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Navigating the dilemmas of mutual aid: International student organising in Sydney during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

In 2020, thousands of international students found themselves stranded in Sydney, Australia, with the suspension of international travel and closure of borders. While many lost their livelihoods due to lockdowns, the Australian government excluded international students and other temporary visa holders from all forms of income support and disaster relief—resulting in food and housing insecurity and social isolation. This article describes and analyses the forms of mutual aid and support that international students organised to address their situation. In providing an account of their efforts, we consider them as forms of *care infrastructure* and draw particular attention to the institutional relationships that were involved: interfaces with faith, community and labour organising; confrontations with state agencies and the higher education sector; and institutionalisation into a formalised and state-funded community organising initiative—the Oz International Student Hub. We examine the evolution of these relationships as responses to a series of strategic dilemmas, as students sought simultaneously to care for one another and to confront the forces that produced their precarity and isolation. And we draw out a series of lessons we can learn from their efforts about how mutual aid can avoid the pitfalls of charity and state welfare, while institutionalising more durable political spaces that do not have to be invented anew with each fresh crisis.

KEYWORDS

care infrastructures, COVID-19 pandemic, international students, mutual aid, public-commons partnerships, Sydney

1 | INTRODUCTION

In early 2020, thousands of international students found themselves stranded in Sydney following the suspension of international travel and closure of borders as part of the Australian's government's response to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. Soon after, populations in New South Wales (NSW) and several other Australian states were subject to stay-at-home orders designed to reduce the spread of the virus. "Non-essential" businesses were forced to close, and people were confined to their residences for everything but "essential" activities. A range of income support measures were hastily enacted to assist workers who had lost work as a result of these lockdowns. However, temporary visa holders were excluded from income support and disaster relief. International students, whose livelihoods depended on jobs in casualised industries such as hospitality, tourism, and construction, found themselves out of work with no access to alternative sources

of income—resulting in food and housing insecurity and social isolation.

In this article, we explore some of the ways in which international students and their supporters in Sydney organised in response to these circumstances. We trace and consider the evolution of these relationships as responses to strategic dilemmas faced by international students in a moment of crisis, as they sought simultaneously to care for one another and to confront and transform the structures that (re)produce their precarity and isolation. We focus on a set of mutual aid and community organising initiatives that were created in the early days of the pandemic and on the establishment of a new organisation called the Oz International Student Hub out of those initiatives. Our analysis of those efforts has three aims: (1) to highlight international students' extraordinary efforts to address and contest the injustices they faced during the pandemic; (2) to contribute to the emerging literature on the making of mutual aid and care infrastructures during COVID-19; and (3) to reflect on the implications of this case for the politics of care and community-owned institutions in cities. In a broad sense, the activities that sought to meet the immediate needs of the students are seen as care infrastructure, while the attempt to create a new organisation relate to institutionalisation.

Our article begins with a note about our methods (Section 2), along with an overview of some of the theoretical concepts surrounding mutual aid, including its presence during the pandemic, and the drive to institutionalise informal networks into formal ones (Section 3). We then shift into our examination of international student responses to crisis in Sydney during the pandemic (Section 4). This section begins with some contextualisation of the situation in which many international students in Sydney found themselves at the start of the pandemic. Following this work, we detail some of the crisis responses that were established to supply basic needs like food and housing to international students in the early days of lockdowns in Sydney (Section 5). Here, we focus on two intersecting initiatives: (1) the mutual aid networks that were established through the Addison Road Community Organisation in Sydney's inner west and (2) the formation and funding of the Oz International Student Hub (OISH) supported by Sydney Community Forum and Sydney the Alliance.

Building on those experiences, we offer an analysis of the relational entanglements of mutual aid (Section 6). We show that while mutual aid does indeed maintain a conceptual critical distance from charitable, market, and state-funded service provision, in this case, such *critical distance* did not involve a complete separation from those other spheres and involved efforts to *institutionalise* a formal space that could hold the new relationships that were being established. Inspired by recent writing on the relationality of (alternative) care infrastructures (see especially Alam & Houston, 2020; Power et al., 2022), we seek to situate this instance of mutual aid within a broader "ecology" of care infrastructure that combined resources sourced from relationships with charitable, market, and state actors established before and during the pandemic. We conclude our analysis in Section 7 by exploring the potential for forms of institutionalisation that might preserve the radical politics of mutual aid while also sustaining the spaces and relationships that are its infrastructural underpinnings.

Key insights

Mutual aid can be considered as a form of alternative care infrastructure. While the mutual aid organised by international students and their supporters in Sydney maintained a critical distance from charity and welfare, it was part of a broader infrastructural ecology involving market, service, and state actors. Students and their supporters sought ways to institutionalise their care infrastructures that might hold space for these newly established relationships beyond the pandemic. In doing so, they were forced to confront the strategic dilemmas of institutionalisation.

2 | A NOTE ON OUR METHODS

The data for this paper come from three key sources: in-depth interviews, a focus group, and observations from student researchers. The first round of interviews was conducted by Mark Riboldi as part of the Strengthening Australian Civil Society project at the Sydney Policy Lab, University of Sydney (Riboldi et al., 2022). As lead researcher on this project, they conducted 36 interviews and 12 focus groups with civil society practitioners across Australia, exploring for-purpose sector capability in the context of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The relevant focus group was also conducted in this context, consisting of a reflective workshop for a group of organisations, convened by the Sydney Alliance, that advocated for the rights of international students during the pandemic. The *story* of the connection between Addison Road, Sydney Community Forum, and OISH first emerged in this context. The authors devised and conducted a second round of six interviews between September 2022 and February 2023 to explore more deeply the connections between civil society organisations, mutual aid, and communities in need. Four of these interviews were

with people originally interviewed for the original project, and two of these interviews were with people identified through field notes or recommendations from participants in this project.

The final source of data comes through a partnership that Kurt Iveson established with OISH in 2021, and which involved third-year undergraduate geography students working with international students to document the mobility experiences of international students during the pandemic. The transcripts of those interviews, focus groups, and field notes have been analysed for consistent themes and used to collectively construct the interconnected story of OISH, Addison Road, and Sydney Community Forum during the heights of COVID-19. Anonymity has been preserved where appropriate, dependent on the level of consent provided by the participant. Where a participant is directly identified, or has quotations attributed to them, this is done with their full consent and because their identity or role adds an essential perspective and significance to the research.

Finally, the account to follow makes no claim to being representative of a universal international student experience. International students in Sydney during the pandemic came from a range of places and backgrounds and had a wide variety of resources and relationships, and their experiences of the pandemic were therefore diverse. Our account in this article tells the story of one set of organising efforts that emerged in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated crises.

3 | MUTUAL AID AS CARE INFRASTRUCTURE

Writing 50 years ago, Ward (1973, p. 19) had argued that, for anarchist theorists, mutual aid describes the "natural and spontaneous tendency of humans to associate together for their mutual benefit." The spontaneous order of mutual aid is distinguished from orders imposed by terror or bureaucracy, and the informal associations that sustain mutual aid are distinguished from the institutions of state and state-funded welfare, with their bureaucratic rules and logic of control. In the contemporary literature that builds on such perspectives, mutual aid is often conceptually and politically distinguished from welfare and charity. For Spade (2020, 21, 28, original emphasis), for instance,

> We should be very clear: mutual aid is not charity. *Charity*, *aid*, *relief*, and *social services* are terms that usually refer to rich people or the government making decisions about the provision of some kind of support to poor people—that is, rich people or the government deciding who gets the help, what the limits are to that help, and what strings are attached. You can be sure that help like that is not designed to get to the root causes of poverty and violence … Mutual aid projects, in many ways, are defined in opposition to the charity model and its current iteration in the nonprofit sector.

Table 1 captures some of the distinctions between mutual aid and other forms of top-down welfare and charity that are articulated in the mutual aid literature.

Practices of mutual aid during COVID-19 have attracted considerable public and scholarly attention (see, for example, Booth, 2020; Sitrin & Colectiva Sembrar, 2020; Solnit, 2020; Mould et al., 2022). In the face of lockdowns and lost livelihoods, people in Australian cities took care of one another in a multitude of ways. Their efforts ranged from coordinating neighbourly check-ins to establishing more organised mutual aid efforts designed to provide social connection, food, health care, shelter and housing, and much more besides.

For mutual aid initiatives that emerge during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, a key strategic dilemma is the question of their *durability*. Should they be sustained beyond the immediate moments of crisis as an on-going form of care and support? If so, how could this durability be achieved without undermining their radical political potential? One pathway for sustaining the informal mutual aid initiatives that emerge during a crisis is via their formal institutionalisation through state and/or market funding. Anarchist theorists of mutual aid have tended to be critical of this pathway to durability—for them, efforts to achieve durability through institutionalisation threaten the very distinction from welfare and charity that defines the politics of mutual aid.

TABLE 1 Charity and/or welfare v mutual aid.

Charity and/or welfare	Mutual aid
Dependency	Inter-dependency
Individualised	Collectivised
Stigmatising	Solidarity building
Isolating	Cooperating
Requires proof of eligibility/need	No proof required/no-one turned away
Professionalised	Egalitarian/self-managed
Top-down	Bottom-up
Centralised	Decentralised
Bureaucratic	Democratic
Meeting immediate needs while leaving systems intact	Meeting immediate needs *and* tackling systemic causes

Note: Based especially on Spade (2020) and also on Mould et al. (2022).

Ward (1973, p. 110), for instance, argues that anarchists are "hostile to institutions in the general sense" and "predisposed towards de-institutionalisation, towards the breakdown of institutions." When the bottom-up associations of mutual aid seek institutionalisation through state-funding, he worries that they lose their purpose, and asks: "Are they in fact remedying the evil or serving the purpose for which they were instituted, or are they merely perpetuating it?" (p. 110).

Ward's perspective on the risks of institutionalisation has echoes in recent work on common infrastructures by Lauren Berlant (2016). Berlant asks: if forms of care such as mutual aid help people deal with crisis, how can they do this in a way that both fixes broken systems and *transforms them in the process*? For Berlant, such questions about the making of alternative infrastructure in the face of broken systems and crisis are central to contemporary counter normative political struggle. A central question they pose is if the "repair or replacement of broken infrastructure is necessary for any form of sociality to extend itself," how can such efforts also be "non-reproductive, generating a form from within brokenness beyond the exigencies of the current crisis, and alternatively to it too" (Berlant, 2016, p. 393)? Like Ward, Berlant worries that the drive to institutionalise common infrastructures works to fix the *movement* of infrastructures and thus recuperates their transformative potential. This transformative movement from the world-as-it-is to the making of new worlds and new "ordinaries" is central to Berlant's infrastructural politics and poetics. For them (2016, p. 403):

> Institutions enclose and congeal power and interest and represent their legitimacy in the way they represent something reliable in the social, a predictability on which the social relies. Institutions norm reciprocity. What constitutes infrastructure in contrast are the patterns, habits, norms, and scenes of assemblage and use.

Such critiques of the institutionalisation tend to associate the transformative political potential of mutual aid with its radical separation from institutions associated with welfare and charity. However, other work on mutual aid and common infrastructures has suggested that they are rarely free of institutional entanglements, from their very inception. Writing about the forms of care and politics that were forged in Barcelona in response to post-Global Financial Crisis austerity, Bianchi (2022a, 2022b) argues that mutual aid and other urban commons initiatives are often sustained by forms of state support that are frequently unrecognised. Similarly, Gibson-Grahamet al. (2016, p. 207) see commoning initiatives such as mutual aid taking the form of assemblages that "may include social movements and grass-roots organisations but also governments, institutions and firms; they may include non-market mechanisms but also markets …."

If mutual aid initiatives are entangled with formal institutions from their very inception, how might this shift our approach to the strategic dilemmas of mutual aid's durability and institutionalisation? We think it is analytically and political helpful to analyse the mutual aid organised by international students in Sydney as a kind of *care infrastructure*. Rather than emphasising separation, this infrastructural approach situates mutual aid within a wider ecology of formal and informal relationships involving a range of actors across civil society, the market and the state. As Power et al. (2022, p. 1174) put it, investigating care from an *infrastructural* lens both "foregrounds the ways in which objects, actors, and circumstances come together to organize how care is practiced" in ways that "pattern the organization of care within society." To see mutual aid as a form of care infrastructure puts the strategic dilemma of durability through institutionalisation in a different light. The dilemma does not disappear—"making infrastructure durable can involve trade-offs, such as securing consistency of care at the expense of optimal care" (Power et al., 2022, p. 1176). But from this perspective, the transformative potential of mutual aid does not necessarily depend on a radical separation from institutions and avoidance of institutionalisation. Rather, efforts to address this dilemma can be assessed with regard to the specific dynamics of any institutional relationships in a given context. For instance, in analysing the forms of state support that sustained mutual aid initiatives in Barcelona, Bianchi (2022a) suggests that it is useful to distinguish between material and decision-making autonomy and argues that material support from the state (such as funding or access to property) does not necessarily have to come at the expense of decision-making autonomy or co-option.

Going even further, Cooper (2017) suggests that encounters between the infrastructures of the commons such as mutual aid and the institutions of state can produce effects on *both sides* of the relationship. Just as a degree of formalisation and institutionalisation will impact mutual aid, so too does a relationship with the commons infrastructures have the potential to impact the state. Indeed, for Cooper, such relationships have the potential to extend the anarchist-aligned concept of *prefiguration* to the state itself. Arguing against political imaginaries that reject engagements with institutions of state, she suggests "there is also room within the left's political toolkit for prefigurative conceptualising, which not only reimagines what statehood could mean (decentring the notion states inevitably mean nation-states), but which also rejects a sharp distinction between states and other political governance formations" (Cooper, 2017, p. 339). Prefiguring the state is not just about making existing state better, but prefiguring alternative "political governance

formations, including formations embedded in communities, active in transforming relations of power, and caring" (Cooper, 2017, p. 336). In other words, the transformative potential of mutual aid is not associated with its radical separation *from* the state, but with the nature of its relationship *with* the state. Russell and Milburn (2018) suggest that such arrangements could be characterised as a form of *public-commons partnership*, as an alternative to the public-private partnerships characteristic of neoliberal governance. The public-commons approach is not a conventional vision of publicly funded community services that we are familiar with in the "shadow state" of neoliberal austerity, with its accompanying exclusionary and controlling criteria for access and accountability. Nor is it a return to conventional forms of state ownership and operation of services. Rather, it speaks to a transitional approach out of those arrangements, using the power and resources of state for a process of democratisation that devolves power outwards towards the logic of the commons that underpin mutual aid as a form of care infrastructure.

In what follows, we seek both to understand how international students and their supporters navigated the strategic dilemmas of mutual aid and to draw out the lessons that their experiences hold for these ongoing debates about the institutionalisation of mutual aid as a pathway to durability. Following Berlant, we are especially interested in the potential for mutual aid and care infrastructures generated by international students and their communities to sustain life during the crisis and also to transform the old "normal" through the production and reproduction of new worlds and a "new ordinary." In the case of the international students that are the focus of this article, a post-pandemic return to "normal" was a return to a "normal" that was far from just. And as we shall see, the experience of international students and their supporters in seeking to sustain their emergent care infrastructure via institutionalisation speaks to the potentials and the challenges of this approach.

4 | INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN SYDNEY

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, international education constituted one of Australia's main exports. In the financial year 2019–2020, international education accounted for over AU$37 billion of Australia's export income, ranking fourth behind iron, coal, and natural gas. In 2019, there were over 750,000 international students in Australia,[1] with around 342,000 enrolled international students living in the Sydney metropolitan area.[2] Universities and tertiary vocational and language schools account for over 90% of those students (Department of Education, n.d.-a, n.d.-b), increasingly relying on international student fees for their ongoing operation.

Sydney is one of the world's most expensive cities. Alongside the challenges of making a new home in a city with high costs of housing and living, the everyday lives of international students in Sydney are shaped by a range of policy settings set by both Commonwealth and State governments and by higher education providers. For instance:

- the Commonwealth Government restricts working hours (at the start of the pandemic, people on student visas were restricted a maximum of 40 hours per fortnight while studying) and does not provide access to income support or free public healthcare;
- the NSW Government does not provide international students with access to state-provided welfare supports such as social housing or transport concessions; and
- higher education providers have no obligation to provide any support services to international students, and few do. They are instead required to provide information to students about external services—which are rarely tailored to meeting these people's specific needs.

Even before the pandemic, these circumstances were pushing many international students into informal work and informal housing, with all the associated precarity that this entails (Berg & Farbenblum, 2020; Clibborn, 2021; Morris et al., 2023; Nguyen & Balakrishnan, 2020; Obeng-Odoom, 2012). They were also the source of significant anger for many international students, who frequently report that they feel like cash cows for the Australian economy, paying fees and taxes without access to basic services and support provided to domestic students (Robertson, 2011). One told us that:

> We are considered Australians for tax purposes, so we pay as much tax as everyone, but we do not have access to any of the benefits. We really feel like cash cows.[3]

Another said:

> It's not just about money, it's more like recognition that you are a student and that you deserve to have the same things, because we pay taxes and we bring our money here to pay for the schools and pay for everything.

The first case of COVID-19 was reported on 25 January 2020, and as infection numbers grew, a range of measures were put in place by Commonwealth and State governments in the effort to reduce

viral transmission. The initial introduction of increasingly tight restrictions on public gatherings escalated into stay-at-home orders and business closures that were first implemented in Sydney in March.

In their political economy of the COVID-19 pandemic, Davies et al. (2022, x) observe that there is something valuable to be observed and learnt in moments of crisis: what persists, what sustains us, when the normal and predictable routines of economic life are suspended? Whose interests come first, and whose come last? Who is protected at all costs and who is left to their fate?

For the first incredibly challenging year of the pandemic, international students were among those left to their fate by the Australian state. While COVID measures impacted a wide variety of Sydneysiders, international students in the city were hit particularly hard. They were caught between two of the strategies that characterised the efforts of the Australian nation-state to deal with the pandemic: re-bordering at both the international and urban scales, and a reliance on the deep well of under-resourced care work that fill the gaps left by inadequate and discriminatory public sector welfare and market inequalities (Davies et al., 2022; Iveson & Sisson, 2023).

Higher education providers remained open, with teaching shifting online. Fees continued to be due, as did rent. But the jobs upon which many international students depended disappeared as businesses closed or significantly scaled-back operations during the lockdowns. Noting that the visa conditions for international students require them to arrive with sufficient funds to cover up to a year of living expenses, Prime Minister Scott Morrison infamously told international students in April 2020 that if they could not support themselves "it is time to make your way home." Most were not in a position to do so, for a wide variety of reasons—some financial, some due to international travel restrictions and lack of transport availability. As of June 2020, approximately 80% of enrolled international students were still in Australia.

For those students still in Sydney, there would be no extra support. International students on temporary student visas were not eligible for the JobKeeper or JobSeeker payments that were introduced to support citizens and permanent residents who lost income due to lockdowns. With the pandemic impacting livelihoods and incomes across the world, many students also experienced reduced financial support from families in their home countries. Compounding this financial situation was the stress of being away from family and friends during a global pandemic, and an uptick in racist harassment faced especially by students of Asian appearance. (For a detailed report on the experiences of temporary migrants across Australia during the first year of COVID-19, see Berg & Farbenblum, 2020; see also Morris et al., 2023, Nguyen & Balakrishnan, 2020.)

The dire circumstances faced by many international students in Sydney during the first half of 2020 occasionally crossed over into the mainstream, mainly through media images of international students lined up at charities seeking support. But charity was not the only response. As Robertson (2011, p. 2203) argued before the pandemic, international students are often represented in the mainstream media as passive victims of their circumstances. However,

> simultaneous to these images of international students as passive, exploited, and marginalized subjects were numerous examples of students, collectively and sometimes quite radically, "enacting citizenship," often in response to the same issues of exploitation and victimization.

Even in the early months of the pandemic, international students organised themselves to address and challenge their circumstances, building on networks and relationships they had established in the city.

5 | CRISIS RESPONSES: MUTUAL AID INFRASTRUCTURES AND CIVIL SOCIETY INSTITUTIONS

Faced with lost income and no support, many students from different communities began to turn to local community services and faith-based charities for assistance—especially with food and housing. International students were among the groups that contributed a doubling in the number of people seeking food relief in Sydney (Williams & Tait, 2023, p. 1368). As one former international student told us, they were frequently turned away, because they were not among the specified "client" groups that these organisations were funded to support:

> People started to ask for help—but didn't know where to go. We started to call community centres. Literally calling everywhere—churches, civil society. And many, many community centres say, "oh no, we can't help. Our funding doesn't cover international students. Oh, you're on a visa. Oh yeah, what type of visa? Oh, you're an international student? Oh no, sorry, we can't help."

But not everyone turned them away. Among others,[4] the Addison Road Community Centre (Addi Road) in inner-urban Marrickville was one of the places that responded positively to these calls. The Addison Road Community Centre Organisation (ARCCO) was established in 1976 after a successful campaign to

handover a decommissioned army depot in Sydney's inner west suburb of Marrickville to the community. ARCCO runs Addi Road from one of the main buildings on its 9-ha site, as well as leasing space to other community-based organisations and services. The centre runs a variety of human rights, arts and culture, and sustainability programmes, informed by its vision of "a community which is equal, just, sustainable, and diverse."[5] Drawing on her experiences organising disaster relief in other contexts outside Australia, Addi Road CEO Rosanna Barbero told us that when lockdowns were announced, staff "basically transformed the whole place overnight into a disaster preparedness response and activation centre." An existing community pantry was hastily re-modelled as a food distribution hub, distributing food that was sourced via direct donations or purchased through cash donations. In part because of how many people were falling through the cracks of government support and existing charities, people came in "thousands in the beginning, it was really fucking overwhelming." Diana Olmos was a student who was making calls on behalf of herself and other South American students in Sydney, and she told us: "Addison Road was one of the community centres that opened the doors for international students, for anyone on a temporary visa going through a difficult situation."

Addi Road became a care infrastructure for many international students seeking food and other assistance. But it did not simply provide charitable assistance to international students as "clients." Certainly, the free distribution of food became a key activity on site. But, as Barbero tells it, students came looking both to give and to receive help: "They came here saying 'we want to help you'. They came with wanting help, but they also came with 'we need to help our communities'."

The team at Addi Road had a political interest both in addressing immediate needs and in doing so in a way that challenged stigma and inequality associated with other forms of welfare and charity:

> I didn't want to establish a patron-client relationship because I don't believe in that neo-colonial model of community development, and so I said to them, "OK, yes, you can come, organise yourself, but you need to go to your communities and find out what they need, just make sure everyone's going to be ok where they are."

Given Addi Road's relationships with other local agencies such as the Marrickville Legal Centre, Addi Road staff and volunteers could also connect students with those services where necessary. Echoing Williams and Tait's (2023, p. 1366) point that the material spaces of community food initiatives play a role in "facilitating care and enabling people to respond to injustice within and beyond the spaces of community provisioning," Barbero said that food was both the essential need being provided and also "the conduit" for connecting with other services and infrastructures through Addi Road's spaces and networks.

cated a specific time for international student work onsite—Friday mornings. In part, this set time was to deal with the high levels of demand the organisation was dealing with, but it had other purposes that connected with a broader political agenda. For Barbero,

> It's about getting them together, talking to each other, meeting people outside of their language group and trying to get a bit of … you know, talk to the press, to talk, to stand up, to do these things.

Journalists and politicians who wanted to know more about the situation faced by international students in Sydney would call Addi Road looking for comment, and Barbero insisted they come down on Fridays to see for themselves by talking directly with students on site.

Meanwhile, a few kilometres away from Addi Road, in the inner south suburb of Bardwell Park, the staff at Sydney Community Forum were facing similar hurdles when trying to help international students in their orbit. Sydney Community Forum (SCF) was established as a forum for community organisations in the inner south region of Sydney in the 1970s (when it was originally known as the Inner South West Regional Council for Social Development). SCF was given a financial grant by the Whitlam Government to seed fund a range of community organisations in its area, as well as an infrastructure grant to purchase its own property. During the early stages of COVID-19, while calling a range of charities and services for assistance, SCF staff member Nirmal Joy said he "very soon began to realize that this is in nobody's cup, no organisation." SCF quickly began to connect with other organisations in their community to organise "listening sessions" on Zoom, reaching out to international students in order to understand their situation and their needs.

In thinking about how to respond to what they were hearing, SCF personnel brought a different set of resources, relationships, and approaches to addressing this problem than Addi Road. SCF is one of the founding partner organisations of the Sydney Alliance—a coalition of around 40 community organisations, unions, and faith-based groups working for a fair and more sustainable Sydney.[6] Sticking with the infrastructure theme at the centre of this article, we could describe the Sydney Alliance as a political infrastructure through which diverse civil society organisations build relationships and take action on issues of shared concern (on political infrastructure, see Karaliotas, 2024). Notably, this

infrastructure has been institutionalised by the formalisation and incorporation of the Alliance. Its operations are entirely funded by member contributions, and it has been institutionalised in order to establish a structure of mutual accountability for the self-management of organisational resources—both financial and human—that are devoted to it by its partner organisations.

The Sydney Alliance was in the process of convening meetings of its partner organisations to prioritise and develop collective responses to the unfolding crisis of the pandemic. SCF Executive Officer Asha Ramzan and staff member Nirmal Joy, themselves both former international students, insisted that the plight of international students be put on the Alliance's agenda for consideration in a key strategy meeting in March 2020 and organised for students they had connected with through Zoom listening sessions to attend the meeting and share their experiences. They were supported by other partner organisations, including the Jesuit Refugee Service and the United Workers Union, whose members had become aware of the crisis facing international students in the industries they organise, including hospitality, cleaning, and care.

At the Sydney Alliance crisis meeting, despite some initial reservations from other Sydney Alliance members, it was eventually agreed that the situation faced by international students and other temporary migrants had to be a priority for the Alliance and that this situation would require campaigns directed at both the Commonwealth and State governments. To facilitate this campaign, Alliance leaders committed to organising a national Zoom hook-up of civil society organisations working with temporary migrants and migrant communities in order to coordinate lobbying and campaigning efforts on the need to urgently extend financial and other forms of support to temporary migrants facing hunger and homelessness. In all, over 100 civil society organisations participated in that network, and in 2020 their efforts contributed to the Commonwealth and State Governments providing emergency relief for international students worth $34 million, including NSW Government's decision to establish a $21 million fund for accommodation support in New South Wales for international students facing eviction and homelessness (Riboldi et al., 2022).

As a political space for community organising and not just advocacy, one of the Sydney Alliance's core values is that "all people have the potential to speak and act with others on their own behalf, to grow and develop as leaders and to participate fully in our democracy."[7] As such, in the national campaign hook-ups, Alliance partner organisations were adamant that international students be given space to speak for themselves, rather than being spoken for. An important role for the SCF team in this process was supporting the students to participate in the broader Alliance process. This capacity building included training in community organising techniques, as well as preparation, debriefing, and peer support before and after meetings.

A challenge in this process, according to SCF's Nirmal Joy, is that people only have the capacity to get involved in organising work when their basic needs are being met. For him, in the face of crisis, "if we start with the advocacy tools, if we start with the organising tools, we are doing it wrong." Thus, the mutual aid being organised through Addison Road was essential. A few key individuals found themselves acting as bridges between the mutual aid and advocacy that was happening at Addi Road and the organising and advocacy that was happening through the Sydney Alliance. They included two trainee organisers with the Sydney Alliance's student organiser programme—Diana Olmos and Chaitra Hareesh. Diana was one of the students who was already working through Addison Road to organise mutual aid, and Chaitra had worked with SCF as part of her internship. Similarly, Anthony Byrne from the United Workers Union (UWU) became another point of connection between activities at Addi Road and the Sydney Alliance. Before the pandemic, Byrne had been attending solidarity sessions with international students at Addi Road, and UWU is a partner organisation in the Sydney Alliance. In different ways, Addi Road, SCF, and the Sydney Alliance had all come to realise the importance of meeting people's immediate needs as a platform for political organising and campaigning on the broader structural issues that were pushing people into crisis in the first place.

On one of the national hook-ups, SCF EO Asha Ramzan decided to test the waters on the formation of a new organisation for international students in Sydney. On the basis of their experiences in the crisis, Ramzan and several of the student leaders had come to the view that it was necessary to institutionalise a space through which international students could be referred to support services to address their immediate needs and also organise among themselves on the issues affecting them. For Ramzan, the crisis revealed what had long been a problem:

> The intersection between people and place, particularly people who are not allowed to claim space, is so important. And temporary visa holders are not allowed to claim space. International students are here in large numbers, and they are not legitimately allowed to claim space.

With the support of the Sydney Alliance network, Olmos and Hareesh were employed by the Alliance to identify opportunities to progress this agenda, identifying two potential sources of support—government and the higher education sector. Supported by a range of other organisations including UWU, Shelter NSW, the Tenants' Union of NSW, and the Multicultural Youth

Affairs Network, NSW Sydney Alliance, and SCF then applied for funding to the City of Sydney Council and the NSW Government to establish an Intake and Referral Service for international students. The idea was that it could operate as a form of service delivery and enable the creation of the Oz International Student Hub (OISH) as a space for student organising and leadership development. For SCF's Ramzan, OISH "was an attempt to create a place" for international students—both politically and physically. As a result of Olmos's and Hareesh's efforts, StudyNSW committed to seed funding for the Intake and Referral Service, which was run by SCF. A successful grant application to the City of Sydney local government provided initial seed funding to establish OISH, auspiced by SCF and the Sydney Alliance. Meanwhile, Olmos and Hareesh also attended a conference of the higher education sector. As UWU's Byrne recalls:

> [The industry was having] their big lobby day in Canberra, and [Olmos and Hareesh] got on the speaking list. And so, Diana basically got up and called them out, saying like, "you're here in Canberra asking the government for money while you're taking our money—and you haven't done enough to help us."

The CEO of private education provider Go Study was in the meeting, and he followed up with an offer of temporary space in the organisation's centrally located Surry Hills premises—which was being underutilised in the pandemic. Soon, Olmos and Hareesh had been appointed as the first two paid organisers working at OISH, and they began a fresh organising cycle with international students. They ran listening sessions in-person and on-line, distilling the issues that were emerging, and supporting participating students to step into leadership roles and develop and run campaigns on those issues. The Sydney Alliance established an organiser training programme for 50 international students who had connected with OISH as part of that process. OISH was formally launched at a public event in its space in May 2021.[8] The excitement was palpable for those involved. Olmos said, "All of a sudden, we had a place, a base, in the heart of the city, doing some organising."

Establishing the Intake and Referral Service and OISH was one thing, maintaining them was another, with the government funding for both organisations and the free provision of space for OISH all being short-term. Even in 2021, those involved were concerned that, as pandemic impacts and measures started to ease, interest in the challenges faced by international students would return to the pre-pandemic "normal" and both government and the higher education sector would lose interest in supporting international student services and spaces for them to connect and organise. The public launch event of OISH in May was deliberately staged to highlight this very issue, and representatives of StudyNSW and several higher education providers were in attendance. StudyNSW committed further short-term funds to extend the Intake and Referral Service into 2022. But the fate of OISH was even less certain. When City of Sydney funding for OISH ran out in 2022, SCF picked up the slack from its own reserves and sought more secure sources of funding into the long term. They approached several universities—among them the University of Sydney, whose international student revenue had remarkably gone up during the pandemic, contributing to an operating surplus of over $1 billion in 2021. But despite several meetings, funds were never committed by this or any other university. For Ramzan,

> It feels like we are going with a begging bowl. And now that the pandemic is over, it's almost like, "It's back to normal and we don't really care as long as we keep getting income from them, they keep paying their fees and they're coming back." And of the things that was said to us that I was really shocked by is: "Our revenue hasn't fallen. In fact, we are getting more enrolments than ever before." The arrogance is incredible.

By the start of 2023, SCF was maintaining OISH as an unfunded network and had funding for the Intake and Referral Service until the end of June. Sadly, that funding has now run out, and the service has been forced to close.

These difficulties in sustaining both the intake service and the organising hub have been a major source of frustration for those involved. As Byrne from UWU told us,

> The Hub was humming really well for a short period of time. You could see how something like this could really work. But our resourcing kind of became an issue, and there was always the pressure on—these grants are limited, and how is this going to be sustainable?

Byrne's view is that, for most of the organisations that were involved in supporting OISH's establishment, securing sustainable resources never made it to the top of priority lists. Instead, "it was everyone's part-time job," competing for attention alongside other organisational priorities. Additionally, many students initially involved have moved on for various reasons—including, of course, the conclusion of their time as a student. But as Olmos reflected, the funding problems were especially dispiriting for some: "sometimes if there is no

money, sometimes it's more damaging when you start doing something and people start getting hopes up and then, you know, 'oh, it's not sustainable'."

Meanwhile, international students continue to organise and attend various activities organised through Addi Road, which continues to run a community food pantry from its space. And organisations involved in the Sydney Alliance, including SCF and UWU, continue to organise on international student issues in the absence of further funding for OISH.

6 | MUTUAL AID IN A CRISIS: ON INFRASTRUCTURES AND INSTITUTIONS

Having provided an account of the care infrastructures that were developed by international students organising at Addi Road and through the Sydney Alliance, we now turn to the questions we posed in the introduction: what lessons can we learn from their experiences about the strategic dilemmas of mutual aid? How can care infrastructures created through mutual aid avoid the pitfalls of charity and state welfare, while creating more durable political spaces that do not have to be invented anew with each fresh crisis?

The events and efforts described above show the vital significance of mutual aid and solidarity as an alternative care infrastructure for international students, in the face of their exclusion from state-provided welfare, state-funded services, and charities. In the case of Addi Road, we can see evidence of some of these mutual aid principles being put into practice, in both the infrastructures of life support that were established and in critiques of charity and welfare articulated by participants. Rosanna Barbero is explicit about Addi Road's distinction from conventional charity and welfare provision. Addi Road places a strong emphasis on providing space for people to help themselves collectively:

> We don't do service delivery. We work with people, … you don't empower people, that's a bullshit terminology. It's about working with people in solidarity, for them to have a platform where you build up a consciousness, you build up a sense of collective, you negotiate that. You don't do it by providing something (and saying) "we're going to give you a box of food, (so) you've got to do a dance from your native country."

As this quote alludes, Barbero is also clear that Addi Road provides space and associated resources without qualification:

> we don't arbitrate, we don't ask people about their poverty, and we don't need people to prove that they fucked up—because it's an emergency. That's not what you do at this time. But the others do.

Finally, Addison Road's approach is one related to the politicisation and collectivisation, and not the stigmatisation and individualisation, of problems:

> So, you either approach it from the perspective that you see that this is a deliberate system that creates this, and you can understand and analyze the causes, or you just see it as "this is an unfortunate thing."

Given our interest in Berlant's question about how crisis responses might be transformative, the literature on mutual aid is especially helpful, we think, in making the empirical and the theoretical links between the immediate meeting of needs and the forging of movements for political transformation. An argument offered by Spade (2020, p. 13) resonates with points made by those involved in our example of international student mutual aid and organising:

> Being able to get help in a crisis is often a condition for being politically active, because it's very difficult to organize when you are also struggling to survive. Getting support through a mutual aid project that has a political analysis of the conditions that produced your crisis also helps to break stigma, shame, and isolation.

Having said this, as we have noted above, the contemporary literature on mutual aid tends to view the effort to institutionalise services and spaces through government and other funding as misguided. Spade recognises that funding and staffing can "increase capacity to provide aid" but identifies some tensions that are ever-present, not least that groups:

> can lose their autonomy, feeling pressured to direct their work toward fundable projects or put time into measuring their work and reporting it according to funders' demands, rather than doing the work the way they think is most effective. (Spade, 2020, p. 105)

From this perspective, the difficulties that international students and their supporters encountered in trying to secure and sustain funding might be viewed a cautionary tale about why mutual aid should steer clear of state engagement. For Spade (2020, p. 60):

> history is full of examples of mutual aid groups that, under pressure from law

> enforcement, funders, and culture, transformed into charity or social services groups and lost much of their transformative capacity.

However, if we approach mutual aid as an infrastructure of care and then take a relational and ecological approach to understanding of that infrastructure, we argue that doing so reveals a significant limitation with approaches to mutual aid which draw "lines in the sand" between mutual aid, the state, and the market. Power et al. (2022, p. 1166) argue that relational approaches encourage us to "trace a more comprehensive set of relations" within which care infrastructures are enmeshed. When we do this same tracing work, we see that even before the attempted institutionalisation of OISH, international student mutual aid and political organising were not so sharply separated from charity, from the market, from social services in the shadow state, or from the state itself.

Consider again the case of Addi Road. While staff and participants at Addi Road make a clear conceptual distinction between their approach to working with communities and the approaches of the welfare, charity, and community-service sectors, Addi Road is also a space of tactical engagement and entanglement with spaces of charity, market, community service, and state. In the first place, those at Addi Road were in a position to offer space to international students thanks to the government land transfer that took place in the 1970s, with the site handed over to community control. And while we agree with Hall (2020, p. 85) that we should not reduce community-building to community buildings, physical space retains its importance—that land is instrumental to the labour of building and maintaining care infrastructures at the site. In terms of independence, Addi Road's food hub operations are coordinated by staff whose salaries do not rely on government funding but are self-funded through various income streams, including rents from other community organisations who use Addi Road's space, as well as revenue from weekend markets and associated car parking. This degree of financial independence ensures that any "conditions" for access to the food hub are determined by the community, in the form of the Addi Road Board of Directors, rather than government or philanthropic funders. Beyond that, the food that was accessed and distributed by international students and other volunteers came from a range of places. Some of it was freely donated by community members or purchased through donations. Some was donated by big brand supermarkets and suppliers. Those donations, along with considerable volunteer labour, were solicited through a media campaign fronted by a famous former footballer with a huge social media following, a big-name Australian actor with an international profile, a big deal celebrity chef, and by local community members with corporate connections and jobs. The food hub is an example of a relational space, where the relationship with state, charity, and market takes the form of critical distance[9] rather than strict separation. The Addi Road community seeks to construct those relationships with charities, with community services, with unions, and even with the state through funding, in a way that supports rather than restricts the organisations' core values in difficult circumstances. While CEO Rosanna Barbero is keen to point out that Addi Road operates with a logic different from that used by charities and/or funded community services, she is happy to acknowledge that it does have state and corporate grants for some aspects of its work, and she is "hassling [the government] non-stop" for funds.

Thus, "zooming out" a little from the mutual aid practised by international students, we can see that the mutual aid infrastructure that Addi Road hosted is composed of diverse relations that connect it to state agencies, charities, and market actors. It lives with, if not thrives within, the contradictions that this entails. Community food initiatives such as those at Addi Road do not exist wholly outside of market relations. Rather, they often take the form of a "temporary assemblage of commodified, non-commodified and differently commodified elements and relations" (Sharp, 2018, in Williams & Tait, 2023, p. 1366). In the case of international student mutual food aid organised through Addi Road, we might extend Sharp's description to include "charitable and differently charitable" and "funded and differently funded" elements and relations as part of the assemblage.

Zooming out even further, we can observe that students who organised food relief through Addi Road were also organising in other physical and political spaces. As Power et al. (2022, p. 1176) note, when we put the "spaces, practices and resources involved in sustaining life at the centre of analysis," we typically find that "life is sustained across sectorial boundaries." As one of the international students actively organising mutual aid through Addi Road while also interning at the Sydney Alliance, Diana Olmos told us:

> I found myself in the middle. Like, some sort of a bridge—where I knew the band aid at that point was critical. It was important. Put food on the table. But also, it wasn't sustainable. And I became quite involved in looking at the bigger picture of how we got here, why we're so disconnected from people that really want to help in civil society.

And as Olmos started looking at the bigger picture, the existing relationships that characterised organisations involved in the Sydney Alliance held promise for addressing the disconnections that had contributed to international students' precarity in the city:

> the resources that Sydney Community Forum had, and Addison Road had, were really different, right? Addison Road wasn't part of the Alliance. Sydney Community Forum was a partner organisation. And they were the ones who brought the issue that we need to organise and put it to the Council.

Of course, it is one thing to begin organising through the Sydney Alliance networks and quite another to seek to institutionalise those arrangements through the state and corporate funding of a new organisation. Seeking government funding was not an obvious or natural step for anyone involved—the Sydney Alliance was established in 2011 as a member-funded coalition to intentionally avoid the pitfalls of government funding, which has associations with the kind of service mentality that community organisers seek to avoid. However, several partner organisations within the Alliance were government funded for core operations and/or projects and were observing with considerable frustration that many charities and services that government was funding for emergency relief had no relationships with international students or their communities. It was in that context that, through the connection with international students provided by SCF and the Sydney Alliance, they made a bet on claiming some of that funding for both servicing and for organising efforts that were at least led by, and accountable to, international students themselves. It was hoped that the Oz International Student Hub (OISH) could hold a space for on-going organising of that kind that emerged during the crisis.

In drawing a distinction between common infrastructures and institutions, Berlant (2016, p. 403) notes that "the relation between these concepts and materialities is often a matter of perspective." To us, this phrase seems to be doing a lot of work. At the very least, it leaves room in our thinking for just the kind of ambivalence and difficulties that we have identified in efforts to institutionalise a set of relationships and resources for international students in Sydney. We think it would be wise not rush to critique the impulse to institutionalise as always and only a form of recuperation and incorporation to the fixed structures and sovereignties that we wish to transform. Reflecting on autonomist responses to austerity and associated cutbacks and crises in Athens, Argyropoulou (2019) similarly has found activists moving between strategies of proposing and refusing viable alternative institutions—moving between what Berlant would call "infrastructures" and "institutions"—in a manner "fluid, responsive, evolving, incorrect, affected and reformulated by the content and inseparable from the strictures of a specific socio-cultural landscape" (Argyropoulou, 2019, p. 305). Here, the question of whether it is politically productive to "refuse to be turned into a stable and unified modus operandi or a policy" (Argyropoulou, 2019) is a question to be answered empirically in the specific context where it is posed, not just theoretically or ideologically.

So, from the alternative relational perspective that we are developing here, the question for analysis is not whether those involved in mutual aid either refuse institutionalisation (good) or give in to the temptations of institutionalisation (bad). Rather, starting from the point that even mutual aid infrastructures are inevitably enmeshed in broader infrastructural ecologies and institutional relationships, the questions for analysis focus on the nature of those relationships and their utility in a given context. Such questions are about how values and institutions are aligned, about the strings that do or do not come with external funding and relationships, and so on.

Those who sought to institutionalise a space for international student organising using funding provided for an Intake Referral Service and OISH would be the first to acknowledge the tensions involved in this institutionalisation. For example, they acknowledge that operating out of a space donated and branded by a private higher education provider had its problems as well as its benefits. For the period of funding, the relationship between paid staff and volunteer organisers required ongoing negotiation, and delivering a "service" in return for funds came with an increased administrative burden. While all of the organisations involved—Addi Road, SCF, and the Sydney Alliance—have their own critiques of top-down "service provision," context matters. Students and former students involved in the institutionalisation effort believed that one of the main problems revealed by the pandemic crisis was the isolation of international students from one another and from civil society more broadly—an isolation that gave governments confidence that they could exclude international students from crisis relief without political consequence. In that context, it was hoped that making connections with international students through their initial access to an Intake and Referral Service would not only help them to meet immediate needs but would also connect them to other students facing similar problems through OISH, thereby bringing more students into mutual aid and organising initiatives. To use a phrase that came up in interviews, the vision for OISH was to *create and hold a space* so that things would not simply "return to normal" after the pandemic.

Of course, the merits of this approach are still up for debate or disagreement. Our broader point here is that these debates should be informed by a careful analysis of how circumstances and context impact the enactment of political principles and the strategies that are used to pursue collectively determined outcomes.

7 | CONCLUSION: CONTESTING, PREFIGURING, AND TRANSCENDING THE STATE THROUGH MUTUAL AID?

In this article, we have taken a relational approach to exploring the production and reproduction of care infrastructures built through practices of mutual aid and have sought to trace the wider set of structures and relations within which mutual aid efforts were enmeshed. This work requires playing close attention to "the funding and other resources that they mobilise and are enabled through, and the risks and pressures underpinning their endurance, alongside the benefits, costs and harms for those practicing care" (Power et al., 2022, p. 1178). As Alam and Houston (2020, p. 3) point out, it is easy for these relations and their associated "undercurrents (of labour, materials and agencies) [to] … sink into the background." Paying attention to them can "help reveal the ways justice and democracy are practiced in the production of infrastructures in space and time."

Embracing this relational approach to care infrastructures, we have situated the mutual aid practised by international students within a wider ecology of cross-sector entanglements. The mutual aid efforts have we examined involve interfaces with faith, community, and labour organising; confrontations and cooperation with state agencies and the higher education sector; and institutionalisation into a formalised and temporarily funded community organising initiative—the Oz International Student Hub.

The alternative infrastructures of care that were built in response to the crisis provided some of life's essentials to thousands of international students who would otherwise have gone without. Dozens of international students stepped into political work and leadership, with immediate impacts during the crisis and with potential and unknowable long-lasting impacts on them as individuals and on their present and future communities. Millions of dollars of emergency relief were directed to international students and other temporary migrants that may not have been provided but for the advocacy of international students and their supporters. And yet, as things currently stand, the effort to institutionalise a space for international student organising that could be sustained beyond the moment of crisis, and perhaps one that could be there for the next crisis, has failed. Depending on one's perspective on the merits of institutionalisation, this outcome might be cause for anger, for indifference, or even for celebration. In terms of the short-lived nature of OISH, as Berlant (2016, p. 414) notes, a "failed episode is not evidence that the project was in error. By definition, the common forms of life are always going through a phase, as infrastructures will." If care infrastructures established through mutual aid are to address the urgent needs created by broken systems, while not reproducing those very systems, how should those alternative care infrastructures relate to the state, the shadow-state, and the market, where exclusionary logics of control and profit lurk? Does the institutionalisation of alternative infrastructures undermine or enhance their transformative counter-normative potential?

In working through this strategic dilemma, we hope we have shown the utility of drawing these discussions of mutual aid into dialogue with work on the relational and ecological geographies of care infrastructures. Doing so is helpful precisely in grappling with the relationship between infrastructures and institutions without lapsing into ideological calcifications. As Berlant (2016, p. 414) argues, we must avoid concepts such as mutual aid becoming "placeholders for our desire [that] become factishes, fetishized figural calculations that we can cling onto and start drawing lines in the sand with." Relational geographies of care inevitably uncover complex relationships that reach across the boundaries and "lines in the sand" that we inherit from some more rigid approaches to mutual aid. If we start from the position that the relationship between infrastructures and institutions exists as a question to be grappled in situ, rather than a problem to be avoided through ideological refusal, this stance pushes us towards the contextual interrogation of such relationships and their capacity to centre equality over inequality, diversity over enforced conformity, and the active pursuit of justice over the passive receipt of charity.

From this perspective, it is possible to grapple with diverse forms of infrastructure-making held in common, which may even have diverse relations with associated forms of institutionalisation. Institutions that are designed to sustain our common care—such as Addi Road, Sydney Community Forum, and what was planned for OISH—can be imagined as "transitional objects"—places and spaces that help us make a transition from one state to another (Honig, 2017). Here, rather than institutionalisation being the ultimate goal of one's efforts, it is instead the means to an end that ultimately lies outside and beyond the institution. As we have seen in the case of efforts to secure funds and space for OISH once it was established, these tasks will not be without challenges—not least in the labour that may be diverted into efforts of institutionalisation.

From where and when we write in Sydney, even with newly elected Labor governments at both Commonwealth and State levels, it seems hard to imagine state actors being interested in resourcing and sustaining common-care institutions such as OISH in ways that provide material resources while sustaining decision-making autonomy, as in the case of the forms of public-common partnerships observed by Bianchi (2022a) in Barcelona. And yet, in the broader infrastructural ecology that we have documented and discussed in this paper, we can see the powerful reverberations of

decisions made in the 1970s by the Whitlam Labor government to grant land to both Addison Road Community Organisation and Sydney Community Forum. In many ways, those decisions prefigure the kinds of public-commons partnerships imagined by the likes of Russell and Milburn (2018) as alternatives to an uncaring urban neoliberalism. Those land grants provided a degree of political autonomy and financial independence to those organisations and have arguably enabled them to sustain crucial forms of labour, space, and relationships that were vital infrastructures for sustaining life for some of Sydney's most precarious inhabitants almost 50 years later. That is a pretty good inspiration for community-owned and common-care infrastructures and institutions we might seek to build today.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Figures from Department of Education, available at https://www.education.gov.au/international-education-data-and-research/international-student-monthly-summary-and-data-tables

[2] Figures from Department of Education, available at https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/datavisualisations/Pages/region.aspx

[3] While the sentiment and injustice expressed here are very real, international students, along with other non-citizens that pay tax on income earned in Australia, are not technically considered "Australians for tax purposes."

[4] We are not claiming here that Addison Road was the only organisation that responded positively to international students. For instance, some universities and student unions entered into partnerships with foodbanks for the cooking and distribution of food, and several restaurants provided free meals to international students in their local and/or ethnic communities.

[5] See https://addiroad.org.au/about-us/ and also Addison Road Community Centre Organisation 2020.

[6] See https://www.sydneyalliance.org.au

[7] See https://www.sydneyalliance.org.au/our-governance#values-we-share

[8] https://www.sydneyalliance.org.au/news-1/hub-launched-to-help-international-students-struggling-with-impact-of-the-pandemic

[9] "Prefigurative spaces do not exist in a vacuum; they are embedded within wider contemporary conditions, concerns and spaces. Nevertheless, their practice produces a 'critical distance' that denaturalises prevailing ways of doing things while simultaneously inspiring, crafting and developing alternatives" (Cooper, 2017, p. 335).

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