



Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia

**Submission by the Multicultural Development
Association Inc.**

May 2011

Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary.....	4
2. The Multicultural Development Association	5
3. Scope of MDA’s submission	6
Part A: Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalisation	6
<i>Term of Reference One: The role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government’s social inclusion agenda.....</i>	<i>6</i>
4. Benefits and strengths of Australian multiculturalism and contribution of migrants	6
5. Multiculturalism in the context of social inclusion	10
Recommendations	15
Part B: Settlement and participation	16
<i>Term of Reference Three: Innovative ideas for settlement programs for new migrants, including refugees, that support their full participation and integration into the broader Australian society.....</i>	<i>16</i>
6. Settlement for refugees and migrants.....	16
a) What is effective Settlement?	16
b) MDA’s settlement services	18
c) Settlement casework	20
d) The importance of settlement casework.....	20
e) The improvement of settlement services.....	21
i. <i>Settlement casework focused on early intervention and prevention</i>	<i>21</i>
ii. <i>Settlement lifeskills</i>	<i>22</i>
iii. <i>Ongoing service linking</i>	<i>23</i>
iv. <i>Torture and trauma counselling, and services to address health and wellbeing</i>	<i>23</i>
v. <i>Secure and affordable accommodation and housing</i>	<i>24</i>
vi. <i>Accessible and well resourced refugee health services</i>	<i>24</i>
vii. <i>Improved regional settlement</i>	<i>24</i>
f) Intensive support services	26
g) Community engagement and capacity building	29
h) The future of settlement services in Australia.....	31
i) Collaboration in settlement service delivery	32
Recommendations	32
7. Ongoing settlement issues for refugees and migrants.....	34
Recommendations	36

Term of Reference Four: Incentives to promote long term settlement patterns that achieve greater social and economic benefits for Australian society as a whole37

Part C: Summary of Recommendations38

1. Executive Summary

Australian multiculturalism has been one of our nation's greatest success stories and is the pillar of our national identity. It celebrates the traditions and values of Australians and promotes a just and fair society where the rights, equality, dignity and freedom of all people are recognised, included and respected. Multiculturalism has and continues to enrich Australia economically, socially, culturally and politically.

Yet despite the many successes of Australian multiculturalism, refugees and migrants settling in Australia continue to experience ongoing barriers to equity, participation and access to services, social exclusion and multiple dimensions of disadvantage.

As Queensland's leading settlement agency for refugees and migrants, the Multicultural Development Association observes daily the challenges refugees and migrants experience in settlement. Continued resourcing and support of specialised settlement services is critical to developing new arrivals' lifeskills, cultural orientation, support around essential services and enabling refugees and migrants to function independently, effectively and inclusively in Australia.

Australia's thriving multicultural community is a valuable commodity which must continue to be promoted and embraced in order to maximise our prosperity. An ongoing and clear commitment to multiculturalism by the Australian, State/Territory and Local Governments, underpinned by national policy and funding frameworks, is imperative to progressing Australia as an inclusive, cohesive society and the values inherent in our cultural diversity – equality, unity, mutual respect and understanding, human rights, shared laws and values, collaboration and cooperation, access to opportunities and services, and participation and inclusion, among others.

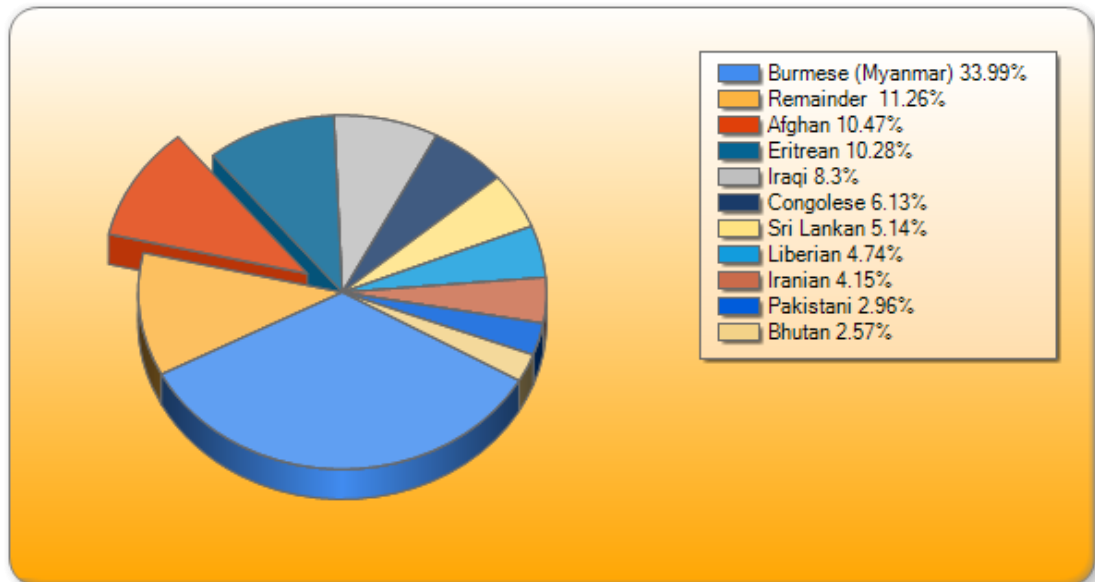
This submission provides:

- a comprehensive overview of the benefits and strengths of Australian multiculturalism and multiculturalism in the context of Social Inclusion;
- comments in relation to Australia's settlement services and innovative ideas for settlement programs to support refugee and migrants full participation and integration into Australia;
- Recommendations to promote multiculturalism; address social exclusion of refugees and migrants and improve settlement service provision.

2. The Multicultural Development Association

The Multicultural Development Association (MDA) was established in May 1998 to promote multiculturalism and empower people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds through advocacy, community and multicultural sector development, and the delivery of client services. As Queensland's largest settlement agency for migrants and refugees, MDA works with individuals, families and communities at its offices in Brisbane and Toowoomba to achieve a society which values justice, diversity and equality.

MDA settles approximately 1,100 newly arrived refugees annually and currently works with 3,500 migrants and refugees. Most of MDA's clients are from Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Table 1 below shows the cultural composition of new arrival clients serviced by MDA through its Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy work from March 2010 – March 2011.



Approximately 11.26% of MDA clients during this period were from a broad range of countries and cultures including Ethiopia, Faili Kurds, Togo, Rwanda, Somalia, Iran, Sudan, Sierra Leone and Burundi.

A key priority of MDA is promoting multiculturalism. MDA is committed to respecting human rights and social justice principles of fairness, equity, opportunity and dignity for all people. We believe that every human being has a unique dignity irrespective of nationality, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, sexual preference, ability, social and economic status, beliefs or contribution to society.

In delivering settlement services to refugees and migrants and in undertaking its community development and advocacy functions, MDA is uniquely placed to understand and comment upon multiculturalism, social inclusion and settlement services.

3. Scope of MDA's submission

MDA's response is informed by its experience as a provider of settlement services to refugees and migrants under the Humanitarian Settlement Strategy and the Settlement Grants Program.

MDA's submission will:

1. Discuss the benefits and strengths of Australian multiculturalism, and the contribution of migrants
2. Inform the Joint Standing Committee on Migration about multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalisation; and settlement and participation in accordance with Terms of Reference 1, 3 and 4.
3. Provide recommendations in relation to Terms of Reference 3 and 4 to strengthen multiculturalism, social inclusion, settlement and national productive capacity in Australia into the future.

In respect of the Terms of Reference in relation to National Productive Capacity MDA endorses the submission of the Employment Action for Cultural Diversity advocacy working group to this Inquiry.

Part A: Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalisation

Term of Reference One: The role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government's social inclusion agenda.

4. Benefits and strengths of Australian multiculturalism and contribution of migrants

Australia is unmistakably a multicultural country. As at June 2009, approximately one quarter of the Australian population (5.8 million) was overseas born.¹ The 2006 Census reported that:

- One or both of the parents of approximately 41% of the population were born overseas.²

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *3412.0 Migration, Australia, 2008 – 09*
<<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/8AA900653299CC46CA25776E0017881B?opendocument>> at 14 April 2011.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, 20680-Ancestry by Country of Birth of Parents by Sex – Australia
<<http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/ABSNavigation/prenav/ViewData?breadcrumb=POTLD&method=Place of Usual Residence&subaction=-1&issue=2006&producttype=Census Tables&documentproductno=0&textversion=false&documenttype=Details&collection=Census&javascript=true&topic=Birthplace&action=404&productlabel=Ancestry by Country of Birth of Parents by>

- Approximately 22% of Australians speak a language other than English.³
- The Australian population identified with over 130 different religious affiliations.⁴

Multiculturalism is fundamental to our shared Australian identity. It promotes unity in our society through embracing people from diverse cultural, linguistic, religious, racial and ethnic backgrounds. Multiculturalism celebrates the traditions and values of Australians and advances our nation's social, economic and political identity.

Australian multiculturalism has been one of our nation's greatest success stories. Due to a deliberate and conscious strategy of Australian multiculturalism developed and implemented over the past 45 years, Australia has prospered economically and socially through the contributions of its diverse migrant population.

This cultural diversity has its foundations in the rich cultural heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the First Australians. Since European settlement the Australian people have continued to embrace diversity through welcoming migrants and refugees from many nations.

Cultural diversity benefits all Australians and is one of our nation's greatest strengths and assets. Our diversity of skills, knowledge, expertise and experience has strengthened Australia's economic development and prosperity, business, trade, agriculture, tourism and the arts.

As former Acting Race Discrimination Commissioner Tom Calma noted, economically, multiculturalism has also brought significant benefits through creating global economic links and relationships; developing export markets;

Sex&order=1&period=2006&tabname=Details&areacode=0&navmapdisplayed=true&> at 14 April 2011.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2068.0 *Language Spoken at Home (Full classification list) By Sex* (2008)

<<http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/ABSNavigation/prenav/ViewData?action=404&documentproductno=0&documenttype=Details&order=1&tabname=Details&areacode=0&issue=2006&producttype=Census>

Tables&javascript=true&textversion=false&navmapdisplayed=true&breadcrumb=POTLD&&collection=Census&period=2006&productlabel=Language Spoken at Home (full classification list) by Sex&producttype=Census Tables&method=Place of Usual Residence&topic=Language&> at 15 April 2011.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 20680-Religious Affiliation (full classification list) by Sex

<<http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/ABSNavigation/prenav/ViewData?breadcrumb=POTLD&method=Place of Usual Residence&subaction=-1&issue=2006&producttype=Census>

Tables&documentproductno=0&textversion=false&documenttype=Details&collection=Census&javascript=true&topic=Religion&action=404&productlabel=Religious Affiliation (full classification list) by

Sex&order=1&period=2006&tabname=Details&areacode=0&navmapdisplayed=true&> at 15 April 2011.

enhancing creativity and innovation through access to a range of cultural perspectives and diverse skills; introducing new goods and services; and increasing economic growth.⁵ Other considerable economic contributions by refugees and migrants are outward remittances to support families and communities in developing countries, which amounted to over US\$2.815 billion in 2006 alone, and the establishment of businesses and entrepreneurial initiatives in Australia.⁶

Australian multiculturalism is a source of strength, opportunity and unity. It has never been about cementing divisions between people but rather galvanising the whole community to work together to promote the fundamental principles and values of our shared Australian society and our inclusive citizenship: respect for the rule of law, democracy, freedom, justice, unity, equality, opportunity, gender equity, the right to participate, tolerance, English as a shared language for everybody, languages other than English as valued resources, a commitment to human rights, a shared responsibility for the wellbeing of our nation, and a recognition and respect for the first peoples of Australia.

Multiculturalism recognises the need for and value of equity. A multicultural Australia is a just and fair society where the rights, values and freedom of all people are recognised, included and respected. It supports the equality, respect, dignity, access to services, participation and inclusion of its individuals and communities. A multicultural Australia provides opportunities for everyone to contribute positively to the social, cultural, economic and political life of our nation without discrimination or prejudice.

With some exceptions, Australia has been generally successful in providing opportunities for employment, income, home ownership, health and education. Groups of newcomers have found their way, secured jobs, bought houses, accumulated wealth and built better opportunities for themselves and for their children. That is the Australian way colloquially referred to as “the fair go”. This is one of the fundamental differences between the Australian experience of multiculturalism and the experiences in some other countries.

In MDA’s experience many refugees and migrants are motivated to integrate into the Australian community, to adopt and share Australian values and beliefs and are eager to work hard to contribute to and ‘give back’ to their new country. Many of the clients and communities MDA works with also dedicate considerable time to volunteer activities within their community while maintaining jobs and undertaking study in order to create better lives for their families. Indeed, it is estimated that nearly 30% of people in Australia who were born overseas participate in formal volunteering – the number of informal

⁵ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Multiculturalism: A position paper by the Acting Race Discrimination Commissioner* (2007) 7.

⁶ Refugee Council of Australia, *Economic, civic and social contributions of refugees and humanitarian entrants: A Literature Review* (2010) 7.

volunteers is unable to be measured.⁷ Benefits of volunteers from culturally diverse backgrounds include provision of specific cultural knowledge; fostering connections between CALD communities and non-government organisations and service providers; increasing cultural awareness and contributing diverse perspectives to organisations.⁸

During the 2011 Queensland Floods the strength of Australia's multiculturalism was demonstrated when, during the flood clean up MDA was inundated with offers from Brisbane refugee communities who were eager to help with the clean up, despite feeling traumatised by the flood event. Over a period of four days, MDA had approximately 120 volunteers from nine refugee communities contribute approximately 780 hours to the clean up process. Refugee communities assisted with all tasks from sweeping out muddy houses to carrying furniture and providing food in their local communities. One local community even held a BBQ sausage sizzle in a nearby park and provided much needed food and drink to over 200 weary local volunteers. For some refugees, being able to help others in the community was a practical way for them to show their support for their local community.

On Wednesday 19 January 2011, the streets surrounding Milpera State High School's flooded campus at Chelmer, Brisbane were inundated with construction workers, residents and a significant army presence to control the traffic and surrounding areas. Over 20 Rohingya men (from Burma) arrived to volunteer in the clean-up efforts to prepare the site for the massive construction to take place the following week.

Many of the men and youth were at different stages of resettlement and each carried with them different stories from their refugee experience, all touched in some way by the heavy military presence from their time in Burma and in refugee camps in Bangladesh. While there was some trepidation about coming into contact with military personnel, it soon dissipated when our community members were greeted with warm smiles and friendly handshakes from the men and women in uniform.

The community worked hard all day, barely stopping for breaks, reporting to their community development worker that they would stay all day if they were needed as they were working by choice as opposed to the forced slave labour they endured back in their home country.

MDA received significant positive feedback from members of the community about the efforts of refugee communities. One elderly couple whose business premises was severely impacted by the floods told MDA workers that having

⁷ Volunteering Australia, Celebrate and realise the potential of cultural and linguistic diversity in volunteering (2009)
<http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/html/s02_article/article_view.asp?id=3277&nav_cat_id=359&nav_top_id=55> at 14 April 2011.

⁸ Ibid.

scores of refugees helping them clean their premises and being able to talk to them about their experiences had completely changed their perspective and opinions about refugees.

Multiculturalism is often thought of as something to do with the way we relate to migrants, but is more than that. It is the way we build our future together, as a community and as a nation. We have enjoyed its successes, and through embracing our differences and similarities we can continue to collectively benefit from the unlimited opportunities of multiculturalism.

MDA unequivocally rejects any suggestion that multiculturalism in Australia has 'failed'. Rather, it is our embracing of diversity and difference that has made Australia one of the most desirable and fortunate countries in the world to live. Multiculturalism enables us to share experiences, to learn from one another and foster communities where people communicate, collectively participate and connect, and share a future. Australia's thriving multicultural community is a valuable commodity which must continue to be promoted and embraced in order to maximise our prosperity.

To continue to prosper, multiculturalism 'demands the involvement of all institutions of government and civil society'.⁹ An ongoing and clear commitment to multiculturalism by the Australian, State/Territory and Local Governments is imperative to progressing Australia as an inclusive, cohesive society and the values inherent in our cultural diversity – equality, unity, mutual respect and understanding, human rights, shared laws and values, collaboration and cooperation, access to opportunities and services, and participation and inclusion, among others.¹⁰

5. Multiculturalism in the context of social inclusion

MDA commends the Australian Government on its *The People of Australia: Australia's Multicultural Policy* (the National Policy) and supports and welcomes its key principles and initiatives. Embedding principles of multiculturalism in a national policy not only emphasises the rights of all Australians to equality, dignity and respect, but constitutes a significant step forward in addressing racism and discrimination and encouraging and cultivating broader community acceptance and recognition of the value of cultural diversity. MDA also strongly supports the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council's recommendations in its 2010 *The People of Australia statement on cultural diversity and recommendations to government*.

The introduction of multicultural principles and key initiatives around multiculturalism in the National Policy are also consistent with the Australian

⁹ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Multiculturalism: A position paper by the Acting Race Discrimination Commissioner* (2007) 13.

¹⁰ See for example the principles of multiculturalism enunciated in the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2004* (Vic) s 4.

Government's commitment to social inclusion and human rights and is a positive step towards the development of a truly socially inclusive society in which all Australians, including those from refugee and migrant backgrounds are valued, respected and provided with opportunities to engage and participate.

In particular, MDA supports the Australian Government's commitment within Principle 2 to a '*just, inclusive and socially cohesive society where everyone can participate in the opportunities that Australia offers and where government services are responsive to the needs of Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds*'.¹¹ Central to achieving this however is addressing the ongoing social exclusion currently experienced by many refugees and migrants, and ensuring equitable access to government programs and services responsive to refugee and CALD communities' needs.¹²

Social inclusion is fundamental to ensuring multiculturalism in Australia continues to flourish, and that Australians continue to embrace diversity. Australia prides itself on providing all of its people equality of opportunity. In reality however many people from refugee and migrant backgrounds continue to be denied equality and a 'fair go', and experience both multiple and entrenched disadvantage through ongoing barriers to social inclusion and lack of access to fundamental services.

Many refugees and migrants continue to endure poverty, high unemployment, lower educational outcomes, poorer health, discrimination and other disadvantage.¹³ Examples of areas in which refugee and migrants experience social exclusion are extensive and include employment, education, housing, sport and recreation, participation in decision-making and governance and others. Issues including language barriers; racism and discrimination; negative media stereotyping; lack of access to transport, family breakdown, isolation from community and failure of essential services to provide interpreters contribute to social exclusion for migrants and refugees.¹⁴

Participation in community life and social interaction is vital to ensuring refugees and new arrivals settling in Australia are not isolated or socially excluded. To realise this improved access and equity to employment, education, transport and other services to enable participation is essential. MDA considers achieving access, equity and inclusion is a two way process whereby refugees and migrants participate but are also supported, invited and actively engaged to do so.

¹¹ Australian Government, *The People of Australia: Australia's Multicultural Policy* (2011) 5.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, *Social Inclusion for Migrants and Refugees* (2009) 14-15; J Taylor, 'Refugees and social exclusion: what the literature says' (2004) *Migration Action* vol XXVI(2).

¹⁴ Australian Human Rights Commission, *In our own words: African Australians: A review of Human Rights and Social Inclusion issues* (2010)

< http://www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/review/in_our_own_words.pdf> at 14 April 2011.

Racism and discrimination continue to fundamentally contribute to the social exclusion of migrants and refugees. A two year study into the nature and extent of racism in Queensland from 2006 - 2007 received reports of approximately 400 racist incidents.¹⁵ 9% of respondents had experienced social exclusion at work, social events or school, or while receiving customer service, through being ignored or avoided due to skin colour, or ethnic, cultural or religious backgrounds.¹⁶ Other types of racist incidents included actual or threatened physical violence, property damage, verbal harassment, racist graffiti, offensive media content, discrimination and institutional racism.¹⁷

Similarly, the national findings from the University of Western Sydney's 12 year Challenging Racism Project found concerning trends from over 12,500 people surveyed from 2001 - 2008 in relation to attitudes to racism, cultural diversity and recognition of racism:

- Approximately 12% acknowledged they are prejudiced against other cultures;
- Only 84% believed that all races of people are equal; and
- Only 78% of people felt secure when with people from different ethnic backgrounds.
- 85.6% of people believed something should be done to minimise or fight racism in Australia.¹⁸

Accordingly, there is a fundamental need for positive strategies to address racism and direct and indirect discrimination in order to improve social inclusion of migrants and refugees.

Negative, inaccurate and misleading media reporting of refugees and asylum seekers, such as that seen around the time of the 2010 Federal Election, has also contributed to social exclusion and stigmatisation of refugees and migrants. As noted by the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) there is a need for a coordinated strategy to counter such reporting, which should involve responding to negative coverage and creating opportunities for positive engagement with media.¹⁹ The RCOA also notes that political leaders and Governments officials must take greater leadership in responding to inaccurate

¹⁵ Centre for Multicultural Pastoral Care, *Confronting Racism in Communities Project Racism in Communities Project: A Final Report on the nature and extent of racism in Queensland* (2009) 15.

¹⁶ Ibid, 23.

¹⁷ Ibid, 21.

¹⁸ University of Western Sydney, *Challenging Racism: the Anti-Racism Research Project national level findings 2001 - 2008*

<http://www.uws.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/173635/NationalLevelFindingsV1.pdf> at 5 April 2011.

¹⁹ Refugee Council of Australia, *Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2011 - 2012* (2011) 142.

and misleading reporting.²⁰ MDA supports RCOA's recommendation that DIAC consider funding the development of a national training and media strategy to improve reporting on refugee and asylum seeker issues, and media engagement.²¹

While the Australian Government's national statement on Social Inclusion *A Stronger Fairer Australia* noted the vulnerability and heightened disadvantage of refugees and new migrants, as well as the costs associated with this, it did not make refugees and migrants a specific priority within the National Social Inclusion Agenda. It is further noted that the Australian Government only 'supports in principle' the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council's recommendation 8 in *The People of Australia* with respect to inclusion in the National Social Inclusion Agenda of strategies to address the needs of vulnerable migrants and refugees.²²

Incorporating refugees, migrants and CALD communities as a specific priority in the National Social Inclusion Agenda is fundamental to:

- Facilitating the development of appropriate and clear policy instruments, strategies and programs to address the disadvantage experienced by many refugee and CALD communities. This must be driven and supported by strong leadership from Government in order to ensure best practice, compliance by all government departments and agencies and to maximise the benefits of a culturally diverse society. In this regard, consultation and engagement of the community sector, particularly organisations such as MDA which support refugee and CALD communities, would be advantageous and offer opportunities for collaboration and partnership.
- Stimulating a much-needed cultural shift towards greater recognition and acceptance by all Australians of the value of diverse cultures, languages, religions, ethnicities and races to our community and social, economic and political life.
- Ensuring greater consistency in policy, service delivery and practices among Government departments and agencies in areas including cultural competency of staff; access to interpreters for initiatives, programs and projects funded by Government; improved education, awareness and understanding of the challenges experiences by people from refugee and CALD backgrounds and better outcomes for those people in employment, education, health, family matters and other key areas. It would also ensure greater political leadership, clarify multicultural priorities, improve coordination and planning, result in

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Australian Government, *Response to the recommendations of The Australian Multicultural Advisory Council in The People of Australia* (2011) 8.

more effective resourcing, data and information collection and enhance community involvement and support.

- Reducing the costs of social disadvantage of vulnerable migrants and refugees to individuals, communities and Australia generally.
- Tackling disadvantage at the earliest possible stage before it becomes entrenched within families and communities and inter-generational in effect.

In prioritising refugee and CALD communities in the National Social Inclusion agenda it is imperative that all levels of Government (Local, State and Federal) exercise leadership and work collaboratively to address such issues. Working in partnership, rather than devolving responsibility to any one level of government, would ensure national consistency, shared funding and resourcing and whole-of-government leadership, commitment and support. A collaborative approach would also enable States and Territories to address the local needs of refugee and migrant communities in their regions.

Well resourced settlement services are also critical to social inclusion. Ongoing commitment to and early investment in settlement services will provide refugees with the lifeskills and foundations to function independently, settle effectively and achieve their aspirations. As noted by the Refugee Council of Australia:

While the benefits of resettling refugees can be great, it is important to recognise that the gains cannot be accrued unless investment is made in the settlement of new arrivals. This investment must be formulated with the ultimate goals of social inclusion, freedom from discrimination and access to economic resources in mind. In this sense, adequate planning that promotes inclusion in the cultural, economic, political and social systems that underpin the host community is crucial.²³

Australia must be well-equipped to tackle the social, cultural and economic challenges of rapid demographic change, ageing and population growth over the next 50 years. Investing in the immediate future in mechanisms to ameliorate the social exclusion of refugee and migrants communities is essential to better positioning Australia to manage the challenges opportunities of a burgeoning multicultural community in a changing global economy and society.

²³ Refugee Council of Australia, *Economic, civic and social contributions of refugees and humanitarian entrants: A Literature Review* (2010) 8.

Recommendations

MDA provides the following recommendations to improve the social inclusion of refugee and migrants communities within the broader Australian community, and to promote and further embed multiculturalism within Australia:

- 1. *Inclusion of refugees and migrants within the National Social Inclusion Agenda as a specific priority, or development of a targeted and comprehensive policy framework containing strategies, programs, initiatives and mechanisms to address the unique needs of refugees and migrants, enhance their participation and reduce social exclusion.***

In prioritising refugee and migrant communities in the National Social Inclusion agenda or under an independent policy framework all levels of Government (Local, State and Federal) should work collaboratively to address such issues through development of a whole-of-government strategy, intergovernmental coordination and planning and engagement of local communities. An ongoing commitment of funding and resources by all levels of government for social inclusion initiatives is also necessary.

- 2. *Ongoing resourcing of community engagement and capacity building initiatives within the government and community sectors to enhance refugee and migrant participation and inclusion, and build the capacity of refugee and migrant communities to be more effectively included in the Australian community.***
- 3. *Continued commitment to and resourcing of the proposed National Anti-Racism Partnership and Strategy as a pillar to address racism and discrimination against refugees and migrants and foster social inclusion. As part of the strategy it is imperative that education initiatives which address topics including racism and discrimination, multiculturalism, citizenship, human rights, cultural diversity and the contribution of migrants and refugees to Australia are developed and included in the National Curriculum and community education and engagement programs in order to promote social inclusion.***
- 4. *Positive media campaigns, supported by Government, to reduce negative stereotyping, stigmatisation and alienation of refugee and migrant communities by the media. Further, where misleading, inaccurate and unbalanced media reporting of migrants and refugees does occur, the Australian, State/Territory and Local Governments take measures to refute such claims, stories and information. MDA also supports the Refugee Council of Australia's Recommendation 28 in its Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2011-2012 submission.***

5. MDA supports the Government’s intention to conduct an inquiry into the responsiveness of Australian Government services to clients disadvantaged by cultural or linguistic barriers.²⁴ However, Terms of Reference should be broadened to specifically consider current equity of access to services and the services of all local and state/territory governments. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of issues of access to and responsiveness of services across governments throughout Australia, and current gaps.

Adoption of the recommendations in Part B below in relation to settlement services and the systemic barriers experienced by refugees and migrants in accessing employment and government services is also fundamental to addressing social exclusion.

Part B: Settlement and participation

Term of Reference Three: Innovative ideas for settlement programs for new migrants, including refugees, that support their full participation and integration into the broader Australian society.

6. Settlement for refugees and migrants

As Minister Chris Bowen noted in his February 2011 ‘The Genius of Multiculturalism’ address, ‘*Multiculturalism is about inviting every individual member of society to be everything they can be and supporting each new arrival in overcoming whatever obstacles they face as they adjust to a new country and society and allowing them to flourish as individuals*’.²⁵ This is the very essence of the settlement services MDA provides.

a) What is effective Settlement?

“Settlement is about starting over again. It is about feeling safe again. Making a new home and friends and finding out how you can contribute and be happy. Settlement is about not forgetting who you are but also learning to be Australian.” African Community Leader.

Refugees come to Australia with many hopes and aspirations about their future. They bring with them skills and experiences which contribute to the wellbeing of our society. The refugee women, men and children who require settlement support have experienced significant trauma and displacement. They have confronted inequality on the basis of their refugee experience and continue to face unequal circumstances as they settle in Australia.

²⁴ Australian Government, *Response to the recommendations of the The Australian Multicultural Advisory Council in The People of Australia* (2011) 5.

²⁵ Minister for Immigration and Citizenship The Hon. Chris Bowen MP, *The Genius of Multiculturalism*, speech to the Sydney Institute, 16 February 2011.

Resettlement offers refugees the possibility to begin new lives and to become fully participating members of society. If refugees are to have the best prospects for realising their potential, most will require support in the period immediately following their arrival. This is important to redress the personal, social and economic disadvantage they have faced and to deal with the intensive demands of adjusting to a new country.

Settlement is a dynamic, two-way process through which refugees can achieve full equity and participation in society together with Australian society gaining access to the full human resource potential within refugee communities. Successful settlement is a process of adaption and development of knowledge, skills and understandings relevant to living meaningfully and productively in a new country.

Refugees require personalised, flexible and very practical specialised support. A settlement environment which ensures adequate access to accommodation, income and health care is critical for refugees not only in terms of meeting basic needs but also to enable the regaining of a sense of independence and control. During the initial settlement process however it is also important to address refugees' fundamental needs for dignity, social connectedness and identity as well as settlement aspirations. This is necessary to enable solid emotional, psychological, social and cultural foundations from which to rebuild a positive future in Australia.

Specialised and effective settlement casework can prevent problems occurring later in the resettlement period when they may be more complex and costly to address. Creating optimal conditions for settlement through a holistic model of settlement service delivery provides a solid foundation to enables refugees to achieve independence and settle in a way that Australia can benefit from the skills and attributes which they bring with them.

Settlement is a two-way process: it is not just something that refugees must do, but there is also a need for the wider community to make adaptations to accommodate refugees. A 'spirit of hospitality', where refugees are made to feel welcomed into a community, underpins successful refugee settlement programs.

2001 International Conference on the Reception and Integration of Resettled Refugees - Sweden

For individual refugees, settlement is a process of adaption and development of knowledge, skills and understandings relevant to living meaningfully and productively in a new country. MDA's settlement goals, which have been adapted from the UNHCR Refugee Resettlement Handbook: Framework for Planning Refugee Integration, are:

- ❖ **Restoration of independence** through meeting basic needs and settlement lifeskills.
- ❖ **Equitable access to resources and services** needed to establish life in a new country.
- ❖ **Cultural orientation** to enable acculturation and integration.
- ❖ **Development of new social connections** and inclusion in the local community.
- ❖ **Restoring a sense of hope and dignity** through progress towards settlement aspirations.

While there is much to be reflected upon and improved in relation to settlement services, it should not be forgotten that Australia has one of the best settlement services in the world. Services have improved significantly over the past ten years through a process of reflection, commitment to improvement and spirit of partnership between DIAC and the settlement sector.

MDA's settlement service model has proven to be highly effective and efficient in the delivery of quality, targeted, coordinated settlement services to refugees and new arrivals. This was acknowledged by Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services Laurie Ferguson in 2010 who noted that MDA is one of Australia's lead settlement agencies.²⁶

b) MDA's settlement services

MDA provides settlement support to refugees through three separate programs:

- Refugee Settlement Services settles all new refugees in Brisbane and Toowoomba from their initial arrival to six months residency and this service is funded by the Department of Immigration & Citizenship (DIAC), under the Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (HSS) program. In 2009 – 2010 MDA welcomed 1,005 newly arrived refugees in Brisbane, and provided support for another 1,109 clients that were eligible under this program.
- Continuing Settlement Services, through which MDA provides ongoing casework and settlement assistance to refugees who are more established and have lived here from six months up to five years. This service is funded under the Settlement Grants Program through DIAC. In 2009 – 2010 MDA worked with 508 families under this program.

²⁶ Mr Laurie Ferguson, Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services *Immigration (Education) Amendment Bill 2010* Second Reading Speech, 23 June 2010.

- Intensive Support Services, funded by the DIAC Complex Case Support Program, through which MDA works with clients from a refugee background with intensive support needs including issues with mental health, child safety, family breakdown, complex health, disability or difficulties with settlement life skills.

Other services provided at MDA to compliment settlement casework include:

- **Employment Services:** These services, funded by the Queensland Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, include job preparation assistance, Australian work culture training, basic career information and a work placement program to prepare and assist refugees and migrants to secure meaningful and sustainable employment.
- **Advocacy and Social Policy:** Systemic advocacy around the rights, interests and needs of people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and issues that affect successful settlement and community inclusion. These services are funded by Multicultural Affairs Queensland.
- **Community Development:** MDA works alongside new and emerging refugee communities to build the capacity of their leaders and community members; establish social support networks and provide activities to link people within and outside communities. These services are funded primarily under the Settlement Grants Program and by Multicultural Affairs Queensland.
- **Youth:** MDA supports young people from CALD backgrounds through programs including youth-specific employment services funded by the Queensland Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation; and training and mentoring and an outreach student support program at Milpera State High School, funded under the Settlement Grants Program.
- **Cultural Consultancy:** MDA coordinates a state-wide pool of approximately 190 cultural consultants who, through their specific cultural understanding and language support assist communication everywhere from pre-schools to government agencies, health practitioners, businesses and community sector organisations.
- **Volunteers:** MDA has over 400 volunteers who play a significant role in welcoming and helping refugees to settle in Queensland. Many volunteers assist newly arrived refugee families while others assist through administrative and project work.

c) Settlement casework

Refugee settlement casework is a process of enabling newly arrived people from a refugee background to effectively establish their life in a new country through assisting people to develop relevant knowledge, skills and understanding to live meaningfully and productively. Settlement casework involves:

- individualised assessment of individual and family needs
- on arrival reception
- practical assistance with basic tasks in the immediate period after arrival
- specialised settlement casework to assist entrants to respond to those needs which impact on their ability to effectively settle
- emotional support and empowerment to enhance independence
- cultural orientation and acculturation support to assist people to psychologically interpret and adapt to living in a new culture
- service linking to key agencies to meet basic needs
- settlement information, orientation and education
- settlement lifeskills development
- establishing linkages to meaningful social connections
- advocacy to ensure effective client access, equity and participation
- focusing on settlement aspirations which contribute to positive personal and family wellbeing.

d) The importance of settlement casework

Effective settlement casework, particularly in the early stages of arrival, is crucial for laying a solid foundation for positive long term settlement outcomes for individual entrants and the Australian community as a whole. Initial settlement is a process of adaption and development of knowledge, skills and understandings relevant to living meaningfully and productively in a new country. It is not possible for mainstream agencies to focus on assisting people to learn new settlement lifeskills and successfully acclimatise, adapt and acculturate into Australian society. This is the specialised work of settlement service providers. This work needs to begin from the time of arrival as a means of early intervention and prevention. Settlement casework needs to begin in HSS in the first six months, and continue through SGP where clients have ongoing support needs, or where support needs emerge in the next 6 months – 5 years of settlement.

To effectively understand and respond to client settlement needs, settlement casework requires adequate time and resources. This is especially so in the first few months following arrival, when many clients require significant emotional support and reassurance in order to develop solid foundations for long term settlement and wellbeing. Accordingly, settlement casework needs to be adequately and appropriately resourced in order to achieve optimal client outcomes and maximum effectiveness of other specialised services.

Other services (such as housing and trauma and torture services), as well as mainstream agencies, are dependent on well resourced, quality settlement case coordination programs within HSS and SGP in order to ensure effective and appropriate follow-up of client need. Mainstream services do not view it as their role to do settlement-related casework, teach settlement lifeskills or assist a refugee client with acculturation issues or settlement stress. This is specialised service delivery which is the responsibility of settlement providers.

Intensively assisting people in a holistic manner in the early stages of settlement is the most effective method of preventing delayed settlement dysfunction and difficulties (such as that picked up through SGP and Complex Case Support Programs). Although current anecdotal information suggests that complex psychosocial settlement related need arises later in the settlement process, it is vital that an early intervention and prevention framework continue to be implemented in the early stages of settlement in order to give clients a solid foundation for preventing future difficulties.

Funds spent early in settlement are an investment for the future for clients, refugee communities and Australia. Ensuring clients have solid foundations for independent settlement is a cost-effective way of ensuring that Australian society can gain access to the full human resource potential of refugee entrants and a preventative measure against crisis, social exclusion and discontent.

e) The improvement of settlement services

In its 2009 response to the HSS Discussion Paper, *The Need for Solid Foundations*, MDA and its then consortium partners provided comments and recommendations with respect to settlement service delivery, many of which remain relevant to the provision of innovative settlement services under both the HSS and SGP programs in Australia now and into the future. MDA reiterates the recommendations in its response, which is attached at **Appendix A**.

MDA notes in particular the following points from *The Need for Solid Foundations* and provides the following as recommendations for settlement programs into the future:

i. Settlement casework focused on early intervention and prevention

An early intervention and prevention focus in the early stages of settlement is crucial in providing a solid foundation for ongoing settlement. It ensures all clients:

- have adequate settlement related lifeskills
- are appropriately linked to key mainstream agencies
- are able to appropriately seek early help in the Australian context to prevent crisis situations

- are linked to appropriate social and community supports to prevent social exclusion and isolation
- are adequately oriented to the new cultural context to set a foundation for positive acculturation.

Settlement casework provides the groundwork for settlement, acculturation and social inclusion. If clients are not assisted to have a solid settlement foundation, they will eventually have poorer long term settlement outcomes and individual and family psychosocial difficulties including difficulty with fitting into an Australian workplace, intergenerational conflict, family conflict and long term settlement stress.

A focus on settlement aspirations which contribute to positive personal, family and community wellbeing is a method of early intervention and prevention. Assisting people towards achieving their settlement aspirations is critical to people successfully adapting and acculturating into Australian society.

<p>Settlement Wellbeing Aspirations</p> <p>To feel healthy and well</p> <p>To feel settled, safe and confident</p> <p>To feel capable and active</p> <p>To have meaningful employment and economic opportunities</p> <p>To have a strong and resilient family</p> <p>To feel connected and not alone</p> <p>To be an active community contributor</p> <p>To be an active contributor to Australian society.</p>
--

Accordingly, MDA considers early intervention and prevention should continue to be embedded within settlement service models into the future.

ii. Settlement lifeskills

Settlement lifeskills are the skills required to complete the everyday activities that enable a productive and meaningful life in a new country. Core lifeskills include self care (nutrition, health, hygiene), household management, and safety, emergency skills, money management, community access (including access to transport and other services), social and vocational skills and others. Entrants have basic understanding, knowledge and skills to be able to independently settle in Australia. Accordingly, settlement lifeskills development must continue to be a core component of the HSS Case Coordination service model into the future.

iii. Ongoing service linking

The core focus within Case Coordination in the current settlement models relates to service linking. It is necessary to enhance Case Coordination within the model to include a greater focus on:

- specialised settlement casework to address settlement related needs including emotional support
- settlement lifeskills development
- cultural orientation and settlement education
- community linking to appropriate social supports.

iv. Torture and trauma counselling, and services to address health and wellbeing

MDA also emphasises the importance of refugee access to trauma and torture counselling services, and other services to address health and wellbeing. In *The Need for Solid Foundations* MDA and its consortium partners supported the proposal for 100% referral of all entrants to a STTC provider for an initial assessment of their counselling needs. MDA continues to support this, but equally acknowledges the need of refugees and migrants for greater access to services to address issues of mental health and wellbeing.

Through its daily work MDA observes health, mental health and wellbeing issues experienced by some clients as a result of stress during settlement, isolation, separation from family, unemployment and mandatory detention. In Queensland health services which provide assistance to refugees are stretched and often refugee clients may have to wait for some time before accessing assistance. During this time their condition/s may be exacerbated, resulting in setbacks in the settlement process.

Ongoing funding and resourcing must be committed to trauma and torture counselling and mental health services to provide specialist assistance to refugees and new migrants, supported by appropriate, qualified, professionally accredited interpreters to facilitate successful settlement, independent functioning and ensure participation and inclusion.

Further, it is critical that Short Term Trauma Counselling services are provided by service organisations which have a full understanding of the specialised presentations of psychological functioning by refugee clients. All entrants, regardless of visa class, need to be referred to an STTC provider for an initial assessment of their counselling and support needs. This could be undertaken and funded as a risk assessment rather than a full initial assessment. This initial assessment should not occur before 6 to 8 weeks after arrival, except where a high need or high risk case is identified. This would allow new arrivals to attend to basic settlement needs before identifying counselling needs.

v. *Secure and affordable accommodation and housing*

Housing is a foundation of people's lives and therefore a foundation of successful settlement. Housing affordability and accessibility is crucial in this regard.

The housing experience must be 'normalised' from the time of entry to maximise the long term success for refugee clients and to prevent them from experiencing multiple failures in the rental market. MDA supports ongoing settlement of refugees during the initial settlement stages into individual accommodation, whether through the private rental market or public housing, and building the capacity and skills of clients to obtain accommodation, manage rental and tenancy issues and function independently in the housing context.

MDA opposes the placement of refugees into to reception centres or cluster accommodation and does not consider such arrangements to benefit the long term interests of the client. At the end of this period refugee clients will be expected to enter the private rental market and experience the same discrimination, access and affordability issues without any real rental history or experience in managing housing in the Australian context.

vi. *Accessible and well resourced refugee health services*

All state refugee health services need to be adequately, sufficiently and appropriately resourced to address the unique health needs of refugees and migrants. Uptake of interpreters by health professionals and service providers is crucial to ensure equitable access to health services and patient safety and wellbeing.

While Australia has a national interpreter service that is one of the most extensive, free services internationally, it is grossly under-utilised by doctors, hospitals, and community health services, including GPs. Further promotion and new obligations to use the service are required to ensure health professionals use interpreters and avoid serious, adverse health outcomes. Interpreters must also be available free of charge or for a reduced fee to specialist health professionals. Promotion, education and training in the appropriate use of interpreters must be provided to doctors from undergraduate level training.

vii. *Improved regional settlement*

MDA acknowledges that some unlinked entrants may benefit from regional settlement, particularly those who come from rural and regional backgrounds and may have appropriate skills and experience and/or have an interest in settling in regional Australia.

However, MDA emphasises that the services provided to refugees and humanitarian entrants must be consistent and accessible regardless of where they settle.

MDA supports the general findings of the evaluation documents of the Regional Humanitarian Settlement Pilot projects which suggest that there are a number of prerequisites that must be present in any regional area in order for resettlement of unlinked refugee entrants to be considered:

- Good local support for resettlement, including commitment from key stakeholders such as local government
- An awareness of the benefits of inward migration to the area
- Strong cross-sectoral collaboration and a willingness to deal with challenges and obstacles in an open, constructive and collaborative way
- Available and affordable accommodation
- Availability of major services, such as health and education, as well as the availability of specialist services, such as AMEP, interpreters and torture and trauma counselling
- A range of employment opportunities, including both skilled and unskilled work
- Existing volunteer networks
- A thorough assessment of the capacity of stakeholders and key service providers to meet the needs of entrants
- Sufficient resources for local planning processes
- The provision of good information about the background and experiences of entrants to service providers and key stakeholders
- Careful consideration of which refugee communities may be most likely to successfully resettle in any particular regional area, e.g. Are there appropriate faith communities for them to link to? Are any community divisions likely?
- A HSS provider that has appropriate experience of similar service delivery and is confident that it can deliver a stable, consistent and quality service
- A service delivery model that is appropriately resourced, supported and sustainable
- Comprehensive training for workers and volunteers about settlement service delivery frameworks and DIAC service principles
- The availability of suitable transition and general assistance services for those existing services. For successful regional settlement, it is crucial to

strike a balance between achieving a critical mass of people in any new refugee community to enable them to be mutually supporting, whilst ensuring that services are not overloaded.

In addition, MDA considers there needs to be a stronger commitment to capacity building for the leadership of refugee communities in regional areas. Every community needs strong and effective leadership and investing in capacity building for community leaders can have a significant impact on their ability to support the successful settlement of successive new entrants to that community and the contribution of the community to the regional area in which they settle.

MDA also supports the Refugee Council of Australia's recommendation in its *Submission on a sustainable population strategy for Australia* with respect to the need to ensure adequate investment in planning, infrastructure, programs and services in regional and rural areas to support successful long-term refugee settlement.²⁷

f) Intensive support services

MDA's Intensive Support Services provides critical support in relation to complex casework support, crisis intervention and intensive intervention and prevention for clients from a refugee background with needs around mental health, child safety, family breakdown, complex health, disability or difficulties with settlement life skills. The nature of this work is highly specialised, with staff providing tailored and flexible support to clients with exceptional needs.

The program, funded by DIAC under the Complex Case Support Program (CCS), commenced in October 2008, with the current funding period finishing in June 2011. Under the program support may be provided to clients for up to six months, with the possibility of extension.

Key strengths of intensive support provision through the CCS include:

- The embedding of CCS within a settlement framework. Settlement support is a specialised field of practise which is focused on enabling clients to establish their lives successfully in Australia. The core goal areas of settlement support are enabling self-determination, skill building and nurturing hope and aspirations. Embedding CCS intervention within a settlement framework enables workers to not only focus on addressing immediate needs but also on skill building and aspirations.

²⁷ Refugee Council of Australia, *Submission on a sustainable population strategy for Australia* (2011) 1-2.

- CCS case management within a settlement framework enables generalist case management (ie workers are able to work across a number of issues and case coordinate any specialised intervention which may be required). Many clients have multiple complex needs which impact on their psychosocial situation – the ability to case manage multiple needs across a range of fields of practise is crucial in terms of preventative intervention. Settlement agencies are best placed to provide holistic, integrated support through CCS intervention.
- For many clients accessing CCS intervention, there have been significant barriers (often both personal and systemic) which have prevented clients from acquiring positive settlement outcomes. CCS intervention focuses on addressing the underlying causes preventing successful settlement such as domestic violence, acquired brain injury, etc. The intensive nature of CCS intervention enables these barriers to be addressed and then people to be assisted around core settlement goals and development of core knowledge, skills and attitudes. It has been MDA's experience that CCS intervention has enabled us to more significantly focus on restoration of a sense of hope and dignity which is crucial in terms of achieving positive long term settlement outcomes.
- It enables case coordination of multiple agencies to provide essential client support. Without this case coordination, clients are more likely to fall through the gaps due to lack of integration and coordination of service delivery across agencies. CCS intervention has shed light on core systemic advocacy issues both in terms of settlement intervention as well as the operations of mainstream agencies. This greater awareness is informing MDA practise in both its SGP and HSS programs as well as being utilised in systemic advocacy processes with mainstream agencies around specific issues.
- MDA CCS case management focuses not only on crisis intervention but also intensive intervention and prevention. It is frequently the situation in many human service programs that significant agency resources are used in stabilisation of crisis situations resulting in a lack of resources available for further intensive intervention and prevention. This then results in some clients moving from one crisis to another because intensive intervention to address needs and client capacity building has not occurred. A core element of CCS case management intervention is case coordination of multiple agencies involved in a case. Without this case coordination agencies frequently duplicate services in a way that is unplanned and confusing for clients.
- Ability to provide very intensive support with assessment and intervention focusing on addressing underlying causal issues. Many other programs do not enable sufficient investment of time or expertise to identify and address causal issues.

- The generic nature of the program enables a wide range of psychosocial client needs to be addressed. Most agencies and programs focus on one field of practise (eg child protection, domestic violence, trauma counselling, mental health etc), while complex case support intervention enables case management across a number of fields of practise.
- The casework framework includes both case management for direct intervention with client as well as case coordination of multiple stakeholders.

In summary, the foremost strengths of CCS intervention is that it includes:

- crisis intervention,
- intensive support to address chronic and causal issues,
- capacity building to develop client skills and knowledge to enable greater self-determination, and
- case coordination of multiple agency involvement.

The integration of all four key elements is crucial to successful intervention.

Some barriers exist in relation to successful service provision of intensive CCS support, which require addressing to further strengthen client outcomes. These include:

- Some clients would benefit from longer intervention due to the chronic nature of their needs. There is also a lack of ongoing case management programs outside of the CCS program to address such issues.
- People from a refugee background who have arrived on non-humanitarian visa types, such as spouses from refugees who are from a refugee background themselves, are not eligible for CCS, resulting in a small proportion of clients with significant needs not being able to access intensive support.
- Continuing access and equity issues within core mainstream services has resulted in clients being unable to access mainstream services following CCS intervention.

Overall, in MDA's opinion CCS has been a transformative program for clients, workers and the settlement sector. Many clients have experienced positive and life-changing benefit from CCS intervention.²⁸ Without the intensive support enabled through CCS intervention, it is likely that many client situations would remain unchanged or further deteriorate. Many MDA clients' have provided

²⁸ MDA has developed a short film, "Building Solid Foundations" exploring the impact of CCS intervention for three clients. MDA would be happy to provide a copy of this video to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration upon request.

positive feedback on the benefit of having a caseworker who is able to provide enough time to focus on addressing their needs. Client feedback is that CCS intervention has given them another chance at successful settlement.

For caseworkers, the ability to deliver intervention results in significant positive change for a client is very rewarding. There has also been flow on effects into SGP and IHSS programs with workers in these programs able to concentrate on delivering quality settlement support to greater numbers without the need to focus on crisis and complex intervention.

The creation of an appropriately remunerated and resourced CCS program has resulted in the ability of specialised settlement agencies, such as MDA, to service complex resource intensive cases through CCS enabling SGP and HSS programs to provide quality generic settlement casework with larger numbers of clients. In this way, settlement agencies are able to deliver on both quality and quantity.

For the reasons noted above, it is vital that the CCS program be continued and strengthened into the future as a core component of settlement service provision for intensive intervention and prevention, and crisis intervention, and to ensure better settlement and social inclusion outcomes for those clients.

g) Community engagement and capacity building in the context of settlement

Community engagement and capacity building programs, incorporating participation activities, community education, advocacy skills and support for capacity building are critical to building self-reliance and independence of refugees, and ensuring their social inclusion and successful ongoing settlement in Australian society.

MDA community capacity building initiatives focus on supporting approximately 17 new and emerging refugee communities through bonding and bridging social capital. This enables communities to facilitate healing, develop relationships and form trust.

The MDA community leadership training module supports development of leadership within new and emerging communities and development of skills to support members of their groups. The current leadership forums delivered by MDA facilitate interaction of diverse community leaders as well as provision of opportunities for establishment of networks.

MDA's other community engagement and capacity building activities and programs include its youth outreach services and mentoring programs; sport and recreation activities; Women's Life Skills Group; Women's Leader's Support Group; Men's Shed and Diversity Choir not only provide participation opportunities but foster community connectedness and assist people to link and

establish social and support networks beyond their immediate community, promoting creates understanding and shared learning.

Sharing Skills and Smiles – The MDA Women’s Life Skills Group

The Women’s Life Skills Group began in 2008 as an eight week partnership project with Hands on Arts, using craft activities to engage isolated women from refugee backgrounds and their children. The initial project was so successful that the group decided to continue meeting each Tuesday.

Once a week, this diverse group of women and children from refugee backgrounds come together to share their experiences, strength and hope while learning new skills and completing craft projects. It is also an opportunity to develop their social networks, and gain confidence in their ability to access support services.

Other highlights have included yoga lessons, cooking projects, and basic computer tuition. The women also trialled fundraising activities such as selling snacks and fruit and raffling their craft items in order to make the group self – sustaining.

Multicultural Men’s Shed

This project began in July 2009 with the support of a grant from the Brisbane City Council. Participants were from diverse backgrounds, with the majority of regular attendees of Afghan background, including Hazara and Pashtun.

The project provided an important social opportunity for isolated men from Afghan communities in Brisbane. In addition to participating in activities, the men were able to discuss the nature of divisions within their community and conflict in their home country (many of them for the first time), They were able to identify issues in common and share their visions and challenges.

MDA continues to provide support through one of its community development workers to ensure the continuation of the program.

The strengths of MDA’s delivery of community engagement and capacity building initiatives under the SGP are based on delivery of professional services. This has been achieved through engagement of professional trained staff supported with cultural competency training and engagement of cultural support workers from target communities.

Continued resourcing of flexible community engagement and capacity building programs and initiatives into the future is essential to ensure effective participation and integration of refugee and migrants; to build the capacity of communities to be self-reliant and independent and to ensure better

settlement outcomes. In this regard, MDA reiterates Recommendation Two above.

h) The future of settlement services in Australia

MDA employs highly skilled and experienced practitioners in the field of refugee settlement who are culturally competent in their work practices. All current Case Coordinators are human service degree qualified, and are highly experienced in the use of interpreters, both in person and by telephone, to overcome language barriers. Our workforce is culturally diverse, with staff from key community groups and emerging communities. MDA's HSS casework is supported by:

- Cultural Support Workers (CSWs) appointed on a casual basis, from over 23 refugee cultural backgrounds and with 77 languages, to provide culturally relevant support to new arrivals, usually using their first language.
- Highly skilled case workers and staff from its Continuing Settlement Services, Complex Settlement Services, Employment Services, Bicultural Services and Advocacy and Social Policy Unit.

Settlement services provision is a highly specialised area of human services. Settlement caseworkers operate in a unique service delivery environment and are exceptionally skilled in the delivery of support to meet the needs of diverse refugee and migrant clients. In particular they are expertly trained and skilled in the delivery of tailored, individualised settlement services to clients which address settlement life skills development, cultural orientation, community linking and the unique individual needs of people from refugee backgrounds. Specialised settlement service providers is crucial in providing quality, effective, responsive support for vulnerable refugees and migrants.

Mainstream human services are not equipped to deliver such services and it would be ineffective and counterproductive to rely on mainstream services to respond to refugee client settlement needs. Such services must be supported by specialist settlement services to build their capacity to work with diverse clientele from a range of backgrounds.

In order to continue to provide quality and effective settlement support to future refugees and migrants MDA considers settlement services must be developed, recognised and supported as a specialised profession. In working within this specialised field, settlement service staff also require ongoing human services training, additional professional development and clear support and supervision practices in order to further strengthen and develop their skills, and to continue to deliver quality, professional, effective support for refugees and migrants.

The settlement needs of refugees and migrants are continually evolving and service provision and programs must also evolve and adapt to clients needs. For example, in the past 12 – 18 months there has been a move towards a residence determination (community detention) framework to support asylum seekers awaiting their visa determination in the community. Similarly, Australia’s Humanitarian Program will also adapt and change over time to welcome clients from different countries and regions with diverging settlement needs. Accordingly, settlement services must be supported by government into the future to provide flexible service delivery tailored to the individual needs of emerging clients groups. The Australian Government must also continue to support and operate as partners in the delivery of settlement services to ensure optimal settlement outcomes for refugees and migrants.

i) Collaboration in settlement service delivery

In Queensland there is no state-based Settlement Planning Committee responsible for jointly coordinating settlement planning between Federal, State and Local government agencies, non-government organisations and settlement services for refugee and new arrivals. Queensland had a Settlement Planning Committee convened by DIAC but it no longer exists. Under the new HSS contract HSS providers including MDA will be responsible for ‘Local Area Coordination’ which will enable reporting of retrospective arrival data. Often however government agencies and service providers require data relating to projected arrivals, including numbers, ethnicity and region of proposed settlement in order to appropriately plan service delivery.

A joint mechanism for settlement planning is required to provide a strategic, coordinated approach to service provision by government and non-government agencies in relation to education, as well as health, employment, housing, and transport in key refugee settlement areas. Joint settlement planning is also necessary given the dynamic nature of the refugee program and the Federal Government’s ongoing commitment to regional settlement.

Recommendations

In order to improve settlement service provision to ensure full participation and integration of refugees and migrants into broader Australian society MDA recommends:

- | |
|--|
| <p>6. <i>Settlement support needs to be adequately and appropriately resourced in order to achieve optimal client outcomes and maximum effectiveness of other specialised services within the HSS service delivery model. Provision of support and investment in service delivery at the earliest possible stage in settlement of refugees is not only more cost effective but better supports social inclusion, participation and integration of refugees and migrants in Australia.</i></p> |
|--|

7. *A focus on early intervention and prevention, life skills development and service linking within current and future settlement frameworks.*
8. *Ongoing funding and resourcing for trauma and torture counselling and mental health services to provide specialist assistance to refugees and new migrants.*
9. *Placement of clients in secure and affordable individualised accommodation and housing, and provision of support to build the capacity of clients to function independently in the housing environment.*
10. *Appropriate resourcing of refugee health services, including interpreters for clients who require English language support when receiving health services.*
11. *Appropriate resourcing and provision of support to ensure successful settlement of refugees in regional areas and sustainable regional settlement programs, including:*
 - *Provision of essential support and settlement services, accommodation, employment opportunities, education (including ESL in primary and secondary schooling); adult English language support and health services*
 - *Development of innovative programs and initiatives to facilitate social inclusion, participation and development of relationships between local communities and new arrivals;*
 - *Support for capacity building for community leaders and community development.*

MDA provides the following recommendations in relation to the Complex Case Support Program:

12. *The Complex Case Support program be continued and expanded to provide vital intensive intervention and prevention, and crisis intervention support to refugees with exceptional needs.*
13. *Consideration be given to expanding the eligibility criteria for the program to include clients from 'refugee-like' backgrounds with complex needs (such as spouses of humanitarian entrants) and to greater flexibility around provision of longer interventions for clients who require additional support.*

MDA provides the following recommendations around settlement service provision into the future:

- 14. *Settlement service provision must be developed and supported as a specialised profession to ensure the delivery of professional, high quality, individualised settlement services which address the unique individual needs of people from refugee backgrounds.***
- 15. *The Australian Government, through the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, and settlement services must continue to operate as partners in the settlement process and delivery of settlement services for refugees. Settlement must continue to be seen as a shared responsibility with both government and the sector collaborating to ensure high quality settlement service delivery, integration and social inclusion for refugees and migrants.***

In order to improve settlement programs for refugees and new migrants and to support their full integration and participation into the Australian community MDA recommends:

- 16. *The Department of Immigration and Citizenship reconvene the Queensland Settlement Planning Committee as a joint planning mechanism between Federal, State and Local government agencies, non-government organisations and settlement services to:***
 - *provide a strategic, coordinated approach to settlement planning and service provision in relation to education, as well as health, employment, housing, transport and other services in key Queensland refugee settlement areas.***
 - *identify emerging settlement issues for planning***

7. Ongoing settlement issues for refugees and migrants

MDA's Advocacy and Social Policy Unit undertakes advocacy in relation to a wide range of settlement issues, including equitable access to services, in order to promote, protect and address the needs of refugee and CALD communities and to achieve systemic improvement and reform. Key ongoing issues advocated about by MDA are:

- **Employment and training**, including lack of skills recognition, access to local work experience, absence of CALD specific employment services, discrimination, language barriers and recognition of the value of a diverse workforce.**

- **Education**, including absence of appropriate funding and resourcing of English as a Second Language support and refugee specific support in schools; lack of cultural competency of education staff, absence of intensive language schools and classes, and transition programs, absence of learning support and mental health/social support.
- **Transport**, including unaffordability of and lack of access to public transport and barriers to obtaining driver's licences and private transport.
- **Police and justice**, including lack of appropriate education and training for police officers in relation to interpreter engagement and working with people from refugee and CALD backgrounds.
- **African Australian issues**, including disadvantage, barriers to social inclusion and settlement.
- **Youth**, including issues of social inclusion, participation, employment, education, access to opportunities, cultural identity and inter-generational conflict.
- **Child protection**, including lack of early intervention and prevention strategies, particularly in relation to parenting practice, inappropriate interventions and removal of children by government child safety services, absence of support for families and lack of cultural competency and understanding of child protection staff.
- **Interpreters**, including inconsistent and inappropriate interpreter usage, inability to recognise the need for an interpreter, and failure by some government and private sector services to utilise interpreters.

Case studies in relation to some of the issues noted above are detailed in **Appendix B**. Other systemic issues which continue to adversely impact refugee and CALD communities include:

- Lack of access to migration advice and legal assistance, particularly in relation to family reunion
- Health and mental health, in particular lack of mental health services for refugees and migrants.
- Lack of access to appropriate and affordable housing.
- Addressing the unique barriers experienced by communities in regional and remote areas
- Family relationships, including family breakdown and domestic violence.
- The unique needs and disadvantage experienced by refugees and migrants with disability.
- Racism and discrimination.

Recommendations

MDA has provided numerous recommendations to the Australian, Queensland and Local Governments in relation to the systemic issues noted above. These recommendations are noted in all MDA submissions, available on its website at www.mdabne.org.au. For the sake of brevity, it is not proposed to delve into all of these recommendations in this submission. However, a number of common themes emerge from these issues and recommendations around necessary improvements and reforms to facilitate equitable access to services, to better support and improve settlement outcomes for refugees and migrants, and to overcome barriers to social inclusion. These themes form the recommendations below.

- 17. *Implementation and resourcing of early intervention and prevention strategies, particularly education programs, to develop, enhance and improve the knowledge and capacity of people from refugee and CALD backgrounds to settle and function in Australia.***
- 18. *Resourcing of targeted, individual needs-based programs, support services and initiatives to better support refugee and migrant access to employment, education and critical services.***
- 19. *Prioritisation by Local, State and Federal Governments of refugee and CALD disadvantage on their policy agendas, and an ongoing commitment of funds and resources to address these issues.***
- 20. *Improved access to professional, qualified and accredited interpreters for refugees and migrants who require English language assistance, ongoing funding for access to interpreters, and mechanism to improve the use of interpreters by government departments and agencies and service providers in the government, private and community sectors.***
- 21. *The need for mandatory and continuous cross-cultural training and professional development for all staff of government departments and agencies, both at employee induction and throughout their employment, which focuses on the delivery of culturally sensitive and appropriate services to refugee and CALD people, and improves knowledge and understanding of people from diverse cultural backgrounds. In particular, education and training should focus on:***
 - *the differentiation in parenting practices among diverse cultures***
 - *cross-cultural communication***
 - *child protection in a cross-cultural context***
 - *cross-cultural family units and dynamics***
 - *settlement stages, including complex and high needs groups such as newly emerging communities, asylum seekers, etc***

- *working with bicultural and bilingual workers*
 - *accessing and working with interpreters and translators*
 - *new and emerging communities settling in Australia*
 - *services and resources within the multicultural sector.*
- 22.** *Establishment of centralised, coordinated Multicultural Units within all government departments which work closely with refugees (including health, housing, communities, child safety, employment, education, disability, police and justice and transport) to oversee and coordinate funding, program and service delivery to refugee and CALD individuals and communities; support and address the unique needs of refugee and CALD children, families and communities, and build the capacity of the departments to deliver culturally appropriate services to that cohort.*
- 23.** *Governments work collaboratively with media organisations, community services and the private sector to positively promote cultural diversity and the value, skills and contribution to Australia of people from refugee and CALD backgrounds.*
- 24.** *Strategic programs and initiatives to further develop and build the capacity of refugee and CALD communities to participate in the broader Australian community, be socially included and overcome disadvantage. Governments should work alongside refugee and CALD communities to enable collaboration and engagement and input of communities into policy development and service delivery which meets their individual needs. Many refugee and migrant communities are motivated and eager to contribute to the development and delivery of strategies to address disadvantage and meet community needs, and to establish an ongoing dialogue with governments.*
- 25.** *Improved, consistent data collection around refugees and migrants to better determine their needs and gaps in funding, support and service delivery, and to develop and deliver tailored services, programs and initiatives to meet those needs.*

Term of Reference Four: Incentives to promote long term settlement patterns that achieve greater social and economic benefits for Australian society as a whole.

MDA considers that the key to promoting long term settlement patterns to achieve greater social and economic benefits for Australia is continued intensive support and investment by governments in the early stages of settlement, improved access to services and equity of opportunity. Collaboration by all levels of government with the private and community sectors is crucial to addressing these issues.

In this regard, MDA reiterates and reinforces its recommendations throughout this paper in relation to social inclusion, settlement service provision and ongoing settlement issues, as well as the recommendations of the Employment Action for Cultural Diversity around National Productive Capacity (endorsed by MDA).

Promotion of multiculturalism, prioritisation of refugees and migrants within the National Social Inclusion Agenda, ongoing investment in settlement service delivery and early intervention, addressing the systemic issues which create barriers to access and equity, and improving employment outcomes will ensure long term settlement patterns which achieve greater social and economic benefits for Australian society.

Part C: Summary of Recommendations

The following is a summary of the recommendations provided throughout this paper.

Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalisation

MDA provides the following recommendations to improve the social inclusion of refugee and migrants communities within the broader Australian community, and to promote and further embed multiculturalism within Australia:

Recommendation 1

Inclusion of refugees and migrants within the National Social Inclusion Agenda as a specific priority, or development of an a targeted and comprehensive policy framework containing strategies, programs, initiatives and mechanisms, to address the unique needs of refugees and migrants, enhance their participation and reduce exclusion.

In prioritising refugee and migrant communities in the National Social Inclusion agenda or under an independent policy framework all levels of Government (Local, State and Federal) should work collaboratively to address such issues through development of a whole-of-government strategy, intergovernmental coordination and planning and engagement of local communities. An ongoing commitment of funding and resources by all levels of government for social inclusion initiatives is also necessary.

Recommendation 2

Ongoing resourcing of community engagement and capacity building initiatives within the government and community sectors to enhance refugee and migrant participation and inclusion, and build the capacity of refugee and migrant

communities to be more effectively included in the Australian community.

Recommendation 3

Continued commitment and resourcing of to the proposed National Anti-Racism Partnership and Strategy as a pillar to address racism and discrimination against refugees and migrants, and foster social inclusion. As part of the strategy it is imperative that specific education initiatives which address topics including racism and discrimination, multiculturalism, citizenship, human rights, cultural diversity and the contribution of migrants and refugees to Australia are developed and included in the National Curriculum and community education and engagement programs in order to promote social inclusion.

Recommendation 4

Positive media campaigns, supported by Government, to reduce negative stereotyping, stigmatisation and alienation of refugee and migrant communities by the media. Further, where misleading, inaccurate and unbalanced media reporting of migrants and refugees does occur, the Australian, State/Territory and Local Governments take measures to refute such claims, stories and information. MDA also supports the Refugee Council of Australia's Recommendation 28 in its Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2011-2012 submission.

Recommendation 5

MDA supports the Government's intention to conduct an inquiry into the responsiveness of Australian Government services to clients disadvantaged by cultural or linguistic barriers.²⁹ However, the Terms of Reference should be broadened to specifically consider current equity of access to services and the services of all local and state/territory governments. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of issues of access to and responsiveness of government services across governments throughout Australia, and current gaps.

Settlement and participation

In order to improve settlement service provision to ensure full participation and integration of refugees and migrants into broader Australian society MDA recommends:

Recommendation 6

Settlement support needs to be adequately and appropriately resourced in

²⁹ Australian Government, *Response to the recommendations of the The Australian Multicultural Advisory Council in The People of Australia* (2011) 5.

order to achieve optimal client outcomes and maximum effectiveness of other specialised services within the HSS service delivery model. Provision of support and investment in service delivery at the earliest possible stage in settlement of refugees is not only more cost effective but better supports social inclusion, participation and integration of refugees and migrants in Australia.

Recommendation 7

A focus on early intervention and prevention, life skills development and service linking within current and future settlement frameworks.

Recommendation 8

Ongoing funding and resourcing for trauma and torture counselling and mental health services to provide specialist assistance to refugees and new migrants.

Recommendation 9

Placement of clients in secure and affordable individualised accommodation and housing, and provision of support to build the capacity of clients to function independently in the housing environment.

Recommendation 10

Appropriate resourcing of refugee health services, including interpreters for clients who require English language support when receiving health services.

Recommendation 11

Appropriate resourcing and provision of support to ensure successful settlement of refugees in regional areas and sustainable regional settlement programs, including:

- Provision of essential support and settlement services, accommodation, employment opportunities, education (including ESL in primary and secondary schooling); adult English language support and health services
- Development of innovative programs and initiatives to facilitate social inclusion, participation and development of relationships between local communities and new arrivals;
- Support for capacity building for community leaders and community development.

MDA provides the following recommendations in relation to the Complex Case Support Program:

Recommendation 12

The Complex Case Support program be continued and expanded to provide vital intensive intervention and prevention, and crisis intervention support to refugees with exceptional needs.

Recommendation 13

Consideration be given to expanding the eligibility criteria for the program to include clients from 'refugee-like' backgrounds with complex needs (such as spouses of humanitarian entrants) and to greater flexibility around provision of longer interventions for clients who require additional support.

MDA provides the following recommendations around settlement service provision into the future:

Recommendation 14

Settlement service provision must be developed and supported as a specialised profession to ensure the delivery of professional, high quality, individualised settlement services which address the unique individual needs of people from refugee backgrounds.

Recommendation 15

The Australian Government, through the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, and settlement services must continue to operate as partners in the settlement process and delivery of settlement services for refugees. Settlement must continue to be seen as a shared responsibility with both government and the sector collaborating to ensure high quality settlement service delivery, integration and social inclusion for refugees and migrants.

In order to improve settlement programs for refugees and new migrants and to support their full integration and participation into the Australian community MDA recommends:

Recommendation 16

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship reconvene the Queensland Settlement Planning Committee as a joint planning mechanism between Federal, State and Local government agencies, non-government organisations and settlement services to:

- provide a strategic, coordinated approach to settlement planning and service provision in relation to education, as well as health, employment, housing, transport and other services in key Queensland refugee settlement areas.
- identify emerging settlement issues for planning

MDA provides the following recommendations around necessary improvements and reforms to facilitate equitable access to services, to better support and improve settlement outcomes for refugees and migrants, and to overcome barriers to social inclusion.

These recommendations are derived from common themes which emerge from multiple systemic issues MDA advocates about including employment, education, child protection, transport, youth, African Australian issues and police and justice.

Recommendation 17

Implementation and resourcing of early intervention and prevention strategies, particularly education programs, to develop, enhance and improve the knowledge and capacity of people from refugee and CALD backgrounds to settle and function in Australia.

Recommendation 18

Resourcing of targeted, individual needs-based programs, support services and initiatives to better support refugee and migrant access to employment, education and critical services.

Recommendation 19

Prioritisation by Local, State and Federal Governments of refugee and CALD disadvantage on their policy agendas, and an ongoing commitment of funds and resources to address these issues.

Recommendation 20

Improved access to professional, qualified and accredited interpreters for refugees and migrants who require English language assistance, ongoing funding for access to interpreters, and mechanism to improve the use of interpreters by government departments and agencies and service providers in the government, private and community sectors.

Recommendation 21

The need for mandatory and continuous cross-cultural training and professional development for all staff of government departments and agencies, both at employee induction and throughout their employment, which focuses on the delivery of culturally sensitive and appropriate services to refugee and CALD people, and improves knowledge and understanding of people from diverse cultural backgrounds. In particular, education and training should focus on:

- the differentiation in parenting practices among diverse cultures

- cross-cultural communication
- child protection in a cross-cultural context
- cross-cultural family units and dynamics
- settlement stages, including complex and high needs groups such as newly emerging communities, asylum seekers and others
- working with bicultural and bilingual workers
- accessing and working with interpreters and translators
- new and emerging communities settling in Australia
- services and resources within the multicultural sector.

Recommendation 22

Establishment of centralised, coordinated Multicultural Units within all government departments which work closely with refugees (including health, housing, communities, child safety, employment, education, disability, police and justice and transport) to oversee and coordinate funding, program and service delivery to refugee and CALD individuals and communities; support and address the unique needs of refugee and CALD children, families and communities, and build the capacity of departments to deliver culturally appropriate services to that cohort.

Recommendation 23

Governments work collaboratively with media organisations, community services and the private sector to positively promote cultural diversity and the value, skills and contribution to Australia of people from refugee and CALD backgrounds.

Recommendation 24

Strategic programs and initiatives to further develop and build the capacity of refugee and CALD communities to participate in the broader Australian community, be socially included and overcome disadvantage. Governments should work alongside refugee and CALD communities to enable collaboration and engagement and input of communities into policy development and service delivery which meets their individual needs. Many refugee and migrant communities are motivated and eager to contribute to the development and delivery of strategies to address disadvantage and meet community needs, and to establish an ongoing dialogue with governments.

Recommendation 25

Improved, consistent data collection around refugees and migrants to better determine their needs and gaps in funding, support and service delivery, and to develop and deliver tailored services, programs and initiatives to meet those needs.



Appendix B: Case studies of systemic barriers for refugees and migrants in Queensland

The following are case study examples of systemic barriers experienced by refugee and migrants clients of the Multicultural Development Association. The names and personal details of individuals in some case studies have been changed to protect our client's identities.

Case studies relevant to systemic issues in employment are contained in the Employment Action for Cultural Diversity's submission to the Inquiry into Multiculturalism, which is endorsed by MDA.

Education

Many refugee students confront unique educational challenges through a combination of historical, environmental, cultural and social factors, resulting in barriers to accessible, equitable, quality education responsive to their needs. In MDA's April 2011 submission to the Review of Funding Schooling MDA raised the following systemic issues in education, arising from consultations with MDA clients and staff, community leaders and members of Brisbane's refugee and CALD communities, and key stakeholders in the education and multicultural government and non-government sectors in Queensland (a full copy of MDA's submission is available at <http://www.mdainc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/mda-submission-to-review-of-funding-of-schooling3.pdf>).

- As at October 2010 there were 189.8 full time equivalent staff and 2576 teacher aide hours across state primary and secondary schools throughout Queensland. Although the precise number of ESL students, including refugee students, is not known, teachers and schools consistently report that current need and demand for ESL tuition is not able to be met by existing numbers of specialist ESL teachers and teacher aides, and that there is a shortage of specialist staff across Queensland.
- Teachers report that the current funding periods for on-arrival and ESL support for refugee students are inadequate to support refugee students, particularly for primary aged students with limited or no previous schooling and refugee students from African backgrounds who may require additional language

support by comparison to refugees from other countries and other migrant groups. MDA is anecdotally aware that due to limited numbers of ESL teachers and teacher aides some students in Queensland may receive only 1 – 2 hours of ESL support each week, which is insufficient to address their learning needs.

- In providing feedback to MDA around school funding needs for refugee and ESL students in Queensland, schools, ESL teachers, community organisations and communities consistently reported:
 - Current ESL and Refugee Program funding arrangements do not adequately support refugee and migrant children to overcome multiple disadvantage and attain educational outcomes comparable to students from English speaking backgrounds; and
 - There is limited transparency around funding mechanisms for ESL in Queensland state schools.
- There is a lack of intensive English language schools and intensive language classes in mainstream schools in Queensland, particularly in key regional humanitarian settlement areas. Milpera State High School in Brisbane's outer Western suburbs is the only school in Queensland dedicated specifically to the provision of intensive education and settlement support programs for refugee students. Increasingly in Brisbane and the greater metropolitan area, refugee and CALD families are being settled in the far northern and southern suburbs. As such, students must travel considerable distances in order to access the services offered at Milpera.

For refugee students in regional areas throughout Queensland there are no intensive language support schools similar to Milpera. Further, there are no intensive language support primary schools operating in Queensland, there is also a substantial gap in education service provision for primary aged school children from refugee backgrounds.

- While the majority of parents and families from refugee backgrounds highly value education and wish to make a positive contribution to the education and development of their children, they face challenges in doing so as many families from refugee backgrounds have little or no educational experience themselves. Challenges encountered by refugee parents and families in supporting their children in education include:
 - Lack of understanding of the Australian education system and may not be provided with adequate information about this by schools or other agencies upon settlement in Australia. It is understood that at present limited information is provided by schools, the government and community sector.

- Different cultural perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of parents/families and teachers/schools in educating children. In many countries from which refugees originate, schooling and education of children is the sole responsibility of teachers and schools.

Transport

MDA is concerned about the affordability of public transport in Brisbane for refugees and new arrivals from CALD backgrounds who are not employed and have low income. In Queensland concession travel is not available to low income earners, job seekers or Centrelink health care card holders.¹ Many refugees and new arrivals, who generally experience financial hardship and are dependent on social welfare during the early period of settlement, are not entitled to concession fares.

The affordability of public transport is critical to the successful settlement of refugee and CALD communities, and in particular to employment, social inclusion, community participation, carrying out activities of daily life, quality of life and general wellbeing.

Case Study One

In 2010 MDA and TELLS (TAFE English Language and Literacy Services) collaborated to provide weekly free English classes for Mothers and toddlers as an AMEP (Adult Migrant English Program) pilot project. The classes are run at MDA's office at Woolloongabba, Brisbane by TAFE English Second Language educators.

The students are women aged between 20 to 45 years, and have been in Australia for between 8 months to 3 years. Students are enrolled in a 10 week course and are required to attend two days/week. The course enables women who are isolated, not ready to attend full-time TAFE and/or previously had difficulty accessing AMEP due to lack of childcare, to learn basic English skills while receiving adjunct childcare at MDA. Most students live in the outer Brisbane suburbs including Kedron and Nundah.

Lack of affordable public transport has proven a barrier to maintaining attendance and promoting and increasing the numbers of students enrolling in the class. Since the project's commencement, three participants have withdrawn from the class due to the high costs of travel they incurred to attend class. Some had to catch three different transport services each day. Participants are not entitled to a student card as the class is a part-time course, and therefore incur full fares when travelling to the class.

¹ See <http://www.communityservices.qld.gov.au/community/concessions/> .

Case Study Two

An MDA client resides in southern Brisbane with his wife and seven children. He is currently job seeking and receives Centrelink benefits. His rent is approximately \$340 each week. He catches the bus approximately 3 – 4 times each week to visit his family in Northern Brisbane and to attend appointments at MDA. A bus trip costs him \$6.90 each way. He and his wife cannot afford for both of them to visit the family so they take it in turns.

The client has tried to get work, but he is required to attend English classes at TAFE or he will not get Centrelink. He also cannot afford to catch buses to find work.

His children ask him for money frequently and want to buy things like computers and the internet, but he can not afford to give them anything. His children have Australian friends and he said that they get angry at him for not having a job.

Justice

The primary systemic issue affecting people from refugee and CALD backgrounds in the Queensland justice system is the need for improved and timely access to qualified, accredited, professional interpreters due to limited English language skills. Other common barriers and challenges include:

- Limited cultural competency of government staff and lack of understanding of how to appropriately interact with refugees and CALD people within the justice system. The ability to recognise the need for an interpreter and the skills required to professionally engage with an interpreter requires a solid foundation of cultural competency for police officers, judicial officers, corrective services officers and other individuals working within the justice system through ongoing cultural competency training.
- Limited access to legal services to assist with immigration, criminal, civil and family law matters. Upon arriving in Australia, many CALD individuals frequently request legal assistance for immigration related matters, including visa applications, family reunion matters and protection claims. At present only a small number of community legal centres in Queensland with limited capacity and funding are able to undertake pro bono casework in relation to these issues.
- Lack of knowledge and understanding about the Queensland justice system, including legal avenues to address discrimination. As a result of limited English proficiency, CALD individuals and communities face difficulties in understanding the complexities of Australia's legal system, domestic laws, legalistic language and their legal rights. Broader community and professional education about the justice system and processes, and legal avenues to address discrimination is

paramount to ensuring that people from refugee and CALD backgrounds better understand the legal system, and are able to exercise their legal rights.

- Limited support available to people from refugee and CALD backgrounds engaging with the courts, such as Multicultural Liaison Officers.

Case Study 1

A MDA client was arrested in relation to a public disturbance at a Brisbane night venue. He did not receive appropriate language support from the police when arrested, nor at his bail hearing the following day. With the support of his MDA case manager he attended a second court hearing where he requested an interpreter. The client had health issues which were being adversely affected by this process. An interpreter was eventually granted at third court hearing. However, by that stage he had decided to plead guilty, even though he strongly believed he was innocent, in the hope that his experience with the justice system would end more quickly.

Case Study 2

A Croatian client with no English attended a Guardianship and Administration Tribunal hearing with a bilingual worker from a State funded service. As no interpreter was present the Bilingual Support Worker tried to assist. At the worker's insistence the Tribunal finally agreed to provide an interpreter. The State funded service was concerned about the whole process, in particular the Tribunal's initial reluctance to use an interpreter and to adequately explain the process to the client.

(from A Matter of Interpretation: The case for access to high quality accredited interpreting and translating services and cultural competence in Queensland services working with CALD people (December 2008) by the Queensland Access to Interpreters Working Group, of which MDA is a member. This issues paper can be accessed at [http://www.qcooss.org.au/upload/4614_QCOSS_MatterOfInterpretation\(e\).](http://www.qcooss.org.au/upload/4614_QCOSS_MatterOfInterpretation(e).)

Police

People from refugee and CALD backgrounds continue to experience barriers to accessing interpreters when engaging with police, particularly during the preliminary stages of investigations, due to:

- **Lack of knowledge about how to engage interpreters:** Some police and QPS staff have asked MDA caseworkers how to engage interpreters as they are not aware of QPS policy and procedures for engaging an interpreter.

- **Inconsistent use of interpreters and reluctance of police to engage interpreters:** Some police and QPS staff have been reluctant to engage interpreters in order to avoid their station or department incurring fees. There also appears to be reluctance by some police to engage interpreters when some complainants from refugee and CALD backgrounds initiate contact with the QPS.
- **Failure to engage interpreters at the earliest possible stage in the investigation:** In some circumstances interpreters have not been provided at the time of arrest and/or initial questioning and have not been engaged until the charges have proceeded to the Magistrates Court.
- **Use of inappropriate and unqualified interpreters:** Some police officers have used relatives of the complainant and unqualified interpreters at initial stages of investigations. This potentially compromises the complainant's safety and exacerbates distress, may result in inaccurate information/evidence being provided, and may prejudice the investigation.

The failure to provide an interpreter where appropriate can result in fundamental inaccuracies in evidence; inappropriate investigations and imposition of charges; court proceedings being undertaken where it is not justified; and abuses of process. For refugees who, due to their historical experiences, have a mistrust and fear of authority figures, difficulties accessing an interpreter and failure to provide an interpreter can exacerbate fear and apprehension and reinforce mistrust of police officers.

Case Study 1

A police officer contacted an MDA caseworker in relation to a client with a number of serious outstanding legal charges pending. The police officer attended the client's school and used a 10 year old to interpret between the client and the police officer in relation to the alleged offences instead of engaging a qualified interpreter. The police officer refused to engage an interpreter citing issues of funding and that interpreters could only be used for major incidents and interviews.

Case Study 2

A client from an African nation reported to police that her young teenage daughter was missing. The Police visited the mother without an interpreter and the mother could not communicate her concerns. The Police cited funding issues as reason for not using interpreter. The client's MDA caseworker engaged an interpreter through MDA and took the client to police station to communicate concerns. The Police Officer appeared to be uncomfortable with communicating through an interpreter and required significant assistance from MDA caseworker.

See also case study 1 under 'Child Protection' in relation to police and interpreters.

Child Protection

Current issues for refugee and CALD communities in relation to the child protection system include the following:

- **Inconsistent and inappropriate interpreter usage.** In some cases interpreters have not been engaged where required and inappropriate interpreters, such as relatives, have been used. This can compromise the family's understanding of the situation and reasons for the intervention, exacerbate distress, may result in inaccurate information/evidence being provided and may prejudice the investigation and/or decision-making process.

Case Study 1

In 2009 MDA provided significant support and advocacy for a refugee woman engaging with the justice system. Police attended a reported domestic violence incident between a refugee woman and her husband. When making a formal report about the incident, the attending officers used the husband's friend as the interpreter, despite the friend having no training or qualifications as an interpreter. The interpreting by the husband's friend was intentionally biased and depicted the woman as highly volatile, mentally ill and unsuitable to care for her children.

The report was used by Child Safety Services in assessing the safety and living conditions of the children of the couple. The children were subsequently removed from the woman's care and placed with relatives, resulting in the youngest child being abruptly weaned from breastfeeding.

Despite numerous attempts by the woman to engage with Child Safety Services there was minimal communication with her. In her words "Every time I talked to child safety they didn't take me serious, they made out I was crazy."

Significant individual advocacy about this issue was undertaken by the woman's MDA caseworker. Prior to her initial Magistrates Court hearing MDA advocated to ensure she had adequate language support throughout her legal proceedings, and a professional interpreter was ultimately engaged. Through the interpreter it was determined that the information which guided the decision to remove the children was misleading and false. The children were returned to the mother's care. However, it was too late for the youngest child to continue breastfeeding.

- **Lack of early intervention and prevention strategies, particularly in relation to parenting practice.** At present there is limited provision of education for parents and families through early intervention and prevention programs to newly arrived parents as well as families already engaged with Child Safety Services

about the child protection system; domestic laws; parenting practices; roles and responsibilities and caring for children in Australia. Knowledge and understanding of these areas is essential in order to prevent, at the earliest stage possible, engagement of families in the child protection system.

The current child protection system is adversarial and parents are not supported to address these issues which led to the involvement of Child Safety Services. Indeed, in some cases there appears to be an expectation by Child Safety Officers that parents/families should 'amend their ways' independently without external support to rebuild relationships between the parent/family and child. In these circumstances, parenting education and support is essential to overcome issues.

Case Study 2

Amona is a mother of four children between 10 and 17. She has a long history of torture and trauma and attends counselling sessions. She is on medication for her anxiety attacks.

Recently Amona's two daughters were taken away from her by Child Safety Services and are now living with another family. Amona was accused of violence towards her daughters. She denies that she hurts her children, and disciplines them in the only way she knows how.

Amona doesn't know why Child Safety is involved with her family, and if she will ever get her children back. She attended a meeting with Child Safety Services, but even though there was an interpreter she still doesn't understand anything about the system.

This situation is causing Amona a great deal of stress and she feels very depressed. She doesn't want to leave the house as she feels like people are judging her for being a bad parent.

- **Lack of cultural sensitivity, competence and responsiveness** when Child Safety Services engages with children and families from refugee and CALD backgrounds. In particular, there is often a lack of knowledge and recognition of different cultures within diverse communities. In some cases this may result in the removal of children in circumstances where alternative approaches may be more appropriate; loss of culture and identity for children in care; and the undermining of traditional family values. Culturally competent practice, particularly understanding of parenting in other cultures and the settlement process and challenges is critical to appropriate and effective child safety service delivery.

Case Study 3

Following a domestic violence incident between an MDA client and her husband, the police notified Child Safety Services as they were concerned about the safety of the couple's children. Child Safety Officers visited the house and expressed concerns including that there was insufficient food in the house for the children, and a lack of essential living items, namely beds for the children.

When MDA case officers spoke with the family, the mother explained that the children feel lonely and scared sleeping in separate beds, and consequently they prefer to sleep together in the one bed. In that family's culture, children sleep in the parents' room and often together to look after each other, particularly when children are under five years old. In any event, extra beds were located in other areas of the residence. A cultural support worker also advised that the family's ethnic group was a hunter gatherer group in Africa, and accordingly they prefer obtaining and preparing fresh food daily.