



WSROC

A LIFE DEVOID OF MEANING

Living on a Temporary Protection Visa in
Western Sydney

July 2003

Prepared by Dr Diane Barnes
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For the
Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils Ltd



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In the words of two TPV holders...

”When you take away people’s right to settle or to live as a family unit, life becomes pretty meaningless. “

“We don’t have any life now. Our current life has not meaning”.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The dire circumstances of people with temporary protection visas (TPVs) living in the Western area of Sydney are well known to many service-providing organisations. The dedicated and caring staff and volunteers associated with these organisations want a reduction in the human suffering they encounter every day, but the development of effective strategies to bring about change needs to be underpinned by documentation of the current situation. To this end, a research project was initiated by the Western Region Organisation of Councils (WSROC)¹. What follows is an account of the research undertaken, the findings that emerged, and implications arising from the findings.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As far as can be ascertained, over 50% of TPV holders (at least 3000 individuals) now live in the Western Sydney area. This is primarily due to extensive secondary movement after their release from detention. Qualitative interviews with TPV holders and representatives of local community service organisations (both ethno-specific and mainstream) have shed light on why this secondary movement occurs, the experience of TPV holders after they move to Western Sydney, issues of major concern to TPV holders, and the impact on ethnic communities and service organisations of current entitlement limitations.

2.1 Major Findings

Reasons for secondary movement:

TPV holders are drawn to locations where they know they will find others from their own ethnic background. The extent and duration of their dependence on their own ethnic communities is far greater than for other 'newly arrived' populations, necessitated by their ineligibility for a range of settlement services that are normally available to refugees. In particular, lack of adequate means to learn English prolongs dependence on others to interpret and translate for them, and presents a continuing barrier to engagement with the wider Australian community.

The experience of TPV holders after they move to Western Sydney:

TPV holders' early relief of being recognised as legitimate refugees and being released from detention is quickly replaced by anxiety over the multitude of challenges that immediately confront them. Needs that require urgent attention within the first few days or weeks of arrival in Sydney include:

- Acquiring temporary accommodation until suitable medium to long term accommodation can be found. This invariably involves staying with friends, relatives or acquaintances in grossly overcrowded conditions (eg, a man reported staying for 40 days with his wife and three children in a single room of a two-bedroom flat occupied by his sister and her family).
- Acquiring food, clothing, bedding and general household goods. Living conditions are often very poor in the initial period, as most arrive with no possessions whatsoever and the NGOs that provide household goods sometimes run short of supplies. Beds and fridges are particularly difficult to acquire.
- Applying for Special Benefits, or transferring Centrelink registration from the location of initial application to the local office in Sydney, and establishing local bank accounts. The

¹ WSROC encompasses the following local government areas: Auburn, Bankstown, Baulkham Hills, Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Holroyd, Liverpool, Parramatta and Penrith.

speed with which these things are accomplished is often dependent on the availability of interpreters (usually friends or volunteers from the same ethnic community).

- Beginning to learn English and finding employment. Frustration quickly builds in both of these areas, as unanticipated barriers are encountered.
- Accessing health facilities for immediate medical problems. Reliance on community contacts is necessary, both to locate appropriate facilities and to translate.
- Additional matters need urgent attention in relation to children (eg, school enrolment, application for Family Tax Benefits), and all of the other matters listed above become far more complex for families with children.

While greatly appreciative of efforts made on their behalf, TPV holders quickly realise that their expectations of receiving adequate help from their own ethnic communities or from social welfare organisations are unrealistic. Because of language barriers they have minimal contact with anyone outside their own ethnic community. Trying to find suitable accommodation, searching for avenues to learn English and chasing rumours that could lead to employment become ongoing preoccupations. Those who succeed in finding jobs are often under-paid and sometimes subjected to other forms of exploitation (eg, bribery). But as the months pass and they become more-or-less established at a very basic level, TPV holders become increasingly distraught over the uncertainty that surrounds their own future and that of their families. Many spoke of the inability to visit spouses and children living overseas whilst on a TPV as being tantamount to imprisonment in Australia. And the fear that all they have been through in their quest for permanent protection in Australia may come to naught is adversely affecting the mental health of many.

The impact on ethnic communities and service organisations:

Given the tight restrictions on eligibility for services that are federally funded, and the ambiguity surrounding eligibility for many services that are state funded, ethnic and other local community service organisations are overwhelmed with requests from TPV holders for assistance to meet their basic needs. But these organisations are ill equipped to meet the demands made of them. Those that receive DIMIA funding are precluded from providing services at all and are in a particularly difficult situation as their reputation with their constituent communities is at stake. Organisations that receive no DIMIA funding usually have a very limited resource base to draw upon, and are heavily reliant on volunteers to enhance their service provision capacity. The professional expertise necessary to address the complex issues confronting TPV holders is in short supply. Service provision is fragmented and inconsistent, with a high likelihood that some of those in most need may be missing out altogether. Pressing needs of TPV holders that local service organisations have identified but that are not being adequately addressed are:

- Affordable housing
- Material goods such as fridges, beds, clothing, school uniforms
- English classes, especially at a post-basic level
- Educational opportunities
- Skills training to enhance employment prospects
- Employment opportunities that are not exploitative
- Interpreters
- Advice regarding immigration issues
- Translation of documents
- Legal assistance
- Counselling for emotional problems
- Dental services
- Services for the disabled
- Avenues for social interaction
- Homework assistance for minors

- General orientation and settlement services

2.2 A hierarchy of possible responses

To ameliorate the situation for TPV holders, ethnic communities and service organisations in Western Sydney, three possible courses of action can be considered

A maximal response:

This would work towards the elimination of TPVs altogether and the granting of permanent protection to asylum seekers from the point at which they are found to be legitimate refugees. Strong arguments in support of such a goal can be developed in terms of human rights, treaty obligations, evidence of long-term damage to mental health, etc. If temporary protection were to be replaced by permanent protection for all refugees in Australia (regardless of how they initially entered the country), then the matter of eligibility for the same support services for all refugees would automatically be resolved as well. However, achievement of this goal would require a change to federal legislation, and the current political climate in Australia suggests little chance of success in the short to mid term. In the meantime, there would be no easing of the here-and-now plight of TPV holders.

A mid-level response:

This would not tackle the ongoing issuance of temporary visas, but would work towards broadening the entitlements of TPV holders to equate them with the entitlements of refugees on permanent protection visas. This level of response is still ambitious, as it, too, challenges legislation and associated regulations at both federal and state levels – but it is probably more achievable on political grounds than the former. The argument on which it is based has more to do with equity for all refugees currently living in Australia, in terms of their every-day needs, than with the more politically fraught arguments associated with granting permanent residence to refugees who entered the country ‘illegally’. The assumed position of the Federal Government, that it is not appropriate to provide settlement services that imply permanency to refugees who are likely to only remain in the country temporarily, can be countered by the argument that three years is far too long to let TPV holders flounder without adequate supports. If this strategy succeeded at both the federal and New South Wales state levels, TPV holders would then be entitled to:

- general settlement support (eg, through MRCs and DIMIA-funded ethnic organisations);
- English language training;
- assistance in finding work;
- the right of return if they leave the country;
- family reunion rights;

They could also have means-tested access to:

- public housing and emergency accommodation;
- household set-up and other immediate material goods;
- TAFE courses;
- legal aid;
- disability services;
- dental services.

A minimalist response:

This would involve simply strengthening existing service-provision mechanisms for TPV holders. Essentially, it would mean finding extra resources for ethnic and community based NGOs that are already involved (or have the potential to become involved) with TPV holders. Unless and until the more ambitious strategies to bring about change at the Federal and State Government levels are successful, these local agencies will continue to carry the lion's share of responsibility for meeting many of the needs of TPV holders. There is great urgency to acquire additional resources in the short term for local organisations that are struggling to cope with unrelenting pleas for assistance from TPV holders (eg, several organisations reported receiving over 100 service requests from TPV holders in the previous six months). While strengthening existing service-provision mechanisms has some immediate appeal on pragmatic grounds, ongoing reliance on community based NGOs and ethnic organisations for meeting basic needs has many inherent weaknesses, as noted above. It would be better for these organisations to be relieved of responsibilities that more appropriately belong to federal and state governments, and supported (through government subsidies) in the things they do best. Local community organisations have an invaluable role to play in responding to TPV holders at an individual level, particularly in areas such as:

- child care
- emergency accommodation
- emergency material and financial relief
- transporting and escorting TPV holders to 'official' appointments
- interpreting and translating
- negotiation with real estate agents and prospective employers
- information sessions
- emotional support
- social activities
- homework support
- financial management seminars

2.3 Conclusion and Recommendation:

The strategies discussed above are not necessarily mutually exclusive. They are options to be considered, and the challenge now is to decide how much time and effort to devote to one or more of these strategies. There needs to be debate on strategic options in which all concerned parties participate. Existing interagency networks already devote time to strategic matters, and they are the obvious platform for initiating more far-reaching strategic discussions and planning.

It is recommended that WSROC take a leadership role in organising and sponsoring an initial one- or two-day strategic planning forum to include the Refugee Council of Australia (RCA), NCOSS, relevant local governments, interagency groups and other parties involved in service-provision to TPV holders in Western Sydney. The purpose of the forum should be to develop a coordinated strategic plan for addressing TPV issues in Western Sydney, based on careful consideration of federal, state and local aspects of the situation. In the planning phase a considerable amount of networking will need to occur to ensure the support and involvement of all relevant parties, and work will also need to be done after the forum to implement the plan developed. It is envisaged that WSROC would need to be actively involved in this project for a six-month period.

3. TEMPORARY PROTECTION VISAS

3.1 Introduction of TPVs: Terms and conditions

Temporary protection visas (visa subclass 785) were first introduced in October 1999 (DIMIA, 2002). They are issued to people who have claimed asylum in Australia (having entered without official immigration documents such as a valid passport or visa), who have been held in detention during the processing of their claims, and who have subsequently been found to be legitimate refugees. TPVs are usually valid for three years, entitling the holder to remain in Australia for this period of time, but not permitting them to re-enter if they leave the country. Prior to expiry of the TPV, a holder may apply for a permanent protection visa (to be assessed on the basis of a continuing threat of persecution if they were to return to their country of origin), and may remain in Australia until that application is finally determined. However the criteria of assessment for permanent protection were tightened by legislation passed in September 2001 (DIMIA, 2002) specifying that permanent protection will not be granted to any TPV holder who remained in a transit country where they could have claimed protection, for more than seven days whilst en route to Australia. In circumstances where such a TPV holder is assessed as still requiring protection when their three-year visa expires, they may be granted a further temporary visa.

Holders of TPVs are not entitled to the full range of settlement services available to refugees who have been granted permanent protection (largely those whose claims for refugee status have been assessed off-shore, and who were granted their visa before entering Australia): entitlements and limitations are summarised in Appendix A. Essentially, TPV holders are only entitled to a sufficient level of support to 'tide them over' during what is envisaged by the federal government to be a temporary stay in Australia, the notion of 'settlement' apparently not being considered relevant.

3.2 Issuance of TPVs

As of November 2002, over 8,000² TPVs have been issued to refugees formerly held in detention, since the introduction of this visa class in October 1999. In recent months the numbers being issued have decreased, reflecting the impact of the 'Pacific Solution' in forestalling new boat arrivals on Australia's shores, and a corresponding reduction of the 'backlog' awaiting determination of their refugee claims in immigration detention centres. This trend is likely to continue in the short-term, but can expect to be reversed if asylum seekers find new ways of entering the country.

In recent months, some asylum seekers who were intercepted by Australian forces and relocated to islands such as Nauru and Manus for processing of their refugee claims, have been assessed as genuine refugees and allowed to enter Australia on other classes of visa ('secondary movement' subclasses 447 and 451). Since they have the same limitations as TPVs (ie, temporary nature of the visa, ineligibility for re-entry and family reunion, and restrictions on access to services), they fall within the scope of this research. At the end of August 2002, Australia has received 170 such new arrivals, all of whom are wives and children of men already living in the Australian community on TPVs.

The vast majority of TPV holders are from two source countries: Iraq (approximately 48%) and Afghanistan (approximately 42%). Smaller numbers come from Iran (approximately 6%), Sri Lanka (approximately 1%), and a range of other Middle Eastern, Asian, African and Eastern European countries. Most are males who are single or whose wives and

² Based on Centrelink figures, which reflect applications for income support. Since family groups are likely to have been counted as single cases, Centrelink figures are lower than the actual numbers granted TPVs.

children remain overseas, although the number of family groups has recently increased due to the issuance of 'secondary movement' visas to wives and children. Others came to Australia with one or more relatives, such as siblings or cousins. Centrelink figures provide an approximate age breakdown of TPV holders in Australia, as summarised in Table 1³.

TABLE 1
Age Distribution of TPV Holders (October 2002)

Age	Number	Percentage
15 and under	6 *	0
16 – 17	216	3
18 – 24	1741	24
25 – 34	3038	43
35 – 44	1493	21
45 – 54	468	6
55 – 64	119	2
65 and over	52	1
Total	7133	100

* This figure is grossly distorted, as it excludes unattached minors who have been made wards of the Minister for Immigration, and it also excludes children who have no Centrelink case registered in their own name because the Family Tax Benefit is applied for, and paid to, the parent or other relative who is caring for them.

Almost without exception TPV holders have already applied, or intend to apply, for reassessment of their cases, in the hope that they will be recognised as needing ongoing protection. The earliest recipients of TPVs have now had their visas for almost three years, and thus the visas are, or will soon be, at the point of expiry. In these cases, determinations by DIMIA of their applications for ongoing protection are imminent. Processing of reassessment claims begins after applicants have held their TPVs for 30 months. A large cohort of approximately 3,000 TPV holders will have reached this crucial 30-month point in the first half of 2003.

3.3 Drift to the western suburbs of Sydney

When large numbers of people began to be released from immigration detention centres and given TPVs, the federal government's intention had been to disperse them across Australia. To this end, they have been taken by bus or plane to Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Darwin, Hobart, Launceston or Canberra, set up with accommodation for the first night, and assisted to apply for Special Benefits from Centrelink in those cities (DIMIA, 2002). With few exceptions⁴, only those who have been detained in Villawood are released directly in Sydney, as Sydney was deemed to already accommodate a disproportionately high share of Australia's refugees and immigrants.

After release from detention, however, many TPV holders have taken matters into their own hands, and made their own determination of where they want to live. There has therefore been a considerable amount of secondary movement from the location to which they were first transported – and, to an overwhelming extent, this relocation has occurred into New

³ Note that these figures provide only an approximate estimation, as they are based on cases that have registered with Centrelink rather than individuals: thus, couples are usually registered as single cases, and dependent children for whom the Family Tax Benefit is being claimed are registered through the adult who provides primary care (such a person may already be registered as a case in their own right).

⁴ Exceptional circumstances include minors with relatives in Sydney, or a female with children whose husband lives in Sydney.

South Wales. This is indicated in Table 2, which shows secondary movements in terms of TPV cases currently registered with Centrelink (ie, those currently in receipt of Special Benefits and/or Family Tax Benefits)⁵.

TABLE 2
Secondary Movement of TPV Holders
(Cases registered with Centrelink as of 1 November 2002)

State	Initial location		Movement to other states		Movement from other states		Current location	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
WA	880	20	607	23	95	4	368	9
NT	74	2	74	3	1	0	1	0
NSW	554	13	68	2.5	1717	64	2203	51
TAS	70	2	68	2.5	2	0	4	0
VIC	713	17	328	12	607	23	992	23
QLD	958	22	765	29	75	3	268	6
SA	1056	24	749	28	163	6	470	11
UNK	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4306	100	2660	100	2660	100	4306	100

Table 2 shows that over 50% of all TPV holders currently registered with Centrelink are located in New South Wales, even though only 13% had initially been released by DIMIA in that state. Although there are no statistics available on the secondary movement of TPV holders who are now in employment and no longer in receipt of financial support from Centrelink, it is likely that the percentage of these people located in New South Wales is even higher. Sydney, in particular, acts as a magnet for TPV holders looking for employment, as word spreads through their informal 'grapevine' that this is where jobs can most readily be obtained.

The secondary movement of TPV holders to New South Wales is not fully reflected in DIMIA's own statistics, which are based on the residential postcodes provided by TPV holders. At the end of June 2002, DIMIA had formal record of only 2,238 TPV holders living in New South Wales, which is roughly one quarter of the total number in Australia. Comparison with the Centrelink case figures provides a conservative indication of the size of the discrepancy. The gross shortfall in DIMIA's records of TPV holders residing in New South Wales occurs because, although TPV holders are required to notify DIMIA of any change of address details, many fail to do so. The under-reporting of change of address details appears to be particularly prevalent amongst TPV holders from Afghanistan⁶.

In addition to the anticipation of finding employment, the pull to Sydney has occurred because, like the rest of us, TPV holders choose to live in proximity to people they know and in communities where they can communicate and feel a sense of belonging. For most, Western Sydney is the location that meets these criteria. Although no precise statistics are available on the numbers of TPV holders in specific local government areas (LGAs), there is broad consensus amongst service providing agencies and TPV holders themselves that the vast majority of TPV holders from Afghanistan live in the Auburn LGA, while those from Iraq cluster mainly in the Fairfield and Auburn LGAs. Smaller but still significant numbers of TPV holders from these and various other countries of origin also live in Blacktown, Bankstown, Liverpool and Parramatta LGAs.

⁵ The same limitations as were noted above apply in relation to estimates based on Centrelink cases. Thus, the actual numbers of TPV holders will be higher than the raw numbers provided in Table 2.

⁶ At the end of June 2002, DIMIA's figures of TPV residence in New South Wales were 771 from Afghanistan, compared with 1,127 from Iraq. These figures are discrepant with the nationwide estimates of proportions of TPV holders from various source countries (42% and 48% respectively from Afghanistan and Iraq), as well as with local estimates of ethnic and service organisations in the WSROC area.

Further evidence of high concentration of TPV holders in Western Sydney can be found in the numbers of unaccompanied minors known to the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCs) who are living in various localities across the state. As of 15 October 2002, a total of 86 unaccompanied minor TPV holders were known to DoCs. This includes 58 who were wards of the Minister because they had no relatives whatsoever in Australia, and 28 who were in the care of a relative other than a parent (usually an older sibling or cousin). The state-wide distribution of unaccompanied minors is reported in Table 3. As nearly all unaccompanied minors (whether wards or not) live in households with people from their own ethnic background who are often TPV holders themselves, their geographic spread is likely to be similar to the spread of the ethnic communities to which they belong.

TABLE 3
Unaccompanied minor TPV holders known to DoCs
(as of 15 October 2002)

Location	Number
Auburn	56
Liverpool	6
Fairfield	2
Parramatta	4
Ryde	2
Bankstown	2
Blacktown	2
Strathfield	4
St Mary's	3
Cootamundra	3
Coffs Harbour	1
Mudgee	1
Total	86

It should be noted that DoCs does not know of all non-ward unaccompanied minors in New South Wales, as those moving here from other states with non-parental relatives may not come to the attention of DoCs. The majority of unaccompanied minors are from Afghanistan.

4. UNDERTAKING THE RESEARCH

4.1 Methodology

The aim of this research was to explore the following questions:

- What is the demographic profile of TPV holders in the Western Sydney region?
- What are their current circumstances and needs?
- What sources of help have they approached?
- What impact have these requests had on local organisations and communities?
- What additional resources are needed to bring the standard of living of TPV holders to a level that is basically acceptable in Australian society?

In relation to the first question, demographic data was sourced from relevant government agencies.

To address the other questions, community organisations concerned about refugee issues were initially briefed about the research project at interagency meetings attended by the researcher, where verbal presentations were made and written material was circulated⁷. 54 survey questionnaires were distributed at these meetings and by mail, to organisations in Western Sydney known to be (or deemed likely to be) in contact with TPV holders. They included both social welfare agencies and ethnic support organisations. 24 questionnaires were completed and returned, with twenty of the 24 responses indicating that a key member of the organisation would be willing to be interviewed by the researcher. Interviews were held with representatives of all twenty of these organisations, to explore in more depth the issues they had identified in their written responses to the survey. Types and locations of organisations where interviews were held are specified in Table 4.

TABLE 4
Organisations interviewed

Clientele of Organisation		Location of Organisation	
A specific ethnic community	7	Auburn LGA	11
Migrants and/or refugees in general	6	Fairfield LGA	5
Mainstream (general population)	7	Blacktown LGA	2
		City headquarters	2

Topics covered in both the questionnaire (see Appendix 2) and subsequent interviews were: the extent and nature of requests for assistance that the organisation receives from TPV holders, the extent and limits of their ability to meet these requests, the adequacy and limitations of the referral networks they use for TPV holders, and their perceptions of the impact of current visa restrictions on the lives of TPV holders. While the sample of organisations at which interviews were held was not exhaustive, it did include sufficient variety to produce a comprehensive picture of what was happening at the 'grass roots' level in areas of highest TPV holder concentration. The two organisations interviewed that had a broader mandate than Western Sydney alone were able to provide information from a wider perspective on the comparative circumstances and pockets of need within the WSROC area.

⁷ Interagency groups at which the researcher presented were the Fairfield Migrant Interagency, the Refugee Support Network, and the TPV Support Group.

In the second phase of the research, qualitative interviews were conducted with 20 TPV holders living in the WSROC area. Contact with TPV holders was made through organisations interviewed in the first phase of the research. Information about the research was translated into relevant languages, and was distributed by various organisations to TPV holders whom they knew. These TPV holders were invited to meet with the researcher if they wished, with great care being taken to ensure that none felt coerced. Qualitative interviews were then arranged with 20 TPV holders who volunteered to participate. In developing the sample, diversity was sought in the country of origin, age, sex, and family circumstances of the people interviewed, as summarised in Table 5.

TABLE 5
Characteristics of sample of 20 TPV holders interviewed

Country of Origin	Sex		Family Circumstances		
	Male	Female	Single	Spouse &/or Children Overseas	Accompanied by Immediate Family
Afghanistan	3			3	
Iraq	5	5	4	3	3
Iran	2	4			6
Sri Lanka	1		1		
Total	11	9	5	6	9

The interviews with TPV holders focussed exclusively on their experience of living in Sydney on a TPV: no exploration was undertaken of their background prior to coming to Australia, or of their time in immigration detention centres in Australia. Specific topics covered in the interviews were: their reasons for living in Western Sydney, the challenges they have encountered since being issued with TPVs, whom they have approached for assistance and the adequacy of help they have received, and their expectations concerning their future.

4.2 Limitations of this research and links with other research projects

Using a qualitative methodology, this research identifies a range of important issues confronting TPV holders and service providers in Western Sydney. However because the number of interviews conducted was reasonably small, the findings are indicative rather than conclusive.

This research should not be considered in isolation: it makes a small but significant contribution to a growing body of knowledge and understanding of the TPV phenomenon in Australia. It builds on preliminary research already undertaken in Queensland (Mann, 2001) and Victoria (Mansouri, 2002), which enables interesting comparisons to be made with the situation in New South Wales. However, the present study is more limited in its scope: it aims to provide an overview of needs and services in the WSROC area specifically.

Other research projects currently under way will provide deeper insights into specific aspects of the experience and needs of TPV holders in New South Wales: eg, Pearl Fernandes' forthcoming publication (2003) that reports on the emotional functioning of TPV holders, based on a qualitative analysis of group work at STARTTS; research currently being conducted through Charles Sturt University with a major emphasis on service providers in the health and education sectors; a longitudinal study comparing the mental health status of TPV holders and refugees granted permanent protection that is being

planned by Dr Zachary Steel through the Psychiatry Research and Training Unit at Liverpool Hospital.

Consultation with several of these researchers and a number of strategic organisations led to the realisation that relatively under-explored issues in relation to TPV holders included accommodation, income security and employment, and that the impact of the influx of TPV holders on established ethnic communities was also an area about which little was known. Therefore, particular attention was paid to these areas in the qualitative interviews that were undertaken in the present research.

The findings of this research are presented in the following three sections of the report. First to be presented is an account of the experiences and challenges encountered by TPV holders who move to Western Sydney. The next section presents findings related to specific areas of need that emerged during the course of the research. The third section presents findings related to the impact of the influx of TPV holders on ethnic communities and local service organisations.

5. LIFE IN WESTERN SYDNEY FOR TPV HOLDERS

5.1 The pull to their own ethnic communities

Only one of the TPV holders interviewed for this research had been released from detention in Sydney. All of the others had come to Western Sydney from places as far afield as Perth, Brisbane, Adelaide and Melbourne, for the specific reason that this is where they knew they could find their compatriots. While the pattern of seeking support from their own ethnic community to ease the transition into a new culture is widespread amongst new immigrants in general when they first arrive in Australia, the strength of the pull in small refugee communities is often much stronger. This mentality of banding together in the face of shared adversity is likely to have had its roots in the persecution experienced in the country of origin, and is naturally carried over to facing new shared adversities in Australia. One ethnic leader explained it thus:

‘Because [our community] was a minority in the original country, the people were very close, with a lot of intermarriage, and the place of worship was where they gathered together. So everybody knows everybody in the old country. So, everybody who arrives in Australia *must* know somebody [who has come here before them]. It is *impossible* for someone to arrive and not know anybody.’

Even if TPV holders do not have the personal details of others from their own community when first released from detention, they are confident that if they make their way to an established ethnic organisation they will quickly establish links:

‘Many of our community were originally discharged from detention in Perth. They were given the names of our ethnic organisations in Sydney and Melbourne before leaving detention, so after being taken to Perth they contacted these organisations and then came to either Sydney or Melbourne. Many of these people did not personally know anyone in Australia before, but after arriving here in Sydney they have been able to establish that they came from the same village or city as some other people who are here.’

Often friendship networks become established in the first place in detention centres, and as successive persons are released they will re-establish contact with those who have preceded them into the general community. Such a chain reaction has certainly occurred amongst the Afghan Hazaras in the Auburn area:

‘The majority of Hazara TPVs are in Auburn because in our tradition, when someone comes to a new place and another Afghan is already there, they join together. Because one person we knew about was living in Auburn, that’s why all of us have come to Auburn. ... So if someone comes from one detention centre or whatever, they are invited and introduced to everyone else as soon as they arrive.’

Without exception, they came to Sydney because they believed that they would receive help and support from their relatives, friends or broader ethnic community – help of a type and intensity that was not available anywhere else. One agency employee recounted:

‘A person I know, who has been doing research in Wollongong, was saying that a lot of people in Wollongong were interested in providing accommodation to TPV holders. But TPV holders refuse to go there because they say that their community is in Auburn, and they are coming here because of the community support.’

Even for those who were released from detention in states where a higher level of government-funded services were available to TPV holders (eg, Queensland), the support offered by their own ethnic community in Sydney was seen as more essential. As one TPV holder explained:

‘While other states may have better services for TPV holders, the need for socialising and emotional support is very important and we would prefer to give up the other services available elsewhere in order to get this emotional support from our community in Sydney’.

A number of the TPV holders interviewed for this research were able to explain in more depth the specific types of help and support that they sought from their own ethnic communities, and their reasons for believing that such help could not be obtained from other sources. The predominant expectations of what their own communities would be able to do were:

- To provide them with an initial place to live, since accommodation is arranged by DIMIA for only the first night or so after release from detention;
- To translate and interpret for them. Since most speak and write little or no English, they are “like blind people” when first released from detention, totally reliant on others who speak their language to lead them into engagement with the wider Australian community.
- To teach them how to negotiate their way in Australian society – from learning about and accessing local services, to managing public transport and banking, to dealing with real estate agents, to understanding procedures, to filling in forms, etc.
- To provide the kind of emotional support that comes from being with people who ‘understand’ because they have been through similar traumas and challenges.
- To provide a sense of ‘belonging’, a social network for relaxation, and a haven against racist attitudes that are encountered in the wider community.
- To provide ‘word of mouth’ opportunities for finding employment.
- To provide news of events in the old country.

Each of these issues will be discussed in more detail in later sections of this report. However, there is one further reason for turning to their own ethnic communities that needs to be recognised. Some TPV holders are very uncomfortable with the idea of accepting help from others (especially from the Australian Government), and want to become contributing members of the broader society as soon as possible. They believe short-term reliance on their own ethnic community provides them with the best spring-board from which to be able to achieve this goal. One man explained it thus:

‘One of the reasons we came to Sydney was that we knew that there is a large community of our people based here. So therefore we knew that there would be a lot of services, a lot of help, socialising – and that with this help we can live better. ... We want to try to settle in a healthy way, with the help of our friends whom we can trust and who can understand what it is like for us. ... Also, we want to help the community here by working. Especially when we are young, we want to work and build a life and contribute to the community – it is a two-way process. ... In the other state where I was released, there was not so much possibility of finding work. ... If I had stayed in the other state, and just lived on the support from the government, then I would not be able to contribute – but if I come to Sydney and find work, then I can pay tax and I am not a burden.’

While the pull to their own ethnic communities mirrors a general trend amongst new settlers in Australia, the magnitude of the immediate needs of TPV holders upon their release from detention intensifies this pull enormously. The pull is compounded not only by their ineligibility for settlement services that assist the transition of refugees granted permanent protection, but also by their uncertainty about whether they are really accepted within the wider Australian society. However, they quickly find out that the magnitude of their needs, and their culturally based high expectations of support from their own communities, are in fact far more than their communities can accommodate. As one community leader explained:

‘Most come to Sydney because the community is here, and they are expecting some help from the community. It is only after they come here that they realise that the community can’t help them. Ours is a small community. ... But they can’t do much because the community itself is not so rich. They feel for these people, but there is a limit to what they can do. They do feel very, very bad.’

5.2 Immediate needs upon arrival in Sydney

For someone who has never been through the experience of being stranded in a totally unfamiliar country in which you don’t speak the language, it is hard to imagine what it must be like for a TPV holder on their first day of ‘freedom’ in Australia. One young woman recalled her experience thus:

‘I was in Woomera... We were released from detention and taken by bus to Adelaide, then we were taken by bus to Melbourne, then to Canberra. In Canberra, we were met by two Immigration staff – two nice ladies who were very helpful. They assisted us through Centrelink and bank processes, and they had reserved accommodation for us in a hotel for the first night. The next day the two Immigration ladies took us to the bus terminal, to go wherever we wanted.’

Bewilderment and confusion are rife in the early days, as illustrated by the following situation recounted by the manager in a service-provision organisation:

‘[We know one family where] the eldest girl is 22, then the next girl is 19, and the boy is 14 – they’re siblings. They came from Curtin, and they landed up in Melbourne. They knew one lady in Sydney, so rang her and said “We’re coming to Sydney” – because DIMIA asked them did they know anybody, and this was the only person they knew. The lady said “Yes, you can come – I’ll get my brother to meet you”. They told her they were coming on the bus, and would be at Sydney Central at a particular time. And when they got to Central, they were sitting there waiting and waiting for more than two hours and nobody came. Finally they saw a man passing on the street who looked Afghan, and they spoke to him and told them their situation. This man said “Well, you can come with me” – and he took them in. They discovered later that the lady who said she would get her brother to meet them, actually lived in Dubbo – and she had no idea that Dubbo and Sydney were different places. Because these people come from villages, they’ve got no idea of distances – and the brother was very angry with her for promising these youngsters he would meet them, because it was six hours journey away. Now the three siblings are still with the man who took them in.’

Bombardment by a multitude of issues begins immediately, as the following quotes from two organisations illustrate:

'I have been helping a man who came out from detention about three weeks ago. He would have had some friends from Sierra Leone, but his friends were not in a position to do what was needed. [I made arrangements] to accommodate him, then I took him to Centrelink, to get his Medicare card, to open a bank account, etc – to go through that whole process. He had some English, but he still needed to know what to do. That was his first day in the Australian community. Just to cope with a shopping centre – he would never have been able to do that by himself.'

'There's just so much stuff that they've got to do in terms of settling – and it's really difficult to find employment, or seek employment, without the formal support, when there are so many other things going on in their lives. They don't know when their time [in Australia] might be up, or when they're going to be asked to move on by their friends/family [with whom they have been staying]; they don't know what their kids are doing – all these things that are going on in the background, keeping people distracted.'

Needs that require immediate attention within the first few days or weeks of arrival in Sydney include:

- Acquiring temporary accommodation until suitable medium to long term accommodation can be found.
- Acquiring food, clothing and toiletries, bedding.
- Applying for Special Benefits, or transferring Centrelink registration from the location of initial application to the local office in Sydney.
- Establishing of local bank accounts, and arranging for transfer of Centrelink payments into these local accounts.
- Applying for Medicare, and accessing doctors and other health care providers.
- Acquiring general household goods (as soon as TPV holders move into rental accommodation).

Additional immediate needs that are specific to children are:

- Establishing suitable care and living arrangements for unaccompanied minors.
- Applying for financial support for children (usually this involves application for Family Tax Benefits, but DoCs and DIMIA provide additional support for unaccompanied minors).
- Enrolment in school.
- Arranging child care for younger children.

From TPV holders' own perspective, further pressing needs that they want to begin addressing immediately are:

- Learning English.
- Enhancing employability (through recognition of overseas qualifications, acquisition of new skills or further education).
- Finding employment.
- Acquiring accurate and up-to-date information regarding immigration matters.
- If possible, re-establishing contact with family members overseas.

5.3 Limited sources of help immediately available

When they first arrive in Sydney, TPV holders immediately telephone any relatives or friends they may have here and invariably these personal contacts will take them home for at least a few nights, regardless of the strain of overcrowding. Other TPV holders who do not know anyone personally, will simply make their way to a place where they have heard that others from their background are concentrated (such as Auburn for Hazaras), and start asking around until they can establish a connection with someone. Over the next few days, the limits of the help that is available from these personal sources becomes apparent and then a frantic search for additional sources of support begins.

Centrelink is usually the first port-of-call, although even this needs to be expedited by a friend, relative, or community volunteer who can act as interpreter. Centrelink staff receive pleas from TPV holders for assistance with the full range of immediate needs listed above – even though they are only in a position to arrange income support and provide a minimal job-matching facility.

The application for financial entitlements is relatively straightforward, and does provide assurance of sufficient income for meeting basic survival needs. But TPV holders leave the Centrelink office not knowing where they will be able to live, how they will be able to tell a doctor about their health problems, how they should go about learning English, what to do about finding employment, how to maximise their chances of gaining permanent residency in Australia – and what to do about a myriad other pressing concerns. With each potential source of help turned to by TPVs, restrictions and limitations are encountered and a wild goose chase of referrals from one service provider to another can quickly ensue. For example, as one service agency manager explained:

‘There was an Iraqi fellow released from Curtin – and the only person he knew was someone who had been in the detention centre with him, and who was in Auburn. So this man came to Auburn. He had a child with a disability, and he came to Auburn [with his child] and went to the home of that man he knew, who was sharing a flat with two other families. They obviously didn’t want him in their flat, so they just dropped him at the Centrelink office in the morning (after they had let him stay for the night). So he [and his disabled child] were just on the doorstep of Centrelink. And Centrelink simply gave him the Special Benefit and then referred him here. We were asked to find housing – and I explained that we could not do that – so I referred him to Barnado’s.’

In this case, the wild goose chase continued after they arrived at Barnado’s in Auburn:

‘So the father arrived here at Barnado’s. He didn’t know where to go or what to do. We unfortunately didn’t have any vacancies [in our accommodation]. I had to advocate very strongly to get him some assistance through the Department of Housing. Because of his child, they provided motel accommodation in Lidcombe, for about four weeks. The man couldn’t get any child care assistance, so that he could do anything about getting a job or attending English classes. ... We couldn’t get the child into a special school – I was told very frankly that there are a number of Australian residents who were already waiting, and that she would be on the bottom of the list because she was a TPV holder. That was very, very difficult for the father. ... He then found another Iraqi fellow, who was renting out every room, including the lounge room, to all of these different people. So they moved into that flat, and that little girl was sleeping in a lounge room with her father, with five other unrelated males. ... [After several months] we were able to help him secure a property that he could afford, just for him and his daughter.’

In the light of TPV holders' ineligibility for any services from organisations that receive any funding from DIMIA, it falls back onto very small non-DIMIA-funded ethnic organisations, mainstream organisations funded by religious sources, and community centres with state and local government funding, to do what they can to address the needs. For example, the St Vincent de Paul centre in Lidcombe is able to assist large numbers of TPV holders with basic household set-ups:

'All of the TPV holders first come to us when they've just arrived in Sydney, and they are starting from scratch. They have absolutely nothing when they first come – most of them only have the clothes that they're standing in. When they initially come to us we'll give them clothing, and then when they move into their own accommodation we set them up with beds, blankets, sheets – whatever we've got available. But our resources are very limited now because this is a high refugee area. Our main priority is to get them off the floor, so we give them sheets, blankets, towels and clothing initially, then the other furniture follows as we get it and their turn comes up. They go into a waiting system, and as things are available they'll receive them. They don't have to pay for any of these things. Washing machines and fridges are very scarce – and if we do get them, they're very rarely working. So we don't give a lot of fridges or washing machines away, because we're not given the goods by donors in the first place. Other electrical items like toasters or jugs – yes, some are available, but not a lot. There's a company now where people can rent fridges or washing machines for \$7 or \$10 a week – a lot of TPV holders do that, until they can establish themselves enough to buy one. ...'

The situation is similar at Salvation Army centre in Auburn:

'Usually TPV holders come in and say they've only just arrived from a detention centre. We're able to help them with furniture – table and chairs, lounge suite, wardrobes. A lot need beds, but beds are very hard to come by. We get them via our store at Minchinbury, which relies on donations - I put in an order to them for emergency relief. The big need is for beds. We also help them with a food voucher. But we can only give emergency help, and we can only help each person/family three times a year. The Special Benefit they're entitled to is not much. We help them when they first arrive in Sydney, then some come back for more help a few months later. We won't knock back anyone who's really, really desperate just because they've already been here three times. They come to us initially and say that they have nothing, so we try to help them as much as we can to get set up. There are some limits on what we can provide them with – kitchen tables, wardrobes and lounges are about all we can provide help with. We can also help with electricity bills – we provide vouchers for this – but we don't help with connection or deposit fees. Because we have trouble finding bedding for them, they sleep on the floor, I suppose. We sometimes help with blankets when we get some. Our shop around the corner sells cutlery, cooking utensils, etc, pretty cheap, and sometimes they can pick up those things there (we don't give those things away free). They don't often request help with clothing, but sometimes we help with this through our store or maybe provide a couple of pairs of pants free if they don't have any. A lot of them are cold when they first arrive, and want heaters, but we've only been able to supply a couple of heaters. We can't help with fridges – we're restricted in being able to sell electrical goods, because of insurance liability. We also rely on what people give us, and we don't get many fridges or washing machines, etc.'

At best, this is a stop-gap arrangement with no overarching quality control, where the level of service received depends largely on what happens to be in stock when a TPV holder

applies – and those centres in areas where the numbers of incoming TPV holders are highest are the first whose stocks become depleted. Further, these centres are largely reliant on donations from their local communities, and the lower socio-economic areas where TPV holders cluster constitute a relatively impoverished pool of potential donors in the first place. It is always a scramble to assemble the basics for waves of new arrivals, such as the family groups who are now coming from Pacific islands to join their husbands/fathers. One ethnic community leader asked, during the course of our interview,

‘Do you know of any possibility of getting fridges? Several [recently released] families in our community don’t have them. These five or six families have only managed to get a few things from outside on the street, or from second hand shops. There are also three families who are about to come here from Nauru, and they don’t have anything. They have to start from scratch.’

Within a very short space of time, TPV holders are forced to give up many of their hopes and dreams of what life outside the immigration detention centre would be like. Having found a place to stay (temporary as that might be), acquired basic necessities of clothing and household items, and established a source of income (through either Centrelink or employment) sufficient to minimally cover ongoing living expenses, TPV holders are then confronted with the ongoing struggle of living with minimal supports and resources for the next three years.

5.4 The ongoing struggle to live with minimal support and resources

Highly valuing the emotional support that they receive from their own ethnic communities, but frustrated by the very limited practical assistance available from this source, TPV holders either continue their search for other sources of help or else sink into a state of resignation, depression and/or despair. The former is exemplified by the experience of an Iraqi man who is persisting in his attempts to achieve his goal of learning English:

‘When I came out from detention and was looking for somewhere to learn English, I went to Liverpool TAFE. I registered there and gave them a copy of my visa. So they enrolled me and I started doing some courses for three or four months, and then one day they asked me to come to the office. They then told me that I could no longer study English because of my visa, and they charged me out of the blue [for the classes I had already attended]. I asked them “How am I going to pay this? I told you (at the outset) my visa situation, and now you are saying I can’t continue studying. Why didn’t you tell me this three months ago?” After that, when being able to learn English was hopeless, I tried to find a job. I was looking and looking for eight months. Now I have found a job working during the day, and so now I am trying to get into an English class that I can pay for [from my wages]. In Parramatta College, where they charge \$8 per hour, I can actually learn English at night – and during the day I am working.’

This contrasts with the despair of another man who had a similar goal initially, but whose situation is more complicated because he is accompanied by his family, which includes a severely disabled child:

‘I thought that when I came here it would be very, very important to improve my English – I only knew a very little bit before. Now when I went to school they told me no, I can’t use TAFE. I can’t study. So I stay at home, and it’s very depressing – I get angry and take it out on the family. I feel that if I could work now, it would be very much better for me. But I can’t work because I have problems with my language, I don’t have any documents about my skills. Then they ask if I have work experience

in Australia during the last six months, and I have to tell them “No I can’t get work because of my language problems”. And I have this language problem now because I can’t go to any school. ... Also, I can’t go [to a job or to English classes] because of my children. Two or three days a week my disabled child has appointments with health people at Liverpool Hospital, and while my wife goes with this child to the hospital, I still have to look after my other child. One of us needs to be at home; that is the other problem. ... All I do is wait and wait and wait and wait. It’s very hard to wait! I have to wait for everything – then maybe at the end of all this waiting I will still get nothing. I feel, when I go to bed, I can’t comfort my family, because I’m all the time depressed, all the time worried – and all the time I’m thinking about what will happen if I’m sent back, and what would then happen to my family.’

In their first year or two on TPVs, most concentrate on the immediate goals of learning English and finding suitable employment. They tend to focus on the here-and-now as it is too early to contemplate what might happen to them when their visas expire. Frustration that eventually leads to resignation and despair is often associated with the unrelenting and inter-linked obstacles they encounter in trying to make progress in achieving personally meaningful goals. The numbing kind of day-to-day existence that many single men fall into was described by one ethnic community worker:

‘The young men who are in Australia without their wives and children live in quite abysmal situations. They have no adequate household set-ups – broken down fridges, very, very poor diets because they don’t know how to cook and provide for themselves, etc. They are interested in working, but this is difficult because they don’t have adequate English to apply for jobs or to get anything but the most menial of casual jobs such as pizza delivery or assisting on building sites. They can’t even work in factories because they don’t know enough English to read the regulations, safety requirements, etc. They are desperate to learn more English, and most avail themselves of the couple of hours a week that is provided by some of the religious organisations, but these opportunities are purely for conversational English. While this helps them with day-to-day getting by such as being able to do shopping and so on, it doesn’t help them at all with the more fundamental challenges of finding adequate employment.’

Frustration builds much more quickly for TPV holders who have young children with them, as barriers to learning English and finding employment are compounded by difficulties in accessing child-care facilities:

‘When they’re given a TPV, they’re told they can go to work, but then they’ve got to have security of child care and in most cases they’ve also got to have some English. It’s a bit of a vicious circle. Unless they can get into the English classes to learn some basic English, they can’t get employment – and if they can’t get employment, in some cases they won’t be eligible for child care, in terms of the Child Care Assistance. To get federal assistance with child care fees, people must be Australian residents, and have immunisation records. A lot of TPV holders don’t have accurate records. Child-care fees are \$3.50 an hour – so, on full fees, it’s not going to be worth a [TPV holder] parent’s while [to get a job], especially when they’ve got transport costs on top of that. If our child-care facility (Barnado’s) has a vacancy, we’re usually able to wangle to get a child in. But if we can’t provide a spot ourselves, we’re not very successful in finding a spot elsewhere.’

As political events in their countries of origin change, and as the three-year time limit on their visas approaches, TPV holders cannot avoid contemplating what their futures might hold, and their immediate goals are likely to change accordingly. Thus, the driving force for

many of the young Afghan TPV holders is now to earn as much money as they can, to have something to take back if their bids for permanent residence here are unsuccessful. This leads to a 'rough and ready' lifestyle of chasing job possibilities wherever they occur:

'The young men sleep on the floors of their friend's flats. The person who takes out the lease has to stay for six months so that they don't lose the bond, but the Afghan men, especially, are very, very mobile. ... Wherever they hear that someone got a job somewhere, they immediately follow to try to get work there too – and usually within six weeks they're back here because they didn't get the job. That happens so often!'

The closer they are to receiving responses from DIMIA to their applications for ongoing protection, the more all-consuming their worry about their fate becomes. Speaking about himself and his fellow Hazaras, one Afghan man explained:

'There is no choice but to live with this worry. Some are unable to sleep. They don't have any life – especially those who have had no news for a long time about what is going on [in their villages]. They are coming to us [our organisation] all day and night, keeping on asking if there is any news. They can't think about anything else. Of course, they get sick – all have stomach problems, and mind problems, and other problems. Here in Sydney there may be more that 6000 places you can go for enjoyment, but I can guarantee these people will not go to even one such place. They are just too worried – their mind is on bigger things. It may be our fate. It's very, very difficult for any of them to have contact with their families. Recently, after three months, someone got an international phone call from Afghanistan. It is very hard to call there, or for anyone to go there to convey a message - they can't locate the family since the people are mobile. Our country is completely destroyed, so there is not any communication. But there is hope. There are a few people with permanent residence here who go sometimes into Afghanistan, and they bring us back some little photos and some news. But the saddest thing is, this person who brings the news cannot tell everything [that he has found out about particular villages and families], because he knows the person here cannot do anything to help his family back there. So upon his return here he'll just say: "Oh, they were very good; they were happy".'

While the goals and preoccupations of TPV holders are likely to change over the course of the three years of their TPV, social welfare organisations continue to receive requests from TPV holders for assistance with a multitude of problems. DIMIA-imposed bans on service provision by any organisations receiving their funding cause great distress for TPV holders and agency staff alike, as this lament from one agency employee makes clear:

'With TPVs we're at a loss. There's very little we can do, in terms of who's around and what's available. When TPV holders turn up, with (for example) a few kids and no community networks, very limited income support, difficulty in finding housing – what can you do with a homeless family that are generally not entitled to any additional support? It's very, very difficult for us. We have had requests from families for a whole range of things. ... For instance, people exhaust their [ethnic] community networks. Once the network of relatives and friends has been exhausted they have nowhere else to live. And that's when we usually find out about it. I hate to think what happens to them ultimately, but I assume that people do the rounds in their community again. My guess is that it's probably cyclical – they stay with one group, then give them a rest and stay with another group, and when all of their options have been exhausted they'll try to start again (with the first ones to have taken them in).'

It again falls to under-resourced ethnic groups and small local organisations to fill the gaps as best they can. The strains placed on local neighbourhood centres due to their limited ability to either meet the needs themselves or refer TPV holders elsewhere with any degree of confidence, are reflected in the following statement:

'In the last six months, we've seen 60 to 100 TPV holders as a conservative estimate. They ask for our help with English, employment, some around immigration concerns, and particularly financial matters to do with material relief such as vouchers for electricity bills or gas, and household items and vouchers for food. Employment is a big one, and connected with that is also legal issues to do with immigration. We have been able to set up an English class, and we've also been able to assist with the financial and emergency relief through electricity vouchers, etc. We also provide a lot of information and referral – this is the bulk of what we do, as we're quite a generalist agency and we have limited resources. When we can't assist them ourselves, the agencies we can refer to are very few – you can count them on your hand. We refer, for example, to the Refugee Advice and Casework Service (RACS) because a lot of the migration agents are DIMIA-funded and they can't provide advice to TPV holders. So while we refer to RACS, we know there is a limit to how many they can really take on. We try, but we're not confident that even if we make the referral that they will get the service. There is also the Early Intervention Program at STARTTS, which is just for TPV holders. But I was speaking to a caseworker there and it is the same issue: they can provide basically a very quick shop-front service, telling them what their entitlements are, that they can apply for Special Benefit, etc, but that's about it⁸. So our referral options are extremely limited.'

In the light of the countless 'dead ends' and obstacles encountered by TPV holders in so many areas of their lives, it is not uncommon for disillusionment and despair to take hold. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that questions arise in their minds about fundamental values in Australian society and their own relationship to this society.

5.5 Issues of trust, mistrust, rejection and alienation

TPV holders are refugees who have escaped persecution in their country of origin. They sought asylum in Australia because they believed that here they would be free from persecution and oppression. But these expectations invariably clash with the reality they confront after arrival in this country.

The questioning of their assumptions about Australia begins during their time of detention in immigration centres:

'In Woomera we have suffered a lot. We were not expecting [this] from such a country as Australia, which had been advocating human rights and democracy – and this has made us very negative about this country. ... The way we have been treated in Woomera is beyond what you could ever imagine.'

If their period in detention has not been too long or too difficult, they may leave detention with their hopes and expectations about life in Australia still intact. But the conditions and restrictions of the TPV soon lead them to the realisation that here they cannot live a life of freedom and equality. One young 22-year-old woman explained her growing disillusionment thus:

⁸ Note that this community worker was discussing practical and material needs. The important contribution made by STARTTS in providing emotional support and counselling is fully recognised.

'I wanted to enrol in school, but they wouldn't let me because I'm over 18. So I went to TAFE and they said I can study but I must pay money. But the fees are too much for me. Every time I try to do something, I get rejected. I just hope, when these three years [on the TPV] have passed, maybe they will let us live normally. We had not expected anything like this when we first came to Australia. We thought we would be able to just live like normal people, and after three years we would be like Australians. ... Two days ago I went to a video shop, and I asked if I could rent some videos, and the man said he wanted to see my license, to check my name and address. I said I don't have a license but I have this visa and my health care card. He saw the visa and said "No, it's just temporary [so you can't have the videos]". I said "I want this video for one week – not for three years!" And then he said OK. It's so silly! It doesn't make any sense. ... My brother also wanted to buy a mobile phone, and now he can't – I don't know why. Each time we mention we have a TPV, people say no. What's the problem? We want to live a normal life just like everyone else. It makes us feel like we are strange people, like something is wrong with us. We feel very unwelcome here. ... My mother says maybe they think we are criminals or something.'

TPV holders try to find explanations that will reconcile the conflict between their original expectations and their subsequent experiences of life in Australia. For example, they try to understand the rationale behind the visa restrictions, and wonder if they are being watched with a view to assessing their worthiness as potential permanent residents. They wonder whether the restrictive visa conditions reflect the views of the government but not the community at large, or if there is some hidden political agenda running that the public is not being informed about. The struggle of one man to sort out the contradictions he is encountering is captured in the following statement:

'I know that the Australian government issues TPVs to prevent more people from coming. And now we can see very clearly that this objective has been achieved, because people are no longer coming [by boat to Australia]. Now that that purpose has been achieved, why can't we now be given a permanent visa? That means, if they're not issuing permanent visas any more, that they are saying one thing on the surface and something else below the surface. There must be something else going on under the surface that's not being said. Plus, the humanity, and the way they talk in the media about their way of life and their democracy: it is not really democracy and humane. It is totally inconsistent.'

Given the politically abusive regimes TPV holders have experienced elsewhere, such questioning of the government's operations is not as paranoid as it might seem to the average Australian. However, their fears of rejection quickly extend beyond the government to the Australian population as a whole. Speaking on behalf of TPV holders from his own ethnic community, one person observed:

'TPV holders don't have the confidence to approach Australians for support, because they are fearful of being labelled 'Osama bin Laden' or whatever. The environment is not welcoming for them, and there are other barriers too in relation to getting a job. They feel rejected, that people want them to go away – that the government is prepared to give them a minimal handout, but that is all, that they want these people not to become involved with the Australian society, to be part of the economic activity, etc. They feel unwelcome, and not wanted.'

In many cases, their fear of rejection by the Australian public has been confirmed by racism encountered in the course of their daily lives. An Afghan man explained:

'Afghan TPV holders are experiencing a lot of discrimination and racist attacks. ... eg, when they are asked for their ID, then being from Afghanistan and being Muslim - it's not a good time for them in Australia. When I first came here I was asked by a person if I was Japanese (we Hazaras look Asian): when I told him I was from Afghanistan he just turned away and said "Oh shit!". I have experienced many cases like this. Racism makes their [TPV holders'] other problems worse: when they are trying to find jobs, when they are trying to get health care, or anything else. They have got this in their mind, that we are facing hatred amongst Australians. They are not feeling welcome. And they really are *not* [welcome] – the policy in Australia shows that they are not welcome. The sense of not being welcome in the Australian community is a big thing for them. It's something that always hurts them. It adds to their psychological problems.'

While the feelings of mistrust, rejection and alienation are palpable in their present circumstances in Australia, there are longer-term implications as well, especially in relation to those who have strong cases for being granted permanent residency when their TPVs expire. Perhaps, in this country's efforts to deter asylum seekers from approaching our shores, we are instilling deep alienation in the minds and hearts of those who have already come with legitimate claims for refugee status. As one TPV holder explained:

'I am afraid that if the TPV holders have a bad experience here, then later on, if they get permanent residency, they will have a barrier against mixing with the wider Australian community. For some reason they may think that the community hates them, rather than it only being the decision-makers in the government. If they think the whole community hates them, that could be very, very destructive. But if they know that it's not the whole community, they will start interacting and exchanging ideas etc.'

5.6 Caught between hope and despair: the ordeal of living in limbo

For TPV holders, the practical problems of surviving with minimal resources and the emotional challenges of experiencing rejection from many quarters in their day-to-day lives, pale into insignificance against their major source of distress: living under the threat that their efforts to secure a safe future here for themselves and their families may come to naught. Some put it out of their minds when they are first released from detention, but sooner or later this insidious threat takes hold and overwhelms their every waking moment. When TPV holders began talking about this issue, the outpouring of emotion was as though floodgates had been opened. One man expressed himself this way:

'My biggest problem is this constant waiting and waiting and waiting. ... A lot of people, such as those from religious organisations, try to help – but they can't really do anything about the most important concerns. ... We don't know whether we are going to be able to continue living here or not, so we don't know how to get on with our lives. We can't do anything. I thank you [Australia] for giving us protection, but to know that you can knock on my door at any moment and say I have to leave again, that is not right – that gives us no life. We don't have any life now. Our current life has no meaning. ... Not having any idea of what will happen makes life impossible. When we escaped from our country and came to Australia, we said "[Our ordeal is] finished!", but then we were put in detention. Then we said "When we get out of here, it will be finished!" Then when we got out of detention centre we realised "No, it's not finished – it's still the same". What I was afraid of before, now I still have the

same fear. If we don't get permanent protection after three years, we don't know what will happen – we can't go back! That is what we're afraid of.'

For those who lodged applications for reassessment of their cases before more stringent requirements were introduced in September 2001, there is anticipation of closure when their TPVs expire – although as the date approaches, there is a heightening of both hope and apprehension. Some, such as those from Iraq, are reasonably confident that they will be granted permanent protection because their fear of persecution is related to the regime that is still in power in that country - and thus the case on which their original claim was favourably assessed remains valid.

For others, such as Afghans whose original claims were based on persecution by the Taliban regime, favourable outcomes are far more dubious because they will be assessed on the basis of changed circumstances. These TPV holders are racked with anxiety about how to present a case that will be favourably assessed. Many will go to whatever lengths are necessary to present the strongest case possible, and to exhaust whatever avenues of appeal are available if the initial ruling goes against them. While there is pessimism on the part of community leaders, very few Afghan TPV holders are yet willing or able to contemplate returning to Afghanistan as a real possibility. One ethnic community leader talked about being caught between his own feelings of futility and his compatriots' determination to keep fighting for permanent residence:

'It is hard for me – I'm referring TPV holders to solicitors because that is what they want, but in some cases I feel guilty because I think even the solicitors cannot help them. It's a waste of time and money. ... They are willing to pay \$1100 or \$1200 to a solicitor even if their case is unsuccessful. This is because they have been through such huge problems [to get here in the first place], and they have come here at such a high cost: they have put their lives in danger, having come over the ocean with a 50/50 chance of being dead or alive. And because they have accepted these high risks to get this far, they want to do this one last thing [pay high solicitors' fees to prepare their cases for reassessment], rather than give up and say it has all been for nothing. And because they are ready to do that, I have to help them.'

The ordeal of living in limbo is likely to continue indefinitely for those TPV holders whose applications for reassessment of their claims for refugee status were lodged after 27 September 2001. If it is found that, whilst en route to Australia, they have stayed more than seven days in another country in which they could have claimed asylum, they will not be considered for permanent residence in Australia. Further periods of temporary protection are the only possible outcome for those deemed to need ongoing protection. A community leader explained their need for closure, given how much TPV holders have sacrificed to get to this point:

'These people have made significant investments in relation to their families, and have endured difficult journeys to come here, in very unpleasant conditions. And then they've been shifted around between various detention centres. And all of that to find out that they could be here on indefinite temporary protection visas – it's really very depressing! For some people, it could be like recurring, recurrent TPVs: once one is up, the government still feels it's obligated to provide the bare minimum protection under the Refugee Convention, so they may be entitled to another TPV. They're in a constant state of limbo, with the possibility of an extension. ... They want closure to a lot of this stuff. They want to know what going to happen: do they have to face the idea of being repatriated, or can they start making more concrete efforts towards settling here.'

While ethnic community leaders understand the severity of the situation, the reality that the current legislation may preclude them from any chance of ultimately gaining permanent residence, has not yet been fully digested by a high proportion of the TPV holders themselves to whom this legislation applies. Some are in a state of almost complete denial, while others maintain a (false) optimism by looking for 'conditions', over and above those contained in the legislation, that they can try to meet in hopes of swaying their case determinations in a positive direction. An example is the following statement made by a TPV holder:

'Our wish is to at least have some clear policy from the government. For example, if the government makes very hard conditions for what the TPV holders must do during these two or three years [whilst on a TPV], then we can either meet these conditions or not. But the problem is that during all this time we have no clear indication of what will happen. We are suspended. If someone told us "you must work harder", then we will. But we don't know whether working harder will help us or not. We are confused.'

Living in limbo until a final determination is reached regarding their entitlement to ongoing protection is made all the harder for TPV holders because they have to endure this ordeal alone, without any possibility of seeing their loved ones living overseas in the meantime. As one TPV holder expressed:

'My wife is on Nauru alone: her only family is me, and I am here. We don't have any children. She is there, and I am here. I myself am sick and I need her to come and support me, and also I need to support her. It is not possible for me to go there and see her, and it is not possible for her to come here and join me. There is no option for me on the horizon. Now it is one year and two months in this situation, and we don't know when it is going to end.'

The hope of being granted permanent protection is only one of many hurdles encountered by TPV holders on the long path of realising the dreams and hopes they have nurtured since fleeing persecution in their countries of origin. The ultimate goal is for reunification of the family unit within the safety of Australia. The anguish surrounding this issue is keenly felt by one community leader who regularly confronts such situations:

'I am seeing a lady here with a daughter. She is saying "I want my husband and my other two children who are overseas to come here." But it is impossible for us to help. TPV holders are not allowed to have any family join them here – unless, after the three years pass, they are granted a permanent visa. But maybe they will not be granted one. So, if she is given permanent residence then she will be able to ask to bring her husband here – otherwise not. So, they are crying, they are just hopeless. There is nothing in their future. I have so many cases like that, but I can't help. There is now no hope for any of these people unless they do eventually get a PPV. That is not possible for any who arrived after September 27 last year.'

Many years are likely to pass before the goal of family reunion has any possibility of being achieved, with many pitfalls that could derail their hopes along the way. As one community leader and one TPV holder explained:

'It is a very, very sad condition [separation from families]. They are very, very – I mean, these people have no hope at all. And they are waiting for nothing. And they don't know what to do. Some of them ask "Can I leave the country?" But I tell them "If you leave the country you are not allowed to come back again". Others ask "Can I apply for my spouse to come to Australia?" I tell them "No, because you are not

allowed to". So, they are lost, because they will never see their family again. They simply don't know what to do.'

'[People always come to Australia] with the intention of having the family come eventually. Even though they are the ones that are ultimately facing [reassessment of their cases] on their own, their concern is still "What is happening to my family? What are the implications for my family?" That is always running through their minds.'

The ordeal of living in limbo continues for several years even in the most straightforward of cases, but stretches into what must seem like eternity for those concerned not only about their personal future but that of their family as well:

'I know that they are not able to bring their family member within the first three years [whilst on a TPV], which is sad. But after that they have to apply for permanent protection, and that process takes another year of waiting during which they don't know whether they are going to get it or not. Then after that, if they are successful, they then can apply [for permission] for their family members [to come], which may take a further three years. So by this time about six years have passed. And now even more restrictions have been placed on TPV holders. If they have been in another country for more than seven days they cannot ever get permanent protection in Australia – all they can hope for is more temporary protection, maybe for the next ten years!'

As one would expect, there are serious mental health implications associated with subjecting people to such a high degree of ongoing stress. Mental health is one of the specific areas of need to be considered in more detail in the following section of the research findings.

6. SPECIFIC AREAS OF NEED

The specific areas of need that are to be discussed below are those that emerged during the course of the qualitative interviews of this research, as being of most concern to both TPV holders and ethnic community and generalist service providing organisations. Accommodation, income security and employment had also been identified by key agencies and other researchers, as issues relevant to TPVs that had received no prior research attention in New South Wales.

6.1 Accommodation

As has already been discussed, the majority of TPV holders find initial temporary accommodation with relatives, friends or acquaintances who are already residing in Sydney. However, rarely is the initial shelter suitable or available on an ongoing basis. The search for an appropriate alternative soon begins. The pattern for unmarried men, or those who are not accompanied by their wives or children, usually involves moving into a series of shared rental accommodations with other men in similar circumstances. The single men in shared accommodation live very frugally, with very little by way of material possessions, and often in overcrowded situations with little privacy. The pattern is well known to the workers at the St Vincent de Paul centre at Lidcombe, where many come for basic household goods when they first arrive in Sydney:

‘The single men tend to all get together, so you might have six or eight of them all sharing a place to live. They get out and get jobs – and while one’s in the bed the other one’s out working, and they rotate that way. We give those single men a foam mattress, because they move houses a lot. So we say “Right, this is your bed, and this must go with you when you move”. They get a brand new foam mattress, and so “Have bed, will travel”. They move very often. For instance, I’ve just been tracking one gentleman now – and so far I’ve tracked him to his ninth address over the last twelve months. ... They’ll get together in one flat – I don’t know whose name will be on the lease or whatever – and they might stay there for six weeks, and then they might move on and stay with someone else. So, a man might stay with someone for six weeks, then with someone else for another six weeks, then with someone else for twelve weeks or whatever, and then all of a sudden that man will get his own place. Then once he’s established in his own place, he’ll take others in.’

For those men from large well-established ethnic communities, finding a flat to share with others is usually not difficult, as they are able to approach employees in real estate agencies who are from the same ethnic background. This has been particularly the case for TPV holders from Arabic-speaking backgrounds. Initially it was much harder for TPV holders from Afghanistan – even though the numbers of Afghans on TPVs was similar – because the pre-existing Afghan community was not as well established and it consisted predominantly of people whose tribal origins were different to those of the TPV holders. However, a sufficient number of Afghan TPV holders have now been living in Western Sydney for long enough to have established a pool of rented flats in Auburn and Lidcombe, into which newly arriving single men are welcomed.

Finding suitable accommodation is far more difficult for single men who are from very small ethnic groups and who do not have any personal contacts in Sydney, as it is, also, for single women. The latter continue staying with relatives or friends much longer than is reasonable, knowing that they are a burden, but having no option until they find a place they can afford. As there is virtually nothing on the open rental market that these women can afford as single persons, opportunities to move out are likely to be somewhat unorthodox – for example, a middle aged single woman recounted her experience:

'After eight months, I moved from my brother's place into the little place where I am now living. I found this place just by chance – very good chance. I had been talking with some other TPV holders about trying to find a place, and those people said that they were having to move out of this flat because it was too small for them (more than 2 people). So they asked me if I would like to rent this place when they moved out. However, the flat is not healthy because no sunlight gets into it. It was built in 1968 as a garage – not for living in – so it has no windows. It has a shower, cooking area, and bed, etc, all in the one room – it is extremely small. The toilet is out in the laundry of the main house. ... But recently I have applied for a Housing Department place as well as for Community Housing, for a one bedroom flat. The Housing Department has told me they can't offer me a house because I am not a permanent resident – they will not give me anything unless I am permanent. In Community Housing, they would pay half of the rent and I would pay the other half, but they have informed me that there is a waiting list of six years.'

Other single people have been able to access the one-and-only housing resource that has been specifically established for TPV holders: the House of Welcome. This is a Christian-sponsored organisation that runs a three-bedroom residence, as well as a shop-front in Carramar offering a range of basic support services to TPV holders newly released from detention. At any one time the House is able to accommodate three single people or else a family group, but since the house opened in early 2002, all residents have been single men who have not had any links with people in the community who could offer them temporary accommodation. These men have all been released from the Villawood Detention Centre, referred by volunteers who met them prior to their release. The accommodation provided at the House itself is designed to be for up to four weeks duration, during which time the organisation will assist the residents to find rental accommodation and then help them to get established in the general community. However, the difficulties that have already been mentioned in finding suitable and affordable rentals, as well as other personal difficulties, has meant that the four-week timeframe has had to be extended for a number of residents. That has derailed forward planning for others known to the organisation who were about to be released, and has led to less than desirable stop-gap measures having to be put into place. For example:

'We had a crisis about a week ago when we had three men in the House, so there was no room for anyone else, and all of a sudden this family was released. We had intended to take them, but at that critical moment there was no space. It was quite a confused time! I managed to find an alternative for them, but it's only temporary – and it's not in the area where they eventually will settle. It's with someone from Normanhurst – a well-meaning person who has lots of contacts in Villawood. But Normanhurst is probably not the area where a family is going to be able to find a unit to rent, and work. So there's still another transition that they will need to make later.'

Adults accompanied by children have the biggest challenge of all in finding suitable accommodation. The experience of TPV holder families trying to find rental accommodation on the open market is invariably an ordeal that leads nowhere. The story of one mother with four children is typical:

'We stayed with my husband's cousin for two months. At this cousin's house there was not room for us to continue staying there – because they are a big family, and we are a big family. We tried to rent a house, but it was very difficult for us because we have a temporary visa. We went to many, many agents and they just said "OK, leave your details and we will ring you" – but they never did ring back. We were looking for a place to live in Edensor Park, Fairfield West or Wetherill Park. ... The

reasons agents gave us for not renting us a house were that we did not have jobs (we just get Special Benefits), and because our visa was only temporary. They didn't trust us. ... Eventually we saw this house [where we are now living], which is owned by someone we know, and he accepted to let us live in it – without an agent being involved. The owner knows our cousin.'

The intervention of someone else – be it a relative, a community leader or an NGO – seems to be the only way family groups are able to eventually find rental accommodation. And even then questions of possible exploitation arise, as exemplified by this family:

'When we first got out of detention, for 40 days we didn't have a flat to live in – we couldn't get one because we didn't have documents. When I was writing applications, they needed references etc. They asked me if I worked, and I said no; if I had a driver's license, and I said no; if I had any references from previous occupancies, and I said no. It was no, no, no – so they refused my applications. It happened so many times! So we had to stay with my sister for over one month. We only had one room [for myself, my wife and three children]! After 40 days, a religious leader from my community came with me to the agent and he signed the lease in his name and took responsibility on our behalf. Then they gave us this unit where we are now living, which had been vacant for more than three months. When the real estate agents see TPV, they look for properties that no-one else wants to rent – they give us the worst properties and charge us higher rents. Normally this flat would rent for \$150 or \$160, but they charge me \$185 a week.'

Situations like this come to the attention of various social welfare organisations, but very few are able to help. Although the overall proportion of TPV holders in family groups is relatively small, it is the urgency of situations in which children are at risk that causes most distress to agency staff. Barnado's at Auburn is one of the few organisations that have been able to provide short-term accommodation for a very small number of TPV holder families but, like the House of Welcome, their housing stock is limited and vacancies are not necessarily available when needed. Other NGOs with Supported Accommodation programs are even more restricted in their ability to assist TPV holder families who cannot afford to pay rent, as their services are reliant on rental income from residents and the fees are often in excess of what families on TPVs can pay. In any case, Supported Accommodation is only available to any eligible family for a time-limited period, and in the case of TPV holders the problem of finding suitable long-term accommodation is merely delayed rather than solved. Given that they are ineligible for public housing, the long-term 'solutions' that families end up in are usually grossly inadequate. One social worker who manages a Supported Accommodation program spoke of her experience with TPV holder families:

'People in supported accommodation are supposed to contribute to the rent and there is supposed to be an exit plan for them. But what will we do [with TPV holders] at the end of the period of time that we can provide them with accommodation? We're talking here about families with children. I don't know what happens to all of these families, but I do know what happens to some that I am aware of. I know one man right now - a TPV holder who has a brain tumour, who has four young children and a wife who is a victim of torture and trauma. The only way they can survive is by sharing a house with two other families. So there are twelve children under the age of thirteen in a three-bedroom house. So that is what people do: they will go to people from their own country, and the accommodation that they're in is substandard – it's overrun with cockroaches, there's rising damp, there are broken floor boards, the hot water system doesn't work properly.'

Another group of TPV holders that warrants particular mention in relation to accommodation is unaccompanied minors. The younger ones are usually in the care of related or unrelated adults from their own ethnic group, their experience in relation to accommodation being as has been described above for families. However, a lot of the unaccompanied minors are males in their mid to late teens, and there are many who are sharing flats with others in their same age group. These households tend to operate similarly to those of young single men, but being younger and less experienced, the unaccompanied minors do not always know how to access their entitlements such as Rent Assistance in order to optimise their housing situations. They tend only to receive guidance about these matters if an organisation such as DoCs or Centrelink takes the initiative. Thus, one member of staff reported:

‘When I work with young kids [on TPVs], I always ask about their living arrangements, and give them advice about their entitlements. If six are sharing a two-bedroom flat, which means that some have to sleep on the floor, I tell them that they should be able to split into two groups of three and take two flats, because rent assistance would make this affordable. ... I have talked to one group of eight kids who were sharing a two-bedroom unit, and a lot of them had to sleep on the floor, because they wanted to save money by only paying \$15 a week rent each.’

The general picture that emerges in relation to the housing needs of TPV holders is one of gross neglect. In New South Wales the situation is particularly difficult because of their ineligibility for public housing. Many of these people would be without a roof over their heads at all were it not for their own ethnic communities – relatives, friends and acquaintances who, at great cost to themselves and their own families, do not have the heart to turn out their compatriots until an alternative is found. The gross overcrowding that characterises the early post-release period is subsequently either accepted as an ongoing necessity of life, or replaced by substandard and possibly overpriced rentals expedited through community contacts. The extremely limited and short-term assistance that is available through a very small number of NGOs is merely a drop in the bucket, entirely inadequate to meet the longer-term accommodation needs of TPV holders, particularly of families with children.

6.2 Income security and financial management

As soon as they are released from detention, TPV holders are able to apply through Centrelink for Special Benefits – a basic level of income support that is generally available to assist residents of Australia during periods of special need. However, it is much more difficult for the basic needs of TPV holders to be met by this benefit than for other Australian residents, for a number of reasons.

First, upon release from detention, they have no platform to build upon: they have no pre-established rental accommodation, no household goods or furniture, minimal clothing, etc. Therefore, unlike other recipients of Special Benefits, they are confronted with numerous start-up costs all at once. If and when they find a flat or house to rent, moving in presents an enormous financial challenge. TPV holders can apply for Rent Start through the Department of Housing, which provides assistance with the rental bond and two weeks rent-in-advance that is paid directly to the landlord, but no assistance is given with connecting electricity, gas or telephone. Added to these utility connection fees is the need to acquire basic household set-ups of bedding and other furniture, electrical appliances, kitchen utensils and clothing, etc. Given the shortage of supplies they can access through charities such as St Vincent de Paul, and the unwillingness of retailers to allow them to enter into hire-purchase agreements, they are often forced to endure an abysmal standard of living. A number of agencies commented on this:

'When TPV holders want to move out [from their friends/relatives] to other accommodation, they may not know to ask Centrelink about Rent Assistance. ... Another problem area is emergency relief when TPVs first come to Sydney. Some refugees can link up with their families who will sign hire-purchase agreements on their behalf. But other TPVs have so few links that they can't do any of that, so they go without beds for ages and ages, and they can't buy a fridge or other white goods. They really live in squalid conditions for quite a long period of time. ... [To overcome barriers to hire-purchase, etc], we are advising TPV holders that they do not need to volunteer the information about their visa unless this is specifically requested – usually they just need to give information about their Centrelink payment.'

'A fridge is the key item that everyone needs, but the [St Vincent de Paul] Society doesn't touch them at all. That puts TPV holders in a very difficult position financially, because they're having to buy food every day, and they're not able to stock up. Or else they're going to a dodgy merchant and buying a second hand fridge that breaks down and costs them in repairs.'

Second, given their ineligibility for public housing, the high cost of rental accommodation in Sydney takes a larger proportion of their income than it does for others on Centrelink benefits. This is true even for those who are getting Rent Assistance from Centrelink (which they can apply for if they are paying at least \$50 a week in rent), or if they find very cheap accommodation of a correspondingly sub-standard nature. One single woman described her income and expenditure as follows:

' I am getting around \$400 a month from Centrelink. I have rented a small garage that has been modified into a granny flat, for which I pay \$40 a week. So, \$80 a fortnight for rent, plus another \$20 for electricity - I have no telephone, because I can't afford one – the remaining money is not enough to survive for two weeks. There is only \$100 a fortnight left for everything else, such as food, clothing, transport, etc. Telephone is totally impossible, because the rental is \$30 a month. I have been living in this situation for 14 months.'

Third, as TPV holders have not lived in the general community in Australia prior to their release from detention, they have no prior experience of prices in Sydney. The implication of this is that they have no means of knowing, initially, what they can and cannot afford, and what prices are reasonable or unreasonable. They also have no basis for understanding the billing cycles of various accounts such as rent, utilities, mobile phones, income tax, etc. In addition, many have probably never had to confront the challenge of budgeting before, if they have lived in extended family situations that were underpinned by family assets and where income was seasonal and shared. It is not surprising, therefore, that financial planning is difficult for many TPV holders. In the experience of a staff member of one front-line agency:

'TPV holders have no money management skills whatsoever. I think that some of them have their priorities wrong – like, they'll go and buy a brand new TV or video before they'll buy a washing machine or a fridge. And they don't seem to be able to spread their money out so that they can cover their bills on time – they don't budget at all. They don't know how to budget. I suppose they're coming from a totally different situation, and this is something new for them. So they find it very difficult. That's one of the things that the nuns work on very closely with them in our English classes – their money managing skills. ... That's one of the first things that it's very important for them to understand – that if they pay their rent, everything else can be looked after in one way or another, but they must pay that rent.'

An ethnic community leader concurs:

‘It is difficult for them - they have difficulty in managing their money because of not knowing what their next bill will be, or how prices of everyday goods might increase. They are not able to budget their money because of these things. ... I overhear them talking about these kinds of frustrations [at community social gatherings]. ... They are isolated to their own community. If they were in touch with the wider Australian community they might get more of an idea about financial matters.’

The length of time that TPV holders remain on Special Benefits depends on how successful they are in finding employment, and the extent of their compliance in reporting wages to Centrelink. While the desire to be financially self-supporting is very strong amongst TPV holders, not all succeed in finding jobs, and those that do gain employment are often in casual jobs with erratic hours or of only seasonal duration. As a Centrelink employee explained:

‘Most TPV holders do want to find work. They try to find work through friends who are already here. They apply for Special Benefits while they look for work. They can stay on the benefit until they get jobs, or until their income is over the limit. How long they stay on benefits depends whether they declare their income. Some may not fully understand the system – how much they have to declare, before or after tax – and some get paid cash in hand. So a lot will stay on Special Benefit. We use interpreters a lot, and have pamphlets in different languages, to let them know what their obligations are.’

The incentive to earn as much money as possible is particularly strong amongst Afghan TPV holders who fear they may not be granted permanent residence in Australia. They live very frugally in overcrowded shared accommodation, take whatever employment opportunities come their way, and save to have something to take with them if they are forced to leave this country⁹. Others work in order to generate sufficient income to be able to contribute to the support of destitute families overseas, as explained by a community leader:

‘Most of them definitely want to work, because they only get \$400 per fortnight from Centrelink. They will be much happier if they can earn \$500 weekly – because most of them have left their families behind in neighbouring countries without any financial assistance. So while he’s living here the TPV holder will be assisting his children until he can be reunited with them.’

Families with dependent children can seek additional financial support through the Family Tax Benefit, which is paid directly to the primary carer – usually the mother. This benefit is means tested, the level of payment varying according to the income and assets of the primary carer, and the age of the child. Family Tax Benefit is usually paid until a child reaches the age of 18. However, a serious anomaly occurs in relation to TPV holders who are detached minors in the care of non-parental relatives: upon reaching the age of 16, the young person is eligible to receive the independent rate of the Special Benefit, and the carer can no longer claim the Family Tax Benefit or other ‘top-up’ payments from DoCs. Similarly, for unaccompanied minors on TPVs who are wards, other sources of financial

⁹ Any TPV holder who chooses to return to their country of origin may be eligible for a federal government grant of \$2000, designed to assist them in relocating. There is uncertainty, however, about the precise terms of eligibility for this grant. Centrelink advised that if TPV holders have worked and saved money whilst in Australia, the grant may be reduced by the amount of the applicant’s savings. A representative of another organisation had heard that the grant is not for people on TPVs, but is only given to people who leave Australia directly from detention centres.

support from DoCs and DIMIA cease when they turn 16 and they, likewise, begin to receive Special Benefits instead. The younger-than-usual age of eligibility for Special Benefits occurs because TPV holders are not eligible for Youth Allowance or Austudy. A significant implication of this is that unaccompanied minors are rarely in a position to complete high school – let alone continue with further education. On the other hand, it should be noted that they often express a preference for work rather than study, as will be discussed later.

6.3 English and other education

The capacity of TPV holders to develop a reasonable level of self-sufficiency after they leave detention is grossly undermined by the obstacles that are put in their way with regard to learning English. Lack of suitable avenues for learning English is probably their greatest source of ongoing frustration in their daily lives. Most have an extremely limited knowledge of English at the outset, and are dependent on others who speak their language to accompany them to appointments with Centrelink and other agencies, to explain their medical problems to health professionals, to approach real estate agents on their behalf, to translate letters from 'official' sources such as Centrelink and DIMIA and fill out forms, etc. As an Iraqi TPV holder explained:

'Lack of English is a HUGE problem – you can't go to the real estate to find a flat, you can't find out how to go to the doctor or how to explain ourselves to the doctor, we have trouble accessing schools for our children because of our lack of English. But by being here in Sydney within the Arabic-speaking community, we can usually find someone to go with us to the real estate, to the doctor, to do some interpreting and translating for us.'

Reliance on others to interpret is difficult enough for TPV holders from large ethnic communities and with many personal contacts: it is almost impossible for those from small linguistic groups to find people to take on the role of interpreter/translator when needed.

Of equal importance is the fact that their lack of English stands in their way of finding suitable employment: for instance, they can't read job advertisements; they can't talk in person to prospective employers; they can't address concerns that arise on-the-job; they can't use skills and qualifications acquired elsewhere in an English-speaking context. An example of how TPV holders are impeded by their lack of English in the work context was provided by a community leader:

'I've heard from TPV holders that their employers treat them different than other employees, and because they don't speak English, they can't complain. ... For instance, one guy commented that "Because I don't speak English, they think I am stupid. But if they spoke my language I could explain whatever I want. Sometimes, if I get angry, I try to explain by gestures." That's why they want to learn English.'

The chief obstacle to TPV holders' learning English is that they are not eligible to attend free English classes provided by the federal government for migrants (through the Adult Migrant English Program), and they are usually only able to attend classes run by TAFE colleges if they pay full fees. Fees for TAFE classes can only be waived at the discretion of the Director of a particular college, and are considered on the basis of cases that are submitted on an individual basis rather than being a broad entitlement¹⁰. Developing written applications for fee exemption is impossible for non-English-speaking TPV holders unless they can find an English-speaker to write on their behalf, but even when they do they are frequently rejected, as explained by a community worker:

¹⁰ The NSW Minister for Education is at present considering a request that fees for TAFE courses be waived for TPV holders.

‘Recently somebody came and asked me to write a letter to the director of TAFE to see if he could be exempted from the fees, due to financial hardship – and I think that one was accepted. That is very good, but it is rare – it depends on if the management at the TAFE are satisfied with the reasons that are given by the applicant. For most people, they would have to pay.’

Needless to say, the fees are beyond the means of almost all TPV holders. A highly motivated young woman spoke of her despair:

‘I would like to study. When I was in the detention centre I always told the officers that after I was released I wanted to study and I hoped to become a teacher. I learnt a lot of English in the detention centre. I would speak with the officers to practice as much as possible. But when I came here to Sydney, all this hope died. There is no way I can study and become a teacher. Now I don’t know what to do!’

As with all other major gaps in service-provision that have been considered so far, it falls on the ethnic communities, religious organisations and other small NGOs to respond to the need as best they can. Quite a number of basic English classes have been set up by these organisations, and they are well attended by TPV holders in the early period following release from detention. However, these classes are very limited in what they can achieve. They are invariably run by volunteers, many of who have no formal qualifications in teaching English to speakers of other languages, and thus they focus on basic conversational skills. Furthermore, TPV holders can usually only access these classes once or twice a week for a couple of hours, so progress is slow. Comments from two organisations are:

‘English is a major issue. There are not many classes around for TPV holders. We have some in Blacktown, but only for two hours, two days a week. They are only suitable for people who do not know any English. It is not enough. Some of them are just conversation classes, and they don’t even learn how to write English.’

‘The first need is English – to deny them basic training in English is just preventing them from taking the first step. And then the next step is work and employment. We do have 19 English classes organised through here [House of Welcome], all taught by qualified ESL teachers. Their level of English is assessed, and then they’re allotted to the appropriate class – but they’re always asking where else they can get more. They really want to learn English.’

While TPV holders find these classes very helpful in enabling them to converse with shop keepers, neighbours, etc, the level is not sufficiently advanced to equip them for in-depth discussions with such people as medical personnel, counsellors, lawyers, or immigration officials. Nor are reading and writing skills able to be developed in these basic classes, which is an enormous concern for TPV holders receiving and needing to respond to written correspondence from DIMIA regarding their visa status. TPV holders have no alternative but to rely on their friends and relatives to translate and interpret for them whenever possible – a situation where the potential for mistakes and misunderstandings is considerable, as these well-meaning ‘helpers’ may not themselves have sufficient knowledge of English to capture the nuances.

While learning English is the first priority of TPV holders, some are also highly motivated to undertake further vocationally-oriented education or skills training to enhance their employment prospects. This is particularly true for tertiary-qualified professionals who want

to take bridging courses to enable them to work in their professional fields within the Australian context. One man explained:

‘[My friends and I] all have university qualifications and experience in our own fields, but we cannot improve our English because of the visa restrictions, and we can neither upgrade our education nor contribute with our experience to the fields in which we are qualified. I have a qualification in agricultural science, and would like to be able to contribute in that field.’

Learning computer skills, or gaining Australian qualifications in another area, is also recognised by some as being a necessary precursor to being able to move out of unskilled employment. TPV holders are only able to undertake further such study if they pay full fees, unless they can negotiate an exemption with the director of a particular institution (as has been explained above). A very persistent young woman managed to negotiate access to Bankstown Senior College – an institution that has been particularly supportive of TPV holders who have achieved academically overseas but who are unable to apply their skills in Australia until they learn English:

‘Even though I couldn’t find a job and I couldn’t study, I didn’t stop trying. I have tried every single avenue. I (eventually) went to Bankstown Senior College, and enrolled in order to get English writing skills. I am now attending Year 11. Regarding fees, they asked me to pay \$250 but I could only give \$50. I am going to pay the other \$200 later. This is the fee for Year 11. I do not intend to continue on to Year 12 next year, because I want to get a job. I can’t survive without a job, as I need the income. My (professional) qualification hasn’t been recognised as yet.’

Fees are an insurmountable obstacle for most, although a small number of very determined individuals are already paying, or intending to pay, for courses from money they have saved from employment in unskilled jobs. But even the most single-minded determination to work to pay fees for ongoing study can only result in a very slow rate of part-time study towards the desired qualification.

It has been established that children on TPVs are entitled to attend public schools in New South Wales. Children’s education was not explored in great depth in this study, as it is the focus of research being undertaken elsewhere. However, one important point to note is that it is not mandatory for TPV holder children to attend school. This issue has been repeatedly confronted by staff in the Auburn office of DoCs, in relation to unaccompanied minors who are under the age of 16 when they are first released from detention, and who resist efforts to enrol them in school. Approximately 90% of the unaccompanied minors known to that office are teenage boys from Afghanistan, roughly three quarters of whom have not been enrolled in school because they have expressed a strong preference to find work instead. In the absence of a legal mandate requiring school attendance, DoCs staff do not consider that they have any alternative than (after discussion of the implications) to acquiesce to the youngsters’ wishes – even though their search for work is often futile. As has been noted above, school attendance becomes impossible for these youngsters in any case after they reach the age of sixteen and begin receiving Special Benefits.

6.4 Employment

The will to work is strong, but finding a job is not always easy:

‘Things would be much better for me if I could work, because while working I could forget about all the things that are on my mind. When I look at job ads in the Champion Newspaper, they ask for someone with a fork-lift license, and six months

[local] experience. I know they need somebody to work, and I know I can do the job - I have passed my fork-lift drivers license. I've rung them about six or seven times, and try to talk to them with my poor English, and they don't answer me. I need to improve my language. I really need to be studying English five or six hours a day.'

TPV holders' strong desire to work is underpinned by a variety of motivations. For many, economic self-sufficiency is necessary to maintain self-esteem – they can then view themselves as contributing to, rather than drawing from, Australian society. One man proudly stated:

'When I came to Sydney I only needed help from Centrelink for two or three weeks, then I got a job. And after using my wages for eating, I gave the rest of the money back to Centrelink. I told them "Still I am alive, I have hands, I have energy – and this kind of (welfare) money I don't like."

Ongoing reliance on welfare payments is also actively discouraged by some ethnic organisations, where TPV holders are advised to take whatever jobs they can get as this is a first step towards building a new life in Australia:

'They must find jobs, because [our organisation] tells them not to go to Centrelink if they want to live in Australia. They all prefer to work.'

For others, it is imperative to earn as much money as possible to discharge financial obligations. Even when they are paid at very low rates (as is usually the case), by working very long hours they can still earn more than they would get on Special Benefits. An Afghan community worker described the situation:

'Even when the TPV holders know the work [in exploitative chicken factories] is extremely difficult, and that very bad behaviour occurs towards them, they still take jobs there. They do so because they need at least a few hundred dollars to send overseas, since most of them owe money to the boat owners who brought them here. In the chicken factory they pay them only \$8 per hour. I know people who are leaving home at 3am and returning 6pm - that is 15 hours a day - and they are getting around \$360 a week for that harsh job. And the work that they are doing there is extremely hard work. \$8 for that job! The employers should be sued for that, but they are getting away with it. These employers can just do what they like. Out of that \$8 an hour, the TPV holders are even paying taxes - and they are not getting Centrelink money. They do this because there is a difference of \$150 every week between what they can earn and what Centrelink would give them. This \$150 is huge money for them, because they need money desperately to send back to their families etc.'

There are many obstacles to be overcome by TPV holders seeking work. Lack of English is only one obstacle. Ineligibility for individualised help from job support networks is another. The only government-funded assistance that TPV holders can use is the basic job-matching service, which involves accessing computerised data bases at Centrelink or other employment agencies such as Mission Employment or Work Direction. But this is meaningless for TPV holders who don't have English or computer skills in the first place, and who can't acquire these skills through affordable courses.

The temporary nature of the visa can itself be an obstacle to finding work:

'If the factory management finds out that this person is a TPV holder, his chances of getting employment will be less than the chance of someone with permanent

residence. Most employers do ask what sort of visas they have, on the application form – so most of the TPV holders just leave that question blank.'

The urgency to find work, and the obstacles in their way, lead most TPV holders to chase opportunities wherever they can and to take whatever offers come up. Most end up in unskilled casual jobs, such as work in chicken factories or vegetable markets, cleaning jobs, collecting supermarket trolleys, etc. If they can't find work in Sydney, they often move temporarily to rural areas where they try to get seasonal farm work. As one person explained:

'Farm work is very hard, but it's still better than depending on Centrelink. They [TPV holders] complain that on farms they have to wake up when it's dark and they work until after sunset – so it's very long hours. They stick to farm work until they find something better. The Iraqis mostly come from an agricultural background, so the people who used to be farmers are fine with working on farms here. Those who have other skills look for other kinds of work.'

Some are able to draw on their prior work experience overseas – eg, many Iraqis are from rural backgrounds; some Hazaras are butchers or bakers. However, in the words of one community worker, they are nearly all 'working bad hours for bad money', without any job security (because most of the employment is casual) and without attention being given to health and safety standards.

Those with professional qualifications are not eligible to have those qualifications assessed, have no Australian experience or references to draw upon, and usually have insufficient English to function in an English-speaking employment context in any case. The following example was described by a community worker:

'It is a lot harder for better educated people to find work that is suitable to their qualifications. I have one guy who comes here who has a bachelors degree in agriculture – he's a good bee keeper – and he's trying to get further education, but he went to several TAFEs and they all asked for \$7 or \$8 per hour, which he can't afford. He went to several farms to look for a place to work as a bee keeper, but he was unsuccessful. Now he is working as a cleaner.'

TPV holders are yet again thrown back onto their own ethnic communities for help in finding work. Iraqis have fairly extensive and well-established networks to tap into – for example, there are large Lebanese contractors who employ some Arabic-speaking TPV holders on a casual basis. Afghan TPV holders have a strong 'mutual aid' mentality, where word spreads from one TPV holder to another about where someone has found work, and then others turn up to see if they can be given a job as well. Again, those from smaller communities are most disadvantaged, as exemplified by the following woman:

'In my old country, I have worked for 22 years in a bank where many things were done in English. I have tried to find work here through employment agents, but I have been unsuccessful. I have gone not only for bank jobs, but other types of work as well, such as in K-Mart and Fruit Land. I would take any job at all, just to get out of my situation.'

Because the desire to work is so strong, and the obstacles to finding work are so great, exploitation of TPV holders in the workplace appears to be widespread. One ethnic community leader described the extent of exploitative situations he has encountered:

'This man is getting away with [under-payment of TPV holders]. I know people at this company who are employed for \$14 to \$16 per hour, but he only gives \$8 to the TPV holders. I know many cases where this person was asking TPV holders for \$500 to \$1000 to put an application for them to be employed by the company directly [rather than by himself as a subcontractor, on lower wages]. I know many cases of bribery by this person. He was asking for \$10 in secret from TPV holders – and if they were not giving \$10, he would then ask for \$50 - or else he would tell them not to come back to the job for a full week. You either give me this money, or you don't get work for another week. The TPV holders were frequently giving money to this person. They couldn't speak English well enough to find another job. ... This man has made lots of money from them, and it is still going on.'

Other examples were given by another agency:

'[One man recently told me he] had a painting job for one day, starting at 6am and finishing at 6pm, and they paid him only \$60. [Some teenagers that I know told me that] they were chicken catchers up on a poultry farm, and they said that they were transported to the farm in the front of the truck. There would have been five people sitting in the front of the truck, which is illegal, and they were told to lie down if anyone saw them. And they worked for twenty hours, and were only paid for ten.'

One organisation that was recently prepared to support TPV holders in making a formal complaint of racial vilification in a workplace found that the TPV holders were afraid to proceed for fear of losing their jobs, or of jeopardising their cases for being granted permanent residence. The complaint was never lodged, and the vilification continues.

To end this section on a more positive note, there was one organisation (the House of Welcome) that shared its success in finding suitable employment for a very small number of TPV holders - by taking on the kind of personalised case management approach that is precluded in government-funded employment support services. One case involved placing a man with baking experience to work in a bakery outside Sydney: a 'trial run' was first organised, and accommodation was also arranged for the man. This organisation has also become involved in negotiation with a prospective employer to take on a small number of TPV holders, as an affirmative action initiative. They are hoping that this approach can work as a model for other initiatives.

6.5 Mental health

While mental health was not designed to be a major focus of this research (because of other research being undertaken on this issue), attention must be given to this topic because it emerged so strongly as a theme in the qualitative interviews that were conducted.

The pervasive hopelessness and helplessness associated with the restrictive conditions of their visas emerged as the paramount concern in relation to the mental health of TPV holders. Several respondents talked of life on a TPV being like life in a prison: imprisonment in their original country and then in a detention centre in Australia having been replaced by a larger prison:

'Oppression is what made us come to this country. We were in a small prison [in our original country], and we came here hoping that we would be free. But we have come to a bigger prison, with no hope for the future. The most important thing in human life is waiting for something – and the waiting time is killing our emotional power.'

'When I left my country, I didn't have a specific thought of coming to Australia. I just had to go wherever I could. I wasn't thinking about this country – I was just thinking about saving my life by getting out. Now that I am here, the waiting is very hard! It is like being in jail. But there is nothing I can do about it. It is human nature to want to be free, to choose your own way. Now, it is like we are in jail. I can't do anything! I hope we will eventually get permanent residence, but I don't know.'

This sense of imprisonment is most immediately linked to anguish about ongoing separation from their families – return to Australia being forbidden should they leave for a short period to visit and support their families through crises.

'We have gone from prison in a detention centre to prison outside – there is not much difference: only that here you can move around and there you could not – but really there is not much difference. We are still imprisoned here, because we cannot go and see our family.'

Not being able to visit their families during the three-year period of the visa's validity, and then not knowing whether they will ever be granted permanent residence and then be able to have their families join them here, cuts to the very core of what they hold precious in life. One man noted that, when recently speaking to Australian soldiers returning from Afghanistan, the prime minister recognised the great burden involved in being separated from family – but that a completely different stance is taken regarding the separation of TPV holders from their families:

'When I came here my wife was pregnant. Now my child is two years old. Think about how important it is for the family [to be together]. ... I saw John Howard on the TV greeting those soldiers who came back from Afghanistan, and he clearly said publicly that "You should be congratulated - you are heroes *because you have been separated from your families* while fighting for your country, fighting against terrorism". He recognised that being away from the family is the most important thing for human beings. Imagine [what it is like] for us! The time from when we left, the time we were away, the time in detention, and the time we now have to wait - we don't know how much longer we will have to wait, because we have to get passports to be able to go and see our families. That could all take more than five or six years. John Howard congratulates those soldiers [who were separated from their families for a few months], but for us it is going to be different!'

Several of the TPV holders interviewed tried to describe the effect that the ongoing stress of separation from family and an uncertain future has on them. For instance:

'I have been here three years without seeing my family, because I don't have the right to go out [of Australia and then return]. In Sydney everything is available, but if you are not mentally very good, then nothing exists for you. You can't enjoy anything. You go to the park and see the children, and they are not your children. You see someone with their girlfriend or wife, then you remember yours. And instead of enjoying, you become more depressed.'

'In trying to live here I am always stressed – every moment I am thinking about my future, and about my family. Every time I try to find a job I am really stressed. The stress I am experiencing cannot be described – it is with me all the time, and is making me unstable. I know that it's making me unstable, but I have no control over it. Lots of people say "If they have stress, they can go back" – but this stress is something we can't do anything about. I can't find work, or learn English or learn

some skills, and use these skills to find a job – if I could do these things, I would be far less stressed. That would open wider doors for me to be able to go out and do whatever I wanted to do.'

Community leaders also observed that the lack of hope in relation to ever being able to realise their goals leaves many TPV holders with a deep sense that life has no meaning:

'[People always come to Australia] with the intention of having the family come eventually. ... I've heard people say "I'm not working – I can't do anything – I can't sleep, I can't eat, I can't do anything without my family." When you take away people's rights to settle or to live as a family unit, life becomes pretty meaningless.'

'These people are trying to work, or are working - but other than their jobs there is nothing for these people to live for. They are not enjoying things in Australia; they haven't got any recreation activities; they can't use TVs and media because they don't understand English – they are just going to work and coming back, as though they are part of an old machine. For their emotional problems, they haven't got anything. And they haven't got any family, either, to come home to. They are just by themselves – maybe a group of four or five, or ten or more – the only thing they do is visit within this group of friends, with nothing else to do. ... They only see their friends who are in the same situation. They are not enjoying TV or sports – nothing.'

The depth of the despair they have encountered amongst TPV holders lead several ethnic and community workers to express concerns about suicide or its converse - anger turned outwards:

'I think [the emotional stress] will become worse. Maybe at this point they are just beginning to confront this rule (legislation of September 2001 restricting eligibility for permanent residence), but in six months time, or after two or three years, their understanding will be much deeper than before. I don't know what they will do then. Maybe some of them will commit suicide or something. I don't know what – they will do something bad, either to themselves or to somebody else.'

'Most of them are just working and worrying. Life in that situation is extremely difficult, and in some cases life means nothing. As far as I know they are strongly religious – if they were not religious I think the average of suicide would rise amongst them. It's only because their religion says that suicide is a crime that they don't commit suicide.'

A TPV holder reiterated the concern about possible future implications of long-term stress associated with the restrictive conditions of the visas:

'Because of all these [visa] restrictions, we cannot help ourselves. Think about it – after the three years, if we continue not working and living on the dole and living in a "comfort zone" the government will probably change their mind and give us a permanent visa. But by then, because that three years of living in that "comfort zone" has been such a long time, we would have lost all of our motivation, self respect and so on. So we would probably then come out in the community in a dangerous way, because our emotions would not function in a healthy human way.'

While the Early Intervention Program run by STARTTS is providing emotional support to a large number of TPV holders, others are reluctant to utilise the service, as one community worker acknowledged:

‘Mental health issues are generally quite difficult for us to identify, unless they are motivated themselves to accept the service such as STARTTS. Then, when they have an in-depth working relationship they may articulate some problem – but a lot keep their problems to themselves.’

It was beyond the scope of this research to ascertain the extent and nature of serious mental illness among TPV holders. Nevertheless, a strong picture emerged from the interviews that, as their lives are characterised by ongoing stress associated with separation from families and uncertainty regarding their future, the mental health of TPV holders is deteriorating. The emotional support that they receive from their own communities and from STARTTS is greatly appreciated by TPV holders, and is likely to be slowing the rate of deterioration, but it is not able to turn the tide. Perhaps this is because the emotional support that is available focuses primarily on assisting TPV holders to accept their current reality and work towards achieving goals that are consistent with the terms of their visas: while this approach may offer some short-term relief, it may ultimately not resolve the fundamental issues that give their lives meaning.

7. IMPACT ON ETHNIC COMMUNITIES AND SERVICE ORGANISATIONS

The phenomenon of TPVs not only has pervasive implications for the lives of the holders of these visas, but also for the communities in which they live. The ripples extend outwards to their friends and relatives, to their ethnic communities, to the organisations they turn to for help, and to the general community as a whole.

The magnitude of the needs of TPV holders in Western Sydney leads to local ethnic and community service organisations being inundated with requests for assistance. The twenty-four responses from organisations to the brief written survey that was distributed at the outset of this research gives an indication of the volume and types of requests, as summarised in Tables 6 and 7:

TABLE 6
Volume of requests from TPV holders for services received by 24 organisations in Western Sydney

Number of requests in last 6 months	Location of organisations	
	Auburn LGA	Other Western Sydney LGA
<50	3	9
50 – 100	3	4
>100	5	0

TABLE 7
Requests for various types of services received in the last six months by 24 organisations in Western Sydney, from TPV holders

Nature of Requests	Number of Requests		
	Auburn LGA	Other Western Sydney LGA	Totals
Accommodation	8	9	17
Financial and/or material assistance	9	10	19
English classes	8	8	16
Employment	6	9	15
Health services	7	5	13
Immigration matters	9	9	18

The organisations included in Tables 6 and 7 varied from multi-purpose agencies that are the usual starting point for people with a range of needs, to organisations that have a specific focus of service provision such as accommodation, material assistance or mental health counselling. A striking finding was that all of the agencies received multiple requests for a wide range of services, regardless of their established purpose or limitations on service-provision capability imposed by DIMIA. As expected, the greatest volume of requests was experienced by organisations in the Auburn LGA.

7.1 Cultural and humanitarian imperatives

As has already been discussed, TPV holders move to Western Sydney in the expectation of receiving help from their ethnic communities. This expectation is based on a deeply held value of mutual aid that pervades the Middle Eastern and Central Asian cultures from which most TPV holders come: it involves extending hospitality to newcomers who are from a

similar background, and those newcomers will be expected, in turn, to extend similar hospitality to others that subsequently follow. This cultural pattern enables people to maintain their self-esteem and dignity whilst receiving help, because they expect to be able to reciprocate at a later date. However, the needs of TPV holders are so great that the ethnic communities are unable to adequately meet them. As one ethnic leader commented:

‘There is an expectation [to extend help and hospitality] – and it is happening, but it is limited, because not many people from our community are very rich in order to be able to accommodate those people or help them financially. Morally they can help, and most of them do, but not much else.’

When the needs exceed their ability to accommodate, friends and relatives of TPV holders take or send them to organisations that have gained their community’s trust and confidence. Some of these organisations have been established specifically to provide services to their ethnic community, while others have a reputation for understanding and responding in a helpful way to migrants and refugees from various backgrounds. Yet many of these are also the very organisations that are barred from providing services to TPV holders because they receive DIMIA funding. Despite their inability to accept TPV holders as clients, these DIMIA-funded organisations continue to receive as many, if not more, impassioned pleas for help as do those organisations without such service-provision restrictions. This is clearly shown in Table 8, which summarises the volume of requests received by the thirteen ethnic-specific and refugee/migrant specialist organisations that were included in this research.

Seeing the distress of TPV holders and not being in a position to respond weighs heavily on the staff of DIMIA-funded organisations. The staff’s motivation for being in this type of work in the first place is rooted in humanitarian values and compassion for the plight of newcomers that is often based on personal experience. The manager of one organisation spoke of the personal toll on individual members of staff, and on staff morale as a whole, in the following terms:

‘I lost a very good staff member who just couldn’t take it any more (not being allowed to provide services to TPV holders). She was a very articulate young staff member. And there are other staff who are working in a volunteer capacity – however, I have to keep an eye on the checks and balances, and keep reminding these staff that they can’t do this and they can’t do that – and sometimes it’s very demoralising. Even myself, I’ve come to a point where I can’t take it any more. It’s very, very bad.’

TABLE 8
Volume of requests for services made by TPV holders
to 13 ethnic-specific and general refugee/migrant organisations

Funding status of organisation	Number of agencies receiving requests for service in the last 6 months		
	<50 requests	50 – 100 requests	>100 requests
Receives DIMIA funding	2	2	3
Receives no DIMIA funding	2	3	1
Totals	4	5	4

A member of staff of a different organisation – one that *is* permitted to provide services to TPV holders – also feels the strain at a personal level:

‘While it is hard for us to support the government’s policy, being employed by the government we can’t oppose it either. All we can do is explain the situation in interagency meetings so that [staff from other agencies] who see TPV holders can, in turn, explain issues to them. In this interagency network, we don’t even identify ourselves by name in the minutes. It is very difficult for us.’

Staff of organisations that receive funding from DIMIA are caught on the horns of a dilemma: cultural and humanitarian imperatives demand that help be given, but their organisation’s very existence is jeopardised if DIMIA service bans are breached. The struggle to find a resolution to this dilemma is ongoing. A common practice is for staff of these organisations to abide by the DIMIA bans during their eight-hour working day but then as private citizens to provide services to TPV holders after hours. While this is done at great personal cost, and they recognise the danger of burn-out, they believe it is the only way they can maintain their own personal integrity as well as the reputation of the agency in the community. As one community worker explained:

‘Formally, we are not allowed to provide services to TPV holders, because we receive DIMIA funding. But, as part of our organisation’s commitment to our community, we don’t say ‘no’ to anybody who comes here. If we have spare time we will help them. ... After work they come to me and I help them, in my own time.’

Recognising that this resolution of the dilemma cannot continue indefinitely without staff breaking under the burden, this organisation is desperately searching for a non-DIMIA funding source that will enable it to employ professional staff specifically to provide services to the large numbers of TPV holders that continue to approach them:

‘We are looking for some government funding to actually employ some people to help the TPV holders, but we don’t exactly know where to go. We have the space, we have many qualified people who are willing to provide such services, but we don’t have the funding for such positions.’

Another organisational strategy in response to the constraints associated with DIMIA funding is for volunteers to be recruited and used extensively with TPV holders, while DIMIA-funded staff work only with non-TPV holders. One ethnic organisation described its operations as follows:

‘Our organisation has a DIMIA-funded CSS worker, and this position is not permitted to provide any services to TPV holders. However, the organisation as a whole includes many volunteers who do not have anything to do with DIMIA funding, and it is also the base for many social and cultural activities that are open to our whole community [which includes TPV holders]... We have some volunteers who have been assisting with TPV issues for a long time. ... The volunteers go with TPV holders to keep appointments with Centrelink, Immigration, etc. They do interpreting, as well as giving information and advice.’

Obvious limitations of this response to the dilemma are that volunteers do not have the expertise of professional staff, and furthermore their availability is usually limited to a few hours a week – and those times frequently do not coincide with the times that a particular service is needed.

Some ethnic organisations have never sought funding from DIMIA because they want to retain full independence from government influence – a fear of government officials no doubt being a carry-over from experience in their original homeland. This is particularly true for a small number of Kurdish organisations that have been functioning for some time and are now reasonably well established, though still operating with limited resources. It is only these few organisations that are able to rise above the issue of visa category in their service-delivery, as one leader explained:

‘There are quite a few Kurdish associations, so we only hear about those [TPV holders] who contact our particular association. Also, the associations don’t specifically collect information on who is on a TPV and who is not, because we have come from a background where there is a lot of politically-based fears, and fear of the government, secret police, etc. So we don’t want our people to feel that we are bodies that collect information and distribute it to anyone for any reason – even if there is a good reason. We recognise that this would make people feel uncomfortable, because they have gone through such hardships.’

It is indeed a sorry state of affairs that, in regards to the treatment of TPV holders, we have a federal government policy that undermines the most noble of human motivations: the urge to reach out and help those in distress. DIMIA-funded organisations are threatened with losing their credibility in the community if they *do* comply with the bans on providing services to TPV holders, and with losing their funding and financial viability if they *do not* comply with the bans. It is a no-win situation for these organisations whichever way they go, with repercussions that will impact not only on TPV holders but also on entire ethnic communities. The small number of ethnic-specific organisations that have retained their independence from DIMIA and therefore are, theoretically, in a position to assist TPV holders, do not have the resources to provide the professional help that is needed, as they are operating on shoe-string budgets based on fundraising from within their own struggling communities.

7.2 Gaps and ambiguities in service delivery

A lengthy list of gaps in services that are needed by TPV holders but currently not available (either at all or in sufficient quantities) emerged from responses to the written survey. Items identified (not listed in any significant order) were:

- Affordable housing
- Material goods such as fridges, beds, clothing, school uniforms
- English classes, especially at a post-basic level
- Educational opportunities
- Skills training to enhance employment prospects
- Employment opportunities that are not exploitative
- Interpreters
- Advice regarding immigration issues
- Translation of documents
- Legal assistance
- Counselling for emotional problems
- Dental services
- Services for the disabled
- Avenues for social interaction
- Homework assistance for minors
- General orientation and settlement services

Many of these items were discussed more fully during the course of the research interviews, as has been reported above. Problems of a more general nature in relation to service delivery will be reported and discussed in this section.

While legislation clearly specifies a range of federally funded services to which TPV holders are and are not entitled, there are still many areas of potential entitlement characterised by uncertainty and ambiguity. In particular, there is confusion about TPV holders' access and entitlement to a range of state funded services. Frustration was expressed by staff of two organisations in the following terms:

'For people with disabilities, home based services are usually provided by the state government - and they are not sure of whether TPV holders can access their services. They can't say 'yes' and they can't say 'no' – in the meantime, there is no policy. So we refer people to them, and their intake worker takes the details – but they never get back to us. After a few months, when we ring them again, they say they still haven't got a final answer. So, in the meantime they're not providing any service to TPV holders. There are not many with disabilities, but still it is a big issue.'

'We get a lot of requests [from TPV holders] for computer training – because they have to pay at TAFE. There has been a lot of variation in how TAFE's have responded – eg, Granville TAFE has asked TPV holders to pay, but in the south-west they don't have to pay. We also have some issues with schools, where some schools are asking them to pay. We approached the Multicultural Education Unit to get that sorted out, because schools had been using their own discretion since TPV holders' eligibility hadn't been clarified by the State Government. That is one of the problems – how state departments are interpreting [eligibility guidelines]. Also, how the Housing Department is interpreting is questionable.'

There has also been confusion between federal and state departments in relation to the time at which income support for unattached minors provided by DIMIA/DoCs should be replaced by income support from Centrelink.

'These kids often don't have a documented date of birth. There was a discrepancy between DoCs, DIMIA and Centrelink about the date of birth that the agencies were using. Since last July, the agencies have come to an agreement, that the date of birth should be 31 December [of the year of birth]... It was important to get this sorted out – because Centrelink was formerly using 1 January [of the year of birth] as the date to start paying Special Benefit, whereas DoCs/DIMIA had continued providing financial support as they didn't regard him as turning 16 until the end of the year. Thus, the kid had been getting money from Centrelink, for which they were ineligible, for a whole year. In these circumstances, a debt would be raised [by Centrelink]. ... The debt still exists on the record, and the kid receiving the benefit will automatically have their benefit reduced to recover the debt. If the kid goes off benefits, the debt will still exist on their record – there is no way they can pay back the debt in a lump sum.'

Ambiguity over eligibility also extends to NGOs that receive some of their funding from the state government. When approached by TPV holders, they may provide services in a policy vacuum and run the risk of subsequently not being reimbursed by the state. In this regard, refuges and shelters for the homeless, small neighbourhood centres, child-care agencies and NGOs serving the disabled were all mentioned in the research interviews. One example:

'There are a number of organisations [in the disability field], such as the Spastic Centre, Deaf Society, etc, who are very unclear about what the TPV means, and so their service provision to TPV holders tends to be very ad hoc. Certainly none of the disability service staff get refugee training. ... Regarding small NGOs who are unclear about TPVs - increasingly, services that are provided are being funded on a case-by-case basis, and while a number of agencies will do some work with ineligible clients, they can't then bill for that work.'

For workers who are caught in this web of ambiguity when trying to access services and resources for TPV holders, frustration sometimes boils over into animosity:

'The other day I rang [xxxx agency] regarding school uniforms [for TPV holders], and I asked "What the hell is going on? When kids move from primary to high school they need another uniform". And the officer said "No, they get this much money from Centerlink and we pay them this much. ... But [then I said] "This boy is a Year 12 student – and [your agency] has a subsidy available. You are not being asked to pay from your own pocket!"'

The limitations imposed on DIMIA-funded service-providers has deprived other agencies of their usual referral networks, and has forced them to reconsider the limits and extent of their own involvement with TPV holders. Negotiation between organisations has been occurring in an attempt to resolve who can do what:

'Even though we are not permitted to provide services to TPV holders, they still come to this agency. Nobody really knows who can help, so they send them to us. We've had lots and lots of requests from Centrelink, so I actually went and talked with the manager and explained that they were in a better position than us to help them out.'

While such negotiation has led to some clarification, there is still widespread confusion and frustration amongst agency workers in trying to find ways to meet the basic needs of TPV holders. Ineligibility for a wide range of services, and ambiguity about their eligibility for many others, leads to requests being inappropriately displaced onto mainstream services that have no expertise in refugee matters. Tension is building, as expressed by an employee in one such organisation:

'A drain is being put on mainstream services that are not ethno-specific, that are not crisis services, that are not services that have been set up to deal with people that are coming through with the sorts of problems that these people [TPV holders] have. So the whole thing is going to end up at crisis point at some stage.'

Another fraught area is apparent inconsistency in the way DIMIA deals with the leaders of ethnic communities. On the one hand DIMIA-funded ethnic agencies are precluded from providing services to TPV holders, but on the other hand ethnic leaders who work in these same agencies are briefed by DIMIA about current immigration policies and procedures and are then expected to pass this information on to TPV holders.

'There seems to be limited understanding, on the part of some small ethnic organisations, about what the change of legislation in Sept 2001 really means. ... After quite a bit of pushing DIMIA [recently] had some briefing sessions with community leaders. [But] the chances of community leaders accurately conveying this complex material to TPV holders are small.'

The expectation that ethnic community leaders can accurately convey this vital information to TPV holders may be unrealistic and, as one organisation pointed out, may also place an unfair legal burden on their shoulders:

'By going to community leaders and not dealing directly with the TPV holders about the implications of the legislation, DIMIA is effectively putting community leaders in a situation where they are likely to break the law [by being drawn into giving migration advice]. This can be a criminal offence.'

Furthermore, by using the ethnic organisations that it funds as conduits through which to pass information, DIMIA runs the risk of not reaching TPV holders who are from the same country of origin as the organisations' leaders but from different tribal, religious or political groups. This is particularly true of the Afghans in Western Sydney, where the only Afghan organisation that receives DIMIA funding is seen by TPV holders as working against their interests, and two tribal-based alternative organisations have been established (without DIMIA funding):

'For us [Hazaras], unfortunately, the pre-existing Afghan community here not only did not help us, but they made problems for us. ... They make problems for us as much as they can. ... They are working against us. At least by having our own organisation we can do things for ourselves. We had no choice but to make out own association, and we have to learn how to go about things.'

'Here in Australia, there are huge gaps between the Afghan groups. If you're Hazara, you're only able to be with other Hazaras; if Tajik only with Tajiks; same for Pashtuns etc. Everyone came to Australia with the memory of war, so everyone sticks to their own group here. Contact with each other just doesn't happen. ... Most of the TPV holders are not confident to approach Afghans who are established here already. They are only confident to be with each other.'

The devolution of service provision to ethnic and community organisations that rely heavily on volunteers and staff who are unlikely to have relevant professional qualifications has serious implications. It cannot help but result in a questionable standard of service:

'Many of the services are provided by people on a voluntary basis. Therefore, we're never quite sure how much of a particular service is available on a day-to-day basis. I'm concerned that the quality of service that people receive may sometimes not be good enough as well.'

Further, even the management of these under-resourced services may fall to underqualified staff:

'[Our agency] is basically run by people with some kind of church affiliation. We're volunteers. I am Acting Manager, but I don't have any training in social work – I'm just well-meaning. This job should be done by a professional. They wouldn't employ me [as manager] if I put in my CV, because I have no prior experience in this particular area, and I have no language skills amongst the people that I'm trying to help. So there is a gap there – but we just fill it in the best way we can.'

Perhaps the most serious implication of all is that service delivery is fragmented and inconsistent, with no assurance of access on the basis of need, or of equity amongst TPV holders (let alone equity with refugees who have permanent visas). There is a very real fear amongst service providers that many TPV holders have not come to the attention of any organisations that can help:

'My worry is that, because we don't hear much from the Iraqis (because it's had such a high level of repression and suspicion), there may be a lot of isolated Iraqi TPV holders who are not getting any services at all. I think they are often an overlooked group. We can't make the assumption that because Iraqis are overall more capable (ie, understanding how to make things work on their behalf, and understanding how Western cultures operate), therefore, that all of them are doing OK.'

The service needs of TPV holders are unique and complex. The strong view that emerged from service-providers who were interviewed for this research was that a comprehensive, integrated settlement service needs to be provided for TPV holders:

'TPV holders only get ad hoc services which aren't addressing a whole multitude of areas of need. Existing services are only skimming the surface. ... The biggest gap is that there is not a comprehensive settlement service. ... The TPV holders are not feeling secure; they are fearful. They are not feeling that they are getting any cooperation from within the system. ... Employment is such a big thing to them, as well as education and accommodation. What's needed is for all of these things to be linked up for them, and giving them the appropriate resources. To say that they are able to be employed is meaningless unless you make it possible for them by assisting them with very practical things like how to go about interviews, resumes, how to put in an application, etc.'

There are a number of large, well-established organisations that consider themselves well placed to be able to take on such a role but they are prevented from doing so because their funding comes from DIMIA and/or they are unable to locate alternative sources of funds. One, for example, stated:

'It is very important that an organisation [such as ours] should be responsible for helping these people, instead of having to refer them. We know what their needs are, we know what we can offer them, but we don't have enough funding. We've got very qualified people who can deal with TPV holders; we have the avenue; they all know us. ... If we had full-time staff to deal with them, it would be wonderful.'

The needs of TPV holders are clear. Service gaps in relation to meeting those needs are also clear. Deciding what to do about the situation is the next challenge.

8. DISCUSSION: A HIERARCHY OF POSSIBLE RESPONSES

Two major areas of concern emerged from this research in relation to TPV holders in Western Sydney: first, problems associated with the time-limited nature of the visas, and second, problems associated with TPV holders' ineligibility for a wide range of settlement support services. While the TPV holders themselves experience the problems most acutely, there are also negative repercussions at the local community level, and more specifically for local social welfare organisations.

In terms of possible responses to the situation, three broad approaches can be considered. At one extreme is a maximal response that would work towards the elimination of TPVs altogether and the granting of permanent protection to asylum seekers from the point at which they are found to be legitimate refugees. A mid-level response would be to not tackle the ongoing issuance of temporary visas, but to work towards broadening the entitlements of TPV holders to equate them with the entitlements of refugees on permanent protection visas. At the other extreme, a minimalist response would accept the ongoing issuance of TPV as well as the current restrictions on entitlements to a range of federally-funded services, but work towards strengthening the capacity of those organisations currently providing services and facilitating access to a range of additional agencies that are not bound by federal government restrictions. Each of these possible responses will now be considered in more detail.

8.1 A strategy for maximal change

There is absolutely no doubt that the temporary nature of their visas is the greatest source of anguish for TPV holders, and from their perspective the very notion of being only given temporary protection after having been found to be legitimate refugees is anathema. The elimination of TPVs and their replacement with permanent protection visas is their fervent wish. This position appears to be shared by most, if not all, ethnic community leaders as well as staff and volunteers of organisations that work with refugees. Strong arguments in support of such a goal can be developed in terms of human rights, treaty obligations, evidence of long-term damage to mental health, etc. If temporary protection was replaced by permanent protection for all refugees in Australia (regardless of how they initially entered the country), then the matter of eligibility for the same support services for all refugees would automatically be resolved as well.

However, organisations and individuals wanting to embrace the goal of replacing temporary with permanent protection visas are confronted with a mammoth challenge, as achievement of the goal requires a change to federal legislation. Bringing about change to legislation is a political exercise, and will only occur if there is a groundswell of public opinion demanding that it happen – but it must be recognised that public opinion is, in turn, strongly influenced (through the media) by entrenched political party interests. The issuance of TPVs is part of the Federal Government's border protection policy, and the tide of public opinion remains strongly supportive of this position. At the same time it is encouraging that some progress is being made in articulating an alternative view and that this is beginning to make inroads into the Federal Opposition. But the goal of achieving legislative change is still a long way off. Whether or not it is ultimately achieved remains to be seen, but advocates for change would not want to see the status quo retained simply because opposing voices were not willing to engage in the battle. Perhaps it is in recognition of the slow pace of political change that the recently released Victorian report (Mansouri, 2002) calls, *inter alia*, for the establishment of a review committee by the Federal Government and further research, rather than directly for repeal of the legislation.

Setting one's sights on the ultimate goal of elimination of TPVs holds the potential for the best outcome in the long term, but it does nothing in the meantime to ease the plight of TPV holders in less ambitious but arguably more achievable ways. Driven by a sense of urgency to provide some relief, many field workers are likely to be drawn to a mid-level response.

8.2 A mid-level strategy

Advocating a much broader range of entitlements for TPV holders, to bring them to the same level as entitlements for refugees afforded permanent protection, is a strategy that has already been adopted by the Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS: 2002) with the support of major Sydney-based interagency networks concerned with refugee matters. This level of response is still ambitious, as it, too, challenges Federal legislation and regulations – but it is probably more achievable on political grounds than the maximal goal discussed above. This is because the argument on which it is based has more to do with equity for all refugees currently living in Australia, in terms of their every-day needs, than with the more politically fraught arguments associated with granting permanent residence to refugees who entered the country 'illegally'. The assumed position of the Federal Government, that it is not appropriate to provide settlement services that imply permanency to refugees who are likely to only remain in the country temporarily, is countered by the argument that three years is far too long to let TPV holders flounder without adequate supports. The argument for TPV holders to have the same entitlements as other refugees is strengthened by reference to the inordinate burden that devolves to the State level and local communities in areas of high concentration (such as Western Sydney).

This report abounds with evidence that can support a strategy to fight for specific entitlements that are now precluded by Federal law and regulations. For instance, the research data clearly supports the need for:

- general settlement support (eg, through MRCs and DIMIA-funded ethnic organisations) to assist with the myriad challenges associated with becoming established in new surroundings;
- affordable access to English language training at an appropriate level (eg, through the Adult Migrant English Program) and for adequate assistance in finding work (eg, through case management by federally funded employment agencies), in order for the entitlement to work to be meaningful¹¹;
- the right of return if TPV holders leave the country, especially for the purpose of maintaining family ties;
- family reunion rights, especially in relation to spouses and children, and for unaccompanied minors in relation to parents/guardians.

In addition to working towards establishing eligibility of TPV holders for a range of direct Commonwealth benefits, a mid-level strategy would need to address their eligibility for various State programs that are indirectly supported by Federal funding. State-level provision of needed services is currently fraught by ambiguity and inconsistency, as has already been reported. As indicated by the research data, the main areas needing clarification at the state level are eligibility for:

- public housing and emergency accommodation, especially for family groups and unaccompanied minors;
- household set-up and other immediate material goods;

¹¹ Some progress is being made in this regard, with the Federal Government about to consider adopting new regulations that would require TPV holders to comply with more rigid reporting procedures to Centrelink in order to maintain their entitlement to income support, but that would also give TPV holders access to English language support.

- fee exemption for TAFE courses¹²;
- legal aid;
- home-based disability services;
- dental services.

To date, Queensland is the only state that has “moved to ensure that TPV entrants receive the same State Government services as other refugees” (Mann: 2001). The success in Queensland attests to the feasibility of achieving the goal of equal access for TPV holders to State services. However, a protracted campaign would be necessary to achieve similar outcomes in New South Wales where the current State Government argues that Sydney is already carrying a disproportionate burden in supporting new arrivals. And, of course, state governments are reluctant to broaden eligibility for their services in the absence of an injection of federal funds for this purpose.

If eligibility of TPV holders for the full range of Federal and State services listed above could be established, a crushing burden would be lifted from the non-DIMIA-funded ethnic and community organisations, and consistency in standards of service delivery could be achieved. However, a great deal of advocacy and negotiation at both federal and state levels of government would be necessary as a prelude to possible success in achieving this mid-level goal. While efforts to achieve this goal could well reap rewards in the mid term, the immediacy of the current needs of TPV holders still needs addressing by a shorter-term strategy.

8.3 A minimalist but pragmatic response

Given the time and tenacity needed to bring about legislative and policy changes at the federal and state levels of government, on pragmatic grounds a case can be made for a minimalist response of simply strengthening existing service-provision mechanisms for TPV holders. Essentially, this would mean finding extra resources for ethnic and community based NGOs that are already involved, or have the potential to become involved, with TPV holders. This is the likely level of response to be given by state governments when pressure is exerted on them to take some responsibility for the plight of TPV holders. Thus, in South Australia, “State resources [have been] directed towards supporting NGOs working with TPV holders and State Departments [have] played an active role” (Refugee Council of Australia: 2002). Similarly, the Victorian Government has provided “a one-off grant of \$140,000 to local governments and community organisations to assist in meeting the urgent needs of TPV holders”, and that has “been directed particularly to project designed to meet the mental health and education, training and employment needs” (Mansouri: 2002). This minimalist level of response is also essentially the strategy advocated in the Queensland study (Mann: 2001), but here it is in the context of a State that already provides TPV holders equal access to State Government services.

The pragmatic case for a more modest level of response that is achievable in the short term has some appeal, but reliance on community based NGOs and ethnic organisations for meeting common needs has many inherent weaknesses. These include fragmentation in service-provision, inconsistency in levels and types of services across organisations, the likelihood of some TPV holders not being reached by service providers, and reliance on volunteers and staff who may be underqualified. Federal and State governments are far better placed to provide a range of services that can be accessed, on the basis of established entitlement, by TPV holders. On the other hand, ethnic and other community-based organisations are better able to respond at an individual level to TPV holders, providing emotional and social support. Government subsidies can enable these organisations to provide additional services, but ambiguities about the eligibility of TPV

¹² Significant headway is being made towards achieving this goal – see Footnote 10.

holders need to be removed. With additional resources, at the local level NGOs could appropriately continue to address some of the needs of TPV holders, such as:

- child care
- emergency accommodation
- emergency material and financial relief
- transporting and escorting to 'official' appointments
- interpreting and translating
- negotiation with real estate agents and prospective employers
- information sessions
- emotional support
- social activities
- homework support
- financial management seminars

Unless and until the more ambitious strategies to bring about change at the Federal and State Government levels are successful, these local agencies will continue to carry additional responsibility for many of the other needs of TPV holders that have listed in section 8.2 above. Unsatisfactory as it would be to allow this arrangement to continue in the mid- to long term, there is great urgency to acquire additional resources in the short term for local organisations that are straining to breaking point under the burden of unrelenting pleas for assistance from TPV holders.

9. CONCLUSION: THE IMMEDIATE CHALLENGE

The dilemma for those committed to addressing the needs of TPV holders and easing the associated burden on local communities and organisations is that there is no single strategy that is clearly the best. Rather, there are options to be considered, with competing claims on precious time and energy to be weighed, and chances of success to be estimated. In the foregoing discussion three broad strategies have been outlined, and their major strengths and weaknesses identified. The immediate challenge now is deciding how much time and effort to devote to one or more of these strategies. The alternative is to become so engrossed in the day-to-day work of responding to immediate needs that *nothing* of a strategic nature is done towards trying to change the situation of TPV holders. The latter would be tragic indeed, as the kinds of consequences that could be anticipated include a sharp escalation in the social alienation felt by TPV holders (that can be expressed in self-destructive or socially-destructive ways), exhaustion and burn-out of the many volunteers and NGO staff who now carry an inordinate burden, and a deterioration in community relations.

There needs to be a debate on strategic options in which all concerned parties participate. Existing interagency networks already devote time to strategic matters, and they are the obvious platform for initiating more far-reaching strategic discussions and planning. It is not necessary, or possibly even feasible, for commitment to a single course of action to be reached in response to the TPV situation. But the chances of success will be greatly enhanced to the extent that responses are developed from careful consideration of federal, state and local aspects of the situation, and coordinated into a broad strategy that has overall coherence.

10. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that WSROC take a leadership role in organising and sponsoring an initial one- or two-day strategic planning forum to include the Refugee Council of Australia (RCA), NCOSS, relevant local governments, interagency groups and other parties involved in service-provision to TPV holders in Western Sydney. The purpose of the forum should be to develop a coordinated strategic plan for addressing TPV issues in Western Sydney, based on careful consideration of federal, state and local aspects of the situation. In the planning phase a considerable amount of networking will need to occur to ensure the support and involvement of all relevant parties, and work will also need to be done after the forum to implement the plan developed. It is envisaged that WSROC would need to be actively involved in this project for a six-month period.

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APPENDIX A: ENTITLEMENTS OF REFUGEES ON PROTECTION VISAS

	PERMANENT PROTECTION VISA Visa Subclass 866	TEMPORARY PROTECTION VISA Visa Subclass 785 (and subclasses 447 and 451)
SOCIAL SECURITY	Immediate access to the full range of social security benefits.	Access only to Special Benefit for which a range of eligibility criteria apply. Ineligible for Newstart, Sickness Allowance, Parenting Payment, Youth Allowance, Austudy and a range of other benefits.
EDUCATION	Same access to education as any other permanent resident.	Access to school education subject to state policy. Effective exclusion from tertiary education due to imposition of full fees.
SETTLEMENT SUPPORT	Access to full range of DIMIA settlement support services.	Not eligible for most DIMIA funded services such as MRCs and ethno-specific community welfare agencies. Can use Early Health Assessment and Intervention Programs.
FAMILY REUNION	Able to bring members of immediate family (spouse and children) to Australia.	No family reunion rights (including reunion with spouse and children).
WORK RIGHTS	Permission to work.	Permission to work but ability to find employment influenced by temporary nature of visa and poor English skills. Ineligible for most employment assistance programs.
LANGUAGE TRAINING	Access to 510 hours of English language training.	Not eligible for federally funded English language programs: the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) or Advances English for Migrants Program (AEMP).
MEDICAL BENEFITS	Automatic eligibility for Medicare.	Currently eligible for temporary Medicare cards.
TRAVEL	Will be able to leave the country and return without jeopardising their visa.	No automatic right of return.

Source: Refugee Council of Australia, 2002.

**APPENDIX B:
TPV RESEARCH PROJECT**

Survey of Service Providers

Agency:

Are TPV holders eligible to receive services from your organisation? _____ Yes
_____ No

Regardless of whether or not your agency is able to provide services to TPV holders, what is your estimate of the number of TPV holders who have approached your agency for assistance within the last six months?

- _____ None
- _____ Less than 50
- _____ 50 to 100
- _____ Over 100

What issues have TPV holders requested assistance with?

- _____ Accommodation
- _____ Financial matters
- _____ English
- _____ Employment
- _____ Health
- _____ Immigration matters
- _____ Other issues

What issues (if any) has your organisation been able to assist with?

In relation to issues your agency has NOT been able to assist with, how often have you been able to refer TPV holders to other service providers?

_____ Always or most of the time

_____ About half of the time

_____ Rarely or never

In your experience, what are the main gaps in service provision for TPV holders in your area or community?

Would you be interested in discussing the circumstances of TPV holders in more detail with the researcher?

_____ Yes

_____ No

If so, could you please provide your name and phone number or email address:

(Alternatively, you could call me on 9385 1962 or contact me by email at D.barnes@unsw.edu.au)

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Would you please return it to:

Dr Diane Barnes
Refugee Research Centre & School of Social Work
University of New South Wales
SYDNEY NSW 2052

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DIMIA	Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
DoCs	Department of Community Services
MRC	Migrant Resource Centre
NGO	Non-government organisation
PPV	Permanent Protection Visa
RCA	Refugee Council of Australia
STARTTS	Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors
TAFE	College of Technical and Further Education
TPV	Temporary Protection Visa
WSROC	Western Sydney Region Organisation of Councils Ltd