

ATT: Joint Standing Committee on Migration

Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes

As a member of the Assyrian community in Fairfield, it has come to my attention that the services for migrants and refugees are not generating the best outcomes for migrants. While there are many organisations who strive to do the best, and large amounts of funding flowing into this area, the lack of oversight and coordination is not generating the best results. Many people arrive without support and assistance, have experienced torture or trauma of some kind and need specialised and sustainable support. The current system of services is not meeting these needs, and regularly in my daily work I see the effects.

One example I can share is of a family who had recently arrived. They had experience trauma before arriving to Australia and their financial support (for housing in particular) had run out as they had been in Fairfield for over a month. This family came to visit me to see if I could help. I deal with families and conflict on a daily basis, and to me it was clear there was violence occurring in the family. We needed to convince the family to take part in counselling, and providing incentives to do this was the only way forward. This disconnect between the services providing counselling and psychologically services and the case workers who had managed their case was evident as many families are distressed in taking part in counselling providing services. Further, the differences culturally in the acceptance of mental health issues was more than clear. To help this family get the support they needed, specialised, ongoing and persistent support was needed to achieve a result. While I was able to help this family, there are many others who do not know where to go and are left isolated without support.

This Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes is a timely and needed investigation into what is working, what is not working, and what could be improved. The system of assessing migrants comes from the wrong perspective, instead of what migrants should contribute to Australia, we should ask them what they can do and what they would like to do, and set up a system that supports them to do this. I hope with this submission it is clearer what needs to happen for the benefit of the whole of the Fairfield community. Please find my comments and suggests below the relevant Terms of Reference.

The mix, coordination and extent of settlement services available and the effectiveness of these services in promoting better settlement outcomes for migrants

- Spread of services needs to be considered, centralised services create tensions by facilitating an atmosphere of competition.
- Many people who migrate or come as a refugee have faced torture and trauma – if this is not addressed it attracts the wrong behaviour as they have not dealt with their past experiences.
- Policies currently do not address the need for services beyond the 1-month period, particularly in the area of housing and food support.
- Influence of religious organisations – convincing migrants/refugees to join the religion in exchange for services and support, putting them in a place of vulnerability.
- Not enough support for living and rising costs of living in Fairfield.

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- Case workers – lack of follow through beyond the initial consultation and service provision.
- Migrants become lost in transit, completely isolated from the community.
- This isolation contributes to anti-social behaviour in young people, their parents aren't able to offer them enough support so they seek validation through maladaptive means.
- Need for training and support for family and sponsors for a longer period of time.
- Need for non-religious, non-judgemental support.
- Services are inappropriate and patronising – particularly when migrants first arrive.
- Services don't factor in the lack of awareness about mental illness and cultural sensitivities around mental health. This needs to be dealt with through reflexive practice and ongoing support.
- English Intensive classes should not be delivered with an entire group of refugees of which speak the same language, as they remain speaking to each other in their native language.

Current migration processes adequately assess a migrant's prospects

- Lack of follow up with sponsors before migrants arrive. This is a huge problem as sometimes people come and have no place to live and are not able to access the normal forms of assistance as they have come on a sponsored visa.
- Unlawful brokers exist which interferes with the system of processing. More needs to be done to address this.
- Disconnect between what is happening on the ground and what is happening in Government Policies – asking what they would like to do and supporting them to live the life that they want to here in Australia is the best approach.
- It's not about the migrants' prospects, they are already set up to fail when they arrive by not following through and providing ongoing support.
- Funding is often reactive and given in large amounts to selected organisations without adequate oversight or supervision.
- Some migrants can only afford one meal a day when they arrive with the current financial support. The funding is not reaching where it is most needed.
- Many have face trauma and torture this is ignored because they do not receive the correct specialised services as there is a stigma present with receiving counselling services. The Assyrian Resource centre has been outreaching with STARTTS but further work is needed in order to provide a solution for this problem.
- Domestic Violence occurs when financial and emotional stress are present in many families. It does not mean that are bad people or cannot change their behaviour over time.
- Humanity has been lost. These are people with their own identity that we are trying to help.

Sincerely,

Carmen Lazar