired." - Mindfulness Monday supporting counsellor

### How you can help

This idea needs the support of a mental health professional or network to support its trial and delivery. You could support a young person to recruit others and help create a safe space in the training.



## VENTURE 3: CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN GENERATIONS

### **What is it?**

**Fortnightly conversations live streamed to Facebook on what matters when it comes to mental health for older and younger South Sudanese Australians, building understanding and empathy of the different experiences across generations. Conversations usually include older and younger people discussing an issue, with some special sessions focussing on one generation, gender or other group. It is the mental health spin-off of 'Talk With Me', a program where generations talk more generally.**

### **Why is it important?**

Older people who've moved to Australia as adults have very different experiences of mental health to younger people who've mostly grown up in Australia. This can create tensions between parents and children, and across generations, preventing people from being able to support each other well when times are tough. Conversation Between Generations aims to build understanding and relationships by creating a safe space to talk, where all voices are equal. A community with strong and empathetic support networks is more likely to thrive.

### **What's the impact so far?**

Building on the 'Talk with Me' Facebook platform as well as the personal accounts of hosts Nanchok (Monica) Chol and Aguang (Anthony) Daw, Conversations between Generations has had extensive reach, exposing many people to frank mental health discussions from different age groups.

Across seven live streams so far, there have been over 7800 views of the conversations. Particularly popular was a discussion with young male guests, on how men are affected by and manage their mental health. This episode has 2900 views so far, and received lots of encouragement from viewers. Guests to the conversations told us that they appreciated hearing from the other generation's perspective and it helped them better understand that generation's mental health experience. Viewers commented commending the hosts, wanting to pass the video on to others, sharing their own experience and requesting new topics. The conversations have been shared 56 times, including to popular social media group 'African Australian' which has 33,823 followers.

*"I would love to see this program or similar ones become normal, not just a one off thing. Just to provide constant support for those who need it."*  
- Younger guest

*"Hi my boys, I'm really happy to see you all here talking about things that matter to you and us as parents."* - Older audience member

*"I would say that I now look at certain situations from a different point of view, from my lens and a younger person's lens, to help each other better understand the situation."* - Older guest

### **How you can help**

This idea needs support the hosts in developing and delivering the Conversations and strengthening the involvement of older South Sudanese Australians.

# THE

# T

# AWAK

## 1. AWAK RECH KONGOR GAK

Awak Rech Kongor Gak, is a young South Sudanese black woman living in Narrm (Melbourne).

An aspiring Screenplay Writer/ Filmmaker and Youth Worker, Awak is passionate about her community and actively advocates for young people and their Mental Health and Wellbeing in the South Sudanese Community.

A Footscray local, Awak gained her love for music, fashion, food, Art and community within Melbourne's inner cities.

She readily uses her creativity and creative platforms to engage and support Young South Sudanese people and their Mental Health and Wellbeing through public and private forums, workshops, events and even parties.

She hopes to further the conversation of Justice, Peace and Liberation with her work of visual narratives and story-telling, and hopes to incorporate more of her artistic endeavours with community instead of for community.

## 2. ANTHONY AGUANG WILLIAM MALOUK MAJAK DAW

Hi I'm Anthony Aguang William Malouk Majak Daw, I'm from a South Sudanese background. I'm currently working for TACSI.

One of the main projects I'm working on is called "Conversations Between Generations". We aim to normalise tough conversations around mental health, asking for help, navigating life's challenges. Building empathy between younger and older generations, and insight to how they might support each other.

Sadly, we don't always know the depths of someone's depression until it is too late, I believe individuals like ourselves can really make an impact within our community and make these conversations so normal.





**3. NANCHOK  
CHOL**

My name is Nanchok Chol and I have been a Delivery Lead for the "Conversations between Generations" which focuses primarily on creating more awareness and conversations about mental health within the South Sudanese community. Mental health is a very taboo subject within my community. Therefore, I saw the importance of being a part of this project to ensure more open conversations were created and more awareness was being shined on a subject that affects many of us within the South Sudanese community. Throughout the rounds we've delivered, I believe that we have impacted our community to have more open and solid conversations about mental health within their households, friendship groups and communities.

**4. NAYNDNG  
MAYEN**

Nayndng joined the project to work on 'Culture Party', bringing their creative skills and networks to the team. Nayndng has been co-hosting Culture Parties and asking guests reflective questions about how they take care of their mental health in order to work toward their goals.

**5. DENG  
DENG**

I originate from South Sudan, grew up in Uganda and moved to Australia at the age of 10. I am studying a diploma of information and youth work. I joined this project because I want to be able to help refugees in Australia and the youth who need help, and run this mental health project in the South Sudanese community for young people and parents who are going through challenges and hard times in Australia. I also work with South Sudanese Australians Youth United (SSAYU). I have worked and helped youths since 2018, and also work on mental health with Mental Health First. I also play state basketball for Melton and model for Australia Top Model. I hope to inspire the youth to do great things and chase their dreams.



**6. ATOUG  
DENG**

Atoug has been working on 'Culture Parties', supporting behind the scenes to help everything run smoothly.



**PARTNERING  
WITH  
COMMUNITIES**

These ideas are designed with South Sudanese communities and respond to the current context for young South Sudanese Australians. The three tested ideas have been trailed, evaluated and have buy-in from the communities. The remaining ideas, developed with the communities, also have potential to support mental wellbeing.

The team is seeking support to help its young people to continue delivering this valuable support as we emerge from the immediate impact of COVID-19. The solutions have great momentum and are seeking partners now to help continue this energy and community.

The opportunity is to support cost-effective, shovel ready projects, working with a passionate group of young people to make a difference to wellbeing in South Sudanese Australian communities.

**What collaboration looks like**

Aligned partners would provide relevant expertise and structure alongside the inspiration, connection and lived experience of young people. If you think you might have something to offer these solutions, or are keen to learn more about them, the project team would love to talk to you.

The co-designed, community-led approach that created these solutions is part of the key to their sustainability too. It's a great opportunity to work in partnership with young leaders and their networks, skills and passion. Ownership of the solutions would continue to sit with young South Sudanese Australians and we'd be happy to discuss what this would look like in your context.

We can connect you to the young people leading the work, the community and co-design partner cohealth. [Get in touch here.](#)

**“Work with us but hear the voices of the young people because they’re the ones going through this hard time, and they have experience of these difficulties. They have more to give than us just coming in and telling them. Listen to their voices and by working together we can come up with great ideas and solutions.” - young South Sudanese Australian project lead**

## NEED HELP?

**If you or anyone you know needs help please contact Lifeline anytime on 13 11 14 or Kids HelpLine on 1800 55 1800 for people aged between 5 and 25.**

We would like to thank all of the South Sudanese Australian community members in this project for their time and connection to community, without which these ventures would not be possible. All images in this showcase have been supplied by the team members Awak, Anthony, Nanchok, Nayndng, Deng and Atoug.

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and Traditional Custodians of the lands upon which we live, learn and work and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.

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