



SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

INTRODUCTION

Assisting Collaborative Community Employment Support Services Incorporated (ACCES Services Inc) is a community based, not for profit organisation, which was established some 25 years ago with a view to assisting the most seriously disadvantaged and marginalised, groups and communities in the Logan and North Gold Coast Region. The service is based in Woodridge which is one of the lowest socioeconomic areas of Queensland with the highest unemployment rate for the State.

Since 1992, the organisation has focused on providing specialised support and services to newly arrived migrants and refugees. This includes settlement services which assist newly arrived migrants to build self-reliance and integrate into the local community; employment and training programs which assist the target group to access labour market programs and career based opportunities; and family support initiatives which address some of the social and cultural challenges for new entrants to Australia.

ACCES Services Inc operates within a community capacity building framework by encouraging multicultural communities to identify and address their own issues and works in partnership with other agencies to provide responses which have both an immediate and long term benefit for the community.

Major Federal programs provided by ACCES include:

- The Integrated Humanitarian Support Services
- The Settlement Grants Program
- Complex Case Services
- Jobs Services Australia- ACCES Servicers is the only CALD specific provider in Queensland
- ACCES Services is a member of the Innovation fund and Employer Broker Panels and has received funding to conduct pilot programs under these initiatives
- ACCES Services is an approved assessor for Ongoing Support Assessment (OSA) and Supported Wage System (SWS) under the Disability Employment Services

ACCES also operates a range of state based programs and operates a health clinic staffed by General Practitioners and allied health personnel.

MULTICULTURALISM, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND GLOBALISATION

1. The role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government's social inclusion agenda

It is ACCES's position that migrants and refugees need to be a key target group in the government's social inclusion agenda. Refugees face significant disadvantage from the time they arrive in Australia. They are often separated from other family members, arrive with limited English, no knowledge of the Australian Culture or local services and programs, do not have employment or previous relevant work experience, limited finances (generally arriving with nothing), have poor social networks and are frequently placed in low socio-economic areas due to the fact that these areas have a supply of low cost housing. In addition new arrivals cannot drive and may either not understand the public transport system or be settled in areas which have limited transport options thereby leading to isolation and segregation.

For many refugee families ACCES becomes a defacto family (due to their lack of social networks and/or family support) with many families coming back for ongoing advice and referral. Young refugees may become trapped through generational conflict and/or peer issues. Teenagers are often age inappropriate for their grade and do not interact well or fit in with other young people of their own age, so they develop their own subculture which may not be healthy or appropriate. Often intercultural tensions can occur between different cultural groups of young people. Generational conflict generally occurs due to young people having to take on parental roles in regards to siblings and learning language and technology skills at a more rapid rate than their parents.

Both Substance abuse and Domestic Violence may also occur within the refugee community due to men experiencing a significant gender difference in Australia compared to the patriarchal role that they have held in their country of origin

Child protection notifications have been on the increase as parents have a lack of understanding of parenting in Australian and the laws associated with it. As children enter the care system, this further compounds this disadvantage for the next generation.

In addition to language barriers and family breakdown being part of the cycle of disadvantage, refugees face inherent disadvantages within the current population caused by racism and discrimination. Many refugees report being discriminated against in the employment market, which creates further disadvantage if they are unable to secure a job to assist them in obtaining the necessary resources to build a better life for themselves and their children.

The World Health Organisation had developed a Quality of Life Measurement Tool- that seeks participant's responses to a range of questions that measures Quality of Life. This includes such factors as :

- Health
- Enjoyment of life
- Sense of safety
- Personal acceptance of self
- Financial capacity
- Work and leisure

- Housing
- Social networks and personal relationships
- Transport
- General mood

All of these factors are important in ensuring quality of life and removing levels of disadvantage. Many refugees will score themselves poorly on a number of these indicators when they are first assessed by clinical staff in ACCES Services Torture and Trauma Counselling Program.

Many settlement programs and services are developed to respond to the immediate crisis or issue of newly arrived migrants. Eligibility for the Settlement Grants Program is for humanitarian and Family Stream (Low English proficiency) who have been here less than five years. However for many people issues emerge after this time and mainstream community services (where they exist) do not always address the cultural or specific needs of this target group. These needs must be addressed through social inclusion initiatives that respond to the needs of this target group.

Currently, CALD do not often feature as a priority target group in many funding programs and often fall through the net. For example when the Federal Government tendered for the Youth Partnerships Project (which is designed to target young people at risk of disengaging from schools), CALKD did not feature as a priority group in any location in Queensland, despite the fact that we know that they are a key risk group. When the DEEWR staff were asked why they were not a priority group, representatives from our organisation were advised that as the region s covered large geographic area, the numbers of CALD young people did not feature as a significant enough proportion of the total number of young people. It would be hoped that future funding initiatives and particular local area based initiatives such as those proposed by the Social Inclusion Board use a much more sophisticated planning approach.

2. The contributions of Diaspora communities to Australia's relationships with Europe, the U.K, Middle East and the immediate Asia-Pacific Region.

It is our experience that Australia's Diaspora Communities have improved our relationships with other countries. A large proportion of our clients provide remittance back to their home countries, thereby helping to stabilise the economic base of those countries.

SETTLEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

- 3. Innovative ideas for settlement programs for new migrants, including refugees, that support their full participation and integration into the broader Australian Community and**
- 4. Incentives to promote long term settlement patterns that achieve greater social and economic benefits for Australian society as a whole**

Through its role as a settlement provider ACCES Services Inc has identified and implemented a number of approaches that have supported the full participation and integration of migrants and refugees into the broader Australian Society. These have generally involved strategies which build neighbourhoods and communities which provide support networks and trialling integrated, whole of government approaches that are not confined to funding from one program or department and are tailored to respond to individual needs. Two examples of these include:

The Hub Model - the Cultural and Literacy Development (CALD) Hub was developed in response to local needs and piloted with funding from TAFE, the State Department of Employment and Economic Development and Innovation, Community Renewal and DIAC. The model was developed after the ESL teacher and Principal at Woodridge State School raised concerns about some of the issues they were identifying at their school – this included newly arrived parents dropping their children at school at 7.00am, poor English levels of parents and children, difficulties in explaining school procedures such as permission slips for school excursions to parents, lack of understanding regarding the nutritional needs of school lunches and poor social skills of children and young people. The Hub was developed as a central location where parents could learn English, undertake orientation skills (such as how to enrol children at school and prepare a healthy lunch box), children also accessed the Hub to undertake activities including recreation, homework clubs and volunteer tutoring. Other providers came on board offering other services and information sessions such as information on Australian Law (Police and RAILS), Immunisation (GPLan) and budgeting (Kingston East Neighbourhood Group). The Hub model has been evaluated and has been found to have a range of positive outcomes many of which were unintended such as enhanced socialisation skills and the development of a sense of community among participants due to their attendance at a common venue for a range of activities and programs. The Woodridge State Primary School has noted a marked improvement in the processing and enrolment of refugee students since the operation of the Hub. According to observations and records held by the local ESL Schools Co-ordinator, prior to the Hub operating, many schools including Woodridge State School found the unpredictability and the un-preparedness of refugee parents arriving to schools to enrol their children a significant challenge to address. Parents had often arrived to their nearest school without appointments and schools often had difficulties in obtaining interpreters at short notice. If interpreters were not available, families would be turned away and asked to return later.

Due to the Hub Activities this often chaotic and pressured way of school enrolment ceased and was replaced with an integrated and informed enrolment process which was less labour-intensive for the school yet more supportive and beneficial for parents and students

Other successful outcomes for clients as a result of the Hub have included:

- ✓ Increased English Language proficiency
- ✓ Improved enrolments and preparedness for more formal AMEP Classes
- ✓ Improved employment prospects
- ✓ Improved understanding and practice of way of life in Australia
- ✓ Improved integration of refugee students – enhanced language acquisition, socialisation, school attendance and school achievement
- ✓ Improved school/parent relationships
- ✓ Improved ability to make informed choices
- ✓ Improved knowledge of and links with mainstream service providers

The Rural Employment Assistance Program (REAP) - The REAP project provided an opportunity to relocate newly arrived migrants and refugees from Logan City LGA which is an area recording disproportionately high unemployment (Kingston 13.6%, Woodridge 13.6% and Beenleigh 7.1% - DEEWR *Small Area Labour Markets December Quarter 2008*) to a rural area (Biloela) experiencing

low unemployment (2.4% unemployment Banana Shire – December Quarter 2008) and labour market shortages in particular industries.

This project was funded under DEEWR's Employer Broker Program and has been a major success. Under the REAP project, migrants and refugees newly arrived in Logan and South Brisbane, were given information about settlement and employment options in Rockhampton and Biloela. Those that indicated a preference for relocating to this area were provided with training and settlement services to assist them to successfully settle and obtain employment in that community.

The refugees relocated to Biloela were families of Burmese and Mong origin, while single males of African and Afghani descent were relocated to Rockhampton. A total of 46 refugees have gained employment (twenty two in Biloela and twenty four single men in Rockhampton) which is one hundred per cent of the primary wage earners relocated to the areas as well as a further 4 secondary wage earners who have also gained employment. The community of Biloela has established welcoming ceremonies for the newcomers (as they prefer to call them) and have warmly accepted into the town. This has been supported through the co-ordination of existing mainstream services (formal and informal) by the project co-ordinator and the implementation of a project that involved the whole community so they had a sense of ownership in regard to the initiative.

It is our experience that the acquisition of language skills is one of the fundamental requirements in assisting migrants and refugees to fully participate and integrate into the broader Australian society. While the AMEP program goes somewhere towards assisting in this process, it is our belief that many clients are falling through the gap and a more flexible and accessible strategy is required. Many refugees want to gain work straight away and their hours of work conflict with the TAFE course delivery times. Similarly the classroom style learning does not meet everyone's needs and sometimes the level at which the classes are pitched do not meet the needs of those migrants who may have poor literacy and numeracy skills (in their own language) due to never having participated in formal schooling. It is our submission that there needs to be localised place based initiatives where migrants and refugees (especially women with children) acquire conversational language at the community based level. Part of the difficulties in this target group accessing TAFE straight away is that they may never have acquired study skills. There needs to be a foundational skills component in the first instance (Pre-AMEP) that is accessible, engaging and relevant to the target group.

NATIONAL PRODUCTIVE CAPACITY

5. The role migration has played and contributes to building Australia's long term productive capacity

Migration plays a significant part in enhancing Australia's long-term productive capacity. Tourism from other countries is positively influenced by our multicultural community. Relatives and friends from the expat's home country tend to visit and holiday in our country and spend money which supports our economy. Under the REAP program, clients were relocated to central Queensland to work at the Teys meat processing centres in Biloela and Rockhampton. Teys is the largest Australian-owned and second-largest beef processing company in Australia. It comprises four modern beef processing facilities, a 30,000-head feedlot, a tannery, wholesaling divisions, and a value-added facility. However the Human Resources manager advised that he could not fill vacancies through Australian born employees and production was at risk due to labour shortages.

Large industries such as these support entire country towns through their purchase of goods and services and numbers of employees. Impacts on large industry have a flow on effect to the whole community.

6. The profile of skilled migration to Australia and the extent to which Australia is fully utilising the skills of all migrants

Skilled migrants and refugees have also been brought in to Australia to meet skill shortages. However there are a range and number of other professional migrants who come to Australia on other visa arrangements whose qualifications are not recognised in Australia. Through its work as an employment services provider ACCES has become aware that there are a large number of migrants who had overseas qualifications but these were not recognised in Australia and/or their English skills and lack of Australian Work experience created a barrier in them obtaining work in their field of expertise. Subsequently there are overseas trained Engineers driving taxis and nurses working in retail outlets or as personal care workers. The other significant barrier has also been a reluctance of some employers to hire staff from a diverse background.

In 2008 ACCES Services piloted the Professional Migrant Assistance Program (Pro MAP) in Logan in order to assist migrants with overseas qualifications to gain skills recognition, training, Australian work place experience and professional mentoring in order to gain employment that matches both their skill base and personal aspirations. At the same time ACCES piloted a project in the Ipswich West Corridor known as the Ipswich West Workforce Diversity project which worked intensively with employers (in industries facing skill shortages) to raise awareness of cultural issues affecting recruitment and employment retention practices and to create opportunities for increasing diversity in the workplace. Both of these projects were highly successful however, the organisation has been limited in being able to further extend this program as many projects are funded on a pilot basis only and ACCES's recent application to DEEWR for funding of a similar project under the Innovation Fund was unsuccessful.

7. Potential government initiatives to better assist migrant communities establish business enterprises.

Many migrants and refugees come to Australia with Business skills from their country of origin which could readily translate into western skills, however, like anything new, they do not always come with an understanding of the Australian business sector, taxation requirements and business laws. It is considered that a number of strategies could support this sector in successfully establishing business enterprises. These include:

- Knowledge of government incentives and/or access to free training programs to assist small business owners
- Links to the corporate world. Corporate or business mentoring would assist migrant communities to establish successful enterprises
- Information and understanding of taxation and business laws
- Processes that link people's skills and interest to potential ventures

In 2009, ACCES Services Inc established the Business and Social Enterprise (BASE) Hub which combines paid training; social support and work experience for marginalised groups in enterprises that trade in the market and have a strong social dimension. Participants within the project are subsequently assisted to utilise their skills to obtain employment in other similar fields or to develop their own local business ventures. BASE uses an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach by building on the strengths and positives of the community. It seeks to identify individual strengths, match these to community needs and create local economic opportunity.

To date ACCES Services Inc. has established removalist and property maintenance enterprises. However, again this project has been funded for two years only and cannot continue without the ongoing support of a co-ordinator