

# Migrating from Settlement to Prosperity

An evaluation of SydWest's employability programs and services for recently arrived migrants and refugees in Blacktown and Mount Druitt, NSW



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## An evaluation of SydWest's employability programs and services for recently arrived migrants and refugees in Blacktown and Mount Druitt, NSW

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This is the final report delivered to SydWest Multicultural Services for a project conducted through Australian Catholic University's (ACU) Stakeholder Engaged Scholarship Unit (SESU). The author wishes to thank Clement Meru, Saurav Shrestha and Florrie Hessari of SydWest for their contribution to co-designing the project and recruiting participants, and Vivien Cinque, Caroline Allen and Jillian Cox of ACU for their support of the project.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

In recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' spiritual and cultural connection to Country and in continuing ACU's commitment to Reconciliation, the authors acknowledge the First Peoples and the Traditional Owners and custodians of the Country where ACU campuses are located.

We respectfully acknowledge Elders past and present and remember that they have passed on their wisdom to us in various ways. Let us hold this in trust as we work and serve our communities.

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## Executive Summary

### SydWest Multicultural Services' employability programs and services are crucial to the successful settlement of many recently arrived humanitarian entrants and other eligible migrants within the Outer Western Sydney region.

This evaluation of SydWest's employability programs and services is guided by the National Settlement Outcomes Standards (NSOS) (standard 2 'Employment'). Five key dimensions of the NSOS were adapted for the purposes of measuring the effectiveness of SydWest's employability programs and services. The evaluation framework consists of five key concepts outlined by the NSOS and an additional concept concerning data and evidence:

- Strengths-based approach
- Effective collaboration
- Experiencing Australian workplaces
- Careers counselling and support
- Reducing barriers to employment for women and young people
- Data and evidence

A range of stakeholders were consulted for the purposes of data collection to give their impressions and experiences of receiving employability programs and services, and of working for and with SydWest.

SydWest has developed and administered the following employability programs and services:

- Client intake and assessment
- Employment Pathway Program (EPP)
- Partnered programs and events
- School-to-Work Program
- Case work
- Unfunded informal initiatives

Further, the evaluation sought evidence for the general effectiveness of employability programs and services through client feedback.

### AIMS OF THE EVALUATION

1. Assess the general effectiveness of SydWest's employability programs and services
2. Determine the extent to which SydWest provides employability programs and services aligned with the NSOS for standard 2 'Employment'
3. Rate client satisfaction with SydWest's employability programs and services
4. Suggest how SydWest's employability programs and services can be improved
5. Understand the organisational, communal, and policy contexts in which SydWest's employability programs and services operate and how these enable or hinder employability effectiveness
6. Assess the current data protocols of SydWest relating to employability programs and services and discern the data needs for future benchmarking, monitoring, and decision making.

### RESULTS

This evaluation has found that SydWest's employability services are well organised and administered with a range of successful outcomes for clients leading to employment. SydWest's employability programs and services are highly effective across all standards assessed and provide the overwhelming majority of clients with a highly supportive, culturally sensitive, and empathic service environment. SydWest is innovative and shows determined initiative towards meeting clients' employability needs. SydWest has demonstrated numerous times that as a service they have gone well above and beyond their funded remit in servicing clients with employability programs and services due to an empathic approach and various kinds of repair work that makes up for inefficiencies, apathy, and discrimination from other agencies and employers.

Clients' employment needs and aspirations are complex, and SydWest administer and deliver employability services within a changing and complex employment environment. While the greater majority of SydWest clients are highly satisfied with SydWest's employability services, and many go onto secure employment, there exist some challenges for highly skilled/highly credentialed clients who have aspirations of resuming their former careers in Australia. Meeting this challenge effectively will require significant resources accomplished through an inter-agency approach.





Image provided by SydWest.

## ASSESSMENT OF AIMS

- AIM 1** SydWest's employability programs and services are highly effective.
- AIM 2** SydWest provides employability programs and services that are strongly aligned with the NSOS for standard 2 'Employment'.
- AIM 3** Client satisfaction with SydWest employability programs and services is very high.
- AIM 4** 10 recommendations derived from this evaluation to enhance, develop, and improve employability programs and services.
- AIM 5** SydWest provides employability programs and services within a communal organisational setting that can benefit from the development of an employment network.
- AIM 6** SydWest should review data protocols for employability programs and services to address any current gaps.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That as part of the EPP going forward, SydWest provides more specialist information that assists high skill/high credential clients to take steps towards previous qualification and experience recognition in Australia, and information around Australian industry standards and entry to professional occupations in accordance with client aspiration and previous qualifications and experience.
2. That SydWest develops a role for a dedicated employment and industry liaison officer who can represent SydWest and SydWest clients more effectively in partnered employability programs. The role can also further develop established partnered program events such as the Blacktown Business Breakfast/Lunch and Blacktown Employment Accelerator (BEA), but work on developing new and emerging partnerships.
3. That given their success, events such as the Blacktown Business Breakfast/Lunch and BEA become annual or biannual events. (It is acknowledged however that the staging of public events has not been possible due to the lockdowns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic over 2020 and 2021).
4. That an event like the Blacktown Business Breakfast/Lunch and BEA be considered to cater especially for high skilled/high credentialled clients, enabling assembling, engineering and construction companies, financial institutions, and medical and health departments and employers, universities, and industry peak bodies – amongst others – to meet clients to showcase skills and experience.
5. That SydWest works with TAFE NSW and other English language providers through an employability network to develop work-related English Language courses and teaching opportunities in addition to formal Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP).
6. That SydWest considers developing a formal program to assist clients to start a business with partners such as TAFE, Blacktown City Council, NSW State government, and Blacktown Chamber of Commerce. This program should consider searching and accessing seeding or starter grants for small business.
7. That SydWest records and develops informal unfunded initiatives that have been successful and seek to further develop them with external stakeholders, through an employment liaison officer, and client feedback.
8. That SydWest considers reviewing existing data and data protocols to identify data needs associated with employability programs and services and consider training staff in basic data collection and analysis. Other options might include partnering with a data collection agency or university to gain assistance with data needs. For the express needs of employability programs and services, a data collection model and protocol that builds yearly databases of clients, monitoring of employment programs and services, and evaluation data inclusive of a range of different methods such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups will provide SydWest with adequate benchmarks for reporting and decision making. Further, such methods should ensure that any data collection gives clear and consistent voice to client experience.
9. That SydWest creates a formal employment network in the Western Sydney area that meets regularly to identify opportunities for employment, training, and work placement for clients. The network should also be encouraged to discuss common goals for clients between agencies, barriers to achieving goals, and innovations around problem solving for employment. Clients should be represented in the network and given space to articulate needs and wants. The network should perform a strong advocacy role to help overcome discrimination.
10. That SydWest works in partnership to develop a plan through the employability network on how best to attempt assist high skilled/high credentialled clients achieve employability in their previous profession or related profession.



# 1. Introduction

SydWest Multicultural Services is a leading organisation for cultural diversity issues, responding to community needs and opportunities, located and active in four key locations<sup>i</sup> in outer Western Sydney, principally in the LGA of Blacktown, New South Wales. SydWest offers a range of services for clients that cater to the specific needs of community members throughout the life-course, from maternity services to aged care.

SydWest is a member of the NSW Settlement Partnership (NSP), a consortium of community organisations, delivering settlement services in agreed areas of NSW under the Department of Home Affairs Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program. Of the many settlement programs and services that SydWest offers its clients, those aimed at enhancing employability are amongst the most important. The economic participation of refugees and recently arrived migrants, commencing with employability, is fundamental to successful settlement, integration into the wider community, and to the fulfilment of personal potential.

This report presents the results of an evaluation study of SydWest's employability programs and services. Employability is one of the key settlement criteria established by State and Federal government for recently arrived refugees and migrants. In this report, employability is distinct from, however intimately related to, employment. The evaluation comes at a time of growing need for programs and services

aiding the economic participation of migrants and refugees in outer Western Sydney. Significant increases of recently arrived peoples from Iraq, Syria, and South-East Asia and an increasingly competitive and complex employment market in Australia have produced a service climate whereby SydWest has sought to reflect on how employability is achieved for clients through assessment of programs and services so as to continue to best serve their clients' needs. This includes the notion of economic and employment recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The evaluation was carried out under the auspices of Australian Catholic University's Stakeholder Engaged Scholarship Unit (SESU) in partnership with SydWest management and staff.

## BACKGROUND

Australia has a long history of migration consisting in diverse peoples seeking personal safety, political freedoms, and better economic opportunities. Australia's post World War II migration history is characterised by a great diversity of peoples from widely varying geographic and cultural origins in contrast to earlier migration periods in which most arrivals originated from Britain and Northern Europe.

Very recent migration patterns to Australia record people predominantly from the Global South<sup>ii</sup> who face numerous social, cultural, and economic challenges associated with settlement in their new home country. The very recent experiences of migration and settlement for many individuals and families from countries in the grip of geopolitical conflict and or economic crisis is challenging, complex, and often traumatic.

Contemporary Australia is a country of rapid social and economic change presenting specific complex challenges to successful settlement for those from cultural backgrounds and economic experiences radically different to those of mainstream Australia. The emergence, growing importance, and central role of agencies such as SydWest in the settlement journeys of many recently arrived peoples, represents how crucial agency services are in aiding integration, including economic participation through employment, into contemporary Australian society.

Despite the complexities and challenges of contemporary settlement, recently arrived refugees and migrants often make outstanding economic, social, and cultural contributions to nation building, economic growth, and to community

development. Agencies such as SydWest are fundamental to their flourishing in numerous ways, but crucially as a primary point of contact, connection, and navigation, between themselves and the web of institutions, regulations, and processes that comprise contemporary urban living in an advanced economy.

SydWest has offered multicultural and settlement services in outer Western Sydney for over thirty years. The service maintains a vital presence in the Blacktown and Mount Druitt communities servicing hundreds of recently arrived peoples from diverse cultural backgrounds, many with complex needs. Among those needs employability skills and knowledge are crucial, as other multicultural service agencies have stated emphatically: 'employment is the heart of successful settlement' (Footscray Community Legal Centre Employment Law Project 2014). The employability needs of recently arrived peoples accessing SydWest's services reflect varying background experiences in employment, education, skills, and proficiency in English, prior to arriving in Australia. The variation in client experience and present need has presented SydWest with some not inconsiderable challenges to the successful settlement goal of economic independence through employment.

<sup>i</sup> The evaluation focuses only on staff and clients from 2 of these 4 offices: Blacktown and Mount Druitt.

<sup>ii</sup> The Global South according to Dados and Connell (2012: 13) 'refers broadly to the regions of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania.' These regions are mostly '...low income and often politically and culturally marginalized...'

## 2. Blacktown LGA demographic and socio-economic profile

Using ABS census data, Table 2.1 provides an overview of the demographic and socio-economic profile of Blacktown LGA compared to New South Wales from a ten-year period: 2011 through to 2021.

The first thing to note about Blacktown is that it has grown significantly in the ten-year period to include nearly one hundred thousand new people who call Blacktown home. Blacktown LGA nearly doubles the state rate for language diversity at home, has risen over ten percent in language diversity in the home since 2011, is on average per person 5 years younger, and has a higher rate of younger people with families. This profile all relates to how SydWest is positioned in Blacktown and Mount Druitt and emphasises its need and central role in relation to assisting new arrivals in economic participation.



### ECONOMIC PRODUCTIVITY AND ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

SydWest's employability services are potentially effective in settlement outcomes not only in terms of community integration and the personal wellbeing of clients, but also through a reduction of the economic burden of State support through welfare, by preparing clients for employment. Through its employability programs and services, SydWest therefore contributes significantly to the economic productivity of Blacktown and Mount Druitt by helping to organise and prepare a reliable and skilled workforce.

According to the Refugee Council of Australia the economic contribution of migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants to Australia consists in 'expanding consumer markets for local goods, opening new markets, bringing in new skills, creating employment, and filling empty employment niches' (2010: 3). And despite short term costs of support, migrants and refugees such as those who are or have been clients of SydWest go on to make life long economic contributions to their communities.

As communities such as Blacktown and Mount Druitt continue to grow in terms of population and economic activity, so too do demand for skills in relevant industries and occupations in these communities. Consequently, SydWest's employability services and programs take on an increasingly vital and important role in the continued economic growth of this region of Western Sydney.

### BLACKTOWN LGA ECONOMIC GROWTH AND LABOUR MARKET CHALLENGES

According to Blacktown City Council's economic development strategy, Blacktown is considered a 'growth' city...rapidly growing in population and business activity' (Blacktown City Council, 2018: 3). The main industries include manufacturing, transport, postal, warehousing, construction, wholesale trade, retail trade, health care and social assistance, and education and training. Growth cities such as Blacktown are in need of increasing numbers of skilled workers to meet the labour demands associated with strong economic development.

According to the Local Jobs Plan for Sydney Greater West Employment Region, for which migrant and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) job seekers are a priority, three distinct challenges need to be met to take advantage of current and future economic growth:

- *'High levels of unmet demand for entry level workers in growth employment areas such as social assistance services (including aged and disability care), hospitality and retail.'*
- *'Known and predicted skills gaps in high value sectors characterised by projected growth, including construction, advanced manufacturing, scientific and technical services, health care and tertiary education.'*
- *'Significant pandemic employment impacts on migrants and refugees, both representing sizable job seeker cohorts within the ER (2022).'*

In summary, there exists a socio-economic environment in the Blacktown LGA that attests to the need for SydWest's employability programs and services to be of value to clients and potential employers through effective preparation of recently arrived migrants and refugees for employment. This need reflects the present increasing social and cultural diversity and associated settlement issues combined with the current and future economic growth and unmet labour needs of the region.

TABLE 2.1

BLACKTOWN LGA AND NSW DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE 2011 – 2021 (ABS CENSUS)								
POPULATION	BLACKTOWN 2011		NSW 2011		BLACKTOWN 2021		NSW 2021	
		301,099		6,917,658		396,776		8,072,163
LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH								
	Tagalog	4%	Arabic	2.7%	Tagalog	3.8%	Mandarin	3.4%
	Hindi	3.6%	Mandarin	2.0%	Hindi	4.4%	Arabic	2.8%
	Arabic	3.2%	Cantonese	2.0%	Arabic	2.9%	Cantonese	1.8%
	Punjabi	2.3%	Vietnamese	1.3%	Punjabi	5.2%	Vietnamese	1.5%
	Filipino	2.1%	Greek	1.3%	Filipino	2.3%	Greek	1.0%
HOUSEHOLDS WHERE 2 OR MORE LANGUAGES ARE SPOKEN AT HOME								
	41.3%		24.5%		53%		29.5%	
COUNTRY OF BIRTH								
AUSTRALIA	57%		68%		50.4%		65.4%	
OUTSIDE OF AUSTRALIA	43%		32%		49.6%		34.6%	
COUNTRY OF BIRTH OF BOTH PARENTS								
AUSTRALIA	35.4%		51%		23.9%		43.7%	
OUTSIDE OF AUSTRALIA	54.7%		36%		61.8%		39.4%	
MEDIAN WEEKLY HOUSEHOLD INCOME								
	\$1,388		\$1,237		\$2,107		\$1,829	
MEDIAN AGE								
	32		38		34		39	
FAMILY COMPOSITION								
COUPLE FAMILY WITH CHILDREN	53.5%		45.5%		56.2%		44.7%	
COUPLE FAMILY WITHOUT CHILDREN	24.5%		25.4%		25.6%		37.9%	
ONE PARENT FAMILY	19.5%		16.3%		16.5%		15.8%	

TABLE 2.2

THE MAIN COMMERCIAL SECTORS WHICH OPERATE WITHIN EACH LEVEL OF BUSINESS SIZE*		
BUSINESS SIZE (NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES)	NUMBER OF BUSINESSES	PREDOMINANT BUSINESS TYPE
+200	15	Agriculture (3), manufacturing (3), wholesale/retail (6), health (3)
20 – 199	499	Wholesale/retail (123), manufacturing (80), construction (73), accommodation/food (51)
5 – 19	1752	Wholesale/retail (426), construction (321), manufacturing (193), accommodation/food (168), healthcare/social assistance (141)
0 – 5	6,584	Construction (1659), wholesale/retail (875), professional (836), transport/postal/warehousing (665), administration (346), manufacturing (329)
Sole Trader	12,357	Transport/postal/warehousing (3067), construction (1944), rental/hire real estate (1282), professional (1143), wholesale/retail (1016)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21,207</b>	<b>Construction, transport/postal/warehousing, wholesale/retail, professional, manufacturing</b>

\* Reproduced from 'Economic Development Strategy and Service Delivery 2018 – 2021. Blacktown City Council'



### 3. Evaluation framework

#### SCOPE

The scope of this evaluation is guided by the employability programs and services offered by SydWest under the SETS – Client Services Program, and the National Settlement Framework (NSF) which promotes ‘employment’ as a key area of settlement for recently arrived migrants and refugees. The NSF considers ‘evaluation and review’ of services an important focus area associated with the SETS Client Services Program. The evaluation specifically pertains to the NSOS standard 2 ‘Employment’ whose aim is that ‘newly arrived people achieve positive employment outcomes, supported by services which are responsive, diverse, sustainable, and effective’ (Settlement Council of Australia 2020: 6). SydWest’s main responsibility as a service provider within the SETS program is to provide services that assist clients to be in a state of work readiness or employability. It is important to note that SydWest is not a job agency and therefore it has no responsibility to provide clients with employment<sup>iii</sup> directly or provide job placement services.

Employability, for the purposes of this evaluation, can be defined as *the state of general readiness and preparedness to successfully seek, apply for, be qualified for, and or be offered a paid position with or without the provision of programs leading to specific qualifications otherwise acquired through a registered training organisation, or qualification conferring institution such as a training or technical college or university.*

Employability, however, can vary depending on the aims and aspirations of clients towards jobs and careers, the availability of training and education, job availability, and the work history, qualifications, and capacity of clients to perform jobs at various skill levels, and the capacity of SydWest in terms

of budget and personnel to source, organise, and deliver programs to meet diverse client need. Further, employability relative to the work history and stated aspirations of some clients – especially those whose occupations required specialist skills and specific qualifications in their home countries – is complex to the point that entry into such professions in Australia is often subject to strict government and industry regulation often requiring substantial retraining at significant cost presenting a situation well beyond the capacity of SydWest to ably assist.

#### RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS AND TIMEFRAME

The evaluation is relevant to a select group of SydWest clients, staff, and partner or associate organisations that have participated in an employability program and or service as a student, trainer, facilitator, or worker. For practical purposes the evaluation sought to hear from current staff working in the area of employability programs and services and staff from partner or associated organisations who also worked in employability services in partnership with SydWest. A limited number of employers who have had experience with SydWest clients were also consulted. Relevant clients are those who have participated in one or more of SydWest’s employability services and or programs from 2019 to the present. SydWest’s clients are drawn from refugees and recently arrived migrants who have been living in Australia for between 0–5 years. SydWest draws clients predominantly from the Blacktown LGA, but also from other parts of outer Western Sydney such as Penrith. This evaluation includes experiences of the 2020

and 2021 lockdowns in Blacktown LGA due to the COVID-19 pandemic but given the exceptional circumstances of those times and severe interruption of programs and services, there is not a strong focus on any negative impact and value to programs and services over that time-period.

#### STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES: PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Employability programs and services can be thought of as structures and processes enabling employability through impact and value leading to effective outcomes. This evaluation takes stock of which employability programs and services SydWest offer clients, and how these programs and services are administered. Structure and process also shed light on how clients are assessed in terms of employability, which mechanisms are put in place to assist clients best according to need and aspiration, how partnerships and relationships with other agencies and the greater employability environment are managed, and how employability problems are approached and solved. The broad schema of structures and processes within the evaluation framework is schematised in Table 5.1 below.

SydWest offers a range of employability programs and services to clients from a refugee or recently arrived migrant background in the form of group classes or workshops, extensive one-on-one case work, group case work, and formal partnered training programs. These include classes or courses designed and run by SydWest, and or, registered training organisations (RTOs) such as Wesley Mission and TAFE NSW (Blacktown). Further, SydWest is partnered with educational

providers such as TAFE NSW that assist in providing allied or scaffolding employability services and programs such as English Language courses, child-care and maternal care services, NSW driver’s license preparation, driving lessons, and various ad-hoc needs-based employability services and advice. Also included in this evaluation are various unfunded innovative responses SydWest has devised to problem solve and repair employment and employability problems for clients.

In addition to the continuous one-on-one case work related to employability and unfunded initiatives, SydWest has offered the following formal group or multi-client employability services and programs from 2019 that are included in this evaluation: EPP, Blacktown Business Lunch, Blacktown Employment Accelerator, and School-to-Work program. These programs entail numerous forms of employment-related learning, activity, advocacy, and preparedness for clients and are administered and delivered as a part of a suite of general settlement services.

<sup>iii</sup> It may be considered that a very strong indicator of employability is that of current employment. That outcome is considered in this report, however caution needs to be exercised around this relationship, because attempting to find and being in paid employment is at times a personal choice in terms of a client being assessed as ‘employable’, however, they are for some reason not working. For example, some of SydWest’s clients expressed that they had become mothers very recently and were not working at the time of the research deciding to focus on motherhood.



## 4. Aims

The aims of this evaluation are consistent with the NSF focus area on ‘evaluation and review’ in seeking to ‘identify the settlement...policies and programs [relevant to employability] that are working well as well as where improvements can be made’ (National Settlement Framework: p6). Further, the aims of this evaluation also include how effectively SydWest attempts to provide employability programs and services within the SETS – Client Services Program framework.

To this end the evaluation’s primary aims are clear:

- AIM 1** Assess the general effectiveness of SydWest’s employability programs and services
- AIM 2** Determine the extent to which SydWest provides employability programs and services aligned with the NSOS for standard 2 ‘Employment’
- AIM 3** Rate client satisfaction with SydWest’s employability programs and services
- AIM 4** Suggest how SydWest’s employability programs and services can be improved.

The evaluation is secondarily concerned with the specific contexts that impact the effectiveness of SydWest’s employability programs and services requiring that the study:

- AIM 5** Understand the organisational, communal, and policy contexts in which SydWest’s employability programs and services operate and how these enable or hinder employability effectiveness.

A further aim of the evaluation is to assess data needs to enhance decision making through research and review:

- AIM 6** Assess the current data protocols of SydWest relating to employability programs and services and discern the data needs for future benchmarking, monitoring, and decision making.

From these aims a methodology was established to collect valid and reliable data that will measure key concepts within the evaluation framework providing robust evidence to evaluate SydWest’s employability programs and services in accordance with the aims of the study. The data will serve as evidence to assess the effectiveness of SydWest’s employability programs and services, through examples of impact and value. A series of processes and assessments are recorded in the results section relating to the aims of the study, and recommendations derived from the evidence of structure and process and assessment outcomes will conclude the evaluation. Further, the evaluation aims to bring to light the employability achievements of SydWest and the challenges the agency faces in current and future contexts and what options are available for SydWest to meet these challenges.



Image provided by SydWest.



## 5. Conceptual framework, evaluation schema, and methodology

Data collection employed a multi-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data to best measure effectiveness of SydWest's employability programs and services, satisfaction with SydWest's employability services, and how well SydWest's employability programs address client employment needs.

Data was sought from a number of relevant stakeholders in addition to staff and clients of SydWest to address the aims of the evaluation within the stated scope and framework. Quantitative data aimed at producing a broad benchmark of client profiles, experiences, and satisfaction with employability programs and services, while qualitative data sought to measure the depth and nuance of experiences, process through narrative, and organisational meanings of either being a client of, or working for or with SydWest in its delivery of employability programs and services.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND EVALUATION SCHEMA

The conceptual framework employed for this evaluation is based on the Settlement Sector Quality Framework (Employment) (2020) and on the NSOS associated with the SETS Client Services Program (2020) pertinent to employment. The framework sets out criteria for measuring the effectiveness of employability services that considers the employment needs and aspirations of refugees and recently arrived migrants holistically rather than merely instrumentally. The framework (see Figure 5.1) adapted for this evaluation is comprised of five inter-related dimensions and a sixth that considers the role of data and evidence:

- Strengths-based approach
- Effective collaboration
- Experiencing Australian workplaces
- Careers counselling and support
- Reducing barriers to employment for women and young people
- Data and evidence

The framework also includes a number of connected sub-dimensions that comprise more applied and specific employability related activities and learning such as volunteering, work placements, internships; understanding Australian workplace requirements, workplace rights, and obligations; data and evidence; ongoing support after

employment; and innovation and initiative. The framework is related to a schema of SydWest's specific employability programs and services through a process and structure lens that displays how the study incorporates and uses the evidence concerning dimensions, assessments, and outcomes that equate to effectiveness of SydWest's employability programs and services. This schema is laid out in Table 5.1 below and populated with results in Table 9.1 later in the study but is inclusive of the formal and informal employability programs and services that SydWest offers:

- General Assessment of Employability Programs and Services
- Client intake and assessment
- Employment Pathway Program (EPP)
- Partnered programs and events
- School-to-Work Program
- Case work
- Unfunded informal initiatives
- Data and evidence

### CLIENT SURVEY

The survey's aim was to quantitatively benchmark participation in and satisfaction with SydWest's employability programs and services for recent clients. The survey relied on a convenience sample that was formed from a database of past clients for whom SydWest had contact details and who had participated in SydWest employability programs and services previously. It is difficult to ascertain whether the sample is representative of relevant SydWest clients due to uncertainty about the overall number of clients SydWest has served through its employability programs and services since 2019 and whether all of these clients were recorded in the database. The final sample was just over 100. The survey response rate was 40% which is an acceptable response rate for the contexts of the study (Aarons 2021; Dillman et al 2014). The survey was administered online and through email via the Qualtrics program format. Printed hard copies were made available to respondents also. Some surveys were administered over the phone via an interpreter. Surveys were not administered to SydWest staff and or partners due to a lack of statistical significance owing to very small sizes.

### INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interview schedules were developed around relevant dimensions of the evaluation framework. Interviews were conducted with all relevant stakeholders: former clients, SydWest staff, partner organisations, and employers. Interviews garnered qualitative data that described in rich detail the actions, narratives, themes, and key contexts of employability service and program delivery for SydWest staff, the experiences and everyday life contexts of undertaking employability services and programs for past clients, and how SydWest's relationships with partner organisations work and are perceived. The varied qualitative data offer a rich portrait of experience, context, and process vital to understanding how and to what effect SydWest's employability programs and services achieve their aims.

### LIMITATIONS

This evaluation entails some important limitations. Firstly, the quantitative data should be considered with some caution due to the nature of the sample as not representative. The survey data here cannot be generalised to a broader population of refugees and migrants who have participated in employability programs and services. Further, the survey dataset contains some missing data leaving gaps for some measures. Qualitative data is mostly used in this report and that is appropriate, however interviews with key stakeholders were unable to be sourced for some aspects of the study such as participants for the School-to-Work program.

FIGURE 5.1

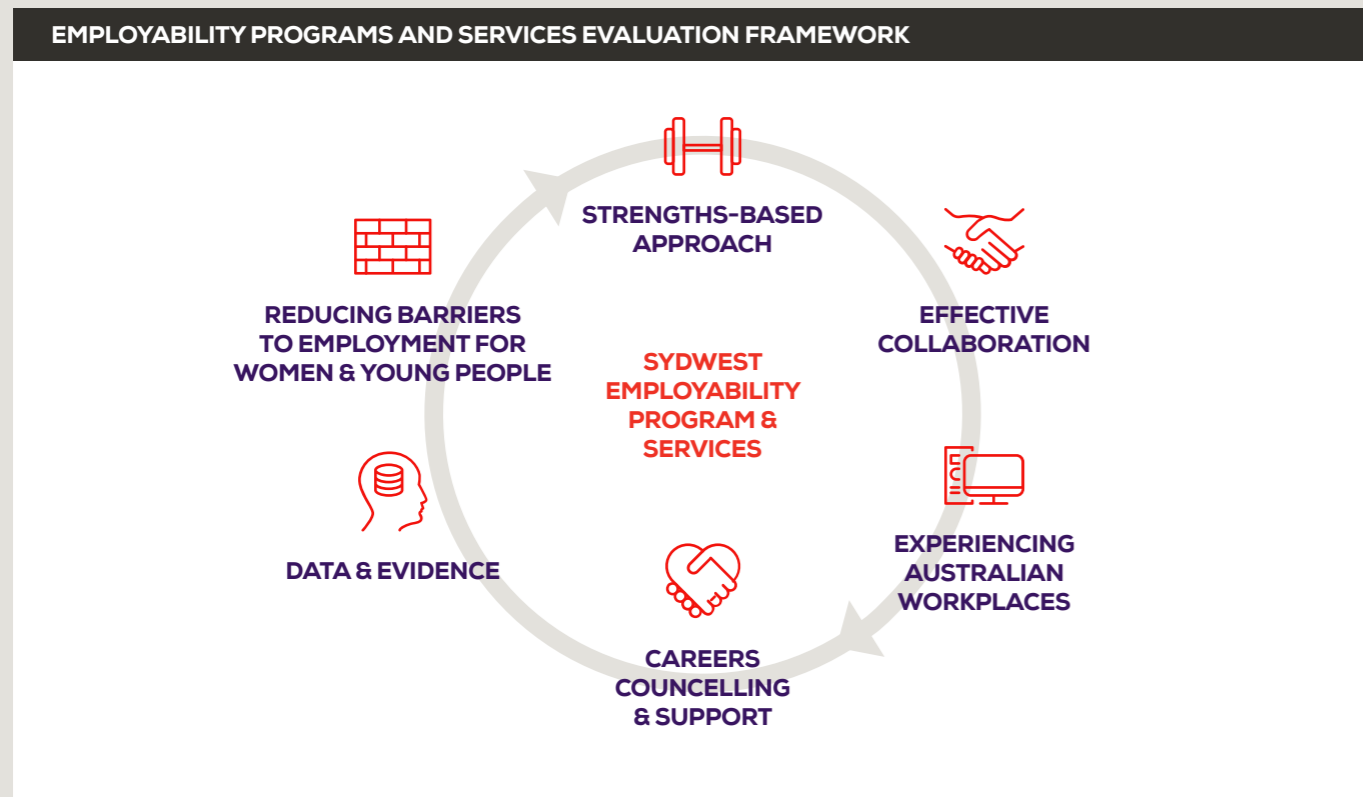


TABLE 5.1

EVALUATION SCHEMA TEMPLATE					
NATIONAL SETTLEMENT OUTCOME STANDARDS (NSOS) (EMPLOYMENT) DIMENSIONS	STRUCTURE AND PROCESS: HOW SYDWEST MEET NSOS (EMPLOYMENT)	INDICATORS	OUTCOMES	EFFECTIVENESS	IMPROVEMENTS
STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH					
EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION					
EXPERIENCING AUSTRALIAN WORKPLACES					
CAREERS COUNSELLING AND SUPPORT					
REDUCING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN AND YOUNG PEOPLE					
DATA AND EVIDENCE					





## 6. Results

### 1. General effectiveness of SydWest's employability programs and services.

#### EVOLUTION OF EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES AT SYDWEST

SydWest's employability programs and services are in accordance with the kinds of programs and services that are advised by the Settlement Council of Australia as a measure of best practice. SydWest as an organisation has evolved in its program and service offerings for clients over the past ten years to include a stronger and dedicated focus on employability for recently arrived migrants and refugees. This shows SydWest as a reflexive and progressive organisation that has responded with sensitivity to client need through greater alignment with SETS – Client Services Program, and the NSF, at times without funding support.

'Anish,' a client services team leader with SydWest describes the evolution of this process of greater focus on the employability needs of clients:

*Anish: 'One of the major components for them [clients] is employment and because employment [gives] some respect to the client and this also gives meaning of their life as well. So, this is a very, very important part for this settlement journey as well. We do understand the client who have got this employment opportunity. They are likely to settle in Blacktown...Otherwise, they move from one place to another*

*place because of good opportunity and other things.'*

*'So, because our organisation is based [in] Blacktown, heavily Blacktown LGA, definitely, we want to help our clients to get a job within the local area or at least nearby the suburb, so that they can settle happily in the Blacktown area and we can also deliver all the services to them. So that also make[s] sense because we [didn't] have any specific [employability] programs to help our clients. In 2016 or '17, one of my team members, ex-community engagement team member-initiated employment project programs. That's how...these things [employability programs and services] began.'*

*Interviewer: 'So, prior to that, SydWest didn't really offer many formal [employability] services...?'*

*Anish: 'No.'*

*Anish: 'We used to run bits and pieces of information... Sometimes maybe, our case worker used to give some odd job applicants, support on [a] job application or resume writing, something like that.'*

*Interviewer: 'But that was just every now and then...?'*

*Anish: 'Yeah. Now and then and we don't have any outcome-focused programs. We didn't have designated portion to just look [after] the employment area [needs]*

*of our clients. So, we used to deliver our services as a generalist... migrant's case worker..., even today, also they are giving their services to our client, assisting our clients in different areas, not including employment. In other area[s] for example, clients who come and ask for transportation and help...to get enrolment in the TAFE or English class. So they came here and employment is one of [those] components. It was not a highlighted one. You know?'*

Assessment for migrant and refugee clients is still generalist though holistic at SydWest but now includes employability needs and also includes employment aspirations. This process has of 2018 grown into a dedicated area of practice with a formal provision of programs and services at SydWest. The development of employability programs and services as Anish later states, arose not only through reflective practice, but also in response to client dissatisfaction with specialist employment and employability agencies such as JobActive. SydWest's main responsibility in terms of employability was referring clients onto such agencies. However, as Anish relates, a number of clients have felt somewhat confused and under-assisted by JobActive, who have not taken into account language and cultural differences in consultations, leading many clients back to SydWest for employability and employment assistance.

*Anish: 'JobActive provider[s] are the right institution or whatever, who are supposed to play a vital role to give employment. But what is happening is some of our clients*

*maybe because of the language barrier or maybe because of technology barrier, they've come back to us. They come back to us and this is okay. [Anish quoting a client]: "I went there [JobActive office] and I sit there for this many hours and they didn't support us sometime. Sometimes they said, okay, I didn't want to go there because they asked us to sit and ask us to search job in their laptop or in their computer."*

*'It means they are not getting that kind of attention and support...and because SydWest is their first or trusted contact...and because we do have bilingual staff who speak their language. They feel more confident and come back to [us] again, "Okay. Help me to find a job."*

From this position of a lack of focus on employability and frustrated clients, Anish suggests that an initial way to fill the service gap for clients was commencing contact with employers on behalf of clients which eventually helped establish local networks between employers (see below) and SydWest, benefitting SydWest clients. The establishment of these networks had the added effect of advocacy through alerting employers to the benefits of employing migrants and refugees and overcoming existing prejudices. For SydWest this resulted in more than a form of practical assistance for clients, but a form of advocacy that has led to attitudinal change in employers unlocking greater opportunity for SydWest clients. Anish again:

Anish: 'So there was one specific program officer who lead this project as well and they are more focused on helping client [with finding employment]. Also, the officer used to contact employer[s], local employer here and try to find some scope for our clients. So the concept of having introduction between employer as refugee clients and helping them to get that job within the local market. It's not only we help our client to give some kind of skill. It's also to make our employer ready to recruit refugee background client. It's a two-way process because in many areas, employer or local industry, they don't have positive mindset about... refugee[s].'

From this point at SydWest comes the development of formal programs and services that have catered to the specific employability needs of clients, such as the Employability Pathway Program, and various partnered programs and events, in addition to the more nuanced and dedicated employability support provided by generalist case workers. The evolution of the programs and services associated with employability suggests a rapid but steady increase in impact, value, and effectiveness through empathy, reflexive practice, advocacy, and innovation.

### EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES: CLIENT FEEDBACK

This section outlines both quantitative and qualitative data around the question of how generally effective SydWest's employability programs and services have been for clients registered with the service since 2019 and client satisfaction with the employability services. The section considers a range of factors and available data to determine effectiveness including client employment data, survey responses to questions about SydWest's employability programs and services, and findings on specific factors directly correlated with employability such as: specific employability programs and services, SydWest's community and agency partnerships, and employability innovations. The relationship between quantitative and qualitative data based on these themes assists in determining an overall portrait of effectiveness of SydWest's employability programs and services for clients.

Tables 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3 report employment outcomes for clients for the financial years 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022. The tables display the numbers of clients who secured employment during the respective financial years and the range of industries and occupations they were employed in. It is estimated that SydWest serviced around 100 clients during the 2019-2020 financial year and fewer clients during subsequent years<sup>iv</sup>. An approximate effectiveness rate (as judged by being prepared for (and securing) employment) for SydWest clients is between eighty and ninety percent over the three years of the recording period. There are two cautions around these rates, 1) the data are approximate due to SydWest client records not indicating exact numbers of clients for each financial year, and 2) despite undertaking employability programs and using services not all of SydWest's clients chose to seek or take up employment once they had completed programs or used services. Further, as stated earlier, securing employment for clients is not the main goal

of SydWest's employability programs and services, but a welcomed indirect outcome that can be read as a measure of SydWest's effectiveness associated with employability programs and services.

Relatedly the employment rates displayed here in Tables 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3 are also evidence of effective partnerships with community organisations, training agencies, and employers. The data indicate a strong relationship between SydWest's employability programs and services and the take up of employment in particular industries and entry level jobs.

Table 6.4 records that overwhelmingly SydWest's employability services and programs helped clients feel that they were ready to attain the employment that they desired. Over 8 in 10 clients reported that SydWest's employability services and programs helped or helped a lot with feeling ready to apply for a job and undertake employment.

The survey asked clients to record qualitative answers to questions about what they found helpful about SydWest's employability services and programs in generalist terms and what specifically they learned from the services and programs that they thought was helpful in finding a job. These responses are also recorded in Table 6.4. All of the responses for the two open ended questions are favourable towards the employability programs and services undertaken. There were no negative or neutral responses from clients, suggesting that clients found SydWest employability programs and services highly beneficial, relevant, and rewarding in terms of being prepared for employment.

The range of responses from clients indicate an array of key skills and learnings associated with a number of dimensions of the framework, in particular careers counselling and support in general, and specifically around education, training, resume writing and cover letters. Comments also suggest an engagement with experiencing Australian workplaces through finding employment opportunities and volunteering. Further, other employability benefits include improvements in English language proficiency and communication skills, preparing for job interviews, and social skills.

### SUMMARY

From the data presented in this section SydWest's employability programs and services have recently evolved to a point of offering a professional suite of dedicated programs and services in accordance with the SETS – Client Services Program, as a result of reflexive and empathic practice to meet the employability needs of recently arrived migrants and refugees. Overall SydWest's employability programs and services received a very high rate of satisfaction with clients surveyed and interviewed, and a very high percentage of clients served by SydWest according to employment data (approximately eighty to ninety percent) have attained employment as a result of partaking in SydWest's employability programs and services.

TABLE 6.1

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES FOR SYDWEST CLIENTS 2019 – 2020 FINANCIAL YEAR		
INDUSTRY/ SECTOR		NO # OF CLIENTS EMPLOYED
RETAIL	Aldi, Woolworths, Coles, Kmart, Target, Chicken Factory, Warehouse, Salvation Army Store	27
SERVICES	Care workers, MYAN Peer Support, Disability Worker	11
HOSPITALITY	McDonald's, KFC, Dominos, Kitchen Hands, Hungry Jack's, Cafes, other food & beverage related jobs	19
HEALTH/BEAUTY	Laverty Pathology, Pharmacy Assistant, Salon/Hairdressing	4
ENTERTAINMENT	Hoyts Cinemas	2
CONSTRUCTION/ BUILDING	Landscape, Construction, Traffic Controller, Plumber, Cleaner	12
POLICE		1
SECURITY		2
TOTAL		78

TABLE 6.2

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES FOR SYDWEST CLIENTS 2020 – 2021 FINANCIAL YEAR		
INDUSTRY/ SECTOR		NO # OF CLIENTS EMPLOYED
RETAIL	Aldi, Woolworths, Coles, Kmart, Target, Chicken Factory, Warehouse, Salvation Army Store, Shop Assistant, Westfield, Baby Bunting, Officeworks	12
SERVICES	Care workers, MYAN Peer Support, Disability workers, Homecare, Telstra, Nursing, Childcare worker	10
HOSPITALITY	McDonald's, KFC, Dominos, Kitchen Hands, Hungry Jack's, Cafes, other food & beverage related jobs, El Jannah	7
HEALTH/BEAUTY	Laverty Pathology, Pharmacy Assistant, Salon/Hairdressing	4
ENTERTAINMENT	Hoyts Cinemas	
CONSTRUCTION/ BUILDING	Landscape, Construction, Traffic Controller, Plumber, Cleaner, Carpenter, Forklift Driver	8
EDUCATION	Research Assistant	1
TOTAL		42

iv. Approximate estimate from SydWest.



TABLE 6.3

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES FOR SYDWEST CLIENTS 2021 - 2022 FINANCIAL YEAR		
INDUSTRY/ SECTOR		NO # OF CLIENTS EMPLOYED
RETAIL	Aldi, Woolworth, Coles, Kmart, Target, Chicken Factory, Warehouse, Salvo Store, Shop Assistance, Westfield, Baby Bunting, Officeworks	6
SERVICES	Care workers, MYAN Peer Support, Disability workers, Homecare, Telstra, Nursing, Childcare worker, Transport NSW, Bloomfield care services, LeanOnWe Support Services	4
HOSPITALITY	McDonald's, KFC, Dominos, Kitchen Hands, Hungry Jack, Cafes, other food & beverage related jobs, El Jannah	4
HEALTH/BEAUTY	Laverty Pathology, Pharmacy Assistant, Salon/Hairdressing, Beauty Therapy and Massage	1
ENTERTAINMENT	Hoyts Cinemas	
CONSTRUCTION/ BUILDING	Landscape, Construction, Traffic Controller, Plumber, Cleaner, Carpenter, Forklift Driver	4
TOTAL		19

TABLE 6.4

SATISFACTION WITH SYDWEST'S EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES (CLIENT SURVEY)				
	NOT AT ALL %	NOT REALLY %	YES %	YES, A LOT %
DO YOU THINK SYDWEST'S EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES HELPED YOU BE READY TO GET THE JOB YOU WOULD LIKE TO DO?	0	14	43	43
	<b>COMMENTS</b>			
WHAT WAS HELPFUL ABOUT SYDWEST'S EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMS THAT MIGHT HAVE IMPROVED YOUR CHANCES OF GETTING A JOB?	supportive and skills' 'resume writing' 'education' 'help with the cover letter and resume' 'everything' 'getting some training about disability' 'advice on resume' 'learning classes and suggest[tions about] job' 'they help with preparing for interviews and making resumes'			
	<b>COMMENTS</b>			
WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM PARTICIPATING IN SYDWEST'S ACTIVITIES THAT YOU THINK WAS HELPFUL IN FINDING A JOB.	'I studied Cert III in disability and got a job' 'education and jobs opportunity[ies]' 'Actually I did some volunteering...with SydWest and I got great experience with them' 'I became more socially aware of different things around the community of Blacktown, and I improved my language' 'They helped us a lot and the children, finding a job, counselling. Meetings with SydWest, finished studying. I asked SydWest if they had any jobs and they offered me a job in aged care' 'how to do a resume' 'The...course I did in SydWest was a good course. It [was] about what abilities... we need in the work environment and what are the ways to find a job opportunity through the Commu[ity]' 'Communication skills, leaderships skills, social skills' 'We came to know that employers go and introduce themselves and they give the opportunities with the available jobs'			



Image provided by SydWest.

## 2. Client employability intake and assessment processes.

### CLIENT PROFILES

SydWest client intake and assessment processes enabled the construction of accurate client profiles. This kind of data is vital to delivering tailored assistance in line with client employment ambitions through a strengths-based approach and allows for better decision making in service and program delivery.

Clients surveyed and interviewed for this evaluation largely mirrored the multicultural mosaic of contemporary Blacktown LGA as shown in the introduction section. Countries where clients were born spanned the Middle-East and Central Asia, reflecting the current and recent geopolitical upheavals that have produced waves of forced migration and asylum seeking from those centres. Clients who took part in the evaluation research were characterised by a broad range of demographic attributes. The majority of clients surveyed and interviewed were women, but a significant minority of men also took part in the research. Ages of clients ranged from between seventeen through to sixty-two, however most clients interviewed and surveyed were near forty years old and had young families with one or two children. Some clients had at least completed some high school, a number of clients had completed high school and undergraduate university studies or were part way through a degree when they left their home country for Australia. Other clients had completed training at a technical or vocational college. Clients who assisted with the research

worked in a variety of semi-professional and professional roles and a diverse range of industries before migrating or seeking asylum in Australia such as teaching, IT, finance, engineering and construction, and medical or health services. The greater majority of clients had become Australian citizens or had attained permanent resident status. English proficiency ranged from ‘not so good’ to ‘excellent’ with most clients indicating that their proficiency in English was ‘not bad’. Many clients indicated in the survey and the interviews that they were currently employed, while others remained out of the workforce by choice, committing their time to family caring roles or study. Clients’ current employment included aged care workers, disability workers, lab assistants, supermarket employees, cleaners, and hospitality workers among other professions as recorded in Tables 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3 above.

<b>COUNTRY OF BIRTH</b>	Iraq, Syria, Bhutan, Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Egypt
<b>EDUCATION LEVEL PRIOR TO ARRIVING IN AUSTRALIA</b>	Some high school – completed undergraduate degree
<b>EMPLOYMENT BEFORE ARRIVING IN AUSTRALIA</b>	Yes 70%, No 30%
<b>LENGTH OF TIME IN AUSTRALIA</b>	Average of 5 years
<b>AGE</b>	17–62 as a range, but mostly clients are over 40 years of age
<b>GENDER</b>	75% female, 25% male

### FACTORS IN CLIENT INTAKE AND ASSESSMENT

Among the common experiences of migration, inclusive of religious and ethnic persecution, severe threats to personal safety, and economic ruin, are the related impediments including career and educational interruption. Many of SydWest’s clients arrived in Australia with limited or no local networks and or family contacts, a low level of proficiency in English language, and no or little understanding of Australian work conditions or the Australian labour market. Aside from some basic assistance from Settlement Services International (SSI), SydWest has been the only formal or informal form of assistance for employment preparedness for such clients. As a benchmark, SydWest provides a series of vital and fundamental employability programs and services crucially linking clients with the Australian workforce in general, Australian labour culture, and employment legislative frameworks. Information about and acculturation to an employment system within an advanced capitalist economy such as Australia’s is for many clients of inestimable importance. Further, as interview data suggest, there is a strong concern to socialise clients into a culture of work and employment over welfare.

The first important step in resuming an economic life for recently arrived migrants and refugees is how clients are assessed to determine employment needs. Assessment for employability needs is part of an intake suite of general settlement needs as established earlier. The preparatory process to gauge the employability needs and the employment aspirations of clients consists of an interview, whereby clients



are asked about educational and employment experience and employment aspirations. This is a valuable source of data that details accurately clients' previous work history and qualifications in their home country as a first step in adequately assessing what a client needs and aspires to in terms of employability. This form of assessment is tempered by the pressing concerns of immediate needs such as a possible need to improve English proficiency, a driver's licence, and child-care needs for some clients.

An important element of the settlement process as it pertains to employment also is that refugees and migrants are encouraged to aspire to certain jobs as per their wishes and capabilities to fulfil personal and economic potential consistent with a strengths-based approach (Settlement Council of Australia 2020). Support for achieving employment aspiration should be reflected in the assessment process for clients over and against a cruder instrumental approach that merely seeks to place clients in employment irrespective of aspirations, qualifications, and previous experience. Criticisms of job agencies and programs such as JobActive centre on the impersonal and often ineffective and inefficient nature of a general process of employability and employment for migrants and refugees as we have seen earlier, and as other reports have suggested (see Tahiri 2017).

The profiles, experiences, and aspirations of SydWest clients are at times radically different, and as a result, employment aspirations do differ. Further, the immediate necessities of settlement produced by the current context of government policy towards migrants and refugees (in terms of a lack of benefits and benefit payments linked to specific activities), can make meeting employment aspirations for some clients extremely difficult in the short to mid-term. Despite some ambitions to revive previous careers, acute economic circumstances in the form of everyday expenses, such as housing, food, bills, and family needs, are often the first concern, so some clients are content for the present to work in any job that they may be qualified for or that is available, with a view of reskilling or retraining for a more aspirational job at some time in the future. Further, the revival of former careers can be made especially difficult by a range of barriers to entry into certain professions through qualification recognition, a lack of proficiency in vocational or professional English, the cost of retraining, and knowledge of how to navigate skills recognition and further study, as a path towards resuming a career.

In addition to information about work and employment in general, an important dimension of assessing clients' employability requirements according to the NSF (2020) is the need for appropriate information, programs, opportunities, and training for specific groups of clients, in particular, women and young people. This is especially true for CALD communities where gendered economic norms and values can be structured to reflect more traditional male and female work and family roles. The survey and interview data reported that SydWest indeed aimed through assessment to accommodate specific needs of women and young people in line with the NSF and NSOS through its intake and assessment processes.

SydWest clients are overwhelmingly referred to SydWest

via SSI. Once in the SydWest system, clients are then assessed for employability needs. The survey and interviews revealed that assessment for employability needs was a key part of the overall intake process for clients undertaken by SydWest. Further, the survey data reveals that SydWest had made a concerted effort to ascertain the previous work experience, qualifications, and skills of clients, as a means of assessing employability needs as an indicator of prospective employment ambitions. Over 80% of survey responses emphasised three important elements of a strengths-based approach (previous work experience, qualifications, and skills) were featured in the SydWest assessment and intake surveys and interviews.

An important compounding factor in assessment of employability needs, irrespective of previous skills, experience, and qualifications, and indeed in employment aspiration was English language proficiency of clients. English language proficiency is a crucial gateway skill enabling or limiting employability. SydWest is not responsible for the teaching of English to clients but does facilitate contacts with English language providers such as TAFE NSW.

'Maryam', a generalist case worker, explains how the intake and assessment process is nuanced and responsive to the individual needs of clients with diverse backgrounds, consistent with a strengths-based approach.

*Maryam: 'Normally, the client is referred to us. But the thing is at...first..., when clients are referred to SydWest, we assess them. So we know, okay, what are their needs?'*

*Sometimes the client just needs a bit of time, and then they [say], "Okay, now I'm going to just focus on my study and education and learn just English," for example. And then they would refer to us again... about employment.'*

*Interviewer: 'And how would you go about assessing a client [for employability needs] that comes to SydWest?'*

*Maryam: 'When they come, we have a[n]...intake assessment form. So it's...general, just assessment. And then we would ask question[s], and normally they raise the issue and then we will go from there.'*

*Interviewer: 'So you're able to...[know]clients [have]... different types of employability needs...?'*

*Maryam: 'Yeah. It gives us the information. Okay. What's the best direction for that client to find a job? Is that only [what] they need to improve their just English language or [do] they need to just study a course?'*

An innovative aspect of the assessment process that clients and staff reported was that SydWest included fielding requests for information on how to start a business for clients. Entrepreneurship is encouraged, and indeed, SydWest clients have had some success with starting and maintaining a

business they started with SydWest's help, especially during the lockdowns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic over 2020 and 2021. Starting a business drew on the expertise of staff with skills and qualifications in accounting, finance, and business law, but is initiated through the intake and assessment process wherein SydWest staff actively listen and aim to accommodate employment aspirations. (This aspect of assessment and intake is discussed in more detail later in the study: see results for 'Unfunded informal initiatives').

The assessment process was characterised by many responses to the survey and in interviews that indicated a high level of satisfaction, such as those from 'Asad' and 'Azadeh' below:

*Asad: 'Yes. Full assessment. My background, my education, the languages I speak.'*

*Azadeh: 'Yeah. When we come into Australia now, we are confused what we want to do. Because there is so many opportunities to do. So many, the courses. And yes, I talk to counsellor...two times, I think. And then she asked us about my qualifications, my interests, and then she suggested me some courses, some pathways, what is best for you to do now. Yes, it was so good.'*

Assessment for employability also accommodated longer term employment plans for younger clients such as 'Zaynab' for whom SydWest was indispensable. Concerning advice on career planning, SydWest ably assisted her to source and enrol in the most appropriate university course to meet her career aspirations

*Zaynab: '...they [SydWest] helped me to find scholarships for...uni. And then I was actually worried about the course, which course I'm going to do. So I went and asked them, and I was like, "Okay, I wanted to do that. But because I know that there is no future jobs, not much opportunities for this course, so what shall I do?" And then they helped me to find a proper course and then a pathway in the same one [interview].'*

In addition to client aspiration, intake and assessment also includes practical advice about getting started in employment and how sometimes economic necessity resulting in taking jobs readily available can be more of an immediate priority than searching for jobs that meet the specific employment aspirations of clients, as Maryam again explains:

*Maryam: 'Yeah. We look into their skills, and we try to [take account of] their interest [in occupations]. But beside that, with this training... and all, those who are interested... go [for] these sorts of jobs [jobs a little easier to get]. So we just encourage them to go. And others also, who are not able to find... jobs on their own, we encourage them to go and just start and look for...jobs. Once they are in [a] job, they have the actual local experience. So, they can write in their resume that I have so many years experience in [a job] and that also helps to get jobs [more suited to] their interest [in*

*the future]...'*

*'...we do look [for] jobs [aligned with their] interest or... [matching] their skills. But...still, if we can't find that, we encourage them to at least...enter into the field, and look for info [on a specific job or career], look for what [their] goals are, look for work [they are] interest[ed in]. Once they are in the field, in [a] job or in the Australian workforce, they know the broader area, they'll have more information. They have more connection with...people. Okay. Yeah. So, they'll be capable of looking [into a field of employment] themselves.'*

From the survey and interview evidence SydWest clients present a wide diversity of skills, experience, ambitions, and needs when reflecting on employment as part of settlement. This has represented a challenge to SydWest's aims to accommodate client wishes and service practice in line with the NSOS. However, the data and examples here suggest that SydWest has risen to this challenge through an attentive and innovative response that shows an encouraging willingness to engage a strengths-based approach to the assessment of employability needs during the intake phase. A range of factors make assisting some clients, especially those clients with a high level of skill and experience from their home countries, very difficult at times.

## SUMMARY

SydWest has demonstrated an adequate and effective client employability intake and assessment process that includes a strengths-based approach through inclusion of clients' previous employment and educational attributes as well as their occupational aspirations. SydWest client employability intake and assessment processes also discerned and accommodated well the priorities of clients in particular stages of life, such as women with young children, and young people. Of particular note, regarding the intake and assessment approach, is the response to entrepreneurial clients who wish to start businesses. Finally, SydWest has demonstrated a nuanced approach to client employability intake and assessment through practical advice balancing aspiration and necessity in complex situations about immediate work experience and future employment aspirations.

### 3. Employment Pathway Program (EPP): Experiencing Australian workplaces and understanding Australian workplaces.

The flagship employability program run by SydWest is the EPP. This program is a formal multi-week course of activities, learning, and practical exercises designed to introduce clients to Australian workplaces and familiarise them with the processes and requirements of seeking and applying for work. The EPP is a vitally important introductory course that provides clients with the basics of employment information and orientation in Australia. Given the backgrounds and profiles of many of SydWest's clients and the complex knowledge needed to begin to orient oneself around the Australian employment landscape, the program design and content is highly commendable for its quality, and its relevance to the employability needs of the many clients who have undertaken the course since 2019.

#### WORKING IN AUSTRALIA: KNOWLEDGE, REQUIREMENTS, OBLIGATIONS, AND RIGHTS

Employment education is a crucial feature of employability for recently arrived migrants and refugees. There have been numerous cases in Australia of blatant and protracted worker exploitation within CALD communities (Fairwork Ombudsman 2017) by unscrupulous business owners who prey on precarious and vulnerable migrant and refugee workers. The lack of knowledge about industrial relations, workers' rights and entitlements, and employer obligations are serious concerns that make migrants and refugees decidedly vulnerable to exploitation. This lack of knowledge, coupled with a sharp decline in union membership in Australia over the last thirty years only increases the opportunities for exploitation of migrant and refugee workers. SydWest is deeply engaged in informing clients about working conditions in Australia through the EPP. In addition to valuable information about worker rights and entitlements, the program also informs clients about the requirements of employees and employers, and the obligations of workers in different jobs. A further important inclusion in this educational dimension of the EPP is a focus on a range of 'soft' skills, and cultural learnings around professional self-presentation, dress, speech, punctuality, and the culture of work in Australia. This is particularly important for clients who embark upon person-to-person professions such as aged care or disability support.

The EPP further assists clients in employability through a series of practical employment-related activities such as seeking for jobs online, drafting cover letters, preparing resumes, and practicing interviews. At times, the EPP draws on the assistance of SydWest partners who may have expertise in a particular industry or in particular areas of employment, such as interview techniques.

Overall, survey and interview responses regarding the EPP from clients were highly favourable of the program format, information, and its value, and effectiveness in assisting clients to be employable.

In response to a question in the client survey about SydWest providing information about working in Australia, the overwhelming majority of respondents answered that the EPP covered issues such as:

*'Things workers must do at work,' 'workplace requirements,' and the 'rights of workers.'*

In addition to the EPP content, client, and staff interviews recorded more nuanced workplace and employment information specific to certain situations.

*Azadeh (client): 'Yes. All information was very useful to me, because I remember that it was ... Oh, it's important that I do this practice because it's very practical for me. The information was so good, yes.'*

*Gaurav (client): 'Yeah, it did really help me, as I said about the resume, about the rules, and it was totally [different from] what I had understood, initially, what I had in mind was totally different.'*

*Anahita (client): 'Yeah, it's good. Good, yeah. Beautiful.'*

*Asad (client): 'Yeah. It was an excellent service, without their support I won't be able to get this job. Without their support and help. I wouldn't be able to do the course to complete the course and to apply for this job. I got a lot of help and support.'*



## CONTEXTS AND ASPIRATIONS

Anish provides some useful observations – to some extent based on personal experience – regarding the personal and experiential contexts of learning about employability and job aspirations that encompasses dealing with a variety of clients with different backgrounds, ambitions, and conceptions of settling and working in Australia. His insights relate especially those clients whom we might call high skill/high credential clients and their engagement with the EPP. Anish's reflections provide some vital insight into managing the outlooks of clients and how case work and program design, as well as partnerships are managed and administered.

*Anish: 'One thing, because different clients have different kind of capacity and understanding, also inspirations to do something. Right? But this is also a fact when they started their journey, sometimes it's very, very difficult to make them understand. Okay. They have to start. You know? From this...point of their life... You know?'*

*'So, that is also, I think, a barrier because if you see people who...migrated here, they started journey from the ground. So many of them, I don't say all but many of them. Maybe 90% or 95% of people, they started from...zero. Right. They grow from that because there is opportunity.'*

*'From zero. I mean ground [from a low social or economic position]. For example, like what I say. Even for example, myself, I came with a degree. You know? But when I came here, I didn't get job immediately. So, I have to. For my [economic need]... I have to go down [take any kind of job or a job below his qualifications]. I have to take any kind of job that is valuable in the market. So, that I can sustain my family or myself. You know? Or to pay rent and so many things. But I'm positive that one day I will get my job [a job more in line with his qualifications]...a job that I feel good to me. Sometime that kind of understanding is lacking to those people who come [from a] refugee background...with... qualifications [such as a Bachelor degree, Masters, or PhD]. You know?'*

*'So...it's very difficult for them. [taking a lower level job] I think this kind of program [EPP] with us, help them to understand that reality. Because...they talk about these things and... their friends...generally...give bad advice. For example...my story. I'm not a refugee... I came here as an immigrant, but when I came here, my friend used to say, "Oh no, no. Your qualification doesn't applicable in Australia. You don't get job like you used to do back home." You know?'*

*'So, [it was suggested to] go and do some kind of cleaning job. Some kind of go and get job in the KFCs or something that. Okay...'*

*Interviewer: 'For some clients that's really hard. You had to try and tell them about that and then how do they react to that kind of [information]?''*

*Anish: 'Yeah. Sometimes it's very difficult. Like, what I'm seeing many clients or refugee clients who are struggling, even coming back to here and leaving again. There are so many clients. They're not our client but they used to be our clients. They're struggling and then they are doing like, they're studying and they have a PhD degree or bachelor degree or master's degree, they're not getting jobs.'*

High skill/high credential clients do pose a problem for SydWest employability programs and services such as the EPP. The type of clients for whom the EPP has tremendous impact and effect are clients who are simply in need of work despite credentials, or clients with lower levels of education and experience. The needs of high skill/high credential clients with employment aspirations of resuming of a previous professional career are well beyond the capacity of SydWest to meet, given the complex regulatory, institutional, and industry barriers to a range of professions. However, given the skills gap in Australian industry (especially in engineering, science, and medical services (National Skills Commission 2021), the rapid development of Blacktown and Western Sydney, and the underemployment of numerous current and former SydWest clients, attempts to address the issues for these clients could be a limited feature of the EPP but also pursued through an inter-agency mechanism and a proposal for training, experience, and skills recognition be developed. The issue of suitable employment for high skill/high credential migrants and refugees goes well beyond SydWest clients and presents as a national issue (see Shergold, Benson, and Piper 2019).

### RECOMMENDATION 1

As part of the EPP going forward, SydWest provides more specialist information that assists high skill/high credential clients to take steps towards previous qualification and experience recognition in Australia, and information around Australian industry standards, and entry to professional occupations in accordance with client aspiration, and previous qualifications, and experience.

## SUMMARY

The EPP is a specific and highly effective employability program providing immense value to clients through the dissemination of vital information about the Australian labour market, working conditions, and rights and responsibilities of employers and employees. The EPP is also highly effective in its practical application of content through such activities as cover letter construction, practice interviews, and navigating applying for a job. Through its content and application, the EPP is highly effective in arresting trends in CALD worker exploitation and gives clients a strong knowledge preparedness for employment in Australia. The program is an excellent preparatory activity for recently arrived migrants and refugees to seek and apply for employment.

The EPP, much like the intake and assessment process, does have to contend with the disparate skill, employment, and credentialled backgrounds of many clients. Of note is the situation of high skill/high credential clients who may wish to resume a former professional career but have little information as to how this might be achieved. To this end, the program, alongside advice from SydWest staff, alerts clients to the difficulties associated with resuming professional careers in Australia. Managing expectations about employment is prudent, however a recommendation here, is that SydWest includes in the EPP a dedicated module on skills recognition, and entry to specific professions.

#### 4. School-to-Work Program: Reducing barriers to employment for young people.

SydWest has also run specialised programs for young people, in accordance with the suggested criteria of the SETS Client Services Program and NSOS. A successful example is the School-to-Work program that was set up for young people from migrant and refugee families. The program is similar to the EPP in its contents and learnings but creates a unique space for young people taking account of their family situations and schooling. Participants were given advice and guidance on putting together a resume, practice in job interviewing, informed about employment opportunities, learned about the Australian labour market, and provided with information about the rights and responsibilities of workers and employers. A feature of the course is also a training module in retail operations, relevant to many young people embarking on the search for casual employment while still as school or university.

Young people can take on a special status in migrant and refugee families as the only family member who is proficient in English, and at times they can be the main breadwinner for the family. The last time the program was run was in 2019 for around seventy students, according to 'Christine', a SydWest case worker, who ran the program back in 2019. Christine relates that around a third of the participants were successful in finding employment after completing the program, while many others sought and found further training and educational options, greatly enhancing their prospects for future employment. One client who participated in the

program has started a successful fashion business catering to Muslim women.

Fundamental to the program is the SydWest environment itself, wherein young people from migrant and refugee families can be released from the burden of financially and socially supporting their parents for a time. Christine, who ran the program back in 2019, explains the situation of some of these clients thus:

*Christine: 'So with young people, I ran a school to work program. Most of our young people could easily be the breadwinners of their family... And their families are... highly dependent on them because sometimes they're the only person in the family that can speak English and they end up translating for everyone. So, we created this program so that after school sometimes they drop in and then we help them to apply for jobs, prepare them for interviews. And sometimes I found that most of the time actually when they come, they just come to talk.'*

A feature of the School-to-Work Program is a range of partnerships with local businesses and employers that allow a direct route from SydWest to employment for a number of young clients. Christine mentions partnerships with employers such as McDonald's Restaurants and Woolworths Supermarkets.

Beyond the process and value of the School-to-Work Program for young people, Christine relates that SydWest makes every effort to follow up on former younger clients who have entered the workforce to see how they are faring. At times this results

in important 'repair work' for clients who have faced abuse in the workplace or who are being exploited, as she states:

*Christine: 'Yeah, so I will call later on and say, "How is it going?" Like one of the people that I refer to work for a certain school or something like that was being abused at work. And it was very unexpected. And this person kept coming into the office just to say hi. And I will say, hi. Have a five-minute conversation. I'm like, "How is work?" "Good." And they kept doing that... And then after a while then I'm like, "Okay, let's see, how are this [is] going?" And then they'll say, oh, this is how work is going... One of our young people that we referred to work somewhere very close to SydWest was getting paid terribly. And I was shaken by that. And it took this young person so long for them to tell us because they felt like, oh, we don't want to lose the job.'*

The overt and tacit empathy and support that is associated with this program is something that is highly commendable and a great source of reassurance and guidance to young people, who in addition to working towards being prepared for employment and future study, have the, sometimes, tremendous burden of constantly assisting their parents and other family members negotiate everyday life. Further, former young clients who drift back to SydWest or whose negative work situations are discovered by case workers who care enough to follow up with former young clients, know that in SydWest they have a place of security and care to share their experiences and regroup emotionally. That the program has been designed with the financial, social, and familial contexts

of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds is testament to the innovation, creativity, and value of SydWest in its approach to young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

#### SUMMARY

SydWest employability programs and services cater directly to young people through the School-to-Work program and satisfy the 'reducing employment barriers for young people' dimension of the framework. The program adequately prepares young people for the workforce in Australia and a significant proportion of participants have gained employment in retail and hospitality consistent with many other young Australians, against whom many migrant and refugee young people can be disadvantaged when it comes to employment. The program is highly effective in assisting younger clients to prepare and find work, as well as plan for future careers through seeking out educational opportunities. The School-to-Work program has been run by an empathic and caring case worker, who works effectively to address the burdens younger people from migrant and refugee backgrounds sometimes carry. Further the program follows up with participants to ensure clients are fully supported should difficulties in the workplace arise.





Images provided by SydWest.

## 5. Partnered programs and events: Effective collaboration.

Employability services and programs are enhanced through partnerships with employment agencies, RTOs, employers, local government, and education providers. This dimension of employability is made manifest through focused planning and regular clear communication networks with partners. Partnerships enable a variety of employability experiences, access to potential employers, specific training relating to employment, and ultimately employment opportunities for clients. SydWest works in conjunction with various partners in the Blacktown LGA and Western Sydney that facilitate training, employment programs, and employability experiences such as internships, volunteering, and work placement programs. Overall, SydWest employability programs and services have been greatly enhanced and highly successful, as a result of SydWest's initiation and development of partnerships with RTOs in the local Blacktown area and beyond.

### BLACKTOWN BUSINESS BREAKFAST/LUNCH

Examples of successful partnership activities enhancing employability run by SydWest since 2019 are the Blacktown Business Breakfast/Lunch (the event has been a breakfast and then a lunch) and the BEA. The Blacktown Business Breakfasts/Lunches hosted by SydWest were enabling and advocacy events that brought together local businesses, agencies, and potential employers in the Blacktown, Penrith, and Mount Druitt areas to learn about the benefits of employing migrants and refugees, as well as promoting social inclusion and diversity in the workplace. A key feature of the Blacktown Business Breakfast/Lunch was to raise awareness about how to engage with migrants and refugees through a focus on their skills, ambitions, and employability. These events attracted over fifty staff from over twenty local organisations according to evaluation data.

Evaluation data from the events recorded that over 68% of participants indicated that what was most valuable about the events was the information it provided and the chance to network with SydWest and other organisations. Further, direct employment opportunities arose from the event, as related by Christine, a case worker whom we met in the previous section, who helped organise the events:

*Christine: 'And some local school as well came because they employed one of my clients as IT assistant, which was really awesome for them. It was really random. They just called me and they're like, "Oh look, we heard about this business [lunch]. We have this position. Do you have*



*anyone?" Which is really great.'*

*'So after that breakfast... the employers, they want to meet our clients... They sent through some positions that they have available. So then we prepared the clients.'*

*'So what we did with that program was equip them with the interview skills, the resume, approaching employers, having that conversation, what to wear. And also had a really, really good relationship with this service that provided free clothing to SydWest [Fit for Work]...'*

Another important dimension of employability is experiencing Australian workplaces through opportunities, such as work placement, internships, and volunteering. Christine relates that this became easier with the partnered Blacktown business events

*Christine: 'When I started the job, it was so weird how difficult it was to find volunteer work experience for our clients because it's like, I want to work for free. It was so, so difficult. It did not make sense. I would call so many places and they would just say, "Oh, sorry, we don't have the capacity. Sorry, we don't have the capacity." But after the business breakfast...[and] the Employment Accelerator Program, we started having like a really, really, almost stable relationship with businesses. Like even Salvation Army they told us that if you have any client that wants to do volunteer work, just email me. And then they sort of jumped over the queue in a sense.'*

### BLACKTOWN EMPLOYMENT ACCELERATOR (BEA)

Another highly effective partnered program relating to employability for clients SydWest undertook was the BEA in November of 2019. The BEA attracted fourteen employers and eighty-five clients. Widely referred to as 'speed dating for jobs', the event paired job seekers with employers in a series of impromptu interviews. Clients went through a preparation phase, wherein through the EPP where clients wrote resumes, cover letters, and practice interviewing, then applied these employability skills during the event itself.

In addition to these one-off collaborative events, SydWest has established and nurtured longer term specialist partnerships with a range of agencies and organisations to enhance the employability prospects of clients. Partners include work training organisations, educational providers, and employers throughout Western Sydney. These partnerships overall are very successful and highly effective in preparing clients for employment in various entry level jobs across select industries.

A sample of SydWest partners were interviewed for the purposes of this evaluation. Partner organisations provided overwhelmingly positive feedback concerning the experience and process of working with SydWest to provide employability programs and services for clients. Partnerships are crucial to employability goals for SydWest as they can be potential employers themselves, such as Wesley Mission, or educational and training providers, such as TAFE NSW. From the evidence, it is clear that SydWest has developed a number of highly effective, longer term, and sustainable relationships with various local partners that have provided SydWest



clients with a range of additional employability programs and services leading to enhanced employment prospects for clients.

### WESLEY MISSION

Wesley Mission is both an employer and a registered training organisation. Wesley Mission provides personal care services such as aged care, disability services, and home care services throughout Western Sydney and run various accredited training courses for those personal care services. They have been a key partner of SydWest's for a number of years and estimate that approximately eighty percent of SydWest clients who undertake their courses find work in industries such as personal care. SydWest and Wesley Mission communicate regularly creating a highly effective channel of information and opportunity, greatly enhancing the employability needs of clients. Communication is often through one-on-one liaison between SydWest case workers and Wesley Mission managers and trainers and is also carried out more formally within interagency fora.

In addition to the processes and outcomes of employability, a feature of Wesley Mission's partnership with SydWest is continuing vocational education for clients. SydWest clients benefit from accessing further training after completing basic courses and initial employment in personal care to gain further skills. This is in consultation with SydWest and planned around client's working hours. As 'David' from Wesley Mission explains:

*David: 'Yeah. For example, right now we're looking at delivering a Certificate III, in individual support, to carers who are already employed but need the qualification. So because they're employed, they won't do one day per week in class or tutorial because they'll be busy working. So now we'll be looking at structuring the course probably in the evenings, by Zoom for these particular clients that we're talking about. So we'll adjust accordingly, based on the cohort, based on the learning needs of the [client].'*

Another important consideration is taking the needs of clients into account through some form of moderating course to account for the needs of clients through what David describes as 'reasonable adjustment' that accommodates the differing capacities and commitments of clients with English proficiency or family commitments, or in recent times the lockdowns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Members of Wesley Mission report that SydWest really cares about clients and does its best to ensure that they are well catered for. Impressions such as those from David below are characteristic of the impressions of SydWest clients' preparedness for employment and general views of SydWest's commitment as an agency to client employability outcomes from a range of partners.

*Interviewer: 'what are your impressions of SydWest's [ability] to prepare...and to help their clients reach a level of employability?'*

*David: 'So in my experience, I think they're, yeah, quite prepared. Yeah, I think they [SydWest] do a really good service to the communities that they serve... the experience that I've known, they care and I think that's pretty important. And they're advocating for the communities that they serve. That's what I've noticed.'*

### TAFE NSW (BLACKTOWN)

TAFE NSW at Blacktown run a range of courses relevant to SydWest clients, principal among them is the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) for which TAFE NSW at Blacktown is contracted, as 'Sarah', a Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Coordinator at Blacktown TAFE, explains:

*Sarah: 'Yeah, so English language and running programs for migrants and refugees is very strong and it always has been, and that's where we've linked very closely with SydWest with the Settlement Services Program and things like that.'*

Beyond the provision of English Language courses, the TAFE's connection to SydWest is through its involvement in some key interagency networks and through stakeholders such as the Blacktown/Mount Druitt Multicultural Interagency (BMI) and the Mount Druitt Ethnic Communities Agency (MECA), these groups share information and link educational opportunities to potential employment, which is a key focus for the TAFE's involvement with SydWest, as Sarah describes:

*Sarah: '...there's a very strong info share, but also what we'll do is, we have things like a guest speaker, and then we've got some working groups. We've got a health working group and then we actually have one that includes employment in a working group, so that would be the one that I'd be in... My focus is education, but I always see it as a pathway to employment.'*

Sarah describes the process of partnering with SydWest as 'organic' and describes her role as a 'connector' that links educational opportunities and services associated with employment to SydWest, who then informs its clients and partly assists in administering and delivering these courses with TAFE. Sarah suggests that the relationship is 'organic' in the sense of responding to client's specific needs, and intimate in that she has known key SydWest staff for many years and can communicate with them directly and effectively, as she explains:

*Sarah: 'I think I always see it as I'm there to offer, so I'll let them know and give updates and send things through, information electronically as well. Then what I do is, I will try and connect with people that attend the interagency, but also I've known the CEO, 'Ellen', 'Francois', and 'Anish' and people like that for many years now, so what I hope is that if they've got something they need help with, they come to me as one of the connectors, but also if I've got something then I will, depending on what it is, I might go to them about that.'*

*'Yeah, so it works that way. I'll usually offer some things, because sometimes that sparks an idea, where people see, "Oh, you're running that course. Well, we don't want that... can we have this?" Or we might have some funding that's available for a particular thing. Then sometimes it'll be they will come to me, and so particularly with things where they've got the Settlement Program or where they've got a need for some training.'*

On a practical level the 'organic' nature of the partnership that Sarah describes is evidenced through TAFE and SydWest working closely around client needs together by combining different strengths, aspirations, and capacities.

The power and effectiveness of partnerships for employability for SydWest clients is clearly evidenced by the development of connections with employers. SydWest has engaged with the process of developing and participating in partnerships with great effect. Sarah describes these partnerships with a number of stakeholders, particularly employers as very important:

*Sarah: '...the big thing is to get the relationship with the employer, with where the jobs really are, and then partner with say a large migrant resource centre, your SydWest type organisation.'*

*'It might be one or two, and then you actually bring in then the teaching section. For instance, if it's something that's quite [relevant], we had one that was about business skills or it might be health or something like that, so we bring the partners all together and then we design a program, and it might be stages, and the first one might be non-accredited CSO funding. The next stage might be a skill set, and the next stage might be a certificate course or something like that.'*

Sarah shared a current example (at the time of writing) of this kind of extensive partnership that had the potential to employ a large number of people, such as SydWest clients:

*Sarah: 'We're actually doing something at the moment, and SydWest were a part [and] did refer people, there were jobs going for cleaners at an extension to our hospital, a huge number of jobs. We worked with the HR department of the hospital, we worked with the community partners and then we ran job seeking skills. That way we were actually preparing them for those real jobs.'*

Overall, the organisational links between SydWest and partners such as TAFE go a long way to learning about, accessing, and providing different employability options for clients. SydWest's part in these developments has been active and effective. However, as Blacktown and Mount Druitt become sites of continued rapid economic growth occasioning greater opportunity for migrants and refugees, there is a need to have staff whose focus is on employment, so as to liaise with potential employers to help structure relationships between them and clients, and provide pathways

for clients into prospective jobs, identify appropriate training and qualifications, and have detailed knowledge about Australian workplaces and industries. Sarah suggests that at times SydWest staff, who are mostly excellent, may not have as much knowledge about emerging employment conditions, training needs, and industry developments due to the nature and volume of their generalist case work, but also because employment is complex and finding opportunities isn't always straightforward.

*Sarah: 'Because what I found sometimes is, if the case worker or the community development worker, sometimes if they are not really familiar with the local labour market themselves, or things about Australian workplace culture, then I'm finding... I'm having to help them navigate sometimes some systems.'*

*'I don't mind doing that, but if we'd know about apprenticeships, we'd know about [other employment opportunities]... So even though you might not know about it today, you'd go, "I reckon I could do a bit of research and I'll at least get to a point." Whereas what I was finding sometimes is it'd be like, "I've got a client, they want to do this," which sometimes it wasn't very realistic, and it'd be like, "Okay, well, maybe." Then you'd give some information, which was good, because you were not just doing it for them, you were sharing them information and then they did it with their client.'*

*'I wonder sometimes whether an organisation like SydWest, they may be starting to do it, but maybe bring somebody in that has connections, has contacts with those industries, because even if you employ them part-time or on a consultancy type thing, I think you might get more out of it in some ways.'*

*Interviewer: 'Is that about knowing what opportunities exist?'*

*Sarah: 'I think it is, but it is also connections. Because as we all know, there's that hidden job market, where one of my colleagues, she was very proactive of really going to industry, and she worked it back that way, so she said, "I'm going to industry first and then I'll work it back." Then she did have a large cohort, so there was a pool of people that she could then bring in.'*

Sarah also goes on to comment about the complexities of this area of employability, and how community connections and interagency communication is vital to assist organisations such as SydWest in learning about and accessing opportunities for clients. However, as we will see, SydWest has been active in scoping and developing industry contacts through its more informal and community-based case work that channels employment and training opportunities to clients.



## COLES BLACKTOWN

Coles Blacktown is an employer that has built a relationship with SydWest to fill positions that come up occasionally. Mostly Coles Blacktown have employed SydWest clients to fulfil cleaning and warehouse work roles. The partnership does not appear to be formal in the sense that there is an agreement between SydWest and Coles, but more informal, local, and personal, and one that has been established through the innovation and initiative of SydWest staff. The Coles employee who was interviewed for this study reported that when positions became available, he would approach a SydWest case worker and ask about the availability of suitable clients who might be interested in cleaning and warehouse positions with the supermarket. When clients' names and resumes were passed on, they would run through a brief interview and then be employed. The Coles employee, 'John', reported that they have employed around twenty SydWest clients over recent years, and is pleased with the work ethic and preparedness of SydWest clients.

*John: '...they're reliable. Yes, reliable and hard workers.'*

*Interviewer: '...would you say that once they start there, they're generally ready to work?'*

*John: 'Yes.'*

One of the ongoing benefits of working for a large company, such as Coles, is the chance to build a career and diversify work through further training and opportunity. John from Coles related that the company do offer and encourage employees such as SydWest clients the opportunity to apply for and perform various roles within Coles after starting in cleaning and warehouse work. Some SydWest clients had moved into different roles.

*Interviewer: 'Have any of them [SydWest clients] gone on and done other jobs at Coles? Like started maybe as a cleaner or...trolley collecting and worked their way up to other roles?'*

*John: 'Yeah of course. We offer them...careers. If they want to step up, yeah, we do offer that. So yeah, some of them they have actually step[ed] up.'*

Examples that John describes include SydWest clients who have successfully moved into roles with the supermarket that have quite high levels of responsibility, as John relates:

*John: 'So we had one team member started as... I can't exactly remember, maybe morning cleaner or maybe just a trolley collector and he then became in charge [of a department] full time.'*

*'And I do have another team member who used to clean stores in the morning and then he change[d] his department and he was working in produce department.'*

SydWest's partnered programs and events create tremendous value, are impactful, and are highly effective modes of enhancing and promoting employability through advocacy, awareness, and education. Additionally various partnerships and events have led directly to experience in the workplace or outright employment for many clients, which goes well beyond SydWest's employability responsibilities as an agency. SydWest's role in partnerships to enhance employability for their clients is highly respected by the agencies and employers consulted.

### RECOMMENDATION 2

That SydWest develops a role for a dedicated employment and industry liaison officer who can represent SydWest and SydWest clients more effectively in partnered employability programs. The role can also further develop established partnered program events, such as the Blacktown Business Breakfast/Lunch and Blacktown Employment Accelerator (BEA), but work on developing new and emerging partnerships.

### RECOMMENDATION 3

It is recommended that given their success, events such as the Blacktown Business Breakfast/Lunch and BEA become annual or biannual events. (It is acknowledged, however, that the staging of public events have not been possible due to the lockdowns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic over 2020 and 2021).

### RECOMMENDATION 4

That an event like the Blacktown Business Breakfast/Lunch and BEA be considered to cater especially for high skill/high credential clients, assembling engineering and construction companies, financial institutions, and medical and health departments and employers, universities, and industry peak bodies amongst others to meet clients so as to showcase skills and experience.

## SUMMARY

SydWest has initiated and sustained a range of valuable partnered programs with employers, training organisations, and education providers in the Blacktown LGA and in Western Sydney that have produced a range of highly effective collaborations. These partnered programs have all demonstrated a range of successful employability and employment outcomes, but allowing clients to gain experience in the workplace, access adequate training for entry level positions, and raise awareness about the employment skills and willingness of migrants and refugees with potential employers.

This success notwithstanding, SydWest should look to further increase the effectiveness of partnered programs through the establishment of a specialist case worker whose main focus is employment and training opportunities, making the process of information gathering and communication with clients, partners, and colleagues more efficient. As Blacktown and Western Sydney continue to rapidly grow economically and in population, numerous opportunities present themselves for clients, a dedicated employment liaison case worker would be best placed to take advantage of these opportunities in place of generalist case workers whose workloads currently cover the full range of client services.





## 6. Case work.

*Sarah: 'I think they [SydWest] case manage really well, and I think that they really do know their local communities. They really have a lot of [responsibilities]... They're involved in a huge number of different activities, are involved in the community.'*

*'I think they're such a vital part [of the community], because often clients haven't got anywhere else to go, and I think SydWest is able to bring a whole heap of resources in, centralise that, to allow their clients, to be able to provide them with stuff to do with living skills, stuff to do with navigating Australian systems and things like that.'*

*Interviewer: 'Would it be fair to say that they have a really big responsibility?'*

*Sarah: 'It is, it's huge. Yeah, and it's growing.'*

A crucial element of SydWest's employability programs and services is the role of staff, in particular the generalist case workers who do much of the inter-personal communication and groundwork with and for clients, who liaise with partners and potential employers, and who innovate around constraints and barriers be they policy related, organisational, or financial. Case work can be challenging given the varying needs and personal histories of clients and the environmental parameters that delimit SydWest's settlement operations. Important aspects of case work impacting on effectiveness of services are qualifications, motivation, and the experiences of staff.

In addition to programs and partnerships, general case work that pairs individual clients with case workers is a mainstay means of intake assessing, processing, and working effectively towards employability goals. One of the more impressive and effective aspects of the case work performed at SydWest is its emphasis on cultural sensitivity. There is a strong cultural sensitivity that SydWest demonstrates with its case workers whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds are often the same or near to those of the clients they serve. This allows staff and clients to communicate, plan, and work towards employability outcomes in a highly efficacious manner through empathy, meaningful cultural comparison, and linguistic parity. Many clients and staff reported strong synergies with each other as a result of case workers sharing cultural and ethnic backgrounds, not to mention similar experiences of being a migrant or refugee.

Case work is mostly carried out on an individual, one-on-one basis, but SydWest also offers group-based case work wherein essential settlement services are provided to many clients at once, all of whom are from the same cultural and linguistic background, have the same needs and can benefit from various group-based settlement information sessions and activities. For example, 'Katarina', a case worker at SydWest's Mount Druitt office, explained how these group sessions worked for a group of recently arrived Tamil women from Sri Lanka:

*Katarina: 'And the other part [in addition to one-on-one work] is...group work. Like for example, I am in charge with the women's support group for Tamil community. Yeah. So we do these...women's monthly group meetings.'*

*'Whenever through the intake, when I do when I receive new clients or new referrals. When I do intake, I explain our settlement services to them. So I focus a lot in employment and education...They said we cannot get employment unless we improve our English. Yeah. So this is the barrier for most. And especially with Tamil, they have only maybe... They don't have a lot of extended family or like other communities or support. Yeah. So with these groups also we improve their social engagement, not only that information session. So we do it like one time is only group discussion, only associate engagement on this. And second time, like if I have... if they address any particular topic they want information. So I have to arrange a guest speaker to come deliver this information.'*

Case work and client practice is often related to client cultural contexts and experiences. Katarina explains that she often works with clients who are from poor rural backgrounds and whose employability needs are coaligned with general settlement needs. For Katarina, English language proficiency, informing clients about the transition from welfare to work, and deriving an income through work, are key priorities. Some of her case work with groups is repair work aimed at correcting misinformation about welfare, money, and work clients have received from others prior to migration.

*Katarina: 'And of course, when I provide employment [information], like deliver information session about education and employment within my role...I tell them all the... information about the importance of learning English and getting employment because they come... Many..., the majority, they come from mentality that they receive wrong information overseas... Like sometimes when you do need assessment, then they tell you, "We go there. We heard that from Australia they're getting money from the wall"... Like the ATM machine. Or their proposer they say to them, "You come. You will get money from Centrelink." So my role as orientation trainer, I say to them, this information is not right because no one can get money like this. This money they're giving is not forever. They're giving it so you can do activit[ies] [settlement activities such as finding housing and medical appointments].'*

Katarina goes on to state that for some clients the misinformation has the potential to lead them into illegal activity with regards to working and fraudulently claiming benefits. In addition to illegal activity, Katarina's sessions also highlight the potential for clients to be exploited by employers through not knowing about wages, as well as the longer-term economic benefits to working over welfare. This information about working culture, the legal dimensions of welfare, and the potential for exploitation is invaluable information for clients with little to no knowledge of Australian welfare

conditions and limitations, labour processes, work culture, and exploitation (as we saw earlier). Katarina continues:

*Katarina: 'Yeah. So with th[ese] sessions, they also like some take their relative or th[eir] proposer they tell like you still can get the money from Centrelink if you work some cash money. And I say the risk about it. I say, this is not legal. And if you work cash, [and] something happened or got sick an injury or something, you and the employer will be in trouble. And like also they get [take] advantage with you, if they don't give you a [proper] work wage. If one hour is for example, 40 [dollars], they give you maybe \$10. And I say to them be careful not to do this not legal stuff. And if you want to have a good future instead of relying on Centrelink payment, which is 500 a fortnight. If you find a job, maybe you will get \$1,000 a week. You can get a loan in the future to buy a house, to buy a car. So I educate them.'*

Katarina's group-related employability and settlement activities extend into partnerships and create indirect opportunities to upskill and extend English language opportunities. This confluence of skills, language engagement and social connection aims at assisting clients to gain confidence, as Katarina explains:

*Katarina: 'But we have also MECA here in Mount Druitt. They also provide like a settlement support to the clients. And the partner of course, like I work with like we have from TAFE. For me, I am in charge of sewing class... I am the facilitator. I organise the sessions. I deal with that teacher. Teacher is like who deliver for them the program, like sewing class. We do it here every Wednesday... The sewing class by TAFE, partnership with TAFE. So this also help them [SydWest clients] to get some kind of certificate or thing that they learn new skills of sewing.'*

*Interviewer: 'Is that designed to help your clients look for employment?'*

*Katarina: 'Yeah. I had one client, she was referred by SSI. She attended this. She had a bit background before from sewing. And then she is working now with sewing something related to sewing industry factory. Yeah. She's working. In addition to that, these women also engage during this learning sewing schools. Also, they improve their social engagement... with each other and with teacher. So this give them also help to [learn and practice English]... Because the teacher is speaking English. So, they're practicing their English. And talking with each other, they're improving their social active engagement and [reducing] isolation. And the same time they're learning new skills. Th[ese] skills, there are some jobs like, even with taxation is okay for you like if you do it like... as a hobby. For example, hobby some alteration or doing zipper or this, as long as they report it so they can get some additional money in the pocket. So this is also very helpful. And I'm in charge in this.'*

## QUALIFICATIONS

SydWest staff are all appropriately qualified for the positions they hold. While not essential, it may be desirable for SydWest management to consider encouraging staff to undertake further study to keep abreast of change and development in key policy areas, legislation, and research associated with employment. In addition to further study, regular professional development around industry and economic developments in Western Sydney and would enhance otherwise adequate qualification levels among relevant staff.

## EXPERIENCE

Most of the case workers at SydWest are highly experienced in working with recently arrived migrants and refugees. The average length of time staff have worked with SydWest is approximately 8 years. SydWest has experienced little employee turnover with case workers which benefits team building and team structure, and assures clients have knowledgeable and consistent support from those case workers that they have dealt with previously. Longer term tenures and service of case workers also produce a stock of knowledge, stronger partnerships, and experience in assisting clients.

This stock of knowledge – both formal and tacit – that SydWest case workers have about the problems, challenges, and needs of clients associated with employability, is deployed to assist clients in various ways. At times the challenges and barriers to employability and employment are complex, however many SydWest staff are aware of the complexity and nature of the issues that their clients confront. This is crucial in identifying how services and programs might improve, how partnerships might better meet employability needs, and how to prepare clients for employment through advice or tailored programs (as we have seen above with regards to exploitation and managing career expectations). This kind of knowledge goes beyond the information learned through the assessment and intake process and is gained through many hours spent in both one-on-one and group-based situations wherein clients and staff openly discuss needs and wants, challenges and barriers. Astute and aware case workers are able to operate with clients on a range of levels that reflect the needs of the clients. For example, assessing, managing, and advising the employability needs of Tamil women from rural Sri Lanka, and at the other end of the skill scale, Syrian Engineers.

Much like the experiences of Katarina with Tamil clients, 'Nasir' relates examples of how Arabic speaking clients have been assisted through his tacit knowledge about Australian work cultures for those clients who have not done the EPP or who have been unwilling to do the EPP. Nasir relates that he has encouraged clients who are applying for work in certain jobs to make themselves available on weekends and nights, if possible, to demonstrate a willingness to work and a strong work ethic, important facets of work culture. This has related in some sustained employment success for Nasir's clients at SydWest. Nasir also describes how he sees certain features of learning as indispensable for being prepared for employment, sometimes against the will of some clients, such as being persistent with gaining proficiency in English and attending employability courses that can shield clients from potential exploitation at work.



Nasir: ‘Sometimes, because what’s happening, the community [Arabic speakers in the community] who already have business start using these people, if they don’t encourage themselves to do something [such as study or practice English or learn about employment conditions in Australia]. And because they...have English [proficiency] barriers, something like that. And they don’t know how to do, so [they] start be hunted by another business, for example, in the same background, Arabic background, for example. “Already I have a cleaning business. You can come to work with me. You don’t need English.” They can work with less money. They don’t know anything about their rights, about superannuation, about [if] something happened to you in the workplace [such as an accident or unfair dismissal].’

Interviewer: ‘They’re exploited by some of these groups?’

Nasir: ‘Yeah, they don’t know anything. And also...they don’t have knowledge about the system, the rules.’

Interviewer: ‘Is that part of your role too? To provide that kind of information?’

Nasir: ‘I try, for example, somebody I tell them, “Look,” I said, “Start working.” Sometimes they say, “I start work [and pay] tax.” I said, “How [did] work [pay] tax? Did they pay you superannuation?” They said, “What’s superannuation?” I told, “If you work [and pay] tax, your employer should [pay] superannuation [for you] every time. This is like, because you’re here [in Australia], because back home, you don’t have superannuation. Already [the] government, when you’re retired, they give you money, less money every month. This is your retirement.” They don’t know about...superannuation. About something like that, or about the law et cetera. We try sometimes to also prepare the information session. But sometimes people [say], “Okay, what I’m going to do with this superannuation or this information? I... don’t have job.” People not really want to, like only want to concentrate [on finding a job], “Okay. I want to find a job.” It doesn’t matter.’

## COMMITMENT AND EMPATHY

Of note among the SydWest case workers is the role of life experience, empathy, and a strong ethic of sustained support for clients. Numerous case workers reported being in the same position as their current and former clients as refugees and migrants themselves in an unfamiliar country with little substantive day-to-day support. Despite retraining and requalifying for previous professions in Australia many case workers at SydWest made the decision to undertake study in community services and become generalist case workers to assist those in need. This pattern highlights essential staffing that is deeply engaged with the work through empathy, and a shared experience of the conditions and backgrounds of many of their clients that brings with it a range of tacit skills and knowledge complemented by formal qualifications. Characteristic of the stories of SydWest staff, Katarina describes her motivations for assisting clients as a generalist case worker in powerful terms below:

*Katarina: ‘My own experience like was why I decided to work in a community sector because myself I came to Australia as a refugee. I was very educated. And I had Bachelor Degree in Economics and Administration in my country Iraq. Very educated. Good job. Everything. But I left Iraq seeking safety because of the war. Even at that time, I was working in Iraq as a supervisor in National Insurance Company of Iraq. Even that time the borders were closed. But still my company sent me for training in England. So I was very successful in my field. But when I left Iraq seeking safety. When I went through this journey from Iraq to Jordan and Jordan to Turkey and to Greece. And faced many...life threatening risks, especially I was pregnant with my third child. And I fled because all this, what I suffered through my journey...We were... Yeah. I was pregnant and I fled from Turkey to Greece through boat 37 people in small boat...That time was very risky... Because I also was good in English, I was helping the group with translating, communicating with Greek people, all this. And we stayed.*

*When we applied for our paperwork to come to Australia. It took about 10 months to be processed in Greece until we were given visa to come to Australia. So through all this process with this living like with challenges [of a] refugee. And my first thing I decided when I come to Australia, I’m going to change my career. I will look for work to help community, to work [with] the community because I experienced that...So since arrival [in Australia], I started doing...volunteer work with the community organisations and the churches helping people. Okay. And then I worked as a case worker with ACL. And then worked as a case manager with SSI, orientation trainer with SSI. Then I also worked with a team leader with Relationships Australia for a project building stronger families to help them avoid DV. Because a lot of DV issues they arise due to cultural differences with the new arrivals refugee. And then now a case worker with SydWest. So all this, that’s why I studied... community services, case management diploma, all this.*

*So until now I am having this blessed job, [of] which I am proud. Yeah. I settled many clients. I helped them settlement well. Very complex cases. Now, even they are living in Victoria. In Melbourne, I was working as a case manager many years with SSI. Still, they call me or they appreciate me. Or they say, “We wish if still Katarina is with us as case manager.” Like with us. I feel proud of myself when I help people, motivate them to empower them to overcome their barriers and to settle. Many settle smoothly in Australia.’*

Case work is a mainstay process in the derivation and administration of SydWest employability programs and services. This section has highlighted some of the key facets of case work that SydWest staff are involved in. Others in more detail are highlighted in different sections throughout, as in the next section on informal unfunded initiatives.

Despite the excellent and highly effective case work shown by SydWest, for Anish, a crucial addition to SydWest’s resources to make employability programs and services even more effective and efficacious is a funded full-time industry liaison, as per the recommendations from the previous section. Such a person can learn about, develop, and communicate industry connections and partnerships, and generally build on the effectiveness and efficacy of this aspect of SydWest’s employability programs and services, and indeed this is a recommendation of this evaluation.

*Anish: ‘With staffing, definitely, because right now with the small amount of funding, we are mobilising the staff who we have right now. It means the generalist case worker. You know? Okay. We are mobilising generalist case worker as like... But if we want to deliver good services and expect better outcome, definitely we need a qualified officer who is able to engage with the different local business and who is able to advocate in the policy level as well as with the local business or industries or employer about the benefit of having call [CALD] communities or refugee background people in their workforce.’*

Finally, clients gave a range of highly favourable impressions of their experiences with case workers who had assisted them tirelessly with employability needs. These impressions are characterised by ‘Paresh’ who describes how case workers have helped him with his employability needs:

*Interviewer: ‘Can you tell me any more about how SydWest had helped you in relation to employment?...are there any other things that working with, say a case worker or a particular person that have really helped you...?’*

*Paresh: ‘Yeah. About that worker, whenever I had...a problem and I wanted to clear my doubt or something like that, so I came over here [to SydWest] and they...arranged... for [some] help... So whenever I need, they have helped me.’*

*Interviewer: ‘And would you say that help has been... beneficial?’*

*Paresh: ‘Yeah. “Very beneficial for me. Without SydWest I think it would have been a bit difficult for me as a refugee.’*

## SUMMARY

SydWest case workers are adequately qualified, experienced, and demonstrate various means of skilfully and effectively assisting clients in employability. Further, SydWest case workers have demonstrated a highly impressive and very strong empathy for clients, as many if not all generalist case workers at SydWest involved in employability programs and services have been migrants or refugees themselves. Case workers at SydWest are culturally appropriate and linguistically skilled to assist clients from a range of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, especially those whose English language proficiency is low. This aides effectiveness in employability programs and services immensely (cf. criticism of JobActive earlier). Case work at SydWest relating to employability goes well beyond effective assessment and intake, administration, and delivery of programs, as well as initiating and nurturing partnerships, to include sustained and nuanced advice, information, and counselling pertinent to clients’ employability needs for individuals and sometimes for whole groups, that is sometimes formal but otherwise tacit. A fuller exploration of how case workers produce effective employability outcomes through unorthodox means is the subject of the next section.

## 7. 'Informal unfunded initiatives'

'Informal unfunded initiatives' is a term the SydWest staff themselves have coined to capture a range of employability programs and services that go beyond what the agency is required to provide, however represent innovative problem-solving ideas that achieve employability outcomes for clients with few other options. The phrase is also an admission – in the language of community agencies and programs – of the at times exasperating labour of assisting clients with this crucial aspect of settlement under particularly limiting and constrained conditions, be they policy limitations, resource deficiencies, or inaction and disinterest from allied agencies and organisations.

While case work and formal programs are the cornerstones of employability services for SydWest, innovation and creative thinking to reach solutions and positive outcomes in assisting clients is a feature of SydWest's wider commitment to employability programs and services for clients. Interviews revealed a number of ways that generalist case workers in particular have used initiative, experience, and a knowledge of employment and labour conditions to assist clients beyond formal programs and funded initiatives. These initiatives are to be highly commended for their effective outcomes and for the high level of engagement and care with which case workers especially have shown towards clients in need.

A process that characterises the 'informal unfunded initiative' is the work that SydWest does in responding to the specificities of clients and employment. 'Rania', a generalist case worker, provides a compelling example of the nexus

between a case worker's own skills, experience and empathy in responding to clients' employability crises. Rania, who was a taxation accountant before migrating to Australia, was able to assist a number of clients to establish their own businesses due to their knowledge and experience. This example is all the more effective in terms of employability because it is an example of assisting clients to become not just workers, but in some cases, employers themselves through starting a business. Rania describes two key examples of this kind of innovation:

*Rania: 'Some of my clients already started their business. I have one from Iraqi background, and it's very successful story. I was very happy with him. I assisted him how to start his business, and he's starting his business in very successful way. And then he left for, maybe, a few months and he come back to me, "Would you please provide employees for me?"... Yeah. I send for him, employees, from our clients.'*

*'He has a cleaning business...He took big car parks, something like that, and he asked for three or four from our clients. It's very successful for me... So, I assist one to have his own business, and assist other to find jobs.'*

Another case involves a famous Syrian hairdresser, as Rania describes:

*Rania: 'I have another case. I remember that man, he came from Syria, maybe four years ago. His English is*

*not perfect, and he was studying at TAFE, but he was a professional as hairdresser. He has nearly three shops in his country and he has many employees under his hand. He's running good job. He was very famous.'*

*'When he arrived in Australia, he has to go to study English at TAFE. There is another problem, which is English language... for people like him. He has to study from the beginning and sometimes become [discouraged] with the grammar, with the dictation. Sometimes it's not necessary to go ahead [with] that because they are not academic persons. After that he become depress[ed]. [T]hat man came to me and he was crying at that time... He said, "Rania, I can't. I can't continue like this, going and come back from TAFE. There is no improvement." Even at that time, many Syrian and Iraqi people in TAFE together and they speak together in Arabic, so his English is not improved and he feel that he's wasting his time. And he has golden hands.'*

*Interviewer: 'He's really good?'*

*Rania: 'Yeah. Then he said, "Rania, what can I do? I can't continue like this. At the same time, I can't go to my country because it's war. I will be killed there."... I contact one of my local hairdresser. I know her very well, and said to her, if you need someone, he's from Syria, he's a professional. He said, "Rania, to please send him to me. I need him to work with me." He went there and he was very happy at that time. And then he want to start his own business, because when he got the experience, he know where can get the material,*

*where to open his shop, target people who can work with them. And then he opened, I think in Bankstown... He hired a small shop. He's going very well...'*

In addition to these examples, Rania shares that their connections in the community have also led to successful employment outcomes for clients who are interested in catering or hospitality. A number of local restaurants have hired SydWest clients on the strength of communication and networks built up by case workers such as Rania.

*Rania: 'I have many connection[s] with some of the restaurant[s] around us. I send some people to them and they accepted them. We have no problem.'*

Catering and hospitality are key areas of employability innovation for SydWest. In this next example, Rania discusses how the ambition of starting a business can assist in other areas of employability such as the crucial area of English language proficiency, and also coming to terms with ecommerce and digital skills that allow businesses to reach many different customers, especially through the lockdowns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 and 2021.





Image provided by SydWest.

*Rania: 'I think, as I told you, we can focus in specific jobs with the specific language. And after that they can deal with other things... One day, SydWest asked me to run food handling course for Arab people. [T]he course was for 16 persons. They came, and the teacher came from TAFE, and she [ran] the course for, I think maybe, two weeks. I help with translating. All of them, when they have the test, they pass because part of the test is practical. Most of them work for restaurant because they [have] the certificate. Arabic people [in the Blacktown LGA]... have their own restaurants. Some of them start their business from home, just catering and sending [food orders]. They have certificate and they started their business... This is how to manage with people who are not speaking English. Believe me, after that, they're speaking English very well because they have to create their first Facebook, and they have to respond for people from different cultures, and they will contact with English.'*

*Interviewer: 'To take orders and the rest?'*

*Rania: 'They take orders. First time they translated, then they... get used to use these words... That's my idea...'*

*Interviewer: 'Your idea is that the language course could be [based] in very practical settings?'*

*Rania: 'Yeah.'*

*Interviewer: 'You're setting up a business, Facebook page, writing a menu, dealing with customers...'*

*Rania: 'Yes, I have... three. They already start catering from their homes, and they have their Facebook. Even me, I ordered from them... So, you can find Iranian, Afghani, Syrian, Iraqi, you can find whatever you... When you are in this country, you will try everything... It's starting and not being in the corner, because they are working.'*

*Interviewer: 'That's really interesting because, I think, you've got government departments and you've got TAFE and you've got... These programs are designed to try and assist people. From what you're saying, your interaction with these people, that maybe there are much better ways of actually achieving these ends, so learning English or gaining qualifications and experience.'*

*Rania: 'Instead of losing three, four years just studying English, so they can go ahead for work. And they can add some parts for work health and safety... Because it's very important to know about work, health and safety, but it's not that difficult. You can teach him about the signs, about the words, and they can go ahead.'*

Rania describes numerous other clients they have assisted at SydWest to start their own businesses involving the basics of registering a business, getting an Australian Business Number, and learning about taxation. There are many successful employability stories that have arisen from informal unfunded initiatives such as those described above. SydWest might look to formally develop a program around starting a business, partnering with an educational and or training provider, and seek out State and Federal government assistance with seed funding and expertise to assist clients.

## REPAIR WORK: OVERCOMING INEFFICIENCY, APATHY, AND DISCRIMINATION

Another informal unfunded initiative is something encountered above that has been described as 'repair work' for clients. This is where a SydWest client has approached an employment service and had a confusing or unhelpful experience and SydWest case workers make attempts to repair the damage done by another agency that has little understanding or insight into a client's needs or capacities. A poignant example is Christine's description of working with clients to actually find employment after bewildering experiences with agencies such as JobActive.

*Christine: 'Yeah, no, I was just going to say, even though it's not our job to find them a job, we end up doing that. We literally end up doing JobActive work, which I found very, very frustrating because Jobactive the providers, like there's so many times that I'll attend meetings with the clients and their Jobactive provider to try to explain to them. The person does not understand what you're [Jobactive] talking about. You're telling them to look for 20 jobs for a month or whatever, for them to report. They can't... They don't even know how to use the software. They're literally... And the person is frustrated because they actually want to work. But because you [Jobactive] are talking to them and you're [Jobactive] talking really fast without actually acknowledging on or even trying to engage if they understand what they're saying because normally the person [the SydWest client] would just say yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Yeah. So we do end up doing most of Jobactive work without the funding and even helping our clients to look for jobs so that they can do the report.'*

There are a number of important aspects to this evidence that highlight key forms of impact, value, and effectiveness of SydWest's processes and empathic practice. Importantly such 'repair work' relates to intake and assessment processes whereby clients are holistically assessed, leading to a more comprehensive client profile incorporating common migration and refugee experiences, such as trauma, impacting orientation in a new country, and subsequently, various settlement needs such as employability. Christine again:

*Christine: 'When the client first walk[s] in, we have the initial assessment, which is the whole filling out a form. And once that's done is getting to know the client really and getting to know what they were doing back home. What they're interested in. And I think one of the crucial thing[s] that we do is also understanding some of the traumas that they come with... And some of, especially just to examine their mental state to actually work. And the type of job that will be suitable for them, so that comes with ongoing conversation. That's why when the client come[s], we don't find them a job right away because it's not even our job to find them a job to be honest...'*

'Repair work' also involves a level of persistence with clients concerning employability but also with some Australian employers who, according to some case workers, are discriminatory. A discriminatory labour environment reinforces the value and impact of the Blacktown Business Breakfast/Lunch events and other forms of migrant and refugee advocacy to make employers aware of the skills and capacities of SydWest clients. Christine relates the impact of discrimination:

*Christine: 'And when I was doing the employment project, I would go home crying because [these] clients are literally the most intelligent, hardworking people that I've ever met. One man he was from Iraq and he owned several businesses, several restaurants that were... very, very profitable. But then he had to leave everything and come back here to [start from] scratch, starting from nothing. And he was looking for any job at all, even as a waiter and he wasn't getting that. And some clients are like, IT specialist, doctors. There was a lady, she's a doctor back home. But because she practiced in her language, so it's a lot different here. And the processing to get your license recognised here having to pay so much money and do those international tests in English and everything it was just a lot. And she was looking for a job as a pathologist, which is a bit of a downgrade from what she used to do. But that was similarly difficult as well. And there was a woman that... She's amazing. Those people really stick with you. Take them along with you through our life.'*

*This woman she's so intelligent. She's very business minded. And she came on a partner visa. And she was being abused at home. Unfortunately, I couldn't do much about it because she didn't want to report it. She lived with her mother-in-law and her partner. She has a baby. But all she wanted was a job so that she can leave the house. And her English was great. I was baffled when we were reaching out to employers and they're like, "Do you have any local experience?" "No." "Okay. Sorry."*

*Interviewer: 'What do you put that down to Christine in your experience? Is it discrimination...? Or what would you say?'*

*Christine: 'I would say it is definitely discrimination. It is discrimination on the basis that it's easier for me to have a certain type of people in my workplace. Discrimination in a lot of places. It's just... And lack of responsibility as an employer because employers also have a social responsibility to the communities that they're in... Right. But I also believe that on more like a policy level or from a government sort of level, if those things are more enforced [anti-discrimination in employment], if that's a priority for the government that the employees are working... Their businesses are working on that, then they would also prioritise it, if it makes sense. Yeah. It is very evident that it's not a priority at all for them to put in a little effort to employ someone from a different background and give them a chance.'*



Christine further elaborates on discrimination in the labour market and cultural discrimination and the informal repair work that she instigates on behalf of her clients to assist them in overcoming it:

*Christine: 'They have a full portfolio. The only thing that is lacking is experience in Australia and like an accent that sounds like an Aussie sort of accent. And that plays such a big role, even their names can be an issue. I literally have to tell some of our clients to take off some of their middle names or even abbreviate their names when they're... And it's really unfortunate, but that's what we're dealing with...'*

*Interviewer: '...indeed... That sounds like an informal kind of set of learnings and ideas that are not necessarily part of the more formal stuff that you guys would teach clients, but it's obviously crucial because you want... You're trying to help. Look, this is this culture and this is how it deals with some people who are different.'*

*Christine: 'It's definitely off the record sort of conversations that I have with my clients... You build those relationships and they become almost like... You really care [for] them. You want them to do well. And also me being someone from the CALD community and having had this experiences firsthand, know where I have to literally change, swap my first name with my middle name. And I can evidently see the difference when I apply for jobs. And having family and friends that we've literally, we've done like an experiment and changed our names with the same resume and it makes a huge difference...'*

What Christine is relating here is amply demonstrated through a number of studies in the social sciences where names, hobbies, and other references to cultural background are barriers to gaining employment compared with applicants whose names are Anglo-Celtic (see Oreopoulos 2011; Oreopoulos and Dechief 2012; Bertrand and Mullanaithan 2004; Edo, Jacquemet and Yannelis 2019).

While these informal initiatives are effective and relate to a number of dimensions of the NSOS framework, there is ample scope for further development of these initiatives and potential to partner with external stakeholders and government programs through entrepreneurship, seeking of funding opportunities, and proposals with partners in the Western Sydney region.

#### RECOMMENDATION 5

SydWest works with TAFE NSW and other English language providers through an employability network to develop work-related English Language courses and teaching opportunities in addition to formal AMEP.

#### RECOMMENDATION 6

SydWest considers developing a formal program to assist clients to start a business with partners such as TAFE, Blacktown City Council, NSW State government, and Blacktown Chamber of Commerce. This program should consider searching and accessing seeding or starter grants for small business.

#### RECOMMENDATION 7

SydWest records and develops informal unfunded initiatives that have been successful and seeks to further develop them with external stakeholders, through an employment liaison officer, and client feedback.

#### SUMMARY

Informal unfunded initiatives relate to innovation and initiative in employability powerfully and effectively at SydWest. The initiatives related here also relate to other dimensions of the framework such as highly effective career counselling and experiences of Australian workplaces through case work. Other examples of this kind of case work relate to examples of partnered programs we saw earlier. Empathy, cultural sensitivity, and the professional backgrounds of case workers are woven into successful employment outcomes through unfunded informal initiatives. Another important dimension of informal initiatives is 'repair work' associated with the apathy and inconsideration of the needs of migrants and refugees from other employment-related agencies, as well as the discrimination migrants and refugees face from potential employers. Further, the exercising of informal initiatives reveals deficiencies with and proposed potential solutions to, crucial aspects of employability needs such as the acquisition of proficiency in English, which as scholarship demonstrates can be greatly enhanced by situational learning (Blake, Kneebone and McLeod 2017).



## 8. Data protocols, monitoring, and empirical evidence.

Agencies such as SydWest are encouraged to implement and administer appropriate data collection for evaluation and reporting purposes by the Settlement Council of Australia, among other organisations, that exist to assist refugees and migrants. Data assists agencies such as SydWest to engage in evidence-based practice and decision making, to monitor and report on the effectiveness and satisfaction of programs and services such as those designed to deliver on employability outcomes. Capturing general client data that records the employability needs of clients combined with various demographic attributes also allows for planning for specific groups such as women or young people. Such data not only allows SydWest to achieve these aims but is useful as evidence to support funding applications to extend existing programs and services, or implement new ones where the need arises. Despite the value and use of such data, it is widely acknowledged that agencies such as SydWest can find it difficult to collect adequate and necessary data to achieve these aims due to capacity, time, and resources (Victorian Family Violence Data Collection Framework 2019). Data collection and data analysis for people and behaviour are complex and specialised skills and are therefore often beyond the capacity of agencies that operate with tight budgets and whose workforce is at capacity with the day-to-day demands of its core business.

Despite these limitations, SydWest has demonstrated effective collection of some key data that informs particular processes, such as intake and assessment of clients' employability needs and aspirations. Further, some data collection for employment outcomes from 2019 – 2021 for a select group of clients is a vital record of how many clients have found employment and in which industries and professions, assisting SydWest in future program and service provision. Some evaluation and satisfaction data with events such as the Blacktown Business Breakfast/Lunch was also evident, providing insight into the success and value of such events for clients and partners. However, there do appear to be some data gaps with respect to employability programs and services that could be filled, such as surveys evaluating all programs and services, staff climate questionnaires, and qualitative data on client experiences. These data can inform service and program gaps and be used to identify improvements in employability programs and services based on client and staff feedback. Notwithstanding the constraints identified earlier, SydWest could look into a more formal longitudinal data collection project that tracks the outcomes and experiences of clients over time.

### RECOMMENDATION 8

SydWest could consider reviewing existing data and data protocols to identify data needs associated with employability programs and services and consider training staff in basic data collection and analysis. Other options might include partnering with a data collection agency or university to gain assistance with data needs. For the express needs of employability programs and services, a data collection model and protocol that builds yearly databases of clients, monitoring of employment programs and services, and evaluation data inclusive of a range of different methods such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups, will provide SydWest with adequate benchmarks for reporting and decision making. Further, such methods should ensure that any data collection gives clear and consistent voice to client experience.

This concludes the results section. In the next sections, the report summarises the achievements and challenges of SydWest's employability programs and services, tables the effectiveness of SydWest's employability programs and services through the evaluation schema and summarises SydWest's employability programs and services in relation to key dimensions of the evaluation framework.

## 7. Achievements

Firstly, achievements can be related to the aims of the study:

1. Assess the general effectiveness of SydWest's employability programs and services
2. Determine the extent to which SydWest provides employability programs and services aligned with the NSOS for standard 2 'Employment'
3. Rate client satisfaction with SydWest's employability programs and services
4. Suggest how SydWest's employability programs and services can be improved

- AIM 1** SydWest's employability programs and services are highly effective
- AIM 2** SydWest provides employability programs and services that are strongly aligned with the NSOS for standard 2 'Employment'.
- AIM 3** Client satisfaction with SydWest employability programs and services is high
- AIM 4** 10 recommendations derived from this evaluation to enhance, develop, and improve employability programs and services

In addition to these primary aims is 'aim 6: assess the current data protocols of SydWest relating to employability programs and services and discern the data needs for future benchmarking, monitoring, and decision making'. SydWest should review data protocols for employability programs and services to address any current gaps.

SydWest can proudly reflect on many positive and life changing achievements in the settlement area of employability for their clients. Across the dimensions of this evaluation framework, SydWest has achieved many outstanding outcomes of high effectiveness for its clients and is often the sole provider of many essential services for some of the community's most economically vulnerable people.

Of note is the fact that through innovative case work initiatives, highly effective collaborations, and community knowledge and experience, SydWest has often gone well

beyond providing employability programs and services to foster and create actual employment opportunities for many clients. This has occurred through an empathic outlook and practical client-centred response to client need, addressing the gaps and inefficiencies in employment placement encountered by clients engaged with other agencies. SydWest is to be highly commended for the creation, development, and execution of these partnerships, whose impacts and value have been so profound to its clients' economic prosperity, work and employment confidence, and settlement experience.

### EMERGENT DIMENSIONS OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

What has also emerged from the analyses of SydWest's employability programs and services is a set of what can be termed *emergent dimensions of professional practice*. These dimensions are perhaps less tangible and to some extent unrecognised in more formal frameworks such as the one underpinning this evaluation, but they have emerged from the qualitative data and present as important, impactful, and effective means of advancing the employability of migrants and refugee clients. Below are highlighted six emergent dimensions of professional practice that resonate with the overall aims of SydWest's employability programs and services, and that appear especially in case work, intake and assessment, and to some extent in the more formal programs that SydWest has facilitated. These emergent qualities are mentioned not just as a form of achievement-related platitudes evidencing a warm and humane multicultural

service, but as actively effective dimensions of client practice that have tangible effects on stated employability outcomes.

### EMPATHY

It is highly evident that SydWest staff demonstrate empathy towards their clients and their employment aspirations. Through various examples in this report, empathy has contributed to successful and effective outcomes not just in terms of employability of clients but also in terms of employment. Empathy through case work is derived from common previous experience as a migrant or refugee and the recognition of urgent human need amidst challenging and difficult circumstances. Empathy in case work entails the broader environmental complex of migrant and refugee experiences relating to trauma, displacement, mental and physical health concerns, and cultural confusion. Empathy is a lead motivating determinant of the many important instances of repair work identified in this evaluation.

### CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Cultural sensitivity is especially important in assisting clients, especially clients with lower levels of proficiency in English, but whose cultural backgrounds are the same or similar to those of case workers. Cultural sensitivity enables clients to be assisted, when necessary, in a client's native language. The effectiveness of cultural sensitivity stands out for SydWest when comparing clients' experiences with related agencies such as JobActive.



### PRACTICAL AWARENESS

Practical awareness relates to examples herein whereby case workers especially have informed clients about employment situations that are difficult to comprehend or situations that are complex, such as the aspirations of some high skill/high credential clients. As learning about the realities of employment in Australia and meeting the immediate settlement needs of clients is complex, a practical awareness helps clients prioritise and organise effectively. Practical awareness also relates to the examples of unfunded informal initiatives, wherein, case workers are able to skilfully advise clients to adapt to conditions and achieve their employment ambitions through innovation. Practical awareness also operates in the numerous examples of partnerships with employers.

### REPAIR WORK

Repair work is a highly effective yet unacknowledged extra burden carried by SydWest staff on behalf of their clients. It becomes apparent when clients have no one else to turn to in the event of discrimination, apathy, and disinterest on the part of employers and employment-related agencies. Repair work is crucial for the fact that navigating settlement, managing trauma, and rebuilding families in Australia after migrating is highly complex; this becomes even more complex when agencies who are set up to assist migrants and refugees are ineffective or when employers choose not to engage with potential workers from a migrant or refugee background. SydWest does much repair work, and as a result those who might be headed for a life of entrenched disadvantage have some hope of regaining economic dignity. It should be noted also that beyond the personal and cultural indignities that necessitate repair work, this kind of assistance SydWest provides for its clients because of other agency failings is economically and temporally inefficient to the aims of any service or program associated with employment and employability.

### REFLEXIVE PRACTICE

Promoting effective change through awareness of client need and aspiration is a key dimension of SydWest's employability programs and services. Reflexive practice is evident in the evolution of SydWest's formal and informal responses to client employability needs in line with the SETS Client Services Program and the NSOS framework through the development, in particular, of the EPP and partnered programs.

### ADVOCACY

Advocacy is a common theme with service providers such as SydWest, however its practical effectiveness associated with concrete outcomes such as employability is less likely to be raised. SydWest engages in a range of advocacy activities, however, of note is the impact and effectiveness of the Blacktown Business Breakfast/Lunch and the Employment Accelerator Program. These events showcased the skills and capacities of SydWest clients and led to a number of successful outcomes for clients through raising awareness.





## 8. Challenges

### AIM 5

Understand the organisational, communal, and policy contexts in which SydWest's employability programs and services operate and how these enable or hinder employability effectiveness.

SydWest administers and delivers employability programs and services within a communal and policy environment that isn't always conducive to or supportive of its employability settlement aims for its clients. There are many challenges that range from client apathy and personal difficulties to the unaligned aims and aspirations of partner and associated agencies and organisations whose operations are related directly or indirectly to employability. Further, government policy and funding models and communal ignorance of the capabilities and skills of migrants and refugees create additional barriers to settlement goals, such as employability leading to employment. Despite this broader environment being sometimes obstructive, SydWest has confronted these challenges with successful programs and services based on highly effective case work, appropriate employability course work programs, innovation, effective communication, and partnerships that have profoundly assisted the overwhelming majority of recent migrants and refugees who have inquired about and accessed SydWest's services.

Commentary on these challenges from SydWest staff suggests some frustration with external factors that limit what is possible, as well as recognition of the valuable work that partner and associated agencies provide.

A first step in addressing these challenges and a possible area of enhancement for SydWest is to develop a greater focus on employability through the establishment of a formal network with a range of local partners with the specific focus of employment for migrants and refugees. The network would attempt to replicate successful employment networks in other parts of Sydney, such as the Fairfield Employment and Community Services forum. While SydWest has achieved a lot of employability success with current partnerships, a formal employment network can provide a forum of pooled professional resources and knowledge enabling greater collaboration, improved information sharing, greater access to potential employment and training opportunities and data and evidence gathering and analysis. This network, combined with a dedicated employment and industry liaison officer, can potentially greatly boost SydWest's employment and employability information and program efficiency.

### RECOMMENDATION 9

SydWest creates a formal employment network in the Western Sydney area that meets regularly to identify opportunities for employment, training, and work placement for clients. The network should also be encouraged to discuss common goals for clients between agencies, barriers to achieving goals, and innovations around problem solving for employment. Clients should be represented in the network and given space to articulate needs and wants. The network should perform a strong advocacy role to help overcome discrimination.

### HIGH SKILL/HIGH CREDENTIAL CLIENTS

Despite the overwhelming success of SydWest's employability services and programs for many refugees and migrants that have sought the agency's assistance, a key challenge that remains for SydWest is how to engage with and appropriately assist high skilled and highly credentialled clients. It is estimated by SydWest staff that people in these categories constitute approximately half of SydWest's clients who seek employability assistance<sup>v</sup>. This is a high proportion of clients and stands out as a significant current and ongoing challenge to settlement. A few of these clients expressed some frustration at what little SydWest seemed to be able to do for them in the context of their specific employment aims and ambitions. There are highly complex external factors and problems beyond the scope and capacity of SydWest's employability services that make appropriate and desired assistance for this category of client very difficult, however. For example, entry into former professions of many clients in Australia can be excessively time consuming and expensive due to recognition of prior qualifications and experience, retraining, and re-accreditation where necessary.

Sometimes complexities and delays also arise due to problems associated with establishing former credentials and experience from clients' home countries. Appropriate professional standards and credentials notwithstanding, various industry hurdles and government regulations often erect barriers to the professions that are simply beyond the capacities of migrants and refugees to overcome without sustained financial and personal support. The provision of English language teaching for high skilled/high credentialled migrants and refugees

is further lacking through little or no access to professional vocation or technical English related to professional occupations. Further compounding factors for entry into the professions are the confidence and esteem of clients themselves, many of whom would eagerly like to resume their previous careers but lack the information, orientation, and proficiency in English to be able to effectively.

The position of such clients can be complex and difficult, but also consequential with the potential to produce a range of adverse affects on settlement for individuals and families. One serious consequence of what sociologists term 'declassment' (Bourdieu 1978) – a term denoting the downward shift in social mobility and accompanying loss of class and status through loss of profession – is the turmoil of family and gender roles within CALD communities. This in turn is acknowledged to be a trigger for various forms of family disfunction such as domestic violence. Relatedly, the settlement problems associated with employability for high skilled/high credentialled clients extend into poor mental health, anxiety, and depression.

It is not the conclusion of this evaluation that SydWest is responsible for the employment situation of such clients as mentioned. However, it is advised that as a primary settlement contact, that SydWest, in partnership with various agencies and organisations through an employment network, considers carefully and works on developing various options and plans for more appropriate and specialist services and advocacy for such clients, such as the recommendation about exploring options through a revised EPP. In doing so, SydWest and partners can contribute not only to the employability

<sup>v</sup>. Approximate estimate from SydWest.



dimension of settlement but address connected family violence and mental health issues.

SydWest and partners could also look to innovate around options and paths for high skill/high credential clients where access to former professions is limited. For example, while direct entry to previous professions such as a doctor may be out of reach for a client, a client's previous qualifications and experience may be suited to semi-professional work in a related field, such as pathology, teaching, or community health work. Partnering and developing plans with universities and technical colleges to develop bridging programs, professional trainee or work placements, specialist English programs, and other related occupational infrastructure, could enhance the settlement process for these clients.

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

A challenge not just for SydWest but for the network of stakeholders associated with employability of migrants and refugees is the ongoing barriers to employment and employment progression associated with English language proficiency. Staff report that despite the various employability services and programs that SydWest and partners offer – including English language training – there are many clients who find it difficult to progress in a career or fulfil their employment potential due to their English proficiency. Further, there are more intangible or difficult-to-measure experiences that staff report about clients such as confidence and outlook that become diminished as a result of employability experiences and career expectations. Examples are the problems encountered over requirements to enter a profession being overly difficult, while having to deal with the various other necessities that are associated with settlement. Maryam, a generalist case worker, describes this situation for some clients:

*Interviewer: 'Is there sometimes a mismatch between what a client, what type of job they may want and the type of skills or their level of English?'*

*Maryam: 'That's right. But the thing, for example, if I'm an engineer back home, I expect to work here as an engineer. So if I'm not able to meet the needs or requirements, so it doesn't go anywhere. Because by the time I start learning more English, I'll lose my confidence along the way. And there are some other story [impacts] that happen... to me mentally.'*

*Maryam: 'But these are invisible, people don't see that. We just see the visible ones, so okay, the language is not [the only issue], but we don't understand. Okay, what's causing that? We don't know what's causing the issues with the clients. I mean, we do with the employment.'*

*Interviewer: ...'what's happening with the client and how their outlook and their view and their confidence, so that's for you, your clients report back on that to you and tell you that, "Look, this is how I feel about all this and..."'*

*Maryam: 'Yes. Most of them they lost their confidence. Like they tell me, "When someone talk to us, we understand, but we are not able to communicate as much as they do. So it's influencing on our confidence." ...it's [a] confidence issue and motivation for many clients. That even some of them told me, "We feel shy to speak English." Because they might just pronounce a word just correctly. And even in the interview, if they are not able to communicate, they feel shame or they feel shy.'*

*Maryam: '...the thing is it's a different world. So there should be a new person to be able to survive. So to break down that shell, if we name it like a shell, they need to come out of that shell. There are lots of things involved. It's not only just the language or [other] things. So the mental health issue is down there, which is influencing everything.'*

#### RECOMMENDATION 10

SydWest works in partnership to develop a plan through the employability network on how best to attempt assist high skilled/high credentialed clients achieve employability in their previous profession or related profession.

### DISCRIMINATION

Another key challenge is discrimination from employers. As Christine made evident earlier, a number of clients are locked out of potential employment due to having little or no experience in an occupation in Australia, despite having the necessary qualifications and experience, sometimes many years of experience in their home countries. Discrimination from employers is also cultural and relates to how job applications and resumes are constructed and amended to accommodate Australian cultural conditions. While many clients are successful in being prepared for work and eventually finding work, this appears to be more related to the effectiveness of partnerships with training organisations and employers. However, success may be limited for clients who attempt to apply for jobs outside of a partnership. One role that the employment network could undertake is a strong advocacy role for migrants and refugees to further engage employers in considering SydWest clients through more extensive and dedicated events and information.

## 9. Framework dimensions summaries, outcomes, and effectiveness assessments

This section revisits the evaluation framework dimensions with summaries drawn from the evidence presented throughout the study to report formal assessments about the effectiveness of SydWest's employability programs and services. The assessments are outlined and summarised in Table 9.1 below with the populated template. Written descriptions of the assessments are also given.

### STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH

SydWest has shown through case work that it achieves a strengths-based approach to employability of clients. This strengths-based approach is clearly demonstrated through case work and specifically through client surveys and interviews, whereby outcomes such as appropriate advice about courses, training, and employment related to strengths have been demonstrated with empirical evidence. The impact and value of a strengths-based approach is represented by numerous clients who have accessed appropriate vocational training leading to employment readiness or directly to employment.

SydWest has also demonstrated a strengths-based approach through their assessment intake process that consists of an initial interview and client survey that records a client's prior experience, skills, qualifications, English language proficiency and Australian employment aspirations. Importantly, SydWest staff are able to create a client profile that situates the client within a realm of employability possibilities

taking into account client strengths, but also limitations within industry contexts of various professions in Australia, accounting for Australian regulations and qualifications that present as considerable obstacles to clients to the professions. Outcomes SydWest achieves through this process are managing employment expectations of clients, and provision of appropriate advice on a process of enhancing employability through training, education, and or re-skilling options.

### IMPROVEMENTS

While SydWest has achieved a highly effective strengths-based approach to employability, there is perhaps room within certain programs and services to provide greater assistance to high skill/high credential clients who need information about skills and qualification recognition and assistance with navigating that process, in addition to learning about industry standards and other barriers to possibly re-entering their former professions in Australia.

### EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

SydWest has an excellent suite of effective collaborations that meet the employment aspirations of many clients through employability programs and services. Further, effective collaboration occurs through a range of case work-related unfunded informal initiatives from generalist case workers who have created links and communication channels to local employers and RTOs. Three employability programs and services serve as compelling empirical evidence for impact and value leading to effectiveness in effective collaboration. Firstly, a constructive partnership with TAFE NSW (Blacktown) sees SydWest clients receive training and advice, as a first step to employability. Second, the Blacktown Business Breakfast/Lunch and Blacktown Employment Accelerator programs connected a range of local employers with SydWest clients providing a strong form of advocacy, resulting in a greater awareness of the ambitions, skills, and capacities of migrants and refugees as workers. Third, formal and informal partnerships with RTOs such as Wesley Mission and employers such as Coles Supermarkets provide opportunities to gain qualifications and practical experience for employment in personal care through courses and work placements, or employment outright. Effective collaborations are also extant for SydWest's youth employment program: School-to-Work

### IMPROVEMENTS

Interview data from select SydWest staff suggested a need for a specialist role within the organisation who can focus on developing industry and professional partnerships to learn of and develop employability opportunities for clients. Indeed, various data used for this study supports that determination also as a means to further improve an overall highly effective set of collaborations. As Blacktown and surrounding areas continue to develop economically and grow in population, many new and emerging employability and employment opportunities will arise. This for SydWest is a matter attached to how the service is funded by State and Federal government. This evaluation supports an application to State and Federal government to fund an industry liaison officer. Partnerships that lead to unsatisfactory employability outcomes are sometimes due to the differing orientations and goals of partners. There has been some frustration with the JobActive program, for example, that has led clients back to SydWest with some confusion and bewilderment about the process of finding and applying for a job.

### EXPERIENCING AUSTRALIAN WORKPLACES

Experiencing Australian workplaces through work placements, volunteering, and internships, much like effective collaboration, has been achieved for many clients through vocational training courses and case work links that communicate vocational programs and training courses to clients. Key aspects of experiencing Australian workplaces such as understanding Australian workplaces is a crucial component of employability that is well covered in SydWest's EPP and well-received by SydWest clients. The learnings gained by clients about Australian workplaces result in impact and value concerning the rights and entitlements of workers in Australia as well as the responsibilities of workers towards employers and roles within a job. These learnings

are highly effective for SydWest clients who have no or little understanding of Australian workplaces before engaging with SydWest employability services and programs. At times these responsibilities are more covert such as the range of soft skills associated with professional dress, grooming, and personal hygiene for personal care jobs.

### CAREERS COUNSELLING AND SUPPORT

This dimension also includes understanding Australian workplaces, which has been discussed and assessed in the previous section. The focus here however is ongoing support after employment. This is delivered at SydWest primarily through individual case work on the specific request of clients as the need arises such as expressing interest in potential employment in a desired job. The outcome is often further advice about training and employment opportunities for future career and employment ambitions for clients. The impact and value of ongoing support after employment for clients creates a sense of career progression and confidence in the agency's ability to continue to guide and counsel the client in employability. In combination with improvements in clients' proficiency in English and experiences of Australian workplaces through employment, clients reported that they often revisit SydWest case workers to learn about additional training courses, employment opportunities, or information leading to more fulfilling careers in line with greater employment aspirations. SydWest provides strong careers counselling and support after employment.

### REDUCING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

While women and young people's employability needs are often adequately met via generalist employability programs and services, women and young people can present as sub-groups of migrants and refugees who have specific employability needs within specific contexts. Innovation and initiative are at the heart of reducing barriers to employment for women and young people who, as clients, engage SydWest's employability programs and services. Female case workers in particular who have been through the migration and refugee experience themselves provide empathy towards the sometimes specific needs of women. Through assessment interviews case workers are able to learn of and discern the specific needs of female clients and young people, leading to tailored outcomes such as appropriate advice about context-specific training courses and employment pathways, but also auxiliary information about maternal health care, child-care options, and advocacy work to negotiate with trainers concerning commitments such as parenting or caring for older family members that often fall to female clients in families. Regarding young people, they too sometimes have specific employability needs such as educational advice on university courses that reflect a young person's position in the life course without caring or immediate employment needs.

SydWest has also offered female and younger clients ongoing support after employment, after completing the EPP, or after completing a training or a vocational course. This is usually through case work leading to specific advice about further qualifications, information regarding specific jobs, and or communicating to clients other employment opportunities.



TABLE 9.1

EVALUATION SCHEMA WITH RESULTS					
NSOS (EMPLOYMENT) DIMENSIONS	STRUCTURE AND PROCESS: HOW SYDWEST MEETS NSOS (EMPLOYMENT)	INDICATORS	OUTCOMES	EFFECTIVENESS	IMPROVEMENTS
<b>STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH</b>	Client intake and assessment Careers counselling and support	Client survey Client interview Case work Employment aspirations considered Empathy Practical awareness	Accurate client profiles Appropriate advice concerning employment and employment training Advice on English language needs	High effectiveness and high client satisfaction Employment aspirations met Employment aspirations appropriately revised to meet specific needs of client in the context of settlement	Some accommodation of some high skill/high credential clients through employment network and information on skills recognition and careers resumption
<b>EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION</b>	Partnered programs and events Employment Pathway Program (EPP) Unfunded informal initiatives	Blacktown Business Breakfast/Lunch Blacktown Employment Accelerator Vocational training with partner RTOs Brokering employment opportunities Guest speakers from industry Interagency fora participation (BMI and MECA)	Gained employment Employment opportunities Work placement opportunities Strong client advocacy Awareness of skills of clients Reduction of prejudice against migrants and refugees Information and opportunity sharing	High effectiveness and high client satisfaction Clients gained jobs Clients well prepared for employment in specific industries and jobs meeting the needs of community through filling skill gaps	Appointment of a dedicated industry and employment liaison/case worker to represent SydWest and clients to take advantage of current and future employment growth and training opportunities
<b>EXPERIENCING AUSTRALIAN WORKPLACES</b>	EPP Partnered programs and events Case work – one-on-one and group based	Course content Resume preparation Practice job interviews How to apply for jobs Work placement, volunteering, internships Group-based courses on Australian workplaces and work in Australia other than EPP One-on-one case work	Understanding Australian workplaces Recognition of rights and responsibilities of employees and employers Understanding Australian work culture Acculturation from welfare to work Work placement opportunities	Highly effective and high client satisfaction Clients well informed about Australian working conditions Clients learned about the difference between welfare and work Clients gained employment through work placements associated with vocational programs	Some dedicated course content for high skill/high credential clients that provides clear information on how to achieve skills recognition and what requirements are necessary to access former careers in Australia, through the EPP
<b>CAREERS COUNSELLING AND SUPPORT</b>	Client intake and assessment Case work Unfunded informal initiatives Repair work	Client interviews Client consultations Information sharing from local networks and connections to clients Entrepreneurship: starting a business Ablly assisting clients after poor experiences with other agencies Assisting clients to overcome employment-related discrimination	Generation of career aspiration Awareness of job opportunities Awareness of training opportunities Connection to local employers Skills and experience of case workers' former career used to assist clients Empathy driven assistance to achieve employment aspirations	Highly effective and high client satisfaction Clients aware of job and training opportunities Clients have started successful businesses Clients have employed other migrants and refugees Clients' proficiency in English has improved through entrepreneurship initiatives Clients have learned to engage with the digital economy Clients gain clarity around employment activities	
<b>REDUCING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN AND YOUNG PEOPLE</b>	School-to-Work Program Careers counselling and support Case work	Course content Follow up with clients after employed Allied assistance: child-care services, maternal health services Group-based courses Group-based employment oriented social activities	Understanding Australian workplaces Recognition of rights and responsibilities of employees and employers Understanding Australian work culture Acculturation from welfare to work Work placement opportunities	Highly effective Young clients gained employment Young clients sourced training and education opportunities Case workers provided adequate support for young people after gaining employment Female clients can plan employment around child rearing	
<b>DATA AND EVIDENCE</b>	Data collection	Client survey Client interview Evaluation data for some events Client employment data	Accurate client profiles Monitoring of clients Revised counselling Satisfaction with events Strengths and weaknesses of events Impact of events on clients	Effective but needs some improvement Data allows for some monitoring and evaluation of programs and services Can make decisions based on data	Need a more comprehensive and consistent database of clients More consistent evaluation and monitoring data for programs and events Partner with data agency or university to construct longitudinal outcomes data collection for clients

## 10. Recommendations

1. That as part of the EPP going forward, SydWest provides more specialist information that assists high skill/high credential clients to take steps towards previous qualification and experience recognition in Australia, and information around Australian industry standards and entry to professional occupations in accordance with client aspiration and previous qualifications and experience.
2. That SydWest develops a role for a dedicated employment and industry liaison officer who can represent SydWest and SydWest clients more effectively in partnered employability programs. The role can also further develop established partnered program events such as the Blacktown Business Breakfast/Lunch and BEA but work on developing new and emerging partnerships.
3. That given their success, events such as the Blacktown Business Breakfast/Lunch and BEA become annual or biannual events. (It is acknowledged however that the staging of public events has not been possible due to the lockdowns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic over 2020 and 2021).
4. That an event like the Blacktown Business Breakfast/Lunch and BEA be considered to cater especially for high skill/high credential clients, enabling assembling, engineering and construction companies, financial institutions, and medical and health departments and employers, universities, and industry peak bodies – amongst others – to meet clients so as to showcase skills and experience.
5. That SydWest works with TAFE NSW and other English language providers through an employability network to develop work-related English Language courses and teaching opportunities in addition to formal AMEP.
6. That SydWest considers developing a formal program to assist clients to start a business with partners such as TAFE, Blacktown City Council, NSW State government, and Blacktown Chamber of Commerce. This program should consider searching and accessing seeding or starter grants for small business.
7. That SydWest records and develops informal unfunded initiatives that have been successful and seeks to further develop them with external stakeholders, through an employment liaison officer, and client feedback.
8. That SydWest considers reviewing existing data and data protocols to identify data needs associated with employability programs and services and consider training staff in basic data collection and analysis. Other options might include partnering with a data collection agency or university to gain assistance with data needs. For the express needs of employability programs and services, a data collection model and protocol that builds yearly databases of clients, monitoring of employment programs and services, and evaluation data inclusive of a range of different methods such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups will provide SydWest with adequate benchmarks for reporting and decision making. Further, such methods should ensure that any data collection gives clear and consistent voice to client experience.
9. That SydWest creates a formal employment network in the Western Sydney area that meets regularly to identify opportunities for employment, training, and work placement for clients. The network should also be encouraged to discuss common goals for clients between agencies, barriers to achieving goals, and innovations around problem solving for employment. Clients should be represented in the network and given space to articulate needs and wants. The network should perform a strong advocacy role to help overcome discrimination.
10. That SydWest works in partnership to develop a plan through the employability network on how best to attempt assist high skilled/high credentialled clients achieve employability in their previous profession or related profession.



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