

Community Consultation – Migration Program
Department of Home Affairs
migration.policy@homeaffairs.gov.au

21 January 2021

Dear Sir / Madam

Submission to Department of Home Affairs 2020-2021 Migration Program

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on this program.

Community Centres SA (CCSA) is the peak body for 103 Community and Neighbourhood Centres in South Australia. We are part of a national network of more than 1,000 Centres. Over 35,000 people are in contact with Community Centres across South Australia every week, and more than 20,000 hours of volunteer labour are contributed to Centres weekly.

Our submission is based on our 50year history of working with local communities across the State; our understanding of the fundamental role social connectedness plays in creating resilient communities; and a community development, strengths-based approach to understand and respond to community priorities.

The submission outlines the key themes of our work with communities to demonstrate how the Community and Neighbourhood Centre sector can assist the Department to help strengthen Australia's Migration Program and ensure it delivers strong outcomes for all Australians over the long term.

COMMUNITY CENTRES AS INCLUSIVE PLACES FOR ALL

Our Centres are inclusive to all in the community. Centres understand the barriers that limit a person's ability to participate in everyday opportunities. Recent research into the experiences of Community Centre Users in South Australia found that Centres were unanimously viewed as places that bring people together to reduce social isolation and actively promote inclusion, providing physical, psychological and cultural safety.¹ Community Centres are responsive to the changing needs of their community. They work hard to develop trusted connections with community leaders from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds as a way of building connections with newly arrived communities. They work with communities to understand their priorities which informs their program planning and service delivery.

COMMUNITY CENTRES ADDRESSING LONELINESS AND WELLBEING

Places and opportunities for connection are increasingly important with loneliness reaching epidemic levels globally and in Australia.

Loneliness is the deep distress people experience when their social relationships are not the way they would like. It is a personal feeling of social isolationⁱⁱ. It presents a higher risk to premature mortality than smoking, alcohol consumption, obesity, flu, physical inactivity and poor air quality.ⁱⁱⁱ

Research shows that loneliness and its impacts can be addressed by opportunities for social connection. The groups we join contribute to our social identity, providing a sense of self and a sense of belonging as a collective^{iv}. This shared sense of identity from belonging to groups is a basis for both giving and receiving support, provides a sense of control and purpose, and builds resilience to deal with adversity.^v

Migrants and their families are especially at risk of experiencing social isolation and loneliness when arriving in a new country, often without established familial or social networks. Added cultural and/or language barriers can make it harder to build meaningful connections with others.

Community Centres have a significant role to play in the settlement experience of newly arrived migrants. They offer a culturally safe and welcoming place to build relationships with the local community.

Each Community and Neighbourhood Centre offers tailored programs and services that are relevant to their local community: life-skills programs; language, numeracy and digital literacy programs; education, employment and volunteering pathways; health and wellbeing programs, and; opportunities for life-long learning and social connection.

Community Centres are also a valuable hub for outreach services. They increase access to information and service delivery in the local community and provide networking opportunities for service providers to promote a collaborative response to local needs.

COMMUNITY CENTRES SUPPORTING VOLUNTEERING, LEARNING AND EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

Community Centres act as bridges to further education and employment in local communities across South Australia, delivering adult community education (ACE) courses that respond to the unique needs of individual participants and local employers.

ACE courses delivered by Community Centres embed the essential skills required for participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life:

- Foundation skills – English language, literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy incorporating listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
- Employability skills – collaboration, problem-solving, self-management, learning and information and communication technology.
- Tailored pre-employment industry knowledge and skills – designed to meet the needs of local employers.

Courses are delivered in small class sizes in a familiar community setting which support a successful adult learning experience. For many participants, undertaking Centre-based ACE

training is the first step toward further industry training, exploring volunteering opportunities, or commencing employment.

The Case Study below highlights the nature of support provided at Community Centres to provide pathways to opportunities for newly arrived migrants.

Ina's Story

"Coming to a community centres gives you a chance to discover different pathways for yourself."

Ina arrived in Adelaide in 2010 with her husband and infant daughter. They knew no-one else. When Ina's husband went to work, she would stay at home to care for their daughter. Ina learned that her local community centre had a play group and also ran an English class and other courses. Ina decided she wanted to "learn more, interact more, make friends, and build her confidence". Ina completed the Pathways to Children's Services Course, a number of job-readiness courses, and a Certificate 4 in Training and Assessment. With increased confidence, Ina started volunteering at her community centre. She planned a cultural day for the centre, bringing different communities together to share and celebrate their different cultures. This was very successful and led to Ina being offered short-term employment on an anti-racism project at the community centre which was funded by the local Council. Ina has continued to work following this, and now works as an English Language Tutor for the network of community centres in her local Council area.

"Thinking back, I didn't know anyone, and now I'm a part of everyone's journey here where they learn English but also connect with communities. I believe if I didn't go to my local community centre that day, I might not be who I am now."

Listen to Ina's story here: <https://www.communitycentressa.asn.au/about-us/stories-from-our-communities>

COMMUNITY CENTRES RISING ABOVE THE CHALLENGES OF COVID-19

The pandemic has shone a spotlight on the sector which has been at the heart of supporting local communities throughout COVID-19. Whilst adjusting operations to comply with Health Department directions, Community Centres have also worked quickly and tirelessly to build their digital capability to develop other avenues to connect with communities. Digital playgroup and story-telling, interactive language classes, yoga sessions, cooking lessons, counselling and social get-togethers have all become part of the new normal for Community Centre operations. Countless creative initiatives have been developed across the State, some very simple, but all very effective, in keeping communities connected and resilient throughout the restrictions and lockdowns. Over 60 nominations were received for this year's 2020 Loneliness Cure Awards Category of the SA Community Achievement Awards. This year's winner was the City of Marion network of Community Centres for their work in supporting the newly-arrived South Central American Community, working with the community to develop programs and activities based on community-identified priorities, and supporting individual members of the community to access volunteering opportunities with the City of Marion. Listen to the Award announcement here: <https://www.facebook.com/communitycentressa/videos/vb.183724741692597/213814360411603/?type=2&theater>

COMMUNITY CENTRES AND PLACE-BASED RESPONSE

Working with communities to understand and respond to local priorities is integral to the role of Community Centres in creating connected and resilient communities.

Centre Coordinators have extensive local knowledge about their community, identifying community priorities, strengths and opportunities in every-day practice through:

- evaluating the effectiveness of existing programs and activities
- day-to-day interaction with Centre participants
- involvement with local community groups, businesses, services and government
- wider community engagement at Centre-based events
- participation in local networks
- articles in local media, and
- community feedback on social media.

In addition to this knowledge, each community Centre undertakes regular a Community Needs Analysis to ensure they are hearing from all members of the community to inform Centre priorities and program planning. The sector uses a standard approach based on quantitative and qualitative data that:

- Compares the demographic profile of Centre-users with the demographic profile of their local communities to understand how their communities are changing, and to identify target groups in the community.
- Extensive community consultation, including targeted approaches to hear from members of the community that are under-represented amongst Centre users. This includes identifying and working with community leaders, including those from newly arrived migrant communities.
- Identifying local community assets and partners to ensure a coordinated response to local priorities.

The sector has developed it's own community needs analysis tool to support a systematic State-wide approach to understanding and responding to local priorities in partnership with community. The tool can be viewed here:

<https://www.communitycentressa.asn.au/capacitybuilding/community-needs-analysis>

Community Centres SA has current funding from the Department of Home Affairs to undertake an intensive community consultation and capacity-building process with the Naracoorte Community in February 2021. The underpinning aim is to harness the momentum that is growing in the town for a welcoming and inclusive space that creates opportunities for community connectedness between exiting residents and the growing number of newly arrived migrant workers and their families in the region. The town has a vision for a Community Centre that provides:

- A welcoming and culturally safe drop-in meeting place
- Social connection through a range of community-led programs, activities and events
- An outreach space for services to work in partnership as they learn and respond to the changing needs of the community.

The consultation will bring together local residents, community leaders from culturally diverse backgrounds, community groups, schools, churches, service providers, businesses and government. It will map out a way forward for the township to achieve their vision. It will also involve a creative process to transform the Town Hall into a welcoming, vibrant and inclusive POP-UP Community Centre for use over the coming months.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, our submission demonstrates the benefit to the Department that CCSA and the network of 103 Centres can support the Department for Home Affairs with the migration program planning process and future community consultation:

- DHA includes CCSA and any relevant local Community Centres in service provider briefings prior to the arrival of concentrated migrant communities to a particular metropolitan or regional area of South Australia to benefit from sector experience and local knowledge as an expert connector and collaborator in local communities.
- DHA consults with CCSA and any relevant local Community Centre to access current community needs analysis reports (or to undertake an up-to-date community needs analysis) to understand local priorities and assets in planning for the arrival of concentrated migrant communities to a particular metropolitan or regional area of South Australia.
- DHA consults with CCSA to undertake or assist with future community engagement where appropriate given CCSA and Centre Coordinators have expertise in undertaking creative community engagement that respects diversity in how people express themselves and wish to make their contribution. CCSA also has transferrable expertise in collating, analysing and reporting on data to inform government decision-making, developed through our long-standing working history with the Department of Innovation and Skills and the Department of Human Services.
- DHA works with CCSA to explore producing a resource to be included in any new arrival correspondence or settlement information pack, to promote CCSA as a key first contact for newly arrived migrants.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this process. Community Centres SA would like to be updated on the DHA Migration Planning Process and would welcome the opportunity to discuss the role of our sector in supporting this process further. Please contact me if you would like to discuss our submission in more detail.

Yours sincerely



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- ⁱ Mackenzie, C. Louth, J. & Goodwin-Smith, I. (June 2019). "I feel a sense of belonging here" – An investigation into the experiences of Community Centre users in South Australia, research report prepared by the Australian Alliance for Social Enterprise, University of South Australia for the South Australian Department of Human Services
- ⁱⁱ Psychweek.org.au. (2018). Australian Loneliness Report. [online] Available at: <https://psychweek.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Psychology-Week-2018-Australian-Loneliness-Report.pdf>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Holt-Lunstad, J. 2018, Public Lecture: Loneliness and the 21st Century Challenge, video recording Australian Red Cross, viewed 21 January 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EY6F2Va_Po8
- ^{iv} Haslam, S. (2018). 'Unlocking the social cure'. *the psychologist*. Vol.31, 28-31 [online] Available at <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-31/may-2018/unlocking-social-cure>
- ^v Haslam, S. (2018)

