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Joint Standing Committee on Migration  
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Mr Jason Wood MP, Committee Chair  
Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP, Deputy Chair  
Senator Chris Back  
Senator Sam Dastyari  
The Hon Damian Drum MP  
Mr Steve Georganas MP  
Senator Nick McKim  
The Hon Shayne Neumann MP  
Senator James Paterson  
Mr Ross Vasta MP

## **Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes**

Dear Director,

The City of Wagga Wagga's Social Planning unit has considered the request for submissions and appreciates the opportunity to make comment. The summary of recommendations and extended response to the areas of focus provided can be found below.

### **The mix, coordination and extent of settlement services available and the effectiveness of these services in promoting better settlement outcomes for migrants**

The City of Wagga Wagga's Social Planning unit works alongside and collaboratively with many of our State government agencies and local service providers. These service providers include, but are not limited to, those with responsibility for families, youth, ageing, disability, health, education and community safety. We value the important work of the NSW Department of Immigration and Border Protection and the Department of Social Services, in providing frameworks and ongoing support through facilitation of settlement and migration programs for vulnerable individuals and their families in the City of Wagga Wagga.

According to the Department of Social Services Settlement Reporting Facility, from April 2010 to March 2015 there were 1,802 migrants settled in to Wagga across the Humanitarian, Family and Skilled streams. Data collected from the Census (2011), indicated that 4,673 people who were living in Wagga Wagga City were born overseas, and 31% of those had arrived between 2006 to 2011.

This was compared to 19% for New South Wales and 14% for Regional NSW. Overall the data indicates a growing migrant population in the area and identifies a clear need to continue to review and develop adequate settlement services and settlement outcomes.

In saying this, there are a small group of vital service providers and government agencies which exist within Wagga Wagga providing the large portion of migration and settlement services. These include the Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga, Red Cross, TAFE, St Vincent De Paul Society and Centacare. They are adequately skilled in identifying the levels of need often associated with many migrants, such as difficulties in accessing services, trauma and language. In many cases they work collaboratively with other services to address these needs.

There is often high demand placed on these services and because of a lack of funding, time and skill they are often forced into crisis and reactionary driven service provision rather than a holistic plan to address the highly complex needs of migrants.

Migrants, Refugees and Asylum seekers are identified in Wagga Wagga as a vulnerable group and often times open to exploitation. They are of high social need but as we understand, the forecast for future outcomes for migrants in the City continues to be a rocky path. Services currently offering programs to migrant clients are saying they will not have capacity to assist holders of the new Safe Haven Enterprise Visa's. We understand existing funding streams such as Community Assistance Scheme (CAS) and the Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme (ASAS) are being disbanded and there is concern that no replacement funding has been announced and regional areas are going to be further stretched to support these people who are already significantly traumatised, isolated and have, in many cases, minimal English language.

Wagga Wagga also has a higher proportion of people aged between 0 and 17 years, 25% compared with 23% for Regional NSW. In Wagga Wagga, youth are identified as being at significant risk, we have high crime rates and high youth disengagement, which by definition accounts for both lack of involvement in any kind of education or employment.

With young migrants and asylum seekers identified as a highly vulnerable group within this cohort, there is an identified gap, and growing need, to provide specific migrant services focusing on youth. In the past two years Wagga Wagga has lost considerable amounts of funding for youth services generally and we have seen services offering case-coordination for youth with complex needs cease. For example Campbell Page employment services and programs aimed at increasing coordination between services, such as the Partnership Brokering through Compact were both defunded. There has been an increase, however, in the duplication of services, particularly around those that provide advocacy and referral. Without appropriate case management and



complex support services or programs to refer to however, the overall usefulness and effectiveness of these referral services in dealing with multifaceted levels of need is questionable.

The City of Wagga Wagga continues to seek, support and collaborate with, other government and community services wherever possible for innovative solutions to provide opportunities to, and celebration of, a variety of cultures.

Grown over a number of years is a fantastic initiative organised by City of Wagga Wagga successful annual FUSION festival. FUSION is a multicultural food and arts event and is by far the largest multicultural festival existing in our area, attracting approximately 12,000 attendees each year. It offers community members from a culturally and linguistically diverse background an opportunity to hold a food stall, to sell their traditional cuisine and also showcase community performances, traditional arts and dance. This is delivered in collaboration with the Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga, who provide volunteers from many different cultural backgrounds to assist with the running of the festival day.

The cultural make up of previous FUSION events has included, but is not limited to, individuals from an African, Indian, Asian (Burmese, Thailand), Iranian and Egyptian background. Feedback received from previous festivals and anecdotal evidence suggests that this is seen as an extremely important large scale event occurring annually in our City, being a vital opportunity for social cohesion that brings multiculturalism to the forefront and sees it celebrated and enjoyed by all community members. Individual stallholders have gained vital skills and transferred this to small business opportunities.

With this said, there has not been an ongoing funding stream identified for this significant event to continue after 2017. Ongoing issues around grant and funding criteria being too rigid, means FUSION does not fit into the multicultural or arts funding grant models. Despite the Multicultural Council utilising funding grants from Multicultural NSW and The City of Wagga Wagga Community Grants in order to conduct a range of social welcoming activities, difficulty in sourcing funding for opportunities such as FUSION bring with it consequences. These difficulties lie in the gap in social access that is left in trying to provide a welcoming, social and recreational outlet within the wider community. It means that a number of migrants lose the opportunity to celebrate their culture not only with family, friends and their cultural group but also in a public capacity and may further add to the potential for social isolation.

### **National and international best practice strategies for improving migrant settlement outcomes and prospects**

From review of the current settlement strategies and the programs which stem from these in Wagga Wagga, it appears there has been increased movement



towards transparency in selection criteria for local programs and increased opportunities and accessibility to basic human necessities such as health care.

With this said, there is still an identifiable discrepancy between what are considered international best practice strategies and the current state. These international best practice strategies include moving to reduce restrictive and inflexible conditions around eligibility for Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), recognition of qualifications, increased opportunity for skills transfer, increase transport options or outreach assistance and providing services that assist on the journey to settlement and beyond. These should go on to act as national best practice strategies which filter down to state level initiatives driving localised programs.

The key settlement services provided comment to The City of Wagga Wagga regarding their current program delivery. A large portion stated that although they provide free English language courses in addition to a wide range of other settlement services, increased access to A.M.E.P is still difficult to access.

Currently, there are timeframes required to be met from the date of their visa commencement or arrival in Australia to remain eligible, these timeframes include:

- register with an A.M.E.P service provider within six months (or 12 months if you are under 18 years of age at the time of registration)
- commence your tuition within 12 months
- complete your tuition within five years.

Currently in Wagga Wagga, TAFE NSW Riverina Institute is the only authorised provider of this program. The delivery modes offered on the are full-time on campus, part-time evening classes, online, by distance learning or at home with a volunteer tutor. The success of this course can not be measured without direct feedback from TAFE NSW Riverina and they have not provided it. Service providers have still identified a great need in this area which suggests that this course is either full or not meeting the needs of the community.

Combining possible existing difficulties with English language comprehension, inability to access support services generally and lack of transport options, means that timeframes and most delivery modes may often be unachievable and unrealistic as the approach is one-size-fits all.

Understanding the impact that a lack of transport can have on access to service provision is also important. Due to the public transport services being largely centralised in the City of Wagga Wagga often migrants in need of key services cannot find ongoing ways to access them from the suburbs in which they live. Ensuring outreach is a built in component of settlement services



would improve outcomes by enabling and increasing the opportunity for migrants to receive the services and assistance they need.

Another best practice strategy identified from local services relates to skilled migrants. They advised a need to improve access programs to supported employment pathways for skilled migration. The settlement reporting facility reports approximately 65% of those coming to Wagga Wagga through settlement services are from the skilled stream. The reports also suggest there is often tremendous difficulty in having these qualifications recognised or transferred through links to an education or employment pathway program. Additionally, a large portion of skilled migrants are resigned to seeking what is considered 'low-skill, low-pay' work, with potential to move into higher income roles extremely limited.

Acknowledging that migrants are often skilled and qualified people and developing an employment strategy to assist with building transparent and more meaningful pathways to employment would lead to more sustainable settlement outcomes.

There is ongoing commitment from The City of Wagga Wagga, to ensure the policies and plans developed support our multicultural community by consultation with the Riverina Regional Advisory Council. It draws its membership from a broad range of multicultural groups and agencies across the municipality including NSW Police, the NSW Department of Education, Family and Community Services (FACS), NSW Health, and the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) as well as members of the community. The committee meets four times a year and provides expert advice surrounding existing and potential strategies that can better impact this community.

### **The importance of English language ability on a migrant's, or prospective migrant's, settlement outcome**

Lack of fluency in and understanding of English can lead to a sense of isolation and hesitancy to delve into the wider community. Many of the migrant and refugee services in Wagga Wagga, despite their immense efforts, are funded to provide settlement services but have little to no funding to facilitate services outside of settlement.

For example, according to the Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga's Annual report 2015-2016 the majority of their sessions utilised by individuals according to service type were largely referral and advocacy rather than employment.

- Information/Advice/Referral (810)
- Advocacy/Support (731)
- Facilitate Employment Pathways type (12)
- Child/Youth focussed groups (6)



- Outreach (6)

As the journey of migration varies from individual and family and programs need to provide scope for a variety of different needs and issues that this journey can bring both during and after settlement. This should be inclusive of settlement, housing, health, employment, education, language and social opportunities.

As mentioned previously, most are not aware of what opportunities may be available to them. As this part of the journey is often reliant on services outside of the settlement field, it is reported that they face blocks, as not all of these services are versed in what is required when working in a culturally appropriate and sensitive way. This may mean increasing the availability of use for assistance such as interpreters, information and documents in different languages, promotion of programs and events in different mediums and languages and having compulsory cultural awareness training for staff. Without locally based, culturally sensitive service provision, migrants will continue to face somewhat unnecessary obstructions to achieving positive and meaningful outcomes through areas such as education and employment.

Service coordination and collaboration is very much a consideration of many of our service providers and in Wagga Wagga many child, youth and family services providers have developed a framework to coordinate a more strategic response. The Wagga Impact Network (WIN) established themselves with senior representation from many of the locally based not for profit organisations. They are increasingly gaining traction and a voice within our locally-based government agencies.

Lastly, there are a number of inter-agencies that function across the city with regular meetings between a range of service providers and its staff around different areas of need, including youth, ageing and disability, crime and health. These meetings provide a regular opportunity for stakeholders to come together and discuss what services, programs or events are currently on offer. This equips service providers with the information and knowledge to guide their practice and assistance for their clients but also enables them to pass on opportunities to the clients themselves and increase the likelihood of positive outcomes. This inter-agency coordination is often undertaken by service providers own time as this is not identified as part of their core business.

Whether current migration processes adequately assess a prospective migrant's settlement prospects. The Committee shall give particular consideration to social engagement of youth migrants, including involvement of youth migrants in anti-social behavior such as gang activity, and the adequacy of the Migration Act 1958 character test provisions as a means to address issues arising from this behaviour





From the feedback received from local services, there was little mentioned regarding any inadequacy of processes relating to assessing settlement prospects. In terms of migrant youth however, and potential for gang activity, community members have anecdotally reported that they are concerned about this cohort becoming increasingly involved in petty crime. There is difficulty in supporting this however, as there is currently no reporting systems through Police or the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research identified that can discriminate offenders or people of interest based on migrant status.

The character test would have limited provisioning as a means to address issues arising through gang or anti-social behaviour. Although there may be young people who display concerning behaviour prior to entry, there would be a number of youth migrants who may very well not show any cause for concern on these tests initially. These issues only begin when faced with a new home, new language and culture where they may feel uncertain about future prospects.

There is often an enormous amount of pressure on some youth migrants, as they end up being the bridge between the old and new for their parents and extended family. This, together with trauma, lack of English, lack of access to supported education, lack of employment prospects and where they have limited social involvement with the wider community can lead to anti-social behaviour.

In order to avoid fostering these kind of potential responses in migrant youth, there needs to be an increase in service provisions surrounding the types of supports these young people truly need.

These supports could include:

- an increase in access to ongoing English language classes
- access to specialised education and employment services, such as pathway programs
- assisted transport programs
- increased social opportunities, such as free access to sport.

Changes in service provision for this cohort is imperative in fostering not only better settlement outcomes for young people but also their families.

## **Summary of Recommendations**

- Increase funding and scope of service provision to existing settlement service providers in Wagga Wagga, including: Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga, Red Cross, TAFE NSW Riverina Institute, St Vincent De Paul Society and Centacare.



- Ensure the Outreach Mode of delivery is prescribed for all settlement service provision
- Develop and implement a Skilled Migrant Employment Strategy
- Develop and implement a Transport Assistance Scheme for migrants
- Direct youth funding towards services that provide case coordination for youth with complex needs
- Ensure reasonable flexibility in application criteria for funding grants for multicultural events and broader community social inclusion programs
- Increase providers of Adult Migrant English Programs (AEMP), and reduce restrictions around eligibility criteria.

### **Other related matters**

I look forward to your responses to the above issues and opportunity to provide further comments as the matter progresses. If the opportunity arises I would be happy to participate in any facilitated discussions or panel reviews that would further assist the committee in this matter.

Kind regards,

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