

SETS INNOVATION FUND – WELCOMING WORKPLACES- FINAL REPORT

April 2022

1. Introduction

The Welcoming Workplaces Project (WWP) was carried out between February 2021 and March 2022, in partnership between Settlement Services International, Illawarra Multicultural Services and Northern Settlement Services. The project, implemented through the SETS Innovation Fund, aimed to improve employment outcomes for vulnerable migrants in three locations across NSW – Illawarra, Newcastle and Lake Macquarie.

WWP involved engaging with local employers, AMEP providers and volunteer mentors to co-design an innovative employment model that met employers' needs and supported clients to secure employment and attain English language skills. It also involved co-designing a flexible English for Work program and training project staff in cultural responsiveness which could then be imparted locally to employers.

The project had the following objectives:

- to improve employment pathways, including education, training and entrepreneurial opportunities, for vulnerable migrants
- to improve English language acquisition by vulnerable migrants
- to improve employment outcomes for vulnerable migrant

While settlement providers have not traditionally been funded to deliver employment services, in reality, economic participation of migrants and refugees is crucial to successful settlement and much of the work of that settlement providers do involves supporting newly arrived clients to become job-ready. A key element of the Welcoming Workplaces Project was employer engagement and networking, which drew on and strengthened the existing relationships we have with employers in our respective locations.

Settlement providers also have a wealth of cultural knowledge and competence that they can use to support businesses in creating a welcoming environment for migrants and refugees by offering cultural responsiveness, diversity and inclusion training. This type of training is also helpful for employers who lack experience with employees from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds.

Settlement Services International

Settlement Services International (SSI) has a long history of working with newcomers and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) Australians in both employment and settlement.

The Refugee Employment Support Program (RESP) is available in western Sydney and Illawarra for people who are unemployed or underemployed and need extra support. Refugees aged 16 to 66 are eligible and, in western Sydney, people seeking asylum who are living in the community are eligible.

The RESP involves working with people one-on-one using a tailored Language, Education and Employment Plan. The program works with clients to develop employment-level English language

skills, assess their existing skills and qualifications and link participants to training, resources and tools to gain sustainable and skilled employment. Importantly, the RESP also provides clients with opportunities to showcase their skills to potential employers.

The RESP model focuses on community-based solutions through the involvement of local employers and organisations to connect eligible refugees and people seeking asylum with training, support and jobs. The program is flexible and responsive to the needs of participants. It considers people at all stages of the employment journey, whether they are seeking entry into the workforce or pursuing skilled career options. Participants also work with multicultural employment specialists who can provide tailored support based on the participant's skills, experience, and goals.

SSI is also the lead agency in the NSW Settlement Partnership (NSP), through which it delivers the Australian Government's Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program. As SETS providers, we work with and refer clients to employment services and providers to help them achieve positive employment and settlement outcomes.

Illawarra Multicultural Services

Illawarra Multicultural Services (IMS) was originally founded as the Illawarra Migrant Resource Centre in 1980, as one of the first migrant resource centres in the country. It was established as a result of the Galbally Report two years prior, which identified the many challenges faced by migrants around the lack of support for their initial settlement. The Centre facilitated a comprehensive settlement program that included English classes, formal orientation courses including advice and assistance with housing, education, employment, and other support mechanisms.

Today, IMS continues to operate guided by the manta that "all members of our society must have equal opportunity to realise their full potential and must have access to programs and services" and provides a range of services to people in the local community while continuing to prioritise advocacy and support for refugees and humanitarian entrants. IMS is also a member of the NSW Settlement Partnership, a consortium of settlement providers based across metropolitan Sydney and regional NSW. The Partnership has been delivering services under SETS program since 2015.

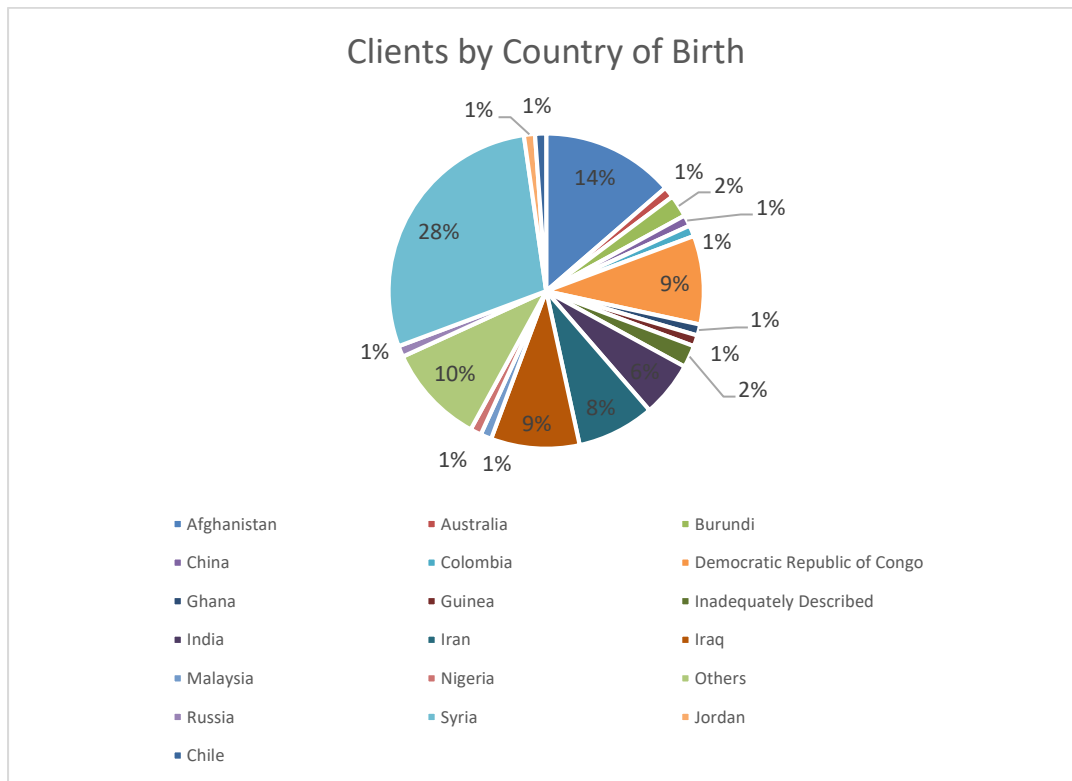
Northern Settlement Services

Northern Settlement Services (NSS) is an independent not-for-profit organisation providing a range of services in the areas of settlement, aged care, youth and family support across the Hunter, Central Coast and New England regions of NSW. It was founded in 1981 to help new migrants and refugees to settle into life in Australia.

NSS have offices in both Newcastle and Armidale, which are government-designated refugee settlement areas. However, Newcastle as a regional city is relatively well serviced and has a diverse population, while Armidale is a rural town of around 24,000 people. Since 2018, NSS have been working closely with the newly arrived Ezidi cohort in Armidale.

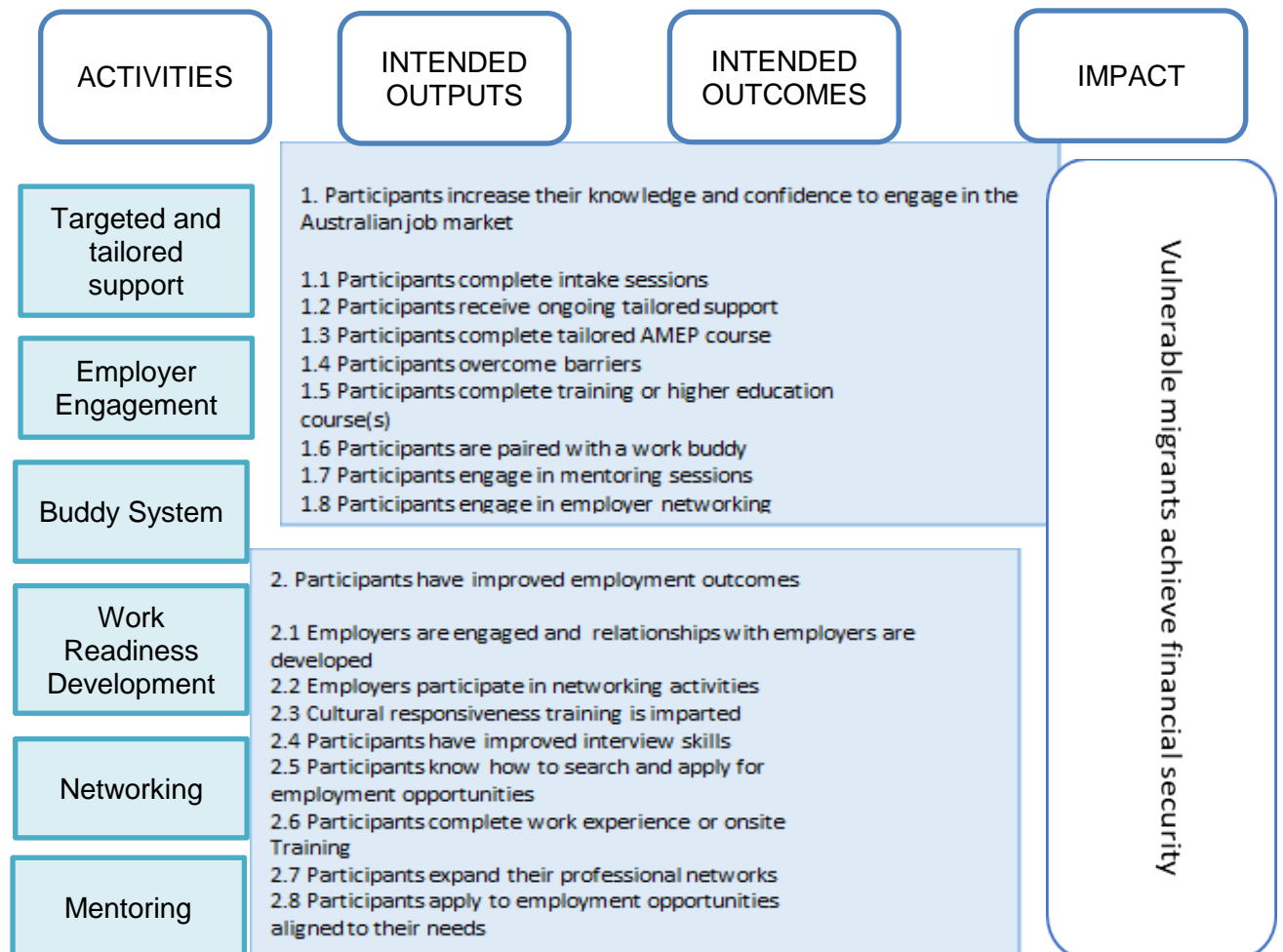
Like IMS, NSS is a member of the NSW Settlement Partnership.

2. Demographic Data Snapshot



| Country of Birth | Clients |
|------------------------------|-----------|
| Afghanistan | 12 |
| Australia | 1 |
| Burundi | 2 |
| Chile | 1 |
| China | 1 |
| Colombia | 1 |
| Democratic Republic of Congo | 8 |
| Ghana | 1 |
| Guinea | 1 |
| India | 5 |
| Iran | 7 |
| Iraq | 8 |
| Jordan | 1 |
| Malaysia | 1 |
| Nigeria | 1 |
| Russia | 1 |
| Syria | 25 |
| Inadequately Described | 2 |
| Others | 9 |
| Total | 88 |

3. Theory of Change



The economic participation of migrants and refugees is crucial to successful settlement. It not only improves financial security and independence, but helps newcomers to feel a sense of belonging in the Australian community and helps people from non-English speaking backgrounds to learn English, thereby increasing their confidence to fully participate in Australian society. This is one reason why employment is a priority area and one of nine settlement outcomes adopted both by the Australian government and the settlement sector's peak body, the Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA).

Drawing on SSI's success with the Refugee Employment Support Program (RESP), we know that there is a solid case for settlement providers to be active in the employment space. We feel that as settlement providers, we can deliver better employment outcomes for our cohort of migrants than most mainstream employment providers. This is because:

- We have a level of cultural competency that employment providers do not and therefore clients are generally more comfortable to talk about their needs with us

- We know and understand the client group and their employment needs within the context of their overall settlement journey and challenges therein
- We have good working relationships with local employers, councils and small businesses
- We can offer a more targeted service which includes mentoring, which is likely to lead to more long-term, sustainable employment and thus benefit the society and economy as a whole

Our theory of change, which was adapted from the RESP for the purposes of Welcoming Workplaces, shows how through the stated outputs and activities, we aimed to achieve two key outcomes:

1. For participants to gain increased knowledge and confidence to engage in the Australian job market, and
2. For participants to improve their employment outcomes.

The overall, long-term impact which is yet to be seen and is likely to manifest if the program is expanded and taken out of the pilot stage, is that clients will be able to secure meaningful employment and, eventually, financial security.

4. What Outcomes Were Achieved

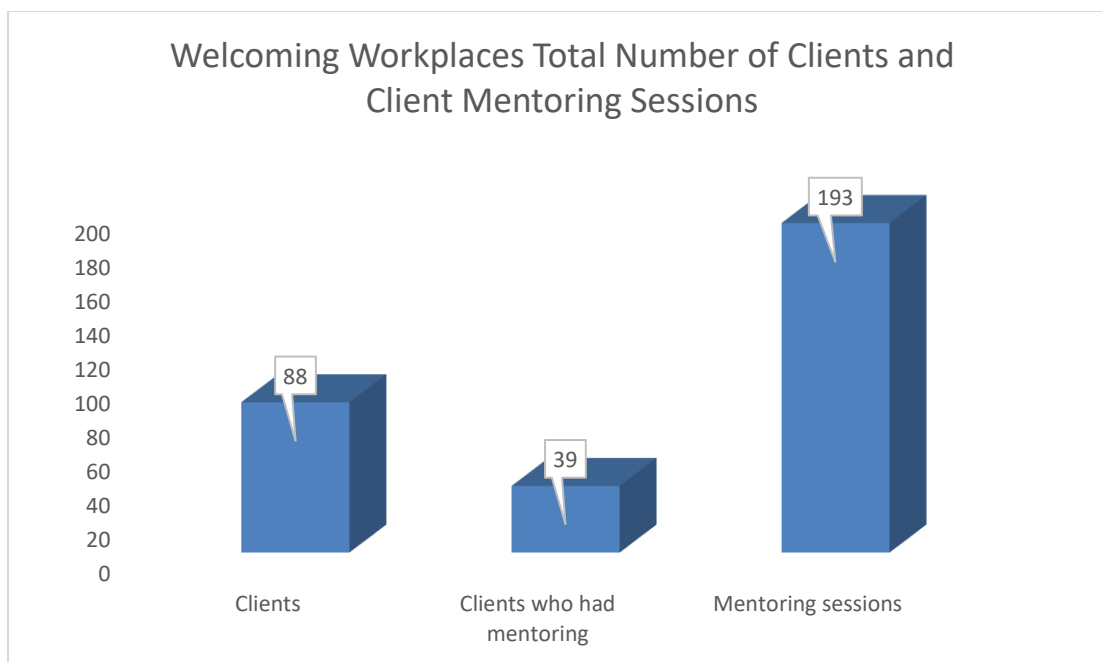
Despite facing many challenges, including a 3-month state-wide lockdown during the peak of the coronavirus pandemic, the WWP achieved strong outcomes in three key areas: employment, English language proficiency, and partnership arrangements between settlement organisations, AMEP providers and employers. These are broken down and explained in detail below.

Employment Case Management and Job Readiness Supports

A total of 74 clients across both regions received ongoing individual job readiness support, including resume development, job interview preparation and role-playing, and improving confidence and English language skills (22 in the Illawarra region and 52 in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie).

Mentoring Support

Out of a total of 88 clients, 22 clients in Wollongong and 17 clients in the Hunter region received mentoring support. Engagement was more intense in the Illawarra, with 132 mentoring sessions conducted, while in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie, there were 61 sessions with clients.



Cultural Responsiveness Practice Training

In July, SSI delivered a cultural responsiveness workshop for project staff, sharing knowledge and resources for them to adapt to their local context and engagements with local employers in the Illawarra, Hunter regions. Five team members participated in the workshop, which was held online. Subsequently, IMS conducted informal cultural responsiveness training with 10 employers.

Pathways to Meaningful Employment

During the course of the project, a total of 25 clients across all project locations were supported into employment (8 in Illawarra and 17 in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie).

IMS secured employment for 7 clients (5 clients secured full-time employment and 2 clients gained part-time or casual work) in a variety of sectors including Aged Care, Banking, Construction, Education, Hospitality and Transport. In addition, 1 client enrolled in a fixed-term training position with a view to ongoing employment. The employers were: ANZ Bank, Austruss Steel Framing, Elenora Montessori School, Ernst & Young, MCCI, Novotel Hotel and Toll Driving Company.

In Newcastle and Lake Macquarie, of the 17 clients supported into employment, three were supported to get recognition of their overseas engineering qualifications and registration with Engineers Australia, the lack of which had been a significant barrier to employment. In addition, 15 clients secured job interviews and 12 clients attended 8 different types of training.

Some of the clients who entered the program stayed connected and some did not, but all were supported or referred to other agencies or networks. For example, 25 clients who engaged with Welcoming Workplaces at NSS were referred for small business support, while 22 clients who briefly interacted with Welcoming Workplaces were referred on to other employment agencies.

Pathways to meaningful employment were also created through training, placements and internships, which are critical steps on the road to gaining employment and improving an individual's skills, experience and chances of getting a job. At IMS, the project officer worked with clients to identify suitable training, to develop a career and training plan and arrange placements for clients who needed them to fulfil training requirements.

Through NSS, internships were offered to high school students at Callaghan Senior College, located in Jesmond. The College has a large cohort of CALD students. Through Welcoming Workplaces, we engaged with them to identify suitable career pathways and opportunities upon completion of the HSC. As a result of this engagement, we were able to achieve the following:

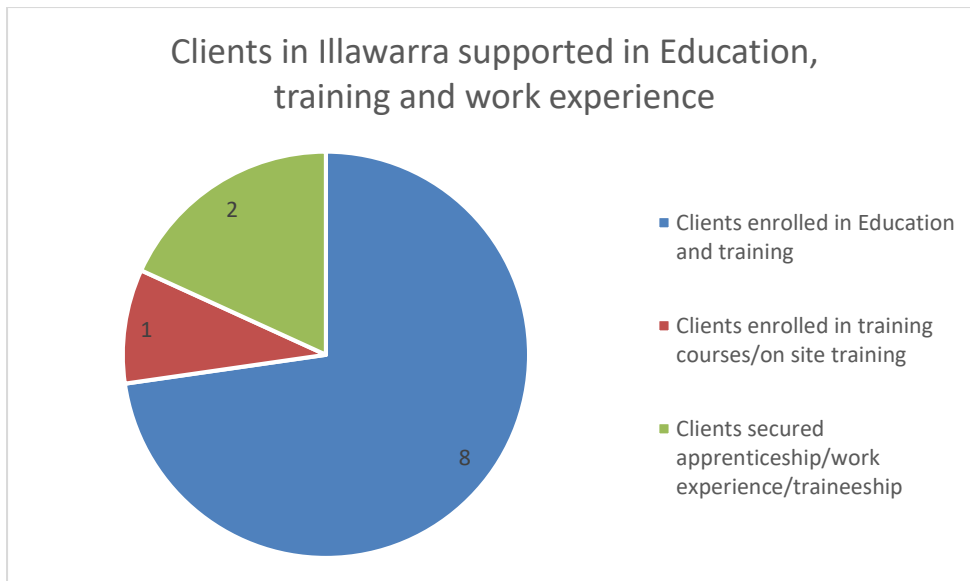
- Delivery of Certificate II in Retail for multicultural students following completion of their HSC
- Referral of CALD students to the Youth Industry Partnership program sponsored by Newcastle City Council, major employers and Career Links
- Support contacts at the University of Newcastle with school presentations and a visit planned to the campus in 2022
- Provision of up-to-date information on Open Foundation for CALD students, including a customised Academic Literacy course

The Head of Vocational Learning at the College said that NSS: *"has been instrumental in forming this network of support by quickly establishing professional relationships with teachers at our school and organising numerous Zoom meetings to provide information on future career pathways and opportunities and support for culturally and linguistically diverse students."*

In the Illawarra region, 10 clients secured apprenticeships or work experience, or were enrolled in education and training programs (including on-site training):

- 2 clients completed 100 hours placement at primary school as part of Certificate IV Teaching Assistant
- 1 client enrolled in Master of Education
- 1 client commenced CPA study
- 1 client obtained paid training at Australia Post
- 2 clients obtained NSW White Card
- 1 client enrolled and completed Diploma Beauty Therapy
- 1 client enrolled in Certificate IV Real Estate Practice
- 2 clients enrolled in the Certificate III in Retail, including 2 weeks placement

In addition, three clients in Wollongong and 1 client in Newcastle were enrolled in Brotherhood of St Laurence's flagship employment program, Given the Chance, through which a range of people including people from CALD background and people who are unemployed long-term, are assisted to find work. Our clients were assisted to apply for various positions at ANZ Bank.



Improved English Language Proficiency

Apart from the employment outcomes achieved, another key outcome was the increased English language proficiency that clients achieved through the delivery of a flexible English for Work program designed in consultation with Max Solutions.

In Illawarra, IMS worked with Max Solutions, an AMEP provider, to provide tailored and flexible English tuition through the “English for White Card” course. This course was designed to prepare clients with lower English proficiency to take the NSW White Card training. There was a total of 12 enrolments for the course but only 5 clients were able to proceed after assessment from Max Solutions (41.6%). Of these 5 clients, one client went on to receive the NSW White Card, while another successfully enrolled in the training. Clients were also able to access training, placement, and mentoring opportunities after completion of the course. The “English for White Card” course was delivered in a mixed mode of online and in-person classes in October 2021.

Similarly, the “English for the Workplace” course ran in July 2021 for our clients in the Hunter region. As a result of these local partnerships with AMEP, Welcoming Workplaces clients in both regions were able to improve their English language skills.

NSS has also been successful in securing funding from the City of Newcastle’s ‘New Skills’ program to fund bilingual support for delivery of courses in 2022. They are in negotiation with TAFE to deliver some of these courses, as TAFE can provide ESL support in addition to bilingual support. The short courses under negotiation pertain to the White Card, painting, hairdressing and food safety supervisions, among others.

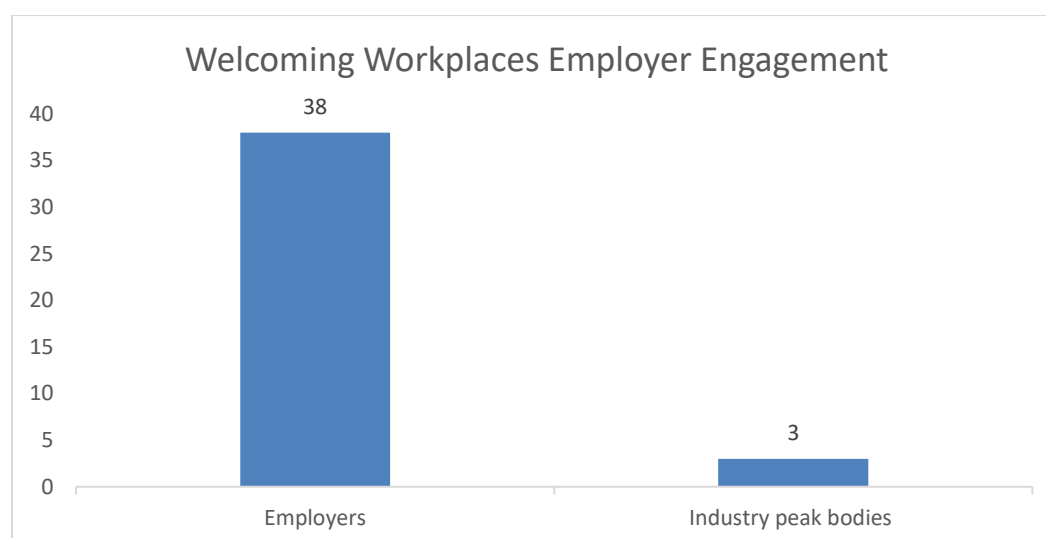
Employer Engagement, Relationship Building and Networking

Relationship building and expanding and strengthening existing networks with local employers and industry peak bodies in the Illawarra and Hunter regions were crucial components of this project. In Wollongong, IMS developed good working relationships with 24 employers in the Disability, Aged Care, Construction, Hospitality and Accommodation industries and had over 150 engagements with employers or other organisations in Education, Training, Industry, Community and Local Government

via Zoom and phone calls. Some of the key networking events attended by the IMS project officer were:

- IDO Illawarra Disability Expo
- Illawarra ITEC collaboration training and networking event
- NSW Minerals Council Dinner
- Port Kembla Chamber of Commerce AGM
- SRBBEC “Biggest Morning Tea for Cancer” event

In Newcastle and Lake Macquarie, 14 employers and 3 peak bodies from a variety of industries and sectors engaged with Welcoming Workplaces. These organisations were: Adam Humble Painters, APG Workforce, Australian Human Resources Institute, Australian Retail Association, Australia Post, Downer Industries, Engineers Australia, Hunter Water, Integrated Reliability Solutions, Lake Macquarie Council, Net Modular, NEXTEEL, NSS Aged Care, Modulate Containers, Protech Labour, Wests Group and Work Pac Labour.



Engineers Australia provided significant support for our cohort of engineers with overseas qualifications. Engineers Australia delivered two training sessions on working and looking for working in Australia. It also provided one-on-one support for five of our clients, reviewing their resumes and offering them free membership for one year. Three clients based in Newcastle were also assisted to have their qualifications recognised in Australia, which was the breakthrough they needed to align their employment opportunities with their chosen career path and put them on the road towards meaningful employment.

The relationships that were nurtured and maintained throughout the duration of the project laid the foundations for deeper, long-term engagement with employers and their networks. This will go a long way in helping to mitigate barriers to employment for newly arrived migrants in the Hunter and Illawarra regions. NSS, for example, has been able to establish two employment and business networks since the start of the project. The first, the Multicultural Small Business Collaboration Network, includes multicultural small business organisations in Sydney (Thrive Refugee Enterprises and Community Migrant Resource Centre’s Business Connect) as well as mainstream small businesses in Newcastle (Hunter Entrepreneurs, Many Rivers and The Business Centre). The Network met four

times and hosted workshops with The Neighbourhood Centre, the local AMEP provider and the local TAFE, all in the Newcastle area. NSS played a triage and referral role, referring 25 Welcoming Workplaces clients on to these organisations. All of the clients received varying levels of support with their business enquiries and endeavours.

NSS also established the Welcoming Workplaces Network, for which an initial meeting was held in January 2022 with representation from 12 of the 14 employers and businesses mentioned above. Each one showed a commitment to resolving common barriers to employment and making adjustments for clients where possible. It is hoped that the network will continue to meet regularly to share resources and programs so that migrants and people from CALD backgrounds can take advantage of employment and training opportunities.

In addition to the above, NSS also has a good relationship with the Hunter Multicultural Youth Workers Network, through which it was able to connect 5 local employers with youth-focused programs to tap into the network and discuss how clients could access the support offered. Options for a series of events to introduce multicultural youth to these organisations, with a particular focus on students and school-leavers, is also being explored.

Through the relationship building element, local employers got to know about the talent that exists and showed interest in hiring many of our clients. In fact, NSS has been contacted by three more employers looking to hire CALD clients in the Hunter region and is currently exploring those opportunities.

5. Lessons Learnt

Overall, Welcoming Workplaces worked quite well as an example of the nexus between settlement services and employment support. The partnership arrangements and relationship building between the settlement providers and employers, business networks and AMEP were key successes of the project, which could not have happened without pre-existing relationships at the grassroots level locally.

Another very successful element of the project was the provision of cultural responsiveness training delivered to project staff and expertise in recognition of qualifications provided by Settlement Services International. This training occurred in July 2021 while local partners were networking with employers on the ground. It proved extremely helpful in addressing issues in real time and the concepts shared were well received by employers.

In addition, we found that clients responded favourably to the ongoing support provided by Welcoming Workplaces project officers. They reported high levels of satisfaction, improved confidence and self-esteem, while the continuity of service provision for existing settlement clients who were referred to the program seemed to be a relief for them, as it meant they did not have to be referred to an external service where they could not get as much personal, one-on-one support.

On the other hand, there were several challenges encountered, such as limited project duration and operational hurdles posed by COVID-19 restrictions, as well as systemic issues which prevented some of our clients from being able to access employment and training opportunities.

Below are the key takeaways and lessons learnt:

1. The establishment of local employment networks can go a long way in mitigating barriers to employment that many migrants face. In the Hunter region, the networks that were established for the purposes of this project worked at level of cultural and organisational change and could, if sustained, lead to a more welcoming and accessible job market for migrants and other people from CALD backgrounds in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie. The breadth of services offered by this group has potential to offer a suite of services to wrap around diverse clients at different stages of employment. It also caters for a broad range of career pathways and interests such as engineering, administration, retail, hospitality, painting and trade workers, as well as small business support.

2. Volunteer mentors facilitate learning by sharing their broad skills and knowledge and help achieve project outcomes. At NSS, eight people were trained as volunteer employment mentors to offer clients advice and support with writing cover letters and practicing interviews. One mentor was also instrumental in helping our clients to apply for registration with Engineers Australia.

3. Welcoming Workplaces Project Officers served as a bridge not only between clients and employers, but also between employers themselves. While raising awareness among the SETS cohort about how to access employment services and support, project officers increased many local employers' and agencies' understanding of – and responsiveness to – migrants looking for work. In the Hunter region, the project officer had time to invest in these relationships, which many generalist support workers do not. For example, one Welcoming Workplaces client said:

"I think employment support should be an essential part of [...] settlement support. There is no mainstream organisation in Newcastle who deals with employment support and connections for migrants. Recruitment agencies can carry a bias against people with an accent or foreign name, we need to balance this with agencies like NSS in employment support for migrants. This is a fundamental service because migrants don't have the connections in a new country, regardless of their qualifications. Migrant and refugee employment mentoring and support bridges the gap. It works when these links are provided."

4. One major constraint during Welcoming Workplaces was lack of time. The 12-month duration of the project was quite limiting and, in many cases, not ideal for securing clients' meaningful, long-term employment. Although we achieved good outcomes for a number of Welcoming Workplaces clients, with more time and investment of resources to support the SETS migrant cohort, there is potential for even better employment outcomes to be realised.

5. Low levels of English language proficiency among the SETS migrant cohort presented a significant barrier to their ability to access and benefit from employment and training opportunities. Clients want to work as well as learn English, either by attending classes or learning on the job. However, flexible English classes, such as night or weekend classes, were not available in the Hunter region. While there was a willingness by the AMEP provider to explore evening AMEP classes early on in the project, COVID-19 restrictions stopped any from going ahead. In addition, many of the courses on offer by RTOs and AMEP providers require a level of competency in English that some people in the SETS target group do not have. For example, some of the clients from Newcastle were precluded from taking the English for White Card course offered by Max Solutions because their level of English was not high enough to meaningfully participate in the course.

6. The level of engagement and commitment from local employers and employment networks was extremely heartening. Employers showed a genuine desire to support our clients into work, but nevertheless faced challenges in doing so. Lake Macquarie Council, for example, made strong efforts to identify different ways to help our clients – but there was a perception that supporting some applicants or prioritising their applications above others amounted to unequal treatment, especially in a merit-based system. As settlement providers we know this is not the case and that, in reality, reasonable adjustments and considerations during the recruitment process can help level the playing field for a variety of candidates, including those from non-English speaking backgrounds.

7. The process of qualifications recognition and recognition of prior learning is arduous and under-resourced. This can result in people with experience and knowledge working in jobs for which they are overqualified. For instance, one of our clients has vast experience and postgraduate qualifications as an engineer and is working in a processing factory. It also has a detrimental mental health and financial impact. Some migrants leave the regions to look for work elsewhere, which has ripple effects on their families, schooling and relationships.

8. Interruptions and delays in project activities proved to be a unique challenge during the duration of Welcoming Workplaces, particularly as it was gaining momentum by the second half the year, just as restrictions came into place between July and September 2021. These interruptions meant that work placements could not happen and that training, information sessions and various meetings had to be moved online, which made it difficult for some of the clients to participate and gain the full benefits of local experience. The experience gained from a physical work placement is hard to replicate. In addition, many of the clients did not have the equipment to participate in online classes, while others struggle with remote and online learning. For example, in Newcastle, the Australian Retail Association was gearing up to deliver classes for Certificate II in Retail, for which many of our clients expressed interest in a face-to-face option rather than doing it online.

9. Clients could have benefited from a workplace buddy system, but this component of the project did not come to fruition. Most employers preferred to assign someone to informally assist the client, as this was already their practice. Often the managers volunteered to act as buddies themselves, but the prospect of this was rather daunting for clients, who expressed reluctance to go to a manager with day-to-day questions in the workplace. While we had good relationships in place with the local employers, as settlement providers we could not convince them to introduce new layers of accountability and reporting within their organisations. In addition, Welcoming Workplaces clients received ongoing one-to-one support from project officers, which allowed issues to be identified and dealt with early.

6. Recommendations

1. Continue funding Welcoming Workplaces or expand it into a wider, fully resourced program to sustain its positive outcomes and strengthen the engagement with employers.

Establishing good working relationships with employers and organisations requires time to build trust and problem solve in order to overcome the barriers facing the target group. Although we have successfully established networks during the course of the project, we cannot continue to support them without funding or a dedicated, ongoing position to coordinate them. The first year of a project involves building the foundations for long term success, as well as striving for short-term outcomes,

but without continuity of the project or a broader Welcoming Workplaces program, the relationships we have established and the capacity to build on to the positive outcomes we have achieved are at risk of being lost.

2. Extend client eligibility beyond migrants who have been in Australia for five years.

As settlement workers and particularly as SETS providers, we recognise that settlement is not a straightforward, linear process and that even after five years, many migrants and refugees still need support. Five years is often not enough time for this cohort to gain secure, sustainable and meaningful employment in addition to English language proficiency. Thus, extending the eligibility criteria could also potentially allow clients who possess the English language skills required to participate in training and employment opportunities to benefit from the project.

3. Responsiveness to local needs and greater definition of roles and responsibilities

Local organisations must be allowed the flexibility to respond to local needs so that programs can garner better outcomes. For example, many of the settlement and CALD clients in the Illawarra have low English language proficiency. Some are dealing with trauma and health issues as well, which adds layers of complexity to the job search. When clients are not highly skilled and/or have low English language proficiency, foundation work must be considered within the work plan for any employment program. Similarly, in a program where there are multiple agencies and project partners, the roles and responsibilities need to be clearly defined in the agreement to facilitate the partnership arrangements that are essential components of the project (in this case, with the AMEP provider).

4. Work with employers to develop more equal opportunities for people from CALD backgrounds, particularly refugees.

While many employers demonstrated and expressed an interest in hiring people from CALD backgrounds, there was limited understanding about how to create conducive conditions. Building employers' understanding and perceptions around equal opportunity employment practices, including in the recruitment process, is an area that could benefit from more support and resourcing. Such practices include providing interview questions in advance, allowing an interpreter to be present at the interview, and allowing candidates with less fluency in English to have more time to answer and clarify questions. Legislative and cultural changes that allow employers to make adjustments specific to candidates from CALD backgrounds would also help in making the job market more accessible.

5. Include training on the Australian workplace and employment mentoring and support in settlement services and programs.

Given the importance of employment within the settlement framework, settlement workers should be resourced and trained to offer in-depth workshops and information sessions about Australian work culture, workplaces, and expectations. These could be presented in multiple modalities over multiple timeframes. In addition, Culturally Responsive Practice training should continue to be offered to employers.

Simultaneously, for settlement providers to support clients in a holistic way wherein they achieve good settlement and employment outcomes, financial resilience and independence, a dedicated

coordinator role needs to be funded along with incentives for employers and trainers so that they can offer work experience, traineeships, apprenticeships, internships, and bilingual supported training classes.

Finally, for this project, an employment expert from SSI's RESP team was able to support the local partners remotely, but could not visit the project areas to interact with clients and project staff in person due to the travel restrictions in NSW. Nevertheless, the support provided through this role was very valuable. Having a dedicated resource person or employment expert with settlement organisations, who can provide advice on recognition of qualifications and prior learning, and who can process relevant documents, would support providers in matching clients with jobs that meet their level of experience and qualifications.