



# Promoting the Development of Sustainable Refugee Communities in Tasmania



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The refugee issue is usually presented as a humanitarian one, and indeed given the distressing and painful circumstances that these people have experienced, this is appropriate. However, in Tasmania's case there is another dimension to this issue that is easily missed, the social and economic future of our state. A vigorous proactive state response to this issue in partnership with the Commonwealth should be understood as a core strategy in responding to the serious economic and social challenges faced by Tasmania.

The ABS projects that Tasmania's population will decline by between 20 and 58% over the next 50 years, with the median age increasing to between 44 and 46 years. One of the primary causes of this shift is the very low projection for migrant arrivals in the state. In 1997-8 Tasmania attracted 0.5% of Australia settler arrivals, compared with 41.8% in NSW.

It is clearly in the interests of the state and the nation to develop policies to moderate these projections. Tasmania is the only state where humanitarian entrants are already the largest proportion of overseas arrivals. In every other state or territory the skilled and family stream are both greater percentages of the total intake. However while the proportion is high in Tasmania, the humanitarian numbers are still very low, usually between about 130 and 180 people a year.

These numbers could relatively easily be increased. The political and community response to the Kosovar's suggests what the hard work of many active community support groups have already shown over many years: Tasmania is willing and able to take in more refugees. The same can not be said of skilled and business migrants who are usually making their choice of location on economic factors.

New migrants and cultural diversity bring enormous economic and social opportunities. Lack of migrant numbers and Tasmania's relative cultural homogeneity is not just a symptom of the states poor economic performance, but also a cause of it. The study *Home from Home; Refugees in Tasmania* (Julian et al 1997) established what this research has confirmed, refugees coming here have qualifications, employment and small business experience and knowledge which potentially can be a major force in the economic and social rejuvenation of the island.

However, increasing the population of refugee initiated communities is not just a matter of higher intakes, but keeping people here. Far too many of the refugees who have found initial safety in Tasmania must soon move on to the big mainland cities to develop a future for themselves and their families.

While this is not an easy issue to address, it is startling how little has been done to respond to the ongoing problems which lead to interstate migration: lack of employment assistance, continuing language problems, and factors relating to community development and size.

It is clear that while the initial settlement support services are working very well in Tasmania, and refugees are positive about this stage of settlement, very little is available to them as they seek to move on to fully participating in the economic, social and political life of the community. Thus while the initial support from DIMA staff, the Community Refugee Support Scheme and the Adult Migrant English Service were highly praised by those refugees entitled to these services, they identified a major gap in resources, opportunities and support when then this first settlement phase was complete.

Meeting this challenge to respond to long term settlement needs will require a shift from a reliance on a Commonwealth coordinated support model to provision of resources and opportunities driven by the Tasmanian government. Political and community will and a high level strategic focus to this issue is the prerequisite to achieving the necessary change.

The settlement of the Kosovars indicated what could be done with sufficient political and community commitment. There is no reason why this energy and commitment can not be harnessed again.

Much needs to be done, but it is clear that Tasmania is already well placed to begin this work.

Refugees have made clear that while employment is crucial, economic factors are not the only issues for them in choosing a permanent home. Understandably for people who have experienced persecution and incredible suffering, other values were also emphasized in this research. Refugees seek a place that treats them with dignity and respect and provides a genuine equality of opportunity.

Tasmanians have given a warm welcome and friendly professional and community support to refugees and this is appreciated by them. It provides the base to develop the opportunities for full economic and social participation required for long-term successful settlement.

Established refugee initiated communities represent a great opportunity for Tasmania to become a vibrant multicultural island. Such communities will contribute significantly to population, culture and economic renewal. This is surely a vision of the future that we can all embrace.



## CHAPTER 1

### OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

#### 1.1 Objectives

The objectives of this research were to:

- investigate the settlement experiences of members of refugee initiated communities since their arrival in Tasmania
- develop strategies which will encourage and assist members of refugee initiated communities to remain in Tasmania
- review policies to facilitate the development of sustainable refugee initiated communities in Tasmania

#### 1.2 Methodology

The data from this research is predominantly qualitative and was recorded as part of 1½ hour focus group sessions with members of seven refugee initiated communities. Refugee initiated communities are refugees and non-refugee family members who join them and their children born in Australia (Julian et al 1997). Participants also completed a brief questionnaire during the focus group. This provided demographic data including information about employment history, household formation and literacy levels.

Participants were paid a small consultancy fee of \$20.

Prior to participation in the focus group the participants were given an explanation of the nature and purpose of the research and were given the opportunity to withdraw from participation. Professional interpreters were used where possible and appropriate although it was necessary to use informal interpreters in some instances. Participants were generally split into a mens' group and a womens' group for the research component of the session and the groups were facilitated by a researcher of the same gender. This did not occur in two instances, once when the group was very small and once when the group requested that there be mixed gender groups.



### 1.3 Research questions

Participants were asked four questions:

- Describe the circumstances that led to you coming to Tasmania?
- Imagine you could make Tasmania into however you wanted it to be – what would life be like in this place for you and your family?
- What is good for you and your family in Tasmania?
- What is difficult for you and your family in Tasmania?
- The tense of these questions was adapted for those refugees now living in Melbourne.

### 1.4 Background to the research participants

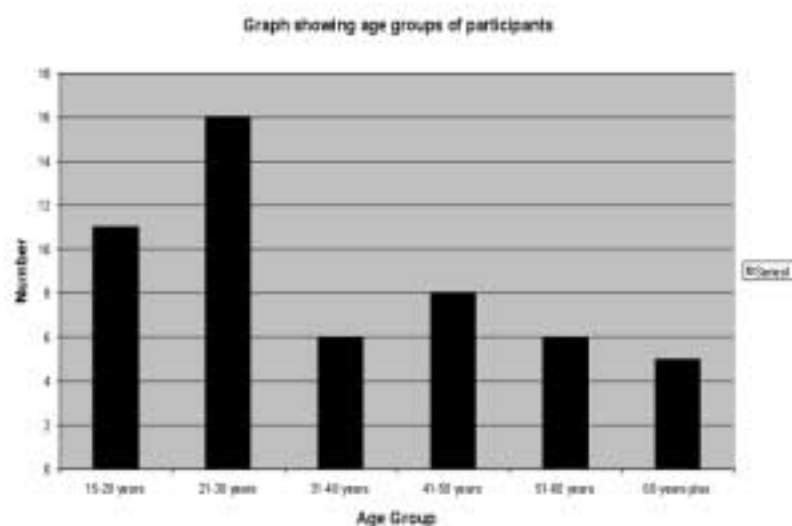
The research participants were 57 members of refugee initiated communities living in Hobart, Launceston and Melbourne. All participants had come to Tasmania as their point of settlement in Australia. Thirty nine of the participants were living in Tasmania at the time of the research while the remaining 18 had moved to Melbourne at some point after initially settling in Tasmania.

#### *Gender*

There were 30 male participants and 27 female participants

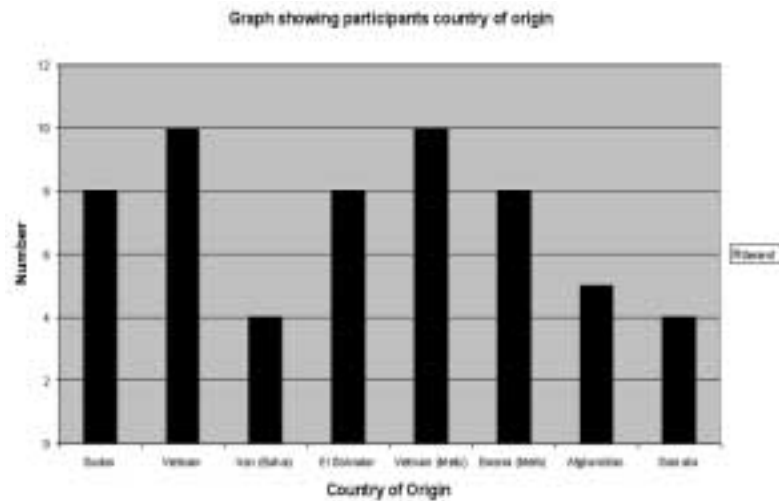
#### *Age*

Most of the participants were aged between 15 and 30 years.



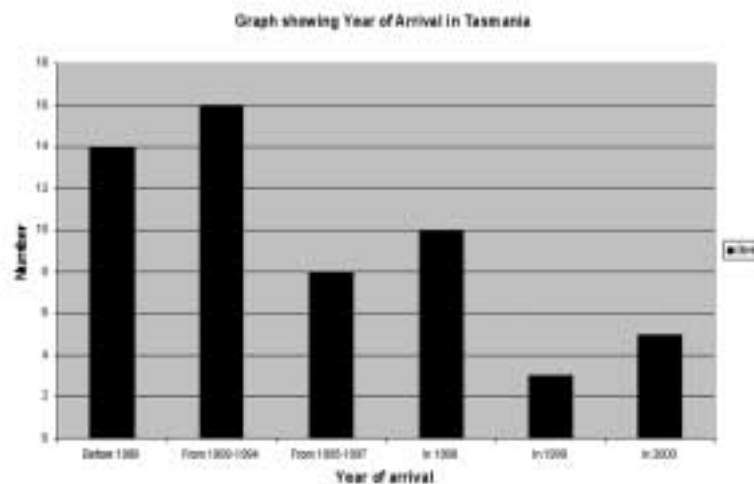
### Country of Origin

The participants came from Sudan, Vietnam, Iran, El Salvador, Bosnia, Afghanistan and Somalia. These are some of the major refugee initiated communities settled in Tasmania during the past twenty years.



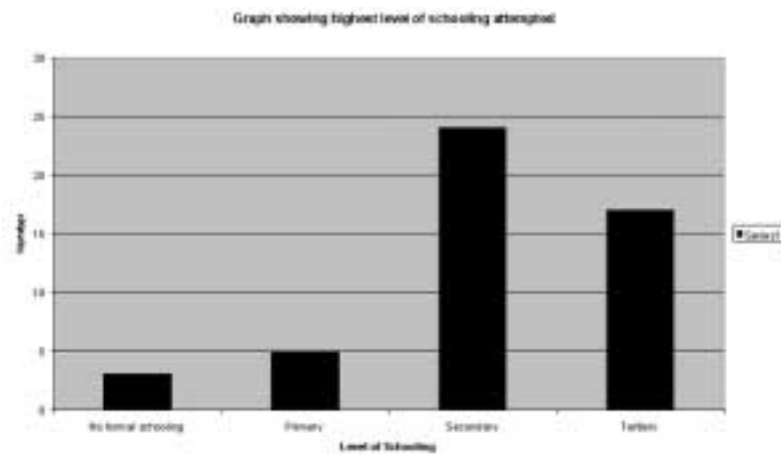
### Year of Arrival

The participants included members of refugee initiated communities who had been in Tasmania up to 17 years and others who had arrived in Tasmania less than one month before the focus group session. This allowed the researchers to investigate the issues of concern for communities at different stages of the settlement



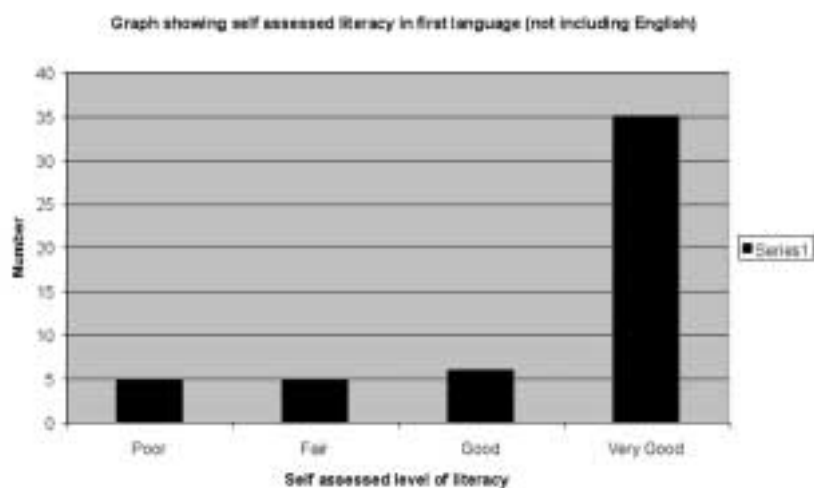
### *Level of Education*

Most of the participants had attempted secondary education and many had also studied at TAFE or University.



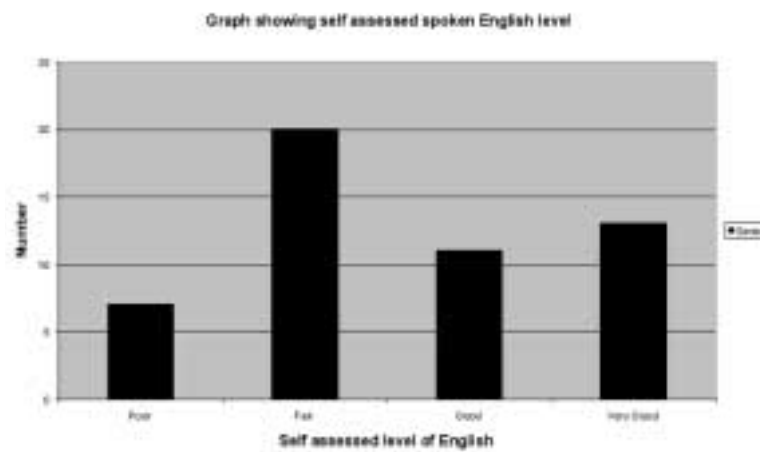
### *Level of Literacy in First Language*

Most participants indicated that they had a very good level of literacy in their first language. Of the 10 participants who rated their level of literacy in their first language to be fair or poor nine indicated that their level of literacy in English was good or very good. This response, combined with their ages indicate that they have grown up in Australia learning English as their first language or learning both languages concurrently.



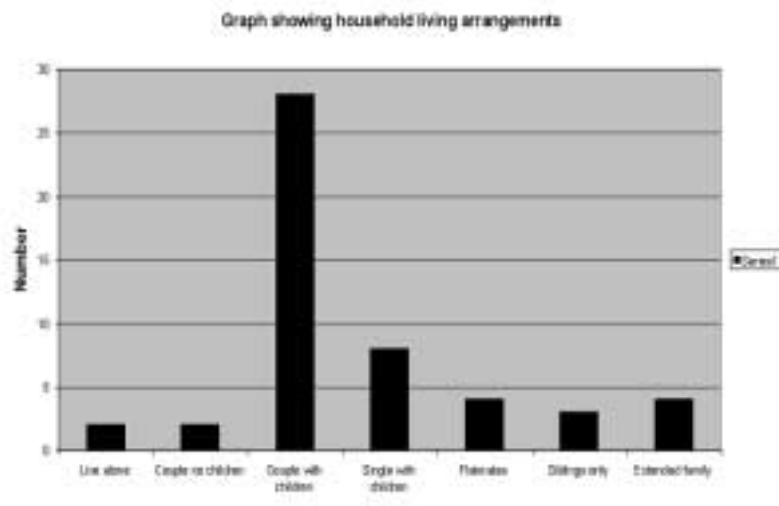
*Self assessed level of English (spoken and literacy)*

Most participants indicated that they had a fair or good level of literacy or spoken English.

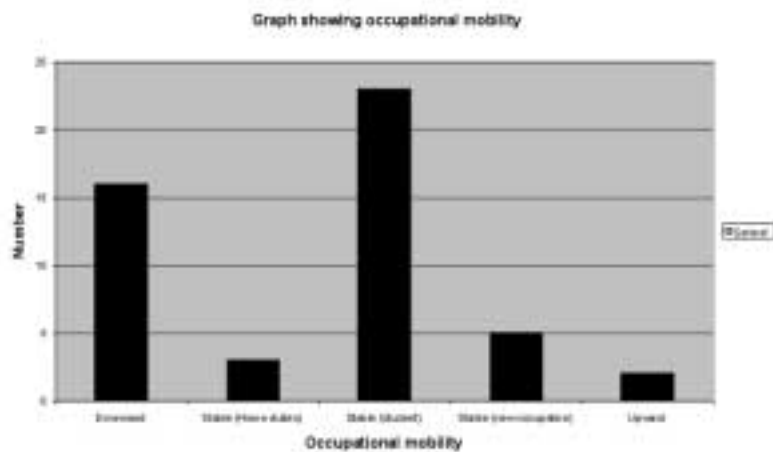


### Household Structure

Most of the participants lived as part of a nuclear family.



### Occupational Mobility



Most of the participants had been students before coming to Tasmania and were continuing with their studies. Of the five participants who maintained their occupational status four were self employed. The two participants who had experienced upward occupational mobility had both come to Tasmania as children.

### **1.5 Limitations of research design**

There were no members of refugee imitated communities interviewed outside Hobart and Launceston. Communities in other areas are very small and relatively fragmented, which made accessing and organising a focus group very difficult.

The number of refugees interviewed is not meant to be a statistically valid sample. The research is essentially qualitative, although the remarkable similarity in the major issues identified suggests that even a much larger sample would have produced similar findings.

The project was largely undertaken between January and June 2000 and focus groups held from March to May 2000. During the course of this year major changes to refugee settlement services were being developed. However they were not the focus of the recommendations of this Report which relate to the major gaps in longer term settlement support.

During the course of this research Tasmania also had its first arrivals of refugees on Temporary Protection Visas, one group of whom were therefore interviewed. These refugees had a much more negative experience of initial settlement, which was related to them been denied access to most settlement services.

The needs of this group have been considered in one section of this Report, but their fundamentally different experiences and issues means these concerns have not had the focus they deserve. Their primary and most urgent need however is relatively simple: the right to access all settlement services . Given that they are counted as part of the total humanitarian intake, which has not increased, this will not impact on other refugees. If this policy change was achieved, there is no reason to believe that their initial settlement experience and primary needs would be substantially different than that of the other refugees interviewed.

### **1.6 Rationale for incorporating TPVs in this research**

Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) (sub class 785) were established by the Federal Government in October 1999 and are provided to asylum seekers who have arrived in Australia through their own means and established their case for refugee status. It replaced the onshore permanent protection visa. Refugees with TPVs are not entitled to many of the services which form a vital part of the settlement process for other refugees.

The distinction in treatment within Australia between people first granted refugee status offshore and those assessed onshore did not exist when Anglicare received funding to undertake this research. The research proposal, methodology and funding contract for this project therefore did not distinguish between different classifications of refugees. Anglicare believes that the integrity of the research therefore required refugees on TPVs to be included in it. During the period in which the research was conducted Anglicare received a standard letter from the Department stating that it was not to use its DIMA funding to assist TPV holders.

Since these refugees were clearly within the research criteria for inclusion in the study, Anglicare chose to fund this component of the research from its own funds.

The fact that the refugees are only on three year visas means that the policy objective of the Commonwealth Government is not long terms settlement. The policy context is therefore different. However unless significant changes occur in their countries of origin, return will not be possible under international law. The Government's publicly stated policy objective for discriminating against TPV refugees indirectly recognises this reality: it is denying settlement services not because three year visa holders don't need them, but to attempt to discourage further asylum seekers coming to Australia.

Regardless, the challenge for Government and community organisations alike, remains to better assist and support these refugees meet the challenges of settlement for however long they are here.

It is hoped this research will assist in this.



## CHAPTER 2

### “ANY CHANCE AT FREEDOM”: CIRCUMSTANCES OF ARRIVAL IN TASMANIA

The stories of those who have fled their countries as refugees are stories of courage in the face of great danger and stories of survival in the face of overwhelming hardship. War, violence and persecution forced the refugees who participated in this research to leave their countries of origin.

The path to Tasmania was long and difficult. Many of the refugees spent time in refugee camps, in some cases this period of limbo extended for many years.

Participants who came to Tasmania as refugees were usually allocated to the state by Australian officials involved in assessing their case. Most of the refugees had no knowledge of Tasmania until they were told they would be settled here. Some participants said that they had asked to come to Tasmania and a few said that they had asked to go to Melbourne but were still sent to Tasmania. The refugees usually received some written information about the state during the short period after they were told of their destination and before they left the refugee camp to come to Australia. None of the refugees expressed concern about this process.

*“Tasmania was not a choice, I was just happy to go anywhere that was safe,”* Sudanese participant.

*“Any chance at freedom is a good opportunity,”* Somali participant.

*“The man in the Embassy chose the best place for the individual and when he found me alone he chose Tasmania for me,”* Sudanese participant.

*“I just got assigned to Tasmania, I didn’t know Tasmania existed but it was very nice,”* Vietnamese participant.

Several of the participants in this research had come to Tasmania to be reunited with members of their family who had been refugees.

*“My father and brother came here first then me, my brother, two sisters and mum came after seven years,”* Vietnamese participant.

For some of the participants Tasmania was not the final point in their migration process as they chose to move on to Melbourne.



*“We went to Tasmania because of dad. Our uncle brought us over in 1992. We stayed for two and a half years but came to Melbourne because of employment opportunities – there are more jobs here – and mum wanted to be more involved in the Vietnamese community. She wanted to interact with more of our people. Her English is not good but when we came over here she can use Vietnamese all of the time because there are a lot of Vietnamese people here,”* Vietnamese participant (Melbourne).

*“Tasmania was very nice and the people were very friendly. We stayed there for all of the children education. The environment is a lot better but once the children were grown up I wanted to leave because the children left. Also I had more relatives and friends in Melbourne. If we had stayed we would have been isolated,”* Vietnamese participant (Melbourne).

*“My daughter and sister-in-law came to Melbourne. We were separated as families during the war in Bosnia, and I didn’t want to be separated again,”* Bosnian participant (Melbourne).



## CHAPTER 3

### “IN TASMANIA PEOPLE HAVE TIME TO HELP ANOTHER ONE” WHAT IS WORKING WELL IN TASMANIA FOR REFUGEES

Participants were asked questions about their vision for Tasmania and their perceptions of the state in terms of what was working well for them and what made life more difficult. They were also asked to discuss specific policy issues. Responses from these questions were able to be grouped into a range of issue based comments.

The participants all had a range of very positive comments about Tasmania and why they liked to live here.

#### 3.1 The Community

One of the pictures that emerged was a great appreciation for the people of Tasmania and their willingness to welcome and assist people who came to the state as refugees. Many participants felt that this friendliness and strong sense of community was associated with the small size of Tasmania’s population. Many participants felt that Tasmania avoided some of the social problems associated with larger cities including fear of crime and drugs.

*“In Tasmania people have time to help another one,”* Vietnamese participant.

*“People in Tasmania are friendly, they make things easy for us,”* Sudanese participant.

*“Because it’s a small place Tasmanians tend to stick together, stick with each other and provide support,”* El Salvadoran participant.

*“It has less crimes than other places,”* Bahai participant.

*“People are very kind and caring here in Tasmania and it is quiet and it is nice,”* Bahai participant.

*“When we first came my oldest son was seven and my youngest was four, we didn’t speak English but people would invite us to their homes for a meal or to spend time together,”* El Salvadoran participant.

*“There’s more racism here (Melbourne), and its dangerous, you don’t feel safe because there’s lots of drugs and lots of stories about drugs,”* Vietnamese participant, Melbourne.

*“I believe that the list could be so long but there are important things that can't be found in other places, feeling safe and secure, feeling closeness and living in a small town – you know everyone and everyone knows you. Being a refugee and arriving when I was 17 and didn't speak English I didn't experience racism, perhaps because I've adapted quickly. People in Tasmania are very friendly and they try to help, even if they aren't open to the experience of another culture they still try,”* El Salvadoran participant.

*“The security – you feel safe in a small city, there are not so many problems,”* Vietnamese participant.

*“There is a willingness to help in Tasmania because Melbourne people don't have enough time for that stuff,”* Vietnamese participant, Melbourne.

### **3.2 The Environment**

Many participants felt that the Tasmanian environment was a particularly good feature of the state.

*“The best place in the world and is not polluted,”* Sudanese refugee

*“The environment is very diverse, is cleaner, looked after better,”* El Salvadoran participant.

*“Clean environment, no pollution, quiet (but I would rather have some pollution and noise and a job!),”* Sudanese participant.

*“Tasmania is very similar to Bosnia, mountains, rivers, forests and the climate. The temperature is just right for us. I like everything about it. We all preferred to live in a smaller city. It was what we were used to and it was much easier to get around. That's why we came to Dandenong too, and don't live in Melbourne,”* Bosnian participant.

*“The environment is beautiful, the city is not polluted,”* Afghan participant.

### **3.3 Education**

Many participants praised the quality of education in Tasmania and found it a particularly good place to raise their children.

*“Schooling is a really high standard, especially public schools,”* Vietnamese participant.

*“It is a good place for children,”* Vietnamese participant.

*“Tasmania is the best place in the world for me and my family, Tasmania is especially the best place for my kids,”* El Salvadoran participant.

*“I like to raise the children here and then when they are twenty or so they can go. It is a stable foundation for children,”* Vietnamese participant.

*“The school is perfect for our children. The kids picked up English very quickly. The ESL classes are excellent and the children still enjoy them. The children have a very good education in Tasmania and our relatives in Perth say that the education is very good,”* Somali participant.

*“There is the opportunity to go to University,”* El Salvadoran participant.

*“School in Tasmania was better, every child mattered, the teachers were better. The kids preferred Tasmania but we were thinking of their future. In our culture it is very important to support our children through life until they are married. They need jobs, education and opportunities to become independent,”* Bosnian participant (Melbourne).

*“Tasmania works well when you have school aged children, it is not so good before that or after that. During the school it’s a good place to stay. The education system is much better. It’s a good place for children and families. Education was excellent. The teachers paid us very close attention and guided us well. The time and effort that those teachers put into us was invaluable. Some of us still keep in touch with our teachers,”* Vietnamese participant (Melbourne).

### **3.4 Other institutions**

Participants also praised several other institutions as being particularly helpful.

*“The teachers at AMES are nice and friendly to all the people,”* Vietnamese participant.

*“The accommodation and people at Mt St Canice was an excellent start with the programs they had for adults,”* Vietnamese participant.

*“The support group (CRSS) helped us a lot. They are very good and at the end of one year they said that they would help us forever. Sometimes its hard if I can’t understand what people are saying but they help and are good. When we arrived they had already put the names of our children down with the school,”* Somali participant.

*“We had a support group to help us settle in and they showed us everything. We are still friends with them and they are very good people, very helpful. They did very well to help us settle in,”* Somali participant.

*“The Department of Immigration is much more efficient in Tasmania. They work much better there. Whatever we needed in Tasmania, whatever we asked for, they helped. In Tasmania, we could contact Interpreters directly. We called them direct and they would come. It was so much easier to get information and help. But nothing is good if you have no dollars. Look at us now. We all work. Everyone who came here, everyone is working. Many of them have bought houses. It is easy to get jobs. There are many, many factories here. We have money, a job and a future for our children,”* Bosnian participant (Melbourne).



## CHAPTER 4

### “WE NEED OPPORTUNITIES”: ISSUES OF CONCERN TO REFUGEES ABOUT LIVING PERMANENTLY IN TASMANIA

While there were many things that participants perceived as benefits of living in Tasmania there were also a range of issues which made life more difficult for them and their families.

#### 4.1 Employment

Lack of employment was raised by all focus groups as an issue of major concern.

*“Nobody left Tasmania because they didn’t like Tasmania. Everybody left because there are no jobs,”* Bosnian participant (Melbourne).

*“In Hobart we had friends and family but there was no chance to get a job. Here we can get a job easily. There are more jobs in the factories and more employment. We were used to working. It was very hard to sit around the house and wait to get the payment through from Centrelink on Thursdays. Back home we had our own houses with land around, so we looked after the garden and had a lot to do. We also worked in factories and had jobs farming or working in our vegetable patches. Tasmania is a beautiful place but there is nothing to do,”* Bosnian participant (Melbourne).

*“Without a job you feel like you’re depending on others,”* Vietnamese participant, Melbourne.

*“You feel lonely when you stay at home seven days a week. I want a job but in Tasmania there aren’t enough jobs. If you don’t have enough money then life is very boring,”* Vietnamese participant.

*“The employers here (Melbourne) do not think its such a big problem if you don’t have English. But in Tasmania they don’t look at you if you can’t speak English even though it’s not such a problem in many jobs,”* Bosnian participant (Melbourne).

*“Employment is the main problem, it’s very hard to find a job,”* El Salvadoran participant.

*“The life is very good in Tasmania but for pensioners, I would say. I didn’t find any job, we wanted **any** job. The biggest problem was English. We couldn’t learn English and we didn’t have any friends to help. We are too old for study, we need to learn from working,”* Bosnian participant (Melbourne).

*“The only problem in Tasmania is jobs. I liked it there. If I had come alone I would have stayed but my children are here. My daughter has more opportunities here,”* Bosnian participant (Melbourne).

*“Tasmania is a small place it is easy to get around but little by little I’m getting used to this big place. My profession is a building worker, I tried to find some job in Tasmania but I couldn’t. It was difficult for everyone in our community. No one got a job except apple picking. But here on my first Monday a man says ‘No problem’. Now two years on I bought a house. My wife has got a job too and we have two cars. Over there I bought one car with difficulty. Here I have settled down,”* Bosnian participant (Melbourne).

## **4.2 Language**

Language acquisition was a major issue of concern. Participants expressed great appreciation of the high quality of the service provided by AMES but did not feel that 510 hours was enough to allow them to participate in the general community.

*“Need more English classes. Language is the primary factor. In Springvale it is not so important, but in Tasmania it is essential. Tasmania needs to make more effort with language, because older people can come to Springvale and they don’t need English,”* Vietnamese participant, Melbourne.

*“510 hours is not enough, especially if you start from scratch,”* Vietnamese participant.

*“We went straight away to English classes, it’s very important, but 510 hours is not enough – we need 1000 hours, because some of us had no English and you need more than 500 hours to improve. Childcare is very expensive if we want to study further, but they provided childcare when we were at AMES. It would be good if we could have more English classes at the TAFE. We need to have better written and spoken English. I would like to get work in Australia and I have tried many places, but it is hard when my English is not good and sometimes I wonder if the clothes that we wear make people think it would be difficult for us to work. When I finish my English classes I have nothing to do but when I was in Somalia I used to be a dress-maker and a head mistress,”* Somali participant.

Access to English classes was of particular concern to Afghan participants who are not entitled to any AMES hours (see TPV section).

*“We get no help with English and have nothing to do during the day,”* Afghan participant.

## **4.3 Community Size**

The small size of communities was also listed as something which makes life more difficult for participants. Some participants also indicated that the small community size also meant that there were unlikely to be stores which catered for specific requirements.

*“Sometimes it would be better if there was a large Somali community because we feel lonely sometimes. It would also help our kids to be able to learn about their religion and Somali culture,”* Somali participant.

*“There aren’t many Asian vegetables or food products in Tasmania,”* Vietnamese participant, Melbourne.

*“The older generation felt a bit isolated in Tasmania, there were not a lot of friends and relatives. Over here (Melbourne) they can go anywhere, for example to the market,”* Vietnamese participant, Melbourne.

*“People lose enthusiasm and don’t feel like they belong anymore so they don’t get together as a community to have parties or festivals,”* Vietnamese participant.

*“Friends keep leaving and I feel left behind. I’m leaving in three months time to go to Melbourne to get a new job – there are more opportunities there,”* Vietnamese participant.

*“The El Salvadoran community is very small. There is a problem within the community, not all of us have good social relations among ourselves,”* El Salvadoran participant.

#### **4.4 Cost of essentials**

The high cost of basic items such as electricity and groceries was also of concern.

*“The cost of living is very high, higher than the other states, especially the heating – we can’t shorten the winter so we need to shorten the bills,”* Bahai participant.

*“The high cost of living e.g vegetables, Hydro, groceries,”* Vietnamese participant.

*“We spend a lot of money on electricity and phone bills, talking to relatives overseas on the phone,”* Sudanese participant.

#### **4.5 Poverty**

*“I cannot afford to live here and pay bills. I have no money, I receive some from the government and it all goes out, I always get warning letters from Aurora. Without power I cannot cook. I cannot find a part time job,”* Sudanese participant.

*“You must be able to have a car to get a job. I have decided to go into debt to buy a car. I cannot eat after that.”* Sudanese participant

*“We would like Tasmania to be a place where there is less difference between how we live and the rest of the community lives. The differences are too big now and we are at the bottom.”* Sudanese participant

*“We can’t afford to live. Newcomers and ordinary people are so different.”* Sudanese participant

*“Tasmania is cold. We cannot afford to stay warm. I pay \$170 a fortnight rent and my total income is \$270 a fortnight.”* Sudanese participant

#### 4.6 Cultural ignorance

Many participants felt that there was a lack of understanding about the culture they had left and a presumption that refugees would not know about how things worked in Tasmania.

*“Some people assume that coming from overseas you don’t know much,”*  
Sudanese participant.

*“Some people judge migrants in terms of the culture they come from. At a job interview the woman was talking to me just normally, then when she found out where I was from, she completely changed. I was interested to know why. I asked her what she knows about El Salvadoran people. That wasn’t professional because I was a client and I got the impression that she was no longer interested in me and that was very depressing for me,”* El Salvadoran participant.

*“Some people ignore that we know exactly about the culture here and they treat us as if we have no idea about the culture and about our rights but they don’t realise that when we arrived we were taught our rights. So people think that because we don’t speak English we don’t know so they can treat us how they like”*  
El Salvadoran participant.

*“The media misleads people about Africa. It presents Africa as if there is nothing but hunger and wars and as if it is all primitive. We need people to know that ‘I am from Africa and I am here to share with you.’ Many of us are city people but people think we are all from way out in the country. People have completely the wrong idea about where we come from. We would like people to know about where we come from and what it is like,”* Sudanese participant.

#### 4.7 Racism

Some of the participants raised concerns about experiences of racism.

*“I had racist abuse from a neighbour whenever he got drunk. It was not possible to get anyone to take action, not the police or the landlord. They won’t do anything.”*  
El Salvadoran participant.

*“I have had a few problems, I think kids are bored. Out in Claremont everyone is so bored that they trash things and find stupid things to do, if every one was happy and employed they wouldn’t mess with others. I think people sometimes do it because of jealousy,”* Vietnamese participant.



#### 4.8 Housing

Several participants raised issues around access to appropriate housing options.

*“When we came to Tasmania housing wasn’t very easy to find especially when we have a very large family. The Housing Commission only have small houses. We need four or five bedrooms because we have so many children and because I live with my brother as well,”* Somali participant.

*“Location - we must live in the city we cannot live alone in Bridgewater we would be in trouble alone there because we look different. Housing Services must know this but they still offer us Bridgewater etc. Two years my application was with housing and then I got nothing but Bridgewater,”* Sudanese participant.

*“I think some housing is rather inappropriate for people living together, for example, where we live we are the only elderly people, we feel so uncomfortable and we can’t relate to other people. As far as public housing goes I know there’s a lot of people on the waiting list and it takes too long,”* El Salvadoran participant.

*“No heating, we come from a hot place. The money received is not enough to heat. We need decent, warm, affordable housing and Housing Services must offer us places together and close to the city,”* Sudanese participant.

#### 4.9 Entertainment

Some of the participants also listed the lack of a vibrant street life and entertainment options as factors which made Tasmania a more difficult place to live.

*“The lack of a street life. We like to be out in groups and make noise and be together. But here that is seen as a problem. Police attitudes are a problem, they don’t understand the culture that we need to be together and to shout. We like to be in groups. But the Police watch us and see it as a threat,”* El Salvadoran participant.

*“There are not enough amusements for the younger generation,”* Bahai participant.

*“We need more activities, entertainment and concerts. It would be great if the AFL was played here more. We need more cultural and sporting events. We need to attract more young people because they can open their own businesses and we can create more jobs,”* Vietnamese participant.

#### 4.10 Community and religious facilities

Several participants felt that there was a need for more community and religious facilities in Tasmania.

*“We would like there to be a mosque in Launceston, some families have left because there is no mosque here,”* Somali participant<sup>1</sup>.

*“We needed a place where people could meet together, a centre where people know they can go at any time,”* Bosnian participant (Melbourne).

<sup>1</sup> It is encouraging that that this issue is now being addressed

#### 4.11 Family Reunions

Several participants were concerned about the length and complexity of the process for being reunited with family members.

*“I like to live here, it’s a very good place. We like to live in Tasmania but we need to have our families here with us. I would like to live in Tasmania forever, but we need our husbands and our brothers and sisters and parents here with us because we are a small community and there are not many people to visit or help us if we are sick. If our family was here we would be fine. All of us have parents and siblings and husbands who would like to come to Tasmania. We sent the papers to DIMA but nothing has happened yet. Some people say that they process it quicker in Melbourne and Sydney but we hope to stay here. Tasmania is nice and quiet and we would like to stay. We worry about our families in the refugee camps because they are not safe, and it is very difficult to contact them. It is expensive and they must walk a long way to the phone or the post office. It is really difficult to send a letter or ring up and we worry about our families all the time. The refugee camps are not safe,”* Somali participant.

*“We would like to know more about what is happening to our families, especially what is happening to have them come to Australia. Sometimes we don’t hear anything for a long time and we don’t know what is going on. It is very hard for us because we know that the camps are not safe – we worry about it all the time,”* Somali participant.

*“We need opportunities for family reunion, for my son to come if he wants. He can help look after us when we get old,”* El Salvadoran participant.



## CHAPTER 5

### CHANGE FOR THE BETTER: PARTICIPANTS IDEAS FOR ACTION

Participants had a range of ideas about what needed to happen in Tasmania to make the state a better place for them and their families to stay in the long term.

#### 5.1 Employment

Participants stated that they believe that there should be:

- Access to workplace based English classes
- Greater assistance in finding employment soon after arriving in Tasmania (before completing AMES)
- More training opportunities, especially linked to jobs
- More employment schemes for young people, especially new graduates to keep them in Tasmania
- Translated information about operation of machines in factories
- Greater assistance from Centrelink and job agencies in assisting refugees to find employment, both part-time and full-time
- Education for employers about the benefits of employing refugees and the reasons why they will not have references
- More factories and mines

#### 5.2 Language

Many participants felt that while the quality of AMES language tuition was very good, there was not sufficient time to learn enough English in 510 hours.

- AMES hours be increased to at least 1000 hours
- More time spent in the community learning in social situations during these extended hours
- Full entitlement to AMES hours for Temporary Protection Visa holders.

#### 5.3 Immigration

- More refugees need to come Tasmania to help build viable communities

#### **5.4 Family Reunion**

Participants considered the need to be reunited with members of their family to be a primary concern. This was particularly the case for more recently arrived refugees who still had family members in refugee camps which they considered dangerous. Participants also had concerns about their ability to contact family members.

- The Federal Government needs to make it quicker and easier for members of a refugee's family to come to Australia, particularly for spouses, parents and siblings.
- Telephone costs to family members need to be reduced at least while refugees are relying on Centrelink payments.
- Regular updates on the status of applications for residency from family members need to be provided, even when there has been no progress in the case.

#### **5.5 Housing**

- Refugees need to be able to access housing in areas where they are less likely to experience harassment.
- Refugees need to be housed close together if this is their preference
- Houses need to be adequately heated.

#### **5.6 Cultural Education**

- Tasmanian schools need to offer greater cultural education and perhaps offer more chances for groups from different cultural backgrounds to interact.
- More education needs to be provided in schools and in the media about refugees' home countries.

#### **5.7 Facilities**

Meeting places and activities need to be set up for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.



## CHAPTER 6

### ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Tasmania clearly needs to do much more if it is to develop sustainable refugee initiated communities. While most refugees like Tasmania, and in the first settlement stage are positive about the support received, the opportunities, resources and assistance required to successfully make the transition to long term settlement, are grossly inadequate. The most critical factors, the provision of opportunities for full economic and social participation in the broader community, have largely been ignored. Without a strong political and community commitment to changing this, especially in the areas of employment, English language fluency and community development, Tasmania will not be able to compete with the opportunities offered to refugees elsewhere.

There are some strong positives coming through in the research. Education for school age children stands out as an area very highly regarded by refugees, as is on the whole the health system, CRSS groups, AMES and the state DIMA office.

In addition, the small size of Tasmania is not the barrier to settlement that might have been predicted. Indeed on the whole refugees seemed to prefer Tasmania in this regard, speaking positively of the community spirit and life style advantages conferred.

Nor were the attitudes of the general community a major barrier to successful settlement. On the whole the warmth and generosity of Tasmanians was emphasized, although there were some major issues emerging concerning the high levels of ignorance of the culture and country and origin of the refugee communities.

These natural advantages combined with the support their children are receiving in schools, means that refugees with school age children seem relatively more positive about longer-term settlement in Tasmania, provided they can obtain work. There are some distinct and additional issues for old people and young people.

The sheer poverty many refugees experience in Tasmania is of major concern and a very important factor in people's decisions about staying or going. Many of their issues are similar to those of other low income Tasmanians, but with a distinct dimension.

Perhaps the two most important issues identified, in which far more could relatively easily be done, are language and employment.

Refugees have emphasized that proficiency in English is even more important in Tasmania than the mainland cities because of the requirement to use English for any level of participation in community life, particularly in securing employment.

Employment is predictably the most significant problem. Less predictable is the almost complete lack of targeted strategies to address this. Remarkably none of the recently

arrived refugees in this study had received any significant assistance from the Job Network. They are the victims of three policy failings:

The change and reductions in labour market programs in 1996 that cut most of the targeted assistance.

The lack of any specific Job Network provider for culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Tasmania because the Commonwealth considers the market too small.

The lack of a State Government response to the issue.

These issues and others raised by the refugee initiated communities are discussed in more depth below.

## **6.1 Employment**

The refugees consulted with were not being assisted at all by the Job Network. Nor were they receiving any other assistance from any other labor market or employment program, other than that provided by AMES.

Apart from being an access and equity issue in apparent contradiction to the commitment by all levels of Government to *the Principles of a culturally diverse society*, this is of particularly major concern in Tasmania given the difficult local labour market and the importance refugees have placed on this issue.

Refugees recognise that employment is about much more than economic well being. Employment remains the key to full participation. While locked out of it, refugees are also locked out of the wider community.

The experience of refugees in Melbourne highlights the size of the comparative problem here. Not only did they get work quickly but they talked about employers being much more willing to accept lower levels of English language fluency and Australian work experience. This was partly due to the nature of the labor market, especially the greater availability of unskilled and factory work, but it was also evidently about the perspectives of employers. In Tasmania it seems that employers lack of experience with non English speakers means they will not usually even consider anyone without fluent English. In Melbourne employers are apparently more flexible about language requirements and more aware of the value of overseas experience.

It is also very apparent that since 1996 there has been a significant reduction in the level of assistance provided to refugees to find work. The Status report of the 1995 – 1999 Tasmanian Settlement Plan reveals how much more attention this issue was receiving five years ago, especially from the Commonwealth.

The then Department of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs had a Tasmanian Employment Advisory Committee and migrant contact officers in each CES region and Student Assistance Centre, as well as funding a contract case management service run by the MRC for migrants, targeted job clubs and so on.

The Tasmanian Government has very limited labor market and employment creation programs. However again they do not on the whole seem to have recognized the importance of targeting this client group.

## 6.2 Language

Refugees stressed the importance of English language proficiency to successful settlement. While this is a familiar theme in refugee research, the finding that this is even further exaggerated in Tasmania is significant. The reason it is more important here relates to the nature of the employment market and the size of the communities. As already discussed the lack of unskilled work and the limited experience of employers with this group, makes English language proficiency a virtual necessity to getting a job in Tasmania, which is not true to the same extent in Melbourne at least. Just as importantly, the small size of the refugee communities means that it is not possible to enjoy recreation, shop and participate broadly in community life without English to anywhere near the extent it is in Melbourne.

This finding is significant because it is another primary area where more could be done without large expenditure which would not only address this comparative disadvantage of Tasmania as a settlement location, but move to provide a comparative advantage.

Refugees were very positive about the 510 hours of Government funded English language tuition provided by AMES. However all expressed that for an adult learning English from the beginning this level of tuition was simply inadequate. The lack of flexibility to be able to extend this has left many refugees in Tasmania unnecessarily isolated with very limited English. The costs of this are high, both to the refugees themselves and ultimately the Government and broader community through higher unemployment rates. The attraction of a move to larger language communities in Sydney or Melbourne under these circumstance is obvious.

Some people also were constrained by the lack of flexibility in terms of how English language tuition occurred. Some would have preferred if it were linked to work environments more explicitly as this was their primary goal and they wanted to learn English in the context of achieving this rather than a classroom environment.

Linking English language tuition with labour market goals would therefore have benefited some.

There are also particular concerns about how long it can take to complete the 510 hours of tuition when it is only offered on a part time basis. Most refugees are not able to access Intensive Assistance employment assistance until they have completed this course. Due to small refugee numbers the course can be offered only on a part time basis in some areas and can take more than a year to complete. This is a problem for those refugees who would like to access employment as soon as possible.

The importance of English language proficiency in successful settlement in Tasmania was highlighted by those refugees who left for Melbourne, even though settlement had seemingly been successfully negotiated over many years in Tasmania. If older members of the family, and often the women at home, experience an ongoing isolation, when circumstances are right they understandably support a move into a more active community life.

### 6.3 Sustainable size

Refugees expressed the problem of lack of numbers of people of their community living here.

Successful individual settlement often depends on successful community settlement, which requires that a critical mass is reached where the group is able to express its cultural, social and economic life. Where numbers are too small even a few people leaving can have an impact and begin a process of declining numbers which accelerates as those remaining become increasingly isolated from family and friends. The Vietnamese in Hobart and Melbourne vividly described this process. The once relatively large Vietnamese community in Hobart has now mostly moved to Melbourne even though settlement was reasonably successful here. Ultimately, even a community of two to three hundred is sometimes too small.

The question of a sustainable size will vary from community to community depending on different factors, including the extent of the cultural difference both within the community, and between it and the broader community. However for new refugee initiated communities in Tasmania it would seem as if clear population targets do need to be established with the aim of reaching these targets over a defined period as part of a strategic community settlement plan. Target numbers in the order of 500 would commonly seem more realistic.

These numbers were last achieved in the 1950's with communities such as the Polish and the Dutch, to the lasting benefit of the whole Tasmanian community.

Currently the refugee intake into Tasmania has been disrupted by Commonwealth Government policy to strictly limit the total number of humanitarian entrants, including onshore applicants receiving temporary protection visas, to 12000 a year (unless there is some carry-over from previous years allocations). Prior to 1996 onshore refugees were not counted against the humanitarian program. In the 1999/2000 financial year 65 refugees have entered Tasmania from overseas and a very small number of people on TPVs.

Effectively the humanitarian program is on hold.

This has had drastic repercussions for Tasmania.

There is a very real danger in this context that the community support and service infrastructure developed will suffer and small emerging refugee communities will be lost to the state.

Much larger intakes are needed. This is also an efficient use of resources as the support infrastructure developed, including the community support, would seem to be able to take close to double the numbers usually entering the State.

Refugees in Tasmania are also very keen to bring out their families. Facilitating this process, which has also been made more difficult by recent policy changes, would greatly benefit the development of sustainable communities in Tasmania.



## 6.4 Poverty

The experience of refugees on pensions, benefits and other low incomes in many ways reflects the experiences of other low income Tasmanians described more fully in previous Anglicare research, *Hearing the Voices: life on a low income in Tasmania*. People on benefits and allowances in particular simply can not afford the essentials of life, including school expenses, adequate food, electricity, health care, transport and so on. Partly this reflects a national picture caused by the fact that youth allowance and unemployment benefits especially are set well below the poverty line or the pension (\$166 a week for a single adult unemployed in May 2000, less for younger people). However in Tasmania the struggle is made worse by the higher bills for the essentials of life, food, transport and household fuel and power. Major State Government concessions are generally only available to pensioners. For people on low incomes in the private and public rental markets, Tasmania is the most expensive state in Australia, as these costs are not offset by lower housing costs.

The experience by low income people of the impossible juggling act required, especially when major bills like electricity fall due, was mirrored by refugees. Stories of going cold, time without food, extreme anxiety about money and so on were common in the research.

As for other low income Tasmanians this was placing severe limits on participation and work opportunities, because it was simply difficult to afford to go anywhere and purchasing and running a car, a major advantage in the labour market, was very difficult.

It is evident from the research however that the suffering caused by poverty to refugees does have its own dimensions. In one sense, their backgrounds mean that they always experience it as relative poverty, and to an extent accept their living conditions, no matter how difficult.

On the other hand the poverty of choice and the poverty of inequality seem to be particularly keenly felt. For many refugees life in Australia was not primarily about economic improvement, but the chance to live in a country where there are essential human rights. The lack of choice caused by poverty and the extreme of the inequality evident here was described by some of them with great sadness and disappointment.

Refugees also usually lack the support networks with access to resources, money or in kind, which assist many people to get by. They and their community simply have no reserves and very few material assets. They are literally starting from the beginning. CRSS groups have helped many to supplement the clearly inadequate household formation allocation.

In addition many come from warmer climates and staying warm in rented homes, often with old expensive heaters, becomes very expensive and depressing.

Familiar food can also be considerably more expensive here even than standard groceries, which are in themselves the dearest in the country.

Finally and most importantly refugees are desperate for some spare money to send back to family and friends in often desperate circumstances. The failure to be able to do so can cause great suffering. They also long to be able to save up to sponsor more of them coming to Australia.

While the efforts of volunteers to alleviate the poverty of refugees in Tasmania have been very important, this issue must be addressed if refugees are not to continue to leave the state out of sheer financial desperation.

## **6.5 Housing**

On the whole housing in Tasmania was seen as satisfactory and it was not one of the major priority issues. However there were concerns about affordability for those renting privately and questions about the planning and approval processes of Housing Tasmania.

The experience of the Sudanese man, who after a long wait for public housing, was advised that he would be living alone in an outlying public housing estate, summarizes the problems which still exist in the public housing area

Successful settlement of new refugee communities requires that consideration be given to whole of community issues and that refugees are assessed with regard to their need for community support. While this often happens, with Housing Tasmania endeavoring to place people in reasonable proximity of each other, it still seems ad hoc and left to the common sense of individual officers rather than part of a strategic response to the communities needs.

There also seems some lack of recognition of the different housing types required by different refugee groups, according to gender, age and culture. Again assessing people on an individual basis, without regard to their broader community context, is inadequate.

## **6.6 Information and support**

The information and support received by refugees in the initial settlement period from DIMA, AMES, MRCs, CRSS groups and other IHSS providers was highly regarded in Tasmania. Refugees commented on how much easier it was to obtain information and personalized assistance here than in Melbourne.

In this sense the current changes to the IHSS service provision are not actually addressing the primary areas of expressed concern in Tasmania and it must be hoped that the high levels of satisfaction experienced by refugees in this area are at least maintained under the new model.

### **6.7 Cultural understanding**

The refugees, especially more recent arrivals, wanted the Tasmanian community to understand something of where they had come from. This sense of people having some concept of where they have come from is very important to building the bridges to successful settlement and having some sense of belonging.

The problem is clearly greatest among people from Africa, who had previously only been in Tasmania in very low numbers but was expressed to a lesser extent also by other communities.

Some young people expressed particular concern about a lack of cultural understanding from local police. They were especially concerned that they were the focus of attention when out as a group in public spaces and making a noise.

Some participants were very keen to share their culture with other groups in the community, especially through musical performances. They felt that this would allow other people to learn more about their background.

### **6.8 Transport**

Several participants expressed concern about the lack of transport infrastructure in Tasmania. They feel that they need to have access to private transport, particularly if they are to become part of the employment market. This is extremely difficult to obtain when they have such limited resources.

The high cost of interstate transport is also an issue of concern as many refugees have friends and relatives living in other parts of the country. The ability to visit these contacts more regularly would reduce the feeling of isolation for many participants.



## CHAPTER 7

### “IT SEEMS THAT TOMORROW WILL NEVER COME”: THE SITUATION OF REFUGEES ON TEMPORARY PROTECTION VISAS

The five Afghan refugees interviewed for this research project fled Afghanistan because of the persecution of the ethnic minorities to which they belong by the Taliban militia. Because of the very different policy and services response to these new arrivals, their needs are distinct from the other refugees interviewed.

#### **7.1 TPV refugee entitlements:**

- Transport from the Detention Centre to the settlement city (generally this is not Sydney)
- Special benefit of about \$165 per week
- Rent Assistance (if renting in the private market)
- Medicare
- Access to the Early Health Assessment and Intervention Service
- Job matching through the Job Network (essentially access to touch screens)
- With the agreement of States/Territories, schooling during compulsory school-age-range
- With the agreement of States/Territories access to public housing where available and appropriate

#### **7.2 Standard refugee entitlements that TPV refugees are not entitled to:**

- Assistance from a CRSS group on arrival
- Funding which would go to a CRSS group to assist in setting up a home including paying for bond and furniture
- Access to the Australian education system for those older than 16
- Intensive assistance through the Job Network, including referral to programs reducing barriers to employment access
- 510 hours of English tuition at AMES

### 7.3 Circumstances of arrival in Tasmania

*“I was fleeing for my life, I wanted to get to somewhere safe. I hoped there would be no division between groups, I wanted to be treated the same as others. The reason we ran away was to seek justice, and kindness and freedom. The hope was for humanitarianism without violence and ethnic discrimination. We didn't leave Afghanistan to get more but to be safe and treated as a human. We thought there would be human rights here. In Afghanistan there are many dangerous things. People are tortured by the Taliban and they won't educate the minorities. Nobody helps us, nobody hears our voice. People were being killed near our town. When we came here we hoped that everyone would be treated equally, treated fairly and there would be social justice. In Afghanistan the Taliban tramples on other people's rights. Here we hoped that everyone would be equal and have enough,”* Afghan participant.

After escaping Afghanistan the men entered Pakistan and stayed for some time in camps in Pakistan before traveling to Indonesia and on to Australia. The men were sent to the Port Hedland Detention Centre while their cases for refugee status were investigated. They were released after being assessed as refugees.

*“We spent five months in the detention centre. Government sent us here without any guidance, no details. They sent us to Broome, then Perth, then Melbourne and then Tasmania, and we didn't know about the rules and roles and regulations. We didn't know how to go but they said you look after yourselves. We have one or two sets of clothes and one of us lost our bag and we didn't know what to do to get it back. In Launceston we went to the Backpackers. We hope to be safe and we hope to get more education so we can help others back in Afghanistan. We want to do something for others especially for our families. We want to study but we cannot study for three years. It's an injustice because we can't get any education. It seems tomorrow will never come,”* Afghan participant.

### 7.4 Life in Tasmania

The two Afghan Australians resident in Launceston initially had to assume almost total responsibility for the care of the refugees as only one of the men speaks English. DIMA officials and other agencies, including Anglicare's Northern Outreach Service, have done as much as they can to help, but DIMA officials have been particularly constrained by Federal Government policy which clearly restricts their ability to assist. While the refugees have recently moved into Housing Services units, at the time of the research the men were living in an old farmhouse some way out of town.

*“When they came, Immigration had just booked them into the backpackers for two nights. The backpackers said on the Friday that they had to be out of there. They had nowhere to go. There was no help from Immigration. I found them an empty farmhouse, but they are isolated there. There is no car. Every few days I’ll visit to take food. But no one is visiting to the farmhouse. Organisations help with vouchers for food, that is all – no one is visiting,” Afghan Australian*

*“Some of the NGOs have helped us, for example with furniture and clothing, but otherwise there is nothing. Even the electricity couldn’t be connected to the farmhouse I found them. They had no references. I had to connect under my name. It was the same problem with finding private rental, landlords weren’t interested. It is very, very difficult. These are quiet, nice people. All they want is some peace at last. But when I went to Real Estate Agents they told me, “No”. They said the owner wouldn’t like it. People are terrified of refugees but they are very quiet people because they suffered so long,” Afghan Australian*

*“My personal view is I love Tasmania. It is the first time I see such kind and generous people. It is the first time in my life I feel safe and comfortable. If the Government gave us permanent residency we would stay forever in this city. We would not go anywhere. The Government gave us no help with housing, we had to apply for private rental. We could not do it alone,” Afghan participant.*

The TPV conditions mean that the men are not able to access formal English classes at AMES despite their great need for this. They have been forced to rely on voluntary tutors. They are also unable to access higher education as they would be treated as fee paying overseas students and have no funds.

*“We want to continue our study but if we want to study we have to pay for it and we have no money,” Afghan participant.*

*“We need help with the language. We want to work, to contribute, to help,” Afghan participant*

The refugees are also being denied appropriate employment assistance. Despite being sent to a community which already has some of the nation’s highest unemployment rates the men are provided with the minimum level of employment assistance, essentially the entitlement to go into a Job Matching agency and use the computer touch-screens to look for positions. As most of the men are illiterate in English, and unable to access formal English training, it seems extremely unlikely that any of them will find employment in this manner.

*“Housing and language are both needed for support, but we are not entitled to it. We were brought here. If it wasn’t for ...(the resident Afghan Australian), we would be helpless,” Afghan participant.*

It must be remembered that the Australian Afghan providing the essential support is an ordinary Australian citizen who happens to have been born in Afghanistan. He has not been paid by the Australian government to assist these refugees, he has not received special training in assisting refugees. He is simply an ordinary Tasmanian small business owner who has given huge amounts of time and effort to try to settle these refugees under extremely difficult circumstances. These circumstances are a direct result of Federal Government policy, the services that these refugees needed and continue to need are available in Tasmania but are deliberately denied to them.

*“To present Tasmania as a good place I have to work very hard,” Afghan Australian.*

## **7.5 Risk to infrastructure**

The Commonwealth policy to deny many support services to TPV refugees poses a serious risk to the sustainability of the Tasmanian refugee support infrastructure that has been so favorably perceived by other refugees in this and previous research. Prior to 1996 onshore refugees were not counted against the total humanitarian program. However since then they have been allocated 2000 places in the total intake of 12,000 and the number of people resettled from overseas has been correspondingly reduced once this number has been reached.

Effectively this means that for much of this calendar year the refugee program to Tasmania has been on hold. Some 65 people have entered Tasmania with the support of CRSS groups this financial year, compared with more than triple that on average in recent years and a DIMA target of approximately 200.

Many CRSS groups, not having had a refugee for so long are losing their commitment, English classes are under utilised and so on. The viability of the new tendered IHSS services in this policy context will also be very marginal indeed.

At the same time the unfunded burden placed on other already overstretched community organisations to support TPV refugees from mainstream services is simply not sustainable. The assumption for example that refugees will be able to access housing, pay for it and provide minimum furnishings with no extra support beyond the Special Benefit received is totally unrealistic, as the payment made to other refugees through the CRSS groups to assist with these costs, usually recognises.

Anglicare, through the Northern Outreach Services, has had direct service experience of the staff time and financial resources required to support the Afghan refugees in the absence the customary services and supports. Without additional resources, it is not sustainable.

To ensure Tasmania has the necessary infrastructure to be a welcoming place for refugees, and mainstream community services are not placed under any further pressure, it is essential that the TPV refugees have the right to access all refugee support services.



## CHAPTER 8

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Supporting the development of sustainable refugee initiated communities is one of the few effective strategies available to Tasmania to counter forecasts of population decline. A Tasmania with a number of reasonably sized overseas born communities offers the state an achievable and exciting opportunity for economic, social and cultural renewal as an integral part of our shaping of the future through Tasmania Together.

To achieve this outcome much more however will need to be done. In the first instance the issue must be redefined. This is not primarily a welfare or even humanitarian question. Rather it is an economic and social one needing a high level of state driven political commitment to achieve. The current focus on Commonwealth driven and funded support services for the initial settlement stages must now be complemented by state driven policies designed to provide the opportunities and resources required for full participation by refugee initiated community members in Tasmanian political, economic and social life. This research shows that existing services are working reasonably well to help people settle in on arrival, when the primary need is for support. There is very little provided however to go to the next stage of settlement, and become active inter-dependent members of Tasmanian society, when the primary need is participation.

Once the initial settling-in is over, as appreciative as they are of the help received, refugees must then assess the opportunities available to them and their children to join in the broader life of the community.

It is at this critical stage, that we do almost nothing in response.

Strong determined political and community will is necessary to change policies and provide the resources and opportunities required to develop sustainable communities in Tasmania. This can only be generated from an understanding that this is not only or even primarily about helping others, it is about helping ourselves.

It is only when the full economic and social benefits available to Tasmania, including employment generation, from successful long term refugee settlement are recognized that such a policy shift will occur. This in turn requires a realistic acknowledgment that the small number of skilled migrants choosing Tasmania to live in is unlikely to significantly increase. There is also a need for a greater recognition of the skills and experience which refugees bring. Many are tertiary educated. Most have employment experience, including a large number with small business backgrounds. All have foreign language fluency, valuable cultural knowledge and extraordinary life experience.



The refugee initiated communities of the 1950's show what benefits can come to the State through such policy change. This time around however there will be no big and easy Hydro or industrial developments to give people a place in the economic and social life of Tasmania. The political and community will needs to be correspondingly stronger and the strategies developed more creative and strategic, but it can still be done.

Tasmania obviously faces less employment opportunities available to refugees. It needs to narrow this gap with other states, but also provide more than the other states in other critical areas, especially English language assistance. It needs to increase bridges to the wider community and provide resources and opportunities which are not available elsewhere.

This means leadership from the state government replacing the current reliance on DIMA funded settlement services and the DIMA driven Tasmanian Settlement Plan, which is by definition primarily concerned with early settlement.

The strategies set out below, arising from consultations with the refugee initiated communities themselves offer a first step in making such a policy change. The Tasmania Together process offers the best opportunity to develop these further and reach the goal of a culturally diverse Tasmania.

### **8.1 A new goal and a new vision**

- 1.1 That the clear strategic goal of achieving successful long term sustainable community settlement by all refugee initiated communities be agreed to by State Government, DIMA and community organisations.

### **8.2 A new process to achieve this**

- 2.1 The new strategic direction to be driven by Multicultural Tasmania through State Government funding of the new position of Refugee Community Settlement Coordinator
- 2.2 Tasmania Together be used to harness and direct community and political effort on this issue through setting out benchmarks for successful refugee settlement of each community as an integral step to a culturally diverse society
- 2.3 The terms of reference of the Tasmanian Settlement Plan include this long term settlement goal, with agreed benchmarks established and the workplan identified to achieve this reviewed every 6 months
- 2.4 Community specific strategic plan, implemented by a Coordinating Committee, including all aspects of settlement, be developed for each new and planned refugee initiated community including:
  - a media strategy, focussing on the background, strengths, experiences and skills of the community, emphasising the opportunities for business and community involvement
  - a cultural strategy, exploring opportunities for music, culture and festivals

- a community development strategy, including the facilitation and support for the establishment of a Refugee Community Association, to represent the community in these processes
- community involvement strategy to identify further opportunities for broader Tasmanian community involvement, including identifying needs and publicizing as appropriate.
- agreed benchmarks for major indicators of successful settlement and a regularly reviewed work plan to achieve these

### **8.3 Increase the intake of refugees and establish target community numbers**

- 3.1 The Commonwealth Government commit to increasing the number of refugees coming to Tasmania each year to a range between 250 and 300
- 3.2 The sustainable target population of each refugee community coming to Tasmania be established and usually be upward of 500 people

### **8.4 Job Network**

- 4.1 Given that the population size is not sufficient for specialist providers as funded in the bigger cities , a generalist Tasmanian job network provider be funded by DEWRSB to provide specialized assistance to people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, to ensure the “improved access by target group to appropriate employment services” sought by the Tasmanian Settlement Plan.
- 4.2 This Job Network provider needs to be involved in all settlement planning processes, including pre arrival to ensure whole of community approaches are taken to employment strategies.
- 4.3 All refugees seeking full or part time employment, including students, be immediately eligible for intensive assistance from a Job Network Provider on arrival.
- 4.4 The Job Network provider works alongside other support services, including AMES, as part of a comprehensive case management approach ensuring that, from the beginning, employment strategies are integrated with other support.

### **8.5 Public sector employment**

- 5.1 Employment targets for refugee communities be established in local council, state and commonwealth government and GBEs
- 5.2 Training and work experience for new refugees be provided in the above

#### **8.6 Small business assistance, support and finance.**

- 6.1 Targeted assistance to be provided through Business Enterprise Centres, LEIS and NEIS for the development of small businesses by refugee initiated communities.
- 6.2 Tasmanian Government extend concessions to facilitate the establishment of small business by this group.
- 6.3 A Contact officer for this target group be established in the Small Business Unit to provide active assistance for refugees in the process and approvals required to establish a new business.
- 6.4 Small business ideas be publicized in the community, especially through service clubs to seek experienced volunteer mentors to assist refugees negotiate Tasmanian business requirements
- 6.5 Assistance be coordinated through the community coordinating committee for small income generating projects, especially relating to music, craft and other cultural expressions.
- 6.6 That stalls at local markets, including Salamanca, be provided to facilitate the development of outlets for income generating ideas

#### **8.7 Employer education**

- 7.1 That information targeted at employers be prepared on each new community
- 7.2 That articles be written for business journals on the experience and opportunities afforded by new refugee communities
- 7.3 That work experience placements with employers be sought as part of individual case management by the Job Network.
- 7.4 That service clubs be sought to partner each new refugee community and to assist in this education and change role.

#### **8.8 English Language**

- 8.1 Given the even greater importance in Tasmania of English language ability to successful settlement, the Tasmanian Government provide top up funds to AMES to ensure the flexible support and resources needed to ensure that every refugee has the opportunity to reach fluency in English.
- 8.2 That the southern MRC's Options program be extended through the funding of a half time position by the Tasmanian Government.

## **8.9 Housing**

- 9.1 Housing Tasmania to be involved in planning each community strategic settlement plans, including selection of target geographical areas
- 9.2 Housing Tasmania policies to be reviewed to ensure that applications from individual refugees are assessed in a manner consistent with the community settlement plan.
- 9.3 Housing Tasmania provide flexible housing types in these areas consistent with the culture and lifestyle of the communities

## **8.10 Action on poverty**

- 10.1 That the Community Strategic Settlement Coordinating Committee include targeted emergency relief providers to help assist with the practical needs of the community.
- 10.2 That the Tasmanian Government provide top up funding to these providers
- 10.3 That the Emergency Relief Committee consider these issues in allocating funding
- 10.4 That the DIMA funded initial \$1100 (for the first person, plus \$300 per other family member) for household formation be supplemented by a no interest Tasmanian Government loan scheme for the purchase of white goods and other necessities.
- 10.5 That State Government concessions available to pensioners be extended to all refugees on benefits and allowances for a three year period following arrival
- 10.6 That major telephone companies be approached to provide assistance to refugees in calling home and establishing contact with relatives and friends

## **8.11 Transport**

- 11.1 Given the importance of a driving licence and car to employment and mobility in Tasmania, sponsors and volunteers be sought to assist with refugees learning to drive and/or obtaining their Tasmanian licence.
- 11.2 That the new no interest loans scheme recommended above include provision for the purchase of a vehicle
- 11.3 That the extension of the concession system to refugees includes those concessions applying to driver's licences and car registration.

#### **8.12 Community welcome, education and involvement**

- 12.1 That a service club be sought to sit on each community settlement committee to support the new community through business mentoring, activities, and practical assistance.
- 12.2 Community 'welcome' strategies accompanied by media be developed as part of the strategic community settlement plan for each group
- 12.3 That community information packages be developed about each new refugee community and be made available to schools and community groups.
- 12.4 That support be given to refugee community members interested in visiting schools and community groups to talk of their culture and experience.

#### **8.13 Community culture, religion and festivals**

- 13.1 That coordination be undertaken with local government to support music, festivals and other cultural expressions, including cross cultural activities such as the Devonport Multicultural Festival.
- 13.2 That local government be proactive with emerging refugee community associations to provide community grants for these purposes.

#### **8.14 Temporary Protection Visas**

- 14.1 That the TPV refugees have the right to full and equitable access to all services and support available to other refugees.



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