



**Multicultural Community Centre**

Helping refugees and migrants living in Australia

Patron: Hon Alastair Nicholson AO RFD QC

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Attention: Jane Hearn  
Inquiry Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Migration  
(Letter to be sent by e.mail to: [jscm@aph.gov.au](mailto:jscm@aph.gov.au))

RE: INQUIRY INTO MULTICULTURALISM IN AUSTRALIA

Dear Ms Hearn,

The Louise Multicultural Community Centre (LMCC) was established in 1983 with the mission to assist refugees and migrants living in Australia. While we are based in Box Hill in the City of Whitehorse, we also cover the neighbouring cities Knox; Boroondara; Manningham; Monash; Maroondah and Yarra Ranges.

Our organisation provides a range of educational and social activities. Our English classes in particular have been well attended for over 27 years. We also teach Mandarin and provide Computer training. We work locally with a range of service providers. One example is our popular Book Buddies program which is carried out in conjunction with the Box Hill Library. This program links Australian citizens with new and older migrants and assists them to develop English language skills, friendships and knowledge of how our society works. Further information about our organisation and its current activities may be found on our web-site [www.louise.org.au](http://www.louise.org.au)

We have a great deal of expertise in the area of Multiculturalism and our achievements may be demonstrated by the high number of participants who have benefited from our programs in the past, many of whom are now well settled into Australian life. Our organisation appreciates this opportunity to have input into this inquiry.

**Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalisation**

It is important that the Federal Government recognises the value of multiculturalism in its social inclusion agenda. There are many issues for our community (refugees and migrants) including:

- o lack of genuine work opportunities

- double disadvantage for migrants from a non-English speaking background who also have a disability
- a triple disadvantage for migrants with a disability who are also over 50 years of age
- racism, discrimination, lack of access and equity
- lack of support networks, lack of knowledge of their rights and entitlements

### **Settlement and participation**

*Ideas for settlement programs for new migrants, including refugees:*

1. Funding allocated to Neighbourhood and Community Centres that are seeking to assist in rectifying disadvantage such as: migrant background; disability; lack of work; lack of support networks etc.
2. Programs that assist prospective new migrants *before* they obtain the all important permanent residence stamp in their visa , in particular, international students who are currently being treated very shabbily by the public. Many of these same students will become permanent residents, tax payers and valued members contributing to society in Australia. As it is based in Box Hill, LMCC is in a unique geographic position with several important education providers in close proximity
3. Programs that include “self-help” components to generate resilient communities that can help themselves (community based job search assistance; coaching and mentoring; work experience; self employment opportunities; social enterprises etc).
4. Leadership programs should be funded to provide activities that generate community leaders / facilitators for self-help groups. These can be older migrants with skills who can pass on their expertise. LMCC has an active volunteer “workforce” with a range of valuable skills.
5. Greater earlier orientation is needed, supported by more language for social interaction. Programs that provide learning in social networking, for migrants and refugees where people can become better connected to opportunities in the community.
6. Education, health and housing all need to be boosted and provided in a more coordinated way.

### **National productive capacity**

Migrants and refugees are also customers, they seek out cultural food and other goods they know and love. As migrants settle in Australia, they will increasingly buy Australian goods, however, there will always be a genuine need for goods that remind them of where they come from. This is a business opportunity for the right culturally aware business operator.

### **Potential government initiatives:**

We have carefully considered your inquiry and have come up with 3 initiatives which we feel would benefit disadvantaged migrants with low English skills. LMCC and other Community Centres are well positioned to provide these programs in a friendly and supportive environment.

1. **“Building your business through English program”** to focus on assisting migrants to develop and initiate business enterprises. Assistance can be provided through Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres so as not to be too intimidating for disadvantaged migrants and refugees with language and cultural issues. Assistance must:
  - have *English for your business* education built into the program and be culturally appropriate
  - provide aid in developing a viable business plan as well as a marketing and promotions plan

- tap into businesses opportunities that can be undertaken from home for people with family responsibilities
  - have 'hands on' assistance from experts to help overcome the red-tape issues with starting a small business
2. **Australian mentor scheme for international students.** "Aussie Fusion" is an example where international students can *Adopt an Aussie*. One example would be helping a regional centre ravaged by floods or assisting a farming community for a week. Example: LMCC could liaise with local education providers and link to 'sister' organizations such as Neighbourhood Houses in regional areas in relation to worthy causes. This would provide:
- Regional community benefits: e.g. being assisted to get back on their feet after their own unique episode of disadvantage;
  - International student benefits: learning about regional issues;
  - Community benefits: improved understanding and tolerance of cultural differences.
3. **"Migrant Business Buddies" Scheme.** Learning from successful migrants mentoring and coaching program. Example: new Chinese migrants learn from experienced Chinese migrants. This program would put new migrants and experienced migrant business owners / operators in touch with each other. This would be a volunteer program run through community centres such as LMCC. This "buddy" type system but could also be undertaken in groups such as the many support groups developed through community centres. Benefits for business owners or operators would be through recognition of their participation in the program. Incentives and motivation would be assisted through a state-wide recognition event once a year with publicity for the winning business.

If you have any questions regarding the above please do not hesitate in getting in touch with me on 0411818231. We are happy to organise a panel of participants to provide additional details.

Yours sincerely

Ruth Lee  
Louise Multicultural Community Centre  
President