



Inquiry into Multiculturalism In Australia

Submitted by

THE MIGRANT HUB INCORPORATED

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April 1, 2011

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Executive Summary

Multiculturalism in Europe had been described a failure by Britain's Prime Minister and other European leaders. Fortunately this is not the case in Australia but there is danger that it would be if we do not do anything to prevent it from happening.

Our leaders talk about the need for migrants to integrate but **integration cannot be legislated**. If migrants are to integrate, it has to be because they want to integrate. Most migrants come to Australia because they want the lifestyle, because they want a better future for themselves and their families, because they want to be Australians. They come from different backgrounds, experienced different situations that caused some of them, not being able to integrate and even some - not wanting to integrate.

This submission will examine and explain the situation of migrants who come as skilled migrants - which comprise together with their families, the majority of migrants coming to Australia. Many migrants under the Family Stream come with skills and their situations are similar to the Skilled Migrants.

The author came as a skilled migrant 24 years ago, have been active in the migrant community for 20 years and have worked with and listened to stories of skilled migrants over those years.

The submission will focus on the situation in the City of Wyndham and describe the rationale for the formation of The Migrant HUB, which is a not-for-profit organisation based in Werribee. The aim of The Migrant HUB is to encourage and support migrants to integrate better into Australian society and become more active citizens of the local community.

In its little more than a year of actual operations, The Migrant HUB has created a positive impact in the community for the organisation and for the migrant community in Wyndham. It has become a place to eat, a place to meet and a place to build community. It has created a place where migrants feel they can belong, a place where mainstream Australians feel welcome and can mingle and interact with members of the migrant community. It has created a place where networking is a normal activity promoting an environment where job seekers and unadvertised jobs find each other. It has created a place where migrants with business entrepreneurial skills are encouraged and supported creating jobs for migrants and their families and often promoting exports of Australian products to former home countries of migrants. It is a place where talents as in music and arts are discovered and promoted. It is a place where everyone is welcomed.

We believe our solution to the issue is innovative and can be replicated in many other local government areas where migrants comprise a substantial percentage of the population. We believe more organisations like The Migrant HUB should be organised and funded to complement other programs already being implemented and those that will be designed as a result of this inquiry.

1. Our Diverse Community

Australia's population is becoming more and more diverse with 40% of its population born overseas or has at least one parent born overseas. This is expected to be more than 50% in 10-15 years. 60% of new arrivals are skilled migrants and their families, around 1% come under the refugee and humanitarian entrant category and the balance from the Family Stream.

Wyndham is the fastest growing area in Victoria currently with a population of 147,000 and a projected population of 430,000 by 2030. 31.6% of the population today are of migrant backgrounds. **Refugees and humanitarian entrants** comprise around **1% of the population** but is relatively a high number compared to other suburbs in Melbourne.

2. Relevant Issues

2.1. Diversity and Active Citizenship

The ultimate objective of society is to have as many of its members become active citizens. The more active citizens there are, the stronger the community, the happier the residents.

Society's aim is ultimately to have as many of the residents become active citizens

- EVERYONE SHOULD BE IN THEIR JOURNEY TO BECOMING ACTIVE CITIZENS
- WHERE THEY ARE IN THEIR JOURNEY DEPENDS LARGELY ON WHERE THEY ARE IN THEIR HEIRARCHY OF NEEDS



Each resident is on a journey to becoming an active citizen. The stage they are in depends on where they are in their own particular hierarchy of needs.

Society's aim is ultimately to have as many of the residents become active citizens

- HAVE A LONGER JOURNEY BECAUSE THEY HAVE NEEDS THAT MUST BE ADDRESSED FIRST
- EXAMPLE – ADJUSTING TO NEW CULTURE AND NEW LANGUAGE, FINDING A JOB, ETC



The journeys of migrants are longer than the average residents. They deal with their immediate settlement needs before they consider getting involved in community.

Migrants 31.6%

- Skilled
- Family Stream



The journeys of refugees and humanitarian entrants are even longer the average migrant. The traumatic experience in their home country and in camps, their lack of education and the cultural differences they need to deal with, create more issues to smooth settlement and community participation.

LONGEST JOURNEY – FROM TRAUMATIC SITUATIONS, NO ENGLISH, NO SKILLS



Migrants 31.6%

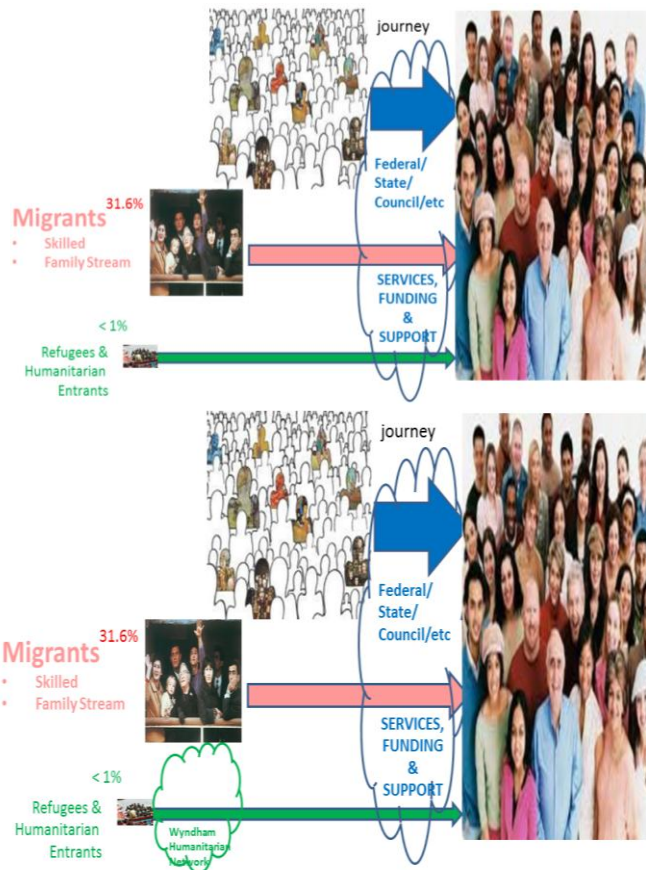
- Skilled
- Family Stream



< 1%
Refugees & Humanitarian Entrants



2.2 Services and Funding Support Available



Many services in the community are provided by all levels of government as well as philanthropic organisations to provide support and fund projects that are aimed to bring together and build community. They encourage residents to participate in volunteering and be active in society. Most of these services are available to everyone. Grants are generally competitive.

Settlement Grants and other funding sources are available to fund groups providing support to migrants of refugee and humanitarian backgrounds to assist them to settle in their new community. These services are vital and required as we want these new migrants to become active citizens as soon as possible.

The Wyndham Humanitarian Network (WHN) was organised with

around 60 members attending regularly to coordinate the support provided to refugees and humanitarian entrants by all the service providers in Wyndham.

2.3 Service Gap

A gap in services pertaining to migrants who are not from refugees or humanitarian entrant backgrounds have been identified in Wyndham.

Society's aim is ultimately to have as many of the residents become active citizens



While there are a lot of services available for everyone in the community, a lot of funding available supporting migrants of refugee and humanitarian backgrounds, there is practically none specifically for migrants in the Skilled and Family Stream category despite them comprising more than 30% of the population in Wyndham and with needs specific to them which may discourage them from being active citizens.

The Western Metropolitan Melbourne Migrant Resource Centre based in Footscray operated in Werribee in 1980s but was closed in 1990s. The Westgate Migrant Resource Centre based in Altona took over the operations but lost their funding a few years ago. The New Hope Foundation, a migrant resource centre based in Prahran took over from the Westgate MRC but was and still is funded primarily for

the refugees and humanitarian entrants.

MRCs provided a meeting place for migrants where they find other migrants of similar backgrounds or interest then organise themselves and support each other.

Migrant Resource Centres were until lately specifically funded to be the first point of contact for migrants for information and for settlement services. Many MRCs continue to receive funding from Federal government through the Settlement Grants Program and as well as from other grants programs through the State government and philanthropic organisations.

Wyndham is the fastest growing suburb in Victoria with a high and fast growing migrant population. Until 2009 Wyndham did not have an MRC and there were issues in the community support structure.

2.3.1 Access and Information Issues

Correct, accurate and timely information about where to go to find help is one of the most needed commodities for migrants. Without the correct information, access to the services is hampered. Migrants do not expect many of the services provided to the community to exist since these are generally not provided in their home countries. In time of need migrants seek help from MRCs, family, friends from their own ethnic communities as well as their religious leaders.

In other Council areas, migrant resource centres exist to support and advocate for migrants so they find and receive help when they need it. Information sessions and information kits about the services available are provided by Council and other local organisations to newly arrived migrants but their language skills at that stage is not sufficient for them to comprehend the nature of the services the organisations provide especially when the service is not needed yet.

Community Information Centres (CICs) exist in other areas which operate as a first point of contact for information and to provide information required when it is needed. There are 61 CICs around Victoria, 29 in the eastern suburbs and only one exists in the western suburbs. This CIC is located in Altona and is funded by the Hobsons Bay City Council to provide the needed information and referral service required by its residents. No similar service exists in Wyndham.

2.3.2 Employability Issue

Skilled and sponsored migrants arrive expecting to be highly employable. Many apply for advertised job positions and find their qualifications and years of experience overseas are no match to the local experience and qualifications of others competing for the same jobs. Often the frustrated skilled migrants mistakenly blame discrimination and their lack of local experience for their not getting the job they want. The common lament is that no employer wants to give them a go so they are not getting the local experience they need.

2.3.3 Wasted Skills of Migrants

In need of a source of income, some having burnt bridges in their home country and not being able to access unemployment benefits or because their sponsoring family assumed responsibility for their needs in the first few years, they take the first job offered to them even if the job is not related to their skills set. They then get a mortgage for a house and finance for a car. Many years later they are still in the same unskilled work situation.

Today, a lot of migrants who have masters degrees or PhDs from their home countries end up working as taxi drivers, security guards or as labourers in factories.

Australia continues to bring skilled migrants in to fill skilled workers positions needed by industries but is wasting the skills of many migrants we already have.

Wyndham has a large skilled migrant population in need of jobs related to their background.

2.3.4 Wasted Business Skills of Migrants

Many migrants come with business skills, experience and strong networks from their home countries. Many unsure about their prospects as entrepreneurs in a new country seek employment to get a stable income.

Migrants with entrepreneurial experience, skills and desire are not in business because of:

- Lack of local knowledge
- Lack of time to do a business plan or market research
- They do not want to risk the security of their current employment

2.3.5 Lack of a Meeting Place

Migrants in communities have a better support system and settle better into their new environment. Community is built by people who share the same interests. They find out they have common interests when they meet and have conversations. In the case of migrants of refugee and humanitarian backgrounds, migrant resource centres and organisations providing related services bring them together and help build them build communities. In Wyndham this was and is being coordinated by the Wyndham Humanitarian Network.

Meeting rooms at community centres are available but if migrants are not organised or haven't found common interests with others, they would not see a need to utilise these rooms. Until lately, there was no meeting place for migrants who were not of refugee or humanitarian backgrounds.

3. Impact on Community

Many migrants and skilled migrants in particular, come with a lot of expectations on their employability and how they can use their skills and experience to help build industry and community in Australia - their new home. After scores and to some hundreds of applications sent and hundreds of “we regret letters” received, many migrants trim down their resumes to get a job and income to support their families. This is followed with loans and home mortgages and 10-20 years later they are still in the unskilled job or job unrelated to their field of expertise. Many feel under-utilised, undervalued and some even feel unwelcomed. The much better living standards they acquired in their new home, for themselves and their families, is enough for them to swallow their pride and do what they can, notwithstanding.

The issues enumerated in the preceding sections contribute to the frustrations migrants have with the system, changing their initial impressions of Australia as a welcoming land of opportunities.

4. Seeming Indifference of the Wider Community

There are three major factors that make migrants think that the wider community is indifferent to their situation:

- a. Skilled migrants and those in the Family Stream category know and expect that they are not entitled to any government support at least in the first 24 months. They expect also that the wider community know they are not entitled to support
- b. Many earlier migrants especially from Europe tell them that they also struggled and did not receive support when they first arrived
- c. The media coverage and the ongoing debate about Islamic extremists and refugee boats continue to fuel negative attitudes of the wider community about migrants in general

5. A Need for a Different Approach

While there is a need for action on a national and state level to develop programs which encourage and support migrants to integrate into Australian society; while there is a need to develop programs to up-skill migrants and maximise the utilisation of their valuable experience; there is also a need to develop programs at the local level where the migrants are and where their contribution to community is needed and the lack of it is strongly felt. We developed The Migrant HUB to be such.

6. THE MIGRANT HUB

6.1 What is The Migrant Hub?

The Migrant HUB was registered with Consumer Affairs Victoria in January 2009 as an incorporated association. It was envisioned as a migrant resource centre, a voice and advocate for the migrant community in Wyndham and a catalyst for positive change.

6.2 The Vision

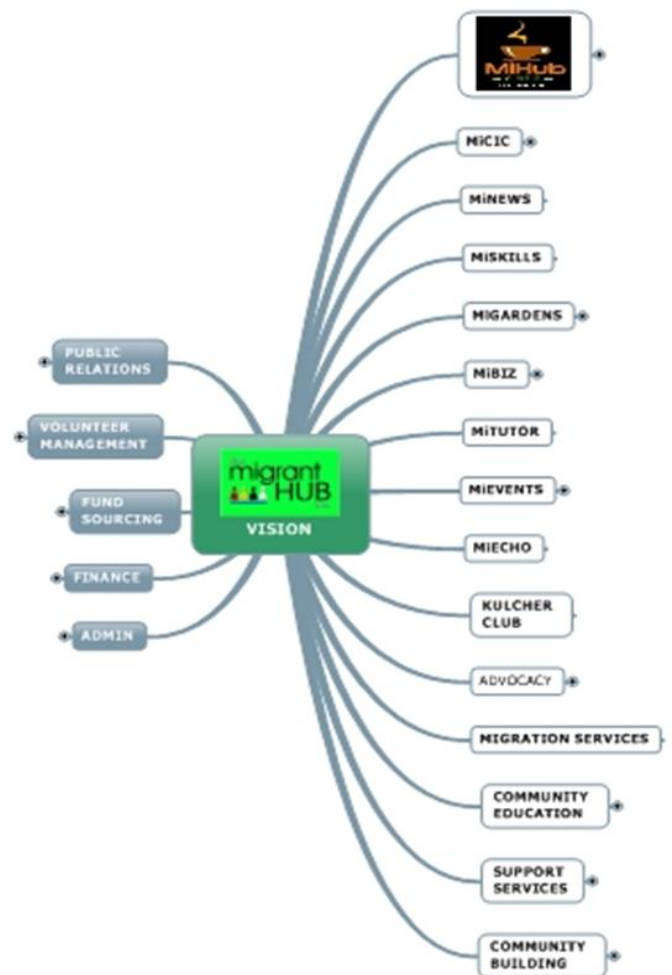
To see an Australian society where residents of migrant backgrounds are fully integrated, participating and contributing actively sharing opportunities as well as responsibilities with the rest of community.

6.3 Our Mission

To support as many residents of migrant backgrounds in their journeys to becoming active citizens and in integrating better into the Australian society.

6.4 Our objectives

- establish an information and referral service for the community identifying relevant services, providers and eligibility criteria
- advocate to Council and service providers in behalf of migrants' interest
- provide a meeting place for migrants and the wider community
- promote volunteering and community participation among migrants
- support capacity building programs of ethnic organisations
- establish a skills bank to support migrants seeking job opportunities
- establish a business enterprise centre to promote entrepreneurship and support entrepreneurs from the migrant community
- establish a newsletter to promote migrant businesses and improve information dissemination
- establish social enterprises to create employment and income as well as reduce The Migrant Hub's dependence on grants.
- create a positive impact in the community of Wyndham for the organisation and for the migrant community in general



6.6 Creating a Positive Impact

The Migrant HUB established MiHUB Café as a social enterprise attracting patrons through its delicious and modestly priced Asian cuisine from Wyndham and from other suburbs of Melbourne. It has supported several migrants find help for their issues, find jobs and established business and social enterprises. These with only volunteers to develop and implement the programs and very limited funding support.

The Migrant HUB has been funded and is in the process of implementing a community information and referral program for the migrant and general community in Wyndham and surrounding suburbs. Information support volunteers will be coming from all sectors of the community.

The Migrant HUB established MiSKILLS to build the skills database of migrant skills. The database is and will be used when employers seek skilled migrants to fill positions. Through the growing network of contacts this is expected to help migrants find jobs - both permanent and temporary. Even without funding support this service is already operating and helping migrants find jobs and employers find workers.

The Migrant HUB established MiBIZ where migrants are encouraged and supported to establish small businesses and social enterprises. Training and seminars were and will be conducted supported by Small Business Victoria and other organisations, to provide information to interested entrepreneurs. Volunteer mentors including retired entrepreneurs and executives will be recruited to support migrant entrepreneurs.

A migrant business network is planned to be organised and is expected to bring more benefits to the migrant community.

The Migrant HUB has become a meeting place for migrants and the wider community in Wyndham. Several organisations have been meeting at MiHUB including community gardens groups, swap meets, new ethnic organisations, church groups, Islamic groups, Rotary Clubs, APEX clubs, etc. Ethnic festivals have been held and will be held to bring community together and promote tolerance and better understanding of other cultures.

In the little more than a year of actual operations The Migrant HUB received positive media support:



When The Migrant HUB's future was under threat:

Hub to close down

Hub with no home

Centre steps up search for home

Wedding, parties and just your standard feasts

THE HILLIER VIEW

The Wyndham community rallied behind it and helped it find a new home:

Home for volunteers

A hub with cheer

Wedding, parties and just your standard feasts

Hub home deal means Mambourin cafe can reopen

from a humble party room to an established reception centre

Wyndham hub gets new lease of life

Community | Fiona O'Delvery

Community | Fiona O'Delvery

Community | Fiona O'Delvery

7. Conclusion

Skilled and Family Stream migrants comprise the majority of new arrivals into Australia. Many of those in these categories, who arrived earlier, tell stories many in the general community is already aware of - that their skills have been wasted and they are feeling undervalued and their capacity to contribute unappreciated. These stories are very similar to the ones new arrivals are telling despite a lot of studies and inquiries over the years.

The situations many skilled migrants face when looking for jobs and the issues in the community support structure contribute to the frustrations migrants face. They do not

encourage migrants to give back to community. The children not seeing their parents place value on “community” are not likely to contribute to community as well. This creates questions on the sort of society we would have when migrants become the majority in 10-15 years. Who will be in our volunteer and community organisations? Is Australian multiculturalism a failure waiting to happen? These are questions that need answers.

The issues raised by the subject Inquiry are the same issues identified in many previous studies at all levels of government through diversity forums, skilled migrant forums, ethnic business development strategies, academic papers, etc. These need to continue but more should be done in the local community level where migrants live with their families; where integration occurs; where they can become active citizens.

Migrants from the City of Wyndham in Victoria established The Migrant HUB initially with no support from government to encourage and support other migrants to integrate better into society and become more active citizens of Wyndham.

The Migrant HUB was established as a corporate citizen of Wyndham and as it becomes active in the community, more and more migrants are encouraged to participate thereby enhancing the migrant’s integration into the community as well.

The Migrant HUB is achieving its objectives and making a very positive impact in the Wyndham community. As a result, more and more mainstream residents have patronised the café, volunteered at MiHUB, referred job opportunities for migrants, donated goods for MiHUB projects. More and more migrants have come to MiHUB and have expressed that they felt welcomed, felt that they belong, volunteered in MiHUB and participated in activities which also involved the mainstream community.

The Migrant HUB was born from a passion and determination to address issues faced by migrants and to support their integration into and become active citizens of Australia. A lot have been achieved in the first year of operation due to the leadership and dedication of its volunteers, some working up to seven days a week without pay. MiHUB has a big vision for the future and had set before itself and its members a lot of goals.

The author:

Walter Villagonzalo was one of the founders and is the president of The Migrant HUB. He is a Fellow of the School for Social Entrepreneurs in Melbourne. Walter came to Australia from the Philippines as a skilled migrant in 1986 and has been active in the migrant and local community for the last 20 years.