



# Insights into Regional Settlement in Practice

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NSW  
Settlement  
Partnership

**SSI**  
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We acknowledge the traditional custodians of Australia's land and waterways. We pay our respects to elders, past, present and emerging, and commit ourselves to a future with reconciliation and renewal at its heart.

## Foreword

**The settlement of migrants and refugees in regional areas has many benefits: it can sustain and grow the population base, bring about economic opportunities and create more vibrant and cohesive communities.**

There are various indicators, however, that need to be considered in order to ensure that regional settlement is mutually beneficial and sustainable for both regional development and for migrants and refugees settling in Australia.

A holistic framework for successful regional settlement should take into account factors such as employment and educational opportunities, infrastructure such as affordable housing, and effective and culturally responsive local services.

*Insights into Regional Settlement in Practice* has been compiled by the regional settlement providers of the NSW Settlement Partnership (NSP), of which Settlement Services International is the lead agency.

Under the Federal Government's Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) Program, we provide client services and community capacity building in metropolitan and regional areas across the state. The regional areas we serve cover Dubbo, the Hunter region, Illawarra, the Mid-North Coast and the Nepean region.

With this policy paper, we aim to showcase key settlement insights from our years of experience on the ground in regional communities and to highlight what the NSP considers to be the key ingredients of successful regional settlement.

Migrants have a lot in common with people living in regional communities. Like other Australians, they want a prosperous future for their children, and they want to have an income and living conditions that allow them to live in comfort and safety.

I welcome this paper and the contribution it will make to enhancing settlement outcomes in regional areas.

Violet Roumeliotis AM  
CEO  
Settlement Services International

## Executive Summary

**Settlement in regional Australia offers several advantages for the locally born population as well as people of migrant and refugee backgrounds.** These advantages include a greater sense of community, more affordable housing compared to that in cities and a more relaxed pace of life, which enhances health and wellbeing. Movement into regional areas can also sustain and grow the population base, bring economic opportunities and diversify the economy and employment base.

The New South Wales Settlement Partnership (NSP) is a consortium of settlement service providers in metropolitan and regional areas of New South Wales (NSW). As settlement service providers, we understand that successful regional settlement depends on a number of factors but strong settlement services, adequate infrastructure, funding and community engagement are key among them. In addition, we believe there needs to be a greater focus on retention and more careful consideration of the needs and wants of both newcomers and the local community in order to facilitate mutual prosperity and social cohesion.

Currently, there is a push by the Federal Government to revitalise regional communities and towns, which have been devastated by natural disasters, including drought and bushfires, and which are experiencing “brain drain” as people move away to metropolitan centres in pursuit of education and employment opportunities. There are several strategies to attract migrants and refugees to regional areas, including the adjustment of visa conditions to favour regional settlement, or the introduction of new visa categories. The introduction of the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa in July 2015, which is a special temporary protection visa for asylum seekers found to be refugees, is one example of this.

We believe there is a need for a coordinated, holistic approach to regional development that enhances regional settlement, emphasises the retention of migrants and refugees and acknowledges the role that they can and do play in reinvigorating regional areas. This strategy should support adequate funding for settlement and multicultural expertise and service infrastructure.

In this paper, we provide insights based on our years of expertise in settlement service delivery on the ground in regional areas of NSW. We also provide case studies to highlight the challenges our clients face in gaining employment, securing housing and other key areas, and offer our perspective on what underpins successful regional settlement. ●

## Introduction and overview of regional settlement in Australia

**Australia has a long and proud history in welcoming and supporting people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.** While many migrants and refugees settle in big cities, in recent years the Australian Government has been increasingly looking to regional areas to settle people.

As settlement providers and practitioners with extensive experience in rural and regional areas of NSW, the regional providers of the NSP have a unique perspective into the settlement of newly arrived people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in regional communities. We know that settlement takes time, resources, commitment and an understanding of local community dynamics.

From our experience on the ground, we also know that what defines regional areas and distinguishes them from metropolitan areas is not always clear. In fact, what defines regional areas has changed over the years, and this has an impact on how settlement services are delivered.



Generally speaking, regional and rural areas have bigger geographical distances, sparse infrastructure and less accessibility to public transport. As a result, there are often resource challenges and inadequate funding to support the number of clients and their needs, meaning there is more pressure on settlement workers in regional areas. On average, settlement workers in regional areas spend more time with clients and have a higher number of sessions per client. They have to manage this workload with fewer resources and far fewer mainstream services to which they can refer clients in their service area.

In addition, while there is a range of Federal and State government departments that support work with multicultural communities in regional areas – and some that fund targeted multicultural positions – beyond the large regional refugee settlement regions there are less likely to be any targeted multicultural positions in government or community agencies. For example, the Department of Communities and Justice Multicultural Youth Worker position in Newcastle is one person, two days a week.

These characteristics are common in rural and regional areas but also very present in parts of the Nepean Region, where NSP provider Nepean Multicultural Access (NMA) is based. For example, some of the Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the Nepean Region have a combination of metropolitan and very rural areas, where the infrastructure, geographical distances and available resources put them on par with areas usually defined as “regional”.

Despite the challenges posed by a regional setting, the settlement of refugees and migrants in regional Australia has much to offer both the regional host communities and those moving into regional areas through primary or secondary migration. Many migrants and refugees are from similar areas in their countries of origin or become attracted by the country lifestyle. Regional Australia offers them an attractive home, a warm welcome and a close-knit community. At the same time, many regional communities are genuinely interested in supporting people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and have been strong advocates of regional settlement because of the economic and social opportunities it brings about through growing the population, diversifying the regional economy

and enriching the already existing vibrant local culture. In regional NSW, successive waves of migration and refugee settlement have contributed to the social and economic fabric of many local communities.

In Newcastle following the Second World War, for example, many migrants from Europe and the Pacific settled in the region over a number of decades to work at the steelworks, making an important contribution to the prosperity and development of the Hunter region. This was similar for the Illawarra, where newly arrived migrants settled and worked in the iron and steel industry and the population increased from 63,000 in 1947 to 171,000 in 1976. The migrant men and women contributed hugely to the local industries and economic prosperity in the region, supported by settlement providers like Illawarra Multicultural Services.

More recently, in 1999, following the conflict in the Balkans, Singleton was designated as one of six Safe Havens in Australia and the Singleton Army Base temporarily housed (for approximately six months) 499 humanitarian entrants displaced by the war in Kosovo.

Over the past 20 years, there has been renewed interest by all tiers of government – Commonwealth, State and local – in revitalising regional areas and attracting skilled migrants and university students to settle in regional parts of the country, often as a pathway way to permanent residency. Migrants from China and India make up the largest segment of these visa categories – e.g., provisional business or investment visas.

The recent trends showed by State and Federal governments project a larger proportion of refugees and humanitarian entrants being settled in regional areas. For example, the Federal Government has set a target of 50 per cent of the referral of humanitarian entrants to regional Australia by mid-2022. Further, there are government-led initiatives to continue settlement of skilled migrants to regional areas. ●

# The NSW Settlement Partnership

**The NSW Settlement Partnership (NSP) was established in 2015 as an innovative model for the delivery of settlement services for refugees and migrants in NSW.** The NSP consists of 21 community organisations, led by Settlement Services International (SSI) and including 11 migrant resource centres and multicultural services, and nine ethno-specific and community organisations, all of which has a long and proud history of service delivery in their community or location.

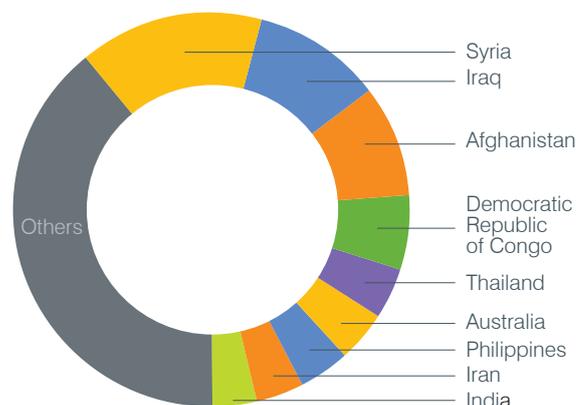
As part of the Department of Social Services' Settlement Services Program (SSP), the NSP delivered SSP services from 2015 to 2018. In line with the program change, from 2019 to 2022, the NSP provides the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) Program for client services and community capacity building streams.

As the regional partners of the NSP we have individually been delivering settlement service across a number of areas in regional NSW since the 1980s.

**We have and continue to offer support and services including:**

- Casework coordination and referral to mainstream services
- Community capacity building and development
- English conversation classes
- Multicultural women's groups
- Settlement-related information sessions, advice and advocacy
- Youth work, multicultural family support and counselling

From 2015 to 2020, the regional members of the NSP supported 4,106 individual clients from various countries of origin, including but not limited to Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Iran, Iraq, the Philippines, Syria and Thailand. The largest demographic during this period has been clients from Syria. The gender composition of clients supported is 2,417 female clients and 1,547 male clients. ●



67%



33%

## NSP Regional Partners



The 21 organisations who are partners in the NSP provide settlement services across a diverse footprint of NSW – from urban metropolitan areas to regional areas.

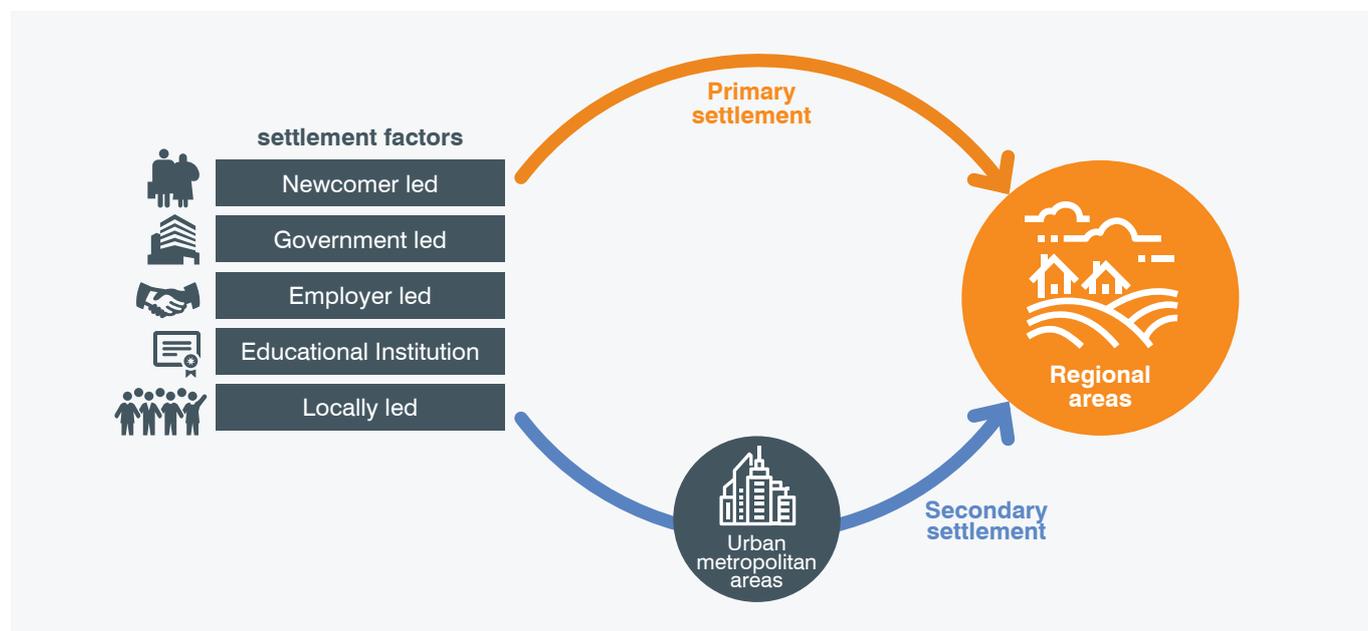
### NSP regional partners include:

- Connecting Community Services
- Illawarra Multicultural Services
- Manning Valley Neighbourhood Service
- Nepean Multicultural Access
- Northern Settlement Services

### We provide services in:

- Central Coast
- Far West and Orana (Dubbo)
- Illawarra
- Mid-North Coast
- New England and North West
- Newcastle, Lake Macquarie and Hunter Valley
- Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven (Nowra)
- Nepean Region –  
Hawkesbury, Penrith, Blue Mountains LGAs

## NSP Regional Partners



### How people of migrant and refugee backgrounds come to regional areas

The way in which people from migrant and refugee backgrounds come to live in regional areas is not one dimensional. It is rather a complex set of factors and variables.

The settlement journey in which a migrant, refugee or humanitarian entrant moves into a regional area can broadly be categorised as:

- **Primary settlement:**

Where the regional area is the first home in Australia for an individual or family.

- **Secondary settlement:**

Where an individual or family has initially gone elsewhere (a city, for example) and then moved to a regional area at a later date.

Both primary and secondary settlement is influenced by, and can be initiated or led by, a number of factors:

- **Government led:**

The primary driver for this is a targeted intervention via the creation of specific visa categories that provides for a pathway to permanent residence if a number of factors are adhered to by the applicant. Some of these are, for example, time in a regional area, meaningful contribution and employment. Some key examples are the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV), Skilled Regional (Provisional) Visa and Skilled: Regional Sponsored Visa

- **Newcomer led:**

The driver is either the migrant or person from refugee background making a choice of resettling in a regional area after arrival, or the decision is made by the person's sponsor, such as people arriving under some family or spouse visa categories.

- **Employer led:**

The driver is the prospective employer. In this instance, the employer identifies a need for workers in a regional area and seeks a workforce either through sponsorship as part of a migration program pathway, or through working with a range of stakeholders to address

## NSP Regional Partners

workforce needs in other ways, such as temporary migration. In some instances, there is a pathway to permanent residence.

- **Educational institution:**

The driver is an educational institution, mostly a university. The intent is to attract international students to their campus, some of whom later apply for permanent residency if their visa status allows it.

- **Locally led:**

The main drivers are members of the community, either in a regional community or local government area. Usually these groups are committed to supporting the settlement of people from refugee backgrounds and or newly arrived migrants to the region and work with other stakeholders to attract and retain a diverse population.

The settlement journey of migrants and refugees to regional areas is influenced by a number of factors, but it is important to remember that the journey does not end simply with movement into a regional town or community. Successful settlement and retention of migrants and refugees in regional Australia requires consideration of some of the unique challenges and dynamics of a regional setting. ●



## Nature of a regional setting

Life in a regional area broadly has the following common characteristics, which are important to consider in the context of regional settlement and service delivery planning and design.



- **Community connection:**

Regional communities largely offer a warm welcome and sense of belonging, which is extended to newcomers, assisting greatly in their settlement. However, our experience as settlement providers is that in some regional communities there are still community members who are resistant to, or unfamiliar with, migrants and refugees living in their community. This can provide extra challenges for new arrivals and must be considered when selecting regional locations for settlement. To optimise the settlement process, appropriate planning, infrastructure and resources must be part of the decision to settle people in a regional area. It is important to give consideration to mechanisms that enhance the host community's perception of new arrivals and build new connections between all parts of the community. For this to successfully occur there is a need to enhance community engagement activities in regional areas. For example, some of the NSP settlement providers have regularly delivered community building activities like Harmony Day. These types of activities are recognised in agreed work plans. Further, the lead consortium agency, Settlement Services International (SSI), has a Community Engagement team, which has focused its work in the Coffs Harbour and Armidale regions.



- **Support and networks:**

Regional areas do not see the formation of ethno-specific organisations but rather loose gatherings of community members from across different cultural groups. That is most likely due to smaller settlement numbers in the regional centres. Regional settlement service providers note that there are generally more links to multicultural and mainstream community services and communities than ethno-specific organisations. While this fosters community links, it can also mean that small and emerging communities lack leadership structures, cultural resources and advocacy mechanisms. This problem is further impacted by the lack of family support networks, thus requiring additional support and assistance to engage with the community.

## Nature of a regional setting



- **Distance and travel:**

Australia is a vast country and, for many regional and rural communities, distance, space and time are key considerations when providing settlement services. For example, in smaller communities there may be no high schools or specialised health services and, as a result, people have to commute long distances each day to access them, making life more challenging than usual for those settling in a new environment. This situation is aggravated by the limited transport available and associated costs. Therefore, it is important that infrastructure, including access to transport, is considered in settlement planning and service design and delivery.



- **Lack of culturally diverse and responsive service delivery:**

While state and federal governments have offices located in regional or rural areas, there can be limited multicultural staff to provide outreach and service support to individuals from refugee or migrant backgrounds; staff who are culturally competent or who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds themselves, with lived experience. This can place additional pressure on settlement workers as the only multicultural experts in their service area. For example, at Manning Valley Neighbourhood Service, there is only one Migrant Support Worker. ●

# Network of settlement support in a regional area

**The key to successful settlement is having adequate support. Australia has an acclaimed settlement services sector, which is a core component of successful regional settlement.**

Settlement programs work to harness and promote human capital, the strengths and capacities of the individual, and social and community belonging – the connections and networks that are vital to civic, social and economic participation and wellbeing.

Historically, the various forms of settlement services provide the first steps and necessary support for newly arrived humanitarian entrants and other migrants as they develop the knowledge and skills needed to become active and independent participants in the Australian society.

Today, settlement services encompass targeted initiatives funded by the Australian, state and territory governments. These are complemented by universal services such as access to publicly funded education and health services, and programs that assist with housing and employment, some of which may have multicultural workers in larger regional centres or in refugee settlement locations. In addition, local government plays a vital role in supporting settlement services, particularly in regional areas where there are smaller communities. Local councils can foster a welcoming environment for newcomers and bring community members together through initiatives and events such as LGA networks, Harmony Day, creating welcome zones and supporting emerging communities. They also partner with local businesses and various service providers on a number of local initiatives that migrants and refugees can participate in and benefit from.

It is important to note that there are a number of differences in service provision between sites that are designated regional settlement areas and those which are general settlement sites.

## Designated Regional Refugee Settlement Site

### 1. Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP):

The Australian Government provides humanitarian entrants to Australia with assistance on arrival and beyond through the HSP. The HSP assists humanitarian clients in their early settlement period (6-18 months) in Australia, with a focus on establishing a foundation for newcomers to become self-reliant and to thrive in Australia. Service providers offer intensive case management support, including but not limited to:

- Orientation
- Linking to relevant services
- Securing on arrival and longer-term accommodation

When clients have achieved the HSP outcomes, they are exited and referred to the SETS program.

### 2. Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) Program:

An early intervention program that equips and empowers individuals to address their identified settlement needs during the first five years after arrival.

The SETS program fills an important gap in the post-arrival period for eligible clients who do not have family and other community supports to rely on.

SETS provides newcomers with settlement-related information, advice, advocacy and assistance to access services. Community capacity building initiatives also enhance the skills of new and emerging community groups so they can in turn support their community/community members.

SETS aims to ensure longer-term positive settlement outcomes are achieved:

- Language services
- Employment
- Education and training
- Housing
- Health and wellbeing
- Civic participation
- Family and social support
- Justice

### 3. Complementary services:

There are a number of programs funded by the federal, state and territory governments that are complementary to settlement services, focusing on specific areas that further assist newly arrived people.

- **Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP):** provides a range of courses to build English proficiency for day-to-day living and joining the workforce. It is important to note that in regional areas delivery may be limited to only two days per week or is offered through a video link. Demand is the key to the response.
- **EALD (English as an Additional Language or Dialect):** The provision of teaching support in schools to assist children whose first language is not English. This important service is often limited in regional areas due to student numbers, affecting the level of support that can be offered. Largely, these services are delivered one-to-one.
- **Refugee Health Service:** On arrival health assessment and support for medical practitioners.
- **STARTTS:** A state-funded service that provides specialist counselling, community education and community development support to survivors of torture and trauma.

- **Translating and Interpreting Services (TIS):** This service is offered only as a telephone service in regional areas.
- **Department of Human Services:** Multicultural Services Office supports immediate registration for income assistance and provides targeted ongoing community education and assistance.

### 4. Local Government:

Alongside settlement services, mainstream providers and the federal government, local government is an important player in the network of settlement support available to migrants and refugees. Its support is particularly vital in regional areas. For example, Armidale Regional Council, Blue Mountains City Council, Dubbo Regional Council, Port Macquarie-Hastings Council and Wollongong City Council have all been declared Refugee Welcome Zones. Our regional settlement providers work in partnership with their local councils to support their clients in numerous ways; for example, MVNS has hosted information and citizenship sessions with the Mid-Coast Council while, in 2015, SSI and NSS worked together to support the settlement of hundreds of Ezidi refugees in Armidale through the HSP.

	Designated Refugee Settlement Site	General Regional Settlement Area
<b>Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP)</b>	✓	✗
<b>Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS)</b>	✓	✓
<b>Complementary Services:</b>	•	•
● Adult Migration English Program (AMEP)	✓	✓
● English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD)	✓	✗
● Refugee Health Service	✓	✗
● STARTTS	✓	✗
● Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)	✓	✓
● Department of Human Services – Multicultural Services Office (MSO)	✓	✓
<b>Local Government</b>	✓	✓

## General Regional Settlement Area

### 1. Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) Program

### 2. Complementary Services:

- **EALD (English as an Additional Language or Dialect)**
- **Translating and Interpreting Services (TIS)**
- **Department of Human Services:** Multicultural Services Office activity is usually delivered as a telephone or visiting service for non-refugee settlement locations, in community education and as a resource to service providers rather than directly engaging with the migrant community on their individual cases.

### 3. Local Government

## Pathways to permanency

As many temporary visa holders in regional areas are seeking a pathway to permanency, and the government is offering these pathways through a range of visa categories, withholding some services from these clients delays their capacity to engage positively and effectively with their local community. Leaving people vulnerable to exploitation through lack of settlement support is counter to the goals of long-term settlement.

**In regional areas there is a strong case to further widen the visa categories of people able to access settlement services and increase resources to support regional settlement.**

## Eligibility of settlement services

**The current mix of settlement services is provided mainly to eligible family and humanitarian stream migrants.**

Under SETS, services are available to refugees and humanitarian entrants but eligibility of family stream migrants is restricted to those with poor English language proficiency. Skilled permanent migrants, who make up two-thirds of the annual permanent intake, are generally ineligible for SETS, with the exception of regional areas where the spouse of a primary visa holder has low English proficiency.

SETS services are also restricted to provide services to eligible clients for the first five years of settlement in Australia. Broadly, we know that settlement is not a linear journey and services should be more agile so they can respond to client need by complexity and presentation and not only by length of time in Australia or visa class.

The strictness of such eligibility requirements contributes to a number of challenges that are experienced by newcomers and settlement providers in regional areas. Settlement services and refugee support groups are valuable sources of information and support, however often they are the only multicultural service provider in the region, are only funded part-time, and are working across multiple localities. This means that there is often limited generalist multicultural support beyond settlement, coupled with limited cultural competency of many local services. ●



## Settlement capacity and capability

Settlement capacity refers to the ability of a place to meet the needs of newcomers in the community. This includes the availability of housing, employment, health and education services.

As settlement providers we provide support to address these ongoing and immediate needs of refugees. However, there is little funding available for engaging with communities and building relationships between locals and newcomers. Community belonging and social cohesion are key ingredients to successful regional settlement and as settlement service providers we believe that more can and should be done to support local communities in fostering a welcoming environment for migrants and refugees and facilitating integration and cultural diversity in regional settlement areas.



## Specialised settlement services

Although community engagement and social cohesion are important, there is no substitute for the specialised settlement services and expertise that settlement providers are able to offer clients. Strong, adequately funded and resourced settlement services, including individualised client services – case management, advocacy, referrals and working directly with clients to support great outcomes in areas such as employment, education and training, housing, transport, and English language acquisition – can help newly arrived people to gain confidence and become self-reliant in a new and unfamiliar environment. Providing these kinds of services also ensures that there is less burden on the community, and prevents an over-reliance on community goodwill.

# The role of the settlement worker

The role of a settlement worker is generally consistent across urban and regional areas:

- To provide effective case management, group work and referral support to clients in the broad settlement domains of employment, education, English language support, health and wellbeing, transport, family and social support and justice.
- To strengthen relationships with other settlement and mainstream services in local areas.
- To conduct community consultations to discuss issues, needs and challenges affecting the settlement and integration of specific cohorts.
- To empower new and emerging community groups and organisations to support their specific communities. Support may include development of leadership and governance skills, linkages to the broader community, interaction with government and local stakeholders, and access to resources and facilities.

**“Being a migrant settlement worker in Taree can be challenging, but it is also very rewarding. My job requires me to be both innovative and flexible, as I am involved in all operational areas from case management, community development and reporting through to networking and collaborating with other services. The clients are extremely diverse in their nationalities, backgrounds and needs, and I feel fortunate to be the focal point in their settlement journey. Being part of a smaller community, I also feel quite close to my clients, and it is wonderful to see them grow and thrive in the community.”**

Jane O’Dwyer,  
Migrant Settlement Project Worker,  
Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services

However, in regional areas, there are a number of key divergences:

- **Servicing outside the client group:**  
The settlement service provision eligibility criteria is narrow compared to the actual reality and evident needs of people from refugee and migrant backgrounds settling in regional areas. The existence of temporary skilled visa, SHEV holders and asylum seekers in these regions places added pressure on service providers, whose service provision is limited by eligibility criteria identifying the target groups to benefit from support and assistance. In the absence of generalist multicultural support positions able to support these groups of new settlers, it often falls onto the settlement services to support them. Further, there is an expectation from local service providers that settlement providers respond to the needs of all multicultural clients, placing pressure on settlement services to assist because there is “no-one else”.
- **Cultural consultant:**  
The lack of generalist multicultural support beyond settlement means that settlement providers are often called on by the community and other services to provide advice in working with clients from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Settlement providers are often called on to support mainstream providers with what questions to ask, issues to be aware of, cultural sensitivities and how to communicate with clients, and how to use translating and interpreting services. Through the nature of the work, settlement providers support local mainstream agencies to be more responsive to our client group. This is a role of extreme importance in regional areas, but is often not recognised by mainstream agencies.
- **Partnerships are key to providing services in regional areas:**  
In many regional areas, regional settlement workers work part-time or are sole workers, covering broad geographical areas. There is strength in collaboration, where partnerships with local communities and services are central to providing services and support.



## Effects of drought, bushfires and coronavirus in regional migrant and refugee communities

The effects of drought on regional communities across large parts of rural New South Wales have been severe. Mainstream, Indigenous and multicultural communities living in these regions have experienced hardship in terms of job loss with diminishing need for unskilled labour, lack of reliable income, and increasing cost of general living expenses.

Drought further impacts local economies by destabilising aspects such as the availability of rental accommodation, access to assistance from charitable organisations, and redirection of funding that would usually be put toward developing unity and diversity into emergency funding packages for local producers, small business and essential services.

Drought stricken areas have a much higher risk of natural disasters and crisis such bush fires, water shortages and land movement. What this means for local multicultural communities is that there is an increasing need to educate and inform these communities around responsible water and resource management, how to access emergency services (language and cultural) and what options are available to them as individuals and communities to better cope with the increasing pressure of living in a drought-stricken community. Understanding water restrictions and the fines (sometimes sizable) that result from excess water usage is an emerging issue in local communities, for example in the New England Region. All communities are dealing with multiple barriers due to the effects of drought, bushfires and the global pandemic, but multicultural communities face additional barriers such as lack of access to information and support due to language, few social networks and connections. For example, in the

New England Region, messaging about water restrictions posted on Facebook by the local council was in English.

In addition to drought, regional areas, including our service areas in the Mid-North Coast and Hunter regions, experienced one of the worst and most prolonged bushfire seasons on record, beginning in September 2019 and lasting until at least March 2020. The bushfires caused the deaths of 33 people, devastated wildlife, destroyed people's homes and had severe economic and health impacts. For migrant, refugee and multicultural communities in particular, lack of access to in-language information proved to be a huge barrier. At various points there was no electricity or internet, leaving the radio as the only way to broadcast important public messaging, but the information was often in English only.

Adding to the already devastating impact of both ongoing drought and raging bushfires, the coronavirus pandemic has had a huge impact on how service providers deliver services like casework, which has moved online, while group sessions have mostly been stopped on account of the need to practise social distancing.

Some of the key challenges posed by the pandemic for communities living in both regional and urban areas have been:

- Lack of access to crucial, in-language public health messaging
- Need to improve digital literacy and accessible internet as most services have moved online
- The impact on families and children who may be experiencing spikes in domestic and family violence (DFV) because they are unable to leave their homes

## Settlement learnings

### Education and training

#### Why is it important?

**Access to and linkages with education and training pathways are a critical component a person's settlement journey.**

#### What underpins successful regional settlement in this area?

- Access to English language education to support work readiness.
- Locally available Adult Migrant English Program classes.
- Availability of TAFE and university courses and other training institutions.
- English language workshops and conversation classes to facilitate use and practice.
- Support in schools for children and young people.
- Transport provided to support access on weekdays and evenings.

#### Challenges to be managed

- AMEP classes are subject to class size and visa restrictions. For regional areas with high migrant populations, many people may not be eligible.
- Many newcomers may have qualifications, but they are not formally recognised in Australia. The cost of getting qualifications recognised is very expensive.
- Many newcomers have restricted access to services due to their visa status.

## Case study

In 2017, Ravinder arrived in Australia on a **Temporary Spouse Visa**. She enjoyed attending the local AMEP classes in Dubbo, where her English began to improve and she gained more confidence and developed social networks.

To move towards her employment goals, she attempted get her qualifications from India recognised in Australia but was unable to pay the fee. She then began looking for short courses at University, TAFE and other educational institutions to re-train. However, she found that, with her temporary visa, the commercial fee that was required was too expensive.

Ravinder found herself frustrated and lacking in motivation for her job prospects. Education is important for her and her sense of self, as she knows that having her skills recognised, and gaining training here in Australia, will lead her to better employment prospects.

# Settlement learnings

## Employment

### Why is it important?

**Employment fosters empowerment, a sense of belonging and opportunities to improve quality of life.**

Many newcomers will be able to find successful and meaningful employment in regional areas, with regional communities offering a high number of employment opportunities. However, the nature of employment opportunities differs to that in urban areas.

### What underpins successful regional settlement in this area?

- Understanding the local employment job market and how to access opportunities.
- Job readiness support and assistance.
- A level of workplace English proficiency.
- Access to independent transport and the opportunity to acquire a driver's license.
- Pathways and opportunities to access education and training, to reskill if required.
- Employers interested in and committed to engaging people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

### Challenges to be managed

- The kind of jobs available might differ in nature and type from the opportunities available in urban areas; for example, there would be fewer white-collar jobs and more labour-intensive jobs in regional areas.
- Access to JobActive services as a migrant is predominately voluntary, which has little servicing.
- Cultural competency for funded employment services and employers.
- Underemployment and inability to match qualifications with opportunities and availability of employment (number of hours, type of employment).
- Lack of skill recognition and expenses associated with having skills recognised or retraining.
- Citizenship status restricts access to some positions.

## Case Study

**Ahamed and his wife Memment are clients of Connecting Communities Services in Dubbo. They arrived to Australia from Abu Dhabi in January 2020.**

Both are originally from Egypt. He is an engineer with two Master's degrees and a PhD, while his wife has a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Arts, specialised in digital graphics design. Their English is quite good and does not pose a problem in finding a job or transport. For this region, both are overqualified and some employers feel threatened by their qualifications and experience, which has been quite frustrating for both Ahamed and Memment. Also, for the type of visa there are on in Australia, they cannot access the services of any job agencies as they are not receiving Centrelink payments.

The couple were not advised about the difficulties of gaining employment in their field, and that there are more lower-skilled jobs available than those which they are qualified for. With the onset of coronavirus in March 2020, they were in a similar situation to many other newly arrived people and people from CALD backgrounds who could not access JobSeeker payments due to their visa. Many CALD community members and new arrivals are still looking for work, while those who were employed have also been affected through reduced hours or losing their jobs altogether.

# Settlement learnings

## Health and wellbeing

### Why is it important?

**Successful settlement outcomes can only be achieved if a person's health and wellbeing needs are realised.**

Many people from refugee backgrounds, in particular, have specialised health care needs that necessitate access to GPs and specialised health providers, and for these services to be culturally responsive.

### What underpins successful regional settlement in this area?

- Local health services and practitioners having experience and training to work with people from refugee backgrounds, tailoring their services to support client needs, and/or increased awareness of specialised services and referral pathways.
- General practitioners prepared to bulk bill for SETS clients.
- Falling within a specialist health services (STARTTS, Refugee Health and Transcultural Mental Health) outreach area, where they promote themselves among local/regional providers.
- Hospitals are in reasonable proximity, or accessible by transport.
- Partnerships between SETS providers and specialists/general providers.
- Information sessions about health issues and how to access services provided to clients, with language support.
- Medical practitioners and services utilising the Australian Government's free interpreting service to provide support in language.

### Challenges to be managed

- Lack of culturally responsive universal health services.
- Distance to travel to access specialist support services.
- Lack of use or understanding of interpreter and language services by GPs.
- Understanding and appreciation of cultural competency for the culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) sector.
- Allied Health service access to interpreter and language services.
- Transport and access to public and independent transport – e.g., in Armidale there currently is no bus that stops at the local hospital.
- No government sponsored and or funded transport options. Many are private providers.

# Health and wellbeing Case Study

**Breaking Barriers Bringing Understanding (3BU) Project** is a 2015 initiative of Nepean Multicultural Access Inc. (NMA). The project studied the mental health perspectives and barriers to access for CALD communities in the Penrith, Hawkesbury, Blue Mountains and Lithgow LGAs.

The findings found a significant presence of mental health issues among community participants. Depression and anxiety were the most common mental health issues in relation to migration and the resettlement experience.

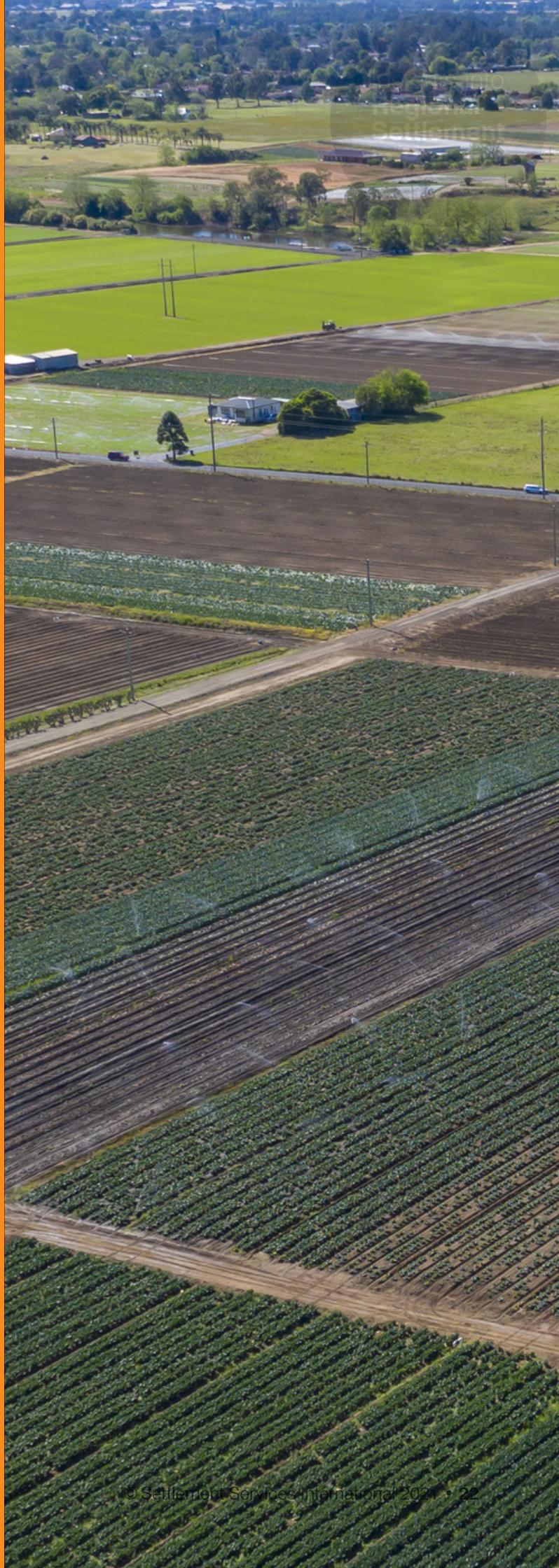
The key barriers to access for clients included lack of information about mental health service providers, language barriers, cost of mental health services, level of cultural competency, lack or poor use of interpreters, lack of CALD-focused performance indicators and accountability standards. The lack of outreach mental health services and a lack of coordination between the services were identified as other barriers at the service level.

Kay is a Thai woman who arrived in Australia on a spousal visa. Kay is married to a Maltese man and lived on a farm with him, his in-laws, and her young daughter. She was struggling with breastfeeding and contributing to the household. As a result she was caught in a family dynamic that was damaging to her mental health.

Kay's husband knew of the local SETS provider, NMA, and sought help. Through working with her case worker, Kay was referred to the local Women's Health Service and Transcultural Mental Health. She was diagnosed with post-natal depression. Kay received much-needed medical support and care, but her family's limited understanding delayed her recovery.

A broader effort has since been made to deliver information sessions and talks on mental health and ageing to the Maltese community and other CALD communities in the area to support broader cultural understanding and support.

*"In my country no one had heard of word depression. Everyone had problems and you tried to fix them in the best way you could."* – Kay, SETS client.



# Settlement learnings

## Housing

### Why is it important?

**Access to safe, affordable, secure housing is crucial to supporting the settlement of newcomers and directly impacts the achievement of settlement outcomes such as health and wellbeing, education and training, employment and building social connections.** This is particularly the case for many women who are at risk and experience domestic and family violence (DFV).

### What underpins successful regional settlement in this area?

- Relationships with local real estate agencies, and providing education, capacity building and support to facilitate rental opportunities and appropriate, culturally responsive engagement with multicultural communities.
- Information about available services and eligibility requirements that is readily available and updated.
- Training and education for newcomer communities regarding tenancy rights and responsibilities.
- Advocacy skills as clients may have added barriers with visa subclass issues and limited understanding of the system and requirements.

### Challenges to be managed

- Lack of rental history in Australia for newcomers can be a barrier to securing housing. Equally, in cases of domestic and family violence (DFV), it is common for female clients to have had their previous tenancy or home ownership in their husband's name.
- Unstable or low income, making accommodation unaffordable.
- Ineligibility for social housing due to visa subclass. For example, temporary partner visas.
- Lack of understanding of what is required to be eligible for services – e.g., a record of rental houses looked at or applied for, minimum amount of finances in the bank.
- High demand for low rental accommodation relative to availability.
- Housing for large families, as owners may be concerned that bigger families cause more damage to properties.
- Lack of understanding on how different Australian homes may operate and need for education and support – i.e., gas, electrical heating, running water.

## Housing

### Case Study

**Partnership and collaboration are core components to supporting clients with their settlement needs in regional areas.**

Elena is a 45-year-old woman from the Philippines. She arrived in Australia in 2015 with her 15-year-old son. She experienced DFV and left her home in 2018, becoming homeless.

Elena approached Community Housing and New Horizons but struggled to access support as they did not have the capacity to support her in gathering the required documents and keeping appointments.

Manning Valley Neighbourhood Centre, the local SETS provider, over the following 12 months supported Elena to stay engaged with Community Housing and meet and understand its requirements – e.g., maintaining a rental diary, understanding the rental market and appropriate price points, eligibility for temporary accommodation, gathering documents for Centrelink (special benefit) and contributing to some temporary accommodation costs.

During this time, Elena lived mainly in her car, while her son remained at home. Elena was unable to apply for Newstart, due to the waiting period for newly arrived persons. Elena's mental health deteriorated substantially.

Community Housing was eventually able to offer Elena a one-bedroom unit in transition housing. However, as she wanted her son to move in with her, she needed a two-bedroom unit, which was unavailable. Elena applied for some rental properties but was unsuccessful due to her low income.

Community Housing linked Elena with the outreach DV service, and Elena moved into the local women's refuge. She secured a tiny bedsit tenancy in May 2019.



# Settlement learnings

## Transport

### Why is it important?

**Access to regular and affordable transport facilitates freedom of movement, empowerment and ownership of a person's settlement journey, and is important to achieving settlement outcomes of social participation, economic wellbeing, independence, personal wellbeing and community connectedness.**

### What underpins successful regional settlement in this area?

- Education institutions and employers of newcomers providing transport to support clients in accessing services and opportunities.
- Education and awareness raising for clients, particularly women who are on temporary partner visas who have a driver's licence in their own country and are not aware they can drive on this licence (if it is translated into English) until three months after being granted a permanent visa.
- Education/learning opportunities to assist clients to pass their driver knowledge test and practical test.
- Advocacy to assist clients to access interpreting services at the driver knowledge test stage.

### Challenges to be managed

- Public transport is more limited in regional areas, and poor public transport can limit accessibility in and around the community. This often means that individuals must rely on themselves, others or private options such as taxis that are unaffordable.
- Relying on others affects independence, capacity to work and participation in social and community activities. It also sets up a dependent relationship with a partner or other supports.
- For women it is important to have independence to avoid being placed in a vulnerable position and become socially isolated.
- Limited transport can impact on an individual's ability to access services or alternatively place additional load on services that must provide outreach services to ensure the client receives the service.
- Supporting clients with transport is also linked to additional workers or program costs.
- Sometimes the barrier to driving for women is a DFV relationship. This can be difficult for workers to navigate.

## Transport Case Study

**Raphael, 38, arrived in Australia from Uruguay in March 2017 on a permanent partner visa.** Raphael registered as a SETS client with Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services (MVNS) in September 2017, when he was assisted with housing after he and his wife became homeless.

In January 2018 Raphael was successful in getting a job at the local meat works, approximately 15 kilometres from his home. Due to the hours of work and a limited bus service he could not use the local bus service to get to and from work. Unfortunately, arranging lifts from another worker was not consistent. Due to the inaccessibility of transport, he quit his job within the next couple of weeks and subsequently struggled with gaining employment. It was difficult for him to seek employment being limited to walking and unable to afford taxis.

In February 2018, Raphael was referred to a water safety program to improve his swimming skills and mental health. However, the program was difficult to access without a driver's license or car. The local bus service did not run late enough for him to attend at the scheduled time and the swimming centre was a 45-minute walk from his home. Thankfully, funding was available for him and another attendee to catch a taxi there and back. The program was very beneficial for him as he not only learned water safety skills but also developed more social skills through his interactions with others in the program. Thus, in 2019 he enrolled in another water safety program, but this time there was no funding for a taxi. With difficulty getting to and from the centre, he was only able to attend two out of the seven lessons.



# Settlement learnings

## Community welcome

### Why is it important?

**Regional communities across Australia have a long history of welcoming many people from around the world.**

The atmosphere of many regional communities *“treats everyone like one big family and where a great sense of community exists, and this is extended to the multicultural community as well ... When help is needed, the community is quick to roll their sleeves to assist with compassion and humanity.”*

– SETS Settlement Worker, Northern Settlement Services (NSS)

### What underpins successful regional settlement in this area?

- Employment opportunities mean that workplaces are places of engagement with others in the local community.
- Presence of “links” such as extended family or other community members from country of origin.
- Different church denominations available for people to connect with. For example, many of the Filipinos are Catholic and congregate there; the Karen have strong Baptist connections from their time in refugee camps.
- Links and engagement with the local mainstream community through schools, sport, local clubs, churches and neighbourhood activities helps provide a place to meet other people and build understanding while building relationships.

### Challenges to be managed

- **Racial Discrimination:** Experiences of discrimination against people based on colour and/or countries where they come from.
- **Lack of exposure to migrant or refugee communities:** Due to the smaller numbers of multicultural community members, many people have not had much contact with or knowledge of different cultures, religions or life experiences which migrant and refugee communities bring. Stereotypes or misconceptions can thrive in this context.
- **Employment:** Client groups are mostly “confined” in the meatworks with limited upscaling in terms of career. Overseas qualifications are not recognised in Australia and the process of accreditation is expensive, tedious and arduous.
- **Government policies:** Need to promote better access to services; first home buyers grant extended when buying a pre-owned home opens up fast resettlement of those migrants and refugees wanting to move to the bush; minimise bureaucratic red tape for skilled migrants in order to maximise their employment opportunities.

## Community welcome

# Case Study

Like other regional communities, Tamworth's multicultural community does not have a large population of any particular ethnic group. However, the Filipino community has formally incorporated as an organisation. Tamworth is a bustling city of more than 40,000 people but with a laidback rural lifestyle and it is very family friendly. It has a strong sense of safety and security where families find employment opportunities, good schools, medical, sporting and other facilities while enjoying a lifestyle that is not as hectic as Sydney or Newcastle.

Engaging with the community around you is the key to feeling truly "at home" where you live. This is why the Northern Settlement Services (NSS) has been organising a team to participate in Clean Up Australia Day in Tamworth, since 2016.

In March 2016, NSS collaborated with the Filipino Association of Tamworth (FIAT) with many of the latter's members coming for the clean-up. In total, 45 Filipinos and a few Burmese (five Karen and two Rohingya) met up at the Bryan Martin Park to pick up litter, clean the ceilings of the gents and ladies toilets and scrub the barbecue grills. Kids and mums also cleaned and wiped the toys in the children's playground.

The following year, 72 people came with rakes, grabber arms, whipper snippers and gloves. Young and old wasted no time in picking up all types of rubbish. A "cooking crew" prepared an Aussie style breakfast with eggs, sausages and bacon as energy boosters for participants when they finished. It was a proud moment for all, giving quality time to clean up and beautify a park in Tamworth.

In 2018 and 2019, members of the Karen community again participated in the clean-up. NBN TV News interviewed a member of the group and took photos and filmed them working. One of the Karen gentlemen interviewed said, "I like to contribute my time and energy to this community. I love this community, by the way."

## Conclusion and recommendations

**Successful regional settlement depends on a number of factors, but key among them are adequate funding for settlement services, culturally responsive service delivery (particularly in mainstream services), more funding for community engagement and development and the presence of strong infrastructure and essential services.**

As settlement support workers with experience in metropolitan and regional NSW, we understand that the role of settlement workers is more or less consistent across locations. However, due to the nature of a regional setting, there are a number of additional challenges that regional settlement workers as well as migrant and refugee communities in regional areas have to contend with.

Settlement workers in regional areas work under more pressure because they have fewer resources and funding, as well as fewer mainstream services to which they can refer clients in their service area. In addition, regional areas are characterised by large geographic distances and often there is more travel required but less access to public transport for clients to access services.

Adding to the above challenges, regional settlement workers are often called upon to act as “cultural consultants” for mainstream agencies. This is because of the lack of funded multicultural service delivery in regional areas of the country. Thus, it often falls on us to assist mainstream services to be more culturally responsive in order to meet the needs of our clients and even other clients who we are not funded to support under the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) eligibility criteria. The work we do in advising mainstream services and helping to make them more culturally responsive and competent tends to be under-recognised, but more funding is badly needed in this area.

More funding is also needed for community capacity building, including community engagement activities that foster harmony and social cohesion between the host communities and people of migrant and refugee backgrounds settling in regional areas – e.g., through events like Harmony Day.

We also believe that partnerships are key to strengthening the delivery of settlement services in regional areas. Enhancing collaboration and partnerships with local services, councils, community organisations and even research institutes or universities, would go a long way in bolstering settlement service delivery – e.g., by providing a clearer picture of the needs and funding required to support migrant and refugee populations in regional areas. We recommend partnering with a university, such as the University of New England or Wollongong University, or research organisation, to further explore the issues we have raised in this paper.

Finally, many regional settlement workers are employed part-time, or work alone and cover vast distances. Because of this, it is vital for settlement workers in regional areas to be able to build professional networks to facilitate learning and professional development. We recommend that more funding be allocated for the training and capacity building of regional settlement workers. ●





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