



Submission to:

Reference Group informing the Minister for Social Services

Migrant Resource Centre (Southern Tasmania) Inc

Welfare Reform Submission

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Migrant Resource Centre (Southern Tasmania) Inc

The Migrant Resource Centre (Southern Tasmania) Inc (MRC) was founded in 1979. We provide services to migrants and former refugees to settle in Tasmania. Our services include:

- Individual help for new migrants settling in Tasmania
- Help and support for older migrants including packaged care programs and home and community care
- Support and counseling for migrants who have experienced torture and trauma
- Community development and building of cultural awareness of migrant issues
- Advice to government, business and the community about migrant needs and issues
- Support for former refugees in finding employment

At 30 June 2014, we consisted of 94 staff from 30 countries; our staff is also fluent in 33 languages. A number of staff express proficiency in other languages to a high level, but are not fluent.

In addition to our staff the MRC is supported by over 100 volunteers who assist in the delivery of services in a variety of ways from be-friending, helping at events, driving lessons, tutoring young students and aged care assistance such as gardening. Over 40 per cent of our volunteers are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD).

The MRC has over 35 years of expertise in service delivery to multicultural communities in the state of Tasmania. Both the CEO and the Director of the Phoenix Centre participate in work on national peak bodies such as the Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) and the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT).

The MRC is a committed supporter of the Australian Human Rights Commission Anti-Racism campaign, *Racism. It Stops with me*. At all times we promote non-discriminatory behavior in our workplace, migrant communities and the wider Tasmanian community.

Compared to other Australian States and Territories, Tasmania has a higher homogenous population with 11.6 per cent born overseas versus 24.6 per cent for the Australian population as a whole¹. Therefore in general, Tasmanians have less exposure to CALD communities and fewer opportunities for engagement. Tasmania has the largest aged population and ageing per capita in Australia, the Government recognises that we need to invest in our economy and welcome our migrants, particularly in *Tasmania's Place in the Asian Century White Paper*².

For more information on the MRC refer to our website www.mrchobart.org.au and our 2012-2013 Annual Report for client statistics and project reports <http://www.mrchobart.org.au/content/annual-report>.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011 Census

² Tasmanian Government, *Tasmania's Place in the Asian Century White Paper*, March 2013

Simpler and sustainable income support system

MRC supports simplification of the income support system in principle. Any changes in architecture should be informed by direct client consultation with focus on reducing inequality. In reviewing the architecture of income support systems it will be important to keep successful strategies in place, such as the special payment for humanitarian entrants when they first arrive in Australia as refugees. Access to special benefit has proven to be an effective intervention at a time when families are experiencing a particularly high level of change.

Review of income support payment structure and architecture will need to be alert to the needs of migrants and people from refugee background, especially in promoting access and equity. FECCA's recent report on Multicultural Access and Equity⁵ highlights the capacity for leadership in this area from Government, and the key place equitable access to services can play in promoting social cohesion and settlement.

In examining the rate structure for income support payments it is essential that payment rates are set above the poverty line, and be sufficient to maintain health, including mental health. Rate structure and levels is an area where a focus on addressing structural inequality is important. Rate structure also needs to take into account the impact of family structure on payment levels. For single refugees the current income support levels can make accessing independent secure accommodation functionally impossible. The pressure on single refugees to share accommodation can have significant impacts on safety, security and re-traumatisation. For young people within a family unit assessing income support rates is a balance between individual rights, promoting independence and acknowledging family bonds.

The rate structure for income support will also need to address additional issues for refugees, particularly in terms of the potentially long term impact of trauma on learning, language and capacity to work. Refugees can also experience higher than average levels of poverty and housing stress in their initial settlement years in particular.

Eligibility criteria for financial support for people who are unable to work due to the effects of torture and trauma on mental and physical health needs to ensure cultural differences in expressions of ill health are taken into consideration. For example, survivors may not meet DSMV criteria for mental illness due to cultural variations in expressions of mental illness. Despite this they may be experiencing severe symptoms of mental ill health.

- For older survivors of torture whose capacity to learn English is limited, there needs to be well-functioning welfare support which recognises a limited capacity to find work in a market in which there is an undersupply of jobs available. The system should ensure it does not place additional mental strain on these individuals through unrealistic demands and uncertainty of financial support.
- Eligibility for financial support such as disability payments needs to take into consideration that the impact of torture and trauma may be episodic rather than permanent

⁵ FECCA's report on Multicultural Access and Equity

- Survivors of torture and trauma are less likely than others to have access to financial support from families. This is particularly critical for those who have arrived as unaccompanied minors. Welfare support must recognise the isolation that many survivors of torture and trauma experience and that family and community support is not equally accessible across the community.

Older CALD people do not necessarily know about, understand or apply for supplements. Although the government prints information in community languages, it doesn't help people with low literacy in their own language.

It's the Plain English versions that need to be translated.

Perhaps fewer supplements with clearly defined additional costs that contribute to and support participation/social connection are necessary.

Lack of money, services and support to engage in physical activity and social participation are the biggest barriers to sustaining good health for CALD Migrant pensioners serviced through our aged care programs.

Both of which are key social determinants of health indicators, and without which add to increased illness (increased visits to the GP, and repetitive hospitalisations) and morbidity.

Strengthening individual and family capability

Support for families with children and young people

Income support structures for families from migrant including refugee backgrounds need to acknowledge the differences in family structure and composition, and the impact refugee and settlement journeys have on family structure. Refugee children and youth experience growing up in Australia differently from their mainstream peers, as highlighted in recent research from Centre for Multicultural Youth⁶. CALD children are more likely to still be at school, and more likely to live in two family households than their Australian counterparts. Specialist services which provide accessible and appropriate support are important for this group.

The recent Productivity Commission report on Childcare and Early Learning⁷ highlights the role support for children can play in supporting work and social inclusion.

"Formal and informal Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services play a vital role in the development of Australian children and their preparation for school, and in enabling parents to work. Many parents use a mix of care types and/or choose to care for their children at home."

"Government assistance should focus on three priority areas:

⁶Centre for Multicultural Youth research paper

....

Children with additional needs should have access to a ‘top-up’ subsidy to meet the additional reasonable costs of service. Services should have access to assistance to build capacity to provide ECEC for: individual additional needs children, for children in highly disadvantaged communities and to facilitate the integration of ECEC with schools and other services.”

If there are bonus or incentive schemes within the architecture of income support it is important that they are positively aligned to learning and education outcomes for children and families.

Effective Rent Assistance

Accommodation pressures are a significant factor in the settlement process for migrants and people from refugee backgrounds. MRC acknowledges that housing stress is a national issue affecting all Australians. The Settlement Council of Australia completed a discussion paper on the issue. Key points and recommendations include:

- Levels and locations of housing stock
- Accessing affordable secure housing
- Discrimination experienced by people in navigating the housing market
- Particular housing stressors for single males of refugee backgrounds

Rental assistance has been essential to help alleviate housing pressure and homelessness. NRAS provided a positive link between the public and private rental markets, which is needed to help people graduate into private rental.

Rewards for work and targeting assistance to need

Employment is important, but it is not the only factor, nor the only solution, in addressing structural inequality. Targeting assistance to those in need must address barriers to employment, such as experienced by migrants, especially those of refugee background in terms of skills recognition, access to services, language barriers and lack of familiarity with Australian job markets. The MRC prepared a policy discussion paper on employment, which contains broader analysis and recommendations on this issue to the previous employment Minister Kate Ellis. Key points and recommendations include:

- Navigating employment pathways
- Complications and difficulties in gaining recognition of prior skills and qualifications
- Gaining Australian work experience
- Re-engineering the JSA structure to provide greater support to people of migrant and refugee backgrounds
- Re-engineering of the Job Capacity Assessment Tool and instruments so that they are more meaningful to vulnerable cohorts such as new migrants and former refugees

⁷ Productivity Commission report on Childcare and Early Learning

Mutual obligation

Mutual obligation is important but does need to be viewed with a wider lens for migrants including those of refugee background. Strong links to English language skills acquisition will contribute to greater social inclusion in the long run. Supporting either full time learning or full time work or part-time learning and part time work and having flexibility around arrangements will contribute to ensuring mutual obligation requirements do not disadvantage migrants and people from refugee backgrounds.

A broad view of participation is needed, with acknowledgement of volunteer roles within communities, and a broader understanding of family and family commitments, which is particularly important for carers is important. Barriers to work for CALD people need to be acknowledged within the system, with support programs to mitigate barriers with an early intervention focus.

The exposure draft for employment services includes a greater focus on work for the dole, it will be important as this program is expanded through the network of “Work for the Dole Coordinators” that partnering with the community, settlement agencies and employers is sufficiently resourced to strengthen pathways to employment.

Income management and support services

MRC does not support the extension of income management, as income management works against individual empowerment and is difficult to deliver in a culturally sensitive manner.

Early intervention

Early intervention should have a greater focus on asset strengthening, and providing specialist training for support systems for refugee and asylum seeker children. The impact of the refugee journey and associated torture and trauma experienced by family members can have significant long term impact on children.

MRC recommends setting up a national registration system for people working with vulnerable children, which will provide consistency of care and capacity building support for programs and agencies working with vulnerable children.

Education and training

Access to education and training is a key pathway used within the settlement process by many migrants including those of refugee background, and their children, to build their new lives in Australia. In providing education and training programs key considerations will be their accessibility, and promoting individual choice and agency.

Courses focussing on English language and skills recognition are popular with migrants and people from refugee background. There is a positive opportunity to ensure programs are aligned with job skills and training gaps in the shift of management of AMEP to the Department of Industry. Realising the benefits of employment is of central concern to all involved in supporting settlement.

Improving individual and family functioning

Specialist services which support migrants and people from refugee background are important to ensure the specific issues and stresses which can be experienced by families through the settlement journey are addressed. There is an important link in early settlement for refugees between AMEP services, and the positive impact learning English can have on long term settlement. It is important that the link between English language and settlement support be maintained and strengthened.

Engaging with employers

Improving pathways to employment

Pathways to employment are key for migrants and people from refugee background. Refugee youth also need support in navigating the process from school to long term stable employment. The Centre for Multicultural Youth recently released a report which highlighted effective strategies for refugee youth in gaining employment⁸.

Mentoring programs such as the Accor Hotels “Job Ready Program” which has successfully connected migrants and refugees with training and employment in the hospitality industry are ideal and need to be expanded across more industries and locations.

Supporting employers

Assessment of support levels for job seekers is the first step in assisting people find long term secure employment. The current assessment process through the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JCSI) has not proven to be effective for refugees, with mis-streamed clients leading to a range of problems as time progresses. Initial specialist support is needed to facilitate more effective early intervention for refugees within their settlement journey.

This is an area where effective engagement across all levels of government, from federal to local, will generate stronger outcomes. The role of local government in supporting business make links to job seekers and support settlement can be strengthened through the implementation of the National Settlement Framework.

Role of local business

A focus on improving pathways and links for social enterprise as a way to address structural inequality and promote access and equity connects closely to the role local business can play. Linking regional development to supported settlement can have significant benefits for local communities, as evidenced by the experience in Nhill Victoria and the company “Love-A-Duck” who have a large proportion of refugees working in the factory and related areas. The MRC has many similar stories where providing pre- and post-placement support for clients and employers has strengthened workplace opportunities for people of refugee backgrounds

⁸ Centre for Multicultural Youth report on effective strategies for refugee youth in gaining employment

Although survivors of torture and trauma are often very keen to work, they face significant barriers to employment. In addition to the barriers faced by other migrants (including language and lack of recognition of qualifications), survivors of torture and trauma may face additional mental health challenges such as symptoms which fluctuate in severity and impact, stigma and discrimination. Therefore, survivors of torture and trauma are doubly disadvantaged. Strategies to support this cohort to find employment need to include:

- programs for employers which target discrimination and stigma associated with mental health and ethnicity,
- Incentives for employers to increase employment of this group

Of particular concern in Tasmania is the high proportion of unemployed refugee youth. Programs like Connect Employment Services run by the MRC provide an essential link between employers and people of refugee backgrounds. Initially supported through Federal Government Innovation Funding it is a program that has been operational for the last five years. The program has provided 179 work opportunities to people of refugee backgrounds over this period.

Proportion of population aged 18-24 employed full or part time, selected population groups, Tasmania, 2011

	% Australia born	% CALD born	% Refugee born	% Refugee ancestry	% CALD ancestry
Hobart	68.3	29.8	26.5	30.1	44.8
Launceston and North East	68.1	24.4	14.8	15.9	44.9
South East	64.8	34.8	-	-	59.8
West and North West	68.0	58.5	50.0	100.0	65.8
Total TAS	68.0	29.6	22.3	26.8	47.0

Source: ABS Census 2011, place of usual residence data

Bernard's Story

Bernard is a young Sudanese man who first came to Connect in September 2013 seeking assistance to find work opportunities within the Horticulture Industry as he had recently completed a Certificate II in Horticulture and a white card through TasTAFE. With a large dependent family and limited transport options in Tasmania, finding work was a necessity.

Connect staff worked with Bernard to update his resume and discussed what he wanted in a job, his passion, his ultimate dream job and what type of work would he settle for if the dream job was delayed somewhat. Connect staff contacted the Glenorchy City Council seeking work experience opportunities for Bernard. Community Development at Glenorchy City Council set up a meeting between Bernard, Connect staff and the Urban Services Co-ordinator at Works and Services at the Glenorchy City Council. The Council was more than happy to provide Bernard with a work experience opportunity for two weeks.

Bernard completed his two weeks work experience with ease. Feedback received from Glenorchy City council was extremely positive. Bernard's performance at work experience was very good, he was punctual and showed enthusiasm to work for the Glenorchy City Council – this was Bernard's dream job.

The Urban Services Coordinator contacted the Connect Manager to encourage Bernard to apply for a Central Business District Maintenance Worker position with Council. Angela from Connect worked with Bernard to get his application submitted unfortunately Bernard was unsuccessful with this position, mainly due to lack of a drivers licence. Bernard registered with Australian Employment Services (AES) the labour hire company who looks after casual staff for the Glenorchy City Council however no positions were available.

Early into 2014, Bernard was successful in obtaining his provisional licence, opening up many more doors to employment. In March 2014 an opportunity for employment within a large Tasmanian owned bakery become available. This opportunity was for casual employment within the production team. Bernard with assistance from Connect staff applied for and was successful in obtaining this employment.

In early April 2014 Glenorchy City Council contacted Connect staff to notify them that there was an opportunity available of casual work (with full time hours) and encouraged Bernard to re-register with AES. Although enjoying his casual work and not wanting to let his employer down Bernard was ecstatic with the prospect of working for the Glenorchy City Council, his “dream job”. Bernard was assisted by Connect staff to re- register with AES, this time with greater confidence as he had his licence and the work experience to add to his resume. Bernard was successful in obtaining the employment and started work at the Glenorchy City Council on Friday 11 April 2014. All reports are Bernard is going very well once again showing enthusiasm, reliability and punctuality.

Building community capacity

Community resilience

Building on community strengths and assets is key to strengthening community resilience. A common assumption is that elements of the community are a drain but this is not always the case. There are a wide variety of ways that migrants including those of refugee background can and do participate in the Australian community, demonstrating the development of strong social capital. Research by Graeme Hugo on the economic, social and civil contribution of humanitarian entrants⁹ points to the depth and variety of contributions refugees are making in Australian communities.

Supporting participatory frameworks and using the lived experience of refugees to inform government policy will strengthen outcomes for refugees and lessen dependence on income support and social welfare.

Tasmania is characterised by relatively small clusters of CALD communities. Sustainability factors that exist in communities in other states have not unfortunately been able to be sustained in a Tasmanian context. CALD specific organisations often lack the capacity to form associations and advocate on behalf of themselves. This is also exacerbated by the fact that the peak body for multiculturalism does not have strong engagement in this area. Distance, the high cost of transport and the generally complex family units that exist in Tasmania have provided considerable barriers for CALD communities in coming together. The MRC through its service delivery structure provides a valuable means of bringing together communities and ensuring individual and community are maximised.

⁹ A Significant Contribution: The Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants, Hugo, 2011