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## SUBMISSION TO THE MINISTER FOR CITIZENSHIP AND MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE REVIEW OF SETTLEMENT SERVICES FOR MIGRANTS AND HUMANITARIAN PROGRAM ENTRANTS

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#### Appendix 1:

#### List Of Agencies that Participated In RCOA's Consultations

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) is the peak agency for refugee and asylum seeker issues. It currently has over 180 members whose work and interests reflect the full spectrum of refugee assistance within Australia and internationally. The aim of the Council is to promote the adoption of flexible, humane and constructive policies towards refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons by the Australian and other Governments and their communities.

The Refugee Council welcomes the opportunity to have input into the current review of settlement services for migrants and humanitarian program entrants<sup>1</sup>. It is the Council's view that while refugee settlement services in Australia are undeniably some of the best (and, in many areas, the best) of their kind in the world, there are still many areas in which improvements can be made.

The Refugee Council notes that through the review, advice is being sought about how to achieve:

- improved integration between settlement and mainstream services;
- stronger partnerships among and between service providers and the government;
- innovative and flexible funding models;
- clearly articulated principles for future delivery of settlement services; and
- an enhanced performance and accountability framework for the delivery of funded outcomes.

While in full support of these objectives, RCOA is concerned that flaws in the review process will not enable them to be fully achieved. Reference is made in particular to:

- the lack of additional resources given to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) to undertake the review;
- the unrealistically short review period; and
- the timing of Ministerial consultations in the major settlement cities.<sup>2</sup>

Further, the Council believes it is relevant to convey views expressed in the community sector that:

- the unresolved tensions between DIMIA and the community sector that have resulted from the implementation of the IHSS could compromise the review. The competitive tender process and the "teething problems" that have been part of the introduction of IHSS have negatively affected the level of trust within the community sector and between the community sector and DIMIA. Many agencies have looked at the review with suspicion, fearing that the possible outcome will be cuts to services and/or expansion of least-favoured funding models. This will inevitably affect the way agencies respond to the review;

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to recognise that Council's comments throughout this submission will relate specifically to settlement services for refugee and humanitarian entrants as migrant services are outside the Council's mandate.

<sup>2</sup> The fact that the Consultations in both Sydney and Melbourne are so close to the due date for submissions.

- there is a possibility, because the evaluation of IHSS and the review of settlement services are being conducted separately (albeit in a similar time frame), there will be insufficient consideration of the fact that IHSS services and DIMIA's other settlement programs for humanitarian entrants (MRCs, MSAs and CSSS workers) have to link together seamlessly if the objectives of both are to be met;
- the exclusion of temporary protection visa (TPV) holders from the review is inappropriate. Not only is there widespread concern about the implications of restricting access to services that have long been recognised as being essential if a refugee is to become a productive member of the community, but there is also a recognition by DIMIA-funded service providers that when TPV holders eventually become eligible for services (as they inevitably will), their needs will be so significant and complex that services will be struggling to meet their needs. Similar concerns have also been raised about asylum seekers who have even more restricted access to funded services;
- the review process is culturally biased. The process of asking people to reflect on a written discussion paper is appropriate in the dominant western culture in this country but is not necessarily so within many refugee communities, especially the new and emerging communities from Africa. The short time frame of the review did not allow either DIMIA or peak agencies such as the Council to work with communities to explain the review and to train them in the skills they would enable them to make a meaningful contribution;
- the review process, as outlined, does not allow for proper consideration of the opinions of the beneficiaries of settlement services. It is all very well to have a highly cost-effective, efficiently managed and fully integrated program, but if it is not meeting its clients' needs, it is useless. Socio-economic data only goes so far as to indicating whether refugees and humanitarian entrants are "settling"<sup>3</sup> well. If the issues that are most important to the people themselves are not addressed, success cannot be claimed. Section 5 of this report will explore in more detail issues surrounding involving entrants in the evaluation process.

RCOA considers that it is important that those undertaking this review note the reservations about the review process and look to find ways to minimise their impact on what we hope will be a constructive process leading to positive and tangible outcomes, not least for the refugees themselves.

As part of our contribution to the review process, the Refugee Council has prepared a submission that:

- begins by outlining the Council's views about what refugee settlement is and what are the fundamental components of good settlement service delivery. This is considered important to provide a context for the comments that follow;
- examines each of the thematic areas identified by DIMIA in the discussion papers;
- suggests a number of other areas that have not been mentioned but which are considered essential in this process; and
- incorporates a number of recommendations about enhancing settlement services.

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<sup>3</sup> See section 2.1.

## 2. SETTLEMENT

### 2.1. What is Settlement?

Settlement – the context of humanitarian entrants - is a rather amorphous term that everyone uses but for which a simple definition is elusive. The Oxford Dictionary defines “settle” as meaning, *inter alia*, “to establish or become established in an abode or place or way of life”. But when you add the displacement that characterizes the refugee experience, the term “settlement” takes on whole new dimensions.

In undertaking research into refugee settlement in 2001, the Refugee Council asked workers in this field to define the term. According to the workers, “settlement” is:

*“the point of balance where connection to the old country still exists but the refugee is able to function at the same level as a national in the community;”*

*“about refugees having the confidence and the knowledge to make the system work for them;”*

*“underpinned by access and participation;”*

*“when people have a real sense of themselves ... being able to link where they are with where they have been;”*

*“about putting your roots into new soil;”*

*“when people feel comfortable about participating in whatever community they want to;”*

*“the end of turmoil - rehabilitation and recuperation;”*

*“about being able to ‘walk in and out’ (or ‘dream in and out’) of their own culture and the new culture;”*

*“the point at which you are ready to be buried in your new home;”*

*“when people cease to answer to the title of refugee and have another name for themselves”.<sup>4</sup>*

One thing about which there appears to be very little doubt is that the emphasis has to be on **empowering** the refugees and ensuring they become **self-reliant**. There is a strong view that the welfare “missionary” model is a thing of the past and that there needs to be a model that builds on continuous settlement achievements for the refugee(s) through the promotion of independence.

As will be apparent from the above quotes, however, uncertainty remains about whether “settlement” is a point that can be reached or a process that will continue throughout the person’s life (or as one worker put it, a “staircase of events”). It is debatable, however, whether this is an issue that needs resolution. Many refugees might feel “settled” at one

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<sup>4</sup> These are direct quotes from focus groups conducted by RCOA in the context of the 2001 project.

point but then have something happen to them that reopens doors to their past experiences.

The issue of how settlement is measured, be this in the context of initial settlement or longer-term settlement, is another area where there is appears to be no consensus. Many in the community sector believe that the way they measure settlement is very different to the way the government looks at it. While it is typical in the community sector to view settlement as an ongoing dynamic process, there is an increasing tendency for government agencies to seek tangible markers such as “has received four weeks of ...” or “has entered the workforce”. Such economic rationalism sits uncomfortably with many in the community sector. Community representatives argue that that “settlement” should not be defined according to whether the refugee has ceased costing more than another resident.<sup>5</sup>

Amongst the community sector there is a strongly held view that there is no such thing as a “Settlement Plan”. All refugees have the same set of practical needs (health, housing, employment etc) but there is no defined hierarchy. Each refugee will have his/her own set of priorities that will determine the relative importance of one thing over the others. Further, for any one refugee, the relative importance of the various needs is likely to change over time. It is therefore important that refugees be involved in determining their settlement path rather than having a predetermined plan imposed on them.

Recognition must also be made of the fact that all refugees have both practical and emotional needs. The practical needs are much more tangible and thus are easier for service providers to focus on. The emotional needs are much harder to quantify but there is agreement that the sensitivity, timeliness and thoroughness of the support offered to meet practical needs will, to a large extent, determine the extent to which the emotional needs are met. The following table sets out the practical and emotional needs of refugees as identified by the refugees themselves and workers.

Practical Needs	Emotional Needs
Pre-embarkation Preparation Initial Information and Orientation Accommodation Material Assistance Language Education Income Support Employment Health Care Torture-Trauma Counselling Legal Assistance Community Development Religious Expression Leisure Becoming Part of the Community Support for Special Needs Groups	Safety Trust Control Over the Environment Ability to Plan for the Future Restoration of Sense of Dignity Regaining a Sense of Self Worth Sense of Belonging

<sup>5</sup> For further discussion on the issue of settlement refer to “No Turning Back” by Maria Dimopolous, the ANU Settlement Indices and the DIMIA Longitudinal Study commenced in 1996.

The review of settlement services should ensure that it does not interpret “settlement” too narrowly (eg accommodation, income support, language skills) and that there is scope to consider the emotional as well as practical needs of entrants.

## 2.2. Stages of Settlement <sup>6</sup>

Irrespective of whether settlement is viewed as a life-long process or a desired end point, there is agreement that there are many stages through which refugees go, and that the progression is not linear.

### **STAGE 1:** **FIRST ARRIVAL**

On the physical level - this involves learning about the new place. On the psychological level - it is about adjusting emotionally to the new environment.

It is a stage of mixed emotions: fear, relief, excitement, uncertainty ... and of many pressing demands - finding a house, job etc and adjusting to everything that is new (food, climate, culture ...)

*“It’s like trying to walk again only you are a lot heavier”  
Refugee Woman*



### **STAGE 2:** **THE HONEYMOON STAGE**

This is the period where things start to gel but the real issues have not yet been faced. Typically it is a time of euphoria - “I’m finally here, I’m safe, isn’t this great”. The Honeymoon Stage tends not to last long as reality soon begins to bite.



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<sup>6</sup> From RCOA Report: Refugee Settlement in Australia 2001.

**STAGE 3:**  
**THE CRASH**

This comes when the realisation sinks in that it will be hard to get a job/house etc and to learn the language, and when it becomes apparent that their notions of life in Australia are not like the reality.

Often depression sets in - which can last for some time. Many are unprepared for these feelings and this in turn can lead to further problems. Typical of this stage are the following:

- questioning the decision to come;
- feeling an outsider - not accepted by or able to contribute to society;
- mourning that which has been lost;
- intergenerational conflict and tension between spouses.

Early identification of this occurring and support for the refugee when it does is very important. The refugee needs to be given "permission to feel lousy". Refugees need help to be able to work through their mixed emotions and to know that it is normal that they will feel depressed and confused and have doubts and that things will change. Many workers use a "U- Curve" model to explain to refugees that while they feel bad now, they will move on and begin to feel better.



**STAGE 4**  
**for which there are two possible scenarios:**

**Scenario 1:  
PARTICIPATION**

Realising goals:  
- getting employment  
- finding accommodation etc

Having a sense of being able to contribute to society.

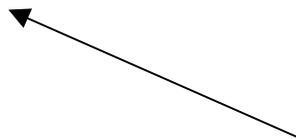
Being able to see the way ahead  
Being accepted by "the dominant culture"

**Scenario 2:  
BEING PARKED**

Not achieving goals.  
Being seen as difficult case.  
Having service providers stopping looking for solutions.  
Sinking deeper into depression.



The challenge is to help refugees in this situation set realistic and achievable goals and assist them work towards them ie helping them through the process of "destination mapping" and supporting them to move into the stage of "Participation".



There is no set time frame for people to move through these stages, and like the well recognised “Stages of Grieving”, it is not predestined that an individual will progress through all of the stages or how long it will take before s/he progresses to the next stage.

One of the challenging realities of humanitarian settlement is that within one family, individuals will move through the stages at different rates. There are many common scenarios where differential rates of settlement lead to tensions within the home, for example:

- where the younger members adapt more quickly than their parents, particularly if one or more parent is still grieving for that which has been lost;
- where the wife gets a job (ie is participating) and the husband remains unemployed (ie is parked), particularly where there is a strong cultural imperative for the man to be providing for his family;
- where a grandparent is isolated and has no community support and the younger generations are too busy with jobs/school to give the care and attention s/he expects.

These issues are exacerbated in many instances by cultural differences (some cultures have a strong community focus whereas contemporary Australian culture is very much focused on the individual) and by the absence of extended families (in which the various members have clearly defined roles).

The progression is also influenced by the level of attachment to the country of origin. Research<sup>7</sup> has found that the experiences prior to departure, and the refugee’s involvement in the decision about flight have a significant impact on the level of attachment the refugee has to his/her country of origin and to the country of resettlement.

A refugee’s attachment to the resettlement country is in turn determined by many factors including:

- the extent to which the refugee is made to feel welcome after arrival;
- the degree to which their needs have been met;
- the level of understanding of the new country’s history, culture and social and legal institutions;
- the extent to which the refugee feels that his/her own culture and traditions are respected;
- the level of appreciation of his/her rights, privileges and responsibilities as a member of the new community;

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<sup>7</sup> Barnes, Diane. *Where does the Heart Belong? An exploration of how refugees relate to Australia and their country of origin.* Paper presented at the *National Conference on Reconciliation, Multiculturalism, Immigration and Human Rights*, University of Technology, Sydney, 1-2 December 2000.

- the extent to which his/her aspirations (with regard to self, spouse or children) are realised; and
- the degree to which the refugee is able to focus on the future rather than the past.

It is also important to recognise that for refugees the concept of “identity” is very significant and that refugees must be allowed to define their own identity eg:

- do they want to be known as a refugee?
- how do they describe their place of origin?
- at what point do they identify with their new country?

Furthermore, while service providers typically admire refugees and see them as people of great personal strength and courage, for some refugees, their “refugeeness” is a sense of personal failure, representing the fact that they had to flee to let others carry on the struggle or that they survived while others did not.

### **2.3. Settlement Services**

In the context of the development of its 2001 report, “Refugee Settlement In Australia”, the Refugee Council asked service providers to identify what were the key elements of good settlement services for refugees. As can be seen below, a variety of answers were proffered:

- *offering help to enable refugees to reconstruct their lives;*
- *intervening early on in the settlement process to prevent endemic problems developing;*
- *making the refugees feel that they are welcome in this country and have a place here;*
- *helping refugees regain their self reliance and independence;*
- *helping refugees to discover and draw on their strengths;*
- *listening to the refugees and responding to their articulated needs;*
- *being sufficiently flexible to respond to a variety of needs rather than using a “one size fits all” model;*
- *ensuring that their staff understand the cultures of clients and programs are culturally relevant to each client group;*
- *recognising both the similarities and differences between and within various refugee groups;*
- *factoring in the various emotional needs of the clients: torture/trauma, grief, culture shock ...;*
- *ensuring that the refugees are clear about what the service can offer;*
- *ensuring that services are provided equally and responsively to all in need, not just those who are the most assertive;*
- *ensuring that appropriate referrals are made to other service providers;*
- *ensuring that refugees develop their own informal networks as well as linking them into service providers;*
- *ensuring that there is a link between service providers and policy makers so that the policy can reflect reality;*
- *building community ties and facilitating community-based support networks;*
- *encouraging more settled refugees to be involved in assisting newly arrived refugees.*

From these, it is possible to get a clear indication about what those working in the industry consider to be best practice for service providers.

Further clarification of this issue can be derived from the following list of “don’ts” for service providers:

- *don’t romanticise the settlement of refugees (or the refugees);*
- *don’t patronise;*
- *don’t let workers forget the importance of remaining objective and not getting too involved with their clients;*
- *don’t fall into the trap of doing everything for the clients because it is easier - the aim is about facilitating and empowerment;*
- *don’t pathologise refugees - this can lead to overcompensation and over-support - important to recognise the refugees’ resilience and strength;<sup>8</sup>*
- *don’t make assumptions eg “because they are Muslim they will ...”;*
- *don’t assume that because a program worked in one place it will work in another - program must respond to the specifics of the entrant group and the place;*
- *don’t forget to listen to the clients;*
- *don’t think you can do the job without interpreters;*
- *don’t forget the importance of understanding the power structures within society;*
- *don’t ignore community attitudes - especially if they are negative.*

Factors considered as crucial in the delivery of settlement services to refugees include:

- federal government **funding** for settlement services;<sup>9</sup>
- recognition by **all relevant government agencies** that refugees are part of their constituencies;
- the formation of a **cohesive matrix by services**, with clear referral paths and communication channels;
- general acceptance of the principles of **partnership** and **cooperation** in settlement service delivery;
- **early intervention** - ensuring that refugees are linked into appropriate services from the outset;
- **case management** - good case management<sup>10</sup> can ensure that entrants are properly linked. Further, the case manager can monitor the services provided to the client to

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<sup>8</sup> Note that Service Providers are faced with something of a dilemma here. On the one hand they are aware of the need to foster the strengths of many of their clients, on the other, they are required to argue the vulnerability of their clients in order to get sufficient funding for the service.

<sup>9</sup> While this is recognised, there is concern that service delivery becomes politicised - ie dependent on commitment of whatever government is in power at the time. When a government decides to be less generous - or decides to exclude a particular group of refugees (as with the current Temporary Protection Visa policy) - states are forced into the position of having to come in with a band-aid, non-systemic approach.

<sup>10</sup> It is estimated that it takes at least 40 hours intensive work with each client in the immediate post arrival period to ensure that their needs are met.

ensure that he/she is receiving appropriate support. Case management also means that the refugee will be able to build up a relationship with one key person - someone with whom he/she can develop a sense of trust and who relates to them as a person (doing the “little things that can make a difference” such as inquiring how their children are etc);

- **support for workers:** while last on the list it is definitely not the least important. Working face to face with refugees can be very stressful and workers need support and systematic debriefing to prevent them from burning out. It is essential that management committees both recognise this and provide opportunities for staff to receive debriefing during their working hours.

Another point stressed by workers is the importance that services do not simply reflect the methodology of the dominant culture. It is argued that they need to be able to provide culturally appropriate service models - eg provide times for a “drop-in” service rather than requiring all clients to come at a pre-arranged time (which is a foreign concept to many cultures but it can create havoc to services who work on an “appointments only” basis).

Many of the services identified as being exemplary go to great efforts to make people from different backgrounds feel comfortable as soon as they walk in the door. This will include having welcome signs in the community languages, having translations of all information material, having a comfortable place to sit and wait (with toys to occupy the children) and having staff who are culturally sensitive and can greet the clients in a culturally appropriate manner.

Before closing this section it is relevant to reiterate the strongly held view that there should not be a defined cut-off point for access to “refugee services”. While refugees will progressively move towards using mainstream services, there could well be a point some time later where the specialist services are more appropriate eg if there is a crisis<sup>11</sup> or as the refugee enters old age.

## **2.4. Generalist versus Ethno-Specific Services**

Within the DIMIA-funded service delivery sector, there are two broad categories – generalist programs and ethno-specific programs. There is widespread recognition of the importance of both models, as some refugees feel more comfortable being assisted by someone from their own background, others want nothing to do with their former compatriots or with groups within their own community.

Generalist agencies have some very important features including:

- they tend to have better links to other service providers;
- larger services tend to be better resourced and offer more opportunities for staff training and support;
- their workers are not caught up (as much) in community politics and pressures.

On the other hand, ethno-specific agencies offer:

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<sup>11</sup> Refugee support services can also play an important role advocating for former refugees who are having difficulties with mainstream services.

- workers from the same background who speak the language and can empathise with experiences (the notion of getting help from “within” is very important in some cultures);
- opportunities to link up with others newly arrived refugees who are confronting similar challenges thereby breaking down the sense of isolation and that they are the only ones who are in this situation;
- a chance to become part of a community and to participate in a range of community activities.

## 2.5. Advocacy

While a large part of the work of service providers is client support and casework, there is a strongly held view that advocacy is a legitimate and important part of the role of a refugee worker. This can take the form of advocacy on behalf of their clients and/or in defence of principles. It is noted, however, that there is considerable unease at present on the part of the government about funded service providers engaging in advocacy and this has resulted in an enforced split between service delivery and advocacy.

## 3. ACCESS AND EQUITY

### 3.1. The Evolution of Access and Equity Policy

Prior to the 1970s, Australian policy with respect to refugees and migrants was dominated by the White Australia Policy and underpinned by a philosophy of assimilationism. Both domestic and international pressures led to major philosophical changes during the 1970s which were reflected in the ***Galbally Committee of Inquiry into Post Arrival Programs and Services for Migrants*** which was undertaken in 1977 and in the subsequent report of this inquiry, ***The Galbally Report***. This report recommended four guiding principles for programs and services for refugees and migrants:

- i. *all members of society must have equal opportunity to realise their full potential and must have equal access to programs and services;*
- ii. *every person shall be able to maintain his or her culture without prejudice or disadvantage and should be encouraged to understand and embrace other cultures;*
- iii. *needs of migrants<sup>12</sup> should, in general, be met by programs and services available to the whole community but special services and programs are necessary at present to ensure equity of access and provision; and*

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<sup>12</sup> Where the term “migrant” is used in this case, it also covers people from refugee background.

- iv. *services and programs should be designed and operated in full consultation with clients, and self help should be encouraged as much as possible with a view to helping migrants to become self-reliant quickly.*<sup>13</sup>

The Galbally Report established a policy context for the provision of services to migrants and refugees. Subsequent inquiries have largely affirmed Galbally's recommendations, refining them further with the conclusion that settlement services should be confined to the specific settlement needs of refugees and migrants, while general needs should be met by mainstream services supporting new entrants through the deliberate introduction of access and equity measures.

Out of recognition that equitable participation in society cannot be achieved by goodwill alone, the Australian Government then launched the **Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society** in 1998. The Charter requires that all Government agencies take into consideration the needs of people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in the planning and delivery of their services. It is based on the principle of ensuring that all people have equal access to services and can expect equal outcomes from them, irrespective of their background. Ways to achieve this include, for example, ensuring that client information is translated into different languages, interpreters or bilingual staff are provided to communicate with clients if required, and that staff receive cross-cultural training. The Charter applies not only to the mainstream Government agencies themselves but also to any community agencies or private sector organisations they fund.

### 3.2. Current Challenges in Implementing Access and Equity Policy

Despite having been adopted in principle almost 25 years ago, and enshrined in policy for the last 4 years, the concept of Access and Equity is still far from being reflected in the operations of all relevant government agencies. If they were, we would see:

- an unchallenged acceptance that Australia is a country made up of people from diverse backgrounds, cultures and language groups;
- every government and government-funded service delivery agency actively tailoring its policies and programs to ensure that the specific needs of the various groups within the community are met;
- recognition that the costs associated with meeting the needs of a diverse client base have to be factored into the development of the agency's program budget.

While recognition of these principles is creeping into some sectors, there is still widespread adherence to:

- the perception that the responsibility for all people born outside Australia, especially for those whose first language is not English, rests with the Department of Immigration *ad infinitum*;
- the view amongst workers in mainstream agencies that if a person from a non-English speaking background presents with a problem, all they have to do is refer that person

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<sup>13</sup> Galbally Report. 1978. P4.

to the relevant ethno-specific organisation (usually to a CSSS worker) who will then take full responsibility for resolving the problem;

- the belief that the Department of Immigration is responsible for bearing the costs of all services to people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

The challenge facing the sector today is how to move from the actual to the ideal.

Given the centrality of DIMIA's role in administering the migration program, it falls appropriately to the responsible Ministers and to DIMIA to take the lead in bringing about the necessary changes in the minds of policy makers and those who hold the purse strings.

First and foremost there is the role of the two Ministers, the Minister for Immigration and, more particularly, the Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs. They are uniquely placed to mount an argument to their Ministerial colleagues that each of the relevant departments have a duty to respond to the diverse needs of their client base<sup>14</sup> and to Treasury that such services must be funded. This can be done through formal Government processes and also through bilateral dialogue.

The duty also falls to senior departmental officers within DIMIA to make this point to their counterparts from other departments at every appropriate opportunity. The logical place for this is in the context of the interdepartmental consultative process but there are many opportunities for formal and informal dialogue between departments (at both federal and state levels) that should not be overlooked.

If there is an institutional commitment, from the Ministerial level down, to encouraging mainstream agencies to take more responsibility, there will also be flow on to all other levels within the Department where there are consultations between agencies.

Implicit within this, however, is the notion that there is a clear understanding of exactly where DIMIA's responsibility lies and where it does not. It is suggested that at the current time, the margins of this definition are very blurred and the absence of clarity will make negotiations that much harder.

Then one comes to the question of whether the approach taken to bring about change should be "carrot or stick". The Council is wary about compulsion as it has seen too many instances where this has resulted in half-hearted compliance with no institutional commitment. The challenge is to change agency culture and the impetus for this really has to come from the top.

Finally, there needs to be recognition that government agencies alone cannot provide everything that the entrants need. Strategic alliances have to be formed with other sectors and that DIMIA should see itself as playing a catalytic role in forming these alliances.

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<sup>14</sup> Such a response needs to be at various levels, with the specific nature of these depending on the function and structure of the department. In general terms they should, however, include both intra-organisational responses (supported by a specialist unit within the department whose responsibility it is to promote mainstreaming and provide training. An example of such a unit is the NSW Refugee Health Unit) and through the funding of the community sector (so, for example, funding for ethno-specific aged care programs could come from the Department of Aged Care rather than from DIMIA).

### 3.3. Sectoral Examples

Two of the most important settlement objectives for humanitarian entrants are employment and accommodation. These will be used to provide concrete examples of the some of the issues discussed above.

In both instances the Council has approached the issue from the perspective of the needs of the entrants. Section 2 of this report stressed that service planning has to ensure that in meeting the practical needs of the entrant, the emotional needs are also met. With this as a prerequisite, consideration needs to be given as to which agency is best placed to meet the need and how can their involvement be facilitated and supported by DIMIA.

#### i. Employment

For many refugees, getting a job is seen as being the most important goal after arrival because:

- they want to feel that they are making a contribution;
- employment gives them status/self worth;
- they need the income to support family members overseas;
- they feel compelled to fulfil the expectations of those left behind.

But for many entrants, finding meaningful employment will also be one of the hardest challenges he or she will face.

It is suggested that there is a valuable role that DIMIA can play if it sees its role as facilitator. The first step in doing this is to acknowledge the barriers faced by humanitarian entrants in getting employment. These include:

- language proficiency (as will be discussed in Section 7 this is relevant for those from English speaking backgrounds as well as those from non-English speaking backgrounds);
- lack of recognition of qualifications;
- lack of local work experience;
- lack of understanding about the Australian workplace environment;
- the absence of a network or contacts (not being able to call on the “old boys/girls network”);
- difficulties gaining access to affordable child care;
- discrimination from employers, often because the employers do not understand who the refugees are and why they have come to this country.

Having done this, the next step is to engage the various agencies and groups that have the capacity to play a constructive role in breaking down these barriers, including but not limited to:

- the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations;
- Centrelink;
- professional associations;
- large public sector employers;
- unions;

- training institutions;
- AMEP providers
- (peak) child care agencies;
- service clubs;
- chambers of commerce;
- targeted media (for running “success stories”).

Next comes the issue of how to engage these players? One suggestion, known from experience to have merit, is to bring sectoral representatives together (be it at a state or regional level) into a Task Force whose role is to come up with innovative models to facilitate entry of refugees into the workforce. There are many examples that could be used to promote thinking, including:

- the now defunct Jobskills program that funded specific programs to work with high-needs groups such as refugees. The program involved specialist community agencies first providing training in employment skills, English and the rights and responsibilities of workers in an Australian workplace and then placing them in subsidised employment positions in community based or not-for-profit agencies for a 13 week period. This provided them with local work experience in a supportive environment under the supervision of the employment agency. The ANCORW Jobskills program for refugee women is the Jobskills project with which the Council is most familiar. This was highly successful and a significant number of the trainees were engaged permanently by the agencies in which they had been placed. Those who were not kept on, had a high success rate in getting employment (or going on to further study) because they had the skills and confidence to do so;
- mentoring programs: many refugees are highly qualified but find it almost impossible to break into their profession because they have no local contacts or experience. If professional associations could be encouraged to establish linkages between willing members and humanitarian entrants, entry into the workplace could be facilitated;
- engaging large public sector employers: government departments and public utility providers employ tens of thousands of people. If large agencies could commit to employ and train a specified number of humanitarian entrants in any given year, this would open up opportunities for many entrants;
- breaking down employer prejudices and workplace discrimination is another important area and in this support can be solicited from business chambers, service clubs and the unions.

And so the list could go on ... if the key players are helped to understand the issues, recognise the importance of finding solutions and are enthused by the challenge of being part of the solution significant progress could be made.

## **ii. Housing**

For refugees, finding secure and affordable housing is vitally important, as most have spent long periods in limbo. DIMIA is currently - and appropriately - playing a role in providing initial accommodation and assistance with finding longer-term accommodation but in some states, in particular those with larger intakes, actually getting refugees into suitable housing remains a major challenge. If we examine at some of the reasons why this is the case we see that:

- the state agencies responsible for public housing do not see humanitarian entrants as a priority group and thus entrants have to go to the end of (often very long) waiting lists;
- the available housing stock in the private rental market is often not suitable for the entrants, eg low cost rental accommodation is typically 1-2 bedroom flats which are entirely unsuitable for large families;
- real-estate agents and landlords are often reluctant to rent to people from unfamiliar cultural backgrounds, especially where they do not have a “rental history”.

Here too a multi-faceted approach is required, in this case involving state and local governments, developers and the real estate industry. Once again, some of these sectors are bound by Access and Equity requirements, others are not, so arguing Access and Equity alone will not solve all the problems. The challenge confronting DIMIA is to help the various sectors understand the particular contributions they can play in helping to meet the needs of humanitarian entrants and the benefits they can derive if they were to do this.

### **3.3. Help for Entrants Dealing with Mainstream Agencies**

For humanitarian entrants negotiating the complex array of bureaucratic process involved in becoming a part of our society is a daunting task. For most it cannot be accomplished without support. And even after the initial registration period is over, there will be occasions when entrants have to deal with government or other agencies and find the process beyond their capacity. It must not be forgotten that for many refugees, the act of dealing with any government agency can be quite intimidating because of their past experiences, so we need to look beyond simple issues of language proficiency in determining levels of support required.

It is important that humanitarian entrants not only have initial intensive assistance but that they also have the ability to seek assistance after this time when they need help to deal with obstacles. This is where the Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs), Migrant Service Agencies (MSAs) and Community Settlement Support Scheme (CSSS) workers have the capacity to play an invaluable role. Their ability to do this, however, requires that:

- workers have the knowledge of what services are offered by which agency and what the eligibility criteria for these services are;
- workers have the skills to negotiate effectively with government agencies on behalf of their clients;
- workers are given permission to perform this role (i.e. it is written into their workplan);
- agencies are sufficiently funded to enable this casework to be undertaken;
- mechanisms exist that enable any systemic problems that are encountered to be addressed.

Fundamental to this is the need to accept that settlement workers have an important and necessary role to play as advocates, ensuring that their clients really do get access to all

that they are entitled to and the need for DIMIA to recognise that this is a legitimate part of their job description.

### **3.4. Case Management**

One of the trends in recent years has been a move away from case management. The Refugee Council sees this as a retrograde step.

Humanitarian entrants typically form a high-need client group. Their past experiences and lack of preparation for migration mean that they arrive with complex and significant needs the meeting of which requires the involvement of a number of agencies. Not only do they need someone to act as advocate (as per the previous section), they might also need someone to coordinate the service delivery to make sure that the various players are in possession of relevant information and minimise the possibility that the intervention of one will counteract that of another.

Case management is therefore seen as a way that humanitarian entrants can receive the services from mainstream agencies that they need in a way that they can derive maximum benefit from them.

### **3.5. Ongoing Resource and Support Role for DIMIA**

For service providers to meet entrants' needs it is necessary that they have readily accessible and relevant information about:

- the situation in their home country that forced them to flee;
- the conditions in the country(ies) of first asylum;
- their language, religion, culture and customs;
- typical family composition;
- possible medical needs;
- other factors that will have an effect on settlement needs.

It used to be the case that whenever a new entrant group was to be included in the humanitarian program, DIMIA would compile and disseminate written profiles of entrant groups. These would inform providers and enable them to make the necessary preparations to ensure that the services they provided were reflective of needs and culturally sensitive.

During Operation Safe Haven this concept was extended to include oral briefings as well. The Refugee Council was engaged to work with the Albanian community to develop background material on the Kosovars and then to undertake briefings for those who would be working with and living alongside the Kosovars. These briefings enhanced the quality of service provision and also went a long way towards ensuring that the communities into which the Kosovars went were comfortable about their coming.

The fact that material about new entrant groups is no longer compiled and disseminated is seen as regrettable. Recently we have seen a number of entrant groups, including those from Sierra Leone, Burundi and Haiti, where there is no pre-existing population and little knowledge both about the people themselves and their experiences. The lack of this information affects the ability of services to plan in advance and inevitably results in a lag in having all that is needed in place. The first entrants in any group thus do not receive

the same quality of services as later entrants. This is a clear Access and Equity issue both in relation to DIMIA services and services provided by other agencies.

There is great merit in DIMIA reintroducing the policy of developing (or commissioning the development of) entrant profiles and ensuring these are disseminated to all relevant service providers (both government and non-government).

## 4. PLANNING

In 1991 *the National Integrated Settlement Strategy (NISS)* was initiated as a joint initiative of federal, state and local government to coordinate government agencies at all levels which were involved in settlement related activities. This was backed up by the establishment of settlement planning committees in each state and territory.

As with many strategies, there is a gap between what was it was hoped NISS would achieve and what is happening on the ground. Most of the community concerns in this regard relate to the operation of the settlement planning committees. It is the Refugee Council's understanding that the committees in each state vary considerably and as a result, so do sectoral attitudes towards them. In some states they are seen to be well connected to what is happening on the ground and to be making a relevant and constructive contribution. In other states, they are seen as unproductive talk-fests.

On the basis of both positive and negative comments received, RCOA would like to suggest that the following are key elements of good state planning committees:

- those attending are senior policy makers with a sound knowledge of relevant sections within their own department and an ability to influence departmental policies and practices;
- there is continuity in the representation from the various agencies;
- there is representation from the community sector on all committees and subcommittees;
- all members of the committee, not just the community representatives, commit to consulting with the community sector and client groups on a regular basis;
- there are good lines of communication between the committee and those providing settlement services;
- there are clearly defined (and well utilised) mechanisms for people to bring issues to the committee's attention.

While both the federal and state planning committees have the capacity to play a valuable role, it is important that mechanisms are put in place to ensure that their deliberation are both informed by of what is actually happening to humanitarian entrants on the ground and reflect the priorities of those working with them. In this regard, the Council would like to stress the necessity of consultative structures. In addition to the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council, there are various other mechanisms through

which information about settlement issues can be collected and disseminated. These include:

- the DIMIA-IGO-NGO Forum which brings together national peak agencies;<sup>15</sup>
- DIMIA convened consultations with key stakeholders at a state level, such as the NSW Refugee and Asylum Seeker Forum;
- NGO interagency meetings such as the Refugee Support Network;
- local and regional interagency meetings.

It is essential that there be clearly defined and well understood links between the various community consultative processes and the settlement planning committees and policy makers. Without these links there is a real danger that an “ivory tower” syndrome will develop, with the work of the planners having little to do with the day-to-day reality of settlement service provision and as a result, humanitarian entrants’ needs will go unmet.

In addition to the above, there are times where particular issues present that would benefit from the establishment of an ad hoc mechanism. An example is given below.

IHSS providers in NSW expressed concerns about the incidence of domestic violence and family breakdown they were encountering amongst their clients. RCOA convened a meeting which brought together people with expertise in domestic violence (from the police, state government, women’s legal centres, refuges etc) and in settlement services (from DIMIA, Centrelink, MRCs, STARTTS, women’s organisations etc) to talk about how both sectors could be better educated about the other. Those present saw the opportunity to share expertise as so important and so timely that the group has been meeting on a monthly basis for the last 6 months and a number of collaborative training exercises and information strategies are in the pipeline.

## 5. SERVICE DELIVERY

### 5.1. Settlement Service Delivery Models

Before embarking on an analysis of the strengths of each settlement service delivery model employed, it is essential to stress that each must be seen as **complementary** parts of a whole and none can exist in isolation. Each model has its own strengths and no one model can achieve the full range of settlement outcomes independently.

That said, there is concern that where service delivery becomes politicised it undermines the complementarity of this holistic approach and services are forced into the position of having to come in with a band-aid, non-systemic approach. This can occur where funding priorities do not correlate to greatest need.<sup>16</sup>

#### i. The Role Of Direct Individual Client Services

<sup>15</sup> It is noted that at the time of writing, this forum had not been convened for over 12 months, though DIMIA has given promises that it will meet again.

<sup>16</sup> The TPV regime being a case in point.

Direct individual client service usually refers to case management. Good case management<sup>17</sup> can ensure that:

- entrants are properly linked to both mainstream and ethno-specific services;
- entrants' settlement experience is monitored, including monitoring of the services provided to the client to ensure that he/she is receiving appropriate support;
- the refugee will be able to build up a relationship with one key person - someone with whom he/she can develop a sense of trust and who relates to them as a person; and
- intensive case management is available to those who need it.

In order to perform these tasks well, the service provider needs to be aware of a variety of welfare related services, have case work skills and detailed knowledge about the cultural background of their client.

While a large part of the work of service providers is client support and casework, there is a strongly held view that advocacy is a legitimate and important part of the role of a refugee worker. This can take the form of advocacy on behalf of their clients and/or in defence of principles. It is noted, however, that there is considerable unease at present on the part of the government about funded service providers engaging in advocacy and this has resulted in an enforced split between service delivery and advocacy.

## **ii. The Role Of Community Capacity Building**

Community capacity building uses a community development approach to develop the skills and infrastructure of ethno-specific communities to ensure that:

- mainstream services, settlement services and entrants themselves are able to access the community;
- community members can advocate for their own needs to service providers;
- community cohesion is rebuilt, recognising that many entrants have experienced years of suppression, organized violence and civil war before arriving;
- community leadership can be developed, noting that in the initial stages of settlement in Australia, leaders often emerge because they are able to speak English or because they are more familiar with Australian systems, which can conflict with traditional leadership based on blood-lines or maturity;
- community specific issues, such as unfamiliarity with private housing services, can be addressed in a holistic and cost effective way rather than through individual direct case management;
- small and emerging communities that do not receive specific funding are able to access the resources and skills they need to ensure the community is able to continue traditional practice and are able to participate in the wider Australian community; and

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<sup>17</sup> It is estimated that it takes at least 40 hours intensive work with each client in the immediate post arrival period to ensure that their needs are met.

- services are delivered in a culturally sensitive manner by ethno-specific workers.

In order to perform these tasks well, the service provider needs to have specific community development skills and, if from a different background, also have a detailed knowledge about the cultural and historical background of their client.

It is essential that there are avenues within this model for community concerns to be expressed at broader policy fora (see Section 4). While some issues may be more prominent in a particular refugee community than others, it is rare for issues to occur in isolation. Ensuring Access and Equity is clearly not just the responsibility of the refugee community or settlement service provider, mainstream services are also required to adhere to Access and Equity policy.

### **iii. The Role Of Service Integration And Development**

If a service is to function effectively, there must be liaison between the policy bodies and those who are providing services to refugees and humanitarian entrants. The role of the service integration model provides an opportunity for:

- a 'bottom-up' monitoring of service delivery;
- improvement of the quality of services by ensuring avenues exist for refugee communities and service providers to input into service planning and delivery;
- relationships to be developed between services so that when problems arise, they can be address bilaterally before they become more severe;
- refugee communities to input their concerns into settlement policy and procedure development;
- information exchange to be promoted, which in turn provides a means of educating services about the specific needs of refugees and humanitarian entrants, and vice versa;
- a whole-of-state approach to a specific issue of concern.

In order for service integration and development to be effective it requires the Australian government to demonstrate a measurable commitment to:

- a whole-of-government approach to service delivery; and
- being responsive to issues raised by service providers.

## **5.2. Additional DIMIA-Funded Services: The Role Of Peaks**

As well as direct service delivery, DIMIA also funds peak organisations, such as the Federation of Ethnic Community Councils (FECCA) and the Refugee Council of Australia to provide national representation on issues of concern to their constituencies.

Peak agencies provide an opportunity for refugees and migrants to have a voice at a government and community level that they would not otherwise be able to access.

Language difficulties, unfamiliarity with the Australian Government and the service framework, and the need to resolve numerous settlement issues, mean that most refugees are not in the position to advocate their needs independently on a policy level for a number of years from arrival. Ethno-specific community groups are often quick to form but may not represent a whole-of-community approach. The representation of minority sub-groups, women and youth can depend on traditional community practice, and not necessarily the level of need. Single member agencies are limited from pursuing policy issues outside of their mandate and may only represent their own local perspective.

Peak agencies, such as the Refugee Council, create opportunities for both refugees and settlement service agencies to have meaningful input into policy development. By collating information on a national level, issues can be addressed more effectively and systemically.

### **5.3. Improving Performance**

The current combination of models works well to address the range of needs refugees and humanitarian entrants have. While it is noted that a number of recommendations have been made throughout this report for improving elements of service delivery that could be applicable here, the Refugee Council wishes to make specific reference to the following:

#### **i. Improving Linkages Between Service Types**

One of the strengths of the Australian model of service provision is the combination of models available. The service types are not effective in isolation; issues raised in direct service provision need to be able to inform the policy development. One of the concerns continuously raised about the IHSS model has been the almost exclusive focus on direct service provision and the negative impact this has had on service development. It is important that post-IHSS settlement services continue to maintain a focus on collaboration and on supporting links between services.

#### **ii. Supporting Training**

Ensuring that services have access to the types of training they need is essential to the success of each model. This is discussed in detail in Section 9.

#### **iii. Resourcing Each Model Adequately**

If services are able to deliver the quality of services required, they need to be given financial support to do so. In a context of scarce resources, competition for funding rises. While competition can be a healthy motivator, it should be noted that within the community sector it also has the potential to threaten key relationships and therefore undermine attempts to maintain a holistic service. Maintaining skilled competent staff also requires adequate financial resources to enable security of tenure to be offered.

#### **iv. Developing Pre-Embarkation Information**

Thus far all of the focus has been on what happens after the humanitarian entrants have arrived in Australia but experience has shown that the initial settlement period can be made much easier if the entrants are provided with culturally appropriate and relevant

information prior to their arrival in Australia. They feel much more in control of the situation if their post arrival experiences are consistent with their expectations.

The need for good pre-embarkation information is well documented and its absence has been an issue of concern for many years.

In 2000 DIMIA commissioned RCOA to undertake research into the pre-embarkation information needs of humanitarian entrants. A detailed final report was submitted in August 2000 and DIMIA committed to taking active steps to implementing the recommendations of this report. RCOA is concerned that more than 2 years have elapsed and there has been no concrete action.

#### **5.4. Consulting with Humanitarian Entrants**

Because settlement services are intended to improve the settlement experience of refugees and humanitarian entrants, it is both logical and ethical that entrants should be given every opportunity to express their views about the services they receive. Achieving this end is not, however, as simple as just going and asking the humanitarian entrants how they feel about the services they have been given. The reality is far more complex and those undertaking consultation with refugees and humanitarian entrants have to have a detailed understanding of the target group and the many issues that will have an impact on the way they respond to a formal consultation process. The many issues that must be considered include:

##### **i. Questioning Style**

Whereas most survey techniques favour open-ended questions to enable as much information as possible to be elicited, when seeking information from refugees simple closed questioning has been found to be more efficient. The “yes-no” answer format is less intimidating and is less open to confusion about intent.

It is essential that the questions developed be trialled to establish whether they are clear to the respondent. Possible differences in interpretation by people from different cultural backgrounds also need to be considered.

##### **ii. Interview Process**

Those working with humanitarian entrants favour focus groups rather than individual interviews for this type of information gathering. It reinforces that the inquiry is about the program rather their own personal success or failure within the program. It also reinforces to entrants that they are not the only person being consulted and that their collective views, rather than any individual opinions they might have, will be reflected in the evaluation.

##### **iii. Full Explanation**

It is vital that a clear explanation be given to entrants about the purpose and scope of the evaluation, stressing that the focus is on looking at how to make services better for other refugees who will be coming after them. Included in the explanation must also be a clear statement of what the evaluation is not, for example:

- it is not assessing their personal success as settlers;

- there is no pass or fail;
- it will have no impact on their immigration status;
- it will not affect their settlement entitlements;
- it will have no impact on any sponsorship applications they might have for family members.

It is also important to stress that, if it is the government that has commissioned the evaluation, the purpose is not to gather information about them or their family for the government. This point is important because many refugees come from countries with totalitarian governments and they have learnt from hard experience that the motives of governments are not necessarily always benign. There is ample anecdotal evidence that some survivors will reject requests due to suspicion of what the records will be kept for.<sup>18</sup>

The other essential inclusion in the introductory briefing is the confidentiality of the process. It must be stressed that any comments they make will not be attributed to them. By extension, the reviewer must take care to ensure that any material produced, in particular case studies, must not identify the entrant unless permission has specifically been obtained for this.

#### **iv. Informed Consent**

The issue of obtaining informed consent is crucial in any form of social research. In the case of humanitarian entrants there are two additional issues that need to be factored in:

- humanitarian entrants typically feel a debt of gratitude to those who have helped them when they first arrive and believe that this must be repaid. One way of repaying this debt is to respond favourably to any request made of them;
- humanitarian entrants spend the first period after arrival being “told” what to do ... “open a bank account, go to Medicare, go to Centrelink” ... It is important that any invitation to participate be seen as an invitation not an instruction.

It must therefore be made clear to those invited to participate in the evaluation that they are free to choose whether they do so or not and that if they decide not to, they will not be disadvantaged in any way and will not be giving offence to anyone. Participants should also be given access to the results of the evaluation.

#### **v. Power Relationships**

It must be recognized that there will be an unequal power relationship between service providers and the entrants per virtue of the former’s status, connections and role. It is important that every effort be taken to minimize the impact this will have on the nature of information obtained. Efforts must be made to ensure that the sessions – be they focus groups or one-on-one interviews are as informal and relaxed as possible, with time set aside for developing rapport.

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<sup>18</sup> Iredale R., Mitchell C., Pe-Pua R., & Pittaway E. (1996) *Ambivalent Welcome: The settlement experience of humanitarian entrant families in Australia*, Centre for Multicultural Studies: Wollongong, and Yu E. & Liu W. (1986) ‘Methodological problems and policy implications in Vietnamese refugee research’, *International Migration Review*, 20 (2), 483-501

## vi. **Courtesy Bias**

As discussed, humanitarian entrants can often be very keen to please – both out of sense of gratitude for the support they have been given and also because in some cultures, it is impolite to complain. Whatever the motivation, it is important to find ways to overcome any bias these traits might inject into an evaluation of service delivery if it is to provide an accurate assessment of the settlement experiences of humanitarian entrants.

## vii. **Sample Selection**

The success of a consultation will depend on the extent to which a representative sample is surveyed. The need to select a sample on the basis of country of origin is both obvious and relatively simple to arrange. Other sampling issues are less straightforward.

It is common amongst many entrant groups that the males are the family spokes persons and any inquiries should, out of courtesy, be directed to them. But this poses the question of how one can assess the settlement experiences other family members: the women, the young people and the elderly. The evaluation must find ways to get past the “gatekeepers” to ensure that the experiences of the full spectrum of community members are reflected. It will be up to the service providers themselves to decide how to do this but the Refugee Council has found that targeted focus groups, for example those that purport to discuss “women’s business” such as child care and health, are a non-threatening and culturally appropriate way to gather selected groups together.

Further, it is important to point out that the sample selected for consultation must not be limited to entrants who can speak English. If entrants are not English speakers, provision must be made for the engagement of fully qualified and accredited interpreters.

## viii. **Timing of Interviews**

As outlined in Section 2, newly arrived humanitarian entrants pass through many stages on their journey towards “settlement”:

- the **First Arrival Stage** where everything is new and unfamiliar and emotions are confused;
- the **Honeymoon Phase** where things start to come together, the person begins to feel safe and where hope is regained;
- the **Crash**, which occurs when the realities of establishing oneself in the new environment become apparent: one cannot become fluent in English in couple of months, it is hard to get a job, the house is not as grand as the one they left .... Depression, sleep disorders, fatigue, anxiety and appetite disturbances are common during this stage;
- being **Parked** or **Participating** depending on how a person deals with the crash. In the case of the former, the person remains in a state of depression and lethargy, unable to connect with the new community. In the case of the latter, the person is able to engage constructively and function at a level commensurate with an Australian born person.

Given the marked differences in the psychological well-being an entrant passes through, it will be necessary for any consultation process to:

- be aware of what point an entrant has reached at the time of the interview;
- factor this into the evaluation methodology.

If this is not done, the research data can be skewed either in a positive direction (with many respondents in the honeymoon phase) or a negative direction (with respondents at the crash stage). It is not viable to simply say that “things will even out” because any assessment of service delivery is meant to be targeting whether the service is meeting entrants’ needs. Having some very satisfied clients and others who are deeply dissatisfied, does not constitute balance.

#### **ix. Torture/Trauma Survivors**

Many humanitarian entrants have been subjected to interrogation or harsh questioning by authorities in their country of origin. It is important not to in any way trigger memories of past trauma through inadvertent choices or actions.

A conscious effort must be made by service providers to ensure that every aspect of the relationship they have with the entrants is as unthreatening as possible. Particular care should be taken with:

- the interview environment: this should be as informal as possible, with consideration of things such as not interviewing across a table, leaving a door open – or ensuring that the entrants is comfortable if the door is closed etc;
- the questioning style: this should be as relaxed and non-inquisitorial as possible. As previously stated, establishing rapport at the beginning of the session is very important.

#### **x. Consultation Fatigue**

As most agencies which provide services to refugees and humanitarian entrants are required to assess the effectiveness of their services to meet accountability requirements, it is possible that entrants will have been “surveyed” on a number of occasions.

This needs to be factored into any consultation planning, both in terms of considering timing (have the subjects selected been surveyed on other issues in the recent past?) and whether there are any chances of dovetailing with other consultation processes to minimize intrusion and reduce the chances that the entrants will be so sick of being asked questions they will be unwilling participants.

#### **xi. Regional Differences**

The existence of significant regional differences in lifestyle and prospects means that settlement experiences can be affected by where one lives in Australia. A consultation process that is administered uniformly across the country will, almost inevitably, produce different outcomes in different locations. Consultation processes need to respond to these regional differences so that the needs of the entrants in that area and the service provided is assessed, not the regional variations.

## **xii. Quality vs. Quantity**

Quantitative assessment techniques are, by nature, much easier to administer and process and any evaluation will include a degree of quantitative analysis. Clearly quantitative data is already collected from reports and milestones and provide a useful snapshot of the demand for services. To be truly effective and to be solution-focused, an evaluation must however go beyond simple assessment to delve more deeply into the rationale of needs and the impact the program is having on the settlement experiences of humanitarian entrants. For this, qualitative assessment tools will be required.

## **6. TRANSLATING AND INTERPRETING SERVICES**

The Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) provides an invaluable service to both refugees and service providers. While it is the desired outcome that all refugees will acquire functional proficiency in English, the reality is that for some, this will take time and for others, it will be an unachievable goal. It is also important to recognise that even where a person is comfortable in a second language, there might be occasions where he/she does not possess the necessary language skills to deal with the situation (e.g. in medical or legal context and other times of crisis). While obviously demand for this service is high during the initial period of settlement, demand may continue sporadically throughout an entrant's lifetime.

Settlement service providers have identified a number of things that need to be done if there is to be effective utilisation of TIS by mainstream service providers and other agencies. These include:

- ensuring that humanitarian entrants are able to distinguish between services that can access TIS and those that can not, and that they are informed of the eligibility criteria and time limits on translation of documents;
- ensuring that mainstream agencies understand whether they should go to TIS or to a state-based service;
- disseminating information about TIS services to mainstream services particularly in rural and regional areas;
- ensuring that workers in mainstream services are skilled in and confident about the use of interpreters. For example, despite the commendable efforts of the Doctors Priority Line, service providers continue to report that some private health professionals in both urban and regional areas are not accessing the service;
- making TIS services affordable. It has been noted by some service providers that fee-for-service TIS services have increased by 92%<sup>19</sup> in the last year. Costs create a disincentive to accessing TIS services;

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<sup>19</sup> The Refugee Council is alarmed by these reports as it was our understanding that the centralisation of TIS in Melbourne would bring about savings.

- consulting regularly with the settlement services sector to seek feedback on services and to track relevant settlement issues;
- ensuring that the demand for different languages being met. The lack of interpreters for some languages, particularly in new and emerging refugee communities, disadvantages these communities;
- making eligibility for fee-free services flexible enough to meet a variety of settlement needs. Some essential settlement services are not considered fee-free services. An important example is that of real estate agents, despite the fact that accommodation is well recognised as a basic settlement need. This exclusion limits access to the private rental market and places entrants in a vulnerable position as parties to a lease agreement; and
- providing TIS services on the basis of need. Effectively excluding refugees with a TPV from this service type has significantly disadvantaged this high need group.

In addition to the above, it is considered that it is important for DIMIA to:

- continue to ensure that TIS services are promoted to entrants by the IHSS Initial Orientation and Information Assistance workers;
- use the IHSS evaluation to monitor the level of awareness that proposed entrants have of TIS services and related time limits on translation;
- continue to promote TIS services to government departments and agencies, community organisations and approved individuals;
- continue to ensure that TIS engages in regular consultation with the settlement sector. It should be noted that concerns have been raised in NSW by service providers about a decrease in the quality and number of formal links between TIS and the sector in 2002;
- develop a system to monitor the use of interpreters by doctors including the development of programs that promote the use of complaints procedures within affected communities (while recognising the limitations of non-English speaking entrants making complaints to Government bodies);
- promote training on the use of interpreters within Commonwealth and State Government services. Relevant educational institutions should also be encouraged to include these skills as part of their curriculum, particularly at medical schools. Training on TIS services should also be promoted to front-line staff such as reception staff at health services;
- link settlement planning with TIS recruitment of interpreters where possible to avoid delays between availability of interpreters and new and emerging refugee communities;
- where a shortage of interpreters of a specific language is identified, consider exception or deferred payment of NAATI course-related fees for potential interpreters who may be unable to afford the up-front expenses;

- develop a TIS “smart card” that will allow entrants to access a set amount of interpreting over the phone in addition to the free services they are currently being provided with<sup>20</sup>. This will cover other needs such as dealing with real-estate agents;
- undertake as a priority to provide TPV holders with access to the same entitlement to TIS services as Permanent Protection Visa holders. The Council recognises that this proposal requires legislative changes and the allocation of additional resources. We reiterate that the current system is deeply flawed, ultimately more costly, and requires radical change. This approach would be in the spirit of the *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society* which promotes equal rights and responsibilities within a cohesive and harmonious multicultural society and which makes a formal commitment to the principles of greatest possible access to government services.

## **7. ADULT MIGRANT ENGLISH PROGRAM**

### **7.1. Language Acquisition**

Language acquisition, like settlement itself, is not linear. It is not as the textbooks would have us believe - where you begin at the beginning and work through a set of exercises and then you can speak the language. There are many factors that create additional difficulties for refugees learning a new language. These include:

- the fact that as you get older, it is often harder to acquire another language;
- past torture and trauma effects a person’s ability to learn;
- if a refugee is separated from his/her immediate family, worry about them will interfere with concentration;
- realising the strong drive to get a job will often truncate participation in language programs;
- if the refugee is working and attending language classes and establishing him/herself in the new country, fatigue will effect learning.

It is vitally important that language programs for refugees recognise and cater for the various constraints on the ability of refugees to acquire a new language. In order to do this it is necessary to have a variety of learning pathways - full-time intensive, part-time with work options etc and to provide learning programs that take into account different learning styles. There is also a need to accommodate cultural issues eg by having classes only for women for certain Islamic groups.

### **7.2. The Adult Migrant English Program**

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<sup>20</sup> Free interpreter services are available in a range of areas deemed directly related to a refugee’s settlement needs.

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) is the DIMIA-funded program that sees language training tendered out to a variety of agencies around the country. While there are differences depending on who the provider is in any given place, by and large the program is very well regarded and at its best, is seen as being world leading.

This being said, there are some areas where it is felt that improvements could be made to enhance the effectiveness and reach of the program. One of the key areas where revision is seen as necessary is that of the policy framework. The rigidity of this leads to a number of problems including:

- the requirement that entrants must register within 3 months of arrival to be eligible means that some entrants (especially women) miss out eg because they are totally absorbed in making a home and ensuring the children are settling into schools;
- the requirement that tuition entitlements must be taken up within the first year means that refugees who have other valid priorities, including assisting other family members or dealing with health issues, will miss out. Providers report that they regularly encounter people who have “passed their use-by dates” i.e. are no longer eligible for funded instruction but who have reached a time in their lives (eg women whose children have started school) when they have time/energy/inclination to focus on learning English;
- the fact that there is the same entitlement (510 hours) for everyone irrespective of whether they are a doctor from the Balkans or an illiterate Somali woman, and that there is no capacity to “cash in” unused hours to enable a student to do advanced English or to be diverted to a student who needs more time.

Given the nature of the client group, it is also vital that teachers are specifically trained to work with refugees. Of particular importance is having an understanding of the impact of torture/trauma on the learning process and of the various competing demands on the student’s time. Teachers also need to be provided with a repertoire of strategies that will enable them to deal with difficult or disruptive behaviour.

Other important areas that need to be factored in to a language program include:

- **incorporation of settlement information in the curriculum:** a number of language providers have been very creative about how they have been able to incorporate settlement information into their curricular and a number of strategic alliances have been made in this regard between language providers and other agencies (such as the NSW Refugee Health Unit). It is worth noting, however, that this strategy presents certain challenges to language providers, especially where the funding agreements require teaching an accredited program with prescribed outcomes. Some teachers, while seeing the sense in having linked programs, are concerned that the extra work will mean that they are unable to meet their targets. This points to the importance of having flexibility in the funding agreements and of funding bodies recognising the important role that language providers can have in informing refugees about other settlement issues;
- **link to employment:** for many refugees, learning English is as much, if not more, about acquiring the necessary skills to get employment as it is about being able to function more generally in society. In order to address this need properly, language

programs need be flexible enough to help entrants acquire the necessary vocabulary for them to seek employment in their area of expertise and also targeted in giving them other knowledge relevant for those entering an Australian workplace for the first time (especially in relation to their rights and responsibilities in the workplace). In this regard, it is felt that if the funding structures could be made more flexible, it would be possible to develop more strategic alliances between language providers and employment agencies;

- **ensuring take-up:** some entrant groups to take up English language instruction opportunities than others. Communities that have had low participation rates, such as the Vietnamese and Lebanese communities, are typically those in which it is possible for entrants to meet most of their needs (shopping, medical, employment etc) in their own language and in which there is a tradition of close-knit families and long working hours. It is necessary to find ways to break down these barriers, however, so that we do not end up with excluded subcultures;
- **follow-up after language classes:** it is fine if the refugees go out into an English speaking environment after their language classes and are able to reinforce the lessons they have learnt but problematic if they return to an environment where their first language is spoken and they have no opportunity to mix with English speakers. This is particularly the case for women in the home and older people. Creative solutions are needed for these groups;
- **appropriate use of volunteers:** volunteers can supplement fully qualified teachers but should never be seen as an adequate substitute for them. Volunteers do not necessarily have sufficient understanding of learning processes and/or adequate grasp of language structure and/or a full appreciation of the impact of torture/trauma on learning. If the volunteer coordinating agency can ensure these competencies are present, volunteers can play an important role in supplementing the instruction provided by paid teachers, especially for special-needs refugees requiring extra tuition and those who are house-bound;
- **access to culturally appropriate childcare:** this is seen as being of fundamental importance to enable newly arrived refugees to be able to attend language classes. In the first instance, childcare is necessary to enable adults to be able to attend classes, as few refugees have extended families or networks with whom they can leave the child. But the service provided must be more than a regular childcare centre. The service needs to be highly specialised, recognising that for many refugees, this is the first time they have left their children with strangers and it can be a deeply stressful experience for them. It is vital that the service understands and is responsive to refugees' concerns about leaving their children with strangers/people from another background.

It is also important not to forget that not all humanitarian entrants have access to AMEP services. Rightly or wrongly<sup>21</sup> they are assessed as having a level of competency in English that does not require language instruction. In this regard, RCOA would like to make a number of points:

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<sup>21</sup> The Refugee Council has had occasion recently to be concerned about reports from service providers that some newly arrived entrants (from West Africa) with no functional literacy have been assessed as being ineligible for AMEP. While they might speak English – as their first or second language - the fact that they are unable to read it must surely make them eligible for post-arrival assistance.

- the fact that a person might speak English does not necessarily mean that he/she will be able to understand the version of English spoken in Australia. The accent here is quite different to US or British English with which more people are familiar and it takes time to attune one's ear to it;
- following on from above, the English spoken in those source regions where English is widely spoken (eg West Africa and India) is very different to the English spoken in Australia. Further, some people who have learnt English as a second language have accents that make them almost unintelligible to a native speaker. Such entrants need help to modify their intonation and stressing so that they can be easily understood;
- a person might be functionally fluent in English as a second language but not possess the vocabulary that would enable him/her to practice in their chosen profession.

Exclusion of people from language programs on the basis of assessed competency therefore does not make sense. It should be up to the entrant to assess whether he/she could benefit from some additional language training, be it to help them to come to terms with Australian English or to enhance their professional English.

Finally, RCOA would like to stress that as valuable as the current language programs are, it is important that they are seen as a complement to other settlement services and not be considered as a replacement for them. The staff of the various DIMIA-funded settlement agencies play vital roles in many areas that are not being replicated by language providers.

## **8. INTEGRATED HUMANITARIAN SETTLEMENT STRATEGY**

The Refugee Council acknowledges that a separate review of the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) is taking place and we anticipate that this will reveal many important insights not only into the operation of the IHSS but also into how the introduction of the IHSS has impacted on other settlement service types. This being said, there are a number of issues relevant to this review process on which the Council would like to comment.

### **8.1. Transition**

The positive transition from IHSS services to other settlement services, and the pathways that facilitate this transition, is an essential element in achieving good service delivery that values continuity, equity and integration. For this to occur:

- entrants need to be efficiently assessed as to their readiness to move away from intensive support;
- the long-term support services must have the capacity to provide ongoing assistance; and
- effective referral pathways between IHSS providers and other services need to be developed and maintained.

As expected, many IHSS providers and long-term settlement services may still be dealing with issues of adjustment due to the staggered introduction of the IHSS and the

competitive tender process. Subsequently, some referral pathways may not have developed as effectively or efficiently as others and this should be considered in the context of this review. Regional differences may also influence the development of pathways between the IHSS and other settlement services.

## **8.2. Improving Pathways**

In examining ways to improve referral pathways that facilitate the transition from the IHSS to other services, various assessments need to be made. These include:

- the impact of this transition on entrants and communities,
- the relationships between agencies, and
- the nature of referral pathways between IHSS providers and mainstream agencies.

### **i. Impact on Entrants and Communities**

For many entrants, making the transition from the intensive support offered through the IHSS to more long-term services may be a daunting prospect. Difficulties associated with the IHSS such as the breakdown of proposer/entrant relationships and the inability to acquire suitable accommodation may mean that at the time of transition, entrants are in a highly vulnerable state experiencing uncertainty, anxiety and confusion regarding their settlement. Further, many entrants will reside in a variety of geographical areas during the early stages of settlement as they seek housing solutions and employment opportunities. This may impact significantly on the settlement of entrants as referral pathways between IHSS and other services will inevitably be interrupted. Improving pathways within and between different regional areas is essential in providing equitable and integrated services to entrants.

Through consultations with service providers and community groups it has become apparent that inefficiencies in referral pathways often lead to entrants 'falling through the gaps'. This places increased pressure and strain on communities to which the entrant will naturally turn for support, particularly if his or her needs are not being met elsewhere.

### **ii. Impact on Agencies**

Similarly, community agencies have reported they are increasingly 'filling the gaps' created when referral pathways between services do not appropriately address the needs of entrants. Community agencies in this situation are facing the dilemma of fulfilling an ethical obligation by providing much needed support to entrants without sufficient funding to do so. Not only does this impact upon agencies' capacity to meet the needs of their current clients but also may adversely affect collaborative relationships between agencies.

The improvement of pathways between the IHSS and other services needs to address the current gaps that are compromising the already stretched resources of communities and community agencies seeking to provide settlement support.

### **iii. Mainstream Services**

Referral from IHSS services to mainstream agencies is clearly another important element in the provision of integrated services to entrants. Mainstream services in balance with ethno-specific services play a vital role in the successful settlement of refugee and

humanitarian entrants. While mainstream services have achieved a great deal in terms of assisting entrants, there remain some issues requiring further consideration.

Consultations with several mainstream agencies have revealed that the connection between initial intensive support for refugee and humanitarian entrants and mainstream agencies is, in many instances, not meeting the best interests of the entrant. This has been most strongly argued by health service providers indicating they are not receiving the appropriate type or number of referrals from settlement services. While this may be attributed to the perception of entrants that health is less of an immediate priority than housing or income, access to appropriate health care continues to be an important element of a positive settlement outcome. It is recognised that although Community Health Centres have generally developed very successful referral protocols with settlement agencies and IHSS providers, entrants are still vulnerable to gaps in the system stemming from regional differences in the delivery of and accessibility to health services.

Improved referral pathways and agreed protocols need to be developed such that they can be maintained and reviewed through formal feedback mechanisms that foster relationships between settlement and mainstream agencies promoting understanding of common issues and collaboration.

## **9. MRCs, MSAs AND CSSS WORKERS**

### **9.1. Service delivery arrangements of MRCs/MSAs**

As generalist services catering to the needs of established and new communities, Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) and the more recently introduced Migrant Service Agencies (MSAs), are ideally situated to act as a conduit between communities and mainstream services. Many mainstream services view the MRC/MSA as the first point of contact with communities and this relationship developing over a period of time, has facilitated the sensitisation of mainstream agencies to refugee settlement issues.

Rather than being ethno-specific, the MRC/MSA has the capacity to engage in a broader scope of settlement policy with a particular regional focus. This has allowed the MRC/MSA to maintain its important relationships with communities in addition to overcoming division within communities. As mentioned in Section 2.4, the value of maintaining the balance between ethno-specific and generalist services is widely recognised in the sector. This acknowledges the differing preferences of refugees, some of whom wish to be assisted by members of their community while others may prefer to limit contact with groups and individuals from within their own community.

The ongoing capacity of MRCs/MSAs to maintain this balance and be responsive to the changing needs of communities, will depend greatly upon an examination of current funding and service delivery arrangements. For example, current annual funding arrangements have raised concerns about:

- job insecurity,
- employment casualisation,
- maintaining a sense of professionalism,
- the ability to retain skills base, and

- the capacity to retain experienced staff.

Other concerns regarding service delivery arrangements raised through consultations with MRCs/MSAs include:

- time spent meeting reporting requirements,
- the impact of the IHSS and Temporary Protection Visas<sup>22</sup> on MRCs/MSAs,
- regional differences in relation to infrastructure costs.

In order to address some of these issues, options of introducing more flexible, responsive and needs-based funding models ought to be thoroughly explored. Service delivery and funding arrangements need to reflect changing community needs and the changing face of settlement, in addition to facilitating improved relationships between DIMIA and service providers.

## **9.2. The Community Settlement Services Scheme (CSSS)**

The CSSS complements the MRC/MSA one-stop-shop service model as it can focus on a particular community or communities, specific issues (e.g. volunteering) or a specific group (e.g. new and emerging communities) rather than being purely generalist service delivery.

The grant-based project has a number of advantages:

- generalist positions can be funded in areas that may not justify the cost of establishing a MRC/MSA;
- issue-based projects offer can offer a systemic approach to addressing need; and
- a combination of direct case work and community development can be employed as determined by the needs identified by the project.

CSSS also offers communities an opportunity to engage ethno-specific workers for particular projects. Ethno-specific positions are important as they offer:

- workers from the same background who speak the language and can empathize with experiences of entrants;
- community capacity building through the process of management of the project by the Management Committee members;
- opportunities to link up with others newly arrived refugees who are confronting similar challenges thereby breaking down the sense of isolation;
- a chance to become part of a community and to participate in a range of community activities;
- an opportunity to identify and address the specific needs of a community.

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<sup>22</sup> In the past, Refugee Council consultations with DIMIA funded service providers have revealed that workers are experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety in relation to their inability to provide services to Temporary Protection Visa holders. This places workers in a highly difficult ethical position as they find themselves in a position to assist some refugees but not others.

Settlement service providers have suggested that settlement outcomes could be improved by:

- providing increased security of tenure by offering tri-annual grants for projects rather than annual grants. The increasing shift to offer annual grants has created employment insecurity for workers that make staff retention difficult and compromise planning;
- reviewing reporting requirements for CSSS grants. Concern has been expressed by some CSSS workers at the length of time taken to complete quarterly milestone reports and the 6 monthly reports. Further, the nature of the information collected needs reconsideration. An increase of the proportion of qualitative reporting would mean that DIMIA would be better able to identify current needs and concerns in the sector;
- adopting innovative reporting methodologies that can be adapted to the strengths of workers. For example, oral reporting may be a more time efficient method than extensive written reports for peoples whose first language is not English and should be considered for the mid-period reports;
- ensuring that milestones are cohesive and build on each milestone preceding it. Concern has been expressed that some milestones appear to be unrelated to each other and as a consequence can undermine community development objectives;
- providing continued training for DIMIA consultants on community development and case work processes so they are able to provide the required level of supervisory support. The high level of staff rotation within DIMIA means that these skills are regularly lost;
- reviewing the relationship between IHSS and CSSS workers. While DIMIA's concern about 'double-dipping' is acknowledged, strict delineation between IHSS and CSSS programs can cause conflict between the cultural norms of some entrants and the CSSS eligibility. "Refusing to assist" is frowned upon in some cultures and can place CSSS workers in conflict with their community, which can in turn jeopardize the community development goals of their project. CSSS workers are often well placed as community leaders to identify client needs, however this resource is often under utilized. Further, the lack of integration between the programs, and the competitive nature of the IHSS can mean that workers are discouraged from reporting problems as they emerge;
- evaluating the feasibility of a mentoring program for CSSS workers in stand-alone positions and regional areas with experienced settlement support workers. While a number of these CSSS workers are linked to a more experienced worker, this is not always the case. Although DIMIA's increased involvement in rural and regional areas has been noted, CSSS workers in rural and regional areas have less access to advice and supervision from their DIMIA consultants that do workers in the city;
- retracting the current TPV regime which has caused conflict between some CSSS workers and their community and has run counter to their professional principles. The TPV regime has had a very decisive impact on some communities, undermining the community capacity building goals of some CSSS projects.

### **9.3. Determining Priority Groups For Funding**

The Refugee Council of Australia commends the Federal Government for recognising Refugee and Humanitarian Program entrants as a target group for CSSS funding.

Within this group there is, of course, a range of needs. In order to identify groups with the greatest need, it is essential to have some understanding of how the refugee experience affects different groups amongst the wider refugee population. There are clearly defined differences and these have an impact on what happens to refugees during the settlement process.

#### **9.3.1. Special Needs Groups**

Once you start to explore “what constitutes a special needs group” you soon get a list that includes:

- children and youth
- women
- men
- families
- the aged

Recognising that this list effectively encompasses all refugees, it becomes apparent that the needs are more “specific” than “special” and that it is important not to marginalise “special needs groups” but to ensure that the needs of each are incorporated into mainstream planning.

Two groups that have not been included in the above list, but which are often included in a list of “Special Needs Groups” are:

- torture and trauma survivors; and
- refugees with a disability or medical condition.

The sections below present a number of factors to take account of when determining funding priorities with the Humanitarian Program.

#### **i. Children and Youth**

The issue of refugee children and youth is currently the subject of considerable attention at both the policy and practical levels. A number of studies have been conducted, including that by the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council and the research by Sandy Gifford at Deakin University in Victoria. These reports provide an excellent analysis of the many issues relevant to this group.

When considering the issue of young refugees, it is necessary to recognise that there are distinct groups with different needs:

- those who arrive as part of an intact family;
- those who arrive as part of a split family;
- those who arrive without their family.

There is also the issue of family breakdown after arrival. This can happen in nuclear families but is more commonly reported in families where the young person is the child of a sibling or other relative.

Many people fall into the trap of thinking that just because young refugees learn the language quickly and readily adopt local customs, they are settling in well. Outward appearances can often disguise considerable confusion and grief.

It is not uncommon for children and teenagers to be left out of the “information loop”. Things are explained to the parents but sometimes the parents are not well placed to ensure that their children also understand what is happening around them. This can then be very confusing and unsettling for children, especially when they also pick up on their parents’ lack of control. It can be reflected in many ways, not least being behaviour at school. Aggressive or anti-social behaviour can be a symptom of a young person’s inability to understand what is required. It can also reflect past experiences eg young boys having grown up in an environment where they were being trained for warfare. This highlights the importance of schools understanding the background of the children in their care and of their not making simplistic assumptions about behavioural problems.

Dealing with adolescents is a challenge for many parents. It is more complicated for refugee parents because of the difficulty in determining what constitutes “normal teenage behaviour” and what is the result of the refugee experience. This is further complicated by the fact that the parents have lost their societal reference points and often do not have sufficient in the way of support structures in the new community. It is therefore not surprising that in many refugee homes, there is tension between parents and adolescents, particularly over things such as behaviour at home homework, going out, clothes etc.

There is also the situation whereby some of the newer communities have a high proportion of young, single males. This is typically the case with communities from the Horn of Africa. These young men often look to each other as extended families, though the lack of adult support and role models can sometimes lead to:

- confusion about how to assert their masculinity (an issue complicated by the fact that so many of the community and social workers are young women);
- experimentation with drugs and alcohol;
- a strong connection to their peers which makes it hard for any one person to break away (if he wants to concentrate on studies, get a job etc). He either has to break with his “family” or is held back by them.

## **ii. Women**

It is important to acknowledge two groups:

- refugee women in general; and
- refugee Women at Risk.

The latter have come to Australia as part of UNHCR’s Women at Risk (AWR) program. UNHCR considers as AWR “those refugee women or women of concern who have protection problems and find themselves without the support of traditional protection mechanisms. Special needs of refugee women in such circumstances could derive from persecution as well as from particular hardships sustained either in their country of origin,

during their flight or in their country of refuge.”<sup>23</sup> The objectives of the program are as follows:

- to provide international protection and assistance through resettlement of refugee women who are particularly at risk in their country of refuge. Resettlement should be considered when this is deemed to be the only viable durable solution in order to prevent further physical security problems, victimisation, re-traumatisation or other forms of abuse and exploitation;
- to enhance resettlement eligibility for refugee women otherwise ineligible under the general selection criteria of resettlement countries and to obtain priority processing and accelerated departure;
- to ensure that they receive specialised care, if needed and intensive support upon arrival in their country of resettlement with a view to achieving successful socio-economic integration and self-sufficiency.<sup>24</sup>

Australia first participated in the AWR program in 1989 and since then over three and a half thousand entrants have come under this category.

Fundamental to the success of such a program is the provision of appropriately targeted and sensitive settlement services. Many of the developments in this area can be traced to the seminal research undertaken by Eileen Pittaway in the early 1990s<sup>25</sup> and the advocacy work undertaken by the Australian National Committee on Refugee Women (ANCORW) since then. While the Women at Risk entrants have been identified as an “at-risk” group both by their visa class and their post-arrival entitlements, it is important not to forget that many other refugee women have had similar, if not identical experiences, and share with the AWR group the many challenges of settlement, including:

- having to rebuild a home in an unfamiliar environment;
- finding a place to live that for them feels “safe”<sup>26</sup> and where there is security of tenure;
- having to be supportive to all of the other members of the family while receiving very little support themselves;
- often having to enter the workplace for the first time;
- coping with child-rearing without any of the structures that guided their own childhood;
- often bearing the brunt of their husband’s grief and frustration.

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<sup>23</sup> UNHCR: EC/48/SC/CRP.28 May 1998.

<sup>24</sup> UNHCR Resettlement Handbook Chapter 4.

<sup>25</sup> Eileen Pittaway, *Refugee Women: Still at Risk in Australia*. Bureau of Immigration Research. 1991.

<sup>26</sup> This is a very subjective thing. For some women, having a flat in an area where there are lots of people in the streets and lots of noise is comforting. Others might prefer a location where it is very quiet. Preference is dictated both by what they were familiar with in the past and the nature of the trauma they have experienced. Failure to recognise the subjective nature of “safety” can lead to assumptions being made, which can in turn, lead to retraumatisation of the women.

Programs that allow women to come together and make new support networks are a very important part of settlement services. More often than not, the most effective of these programs are those that centre around a particular activity such as learning a skill or sharing craft work.

### **iii. Men**

Refugee men are rarely identified as being a special needs group in the same way that women and children are and as a result, few programs are developed to target them.

It is important, however, not to forget that for many men, the refugee experience presents many huge hurdles which might include, *inter alia*:

- the profound trauma of experiences in the country of origin and during flight;
- feelings of failure that he was not able to protect adequately his family (especially if family members have been killed or left behind);
- the shame of having betrayed family members or former comrades;
- the indignity of not being able to get a job and adequately provide for his family;
- the loss of control over his environment, combined with the realisation that other family members - his wife and children - are more connected than he with the new community;
- the inability to control anger;
- the sense of failure that he can no longer provide advice and be the head of the family he believes he should be.

Complicating this is the fact that many men find it difficult to admit that they are having difficulties coping and will not turn to friends or participate in self-help groups in the way that many women will. This presents a real challenge for service providers.

### **iv. Families**

The refugee experience can place many demands on families for which they are not prepared. These result from different rates of adaptation and the need for family members to adopt different roles. The changing community dynamics can be very stressful for the adults, threatening for older people and hard on children who are often denied a childhood.

Parenting is one of the areas where special support is needed, especially for women who have no female support (parent/aunt). The crucial times for this are when children are infants and when they become teenagers. Support structures have to be cognisant of the culture and traditions of the family and help forge links between the past world and the one in which the family is living now.

Childcare takes on a special significance for refugee families. In many cases, they do not have family or friends with whom they can leave their children while they go to language classes or are engaged in employment. They therefore need outside assistance but

leaving children can be very traumatic for many refugees, especially those who have had periods of separation from their children during flight and/or are unfamiliar with the concept of leaving children with strangers. It is therefore important that there be programs that reassure parents that:

- it is safe to leave children in accredited childcare centres;
- there are programs that will respect the cultural differences of their child.

There is also great value in involving refugee women in the childcare programs as aids. Through this they can receive valuable training, learn about the childcare environment and also be supportive to other children of the same background (and their parents).

## **v. The Aged**

There are two groups of older refugees in the community:

- those who arrived many years ago and have grown old in Australia;
- those who were old when they arrived.

While many issues are common to both groups, there are a number of distinctions that can be made. For those who have grown old in Australia:

- senility and dementia can result in many older people who previously were proficient in English, losing this ability and reverting to their native tongue;
- unresolved grief and trauma can surface in old age to torment the refugee.

For those who have arrived more recently, they often have to confront:

- great difficulty in acquiring functional English - and the sense of frustration and shame that comes from this;
- altered family relationships and different expectations of family members;
- loss of control over the environment;
- loss of status within the family and the community - they are no longer seen as being "wise".

Older refugees tend to be very dependent on their families. If the relations within the family are good, the arrangement can be very positive for all parties. Sadly this is not always the case and there are many reported cases of elder abuse - of old people being trapped into caring for grandchildren, of having their pension money taken from them etc. Sometimes older refugees can be very isolated (both physically and by their lack of English) and they are unaware of who they can turn to for assistance (or of the fact that they have rights).

Then one confronts the situation of older refugees who do not have family or have become estranged from them and who have also not made sustainable links with the community. These people need particular consideration.

Culturally appropriate aged services are seen as being very important in a number of areas, recreational, residential and health care.

Before closing this section it is relevant to reiterate the strongly held view amongst service providers that there should not be a defined cut-off point for access to "refugee

services". While refugees will progressively move towards using mainstream services, there could well be a point some time later where the specialist services are more appropriate e.g. if there is a crisis<sup>27</sup> or as the refugee enters old age.

### **9.3.2. Other Factors Determining Need**

Whereas the above section has examined the vulnerabilities and needs of particular groups of entrants, there are other indicators of settlement need that must be considered in determining settlement priorities. These include:

- pre-arrival experiences, such as the level of torture/trauma experienced and the institutionalisation that results from having spent long periods in a refugee camp;
- the size of the existing community. Entrants with no community support need much more support;
- the level of familiarity with and knowledge of Australian services and society. Familiarity depends on the similarity between Australian infrastructure and that in the country of origin;
- English competence, taking into account differences between gender and age groups;
- education level, noting that herein lie considerable variables of gender and age; and
- the level of religious and racial discrimination experienced by their group in Australia.

### **9.4. Rural and Regional Settlement**

Regional and rural communities may offer a number of advantages for humanitarian entrants when compared to urban settings, particularly with respect to community cohesion and lifestyle. This is particularly the case for entrants from rural backgrounds who might find it easier to settle in rural areas of Australia because it is easier for them to adapt their knowledge and skills to the local economy.

For others, particularly those without English or from an urban background, regional areas may hold little attraction. It is understandable that refugees and humanitarian entrants, after often-extended periods of dislocation and upheaval, may wish to be near friends, family and community. Those with specialist health needs, such as torture and trauma survivors, may be better placed in capital cities. Urban areas also tend to have more employment opportunities, though this is not always the case.

In relation to determining who is directed to either a rural or urban area, the point must be stressed that entrants must be involved in the decision making process and must be given sufficient information to make an informed choice. Without this, inappropriate placements will be made, the incidence of secondary movement will be high and service providers will be very annoyed because their funding depends on entrants remaining long enough for them to be able to submit a bill.

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<sup>27</sup> Refugee support services can also play an important role advocating for former refugees who are having difficulties with mainstream services.

The commitment of the current government to improving settlement outcomes of refugees in rural and regional Australia is commendable. The Refugee Council notes in particular DIMIA's Discussion Paper *Supporting Settlement in Rural, Regional and Remote Australia* which identifies a number of issues and possible strategies to improve service delivery to migrants and refugees.

Currently the dominant service delivery models to migrants and refugees in rural and regional areas include:

- generalist migrant workers funded through the CSSS located at local neighbourhood centres or community groups;
- MRC/MSAs providing outreach services;
- settlement services being contracted to providers with regional arrangements such as AMEP programs operating through local TAFEs;
- urban-based services providing services to regional and rural areas via communication technology such as the Internet, video-conferencing, CD-ROM, and telephone;
- urban-based specialist services providing training to mainstream services in rural and regional areas. For example, local health services may receive training from torture and trauma services on working with survivors of torture.

A range of service models are needed to respond to differences in regional infrastructure, the range of diverse needs presented by mobile seasonal workers, and the need to provide cost effective services to a numerically small group. No one model will be able to meet all these requirements. The choice of model must be matched to best meet the needs in the area. That said, the Council does wish to make particular mention of a number of issues that must be taken into consideration when looking to promote humanitarian settlement in rural and regional areas.

#### **i. Investing in Infrastructure**

Commonwealth and State Government policies to encourage migration to rural and regional areas must not be seen as a cost-saving strategy. For settlement programs to be successful and durable, there must be an investment in infrastructure matched by capital expenditure. In addition to the general costs of settlement services, investment in the infrastructure of rural and regional areas is required to:

- provide on-going training for mainstream services on working with refugees and humanitarian entrants. The use of purely technology-based training models in areas in which some workers will not have extensive experience with computer technology is not an appropriate substitution for face to face training;
- develop appropriate information provision strategies. Reliance on Internet technology to disseminate information to entrants is not effective for many refugee and humanitarian groups. The translation of local resource materials into community languages must also be factored into existing budgets;
- create links between mainstream and specialist settlement services;

- provide support and supervision for settlement service providers to avoid the isolation that generalist workers may face in regional and rural areas and to promote skill development. Where service providers are in stand-alone positions assistance in the development of procedure and policy guidelines can be invaluable. As discussed in Section 9.3, mentoring programs between experienced service providers such as MRCs and regional settlement positions are seen as desirable;
- monitor whether providers in rural areas are equipped to make appropriate referrals. Entrants in rural areas have many needs that cannot always be met locally. A good example of this is in relation to family reunion. It is typical for entrants to want to sponsor family members from whom they have been separated but relevant expertise on this issue tends to be clustered in major cities. The challenge is to ensure that their local providers are sufficiently aware of where they can get information from or refer them to;
- ensure that religious needs can be met in regional areas, as religious expression is central to many cultures. This not only requires the facilitation of migration of religious minority leaders to Australia, it also requires active promotion of public tolerance and understanding of other religions. The latter is central to ensuring that people feel they are free to practice their religion;
- ensure access to cultural needs. No matter how fluent you become in another language, there is something very comforting about being able to be entertained or informed in your own language. Ensuring access to a wide range of opportunities for refugees to get access to films, radio programs and reading material in their first language is important for all NESB entrants and invaluable for those for whom language acquisition is problematic and who are either unlikely ever to obtain a level of recreational English and/or who may have limited opportunities to meet others from their own ethnic background;
- ensure that appropriate leisure opportunities are available. In smaller communities recreation can provide an essential chance for newly arrived people to link with the local community and, through the promotion of culturally specific leisure, the whole community can learn more about other cultures in a positive environment;
- build on existing volunteer capacity to support humanitarian entrants. As will be discussed in more detail in Section 10, volunteer involvement can make a considerable contribution to settlement but requires support and supervision.

## ii. Fostering Community Support

It is important not to lose sight of the need to sensitise the host community to the challenges facing refugees and humanitarian entrants and ensure their support for refugees and humanitarian entrants. This involves, *inter alia*:

- preparing the receiving community in advance of any movement into the area. Integral to this is gaining the active support of key community opinion leaders such as the Mayor or Shire President, the head of the Business Chamber, the presidents of the local service clubs (Rotary, Lions etc), the president of the Country Women's Association, the editor of the local paper, local religious leaders etc;

- education the local community about who refugees are and what their needs are on arriving in Australia. For this it is useful to work in partnership with local government;
- promoting examples of successful regional settlement in Australia, such as those in Shepparton, Dubbo and Young.

### **9.5. Encouraging Best Practice In Service Delivery**

A definitive model of best practice for service delivery in the settlement sector does not currently exist, however there are a number of guiding principles of working with refugees which have been discussed extensively in section 2.3. If a model were to be developed it is important that it be flexible enough to be applicable to the range of functions that the settlement service sector undertakes and regional differences.

It may be more useful to have as an aim **'good' practise** rather than 'best' practice as the latter implies that an ultimate standard is achievable or can be defined. In reality excellence in the settlement services field requires flexibility of response not necessarily adherence to a prescribed standard, and there are always new things can be learnt.

Good practice can be encouraged by increasing professionalism within the sector through the provision of training and development of professional competencies (see Sections 11.1-2.) and ensuring security of tenure (see Section 9.1).

### **9.6. Service Standards**

The development and specification of service standards should aim to reflect broader principles of seeking to deliver equitable, responsive and integrated settlement services for refugee and humanitarian entrants. In order to achieve this, the specification of service standards needs to:

- maintain flexibility in relation to the client, the community and regional differences,
- reflect a needs-based approach, and
- actively promote cultural sensitivity, integration and empowerment.

In order to achieve equitable outcomes, improvements in the ways that service standards are developed and specified need to incorporate community capacity building and be responsible to the client and the community.

### **9.7. Measuring Success**

As highlighted in Section 2.1, there appears to be little consensus within the community sector about what 'settlement' is and how it should be measured. There are also clear differences between community sector definitions of settlement and the ways in which governments view settlement and define indicators of success.

As a concept, 'successful settlement' indicates that an individual has reached a certain level of achievement, a finite point, a conclusion to their settlement process at which time they are 'settled'. However, this is not the reality for most humanitarian entrants who experience settlement on something of a continuum dotted with progressive and regressive periods. The focus of measuring settlement should therefore be more toward

concepts of 'settling well', reflecting the diversity and complexity of settlement needs and difficulties.

Measuring settlement outcomes requires a balance of qualitative and quantitative research that supports diversity and multicultural policy and recognises that measurement cannot be by unit or time frame.

## **9.8. Community Management Committees**

It must be recognised that members of community management committees are often humanitarian entrants themselves who may or may not have a sound understanding of settlement issues, the service delivery environment, their fiduciary duties as committee members or other areas essential to their ability to fulfil their role.

As the funding agency, it is necessary that DIMIA provide training and consultancy services to ensure that community management committees have a sound understanding of, *inter alia*:

- the settlement process: as outlined in Section 2, the settlement process involves a complex interplay of practical and emotional needs that present in entrants at different times and in different orders. Management committees need to understand the basics of this process if they are to provide informed guidance to the staff;
- the settlement delivery environment: settlement service delivery should be a partnership between a range of specialist and generalist agencies. Effective management involves understanding where the particular service fits within this matrix and how best links can be made to complementary services;
- their legal responsibilities as a management committee: this includes issues such as financial oversight, reporting etc;
- relevant legislation: several existing and recently changed legislative issues involving public liability, occupational health and safety, privacy legislation and duty of care issues will have significant implications for community management committees and the manner in which they function;
- their responsibilities to their staff: these include provision of employment contracts, undertaking staff reviews, providing a safe working environment and ensuring that staff are appropriately trained and supported. Recognition also has to be given to the fact that staff are often new entrants themselves and are going through their own settlement experiences;
- their responsibilities to the funding body: committees need to understand the importance of workplans and reports, and the necessity of workers following the workplans rather than responding to issues raised by one or more members of the committee that take them away from work they are contractually bound to do.

In addition to providing training, DIMIA needs to have an understanding of their own duty of care to workers and to management committees. Consultants not only need to have a sound understanding of all of the above issues but also need to be aware of the issues and dynamics within each community and the nature of relationships between workers and their clients within the particular cultural context.

Recognition also need to be given that community development and community capacity building are legitimate and important parts of the role of CSSS workers. It is a natural extension of the work they are undertaking with individual entrants.

Finally, the placement of CSSS workers in MRCs/MSAs has many advantages, not least being the opportunity for the workers to make contacts with other workers, be supported by them and learn from their experience.

## **10. VOLUNTEERS**

Volunteers from the both the mainstream community and from within ethnic communities have played a highly valuable role in refugee settlement programs for some time and have continued to provide essential support to refugees and humanitarian entrants. Volunteers bring a special quality and positive contribution to refugee settlement and are engaged with refugees in a number of ways.

Typically used to provide intensive support and assistance in the initial period after arrival, with contact being reduced as entrants become more confident in their new environment, volunteers are also useful 'ambassadors' for refugees. Through their own family, employment and social networks, volunteers add a human face to the refugee issue and help others in the community come to appreciate refugees and understand why they have come to Australia.

The challenge that confronts those working with volunteers is to balance the needs of refugees and with the needs and capacity of volunteers, ensuring there is no exploitation of either party. Volunteers perform a unique role but are vulnerable for a number of reasons:

- volunteers are often from refugee backgrounds and many are in early stages of settlement themselves;
- relationships between volunteers and entrants are often very close and form over a long period of time;
- many volunteers, due to these close relationships, may experience vicarious traumatisation or re-traumatisation as most refugees have a history of torture and trauma;
- volunteers are required to be available to refugees 24 hours a day;
- the commitment required of volunteers is generally long-term, often extending long after the formal contact period.

If they are to work in refugee support programs, it is essential that volunteers not be viewed as 'resource-neutral' and that paid staff be employed to manage volunteer staff in line with approved standards which include:

- planning;
- recruitment against job descriptions;
- initial induction and training;
- appropriate insurance;
- ongoing support and supervision, including regular de-briefing and feedback and the provision of emotional support and counselling;

- reimbursement for out of pocket expenses;
- being provided with accurate and comprehensive information about clients (while receiving training regarding client confidentiality and privacy legislation);
- referral at the rate volunteers can comfortably accommodate; and
- adequate recognition and reward.

Further, it is essential that volunteer programs incorporate:

- screening;
- training;
- monitoring;
- resourcing;
- education for agencies about working with volunteers;
- mechanisms to protect volunteers; and
- mechanisms to protect clients.

In addition to initial training for volunteers, continued training and support is required to ensure that volunteers feel valued and supported. In order to achieve this, volunteer programs not only require appropriate funding but also structure to support the program including coordination and management from within agencies.

It has become apparent through consultations with agencies that training programs for volunteers have fallen far short of previous expectations and there is some uncertainty about who is ultimately responsible. While it can be argued that responsibility for training rests with those agencies using volunteers, there is a discrepancy between DIMIA's expectations that agencies will use volunteers and the manner in which they are funded to do so. It is argued that if agencies are expected to use volunteers, they should be funded to implement a volunteer training and support program or DIMIA should separately fund such a program under its grant scheme.

*The Refugee Council notes that DIMIA will receive submissions from agencies whose work centres on volunteer recruitment and training, including the Mercy Refugee Service. We acknowledge the experience and expertise of these agencies.*

## **11. OTHER ISSUES**

### **11.2. Training**

#### **i. Settlement Workers**

The ability to provide quality services to humanitarian entrants requires staff with very specialised skills. Even at lower levels of service delivery, staff need to have, *inter alia*:

- excellent communication skills
- the ability to work with interpreters
- good cross cultural understanding
- empathy
- patience

- sound sectoral knowledge.

As the level of responsibility increases, a range of additional skills is required. They will, of course, vary according to the nature of the job description and sector, but might include:

- complex casework skills
- community development skills
- crisis management skills
- staff management skills
- program and budget management skills
- advocacy skills
- community liaison skills etc.

Further, it is important that those who work with clients have:

- a detailed knowledge of the background of the various entrant groups;
- a sound understanding of the settlement process;
- a clear understanding of the objectives behind the humanitarian program and how decisions are made in relation to its operation;
- access to professional support and debriefing.

As will be discussed in the following section, there are no academic courses that are specially tailored to produce “settlement workers”. Social work and related courses cover many of the skills but the reality is that most workers in this field either learn on the job or from their life experiences (in the case of many workers from refugee backgrounds).

Until such time as there are formal academic programs available, DIMIA has a responsibility for providing training for the staff of its funded programs. In relation to the training currently available, RCOA would like to make the following observations:

- the quality, relevance and regularity of training for non-IHSS workers varies over time and from state to state. In the state with which the Council has greatest familiarity, NSW, there has been a much appreciated improvement in recent times;
- RCOA notes that in some areas the DIMIA training is now being linked to TAFE certification. This is a very positive step;
- much of the training provided for non-IHSS workers is predominantly issue-specific eg about reporting, domestic violence or a particular computer application. There is merit in balancing this with periodic induction or refresher programs<sup>28</sup> that would cover broader issues and ensure that workers understand the overall framework with which they are working;
- it is important that DIMIA actively promote the importance of staff training to management committee members. In some cases, committee members do not see the necessity/value of training and actively block workers from participating;

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<sup>28</sup>

It is RCOA's experience that even a number of experienced workers have significant gaps in their knowledge, in particular about the offshore selection criteria and process and about pre-arrival experiences.

- RCOA notes the considerable anxiety felt by those associated with IHSS about training for workers in this sector. Many have been operating for considerable periods without training and now that the provider has been appointed, anxiety centres on whether the amount and content of training will be commensurate with need.

Further, it is relevant to reiterate that working in this sector can be very stressful and emotionally draining and that fundamental to staff health and the longevity of their tenure is access to formalised debriefing. It is important both that DIMIA encourages this to be included in workplans and provides the necessary funding for it.

## **ii. Management Committees**

The ability of workers to fulfil their workplans is dependent not only on their own skills but also on the skills of their management committee. Management committees that have a clear understanding of the context of the service, the particular needs of the clients and their responsibilities as a management committee can be of enormous value to the workers. Those who lack this knowledge and/or whose participation is to fulfil other agendas can be obstructive to both the staff and to the furtherance of the aims of the service.

It is therefore important that DIMIA recognises the importance of investing in the training and resourcing of management committees. Section 9.7 sets out the main areas that need to be considered in this regard.

## **iii. DIMIA Staff and Consultants**

Staff turnover and staff rotation within DIMIA require that regular training must also be provided for DIMIA staff working in the area of settlement services. It is important that staff, especially managers and consultants:

- have a good understanding of the broad resettlement framework;
- are well versed in current thinking about good settlement practice;<sup>29</sup>
- have an understanding of the cultures of the main entrant groups;
- acquaint themselves of the backgrounds and needs of new entrant groups;
- understand the challenges and complexities of community-based work;
- see their role as facilitators and supporters and not as “enforcers”;
- respect the experience of those working in the community, especially those who have been in the sector for some time.

Just as workers need support and debriefing, so too do DIMIA staff.

## **iv. Volunteers**

Carefully selected and well-supported volunteers have the capacity to make a very great contribution to any agency. A number of issues pertaining to volunteers were canvassed in Section 10. On the subject of volunteer training, RCOA reiterates the need for volunteers to be well acquainted with, *inter alia*:

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<sup>29</sup> RCOA commends the new UNHCR Handbook on the Reception and Integration of Resettled Refugees and considers that not only should it be required reading for DIMIA staff in this area but also the subject of formal staff discussions.

- the background experiences of refugees;
- the impact of torture/trauma on behaviour;
- privacy requirements;
- the limits of their responsibilities;
- referral pathways;
- the signs of vicarious trauma; and
- self-help mechanisms.

#### **v. Proposers**

It is acknowledged that proposers are supported under IHSS and that this issue will come up in the context of the IHSS evaluation. The Council does, however, wish to stress that proposers' training and information needs should be given high priority. Under the current service delivery model, a great deal is being required of them. If they are to perform this role, they must be resourced. If this is not appropriately done, the entrants for whom they have responsibility will encounter problems that inevitably will require the intervention of workers at a time when the problems have become both complex and urgent. Ensuring proper investment in the resourcing and support of proposers makes good financial sense and also, and most significantly, is in the best interests of the entrants.

#### **vi. Other Agencies**

DIMIA has an important role to play in relation to training of staff in other agencies. Key areas include:

- using settlement planning committees to promote the inclusion of training about working with humanitarian entrants into the training schedules of all relevant departments;
- ensuring that relevant government agencies are provided in a timely fashion with comprehensive information about the profile and needs of entrants groups, in particular groups entering the country for the first time (see Section 3.5).

### **11.3. Professional Competencies**

Despite Australia's long history of refugee resettlement and the high quality of the settlement services, there is as yet no concept of "refugee settlement work" as a profession. People come into the area through a variety of pathways (social work, community work, education, nursing etc) and often move on to other things after a period working with refugees. The current situation is inherently problematic on a number of fronts:

- there is no clearly articulated notion of what skills are required to work in this sector;
- as a result of the above, academic institutions are not in a position to prepare students to work with refugees;
- there is confusion about “entry points” to the sector;
- there is no objective assessment tool that would allow a person’s competency to work in this sector be assessed;
- there is not clear career path, nor any real understanding of what skills and knowledge need to be acquired to progress to higher levels;
- the staff turnover means that in many agencies there is little institutional knowledge or understanding of how the sector has evolved over time; and
- as a result of all of the above, the sector is missing out on attracting competent workers and is losing many who see their work in this field as transient.

If, on the other hand, recognition could be given to this as a profession, and a clear set of professional competencies for various levels developed, it would enable, *inter alia*:

- academic institutions to devise undergraduate and post-graduate courses focusing on developing these professional competencies;
- workers to see that they entering a profession, with clearly defined pathways to more senior positions;
- refugees who have had experience working for UNHCR or NGOs or in another capacity overseas to have their skills assessed and an appropriate entry level determined (thereby removing the barrier of not having local qualifications or experience);
- professional development trainers to be able to better target their courses.

Recognition of refugee settlement work as a profession could also lead to the establishment of a professional association which could work, as other similar associations work, to promote interest the profession, commission research and support professional development.

In addition to the issue of **worker competencies** as outlined above, the area of **organisational competencies** is also worthy of attention. This revolves around defining organisational structures and practices that should be expected in any organisation working with refugee entrants. Having clearly defined organisational competencies would enable:

- new organisations to have a clear indication of what they needed to put in place;
- existing organisations to assess their compliance;
- funding bodies to make objective assessments of the competency of an agency.

The issue of professional competencies has been raised by RCOA’s Director at RRAC and it has been agreed that it be included in work undertaken by the Council. This being said, it is as complex as it is important and additional resources – in particular in the form of a multi-disciplinary working group – would greatly facilitate the development process.

### 11.3. Community Harmony

*Everyone shares in the responsibility of ensuring respect for the individual dignity and worth of each and every refugee. Politicians and the media have a special charge to keep in combating racism, xenophobia and intolerance, and in resisting*

*the temptation to scapegoat refugees. Let us therefore work together to create a culture of respect. The people who are of concern to UNHCR deserve it.*<sup>30</sup>

One of the regrettable consequences of the current debate about boat people is that the term “refugee” has become synonymous in many people’s minds with “illegal” and “criminal” ... and no distinction is being made between those who have entered by boat and those who Australia invited into this country as part of the offshore humanitarian program.

The Government’s efforts to secure community support for their programs have indirectly resulted in the generation of a climate of fear and distrust about “foreigners” in general and “refugees” and “Muslims” in particular. Refugees who have been resident in the community for many years and who now hold Australian citizenship report a negative change in community attitudes towards them. Veiled Islamic women report that they are afraid to go outside without male support.

The Refugee Council compares the current situation to what happened in 1999 when Australia welcomed the Kosovars. At this time the strong messages from political leaders about the importance of supporting these vulnerable people and the need for the community to work together to show how compassionate and generous Australians can be had a profound impact on the community. The 4,000 (predominantly Muslim) Kosovars were welcomed warmly and embraced by the communities that hosted them, including a number in conservative rural areas. Further, lasting connections were forged between the local communities and the refugees.

Integral to the success of Operation Safe Haven was the recognition of community fears and tackling these head on. Efforts were made to ensure that people had access to information and that any concern they had were allayed. Operation Safe Haven showed just how generous and supportive of refugees the Australian community can be if they, themselves, are treated with respect and honesty.

The Refugee Council argues that the Australian Government has a responsibility to apply the same standards in relation to all refugees, irrespective of their country of origin or mode of arrival. Refugees, by definition, are victims of persecution. Australia has a responsibility to ensure that this persecution does not continue in this country.

#### **11.4. Research**

An issue that has arisen on a number of occasions in RCOA’s discussions with the sector is that since the demise of the Bureau of Immigration Research<sup>31</sup> there has been a dearth of funded qualitative research into areas pertaining to refugee settlement. That research being undertaken is often within an academic context and:

- does not always have direct relevance to what is happening on the ground;
- is often not disseminated or promoted amongst service providers so that they can benefit from it.

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<sup>30</sup> From the opening address of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to the 52<sup>nd</sup> Session of the UNHCR Executive Committee. 1<sup>st</sup> October 2001.

<sup>31</sup> This being the simplest of the various names by which it was known during its lifetime.

The absence of ongoing research can lead to stagnation in the sector, decisions being made without good foundation and wisdom being lost when staff move on. The sector encourages DIMIA to reinstate funding for community-based qualitative research.

## 12. CONCLUSION

In the preceding pages, the Refugee Council has endeavoured to share the insights we have gained into the issues of concern to the Minister and DIMIA through specific consultations organised in the context of this review (see Appendix 1) and through our ongoing dialogue with the community sector.

Throughout the sections, a number of recommendations have been included about how existing services can be strengthened and perceived problems resolved. Rather than reiterating them all out of context, RCOA would like to conclude by stressing a number of points that we consider should underpin all thinking about service delivery to humanitarian entrants:

- Those involved in making planning decisions about settlement services must be across current thinking about this sector and must consult with the community sector to ensure that their decisions:
  - can be implemented;
  - will not have unintended consequences in the target sector or other sectors;
  - actually respond to identified needs.
- When planning services to address the practical needs of entrants (accommodation, information, language support etc), equal attention must be given to considering whether the service delivery model selected will also address the full spectrum of emotional needs (trust, self worth, security etc).
- Recognition must be given to the fact that the settlement pathways are non-linear. Different entrants need different things at different times and there may be occasions when a refugee will need exactly the same help more than once.
- Flexibility is the key to any successful service. They must be able to respond to the needs the entrants present with at any given time and they must be able to cope with crises.
- Adaptability is also essential – especially in generalist and mainstream services. The composition of the humanitarian program is changing all the time and providers must be able to respond to the changing entrant groups. Further, other events (such as those of 11<sup>th</sup> September) can have a profound impact on entrants and on the way Australian society views certain groups within it.
- Providing opportunities for workers to engage in dialogue with policy makers is an important way to check that services are functioning as intended.
- Everyone involved in supporting humanitarian entrants (workers, proposers and volunteers) have to be trained and supported. The work they are doing is too important to leave it to chance that they will “get it right”.

- No one person or agency can provide all that is needed for a humanitarian entrant. It has to be recognised as a collective effort and as such, linkages and alliances have to be formed.
- The complementarity of services has to be recognised by all involved. Territorialism and disputes over funding responsibility are detrimental.
- Care must be taken when changing service delivery models to ensure that the sector is fully consulted. In this regard, volunteers must not be forgotten, as they are the backbone of so many services in this sector.
- Funding models should reflect the reality of service delivery in this sector and the complex demands placed on workers.
- DIMIA's budget allocation for settlement services should be needs based (i.e. how much money do we need to provide the necessary services?) rather than resource based (what can we do with the money we have?).
- Every effort should be made to avoid generating unhealthy competition between agencies and division within the sector. This is especially relevant in the selection of funding models.
- Responsibility for creating an environment that is welcoming to refugees and humanitarian entrants rests heavily on the shoulders of politicians. Principled leadership is required, especially in the current climate of fear and grief.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **List Of Agencies that Participated In RCOA's Consultations**

Anglicare  
Asylum Seeker Project - Hotham Mission  
Australian Red Cross  
Burma Hope Foundation  
Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues  
Centre for Philippine Concerns  
Centrelink  
Ecumenical Migration Centre  
Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria  
Indo-Chinese Refugee Association  
Mercy Refugee Service  
Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory  
National Council of Churches in Australia  
New Hope Foundation  
NSW Refugee Health Unit  
North East Region Migrant Resource Centre  
Refugee and Immigrant Health Program - Royal Children's Hospital  
Refugee Support Network  
Serbian Welfare Association  
South East Region Migrant Resource Centre  
Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau  
Springvale Community Health Centre  
STARTTS  
Sudanese Community  
TEN  
Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture