



Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration – Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes

The Multicultural Development Association (MDA) is committed to building a flourishing multicultural Queensland in which people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds have an opportunity to thrive and contribute.

MDA has provided specialist settlement support for over 16 years. We currently settle every newly arrived refugee in Brisbane, Rockhampton and Toowoomba. Our current client base includes refugees and asylum seekers. In 2015-16 we have worked with over 4500 clients from 68 different countries. A core component of our work is creating welcome by forging connections within and between community groups to facilitate the settlement journey and contribute towards a socially cohesive society.

Executive Summary

MDA submits that

- Australia's future is brighter because of the strengths of our Migration Program and the Humanitarian Program in particular. The richness and diversity of the experience, skills and talents of former refugees will help position Australia to meet the challenges of our collective future.
- Settlement outcomes for former refugees in Australia are achieved with the assistance of a well resourced sector that can provide professional, targeted and flexible support. But the sector is currently underfunded and government has not yet contemplated an increase in funding consistent with the expected increases in intake, which will jeopardize both program sustainability and settlement outcomes over time.
- MDA recommends increasing available funding, at the very least to be commensurate with the projected increase in the number of arrivals. Further funding for particular population groups, as indicated below, is also warranted:
 - There are an increasing number of young people arriving through the Humanitarian Program¹. Young people from a refugee background face a unique constellation of issues that affect their settlement outcomes². Intensive support at key points of transition will improve outcomes for young people.
 - Likewise the small, but increasing, number of humanitarian arrivals with a disability requires more intensive support to live a contributing life in the Australian context³.
- Settlement outcomes include getting jobs, learning English and going to school. Nonetheless successful settlement entails more than this. Likewise measurable indicators of settlement outcomes must be expanded to reflect attributes of independence, wellbeing and belonging. This means funding case-management to provide intensive, individualized services, but also community development work to strengthen emergent communities and achieve greater integration.
- Regional resettlement has the potential for expansion, mindful that support for regional communities to promote inclusion is a necessary component of achieving economic integration and social cohesion in the regions.
- The criteria for inclusion in Australia's Humanitarian Program should reflect the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) recommendations, prioritizing opportunities for the most vulnerable people who have met the criteria for refugee resettlement.
- Australian law currently empowers the Minister to refuse to grant a visa or cancel a visa on the basis of a failing "character test" (s501 *Migration Act*). Ministerial discretion in this instance is quite broad, inclusive of all serious criminal acts, and does not require further amendment to operate effectively as either a barrier to admission or a deterrent to criminal activity in Australia.
- Australian law also empowers the Minister to cancel citizenship in specific circumstances and where an individual retains citizenship in another country (*Australian Citizenship Act*). MDA believes that all Australian citizens should be treated equally under law, regardless of where they were born, and this power should not be activated.

Introduction

This is an important time to reflect on settlement outcomes in the Australian context. Last year the first wave of data from the Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA) survey was released⁴; the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network along with the Refugee Council of Australia completed research into the experiences of young refugees⁵; the Productivity Commission finalized its report into *Migrant Intake in Australia*⁶. At present the Humanitarian Settlement program is going through a significant expansion, during a period of unprecedented demand for displaced persons throughout the world, and Australia's settlement support services are being reviewed, redesigned and re-tendered.

In this context there is a proliferation of research and data that points to both the successes of the Australia's Humanitarian Program and the challenges it faces moving forward. This submission addresses the Inquiry's terms of reference with respect to this part of Australia's migration program. Additionally, MDA notes that the Productivity Commission concluded that Australia's overall migration program promises an ongoing demographic dividend to Australia and higher economic outputs per person⁷. Moreover, that Government would be wise to consider more specific settlement support for those who arrive on non-humanitarian related visa categories. MDA supports this recommendation.

The following submission illustrates the success of Australia's Humanitarian Program drawing on examples from MDA's work in Queensland. Central to our contribution to this Inquiry is the explanation of the outcomes framework which informs our work with new arrivals who were formally refugee⁸. Based on review of Australian and international research, and coupled with the results of internal evaluations, client consultations and practice wisdom, ours is a comprehensive framework that understands refugee resettlement is complex. The framework consists of four key domains: **Getting the Basics Right**; **Enabling Engagement and Independence**; **Enhancing a sense of Belonging** and **Promoting Wellbeing**.

In order to ensure successful settlement, all domains must be addressed in the short, medium and long-term, although different milestones are relevant at different stages. Government's stated objectives for settlement, including outcomes in education, employment and English language proficiency, fall into the second domain, promoting both engagement and independence. These are incredibly important outcomes, but are unlikely to be achieved without working simultaneously in the other domains, as this submission will attest. Moreover, we will illustrate how innovative service design that is driven by client voice and experience contributes to achieving outcomes in each domain. The design of services plays an important part in enculturating recent arrivals to the norms of Australian democracy and life. In particular, to achieving access to rights, economic opportunities, government services, and understanding civic responsibility and pride in the Australian context.

Understanding Settlement

Settlement is a complex process and there is no real consensus on a definition. A 2011 study conducted by the then Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), distinguished between the systemic factors, which are easily quantifiable, and that contribute to settlement from the lived experience of settlement, finding that policy makers emphasized the former, while former refugees discussed settlement in terms of personal happiness and community connectedness⁹. The 2015 EY evaluation of the Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) and Complex Case Service (CCS) programs suggested current research into the factors that promote and impede settlement is inconclusive and that further research is required to truly understand settlement¹⁰. Likewise the Campbell Collaboration's systemic review of research into interventions to improve the economic self sufficiency and well being of resettled refugees found that none of the 9,000 studies consulted met the strict, methodological inclusion criteria employed by the Campbell Collaboration¹¹.

Nonetheless and notwithstanding negative media about gang related activities among Sudanese youth in the Dandenong and some disquiet about unemployment rates among recently arrived persons following the release of the first wave of BNLA data¹², there is increasing evidence regarding the success of Australia's Humanitarian Program. A literature review conducted by RCOA, for example, found evidence that once initial barriers to access and participation in education and employment were overcome, former refugees achieve a rapid convergence in earnings with other migrants¹³. The annual Scanlon Survey provides evidence for continued high levels of support for Australian multiculturalism¹⁴. The 2015 EY evaluation of the Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) and Complex Case Support (CCS) programs prepared for the Department of Social Services (DSS) concluded that both programs are working well and achieving their objectives¹⁵.

In the Australian context, there is an emergent consensus that settlement is a lengthy process: a journey, which follows many trajectories to success. Despite this variation, however, there are identifiable protective factors that can hasten integration and participation, and risk factors that can impede settlement. Thus the key question for improving settlement outcomes for former refugees is: what are these barriers and what can be done to overcome them, to expedite the journey to engagement, independence, inclusion, and wellbeing? The four domains of MDA's settlement framework provide a useful heuristic with which to conceptualize both categories: barriers to settlement and strategies which can assist former refugees overcome these and achieve their aspirations for their lives in Australia.

In brief:

- **Getting the Basics Right** includes activities undertaken early in settlement, like finding appropriate accommodation, securing income support and access to medical services, which provide a foundation for the settlement journey. Former refugees face unique challenges in getting the basics right, not least because most arrive in Australia with very limited financial resources and varying levels of competency with the systems and markets that govern service provision in Australia. But the success of the current settlement program indicates that with dedicated professional resources and an individualized approach we can achieve meaningful progress with regards the basics within a short time frame.
- **Enabling Engagement and Independence** through learning English and participating in education and employment, is a more complex task. The Adult Migrant English Program

(AMEP) teaches newly arrived migrants English. Nonetheless, many former refugees require further support to learn English, particularly those with limited literacy and/or prior experience of schooling. Other than assisting refugee children enroll in school, however, there is little direct specialized support for enabling former refugees to engage with education or get jobs. This is despite the fact that people who arrive through the humanitarian program have real difficulties 1) gaining recognition for prior learning and 2) obtaining experience in the Australian job market, and 3) navigating this same market.

- **Enhancing a sense of Belonging** is reliant on community connections, understanding Australia culture and civil society, all of which take time. The kinds of barriers already discussed, a lack of financial capacity, systems literacy, have an impact on recent arrivals developing a sense of belonging. Additionally assisting former refugees obtain social capital, that is, relationships characterized by trust and reciprocity in intensive and extensive social networks is important for achieving outcomes in this domain. Outside of the Settlement Grants Program (SGP), however, there is little investment in community development activities for former refugees. The current structure of settlement services emphasizes connecting recent arrivals to established ethnic and religious communities, but a more rigorous and dedicated approach to building social capital resources that bridge ethnic differences and enable former refugees to build deeper connections with the Australian community is warranted.
- **Promoting wellbeing** is of particular importance given the loss and trauma experienced by former refugees who are simultaneously navigating a complex process to establish meaningful identities and aspirations in the Australian context. Indeed this domain of the settlement journey is exceedingly complex, so too the relationships between advancement in this domain and those described above: engagement and belonging work to improve wellbeing and vice versa. Current specialized support to resolve trauma related issues is provided through the FASTT network. Nonetheless, promoting wellbeing among former refugees involves more than addressing trauma. Specialized settlement services work to assist clients to regain a sense of safety, security, dignity and self worth during settlement. This can involve working with clients to resolve family and intergenerational conflict during settlement

The complexity of youth settlement

Youth settlement is additionally complicated. Being a refugee has a profound influence on children and young people. Displacement, insecurity, exposure to violence and family separation are common themes. Research suggests that such experiences can interfere with achieving developmentally appropriate milestones, such as attending and completing school, and have profound effects on a young person's nascent sense of self and identity¹⁶. Additionally, resettlement is in of itself a stressful process with specific implications for children and young people, and there is some suggestion that these stressors can have deleterious effects of the same magnitude as negative pre-migration experiences¹⁷.

Each of the settlement outcome domains has specific resonance for young people. **Getting the Basics Right** is profoundly affected by family composition and functioning. Family units are under considerable pressure during settlement, often after being reconfigured during the refugee journey from forced displacement to safety¹⁸. Stressors internal to families may be caused by

unemployment, a sense of social exclusion and relationship breakdown, but regardless have an enormous influence on whether a child or young person has their basic needs met, with further implications for wellbeing. Research suggests that young people from a refugee background have an enormous appetite for **Engagement and Independence**, but encounter difficulties transitioning to mainstream schools and developing peer networks. Correa-Valez' research indicates that outcomes in this domain are promoted by an increased sense of **Belonging** among young people, which is inclusive of their perception of the status and acceptance of their family and community in the Australian context¹⁹. Achieving **Wellbeing** outcomes for children and young people during resettlement, developing a secure identity and clear aspirations for example, requires explicit support for all the reasons just mentioned. For all these reasons improving settlement outcomes for young people requires dedicated support.

Case Studies

MDA's innovation in each domain

MDA undertakes innovative activities in each domain as illustrated by the case studies below. These case studies have been selected because they demonstrate principles that govern MDA's work with recent arrivals: sensitivity to context, coupled with a firm belief that former refugees can thrive in the Australian context with timely and well designed supports. Moreover, the following case studies have been selected to illustrate that great outcomes are achieved collaboratively, working with other providers, philanthropic organizations and volunteers. They illustrate the importance of working across multiple domains simultaneously, for example, activities that promote a sense of belonging also work to promote engagement and connection.

Getting the Basics Right: The Tzu Chi Dental Fair

For the past ten years, MDA has worked with the Buddhist Compassion Tzu Chi Foundation Australia, QEII Dental Hospital and dental students from the University of Queensland, to deliver a biannual dental fair for former refugees who cannot otherwise get timely access to public dental services. Last year, Metro South Oral Health provided interpreter support and we expanded the fair to include clients from Access Community Services and the Red Cross²⁰.

219 clients attended on the day, 42 % received restorative dental work and there were 144 volunteers in attendance.

The extraordinary success of the dental fair is a great example of getting the basics right. As is often the case with getting the basics right, barriers to access include financial impediments and systems literacy, in this case health literacy. Working collaboratively with volunteers provides a way to reduce financial impediments to access. The Dental Fair is always also designed to build oral health literacy in clients and brochures were produced in multiple community languages.

Enabling Engagement at School

Last year MDA, collaborated with Small Town Culture, the Queensland Council of Unions and a number of its affiliates, to produce two film clips featuring refugee youth and other school students in Toowoomba that celebrate local talent, cross cultural dialogue and harmony in regional Queensland. The clips can be found [here](#) . MDA is very active in Toowoomba running community

events to promote inclusion. But this is an example of a successful strategy to develop multicultural awareness and simultaneously promote engagement with local schools.

Many children and young people from a refugee background have little experience of formal schooling prior to arrival in Australia, but almost all have high aspirations for their experience of education²¹. Realizing such aspirations certainly relies on academic achievement, but is also facilitated by social integration into local school cultures. The production of these clips is an example of an innovative strategy to promote cross-cultural engagement while building skills and confidence, allowing children and young people to give voice to their experiences and dreams.

Enabling Engagement for Youth at Key Transitions

MDA's Migrant Youth Vision Program (MYVP), funded by DSS and delivered with six partner organizations²², demonstrates the success of a targeted approach to ensure young people from a refugee background's continued engagement with education and employment at points of key transition to adulthood. MDA's Skill UP, a job readiness project delivered through this program provides experiential learning opportunities for youth to build networks and the cultural competencies necessary to engage in the Australian labour market. Part of the project is delivered through a soccer program developed with the Australian Catholic University (ACU): Kicking Goals Together, which won the national ACU community service prize for 2016 and will be delivered through other universities in the coming year. Working with young people's natural passions, Kicking Goals Together promotes engagement by building skills and network simultaneously to overcome the specific social capital deficits of some recent arrivals.

Enabling engagement by promoting leadership: Youth Advisory Council

The MYVP established a Youth Advisory Council and recruited 12 members with diverse cultural backgrounds through an open recruitment process. Members have provided valuable insight into the issues affecting young people, their aspirations and the challenges they face in pursuing these. Members also act as Ambassadors for MYVP. To date they have assisted in a variety of co-design activities and community consultations, assisting with research and outreach activities.

The Council provides members with an opportunity to learn about each others and forge new networks across cultural difference. But just as importantly membership of the Council allows members to demonstrate leadership and learn how to have influence, developing confidence and competencies that will stay with them into the future as start their careers.

Engaging with young women: STRIDE

With the assistance of Youth without Borders (YWB), MDA MYVP organised a personal development weekend for 25 young women from a refugee background aged between 17 and 24 years in October 2016. The three month post-camp evaluation is currently underway, but already 24 of the participants indicated that they would recommend the camp to their peers. The structure of the weekend was based on MYAN's active citizenship framework and included workshops that addressed topics from personal wellbeing, to education and training pathways, to leadership development. Providing this opportunity for young women works to promote engagement: overcoming marginalisation and isolation by developing peer networks, delivering information and having fun.

Enabling Engagement: Work Experience

Work and Welcome is MDA's work place giving project that enables organizations to fund three month, paid work experience opportunities to former refugees. In the last eighteen months, MDA has established 20 new partnerships. Contributing organizations now include public sector agencies and, trade unions and energy providers²³. During this same period MDA supported placements for 48 clients and 80 percent obtained employment subsequently. Ghazal Abdulwahid, a young woman who arrived from Pakistan in 2014, is a great example. During her first year in Australia she was unable to find work. After completing a Certificate III through MDA²⁴, she completed a Work and Welcome placement with the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services and has secured ongoing employment with the Department²⁵.

This is another example of an innovative approach to promote engagement by overcoming barriers that are specific to people from a refugee background. The Australian labour market is far from transparent to new arrivals. Forging connections and learning about the expectations of employers and colleagues promotes employment outcomes by making former refugees confident that they can navigate the implicit cultural norms of workplaces with which they are not familiar.

Enhancing a sense of Belonging: A Day at The Beach

Working with the Queensland LifeSavers Club at Caloundra, St Joseph's Catholic Parish, Bracken Ridge and Hillsong City Care, MDA recently organized for 130 recently-arrived clients from Syria and Iraq to go to Caloundra Beach for the day. LifeSavers provided beach safety education and Hillsong City Care provided transportation. The event attained positive media coverage with approximately 1.5 million views on ABC social media²⁶. Our clients, some of whom had never spent a day at the beach before, loved it.

The beach is integral to Australian identity, but beach culture and safety is not something that many former refugees understand. MDA provides information about beach safety during initial orientation. But nothing compares to actually going to the beach and meeting LifeSavers. Understanding Australian culture promotes a sense of belonging and events like these promote overcome barriers to access key organizations in civil society such as the LifeSavers and also the costs of travel.

Promoting wellbeing: Culture in Mind

Culture in Mind (CiM) is a multicultural community based health support and recovery services that supports the social, emotional and mental wellbeing of people from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background in the greater Brisbane Region. CiM was developed collaboratively by MDA and the World Wellness Group in response to an identified lack of culturally appropriate mental health support in Brisbane. CiM provides personalized individual support, group activities and family and carer support in a wrap around model. Group activities are co-designed with clients. CiM's specific focus on cultural accessibility and appropriateness has particular and positive effects on clients' wellbeing.

Promoting Wellbeing: *Wangarra Men's Group*

MDA and the Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT) jointly run a weekly men's group - the Wangarra Men's Group. Wangarra works exclusively with adult men over 18 years from an Iraqi or Syrian background. Weekly sessions are offered over 8 to 10 weeks and there is always one major activity or event in any term, for example fishing or sailing. The participants themselves identify issues to be addressed during the program and are offered access to different therapeutic techniques, like mindfulness, along with incidental counselling. The group has also forged links with the local indigenous community – in fact, the group's name the Wangarra Men's group was suggested by local elders. The group functions to promote wellbeing by reducing isolation and the stigma associated with help seeking for psychological difficulties, and the program reports success in facilitating access to more traditional counselling sessions for participants.

Conclusion

Settlement is a journey that takes many paths. As illustrated above, success relies on innovation and collaboration between specialized and mainstream providers, and the good will of the community more generally. Moreover, we must work simultaneously across domains to create a sense belonging and wellbeing in recent arrivals, alongside outcomes in employment and education.

Recent debates about the settlement prospects of young people highlight the complexity of settlement. Children and young people who arrive in Australia through the Humanitarian Program have endured loss and dislocation. For them growing up in Australia involves developing new, often bi-cultural identities that incorporate what they love about Australia, alongside deep and abiding commitments and obligations to family and culture.

Parliament has the opportunity to use this Inquiry to rearticulate its commitment to improved settlement outcomes for young people. MDA submits that the four domains which have been explored in this submission are of particular relevance to young people. To this end continuing youth specific settlement programs, such as that recently funded by DSS is essential.

Future innovations in settlement services, particularly for children and youth, are likely to be supported by developments in technology. The increasing reliability of translation apps is a case in point. These cannot yet replace interpreters, but can certainly advance language learning and render information far more accessible. Moreover, technologies can assist young people forge connections across communities. But again, such technologies cannot yet replace individualized, professionalized assistance that is specifically designed to support young people on their journey to a flourishing life in Australia.

Notes

¹ Multicultural Youth Advisory Network (MYAN) A Snapshot of the Data: Humanitarian and Migrant Youth Arrivals To Australia 2014-15.

http://www.myan.org.au/file/file/MYANHumanitarianYouthArrivalstoAustralia_2014-2015.pdf accessed 27/01/17.

² Nunn, C., C. McMichael, S. M. Gifford and I. Correa-Velez (2014) "'I came to this country for a better life': factors mediating employment trajectories among young people who migrated to Australia as refugees during adolescence" *Journal of Youth Studies* DOI: [10.1080/13676261.2014.901496](https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2014.901496).

³ Diversitat (2014) Diversitat Disability Report Findings http://www.diversitat.org.au/documents/Diversitat_disability_findings_report_1.pdf accessed 27/01/17.

⁴ Jenkinson, R., Silbert, M., De Maio, J., & Edwards, B. (2016). *Settlement experiences of recently arrived humanitarian migrants* (Building a New Life in Australia Fact Sheet). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

⁵ MYAN, Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) (2016) *Speaking Up: The Global Refugee Youth Consultations in Australia* http://www.myan.org.au/file/file/GRYC%20Report_NOV2016.pdf accessed 27/01/17.

⁶ Productivity Commission (2016) *Migrant Intake into Australia: Productivity Commission Inquiry Report Overview and Recommendations* <http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/migrant-intake/report/migrant-intake-report-overview.pdf> accessed 25/01/17.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Nomenclature can get complicated. In MDA's experience clients who arrive on permanent visas consider their refugee status to have been eclipsed by their acceptance in Australia. Despite the ongoing salience of this category – refugee - in explaining settlement outcomes, client preference is to be considered as members of their new homes rather than as refugees in an ongoing sense.

⁹ Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2011) *Settlement Outcomes of New Arrivals –Report of Findings* https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01_2014/settlement-outcomes-new-arrival_access.pdf. Accessed 20/01/17.

¹⁰ EY Australia (2015) *Evaluation of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Programs* https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/11_2015/evaluation_of_the_humanitarian_settlement_services_and_complex_case_support_programmes_-_final_report_0.pdf accessed 25/01/17.

¹¹ <https://www.campbellcollaboration.org/library/resettled-refugees-self-sufficiency-and-well-being.html> accessed 27/01/17.

¹² <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/refugee-crisis-enduring-cost-of-labors-failure-as-nearly-90-per-cent-of-humanitarian-migrants-are-on-welfare/news-story/4b3493bd3e56e3cbe3d752eca9c7ff1a> accessed 25 January 2017.

¹³ RCOA (2010). *Economic, civic and social contributions of refugees and humanitarian entrants: A literature review. Report for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia* <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/rpt/2010-Contributions.pdf> accessed 20/01/17.

¹⁴ Marcus. A. (2016) *Mapping Social Cohesion: the Scanlon Surveys 2016* Scanlon Foundation <http://scanlonfoundation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/2016-Mapping-Social-Cohesion-Report-FINAL-with-covers.pdf> accessed 30/01/2016.

¹⁵ EY op cit.

¹⁶ Correa-Velez, I., S.M. Gifford, A. G. Barnett (2010) "Longing to belong: Social inclusion and wellbeing among youth with refugee backgrounds in the first three years in Melbourne" *Australia Social Science and Medicine* doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2010.07.018

¹⁷ Ibid p1400

¹⁸ McMichael, C. Gifford, S.M., and I Correa-Velez (2011) "Negotiating family, navigating settlement: family connectedness amongst resettled youth with refugee backgrounds living in Melbourne, Australia" *Journal of Youth Studies* 14(2):175-195

¹⁹ Correa-Velez, I. op cit p1401

²⁰ The collaboration was also extended to include Brisbane South Primary Health Network, Mater Refugee Health Services and MICAH.

²¹ MYAN op cit.

²² Partner organizations include: Queensland African Communities Council, Queensland Program for the Survivors of Torture and Trauma, Queensland Community Alliance, Youth without Borders, Welcome to Australia, Help Enterprises.

²³ For more information please see: <https://mdaltd.org.au/work-and-welcome/>.

²⁴ Through *Skilling Queenslanders for Work*

²⁵ Please see MDA's 2015-16 Annual Report for further information <https://mdaltd.org.au/publications/>

²⁶ See <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-18/first-beach-swim-for-syrian-iraqi-refugees/8192284> accessed 30/01/2017.