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Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
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Dear Committee,

Submission on Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes

Introduction & Background

Welcome to Australia is a national not-for-profit organisation which is dedicated to giving people seeking asylum, refugees, new arrivals and long-term migrants a warm, dignified and positive welcome to Australia. We are a community organisation that aims to cultivate a culture of welcome towards new arrivals by changing the public conversation and engaging everyday Australians in practical acts of welcome.

One of our core values is to work towards long-term cultural change for Australia while working hard to improve the policies affecting people seeking asylum and refugees.

Welcome to Australia is grateful to be given the opportunity to provide a submission to the Joint Parliamentary Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes.



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

I. Settlement programs

Australia has a robust and diverse range of settlement services available that cater to most members of the migrant community in some capacity. These include Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS), Complex Case Support (CCS) and the Settlement Services Program (SSP) which in turn includes community development, youth work, case work and migration assistance.

These programs are effective in promoting better settlement outcomes for migrants in that, in most instances, migrants are able to be supported adequately. Where we believe these services fall short, however, is that while HSS usually ceases at 6 months, there is a gap in service delivery between the intensive initial support given by HSS to the dramatic change clients then face when they exit the program – they are required to seek out support on an as-needed basis by dropping in to a service provider and waiting to be seen by the next available worker. While SSP providers do an excellent job of supporting these clients as best they can, they can only support those that show up.

Many clients find this change in service provision to be confusing and stressful, and, instead of showing up for support at an SSP intake time, prefer to not seek out this help for many reasons including confusion around what they can access and when, making mistakes and feeling embarrassed when requesting support, physically getting themselves to offices and so on. This, in turn, often leads clients with problems that could have been easily rectified to find themselves “spiralling” in a new culture. When such clients finally come to the attention of a service provider, their issues are often so complicated that a referral to Complex Case Support is necessary. CCS is an excellent program in which clients are supported to overcome challenges in a very structured and empowering way.

However, it is also a very expensive program for the Department of Social Services (DSS) to fund. It is not necessary for a significant number of clients in the CCS program to find themselves in the situations they are in when they enter the program. Had their transition from HSS to SSP been more supportive and tailored, they would not have needed an expensive and intensive program such as CCS.

Recommendation: create a more supported transition from HSS to SSP. A referral from an HSS case manager to SSP with no personalised follow-up is not enough. Provide scope in the SSP program for intake caseworkers to provide more individualised casework support to those clients whose support from HSS has seemingly ended abruptly. This will cut down the cost of CCS and the stress placed on clients immensely

The SSP program also ceases to support clients that request support after 5 years. This arbitrary number is not indicative of the real-life situations that migrants find themselves in. Settlement is a long and complex journey, and many people that migrate to Australia may find themselves needing support in the initial years, then feel

they are able to navigate systems alone after a time. However, issues constantly arise. People have new children, find themselves in debt, experience family breakdown and so on. These issues can happen at any time, including after 5 years of being in Australia. People often find themselves in need of specialised, migrant-specific support at such times, and would benefit significantly from being able to access SSP past their 5-year anniversary of visa-grant. This is yet another area in which CCS is often left to work with the clients. CCS is the only program in the settlement suite of services that can allow for working with people after 5 years in Australia, and even then it is on a case by case basis and this support is not always granted.

Recommendation: Extend the 5 year limit on SSP access to newly arrived migrants.

II. Role of community organisations

The importance of community organisations in delivering the suite of settlement services cannot be underestimated. Community organisations each bring their own unique sets of values and systems to the programs, which provides clients with tailored support. In our opinion, the possible privatisation of HSS, CCS and SSP should never be an option. Connections between community organisations are built up over years and only serve to support vulnerable communities. By removing small community organisations from the mix of providers delivering settlement services, there is a risk that tailored and personalised settlement support, drawing on the organisations vast connections and expertise, may be lost.

A one size fits all approach doesn't work with regards to settlement, and these services should not be privatised. Ample anecdotal evidence exists of referring clients to different services that can better suit the needs of the client. For example, from extensive experience working in the settlement services sector, clients with disability or aged needs are being kept within a service provider that also offers disability and aged services; similarly, newly arrived families that have parenting or child behaviour issues being kept within an organisation that offers family services support as well as settlement services. These small specialised organisations offer tailor made programs to ensure that internal referrals are quick, streamlined and efficient, and the clients are far less likely to become confused about being engaged with a range of providers, consequently decreasing the risk of them disengaging from support.

Small organisations understand the challenges of different communities and tailor make their services to fit the needs. For example, community based organisations frequently support communities to identify gaps in services provision, then apply for grants and funding to support specific issues and cultural groups.

Community organisations are also better at hiring cross cultural and multicultural/bi-lingual workers that understand the unique challenges their own communities are facing, consequently providing better support to new and emerging communities.

Recommendation: ensure the suite of settlement services programs are not privatised and remain spread across specialised, well-established and experienced community organisations and consortia.

2. National and international best practice strategies for improving migrant settlement outcomes and prospects.

Welcoming Cities is an internationally renowned program, and has been brought to Australia by Welcome to Australia and the Scanlon Foundation, in partnership with Welcoming America.

This initiative was launched in March 2016 and is identifying and supporting the work of, and opportunities for, communities and Local Governments to leverage the social and economic ideas and innovation that come from being welcoming and inclusive. The important role of receiving communities in ensuring that planning, infrastructure and initiatives are in place to welcome and support the integration of new arrivals is under-represented in the conversations and approaches to migration and settlement. What we know is that welcoming - when it is planned, shared and community-wide - works.

More work needs to be done to ensure that local governments, local businesses and community organisations help receiving community members understand who their neighbours are, why they are here, and actively take on bridge building work to overcome barriers to inclusion and find common interests and shared values. When receiving communities are engaged - more robust, well-resourced and successful integration can occur. People will make a positive contribution to a community when they feel welcome and have a genuine sense of belonging. And it is incumbent on the receiving community to do everything that it can to welcome newcomers and to plan as effectively as possible for that.

To be effective, the approach to the engagement of the receiving community needs to be three-pronged:

1. **Building Meaningful contact** - bringing newly arrived migrants and the receiving community together for shared experiences that break down barriers and lead to new understanding.
2. **Leadership Engagement** - engaging diverse leaders to be positive voices around building a welcoming community sends clear messages that change and diversity are an opportunity for growth and prosperity. Local politicians, business leaders, faith and civic leaders play a vital role in affirming the contributions of all people and the importance of social inclusion, cohesion and harmony. Multi-sector approaches to welcoming efforts are vital for effective community planning and development.
3. **Positive messaging and communications** - finding ways to share positive narratives that humanise new neighbours and speak to shared values. This helps receiving communities realise how supporting newcomers and creating a welcoming community for all is just another way of building stronger communities for everyone.

Another initiative of Welcome to Australia that is developing lead strategies for improving migrant settlement outcomes is **Welcome to the Game**. In partnership with sporting associations, clubs, recreational facilities and community organisation Welcome to the Game is enhancing social cohesion and integration by providing clear and supported programs for young people from refugee backgrounds or people seeking asylum to access sporting opportunities. The initiative also draws in parents and builds active social networks, skills and employment pathways. Welcome to the Game programs such as Resilient Referees, AQUA English and Welcoming Clubs are creating a significant improvement in health and well-being, community access, cultural awareness and understanding, and socioeconomic participation.

One of the core activities and very successful program of Welcome to Australia is **The Welcome Centre** which provides support to people seeking asylum, refugees and new arrivals through free English classes, volunteer and work experience opportunities, emergency relief and most importantly friendship.

The Welcome Centre is predominantly a volunteer run drop in centre, funded by the generosity of the community as well as some corporate donors, to provide social connection and to foster a two-way intercultural thinking and understanding.

The Welcome Centre's success is based on volunteers and staff building genuine friendship and trust with the clients, in order to better assist them and their needs. Clients are often referred to existing settlement service providers where they can access help. Most of the clients who come to the Welcome Centre were shy to ask for help and did not have the rapport with others to share their needs. These clients are encouraged to realise the wealth of talent that they bring to this country, and are supported to foster a sense of purpose and worth. Clients often go on to volunteer and even lead some of those programs at The Welcome Centre.

The Welcome Centre aims to facilitate as many ways as possible, for everyday Australians to meet a newly arrived refugee, to hear their story and to better inform themselves about the debate on refugees.

<p>Recommendation: Endorse and resource Welcome to Australia's innovative programs such as those mentioned above, which set benchmarks for how cities, regions, communities, clubs and organisations can embed welcoming and inclusion in their identity, policy and practice.</p>

3. The importance of English language ability on a migrant's, or prospective migrant's, settlement outcome.

While English language is a key feature of successful settlement, it is not necessarily something that every person must achieve in order to be "successfully settled". Many of the migrants that came to Australia after WWII from countries like Greece and Italy still have very little English 50-60 years later. These migrants have become critical to the Australian way of life.

Programs such as Parenting in a New Culture are excellent bridges for newly arrived community members to understand the nuances and differences between their own

culture and the one in which they find their children growing up in. Additional funding for programs such as this will support families to stay together, remain healthy, and for parents to understand their children far more. This can also lend itself to the reduction of social isolation and disengagement from young people – with their parents understanding them more, they are far less likely to find themselves in dangerous or compromising situations.

Chai and Conversation is one of the programs that runs at The Welcome Centre, and it aims to improve the conversational English proficiencies of the newly arrived people, using casual and fun settings. Clients often play board games, share their stories with other Australians, and incidentally learn new vocabulary.

Recommendation: Provide better resources for innovative language programs that integrate culture and provide a relaxed and friendly learning environment.

4. Whether current migration processes adequately assess a prospective migrant's settlement prospects.

People that hold Temporary Protection Visas (TPV) and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEV), are assessed to be genuine refugees and are living in the Australian community. As such Welcome to Australia strongly believes that these people should have access to HSS.

There currently approximately 30,000 people living in the Australian community with these visas. They live with uncertainty about their future and fear deportation as their visas expire. These people already are integrating into the community, with jobs, relationships, have social networks, and are improving their language skills.

Welcome to Australia has seen that this uncertainty is restricting the ability for these people to fully thrive and reach their full potentials. Many want to open businesses and invest in their future, and however are often held back by this uncertainty.

Welcome to Australia strongly recommends that these people be provided permanent residency and the ability to thrive.

Recommendation: People granted TPVs & SHEV's should have access to HSS.

Recommendation: Grant Permanent Protection Visas to all those currently holding and eligible for TPVs and SHEV's.

5. The Committee shall give particular consideration to social engagement of youth migrants, including involvement of youth migrants in anti-social behaviour such as gang activity, and the adequacy of the Migration Act 1958-character test provisions as a means to address issues arising from this behaviour.

Any group of young people, regardless of their background, if marginalised, will turn to anti-social behaviour.

In the late 2000's there was significant rhetoric in the media, and numerous academic papers published on what was, at that time, seen as the "problem" of the Sudanese and other African-based youth crime and gang associations¹. At this time, the issue was proven to be irrelevant to culture, ethnic background or visa/refugee status, and merely a re-framing of political policy to suit the media's agenda of creating an "other"².

While there are some incidents of refugee youth joining gangs, this we think causes of this include marginalisation, a feeling of isolation, and racism. These can be addressed by programs which foster social cohesion, in particular programs which foster a sense of belonging to the wider community, a sense of self-worth, and opportunities for civil participation³.

In addition to these programs, the Government's language should not marginalise minorities and instead it should support them to celebrate their cultures and their achievements. The media also has a role to play.

Recommendation: More support and funding for innovative intercultural and social cohesion programs that foster sense of belonging, worth, and purpose.

Recommendation: The Government should take care when using language to not generalise particular cultural groups and marginalise them.

If we can be of any assistance or for further consultation, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours faithfully,

Welcome to Australia

¹ Joel Windel (2008) The radicalisation of African youth in Australian, Social Identities, 14:5, 553-566.

² Krystal Gatt (2011) Sudanese refugees in Victoria: An analysis of their treatment by the Australian Government, International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice, 35:3, 207-219.

³ Sandram M. Gifford, Christine Bakopanos, Ida Kaplan, Ignacio Correa-Velez (2007) Meaning or Measurement? Researching the Social Contexts of Health and Settlement among Newly-arrived Refugee Youth in Melbourne, Australia, Journal of Refugee Studies, 20:3, 414-440.