



Toowoomba Regional Settlement

The following is a collation of evidence and case studies to showcase the need for adequate and sustainable resources in the Toowoomba region to ensure continued successful primary and secondary settlement of Humanitarian entrants and vulnerable migrant cohorts. Our goal is to ensure the sustainability of Toowoomba as a primary and secondary settlement region.

Contributors

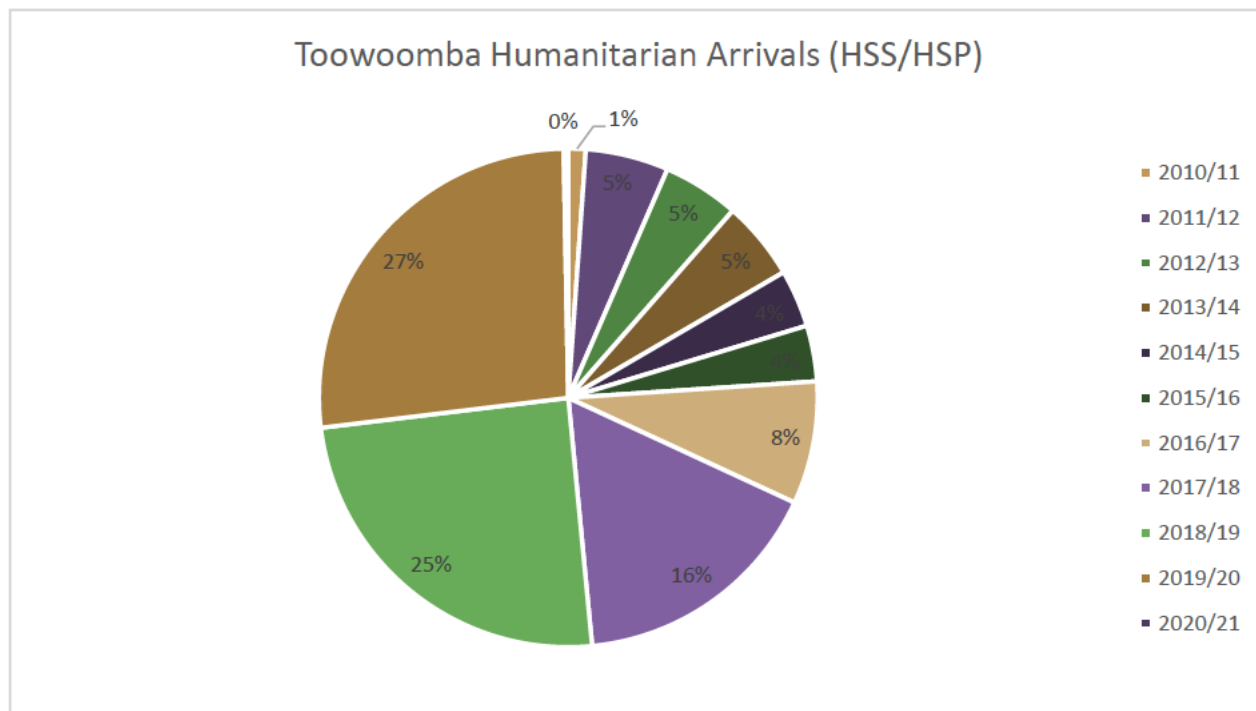
Jointly* prepared by Multicultural Australia and CatholicCare Social Services in consultation with:

- Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT)
- TAFE QLD
- Queensland Police Service
- Toowoomba Base Hospital
- Domestic Violence Action Centre (DVAC)
- Education Queensland
- Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs

**Please note this report has been amended for publishing. Quotes obtained from service providers that were submitted with full report to Department of Home Affairs, have been omitted from this published report.*

The Toowoomba Case Study

Toowoomba city is known for its long history of successfully settling diverse migrant communities and its welcoming character. Toowoomba is one of Australia's Refugee Welcome Zones and a Model City of Peace, showcasing how a peaceful community can be nurtured and encouraged.



CatholicCare has been supporting refugee resettlement in Toowoomba since 2004. CatholicCare has developed strong engagement with the broader Toowoomba community with a large volunteer base and extensive partnerships in place. Multicultural Australia has been settling humanitarian entrants under the Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) and Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) since 2010. Since 2010, approximately 3700 entrants have been directly settled into Toowoomba community, with a significant increase since mid-2016, 76% of total arrivals.

Toowoomba is a success story for regional settlement, largely due to the willingness of the community, education, government, business, social enterprise, and non-profit sectors to participate in creating a welcoming, safe and inclusive community. Various sectors employ internal staff to liaise and coordinate the unique needs of refugee clients accessing their services, ensuring their services are accessible and inclusive (e.g., Queensland Police Services, Toowoomba Base Hospital, schools, etc.). In addition, many faith and community groups around Toowoomba are providing additional services including English conversation classes, craft groups, play groups and interest specific groups to create inclusion and belonging for the refugee and wider communities. However, these services and groups continue to require assistance from settlement providers at intersection to complement their initiatives and ensure the multicultural community can full participate in all aspects of community life in the region.

Whilst the Humanitarian Settlement Program is resourced and able to provide appropriate levels of support for initial settlement, settlement is not linear and for new, emerging and vulnerable cohorts, settlement can take longer. Recently, there have been resource challenges identified in the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program in Toowoomba. This is largely as a result of higher than anticipated numbers of humanitarian entrants in the region since the SETS grant funding was released in 2018 and high numbers of a new emerging community, with no long-term established networks. It is our understanding that approximately 69% of humanitarian entrants to Toowoomba in the last five years have been from the Yazidi cohort, 16% identified as Iraqi or Syrian (potentially a portion of this is also from the Yazidi community), and 5% Congolese.

Background

In the past five years, Toowoomba has welcomed over 2800 humanitarian entrants to Toowoomba through the humanitarian programs HSS/HSP, 35% of whom arrived in FY2019/20, surpassing Brisbane's humanitarian arrivals. Toowoomba settlement numbers are likely higher than HSS/HSP client numbers above, with a number of secondary settlements from the Yazidi (also known as 'Ezidi') and other refugee communities (e.g., Congolese) post-HSP. There are also other SETS eligible visa categories (i.e., partner visas, orphan visas) in the Toowoomba community; however, these statistics are currently unknown to the settlement services.

The Toowoomba community and service providers have stepped up to create a welcoming, safe and inclusive community through a holistic approach to settlement and recovery of the refugee population. This has been demonstrated through consistent and meaningful engagement by settlement providers with Toowoomba Regional Council, Queensland Police Service, Education Queensland, Toowoomba Base Hospital, Services Australia, Department of Housing, Domestic Violence Advocacy Centre, Toowoomba Chamber of Commerce, local real estate agencies, JobActive providers, other non-profit and social enterprise organisations (e.g., youbelong, The Mulberry Project, Tambo Teddies, Vanguard Laundry, Mercy Community), and Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs.

Toowoomba has historically settled higher proportions of vulnerable refugee cohorts in comparison to Brisbane. For example, in the new and emerging Yazidi community, many adults and children have experienced significant trauma, and have lower levels of education and literacy in their first language, particularly women and children. This can influence their settlement experience, sense of belonging, ability to learn English, and independence can take longer for some without sufficient mainstream and specialist supports. Compounding this, there is no established cultural and/or faith community, creating a need to build capacity for the informal and formal leadership to support with settlement. This is evident also in the Canadian context - Wilkinson et al. (2019)¹ have reported that they observe that every aspect of the resettlement experience is complex for the Yazidi community due to their individual and collective trauma experiences.

It is important to note that while the SETS program is for low to moderate support, there is always an element of complexity within the SETS program as clients of Specialised and Intensive Support Program (SIS) are generally transitioned to and from this program if their needs do not meet the eligibility threshold for SIS. It is expected that for some Yazidi community members and other vulnerable cohorts, engagement with specialist settlement providers to support to engage in mainstream services will be protracted in comparison to other cohorts.

Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) Program – Toowoomba

The Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program is a crucial element of the settlement journey for our clients and community, particularly in areas of regional settlement where there are several barriers in accessing mainstream and key services due to resources, transport, and lack of cultural capability.

The main SETS case management (SETS - Client Services) providers in Toowoomba are CatholicCare and Multicultural Australia, focussing on tasks such as: information sessions, individual capacity building, crisis intervention, case coordination, support to access services, and form-filling. QPASTT has tailored its SETS model to complement other providers, focussing on group work and community capacity building to address identified needs such as; psychoeducation, parenting, social cohesion and employment.

¹ Wilkinson, L., Bhattacharyya, P., Riziki, A., & Abdul-Karim, A. B. (2019). Yazidi Resettlement in Canada – Final Report 2018. *Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations*. Winnipeg, MB. Retrieved February, 26, 2020.

“People need to learn to do things themselves, don’t do it for me, sit with me, beside me and teach me step by step... this is settlement, we are not visitors here. Please teach me about living here, don’t get me a fish, teach me how to fish.” (Participant at the Multicultural Australia Client Voice Reference Group, 2021).

Organization	# clients May 2021	CM: Client Ratio
Multicultural Australia	808	1:269
CatholicCare Social Services	1317	1:439
TOTAL	2125	

There are currently over 500 clients within the Toowoomba Humanitarian Settlement Program. Approximately 87% are from the Yazidi cohort, with many expected to exit by December 2021. Additionally, both services still receive regular eligible SETS clients (unaccounted in figures above) through their intake programs and external referrals from mainstream services. There is regular contact by mainstream services requesting assistance for multicultural community members, amplified due to the limited number of Kurdish Kurmanji interpreters and/or lack of awareness of interpreting services.

Significant impacts to service delivery have been identified due to resourcing limitations:

Organization	Service Delivery
Multicultural Australia	<p>Multicultural Australia currently has a waiting list in Toowoomba, and has reallocated staffing resources from other statistical areas to respond to increasing client numbers and needs in Toowoomba;</p> <p>Even with reallocated resources to provide additional support, responses to needs are still delayed due to complex client presentations (e.g., Domestic and Family Violence, housing crisis, legal issues, etc.) and case manager to client ratios.</p>
CatholicCare Social Services	<p>CatholicCare Social Services currently has a waiting list and is unable to accept any new referrals of clients as of 21st April 2021, in recognition of the reduction in resources as of 1st July 2021;</p> <p>As of FY21/22 CatholicCare Social Services SETS case management model will reduce by two case managers.</p>
Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT)	<p>The focus of QPASTT SETS funding is reduction of settlement adjustment stressors that impact on trauma recovery;</p> <p>QPASTT is funded through SETS to deliver group work with follow-up low-intensity support to those individuals participating in groups. QPASTT in their SETS delivery are not funded to provide tailored case management support;</p> <p>Part of QPASTT SETS program resources have been utilized for the Families in Cultural Transition (FICT) parenting program. There is increasing need and community interest in this program. Young people are supported through the UCan2 program delivered in TAFE which includes a combination of wellbeing support, psychoeducation around trauma and employment skills;</p> <p>QPASTT currently have a waiting list for both their group work programs and for individual counselling funded through the Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (PASTT) by Commonwealth Department of Health.</p>

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented both challenges and opportunities to innovate how service providers communicate with clients during lockdowns or restrictions. Due to a large portion of clients not being literate in their first language or in English, messaging to clients has required varied levels of engagement (i.e., health, settlement services and community members) to ensure clear, consistent and responsive communication.

Settlement services have observed an increased amount of time is being spent by staff and interpreters to ensure up to date information is distributed, supporting application of online travel exemption permits, and international travel and overseas family member concerns.

“Due to miscommunication or health, safety and financial concerns of family members overseas, our work with clients is delayed due to clients needing to discuss their stressors and fears” (CatholicCare Case Worker, 2021).

“There has been a deterioration across the state concerning mental health due to the impact of COVID-19 and this has also been experienced in Toowoomba” (QPASTT, 2021).

Moreover, with mainstream key services adapting to digital communication and systems, the digital divide is becoming increasingly evident, creating more barriers due to low computer literacy; limiting ability for some clients to independently manage bills, reporting, etc. This is resulting in an increase in presentations to settlement services to further develop life-skills.

Literacy, Language and Understanding of Systems

For many humanitarian entrants, arrival into a new country is made less daunting by connecting with other members of their cultural, linguistic or faith communities. However, for the Yazidi people this was not possible upon their migration to Australia as they are a small, closed community who speak a unique dialect rarely spoken by others from different cultural groups. Many from this cohort arrived without proficient literacy or language skills, and without the support of previously arrived and established community members who have developed life-skills through their own resettlement experience. Settlement providers are regularly contacted by services to support interpreter or translation needs.

For Kurdish Kurmanji, there is a limited pool of interpreters readily available... This means that the Yazidi cohort require additional support to navigate the health system, as without advocacy support they often struggle to access healthcare. (Refugee Health Officer, 2021).

“The impact of trauma, grief and loss, in some cases generationally, on many clients has a direct and negative impact on their capacity to learn and retain language” (CatholicCare Case Worker, 2021).

With increasingly complex privacy considerations, it is often challenging for clients at times to independently respond to services, even with an interpreter, as they have limited experience with new systems which are often complex. This adds significant complexity in the SETS space, to ensure clients' life-skills are developed, requires advocacy and ensuring consent between client, services and SETS providers.

In response to limited interpreters in the region, CatholicCare SETS has established an interpreting program, with a formal NAATI accreditation preparation for 12 participants, who were trusted locals with high demand languages. Another 25 participants were trained to deliver professional interpreting language support. All participants were connected to employment in various sectors including JobActives, NDIS providers, Aged Care providers, Education Queensland, Toowoomba Hospital, allied health providers, and interpreting services to build capacity of the Toowoomba community to provide safe services. This program also delivered information to various local stakeholders on the importance of accessing interpreters.

Overall, we have observed several mainstream services in Toowoomba, including Queensland Police Services, Education Queensland, Services Australia, Job Actives, Toowoomba Base Hospital employ various bicultural staff from the multicultural communities to increase engagement and ensure equitable access to services.

Children, Youth and Women

Many mainstream services rely on settlement providers to support them in developing their cultural understanding in order to appropriately engage and make decisions. Further, with over 50% of newly arrived humanitarian entrants being under 18 years old, the need is evident to ensure responsive and appropriate support to settlement clients and stakeholders.

Numerous Toowoomba stakeholders, including community and faith groups, supported by settlement providers, have focussed on mitigating risks of social isolation, safety (including crime, child safety, domestic and family violence, etc.), and delays in settlement particularly for refugee women, children and young people. This includes examples of bicycle donations, English conversation classes, playgroups, women's groups, citizenship application support, craft, group picnics, homework clubs, and volunteer home visits.

Women's issues and Domestic and Family Violence

"Women with children and older women face significant barriers to economic and social participation including difficulties accessing mainstream services and supports, education and training, employment, financial independence and interaction with their children's schools and the broader Toowoomba community." (Stakeholder Perspectives, Observations & Needs Report, 2020)²

Due to cultural reasons, a female Yazidi client was expected by her husband and family to resign from part-time employment at the Coffee Club Toowoomba when she was married, as it was a client-facing role. She has requested support to find culturally appropriate work and subsequently she has disengaged from her education." (Youth Hub Worker, Multicultural Australia, 2021).

Early Childhood

"Recently, there have been a higher number of cases of children displaying trauma related behaviour, separation challenges, coupled with parents who are unfamiliar with early children and care benefits and enrolment processes, which require additional service provider and bicultural worker support to navigate in an early childhood setting" (Cultural Consultant, Refugee and Asylum Seeker Early Childhood pilot, Multicultural Australia, 2021).

Youth

Currently Multicultural Australia, as part of the Youth Hub Pilot is attached to two Toowoomba high-schools, Toowoomba State High School and Harristown State High School, supporting young people with pathway planning and community integration, there are over 900 young people engaged, 85% state that they identify with the Yazidi community.

"Toowoomba need to invest in our young people as the strength of our community" (Participant at the Multicultural Australia Client Voice Reference Group, 2021)

Toowoomba Queensland Police Service indicated to settlement providers their concern that if adequate support for refugee families and young people is not provided, there could be a potential increase in court and justice systems representation, particularly for young people if they begin to experience disengagement, intergenerational trauma and conflict and cultural dissonance.

Multicultural Australia Youth Hub workers have been the main contact by schools for a wide range of issues with students, rather than direct communication with parents, due to ongoing interpreter access issues both in access and confidence in utilisation. Due to a lack of capacity for Youth Hub Workers, support is provided for schools to refer to Specialised and Intensive Support (SIS) program, QPASTT, and SETS program to address issues such as:

- Behavioural issues including aggressive behaviour

² Stephenson, A. 2020. *Towards Seamless Regional Settlement Pathways for Humanitarian Settlers to Toowoomba Report – Part 2: Stakeholder Perspectives, Observations & Needs Report*. Conscious Enterprise.

- Bullying and being victim of bullying
- Taking over carer responsibilities
- Low attendance rate at school
- Possibility of undiagnosed learning difficulties or trauma
- Housing

Housing

Currently, Toowoomba's housing vacancy rate is sitting at approximately 0.6%, causing significant difficulties for SETS clients requiring a new rental property. Due to an upward trend in both value of properties and the number of property sales in Toowoomba, settlement providers have observed many clients at the end of their tenancy agreement are not able to renew their lease due to the landlord deciding to sell the property. This is compounded by existing barriers for Toowoomba refugee communities such as cultural, language, financial, transport, rental history, and family size.

"Recently clients have been making up to 30 applications for properties with minimal success" (CatholicCare Case Worker, 2021)

"Toowoomba has a limited stock of affordable housing for larger families (4 bedrooms+), settlers report major difficulties accessing regular public transport. These associated issues impact settlers' capacity to access training, education, employment and social opportunities." (Stakeholder Perspectives, Observations & Needs Report, 2020)³

Settlement providers are experiencing substantial demand for appointments for support and advocacy around housing, this is partially due to wait-lists with mainstream housing support services. Currently case managers have examples of facilitating approximately fifteen appointments before a client secures accommodation.

Despite real estates in Queensland having access to free interpreting services, there is only evidence of one real estate agency in Toowoomba actively providing language support, with many having to be reminded to utilise this service by settlement providers.

To address this, Multicultural Australia's Accommodation Team has been working to capacity build with individual real estates and meeting regularly with the Department of Housing and Public Works. CatholicCare has also been delivering tenancy courses for clients to help them manage their own housing issues.

Health and Wellbeing

For refugee patients, access to health care is greatly impeded by their lack of familiarity with the health system and the complex pathways to health care access (e.g., NDIS, My Aged Care, allied and mental health). This is compounded by language barriers and issues with trusting practitioners, leading to increased anxiety and decreased wellbeing. A key part of settlement and recovery is to address health and wellbeing barriers to encourage the engagement of the refugee community in programs, events, education and economic participation. In Toowoomba, settlement providers and health services work closely in collaboration advocate, educate and address the health and wellbeing of the refugee community.

In the Darling Downs and West Moreton region some of the key barriers to equitable healthcare access are:

- An overburdened public health system
- The high costs associated with private health care
- Some practices being unwilling to work with interpreters
- The lack of interpreters for lesser spoken dialects

³ Stephenson, A. 2020. *Towards Seamless Regional Settlement Pathways for Humanitarian Settlers to Toowoomba Report – Part 2: Stakeholder Perspectives, Observations & Needs Report*. Conscious Enterprise.

- Extended wait times in the dental public health system due to the lack of interpreters
- Limited health literacy
- That there is no way of identifying a refugee within the Queensland Health system

An example of this, in collaboration with settlement services, Darling Downs Hospital and Health have developed audio-visual tools in Kurdish Kurmanji for discharge information to address resourcing issues at the emergency department.

Settlement providers have worked collaboratively with health services in training and development of in language resources. Early in the pandemic a gap was identified in translated resources for the majority of the Toowoomba refugee community, the Yazidi. Multicultural Australia and CatholicCare have been partnering with the Refugee Health Network and the Queensland State Government to ensure resources in Kurdish Kurmanji are created and distributed to those in need. This partnership will continue post-pandemic, ensuring that Kurdish Kurmanji speaking Australians will have access to public health information.

QPASTT has noted that there is a significant need in Toowoomba for trauma recovery support and is aware that they are not fully able to meet this need, due to the availability of resources. Across the state QPASTT has measured a 24.3% increase in contacts, with clients requiring a greater frequency of contact over a longer period of time. QPASTT has focussed on remodelling service delivery to engage with more people quickly; for example, a remodelling of intake processes to improve their ability to triage and mitigate risk through engaging internal or external services, and an expansion of group work including appointment of an Occupational Therapist who is support clients through sensory intervention and pain management, psychoeducation, social cohesion, and settlement barriers where appropriate.

Education

Toowoomba education institutions, inclusive of schools and TAFE QLD, are directly feeling the impact to their service delivery with the increased arrivals to the region. Working with settlement providers, both Education QLD and TAFE QLD have adapted to meet the complex needs of their students, including engagement in regular professional development on cultural capability and working with students from trauma backgrounds.

“Refugee students are experiencing additional difficulties to catch up with school work and adapt to the Australia education system. Teachers at schools and TAFE QLD have observed that students are not progressing with their English.” (Youth Hub Worker, Multicultural Australia, 2021)

Examples of innovative partnerships to address education engagement:

1. Multicultural Australia and Department of Education created short videos in multiple languages with information regarding Kindergarten and Prep enrolments. These were distributed to clients that had younger children at home via Whatsapp.
2. CatholicCare facilitated a Teacher Aide course to improve education experience for children and young people and create employment pathways for clients. Several of the participants are now employed by various schools, with positive feedback from both the employer and employee.

Education institutions in Toowoomba rely heavily on settlement providers in supporting high numbers of refugee students, through referrals to support settlement barriers experienced by the individuals, families and communities.

Employment

Toowoomba is a growing economy with many potential sectors expected to grow and employment opportunities expected to increase. Many of the refugee community have indicated that employment is a key settlement goal. SETS providers are focussed on addressing economic participation barriers.

Toowoomba Chamber of Commerce has partnered with CatholicCare to develop a broker role located in the Chamber. This role promotes the benefits of refugee and migrant employment directly to employers from a trusted source and work with SETS providers and Job Active providers to match humanitarian entrants with employment opportunities. CatholicCare and Best Employment (Job Active provider) coordinate the Migrant Jobs Taskforce which has brought together key players to develop seamless pathways for humanitarian entrants through education into employment in growing sectors. SETS programs provide wraparound support for case work issues that can derail progress of a student if not address quickly. Pathways are currently available for individual support, early childhood, agriculture and hospitality.

Beyond the taskforce network, SETS providers have developed direct partnerships with employers and provides support to emerging entrepreneurs in the community. For example:

- CatholicCare has placed 30 SETS clients directly into employment in 2020;
- After establishing a relationship with Multicultural Australia to address workforce issues, local employer Tambo Teddies now employs several newly arrived refugees⁴;
- Multicultural Australia is currently providing education and support to SETS clients, who have successfully opened a cultural grocery store in Toowoomba city, supplying to approximately 2,500 community members. A key focus is ensuring that they are aware of all legal and financial responsibilities;
- Thrive Refugee Enterprises⁵ Queensland State Manager has co-located at Multicultural Australia and will be introduced to the Toowoomba communities in the near future to motivate and support more SETS clients wishing to have a small business

Summary

SETS providers in Toowoomba - CatholicCare Social Services, Multicultural Australia and Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT), aim to ensure adequate and sustainable resources in the Toowoomba region to support primary and secondary settlement in the region. In this report we have aimed to showcase both the successes and challenges within the region, which have been achieved through our strong partnerships, and by the volume and complexity of the vulnerable cohorts which we support.

Stephenson (2020)⁶ notes that Federal funding for Toowoomba's settlement services has been reduced, despite an increase in numbers of arrivals; resulting in a significant increased need for government, non-government and community organisations to meet level of demand. We believe that Toowoomba's current settlement landscape is amplified due to:

1. Increased number of humanitarian arrivals within the last five years, particularly since 2018;
2. Majority of the eligible SETS clients speaking a language, with limited interpreting/ translation support available, directly impacting independent access to mainstream services;
3. Exceptionally high levels of trauma throughout the lifespan, creating protracted support needs in comparison with other cohorts;
4. Over 50% of clients are under the age of 15 years old, with specific trauma, cultural and behavioural presentations;

⁴ <https://www.tamboteddies.com.au/2021/02/01/meet-the-tambo-teddies-toowoomba-team/>

⁵ <https://thriverefugeeenterprise.org.au/>

⁶ Stephenson, A. 2020. *Towards Seamless Regional Settlement Pathways for Humanitarian Settlers to Toowoomba Report – Part 2: Stakeholder Perspectives, Observations & Needs Report*. Conscious Enterprise.

5. Large, blended family groups, creating complexity with housing and intergenerational relationships.

We are concerned about increased risk, due to reduced funding for FY21/22, which will further limit our capacity as providers to be responsive and adequately support eligible SETS clients in Toowoomba. There have been significant learnings about the particular needs of the Yazidi community, including a better understanding of the complexity of the unique needs of this community since SETS funding arrangements were put in place in 2018. An appropriate level of resourcing for the settlement sector will ensure that benefits can continue to be reaped from the strong collaborative partnerships and networks developed between SETS providers and the broader community across the Toowoomba region.

