

SERVICES NEEDED BY MIGRANTS/HUMANITARIAN ENTRANTS

Comments from Professor Helen Ware,

University of New England.

Although I am currently President of Sanctuary Armidale, a group which works with humanitarian visa holders to help them settle, I am making this submission in a personal capacity as someone who has professionally studied immigration issues in Australia for four decades

WHO IS 'FOREIGN'

I first studied the Italians and Greek communities in Melbourne in the early 1970s. Today we often tend to forget that back then many native-born Australians regarded Greeks and Italians as being as foreign as Iraqis and Sudanese are seen now. As for Serbs and Croats, I was seriously warned that it was not safe to speak to them.

PROVIDING SERVICES

To state the obvious, it is not a case of one model fitting everyone.

Some get too many services, some not enough. Sometimes it happens that service providers are eager to justify their existence or to secure additional funding by providing services beyond what is strictly necessary. People who earn their living as service providers can be unfairly dismissive of the inputs of volunteers. Volunteers do not enjoy the irony of having young social workers who could not find the country on the map state that volunteers 'do not understand' the situation of refugees from countries in which these volunteers have lived and worked long term.

I, personally, would argue that we should take in more refugees but provide them with a more restricted and less costly range of basic services.

New entries often receive extensive help and advice from their own ethnic communities, but there can also be exploitation. 457 visa holders are most likely to be exploited by the people from their own ethnic group who take advantage of them.

NEW INITIATIVE: PROVIDE TRAINING IN CAMPS THEN SELECT FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

The one area where there are frequently deficits in service provision is in English language training, especially for women and for migrants with limited educational backgrounds. It is almost impossible to overstate the importance of English language to migrants being able to live comfortable lives and make a contribution to Australia. So every effort should be made to facilitate English language acquisition once migrants arrive here. This is especially important for spouses who stay at home and do not meet English-speakers in the work-place.

But why not also be pro-active especially for refugees. For example, the Government says Australia is willing to take 100 families from a given refugee camp. Then we should pay to **Provide English language training** in that camp,

making it clear that adequate progress will be one of the conditions for being accepted to go to Australia. In the case of families everyone will need to demonstrate some progress in learning basic English. This would provide motivation and a skill which will be useful even for those who are not selected. Some would argue that selection in part on the grounds of language proficiency is unfair, but any means of selecting one refugee family out of the thousands who want to come is going to be unfair. At least this method provides the refugees with a better chance at a good life in Australia.

FINANCIAL BURDENS ON RECENT HUMANITARIAN ENTRANTS

Recently arrived humanitarian entrants face a wide range of financial burdens. Our Sanctuary group operates a rotating credit fund and thus requires new arrivals to gradually payback their fares so that the next families can come. This is readily accepted by those who have been loaned the money for their fares.

Many have a certain guilt that they have come to Australia leaving relatives behind in refugee camps and therefore struggle to send as much money back as they can. One culturally specific need is sometimes the requirement to send home money to pay 'bride price' of \$20,000 or more. With all of these expenses there are multiple and very strong incentives to be in the paid workforce. Richard Parsons has made a valuable contribution in "Assessing the economic contribution of refugees in Australia" (MDA 2013) which fairly examines the available estimates in this area and their possible biases.

MASCULINITY: THE CULTURE CLASH AND SPORT

Men from other cultures who come to Australia and find that it is against the law to beat their wives/womenfolk should not feel emasculated by the experience, but some certainly do so feel. This is made worse when the young men in the community find that they have nothing meaningful to do and their fathers feel devalued.

Whilst I personally have minimal interest in sport, I recognise the vital role it plays in integrating newcomers into Australia. Basket-ball has been a wonderful and liberating experience for the Sudanese youths whom Sanctuary Armidale has helped. Apart from the personal confidence and feeling of belonging that being a member of a team conveys, it is a great way of bringing together 'ordinary' Australians and incomers who might otherwise have very little chance to meet in an informal setting and on equal terms. As well as sporting groups, the churches, and our mosque in Armidale play a vital role in enabling newcomers to make social contacts. The fact that observant Muslims do not drink alcohol does mean that special efforts are needed to include them in social events, this applies to undergraduates and international students as well as refugees.

Men's sheds have proved to be good in creating social bonds but they could do more to include older men from non-English speaking backgrounds who could thus gain information about Australian ways of dealing with unruly sons.

SANCTUARY'S FRUSTRATION

I used to live in Canberra, I now live in Armidale, in regional NSW, and appreciate just how casually dismissive Canberra bureaucrats can be of those who live 800

km away. Sanctuary and the Armidale-Dumaresq Town Council (before dismissal) demonstrated strong support for Syrian refugees to come to Armidale. Armidale has a mosque on the University Campus, Arabic speakers to hand, even a Syrian doctor but we were dismissed with a 'it's better that they stay with their own people'. Is the aim to create religious and ethnic ghettos in disadvantaged areas of Sydney?

I would be very happy to discuss these issues further.

Helen Ware