

SUBMISSION

TO THE

DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION & MULTICULTURAL  
AFFAIRS

ON THE

REVIEW OF MATERIAL ASSISTANCE TO  
HUMANITARIAN PROGRAM ENTRANTS

BY THE

YOUTH AFFAIRS NETWORK OF QUEENSLAND  
&  
NESB YOUTH ISSUES NETWORK

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## ABOUT YANQ & NESBYIN

The Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ) Inc is the *peak* community youth affairs organisation in Queensland. Representing approximately 400 individuals and organisations from Queensland's youth sector, we promote the interests and well being of young people across the state. YANQ advocates for and with young people, especially disadvantaged young people, to government and the community. Further, YANQ encourages and participates in the development of policies, programs and projects that are responsive to the needs of young people.

YANQ also recognises and acts to promote and support cultural diversity in Queensland. As such, YANQ in collaboration with the NESB Youth Issues Network (NESBYIN), have continued to sustain the *NESB Policy and Network Officer* project position for the previous four years. The NESB Policy and Network Officer seeks to facilitate effective responses to issues as they relate to NESB young people in Queensland. NESBYIN is an issues based Network comprising of 130 individual and organisational members across Queensland whom collectively and individually support YANQ and the NESB Policy and Network Officer position.

## INTRODUCTION

YANQ and NESBYIN welcome the opportunity to develop this submission in response to the *Review of Material Assistance to Humanitarian Program Entrants* (referred to herein as the Review).

However, the extent to which a detailed analysis can be made in this submission is limited by the short time available for organisations to prepare a response. YANQ and NESBYIN are membership driven Networks that consistently seek to represent the views of members. As such, YANQ and NESBYIN are concerned that the time available to prepare a response has limited the extent to which members have been consulted.

## AUSTRALIA'S INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS

On December 17<sup>th</sup> 1990, Australia ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC) with full support from all states and territories. CROC sets out international standards for the treatment of children and young people. Australia has a moral obligation to uphold these minimum standards. It is acknowledged that Australia's resettlement policies reflect the rights of the child and young people. It is also acknowledged that there are approximately 26 million refugees in 104 countries across the globe. More than half of these are children and young people (*UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1998*). Australia is therefore a key humanitarian assistance stakeholder.

Refugee and Humanitarian Settlement Policies must continue to be driven by the desire to uphold the rights and dignity of all people, irrespective of monetary constraints. Material assistance to refugee and humanitarian entrants into Australia is a critical component of the process of preserving the dignity of individuals during settlement. In this context, material assistance can be viewed as obligatory. This should not be overlooked, and is the premise upon which this submission has been developed by YANQ and NESBYIN.

## RESPONSE TO THE REVIEW

### *Types of assistance needed by Humanitarian Program entrants:*

YANO and NESBYN affirm the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) position that the immediate needs of humanitarian entrants on arrival into Australia include furnished accommodation, food, and emergency clothing. Additionally, humanitarian entrants should be guaranteed immediate access to professional interpreters upon arrival. This would ensure a comprehensive assessment of need could be undertaken upon arrival.

However, with the preservation of individual dignity in mind, DIMA should ensure that accommodation where practicably possible, is culturally appropriate and meets minimum community standards relating to quality. Additionally, the provision of emergency clothing should meet the climatically determined conditions of any particular location. Again, assurance that emergency clothing is appropriate to the individual and is of reasonable quality is essential. Members of YANO and NESBYN have raised concerns that the provision of emergency clothing is often sub-standard in quality and appropriateness because of limited choices and financial constraints.

Household formation after an initial period in Australia that includes securing longer term accommodation, bond/utilities connection, and the acquisition of furniture and basic household goods is an accurate interpretation of the types of material assistance required to assist individuals in the settlement process. Furthermore, this component of material assistance is the stage in settlement that will determine to a large degree, the mid-to-long-term safety, security and life-style of the individual. However, there are no guarantees that appropriate opportunities through material assistance will result in an individual having a descent life-style that is safe and secure. This is so because of the following:

- For many, securing affordable and appropriate longer term accommodation means interacting with the free market because there is a lack of public housing provision, or any other alternatives. YANO and NESBYN believe that the *free hand of the market* is not often sympathetic to the individual needs of refugee and humanitarian entrants. Furthermore, the Tenants' Union of Queensland Report *Distant Voices – Limited Choices, 1996*, that researched the needs and issues affecting the lives of NESB tenants, identified discrimination in the private rental market as an issue. Discrimination therefore presents barriers to accessing private rental accommodation in some instances. Other issues identified include NESB tenants having a lack of understanding relating to their rights, and language barriers preventing access to information. These factors are concerning elements that can have negative effects on settlement processes. It seems apparent that government needs to intervene either through increased levels of appropriate provision of public housing stock, or alternatively, through the development of partnerships with the private rental market that guarantee positive outcomes for tenants.

- Throughout the Review document it is made clear that existing resources available for the provision of material assistance will not be increased. However, nowhere in the Review document is there an analysis of how the impending Goods and Services Tax (GST) will affect these resources and costs of materials purchased either by service providers or humanitarian entrants. This is concerning because the GST will have negative impacts on people on low incomes in the private rental market through higher rental costs (*NSW Federation of Housing Associations Inc.*). Further, the NSW Federation of Housing Associations (1999: 1) state: “*Given that housing funds are shrinking, it looks as though the amount of money available to assist people in housing need will be even smaller with a*



should be determined around individual need. Criteria should be flexible enough to account for varying degrees of need due to location that may include public housing stock, public transport, projected rental market costs and availability, and general infrastructure.

Often Humanitarian Program entrants will be assessed overseas. The overseas assessor may not have extensive knowledge of a particular location where an entrant may be placed. They will also have difficulty monitoring changing local trends as they relate to affordability and availability of a range of goods and services. This form of assessment seems to be flawed in that an accurate interpretation of individual need seems to be susceptible to misunderstanding due to many unknown external factors. It is suggested that assessment take place upon arrival in Australia. Overseas assessors could undertake an initial assessment to determine issues such as immediate health and support needs.

***Does having a Proposer, or other Family Links in Australia, make a Difference, and how should/can the Circumstances of the Family/Proposer be taken into Consideration?:***

Commonwealth and state multicultural policies are built upon notions of individual rights and responsibilities (*Multicultural Australia: The Way Forward, 1997, and Multicultural Queensland Policy, 1998*). Individualism is explicitly related to independence rather dependence. The Review document reflects this in the principles that govern the provision of material assistance where it states that “*Services are designed to promote independence and build confidence of the entrant and to discourage dependency*. Non-eligibility to material assistance because a person has family connections and/or a proposer does not promote independence. However, we do recognise that in special circumstances there may be a need to enact a balance. If it is clear for example that an entrant will be staying with family long-term, then their needs may be slightly less based on the material goods a family home already has. Nevertheless, care must be taken not to place an additional burden on the family unit, which is where the balance must be enacted. Assessors should also be aware that quite often Humanitarian Program entrants may not disclose the full extent of their need because they fear this will jeopardise their entry into Australia.

***Principles that Govern the Provision of Material Assistance:***

YANQ and NESBYN suggest one additional principle to be included:

- Services should operate in a collaborative and coordinated manner.

***What Standards should be Applied to the Delivery of Services?:***

YANQ and NESBYN appreciate the inter-relationship that exists between need and resources and quality and quantity. However, YANQ and NESBYN do not agree that adjusting one necessarily has to be at the cost of another. Appropriate quantity and quality outcomes should be overarching objectives in the provision of material assistance and services. Compromising one of these at the expense of another is an economically driven decision, and not one based on principles of social justice. If the resources available prevent quality and quantity of outcomes based on current and projected need, then budget processes should address the issue to ensure that Humanitarian Program entrants receive the minimum material assistance and support necessary to facilitate a positive settlement process. The minimum levels of support and assistance should be fluid enough to meet changing environmental factors such as the impacts of a GST. Therefore, this suggests that a standard applied to the delivery of services should be the provision of an ongoing monitoring mechanism, to gauge external changes and influences that may impact on minimum levels of assistance and support required by an individual.

The Review document suggests that service standards need to be *measurable* in relation to outputs and not just inputs. Such service standards need to account for the difficulties in measuring certain outputs or intended outcomes. For example, how does a service quantify the

level of support it gives to an individual? This can be very difficult to achieve. Yet, it is often expected that service standards are quantifiable and measurable. This often has the effect of placing services under undue pressure to demonstrate certain outputs. This can then have the effect of reducing levels of service delivery through no apparent fault of the deliverer. It is also worth noting that there are differences between outputs and outcomes. These differences need to be reflected through accountability and reporting mechanisms.

### ***How do we Strike a Balance Between Promoting Independence and Providing the Level of Support that is Needed?:***

Assessors and CRSS workers should have the skills and/or opportunities to develop the skills, to negotiate levels of support with an individual based around shared agreements. The use of professional face to face interpreters is also necessary to ensure accurate assessment. Promoting independence as an intended outcome of the support process, and thus working toward this in partnership with the individual is recommended.

Further, a holistic approach to support would include shared agreement with family and proposer if relevant. Therefore, the agreed process and goals could be shared with the family. They then have an intrinsic stake and are therefore more likely to contribute through understanding what the needs of a family member are. Stresses that can lead to family breakdown include a lack of understanding about what may be affecting the life of a significant other. Assessors also need to be cognisant of underestimating the level of material assistance required by an individual who will be residing with their family or proposer. This has the potential to place the whole family unit under pressure. Decisions that are therefore likely to affect support further down the track should be recognised and acted upon as part of the recommended holistic approach to support.

Good support processes should also include relevant information being given to the individual, family and/or proposer on the full range of assistance available and factors to be aware of in settlement. This preventative approach is critical to the facilitation of positive settlement experiences.

### ***Community Involvement:***

YANQ and NESBYN recognise the extent and diversity of community involvement in processes as they relate to Humanitarian Program entrants. It is also recognised that community involvement is often prevented through a lack of resources from government. Nevertheless, it is suggested that community involvement be coordinated and collaborative. DIMA should provide the resources for this to occur effectively. Clearly, advocacy with and for refugee and humanitarian entrants who are young people is a critical element of a responsive and coordinated approach to meet the changing needs of individuals and groups. YANQ and NESBYN are concerned that DIMA's recent decision to cease continued funding for the *NESB Policy and Network Officer* position at YANQ will have adverse effects. This position is the only one of its kind in Queensland. This begs the question of who or what will identify and advocate the needs and issues affecting the lives of refugee young people?

### ***Private Sector Involvement:***

As mentioned above, it is YANQ and NESBYN's view that the private sector is not always sympathetic to the needs of individuals. Again, we would suggest that government either intervene through the development of appropriate partnerships with the private sector that have real and positive outcomes for Humanitarian Program entrants, or alternatively, by filling identified gaps themselves.

***Government Involvement:***

YANO and NESBYIN believe that the government has a moral and social obligation to ensure through any appropriate way possible, that the material, support and settlement needs of Humanitarian Program entrants are met. Decisions as they relate to this end should therefore be driven by social justice principles rather than economic rationalist ones. YANO and NESBYIN also believe that DIMA has a key role in coordinating government, community and private sector involvement. Initially, this should include coordinating and lobbying for whole-of-government responses to the needs and issues of Humanitarian Program entrants. DIMA should also ensure that other government department's obligations in this area are met. Information strategies across government on the Humanitarian Entry Program is suggested as a critical starting point. DIMA should also ensure that community sector organisations with a role in assisting Humanitarian Program entrants are adequately resourced to achieve this against suggested standards that are not compromised.

**CONCLUSION**

YANO and NESBYIN acknowledge the complexities of delivering material assistance to Humanitarian Program entrants. Further, we agree that the development of new ideas and strategies in this area should be done in partnership with Humanitarian Program entrants, communities and the community sector generally, especially peak organisations such as YANO. For this reason YANO and NESBYIN look forward to receiving a copy of the Review report and suggested recommendations that will then enable us to respond appropriately. Again, YANO and NESBYIN have welcomed the opportunity to provide input into the process of reviewing material assistance to Humanitarian entrants. Undoubtedly material assistance is a key factor in the settlement process. To this end we look forward to positive remedies to the issues broached in the Review document.



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