



## **The Australian Refugee Association: An Overview**

1. The Australian Refugee Association Inc. (ARA) was established in 1975 as the Indo-China Refugee Association and has since strived to enable refugees, asylum seekers, family and friends of refugees, community members and former refugees to settle in Australia with independence and dignity, and to develop and achieve their aspirations and opportunities in life.
2. ARA's mission is to help refugees become settled and participating citizens of Australia. ARA believes in the capacity and desire of refugees to be productive citizens through contributing to the social, cultural and economic life in Australia.
3. ARA's vision is a South Australia where all refugees have access to the full range of appropriate settlement services, where refugees have strong supportive communities of their own cultural backgrounds, where the general community is supportive of refugees and engaged with them. Our vision is a South Australia where refugees are an integral part of a thriving, prosperous community.
4. ARA works with individuals and communities from diverse cultural backgrounds, originating from dozens of countries across the world. The organisation receives federal funding under the Settlement Grants Program, and is one of South Australia's most experienced providers of settlement services. ARA's services include social support programs, casework, employment assistance, accommodation support, community development and leadership training, migration assistance and youth programs.



ARA delivers the Settlement Grant Services component which is aimed at people who have arrived to Australia through the humanitarian program. This particular service targets people from 6 months up to five years of settlement in Australia. Our services are vital in assessing the needs of newly arrived clients and supporting them to become self-reliant and able to navigate through the mainstream services post the 5 year mark.

Although this is a protracted time frame, many of our clients do not acquire skills which would enable them to confidently access mainstream services. Many of our clients, particularly the youth, have not had any education prior to their arrival to Australia which instantly further marginalises them. Along with the pressure to learn English and settle into the mainstream community, they are also required to navigate through a system which is unknown to them, difficult to make sense of to them and to their family, education and training, ongoing physical and mental health issues such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and racism.

This and many other barriers further disadvantage newly arrived young people in the field of Australian employment and workforce. Young people from refugee background have the highest unemployment rate within the Australian community. Along with lack of English language, settlement issues, physical and mental health issues are the main contributors. The need for support and culturally appropriate services is great, however the limitation is far greater.

The Australian legal system is also a contributing factor to the poor settlement of young people from refugee background. ARA has supported many young people who have entered the juvenile and adult corrections systems. These young people are unaware of the laws and also have a genuine fear of authority such as the police due to their past experiences. They struggle to make a connection with the legal support system as they are not aware what is available and are often fearful of seeking assistance, and thus tend to avoid making this connection in hopes that the legal matters will disappear. This simply creates more



problems and creates more issues for them. They are also shunned by their community and at times their families, as they have brought shame and embarrassment. Without the support of the community and family these young people spiral into self-destruction while trying to survive and get by.

ARA believes that early intervention and prevention is the key to successful settlement. Support services that are culturally appropriate as well as inviting to the newly arrived young people are vital in effective settlement. This also includes the need for longer settlement support and an extended period of time where settlement services are available.

ARA's work is extensively supported by our volunteers through our social support and youth mentoring program, our homework clubs and holiday activities. Through such activities we feel that people, in particular youth, are able to create connections with the community, learn about Australia and its culture, whilst also teaching volunteers/Australian community their culture. Through this process young people are not completely disconnected from their culture and will feel a sense of belonging in the Australian community. Young people respond to programs and services that they feel a connection to.

In the past year ARA has worked closely with several organisations around establishing supports for a group of young men, predominately from African background who have engaged in anti-social behaviour including public intoxication, violence, harassment and stealing. The group of individuals have become known to a particular community centre as they access the nearby playground to engage in these activities. This cohort of individuals has been known to South Australian Police and although their attitude to SAPOL has always been amicable, the repetition of arrest and callouts has promoted police to seek more support for this group of young men.



These young men are no longer eligible for settlement services provided by ARA and other providers, as they have been living in Australia post the 5 year mark and have not established a good rapport with mainstream services.

ARA is limited in supports that it can offer due to funding restrictions, which only cater to humanitarian arrival within the first 5 years of settlement. The need for culturally appropriate services is essential in supporting these young men and in this case, mainstream services have not been able to cater to their needs.

These young men have identified the goal of bettering their life, however are extremely disconnected from their community, families and services that would be able to support them. Many of the parents and community leaders that ARA works with have stressed that mainstream services would not be appropriate as they are culturally inappropriate as well as unknown to this group, and their individual needs and stories would not be understood.

As Australia's cultural diversity grows along with migration, our services also need to grow and need to be inclusive and culturally appropriate for young people to access. If a young person cannot make a connection with the service/worker, they are not going to access the service again. This also includes the service being culturally aware of these young persons' needs.

ARA considers service provision as a multi-partner approach and feels that many of the services are able to better the young person's settlement prospects and provide specialised care and needs to address the barriers to successful settlement. ARA feels that building relationships with community leaders, families as well service providers will have a better outcome for young people.