



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

Migrant settlement outcomes

WEDNESDAY, 10 MAY 2017

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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

Wednesday, 10 May 2017

Members in attendance: Senators Back and Mr Georganas, Mr Neumann, Ms Vamvakinou, Mr Vasta.

Terms of Reference for the Inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Migrant settlement outcomes with reference to:

- the mix, coordination and extent of settlement services available and the effectiveness of these services in promoting better settlement outcomes for migrants;
- national and international best practice strategies for improving migrant settlement outcomes and prospects;
- the importance of English language ability on a migrant's, or prospective migrant's, settlement outcome;
- whether current migration processes adequately assess a prospective migrant's settlement prospects; and
- any other related matter.

The Committee shall give particular consideration to social engagement of youth migrants, including involvement of youth migrants in anti-social behavior such as gang activity, and the adequacy of the Migration Act 1958 character test provisions as a means to address issues arising from this behaviour.

WITNESSES

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Evidence taken via teleconference—

Committee met at 10:08

ACTING CHAIR (Ms Vamvakinou): Welcome. I declare open the public hearing of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration. In accordance with the committee's resolution of 12 October 2016, this hearing will be broadcast on the parliament's website and the proof and official transcripts of proceedings will be published on the parliament's website. Those present here today are advised that filming and recording are permitted during the hearing. I also remind members of the media, who may be present or listening on the web, of the need to fairly and accurately report the proceedings of the committee.

Although the committee does require due to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that this hearing is a legal proceeding of the parliament, and therefore has the same standing as proceedings of the respective houses. The giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament. The evidence given today will be recorded by Hansard and attracts parliamentary privilege.

I now invite you to make a brief opening statement before we proceed to discussion.

Ms Croft: Today I present a matter from my work experience dealing with domestic violence victims and the second matter is a settlement service in the community. The first matter I want to present here is visa 010 for domestic violence victims who are refused the grant of permanent residency. With this visa, the victims have no social security entitlement. They are no trouble and they are allowed to work. But with no social security entitlement, their special benefits stop and there is debt from overdue payment from time to time, or from the time that the visa is issued. The debt recovery company is pushing clients to pay. With this visa, they are pushing the victim to the last edge of vulnerability—emotionally, financially, poverty, homelessness. There is no chance to recover and learn how to stand on their own and to move on with their lives. They have to deal with unstable immigration status, mental health issues, depression and anxiety and suicide attempts. They are struggling to survive in Australia to proceed their case to a higher court.

In front of me is a decision record from the department of immigration relating to some cases. I have three cases, and the reason why I am involved is because of the client's language barrier. They need help to understand why their visa was refused. We work very closely with RAILS and IS—those organisations that are dealing with the immigration visa. When I read through the decision record, as I understand it, the department acknowledged the family domestic violence happened in the case but the contrary is when they assess. The reason they refused to grant the permanent residency is because they have a doubt on the genuine relationship of the victim. They accept that clients experience domestic violence; they accept that. But when they assess the case of permanent residency, they use the framework for a normal family—the normal case.

My clients have to provide all evidence for a genuine relationship, including all documents. They are hard to get and hard to prove because they are a domestic violence victim; it is a domestic violence matter. They are living in a domestic violence environment. The family does not function normally, but the department views it on a one-size-fits-all basis to assess the case. That is something that I do not feel is right. For example, they ask for joint bank account statements and photos that show they are happy couples or something like that.

Mr NEUMANN: Ms Croft, I will interrupt if you do not mind.

Ms Croft: Yes.

Mr NEUMANN: It is Shayne Neumann. I am the federal member for Blair, in a neighbouring electorate to you around Ipswich way. I am the shadow minister for immigration. I think you are giving us some really important information but it is relating to individual case situations.

Ms Croft: Yes.

Mr NEUMANN: You would know Milton Dick very well, a former councillor in the Brisbane City Council and now the federal member for Oxley.

Ms Croft: Yes.

Mr NEUMANN: His office is in Forest Lake, very close to where you are established in Inala. I would suggest that you take those individual cases to Milton's office so that he can assist you with the immigration issues. I think you have raised some really important matters but they are really local constituency issues which I am sure Milton's office would be very happy to help you with.

Ms Croft: Thank you.

Mr NEUMANN: Can we talk about some overall stuff now? I have some questions. Can you give us a bit of an overview of what you do in terms of your young offenders support services, outcomes and the work that you do?

Ms Croft: I am working as a family worker who deals with young people and families. In my culture, when I work with young people I have to go with the family, so that is why I do a lot of assessment on the case if I have a young person. I am involved in a case because of a family at risk and their young people at risk.

Mr NEUMANN: What sort of feedback have you been getting in relation to the work you are doing with young offenders?

Ms Croft: When I work with a young offender, I work together with another program in my organisation.

ACTING CHAIR: Is Mr James Te Huia with you?

Ms Croft: Yes.

Mr Te Huia: Yes, I am.

ACTING CHAIR: Would you like to make some comments? You are a case worker, James. Can you tell us a little about some of the challenges that you have identified in your work with young offenders that may be challenges associated with settlement services in Australia? That is, where the settlement services are either meeting adequately or are not meeting the needs of young people who then go on a path of offending and end up in the juvenile justice system. What is your experience and understanding of those young people?

Mr Te Huia: I have been in Australia going on for six years now working as an assessor case worker and working with young people. My experience in my current job with the Inala Youth Service is that I am working a lot with Inala Pacific and Maori in general because of my culture being Maori from New Zealand.

The issues I have found are based on New Zealand citizens who arrived in Australia after 26 February 2001. It has come to my knowledge that the crime rates have increased due to—I am thinking this has impinged on it—parents not having enough support around their duty of care for their children, financial difficulty hardship and things like that. I have also seen a lot of parents not being able to give of themselves to go and talk to agencies, so I am having to do a lot of that work myself by going out there and doing it. But there is that fine line between how we actually get them to give themselves to an agency and give as much information, or all the information, that is needed so that we can work with them effectively. Our young people who are from New Zealand, who have come from New Zealand or have New Zealand backgrounds, see that as an opportune time to do crime, violence and misuse drugs. I know that that is probably young people in general, but I have actually seen it increase a lot in my workplace while working with these young people, a lot with of our young Kiwi children. It seems to me that because there is a lot of disadvantage at home that the young people are not getting their needs met.

Mr NEUMANN: What sort of funding do you receive?

Mr Te Huia: Basically, we have to put in tenders for our funding here. We are fund by youth justice to run our program. Effectively, we are able to run our—

Mr NEUMANN: Sorry, which office?

Mr Te Huia: The Inala Youth Service.

Mr NEUMANN: But who are you funded by—state or federal?

Mr Te Huia: We are funded by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General.

Mr NEUMANN: In Queensland?

Mr Te Huia: Yes, sorry.

Mr NEUMANN: A state department.

Mr Te Huia: We get funding for six months and then we have to reapply through a tender to see whether we can continue forward again.

Mr NEUMANN: Do you get any federal government money at all?

Mr Te Huia: I am not able to give you that answer myself as I am not privy to that information, but I can get that for you.

Mr NEUMANN: Yes, and I am interested to hear what your response is to the effectiveness and efficiency of those programs as well. Just to get it in some context, across Logan, Inala and Ipswich there is a very high Pacific Islander community and Maori community—isn't there?

Mr Te Huia: Yes, that is correct.

Mr NEUMANN: You mentioned the challenges that they face. There is also a very large Vietnamese community in that region, particularly around the south-west parts of Brisbane—isn't there?

Mr Te Huia: That is correct.

Mr NEUMANN: What challenges do they face in their settlement services?

Mr Te Huia: The Vietnamese?

Mr NEUMANN: Yes.

Ms Croft: In our area we have a settlement service, which is located not far away from my service. But when I had a consultation with a colleague, who is actually working in our Vietnamese community's Queensland chapter, she said she had difficulty using the service because of the language barrier. The position is for a worker who has an African background. She booked the interpreter line, but each time it failed. It causes so much trouble for clients. They had to come back to her service and she had to deal with them with no funding.

Mr NEUMANN: Around about seven per cent of the population of the electorate of Oxley, where you are located, are actually of Vietnamese background—aren't they?

Ms Croft: Yes, that is right.

Mr NEUMANN: You mentioned the African community. Across Yeronga, Moorooka, Fairfield and across Inala through to Ipswich, there is a growing African community. Can you talk about the challenges that you face in that area?

Mr Te Huia: The main challenge that I have experienced with the young people is that I do not know the language. So there is a language barrier for me in this service and for us in this service, as the parents are not fluent. We tend to use their children who have slight English knowledge to actually interpret for us. But that poses a really big problem. Our young African people do not tend to actually utilise us a lot. It is not that we are not cultural to them, but there are some cultural aspects that they do not like about our services.

Mr NEUMANN: Like what?

Mr Te Huia: I think we have a big problem with the African connection. We are trying here in Inala to open up a wider and culturally vast network through the PCYCs and some of the other African organisations within the Inala area. I work within the Logan area, but I have not been able to tap into that yet because I have only just started here. But we are looking at opening up—

Mr GEORGANAS: What services are available, that you work with, that deal with the African community? It is a growing community. You are saying that there are no culturally appropriate services for the African community within that region or are there?

Mr Te Huia: I have not seen any per se. Since I have been here, I have not worked alongside any of the African community networks yet. All we have done is gone through youth justice referrals and followed up with the young person that is under the youth justice person. We do not follow through with finding agencies that are appropriate, because they do not tend to want to. We are a voluntary program, so they do not tend to want to continue with us.

Mr GEORGANAS: Apart from the cultural differences, what are the other reasons why they do not want to continue? Are they not engaged?

Mr Te Huia: From experience, I think, they work better with their own. A lot of the young people go out and do labouring with their uncles, or family friends, who are African, and they do not tend to want to utilise the other services. I am not too sure why. I have not sat down with a young African person to ask that.

Mr NEUMANN: A lot of the African community in your corridor are Anglicans, and they have a lot of connections with the Anglican churches in that region. My suggestion is to contact some of the clergy in that corridor.

Mr Te Huia: Yes.

Mr NEUMANN: That is my advice. I have a large African community in the Ipswich eastern suburbs and Ipswich central these days.

Mr Te Huia: Excellent. Thank you for that. I have some feedback with regard to federal funding. We do not have any.

ACTING CHAIR: Is there anything else that you want to add before we conclude?

Ms Croft: For our Vietnamese new migrants, who keep coming, we have no funding to deal with settlement services. My suggestion is, with my colleagues in Darra in the Vietnamese community, if we got some funding

for one or two days for settlement services it would be great for dealing with new Vietnamese migrants. For the existing community there are existing services, like the Vietnamese community in Queensland, to deal with the settlement issues.

ACTING CHAIR: This is more about developing a Vietnamese culturally sensitive approach to some of these issues.

Ms Croft: Yes.

ACTING CHAIR: You do not feel that the settlement service providers in the area are adequately meeting those needs?

Ms Croft: No.

ACTING CHAIR: Thank you very much for today. Thank you for your attendance here.

Mr NEUMANN: I suggest you contact Milton Dick's office about those issues.

Ms Croft: Thank you.

ACTING CHAIR: If the committee has any further questions they will be put to you in writing. You will be sent a copy of the transcript of your evidence and will have an opportunity to request corrections to transcript errors. Thank you.

Resolved that these proceedings be published.

Committee adjourned at 10:29