

Cultural Transitions is a program offered to missionaries and aid workers during their times of reentry and/or reassignment.

It is an **eight day residential group** experience conducted by a team of two or three trained facilitators.

Currently there are **five members in the team**. Our **expertise** is assured on three grounds: we have lived and worked in another culture and processed our own experience of transition; we are qualified in the use of action methods and group facilitation and we are committed to the pastoral care of missionaries and cross cultural aid workers. In addition to these three essentials we have between us special training in cultural studies, counseling, spiritual direction and body therapy.

We aim to assist each person negotiate the period of transition in which they find themselves. Normally, this is several months after their actual return.

The method we use is structured around the three classical phases of transition: Letting Go, Letting Be and Letting Begin.

**Letting go** has to do with giving closure to the overseas experience by celebrating the good things and addressing the not so good so that both can be integrated into one's life story with some sense of completion.

**Letting Be** deals with the re-entry experience of being in the liminal space that is neither here nor there and where the questions: Who am I? What do I want? become uppermost. It is a time for waiting and giving attention to one's own inner processes.

**Letting Begin** is the movement forward in which short term plans are made and long term plans given time to develop.

**Letting Go: The first day** is spent connecting the group by a variety of activities which warm them up to their cross cultural story and create a safe environment where they are free to share at whatever level of intimacy they choose, and that safety is consistently recreated throughout the program.

**Days 2 - 4** Story telling is the content and remains basic to the whole program. It is done in a variety of ways, the main one being enactment, a method which connects the presenter with the listeners in such a way that all present are processing their story at the same time. Other methods of telling stories are sharing photos, artifacts and souvenirs, and the wonderful conversations that take place over the meal table, in the informal gatherings, and the pairing off that happens in free time.

**Culture jolts and Culture shock** are dealt with through what we call a Culture Walk which again through enactment concretises the theory of cultural adjustment. It is very effective in letting people know their reactions were shared and quite normal and it is rich in story telling.

**Letting Be: Day 5 & 6** are given to a reading of each one's symbols of their personal journey through drawings of their first memory of place. Because safety and trust have been established the members work very sensitively with each other in naming the core values and spiritual energies represented in the drawings and it is in this sharing that they become more aware of the kind of self care they need to give themselves. For most people it is a very healing and freeing experience.

**Letting Begin : Day 7** We bring in a guest presenter who is a very competent sociologist and anthropologist with a deep commitment to missionaries and aid workers. He has a conversation with the group about how their overseas experience fits into the global context and where Australia stands in that context. He opens up for them the unique value of their experience and how they bring to Australia a very important perspective on what it means to be a member of the human family. The conversation is usually lively and quite reflective, and leads to a new sense of purpose in being in Australia and hope in the future.

**Day 8 . Closing day** We use a video to clarify and recap what is entailed in making healthy life transitions. The group takes time for integrating all that has happened in the program, and deciding on the next step they need to take to move forward in their personal transition.

There is a very leisurely ritual of closure and plenty of time given for farewells. Most groups set up a support network between themselves.