

16th September 2010

The Secretariat
Welfare Working Group
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New Zealand

Tena koutou

We would like to thank the Welfare Working Group for the opportunity to respond to the discussion document. As you may be aware, ChangeMakers Refugee Forum is a rights-based, non-government organisation that represents 14 refugee-background communities that have been resettled in the Wellington region. We do this by:

- listening to refugee-background communities and responding wherever possible to the issues that they identify
- supporting the interconnectivity of refugee-background communities
- utilising the knowledge and experiences of refugee-background communities and those who work with them, to provide informed and effective research on, and advocacy of, concerns that communities, NGOs and government can act on
- facilitating training, mentoring, and leadership development
- building connections between refugee-background communities and relevant service providers
- coordinating the Wellington Regional Action Plan for Refugee Health and Wellbeing

ChangeMakers works to ensure that policy and service delivery are rights-based and informed by refugee-background communities who are often affected by changes to policy or service delivery but are not always consulted about such changes.

Recommendations

That the Welfare Working Group's report to government includes the need for:

1. The provision of targeted, specialised services that meet the specific needs of refugee-background communities; and that
2. These services are developed in consultation with these refugee-background communities.

Background

New Zealand has a long and proud history of resettling former refugees. Resettlement aims to provide protection to refugees who cannot go home or are unwilling to do so because they will face continued persecution, and whose life, liberty, safety, health, or fundamental human rights are at risk. New Zealand has also been at the forefront of adopting human rights declarations and conventions including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Resettlement is the first of many steps that former refugees take in creating a new home and life. Many of these steps are fraught with challenges in realising the rights that others take for granted. Rights such as:

- The right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection of unemployment;
- The right to just and favourable remuneration;
- The right to social security;
- The right to a standard of living adequate for health and well being; and
- The right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood.

UDHR Articles 22, 23, 25

Barriers to the achievement of these rights include:

- The 'knowledge gap' between the support systems, resources, and social services available and former refugees' awareness of these services;
- Limited English language skills and NZ work place experience;
- Qualifications not recognised in NZ;
- Discrimination;
- An unwillingness of some NZ employers to employ former refugees; and
- A lack of a 'network' in which information about vacancies is shared and people are shoulder tapped for employment opportunities.

We welcome the statement in the preface of the *Long-Term Benefit Dependency* paper that the benefit system is about helping people find a job and to get on with their lives. We also welcome the recognition that disadvantaged young people need to be better managed and supported in the benefit and training systems so that the social, economic, and fiscal costs of being unemployed are minimalised. The paper also quite rightly recognises that many Maori and Pacific peoples are long-term beneficiaries. What is missing from the analysis is recognition that the system is also failing former refugees, with this group including youth and single women with children, over represented in the ranks of long-term unemployed.

We also share the concern, highlighted in Refugee Services' submission, that mainstream solutions will further marginalise former refugees and impede their ability to reach economic independence, which is why we are advocating for a targeted support system.

It is clear from the experiences of former refugees highlighted in the recent Refugee Council of Australia publication¹ that in order to reduce long-term welfare dependency there is a need for:

- Specialist employment services targeting refugee and humanitarian entrants;
- Employers who value and are committed to workforce diversity;
- Coordination and collaboration among refugee-background entrants and their communities, education and training providers, employment services and employers;
- Initiatives tapping into the entrepreneurial spirit of former refugees through social enterprise and small business development; and
- Building awareness within refugee-background communities about career pathways

Therefore, ChangeMakers is advocating for the Welfare Working Group to ensure that any recommendations made to Government include the provision of targeted, specialised services that meet the needs of refugee-background communities, and that these services are developed in consultation with these communities. There is considerable experience in refugee-background communities that could be drawn upon, and this should be utilised.

The evidence from Australia is clear. What is needed is targeted, specialised support services for former refugees. Recent changes at Work and Income including the withdrawal of Case Managers specifically allocated to refugee clients is a step backwards and is likely to result in fewer refugee-background clients achieving meaningful, long term employment.

At many of my recent meetings with refugee-background communities the issue of economic independence has been raised. Our next Community Forum, that brings together representatives from all refugee-background communities, has a theme of economic independence, and economic wellbeing is one of the on-going challenges identified by communities at regional and national refugee resettlement forums.

As a country we are happy to accept accolades for accepting former refugees and for providing an opportunity for them to realise a better future. As a country we have a responsibility to ensure that a better future is achievable. A specialist, targeted employment service for refugee background communities would enable this future to be realised. ChangeMakers is willing to work with Government and other agencies to make this happen.

We welcome other opportunities to engage with the Welfare Working Group on this issue.

Many thanks



Tim O'Donovan
General Manager

¹ Refugee Council of Australia (2010). What Works. Employment Strategies for Refugee and Humanitarian Entrants.

