



## **Submission to the Inquiry into the Working Holiday Maker Program**

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### **A) About Settlement Services International**

Settlement Services International (SSI) is a community organisation and social business that supports newcomers and other Australians to achieve their full potential. We work with all people who have experienced vulnerability, including refugees, people seeking asylum and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, to build capacity and enable them to overcome inequality.

SSI draws on its expertise and experience to advocate for the people and communities it serves. Through the work we do, we empower people to change their lives. Through our advocacy and representation, we influence ideas and policy.

From a staff of one in April 2011, SSI now employs over 800 people (including 180 bilingual guides and over 350 volunteers). In 2018, SSI merged with Access Community Services. We now operate locally, nationally and internationally, with offices in metro and regional Queensland, NSW and Victoria.

- In 2019, SSI supported over 37,600 people to achieve their potential: 9,500 refugees were supported in early settlement, including 4,925 new arrivals
- 1,510 people were assisted to secure employment
- 10,870 people with disability, their family members and carers were supported towards their goals
- 5,116 refugees and asylum seekers were assisted on their pathway to employment.

### **B) SSI Employment Services**

SSI has established expertise in delivering specialist employment programs, as well as possessing an understanding of the needs of job seekers, employers and regional labour markets. SSI understands how crucial it is to operate within the ecosystem that supports successful regional employment, including training and vocational education providers. SSI's approach to delivering employment services and understanding of regional employment trends enables people to secure work and achieve lifestyle goals, as well as potentially reducing skills shortages in traditional trades in regional areas and responding to demands in specific growth industries, including aged care, manufacturing, meat processing and disability support.

SSI partners with a number of registered training organisations, peak bodies, local employers and apprenticeship centres to successfully match local regional jobs to job seekers. SSI understands the importance of targeted skills development and reskilling in the current labour market to ensure those looking for work are properly prepared and trained to be able to secure jobs.

To ensure regional employment opportunities result in sustainable employment outcomes for job seekers and employers, SSI delivers intensive post-placement support to ensure any risk of employment placements failing is minimised, to improve completion rates in vocational training courses/apprenticeships and to provide ongoing support to employers and candidates. SSI works closely with apprenticeship centres and Registered Training Organisations to ensure a holistic approach to ongoing post-placement support and mentoring is adopted by all parties involved in the placement.



SSI delivers employment support to jobseekers using an intensive case management model, which is genuinely person-centred and strengths based, focusing first on identifying key barriers to employment and developing a plan with specific activities to ensure barriers are overcome and other support services are engaged if necessary, including mental health services, domestic and family violence services and housing where necessary.

### **C) Refugee Employment Support**

Over the past 3 years, the NSW Government funded Refugee Employment Support Program, managed by SSI, has engaged 7431 participants requiring employment support and has achieved 2737 employment outcomes. SSI's RESP has mentored 3213 participants as part of their journey to employment and has supported 2512 participants to overcome education barriers through accredited training.

### **D) SSI Work + Stay Model**

Work+Stay is a new social enterprise to support recent and new migrants to secure employment in regions, supporting the future of regional economies and communities.

Evidence shows that migration and recruitment industries do not adequately service many regions. Work + Stay will provide specialist local migrant recruitment and settlement services in regions across Australia to fill these gaps.

Work+Stay will involve locals delivering migration and recruitment services to employers in regions, supported by a national network of specialist service providers.

Many thousands of jobs can be filled in workforce-short regions. Newcomers and their families can also be retained for much longer in jobs and communities if gaps in the market are resolved with some key innovations in the ways the services delivered.

Following a start-up period, Work+Stay will be funded by fees for services charged to employers and migrants. Our business modelling shows that helping employers access and retain staff creates significant direct benefits for organisations. These can ultimately support a self-sustaining social enterprise operating at a national scale.

Prior to the COVID-19 lockdown, Work+Stay was on track to launch in mid-2020. However closed borders and a disrupted recruitment market has rendered the planned launch timing unviable in the short term. Ultimately the need for the enterprise will persist.

### **COVID Economic Recovery – Helping Displaced Workers into Regional Jobs**

Getting Australians back to work and the economy back on track is now the priority. Increasing migration to regions with workforce shortages remains an important challenge. As an alternative short-term startup strategy, Work+Stay can be initiated quickly as part of the COVID economic recovery, delivering significant public benefits.

SSI sees an opportunity to work quickly and at scale to adapt Work+Stay to match displaced workers with short- and long-term regional employment needs.

Workforce shortages are expected to persist in inland regions less impacted by COVID. It is unlikely that current commercial or government services will be able to facilitate matching these opportunities with displaced workers, particularly migrants based in urban areas.



While migrant focused as there is evidence of substantial need in CALD communities, the service would be available to displaced local workers as a first priority and to any Australian looking to move regionally to secure work during the recovery.

Work+Stay would transition to its enterprise model once economic conditions stabilize.

#### **Case Study: Mitolo Group in Hillston, NSW**

***SSI partnered with Mitolo Group in Hillston to provide employment opportunities for 18 Fijian refugees to relocate to regional NSW.***

- The Mitolo Group generously paid for the refugees to self-quarantine before beginning work and provided a minibus for them to travel to and from work.
- All 18 people are originally from rural and remote communities in their home country, so were excited to relocate to a regional town.
- SSI and the employer worked in partnership to organise furnished accommodation for every person and connected them with the local Griffith Council to facilitate their successful integration into their new community.
- The Mitolo Group and the 18 new employees are very happy with the arrangement
- The Mitolo Group is keen to provide ongoing employment opportunities for refugees in the future.

#### **E) Recommendation:**

**That the Federal Government fund an SSI Work + Stay pilot in key regional areas to meet employment shortages due to the lack of working holiday makers.**

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