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THE AUSSIE SUNDAY LUNCH: WELCOMING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND ENGAGING THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

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Abstract: This paper presents Southern Cross University's *Aussie Sunday Lunch* (ASL) programme which facilitates international students in their transition to life at a regional university. The programme has been in operation since 2007 and achieves several important outcomes with a minimum of expense to the pastoral care budget. Firstly, newly arrive international students are welcomed to the region by being hosted for a meal by members of the local community. Secondly, connections are made between the university and local faith communities as hosts are recruited and then share a meal with the students. Thirdly, some long-term relationships are established between hosts and student. Fourthly, the ASL project has also assisted in furthering positive working relations within the university between chaplaincy, the International Students' Office, and on-campus accommodation administration. This report considers the practicalities of running the ASL programme and covers such issues as student and host recruitment. It also reports some of the variations to the basic concept which have arisen during the three years of the programme, and which are in some ways the results of adaptation to local conditions when the ASL was introduced at the other campuses. This paper concludes with a brief discussion of suggestions for further study of the ASL as a programme with a religious dimension in a secular university, and also as a contributing factor to a positive student experience for international students.