

## FINAL REPORT OF THE

# Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) Innovation Fund Employment Language Support Program (Job Accelerator) Pilot Program 2021-22

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Funded by the Department of Home Affairs



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Home Affairs**

# Executive Summary

Spectrum is committed to leading change for a more inclusive Australia through collaboration, partnership and innovation. Essential to this is bringing the voices and contributions of the clients and communities we work with to all that we do. Working together we can create positive pathways so that refugees and humanitarian entrants can quickly feel at home and flourish in Australia.

Hosting the SETS **Language Support Program (Job Accelerator) Pilot Program** has enabled Spectrum to do just that. This report demonstrates that despite the extensive challenges of the COVID19 lockdowns, we have been able to develop an innovative approach to sustainable careers into the ageing and disability support sectors while improving participants' vocational English and confidence in the workplace.

As many reports have shown, humanitarian entrants to Australia are resilient and entrepreneurial, but face multiple barriers to connecting to stable employment and full economic participation. By finding creative solutions which build on the hopes and strengths of refugees these barriers can be overcome. When this happens, our workplaces, services and communities are enriched by diversity.

This pilot has demonstrated that this is possible. Essential to this is a supportive and flexible employer, willing to work collaboratively with participants and other support staff. The **Multicultural Home Support Service** social enterprise has been a fundamental component of this pilot and we hope that it will provide inspiration to other for-purpose organisations who are willing to invest in the potential of refugees. As well as growing this work within Spectrum, we hope that the next stage is for us to share these learnings and innovations across the social enterprise and settlement sectors, bringing about change on a larger scale.

Finally, I would like to thank all the participants and staff who contributed so much to this project, and also the Department of Home Affairs for supporting the project through the SETS Innovation Grant.

**Bernie Nott**  
CEO, Spectrum Migrant Support Centre

# Introduction – the Employment Language Support (Job Accelerator) Pilot Program

Spectrum's **Employment Language Support (Job Accelerator) Pilot Program** was developed to provide job opportunities for vulnerable migrants and refugees who were still engaged with the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) or learning English in a community setting.

It was designed as a strengths-based approach to support participants to:

- overcome barriers to entry-levels jobs in the health and community services industries
- introduce people to the workforce earlier in their settlement journey than is often the case
- provide industry-orientated, job-focussed language support

For the Pilot we worked with Spectrum's **Multicultural Home Support Services** (MHSS). We wanted to establish a successful, ongoing pathway for refugees not only into MHSS roles but also into other aged care and disability providers. MHSS has service contracts (to provide staff) to over fifty social care organisations and cannot currently meet all the requests for staff it receives. The ongoing need to recruit support staff provides an opportunity to connect new Australians with paid employment.

Supports offered to the participants included:

- Vocational English language support targeted to the specific employment opportunities
- Group sessions to practice English and participate in a peer network
- Access to self-paced learning
- Peer mentorship (a 'buddy'), work experience/shadow shifts and pre- and post-placement support
- Support to engage in a Certificate III in Individual Support for participants seeking to take on the personal care/support worker roles. An objective of this pilot is to establish an ongoing pathway for SETS-clients into employment at Spectrum and in other industries

*Opportunities for labour market participation should be enhanced. They are a key component of integration. Indeed, for many refugees and their families, finding a job is central to the success of their settlement in Australia. It is a stepping stone to building a career or founding a small business. It is crucial to their families' financial security.*

The Shergold Review, 2019

## Spectrum's Multicultural Home Support Services (MHSS)

MHSS is Spectrum's social enterprise developed over twenty years ago to support migrants and refugees in the northern suburbs of metropolitan Melbourne to connect to work.

It now provides over 10,000 hours per month of culturally appropriate home support services to ageing and disability clients.

Over 150 support workers are employed who together speak over 45 languages.

MHSS employs a range of staff including domestic assistants, gardeners, drivers, and individual support workers.

MHSS often provides the first workforce experience for new Australians. It seeks to be a supportive environment, where workers can gain workplace experience while they increase in confidence and English skills.



### The key aims of the Pilot Program

**Bringing employment & English language acquisition together as one goal** - built on feedback from clients, the program was designed so that participants could increase employment opportunities and connect to work while still learning English. This included the opportunity to improve English in an interactive workplace setting as well as the classroom.

**Support to begin a pathway into a career with different, long-term opportunities** – the participants could begin work as a Domestic Assistant and build experience, skills and confidence while working towards more qualifications and so increasing their opportunities into the future. In particular, providing support to undertake Certificate III in Individual Support.

**Targeted Support for People with Vulnerabilities** – the program was designed to provide a highly supported pathway into employment to make this program accessible to people with additional vulnerabilities including women with caring responsibilities and people with mental or physical health issues. Participants could access others Spectrum services while engaging in the Program, which may include support to access driving lessons, to purchase work-related items, to access childcare, to access mental health support, to be connected to social inclusion activities.

### The Challenges and Limitations created by the Melbourne Covid 19 Lockdowns

When the program was designed, none of the partners anticipated that Melbourne would endure such extended lockdowns in 2021. These had a profound impact on the project. Some of these were negative – causing delays (in the hope that postponing activities would mean that we could do them later in the year), and in some cases cancelling all together. Ultimately, our AMEP partner was not able to deliver the course they had designed as it needed to be delivered in person and this was not possible before the end of the partnership agreement. Some of the prospective participants did chose not to join the program for a range of reasons including inability to join online (for instance because of caring responsibilities), ‘Zoom fatigue’ or taking up different training instead. When the in-person training could take place, we had to restrict numbers due to social distancing requirements. We also had further delays while participants waited for appointments to receive vaccinations.

However, the Covid 19 restrictions also provided opportunities, including testing different learning environments, and refining our approach. Our AMEP partner did develop a curriculum which has already formed the basis of a new project approach and will be used in the future. As an adaption, more educational partners became involved in the development of the curriculum, and we were able to draw from a wider pool of expertise. We learned what activities could be effectively taught online and which needed to be face-to-face. We learned that the optimum number for each course is between 8 and 15 participants, and that many people learn quickly in an interactive, in-person learning environment but that this can be successfully supplemented by online group work.

Although challenging, the pandemic meant that Spectrum developed additional resources which we can now draw on into the future.

# Designing and launching a job accelerator program – communications and recruitment

Part of the aim of the pilot was to reduce barriers to employment which are commonly faced by refugees with little or no experience in the Australian workplace while still providing the opportunity to practice and improve English.

Key barriers include:

- Little knowledge or experience of navigating the employment market and knowing what opportunities are available
- Lack of local experience and references
- Need for certificates and driving licence (which can be costly and time consuming to achieve)
- Lack of roles which are a pathway to different careers options

To overcome this, we designed an ‘Open Hire’ system which removed barriers and made application for the roles as quickly as possible. This included Social Media Campaigns – with videos and flyers – through Facebook, What’s App, Instagram and Settlement contact lists

From the outset of the Pilot, the MHSS Hiring Manager and Individual Support Workers co-designed the communications and resources with the employment team. Many Spectrum Support Workers have a refugee or migrant background, through consultation **key messages** were identified. These included:

- the opportunity to continue to learn English while you work
- a supportive and trustworthy employer who will support you when you are still learning and have questions
- working for a culturally sensitive organisation
- not having to submit a detailed CV or Application Form
- things that are important in doing the job - such as always respecting the client and their customs
- knowing that you will build confidence and find different ways to communicate with the clients and make them feel at ease

These messages were then incorporated into the communications and training materials.





# Outreach Sessions and Job Coaching

**Information Sessions were held in a range of forums with SETS clients - with Melbourne Polytechnic, in Spectrum language and parenting sessions, youth programs with Africause and the National Zakat Foundation.**

Prospective participants attended the sessions and heard more about the program and the opportunity to combine English learning with working towards a job with MHSS. Sessions were mostly provided over Zoom (due to lockdown uncertainty), in English and other languages. We often made use of 'Zoom rooms' where following an English presentation, attendees could follow up with questions in different languages supported by a member of Spectrum settlement services or community partners. Over time, we found that this was particularly successful in reaching recent arrivals who are Tigrigna and Amharic speakers and so also provided flyers in these languages.

Large numbers attended the information sessions and had the option to register for a follow up consultation where we could explain more about the process, check eligibility and progress to an interview with MHSS. These sessions usually took about an hour to conduct.

A lot of people who signed up for these sessions were not eligible for the pilot. The main reasons for this were either that they had been in Australia for more than five years (so could participate in AMEP but were no longer SETS eligible) or that they had come to Australia on a non-SETS eligible visa but were nevertheless struggling to find work while improve English. This demonstrated that there was a significant need for these kinds of programs for a wider group of migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Where possible, Spectrum connected these people to other employment and training supports. This was a learning for the program as it was significantly more resource-intensive than anticipated. However, we have now adapted the information sessions so that we can signpost participants to a range of possible supports. We are now exploring ways in which as well as expanding this program, we might run a similar one alongside so reach a wider cohort of CALD communities, including parents with caring responsibilities.

Another issue which arose concerned applicants who were interested in the program but where the employer chose not to make an offer of employment. The MHSS provides services in the homes of vulnerable elderly and disabled persons, so requires staff to have certain skills and aptitudes to fulfil the role. MHSS also provides services to around fifty social care organisations, so a high standard of service and consideration of reputation is a core feature. The MHSS Hiring Manager did not feel able to make a guaranteed offer of employment to all applicants. Some partner organisations were keen for the applicants to have the opportunity to participate in the course anyway, even if they were not offered employment at the end. As the offer of employment was a core part of the aim and communications of the pilot, Spectrum decided that we would try to offer different supports (such as referral to English language classes and training support programs) instead. This made clear, however, the importance of working with employers on the design of the program.

Some SETS clients chose not to proceed with the program because of the entry-level nature of the work. This was particularly the case for those from highly skilled backgrounds, and in part arose from a concern that once they were in work, they would be ineligible for other employment supports. These candidates were referred to other programs, including ones that linked them with the industry from their country of origin.

## Learnings:

- The flyers and targeted media campaigns were an effective way of engaging participants.
- We were able to refine the recruitment process over the duration of the pilot.
- Providing sessions in English and also different languages enabled many more SETS clients to engage with the program as this provided comprehensive information about the opportunity provided in an accessible form.
- We developed resources to refer non-eligible / unsuitable participants to other employment and training supports.
- There is a significant cohort of (ineligible) new migrants and refugees who have been in Australia for over five years who could benefit from a program like this if we can develop one.

# The Job Accelerator Training Program

**One of the strengths of the Pilot was the opportunity to learn how to create a program that would meet the needs of employers. Although MHSS were closely involved in the design phase, once we began implementation many of the employer's needs came into focus and fed into the training course.**

As MHSS support vulnerable aged and disability clients, the Domestic Assistants and Support Workers they employ need to have qualifications and skills in health and safety procedures, infection control and lifting and handling. As they might be the only person visiting a home, the workers need to be able to respond quickly and confidently in English to a crisis situation. The training course we developed with our partner organisations supported the participants to gain these skills and knowledge in a way that build their English proficiency. There was then significant improvement in language use once the participants began their buddy shifts and work experience.

The Job Accelerator Course was provided in person and online. Each week the participants built upon previous knowledge and looked at a new topic.

As well as classroom learning it included simulated workplace hours.

The following pre-accredited units in the CHC33015 Certificate III in Individual Support (partial):

- *HLTINF001 Comply with Infection Prevention Control Policies and Procedures*
- *HLTWHS001 Follow safe work practices*
- *HLTAID003 Provide First Aid to be provided by ITFE*
- *EAL Provide instruction in English level 1 and 2*
- *IT Basic Computers*

## Learnings:

- The candidates were supported in the sessions with a bicultural settlement and employment staff from Spectrum who could support in English and other languages. This was very helpful in the early sessions in supporting the participants to engage fully and build their own confidence in English.
- When provided appropriately, the participants were able to achieve the micro qualifications which significantly increased their opportunities to connect to employment. Some of the participants chose to work with other employers (nearer to home and caring responsibilities) but the fact they had Health and Safety and other certificates helped them secure a job.
- Not having a driving licence was a significant barrier for many applicants. Support with lessons and driving tests will be important for many SETS clients, especially those beginning their employment journey where not being able to drive could be a significant barrier or disadvantage.
- Participants provided very positive feedback about the interactive elements of the course and the opportunities to hear from lived experience mentors and suggested that this be a strong element of the course going forward.



# Beginning work – support in the workplace

This Pilot was developed out of the recognition that there is room for significant improvement in the employment prospects of refugees. After three years of settlement, 38% remain unemployed. We know through our settlement services that this is often challenging and disheartening for

the individuals and families involved. It is also a loss of resources to the Australian economy and community, and costly. Unsurprisingly, the Australian Government's Priority Investment Approach to reduce long-term welfare dependence has identified refugees as a priority group – in 2017 it was estimated

that the total future lifetime cost of working age (unemployment) payments was around \$344,000 per person. Furthermore, if parents are not able to successfully connect to employment the life chances of their children are likely to be negatively impacted.

Sometimes the biggest challenge for SETS clients is for work to be sustainable in the long term. Clients may struggle with workplace expectations and customs if they are not provided with support to navigate the early stages. This can negatively impact confidence and motivation. To address this, a key part of this Pilot was to provide support in the early stages of employment, and this proved to be very important and so will be a significant part of the Program going forward.

Participants were supported to:

- Continue regular group meetings with Spectrum's AMEP Learning and Development Project Officer to ask questions, reflect on the role and have the opportunity for further training and role play
- Undertake shifts with MHSS staff to learn the job
- Provided with wrap-around supports, adapted to the needs and skills of each participant
- Provide feedback to Spectrum and MHSS about how we can continually improve the Project

### Becoming work ready: other supports that need to be part of the program

The wrap-around supports which were provided were an essential part of the Pilot as they were crucial to its success. As this was a partnership between MHSS and Spectrum's settlement services, MHSS could provide guidance on what was needed from the employer perspective. Spectrum staff could then work with participants to ensure they understood the requirements of the role and build on their strengths to support them to meet them. Without this kind of partnership, an employer may not be able to sustain the

offer of employment and it would be a missed opportunity for participants who just need support to grow into the role.

The additional supports were provided by the Pilot lead, the AMEP Project Officer and MHSS staff as appropriate. These included:

**Reinforcing Safe Work practices** – although we did these in the classroom, they are best learned on the job with a supportive buddy. Participants were also provided with the opportunity to discuss their experiences, questions and ideas with a staff member.

**Developing strong communication skills** – the participants needed to adapt to communicating in English in a whole range of new ways – with the administrative staff to schedule shifts and timetables and receive client reports, speaking with clients and their families and support with responding to emails and telephone messages. Spectrum staff provided helpful coaching and role play to promote the development of these skills. This has had such a positive response that we have now extended the opportunities to practice email etiquette across our settlement groups.

**Support with Centrelink** – starting work meant that participants had to declare changes to income. This also proved to be an opportunity to practice completing online forms in a supportive environment.

**Getting a driving licence** – a number of the participants were keen to do the course but did not yet have a driving licence. Through the SETS Women's Safety Funding a number have been able to have lessons, pass their test and start work. More participants are currently undertaking lessons and this will continue into next year.

## Learnings

- A major strength of the Pilot was the enthusiastic participation of the participants and the ideas, feedback and guidance they provided. The pathway we have been able to create is built on their knowledge and experience.
- The SETS participants each brought many individual strengths to the program and with the right supports both before and after starting work it was possible to build on these and increase vocational confidence and skills.
- Participants valued the opportunity to spend time with staff in an English-speaking context and felt it helped them improve their language skills at a faster pace.
- Some participants benefit from doing the course more than once or supplementing the experience with volunteering and work experience placements. We are now offering increased opportunities for this.
- Those who are still developing English proficiency may need additional supports throughout the journey – from before training begins until months after beginning work.
- Many participants benefitted from one-on-one coaching to develop skills and experience in particular areas. These were very varied – for example writing emails in English, practicing conversations with clients, cleaning skills, arranging childcare and developing familiarity with navigating new neighbourhoods. Some participants adjusted quickly to the workplace setting while for others it took much longer. This was a significant learning for Spectrum in hosting the Pilot, that we need to plan sufficient resources which can then be provided in flexible, holistic ways.
- Working with Spectrum's own social enterprise meant there was a commitment to flexibility and taking the time to reach positive outcomes for participants which may not have been possible with another employer. To meet both the participants and employers' needs going forward we are exploring MHSS hosting work experience placements earlier in the program. This will enable participants to grow into the responsibilities of the workplace in a supportive setting before connecting with other employers.

# Developing Resources for the Future

As part of the Pilot, Spectrum has been able to develop resources and approaches to continue to support SETS clients into work. Two key examples are:

### Lived Experience Mentors

The Lived Experience Mentors were a central part of this Pilot but will make an even bigger contribution going forward. Activities will include:

Mentor training – mentors will be provided with training and development opportunities to support them to develop supervisory skills to new recruits. They will also have a stronger role in facilitating feedback from clients.

Participating in writing training resources – we have created several training videos for MHSS and the mentors will continue to be involved in the co-design of these. As new Aged Care regulations are introduced, we will develop materials to help staff remain up to date.

One of the outcomes of the Pilot was that we were able to develop a **Job Accelerator Manual**, a living document which provides detailed guidance about the whole pathway into work – for example communications and recruitment, assessment, training, job coaching, buddy shifts, and more. Building on this resource, we can continually improve and adapt the Program as needed into the future. We can also easily share the model and approaches with partner organisations and other for-purpose employers seeking to support refugees into employment. Here is an example of guidance to buddies as they support participants in shadow shifts in clients' homes:

There are two types of shifts.

- **watch and learn shifts:** for new workers who need to learn cleaning, manual handling and work health and safety requirements
- **buddy shifts:** for new workers who have a good understanding of cleaning and can demonstrate safe work practices

*For watch and learn shifts. Please show and explain each part of a normal shift. It is important that the new worker shows a willingness to learn and communicate in English. Encourage the new worker to ask questions and to talk with you and the client. The aim is to prepare the worker for buddy shifts.*

*The purpose of the buddy shifts is for new workers to get on-the-job training and for you to observe and evaluate their performance. Please allow the new worker to complete as many of the tasks as possible. Your role is to supervise and support the new worker. Use the checklist to evaluate both the cleaning tasks and communication ability. Encourage communication between the new worker and the client. Their English does not need to be high level, but they should use strategies for clarifying and problem solving if there is a communication difficulty.*



# Stories from the participants

Through Spectrum's settlement services, we knew that a number of recent arrivals from Eritrea were struggling to connect to employment and also find positive opportunities to improve their vocational English. In response we actively promoted the Pilot to the Eritrean community and provided bicultural support to participants. These case studies tell three of their stories of participating in the Pilot:

**Saba** aged 37 years is from Eritrea. She went to Ethiopia to seek refuge where she was registered as refugee by the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Tigray, northern Ethiopia. After staying in a refugee camp there for four years, she got a refugee visa sub class 204 to Australia and arrived on 15/08/2018.

She first found casual seasonal work in Australia after a year, first on a farm in Tasmania and then as a housekeeper in a hotel. She has found that low English language proficiency is the main barrier to employment opportunity for refugees and migrants in Australia. She said the six weeks training under the SETS Innovation Program particularly helped with her confidence in the English language, saying 'The training helped to be confident to talk and respond in English'. She added it also helped improve her confidence with driving especially on freeways as well as use of navigator.

Working with MHSS Saba now has the opportunity to develop her working life in a new industry of social and community care. There are still challenges (the number of hours can be smaller than expected and not all work receives a mileage payment) which she is unhappy about. Otherwise, she recommends the training to others from refugees and migrants because it helps improve English language confidence, gaining of knowledge and skills.

**Mustafa** is from Eritrea. He left his country to seek refuge in Egypt where he was registered with the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). After having lived in Cairo for over two years, he got a refugee visa and arrived in Australia on Humanitarian Sub class 200 visa on 26/07/2017. Mustafa has not found a job until now that he believes is due to his low English proficiency and his being older. He indicated that the six weeks training under the SETS Innovation Program had helped to improve his confidence in speaking English as well as other skills, namely First Aid, Health and Safety at work and Infection Control. He added that the Melbourne COVID19 lockdown situation limited face-to-face interaction which he would have preferred. However, the training had helped him improve his confidence in speaking English.

Although initially he did not get the required number of hours of work as a DSW (because some clients refused to be supported by a male), after a few weeks he was offered a role as a driver for MHSS. Mustafa pointed out that he recommends the program to other participants because it helps them to gain knowledge and skills and improve their confidence in speaking English language.

**Helen** aged 33 years is from Eritrea. She left her country to seek refuge in Sudan. After a year and half in Sudan, she proceeded to Egypt where she got refugee status by UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). She has been doing casual cleaning jobs in Egypt as a refugee. After nearly three years, she got a Refugee, sub class 204 visa to Australia and arrived on 9 April 2019.

She was unable to get a job in Australia mainly due to her low English language proficiency and lack of awareness on how to find a job. She indicated that the six weeks training by Spectrum was very useful in terms of gaining knowledge such as on safety at work and improving confidence with English language skills. She added she is currently doing Certificate III in Health Service Assistance at Djerriwarrh Community & Education Services, and the knowledge and skills she gained from the training is helping her with her studies. She pointed out thanks to the training course she had with Spectrum, she found courses in her current study such as safety at work easier.

She indicated that she highly recommends others to do the DSW training course because it is helpful in improving one's knowledge and skills such as in safety at work as well as improving confidence with one's English language. Lastly, she said after completing her Certificate III, she would like to work part-time for Spectrum besides her PSA role.







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