



Refugee Council
of Australia

Discussion paper

JOB SERVICES AUSTRALIA: REFUGEE COMMUNITY AND SERVICE PROVIDER VIEWS

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Job Services Australia (JSA), funded through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), replaced the former Job Network in 2009 and provides employment services to eligible jobseekers across Australia. As with the former Job Network, many refugee communities and organisations providing services to refugees have expressed frustration at the lack of targeted support offered by JSA services and the poor outcomes experienced by refugee and humanitarian entrants. The JSA contracts that were awarded in 2009 were due to expire on 30 June 2012 but have since been extended for a further three years. While the JSA model has yet to be substantially evaluated and reviewed, the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) has received consistent negative feedback about how JSA services are meeting the needs of refugee and humanitarian entrants. The following is a summary of refugee community and service provider views on the JSA model and services that have been documented through RCOA's annual community consultations.¹

1. JOB SERVICES AUSTRALIA

Job Services Australia (JSA) was introduced on 1 July 2009 by the Australian Government to replace the existing Job Network employment services. The JSA model aimed to deliver a more tailored approach for clients, decrease unemployment and maximise the productive capacity of the Australian workforce. JSA providers are funded to deliver personalised assistance to job seekers that is sensitive to the various employment barriers that individuals face, including providing "early assistance to the most disadvantaged job seekers", in order to help individuals obtain the skills they need to secure sustainable employment.²

JSA providers are organisations contracted to deliver the full suite of JSA services under the *Employment Services Deed 2009-12*. Funded JSA providers are a mix of large, medium and small, for-profit and not-for-profit organisations. Currently, job seekers are referred to a local JSA provider by Centrelink. They are assessed by Centrelink based on their needs and barriers to employment and are placed in one of four streams; stream one being for job seekers with minimal disadvantage and stream four being for those with the greatest disadvantages. The JSA provider will then, in conjunction with the job seeker, develop an Employment Pathway Plan (EPP) to map out the progression and aims of the job seeker, establish what further training may be necessary and link the job seeker to relevant employment and training opportunities. The EPP stipulates certain activities that the job seeker must participate in, with the condition that failure to attend may affect Centrelink payments under the "no show, no pay" policy.³

2. REFUGEE AND HUMANITARIAN ENTRANTS AND EMPLOYMENT TRANSITIONS

For many refugee and humanitarian entrants, obtaining employment is not only important in terms of economic wellbeing, it also represents an important step in the settlement journey and in facilitating a

¹ See: www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/intakesub.php

² Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), *Job Services Australia*, <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Employment/JSA/Pages/faq.aspx#03> (accessed 8 Feb 2012)

³ Disney J., Buduls A. and Grant P. (2010). *Impacts of the New Job Seeker Compliance Framework: Report of the Independent Review*, DEEWR, Canberra, <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Employment/ComplianceReview/pages/independentreviewreport.aspx>

sense of belonging and future in Australia. Despite their desire and strong motivation to work, many refugee and humanitarian entrants experience considerable difficulties entering the Australian labour market. Research into refugee and humanitarian entrants and employment transitions has found that these job seekers require tailored assistance in order to overcome the specific barriers to employment that they face.⁴ These barriers include: limited English proficiency; lack of Australian work experience; limited access to transport and affordable housing close to employment; lack of knowledge of Australian workplace culture and systems; pressures of juggling employment and domestic responsibilities for women with caring responsibilities and limited social networks in Australia; the refugee and resettlement experience and its impact on job seeking; discrimination in employment; difficulties with recognition of skills, qualifications and experience; lack of qualifications; and visa restrictions for some asylum seekers.

Despite the JSA claim to provide tailored services and early intervention to support vulnerable job seekers, there is compelling anecdotal evidence to suggest that the way in which early intervention and tailored responses are defined does not encompass the types of employment support that refugee and humanitarian entrants are requesting and need in order to overcome barriers. Further, the outcomes for refugee and humanitarian entrants within the JSA system are unclear and data is either not gathered or not made available about how they are faring, what types of services are being provided and the effectiveness of these services.

During recent community consultations⁵, RCOA received detailed feedback from refugee and humanitarian entrants and service providers about the effectiveness of JSA providers in supporting refugee job seekers into work. Community members consulted across Australia almost unanimously expressed dissatisfaction with the JSA system. Most consultation participants felt that JSA providers were ineffective in helping refugee and humanitarian entrants find jobs and that those who found work did so through their own networks or with the help of settlement and other community services. The feedback detailed below points to a systematic failure of the JSA model and funded services to provide culturally sensitive and personally tailored services to refugee and humanitarian entrant job seekers who are desperate to find work. Quotes from service providers and community members who participated in consultations are included below to illustrate recurrent themes.

3. KEY CONCERNS ABOUT THE JSA SYSTEM

3.1 The JSA funding model and tailored services

“The JSA model targets largely unskilled Australian workers; it does not work well for skilled and/or recently arrived refugees and humanitarian entrants. It is fundamentally flawed because of the private contracting; it is not based on social justice, but economic rationalism. The most difficult to place do not get the resources or attention they need, because JSA-funded services are paid for outcomes.”

- Service provider, Dandenong (Vic)

JSA providers are awarded contracts by DEEWR based on the services they provide along with their star rating. The “star rating” is determined by a number of factors, including the amount of successful employment outcomes attained for job seekers at that JSA office. The importance of the star rating for maintaining funding from DEEWR has resulted in greater resources being devoted to job seekers who have relatively few employment barriers who can secure successful outcomes, and hence funding for the JSA service provider.

⁴ RCOA (2010). *What Works: Employment Strategies for Refugee and Humanitarian Entrants*, www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/reports/2010_Employment.pdf

⁵ Between September-October 2011, 43 consultations in eight states and territories were held to seek community views on issues for consideration in planning Australia’s 2012-13 Refugee and Humanitarian Program. More than 730 people, representing nearly 200 organisations and 33 refugee communities, participated in the process. A discussion paper was circulated prior to consultations and included a question that specifically asked: *What concerns and recommendations do you have about Job Services Australia and how employment services are meeting the needs of refugee and humanitarian entrants?* See: www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/intakesub/2012-13_IntakeSub_dpaper.pdf

As a result of this funding arrangement, many non-JSA funded service providers in the settlement sector argue that refugee and humanitarian entrant job seekers are all too often placed in the “too hard basket” and are not given the kinds of services and support they require to achieve meaningful outcomes.

“JSA providers don’t do anything. They just send them away. Their attitude is ‘you are too difficult’.”

- Service provider, Wollongong (NSW)

“JSA is founded on individualised tailored support but the reality is quite different. Some JSA providers appear to place or attempt to fit clients into predetermined job pathways so they can secure outcomes as soon as possible, rather than providing quality service and targeted options.”

- Service provider, Brisbane (Qld)

The structure of JSA funding has a significant impact on the types and quality of services delivered. Reports of JSA case managers trying to provide support for up to 80 different clients at one time suggest that the current workload of JSA providers significantly hinders their ability to provide individually tailored services for job seekers with particular needs and multiple employment barriers as well as to adequately develop relationships with potential employers and advocate on behalf of these job seekers. The high workload, as well as reports of high turnover of JSA case workers, also limits their capacity to understand the skills and personal circumstances of refugee and humanitarian entrant job seekers. Background knowledge of a job seeker’s past experience and education is vital in order to develop a realistic employment pathway plan. In the case of refugee and humanitarian entrants, competency in working cross culturally is necessary to establish the correlation between work experience overseas and its equivalency in Australia, career aspirations and skill sets. Miscommunication occurs frequently and can lead to job seekers being interviewed for job positions that are not suited to them or enrolling in training courses that are not relevant or suited to their aspirations and capabilities.

3.2 The creation of parallel employment services

The obligation to meet with JSAs and Centrelink on a regular basis with limited tangible results can often force refugee and humanitarian entrant job seekers to try other means of finding employment. Many non-JSA funded services have developed their own programs and initiatives to connect job seekers with employment or work experience. Many of these service providers said that the key ingredient missing from the JSA model was the capacity for JSA case managers to get to know their clients in a way that enabled them to identify employment and training opportunities in areas relevant to them.

“JSA have been really hopeless at engaging with people who are job-ready. We go around them. Any labour market initiatives we do have nothing to do with JSA.”

- Service provider, Coffs Harbour (NSW)

Some service providers expressed frustration that the work they were undertaking should be the responsibility of JSA providers, for example:

“One client presented a printout of a job that the JSA agency gave them instructing them to apply for the job online. This client had no computer skills so how would they apply for the job? Often at the first presentation of a client, (our service) contacts the JSA agency to let them know that we are working in partnership to provide extra support. Clients often don’t have a resume so (our service) helps with the resume and sends it to the JSA agency.”

- Service provider, Whittlesea (Vic)

“When we have acted independently in the job market to assist clients, we’ve had good results in Townsville. But it’s hard to tell people to go back to JSA and ask for services they should have been offered.”

- Service provider, Townsville (Qld)

When employment is obtained through alternative methods, such as through non-JSA funded services or through a job seeker’s own social networks, the JSA provider should not receive the outcomes funding for assisting the particular individual. Some refugee community members and service providers consulted by RCOA claim that JSA providers are reporting outcomes for job seekers who have obtained employment through alternative means and where little support has been provided by the JSA service. For example, one Congolese community member in Shepparton said: *“The JSAs don’t do anything. I found a job through my own networks and the JSA said they found it for me.”*

Overall, the JSA funding model does not appear to result in many winners. JSA providers struggle to provide intensive assistance to job seekers with particular employment barriers without realistic funding attached and appropriate policy guidelines and there is little incentive to provide sustained and relevant support. Non-JSA service providers experience strain in delivering employment services that they are not contracted to deliver and having to seek funding from sources other than DEEWR or draw on funding earmarked for other purposes. Most importantly, refugee or humanitarian entrant job seekers are frustrated by the time wasted meeting participation requirements that do not lead to jobs and of being juggled between different services when what they are asking for is one place to go that will provide the kind of employment support that is needed to make the difficult transition into the Australia labour market.

“The JSAs are a problem. They get us to sit in front of a computer for two hours a day, three days a week, and tell you if you don’t come your payments will be cut. But they don’t help you to get a job. It takes our time and money to come into the office for nothing. They need to find us a proper job, not waste our time.”

- Community member, Werribee (Vic)

3.3 Specialist JSAs

In the absence of a national employment strategy focusing on refugee and humanitarian entrants, provisions for this group of job seekers are through generalist JSA providers and a limited number of specialist JSA services targeting people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. However, there are fewer service providers claiming particular expertise in working with people from refugee backgrounds funded under the JSA than the previous Job Network, and these specialist providers are required to provide the same suite of services as other JSA providers and with the same levels of funding and accountability framework. Figure 1 illustrates the settlement of refugee and humanitarian entrants by state and territory and the distribution of specialist CALD providers. Figure 2 shows the top 10 local government areas of refugee resettlement by state and the presence of specialist CALD JSA providers in these areas. Both of these figures highlight the absence of any strategic framework for funding specialist services in areas where there is significant settlement of refugee and humanitarian entrants.

“There needs to be transparent and clear communication across the employment sector of DEEWR’s interpretation of who fall into the specialist category of ‘CALD job seekers’ and of the purpose of having contracted specialist CALD providers to assist these job seekers. Processes for the allocation of job seekers to JSA providers need to be reviewed and improved. An increased knowledge across all Centrelink offices of specialist providers/services and capacity to identify which job seekers would benefit from these specialists would strongly support improved processes.”

- Service provider, Melbourne (Vic)

Services have raised concerns that, while the creation of these specialist CALD services rightly acknowledges that within the total cohort of job seekers there are a number of groups that would benefit from specialist attention, the current processes for the allocation of job seekers by Centrelink does not facilitate appropriate allocation of job

seekers to specialist providers. Based on the allocation of job seekers to specialist providers, it has been suggested that DEEWR is not getting the maximum benefit from contracting these specialist providers and that refugee and humanitarian entrants are not being appropriately referred to CALD specialist JSA providers in areas where they are operating.

Figure 1 – Number of refugee and humanitarian entrants settling by Australian state and territory, 2005-2010, and funding of specialist CALD JSA services⁶

State/Territory	# (%) refugee and humanitarian entrants	Specialist CALD provider funded through JSA, 2009	JSA Region where specialist CALD providers are funded to operate
New South Wales	20,599 (31.5%)	Community First Step	Fairfield (Bonnyrigg, Fairfield)
Victoria	18,862 (28.8%)	Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES)	Bayside (Box Hill, Dandenong, Glen Waverley, Moorabbin, Noble Park, Oakleigh, Springvale)
		AMES	Calder (Broadmeadows, Brunswick East, Coburg, Glenroy, North Melbourne, Sunbury)
		Job Futures Ltd	Geelong (Geelong West, Geelong, Norlane)
		AMES	Plenty (Epping, Heidelberg, Preston)
		AMES	Westgate (Footscray, Laverton, Melton South, Melton, St Albans, Sunshine, Werribee)
Western Australia	7,674 (11.7%)	Community First	Central and West Metro (Fremantle)
		Community First	East Metro (Cannington)
		ASeTTS	North Metro (Girrawheen, Joondalup)
Queensland	7,551 (11.5%)	ACCES Services Inc	Logan (Beenleigh, Hillcrest, Logan Central)
South Australia	7,154 (10.9%)	ARA Jobs	Western Adelaide (Kilkenny, Underdale)
Tasmania	1,425 (2.2%)	None	None
ACT	726 (1.1%)	None	None
Northern Territory	725 (1.1%)	None	None

Figure 2 – Top 10 local government areas of refugee and humanitarian settlement in NSW, Victoria, WA, Queensland and South Australia (2005-2010) with specialist CALD JSA services operating⁷

Top 10 LGAs of refugee and humanitarian settlement										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
NEW SOUTH WALES										
LGA	Fairfield	Liverpool	Blacktown	Auburn	Parramatta	Holroyd	Canterbury	Bankstown	Wollongong	Newcastle
# ppl	3,905	2,506	2,331	2,017	1,550	1,063	970	630	485	373
CALD JSA	X									
VICTORIA										
LGA	Greater Danden'g	Hume	Brimbank	Wyndham	Casey	Maroon-dah	Maribyr-nong	Hobsons Bay	Greater Sheppart'n	Whittlesea
# ppl	3,351	2,024	1,998	1,574	1,281	975	752	567	553	510
CALD JSA	X	X	X	X			X			X
WESTERN AUSTRALIA										
LGA	Stirling	Canning	Wanneroo	Bayswater	Gosnells	Belmont	Swan	Victoria Park	Armadale	Cockburn
# ppl	2,463	1,076	1,021	456	454	381	348	194	122	112
CALD JSA		X	X							
QUEENSLAND										
LGA	Brisbane	Logan	Toowoomba	Gold Coast	Cairns	Ipswich	Townsville	Gatton	Rockhampton	Pine Rivers
# ppl	4,198	1,555	429	342	263	203	138	87	41	31
CALD JSA		X								
SOUTH AUSTRALIA										
LGA	Pt Adel'de Enfield	Salisbury	Charles Sturt	Playford	West Torrens	Marion	Campbell-town	Holdfast Bay	Tea Tree Gully	Mount Gambier
# ppl	1,690	1,227	852	624	499	311	251	234	232	138
CALD JSA			X		X					

⁶ DIAC Settlement Database (www.immi.gov.au/settlement) for period 1/1/05 – 31/12/09, accessed 11/2/10; and www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/Publications/News/StreamServicesbyESA.htm

⁷ Source: DIAC Settlement Database, accessed 11/2/10; www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/Publications/News/StreamServicesbyESA.htm

3.4 Streaming and the JSCI

All job seekers, including refugees and humanitarian entrants, undergo a Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) assessment before being referred to a JSA provider. This assessment results in a job seeker being allocated a weighted score which calculates their need for tailored JSA assistance and places them in the corresponding stream. Each stream has different levels of resources attached to it.

“Some clients don’t understand the system and aren’t answering Centrelink questions properly. They will say ‘no’ to a lot of things because they don’t want Centrelink... to know certain information. As a result they will be put in to Stream 1 but then go to the HSS provider with Stream 3 or 4 issues.”

- Service provider, Logan (Qld)

“The streaming does not work because the questions that Centrelink ask as part of Job Seeker Classification Instrument are ‘Have you done university of secondary school?’ Refugee and humanitarian entrants are likely to answer ‘yes’ to this, which means they will be streamed into 1 or 2, regardless of other barriers.”

- Service provider, Dandenong (Vic)

Currently, concerns have been raised that the JSCI criteria and assessment process do not adequately identify specific barriers to employment for refugees and humanitarian entrants, resulting in many people being classified in stream one or two and making them ineligible for intensive support from JSA providers. For example, the current weighting system associates longer time spent on income support with greater disadvantage in the job market. Assessments under Job Seeker History recognise that job seekers who experience a protracted time on income support and/or multiple spells on income support are more disadvantaged in terms of finding employment. As points allocated for this factor are based on the job seeker's Centrelink registration and benefit payment records, *recently arrived* refugee job seekers are automatically excluded from points under this factor as none of them have, by definition, been in the country long enough to have been on benefits for 12-23 or 24+ months. Refugee job seekers – many of whom who have had protracted times of unemployment in refugee camps, and/or have been waiting to gain entry to Australia for at least two years – have no record of income support in Australia. Yet these are amongst the most disadvantaged job seekers and need higher levels of support to gain, and maintain, employment.

Furthermore, many barriers specific to refugee and humanitarian entrants receive little weighting in the JSCI. Lack of English language skills, for example, is not heavily weighted as a barrier to employment, despite extensive and compelling research linking English proficiency and employment.⁸ Another issue specific to refugee and humanitarian entrants relates to the identification and assessment of prior education and learning. The JSCI automatically classifies job seekers who have completed high school or tertiary education in stream one or two. The equivalency of this education is not questioned and it is automatically assumed the level of education obtained overseas correlates with the Australian education and training system. As a result, some job seekers with low levels of education and limited literacy due to the poor education obtained in places of asylum or in refugee camps, or who have had significantly disrupted education, can be offered only limited support from their JSA provider.

“Our experience in working with refugee job seekers who have not been identified by the JSCI as significantly disadvantaged is that they, too, have all or many of the characteristics of disadvantage common to newly arrived refugees. While some have qualifications and skills, their refugee experience and lack of knowledge of Australian workplace culture and Australian work history indicates a need for intensive support in transitioning to work.”

- Service provider, Melbourne (VIC)

⁸; Productivity Commission (2006). *Economic Impacts of Migration and Population Growth*. Productivity Commission Research Report, Commonwealth of Australia, Melbourne. www.pc.gov.au/projects/study/migrationandpopulation/docs/finalreport; Colic-Peisker, V and Tilbury, F (2007). *Integration into the Australian Labour Market: The Experience of Three ‘Visibly Different’ Groups of Recently Arrived Refugees*. International Migration, 45(1), p.66

Concerns have also been raised about the timing of the JSCI assessments and whether it's appropriate for these assessments to happen within the first three months of arrival, a time when a refugee or humanitarian entrant job seeker's performance in these assessments may not be reflective of their ability at that time.

3.5 Communication and cultural competency

The Australian Government's Access and Equity strategy highlights the importance of having staff with appropriate linguistic and cultural skills to address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities and that interpreters are readily available to facilitate communication.⁹ In the context of the JSA system, there has been consistent feedback from across Australia that JSA providers are often inept in cross cultural communication and that interpreters are often absent in meetings with job seekers who have limited English proficiency. More troubling is the anecdotal evidence that some JSA providers are charging job seekers for engaging interpreters. An instance was raised in RCOA consultations where a job seeker had \$800 or more deducted from his training budget for interpreter services that should have been provided free of charge. As a result this job seeker did not have the funds available to him to complete necessary training for his field of work. Some community services reported that they are attending JSA meetings with clients in order to ensure an interpreter is engaged and the client is not charged for this service.

"A client would go to the JSA agency and they would not use an interpreter. So he would sit there and not say or do anything for the appointment."

- Service provider, Whittlesea (Vic)

"Why do some JSA providers charge clients interpreter service fees if clients are non-English speakers and consequently require interpreter services? Other JSA providers do not charge these fees."

- Service provider, Goulburn (NSW)

"English is a barrier for them. They don't know how to use a computer, they cannot read or write, but JSA providers are asking them to find a job through computers and newspapers! They are not preparing them for that. There is huge dissatisfaction with the JSA system."

- Service provider, Campsie (NSW)

Findings from consultations suggest communication barriers between JSA providers and job seekers frequently inhibit the meaningful exchange of information necessary for employment and training needs to be appropriately identified and tailored services delivered. Examples given of poor communication include: forms being given to job seekers who are unable to read, questions being asked such as "why have you not worked for such a long time?" and "why do you not have a driver's license?" to people who have recently arrived in Australia having spent prolonged periods of time in refugee camps, and people being told to look on computers and newspapers for jobs when they have limited or no computer literacy.

Some community feedback has further highlighted that concerns with JSA providers are not only limited to poor cross-cultural communication but more broadly about cultural competency and understanding the needs and experiences of refugee job seekers. For example, a number of people raised concerns that JSA providers only saw "the colour of a person's skin" and provided responses based on a stereotype that refugees should be working in abattoirs, factories and cleaning. This has led to some people with post traumatic stress disorder and recent experience fleeing places of violent conflict being referred for inappropriate work slaughtering animals in abattoirs.

"JSAs should be given star rating based on their capacity to work with diverse communities. They are not communicating effectively with refugees."

- Service provider, Dandenong (Vic)

⁹Federal Government of Australia, *Accessible Government Services for All, Annual Report, 2006*, http://www.immi.gov.au/about/reports/accessible_government/accessible_government_2006/reporting/communication.htm (accessed 16th Feb, 2012)

3.6 Career guidance and support

For newly arrived refugee and humanitarian entrants, accessing appropriate career guidance and support is fundamental so that they understand career pathway options in an Australian context and can make informed decisions. Concerns raised by refugee communities and services are that poor guidance and support is provided by JSAs and the current system of streaming job seekers and creating employment pathway plans seems to place job seekers on a one way route to a given destination with little flexibility to move within the system. Poor communication between JSA case workers and refugee and humanitarian entrant job seekers can mean that someone with intentions to study can be required to take a work position and vice versa. Again, much of this comes down to JSA case workers having the time and skills necessary to understand a refugee and humanitarian entrant job seekers career goals, prior education and employment history and current capacity.

“One person said he used to be a plumber, but what he actually did was dig ditches for the pipes. Job Services Australia providers need to find out what people really mean, what their job involved. They need to take more time to understand the circumstances.”

- Service provider, Albury (NSW)

The current Employment Pathway Plan (EPP) has come under significant criticism. Some service providers have voiced concern that the initial consultations with refugee and humanitarian entrants begin only 13 weeks after they have arrived in Australia – which many regard as too soon to begin properly planning or grasping meaningful pathways to entering the Australian workforce. Furthermore, many refugee and humanitarian entrants do not fully understand the purpose and details of their EPP and are scared into following its requirements out of fear of losing their Centrelink payments.

“Pathways or activity statements aren’t being adequately explained.... People are fearful of having their Centrelink payments cut. They’re experiencing stress because they can’t achieve what they’ve signed; they don’t know what they’ve signed.”

- Service provider, Cannington (WA)

“Centrelink and the JSAs force people to do money activities and to attend appointments when all I want to do is attend TAFE to learn more English. I am studying full-time, but I have to attend appointments at Centrelink and the JSA every two weeks, and this is a waste of my time. The JSA said I should take a job that starts at 8am and finishes at 5pm, but I said I can’t because my child is at school and I need to pick him up. Some time my child misses school because I have to attend appointments and I have to take him with me.”

- Community member, Shepparton (Vic)

This system has resulted in job seekers feeling forced or coerced to follow the recommendations of their JSA case worker and pursue employment and training options that are not suited to their particular circumstances or career interests. For example, the availability of low skilled work in regional agriculture and farming industries has resulted in some job seekers being told to relocate to regional areas in order to fill job vacancies there. Refugee families have been told to relocate away from the services they have been using and the community and school support base they have developed. While employment in these areas may be a forward step in getting someone off welfare benefits, it can compromise the settlement process as well as the wellbeing of children in refugee families. There have also been anecdotal reports of families choosing not to relocate but to commute considerable distances for work, leaving older children responsible for looking after younger siblings while their parents travel for shift work in regional areas (e.g. the family based in Werribee with parents commuting to Bendigo or Nhill in regional Victoria for night shifts).

Disappointingly, there are still reports of stereotyping and racist assumptions being made regarding the employment history of refugee job seekers and EPPs being developed that reflect this.

“I want to study nursing but the (JSA) agency has sent me to get my forklift licence.”

- Community member, Whittlesea (Vic)

3.7 Training

“We keep on getting qualifications – in aged care, disability, security – but this does not lead to jobs. We are all looking for work and filling in applications, going to JSA appointments, but nothing. Why am I filling an application? It is for nothing! I just want a job!”

- Community member, Morwell (Vic)

“We keep on doing training but can’t get a good job. I don’t mind doing the training if it leads to a job, but it doesn’t.”

- Community member, Shepparton (Vic)

Many refugee and humanitarian entrant job seekers across Australia have expressed frustration at the failure of the current JSA model to provide them with links to useful and relevant training courses with clear pathways into industries. Refugee and humanitarian entrants are often referred to training by JSAs (including, problematically, to JSA providers own Registered Training Organisation (RTO) arms) and are disappointed by the lack of connection between these training courses and employment outcomes.

RCOA has heard numerous reports of refugee and humanitarian entrants being referred to, or being targeted by, unscrupulous training providers offering sub-standard training courses that are not recognised within industries (particularly aged care and children’s services). These private RTOs have been known to recruit refugee and humanitarian entrants outside Centrelink offices, to door knock in areas of high refugee settlement, and to offer incentives to community leaders to refer members of their community for enrolment in particular courses. While this is an area where JSAs are not necessarily responsible for regulating or monitoring the quality of vocational education and training (VET) providers, a question remains about how complicit JSA services are in working with private RTOs and the quality of career advice and support they provide to job seekers who are considering such courses.

“Young people are doing certificates that are just not appropriate. Like we have young people doing bricklayers certificates, and they just don’t have any interest or aptitude for this kind of work. The JSAs are so outcomes-based, they don’t recognise what people really want to do. It’s about what serves the needs of the JSA.”

- Service provider, Werribee (Vic)

“I looked up job service providers’ code of conduct. It says they must actively help people to get work. They don’t do any of it. They just tick a box. If they can classify them as not job ready, all they have to do is see that they’re doing some sort of training... and then they don’t do anything else.”

- Service provider, Albury (NSW)

The importance of good career advice and relevant course placement is particularly pertinent in light of VET funding arrangements that entitle job seekers to government-subsidised support for undertaking only progressive levels of training. This means that a job seeker who has already completed a Certificate II in hospitality at the advice of their JSA case worker is not eligible for a funded place if he or she decides they would like to subsequently undertake a Certificate II in nursing or any other field. This makes reports of JSA service providers sending job seekers to training courses that are irrelevant to their field of interest or personal needs all the more concerning, as this approach limits the further training options and career pathways of individuals who are still navigating their way in a new country. Given the “no show, no pay” policy also limits the Centrelink payments of job seekers who do not follow the JSA-recommended training path, there is a clear power imbalance between job seekers and JSA service providers.

3.8 Learning English

“I am worried because the JSA is telling me to get a job, but I really need to learn.”

- Community member, Werribee (Vic)

Community members and service providers expressed different perspectives regarding the way in which JSA providers support or hinder refugee and humanitarian entrants' ability to learn English that will enable meaningful and sustainable employment outcomes. In some cases, job seekers are being forced to learn English when their priority is to find work and are not getting the employment support they are wanting. In other cases, JSA case workers are reportedly putting pressure on clients to move into work when their priority is continuing to learn English after completing their 510 hours in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP).

3.9 Work experience

Currently, JSA providers offer little support for skilled refugee and humanitarian entrants to gain appropriate work experience. Research has clearly shown that one of the greatest barriers to employment faced by both migrants and refugees is not lack of skills but lack of experience in the Australian workforce.¹⁰ Lack of local employment experience is compounded by indirect and direct discrimination in recruitment. The absence of supported work experience and volunteering possibilities in the JSA model fails to cater for the importance that Australian employers place on prior experience in a given field. This has frustrated service providers trying to secure work placements for refugees and humanitarian entrants.

“To work you need English, qualifications and work experience. JSA services are insufficient in the work experience area. We need someone to work on this issue as a broker to create pathways for work experience. Only one or two people have benefited from this through JSA.”

- Service provider, Albury (NSW)

“We encourage refugee and humanitarian entrant jobseekers wanting to work in the community health field to volunteer so they can get some work experience, but JSAs do not recognise volunteering as a participation activity. This should change.”

- Service provider, Dandenong (Vic)

In addition, some services and community members have raised concerns about the lack of recognition for volunteering as a recognised participation activity, particularly given the importance of volunteering in providing relevant employment experience.

3.10 Skills and overseas qualification recognition

A number of refugee community members and service providers have expressed frustration about the lack of support from JSA providers for assisting refugee and humanitarian entrants with overseas skills and qualifications recognition. Combined with the lack of appropriate career guidance and support, work experience opportunities and professional mentoring, this has led to skilled job seekers either undertaking costly and unnecessary re-training or pursuing employment well outside their skill level, expertise and interest. For example, Iraqi and Afghan community members in Melbourne reported that some community members with overseas doctorates or higher degrees had undertaken complete retraining in their field, starting at an undergraduate level, and this still had not resulted in employment outcomes.

“Job service providers often don't seem to identify the skills. A fellow worker has personally taken clients to appointments and it is very disappointing to see the way the cases are handled. The person may be very highly qualified but they see the colour of their skin and make pre-judgements. They just think 'abattoir', they don't consider them for other jobs. There are so many clients who are qualified in their home countries; they need to get their skills assessed.”

- Service provider, Wodonga (Vic)

¹⁰ RCOA (2012). *What Works*.

3.11 Liaison between job seekers, employers and other service providers

“In one case a job interview lasted 20 seconds. The employer asked if applicant was interested in shift work, she said ‘no’ as she had family, and the employer walked out. The JSA agency had not assessed this properly.”

- Service provider, Albury (NSW)

Many refugee community members and service providers shared dissatisfaction at the inability of JSA providers to fulfil their role in liaison between job seekers, employers and other service providers. Reports of JSAs sending job seekers to interviews for jobs that were not suited or relevant to their personal circumstances or interests not only alienates the job seeker at the interview but also minimises the benefit for employers of recruiting with the help of JSA providers. Service providers have raised concerns that employers are frustrated when they receive job applicants who are clearly not suited to the job they are being interviewed for. For the job seekers themselves, limited information is provided about interview etiquette such as appropriate clothing choices and how to communicate during an interview.

Other areas of concern regarding the role of JSAs as a liaison or bridge between refugee and humanitarian entrant job seekers and employers is the lack of advocacy undertaken on these job seekers' behalf, including providing support to employers to consider refugee and humanitarian entrants, and the lack of support provided to job seekers wishing to pursue a traineeship or apprenticeship who do not have links with local businesses.

“Employment services need to highlight and advocate to employees and companies to take on refugees for employment and work experience.”

- Service provider, Liverpool (NSW)

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

RCOA recommends that the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) and DEEWR work in partnership to develop a national refugee employment strategy to map out settlement pathways and supports that will lead to more sustainable employment outcomes for refugee and humanitarian entrants, including developing targeted initiatives where necessary (for example, work experience and intermediate labour market programs) and making better use of specialist CALD JSA providers.

Recommendation 2

RCOA recommends that DEEWR, as part of its ongoing monitoring and evaluation of Job Services Australia, review its effectiveness in meeting the needs of refugee and humanitarian entrants, including evaluating how JSA providers are working with local employment initiatives targeting refugee entrants, using interpreters and bilingual case workers to facilitate communication with clients from non-English speaking backgrounds, engaging staff in cultural competency training, and developing partnerships with settlement and other local services.

Recommendation 3

RCOA recommends that the Department of Human Services (DHS) undertake a comprehensive review of the JSCI assessment process and tool to ensure employment disadvantages for refugee and humanitarian entrant are appropriately identified and weighted in streaming clients for JSA services.

Recommendation 4

RCOA recommends that DEEWR engage an independent body to undertake a cultural competency audit of JSA services as part of the Australian Government commitment to Access and Equity.

Recommendation 5

RCOA recommends that DEEWR and DIAC work together to strengthen career guidance and pathways planning to refugee and humanitarian entrants and strengthen the relationship between Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS), the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and JSA providers at both a service provision and policy level.