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Committee Wellington Regional Strategy
Author Joy Sipeli Project Coordinator

Refugee and Migrant Recruitment and Self-Employment Project

1. Purpose

To provide a final update about the Regional Refugee and Migrant Recruitment and Self-Employment Project.

2. Significance of the decision

The matters for decision in this report **do not** trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger section 76(3)(b) of the Local Government Act 2002.

3. Background

The Regional Refugee and Migrant Recruitment and Self-Employment Project is one of the strategic actions in response to three base strategy documents. These are: the Wellington Regional Strategy (WRS), the Wellington Regional Settlement Strategy and the Wellington Regional Labour Market Strategy (WRLMS). The primary strategy is the WRLMS that was jointly developed by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) and the Department of Labour (DOL).

This initiative builds on the 2006/08 *Wellington Regional Action Plan for Refugee Health and Well-being* for refugees living and settling in the Wellington region that included Hutt City Council, Porirua City Council, Upper Hutt City Council and Wellington City Council as partners “to improve access to information and services that lead to financial independence, appropriate employment and small business opportunities.”

The WRS office is hosting this project as a partnership arrangement with MSD. It is being funded by the Ministry. It is a pilot project, running for a 12month period. It finishes on 14 April 2009.

4. Project Update

This project update will cover the outcomes we set out to achieve, the work in progress and the next steps going forward.

4.1 Final report

The final project report will be completed by 31 March 2009. Over March, project partners will together determine the handover or exit strategy of responsibilities that have been undertaken by the project to date.

4.2 Key outcomes from the project

4.2.1 Commentary is provided for each outcome (*see italics*) expected for participants and the project in general are listed below:

- (a) *Sustainable employment through career support and planning within the local and regional councils in the Greater Wellington region are achieved*

The project has achieved this for one project participant who is married with two dependents. Upper Hutt City Council has employed one project participant to their Community Development section and the participant's comments are featured later in this report.

- (b) *Relevant skills and a better understanding of the importance of skills training and are more marketable to the labour market are gained*

Writing skills (job application cover letter and CV writing) is one area that the project has assisted 39 project participants. We found that just under half of project participants showed levels of weakness in this area and therefore needed our assistance.

A partnership between the project, Career Services and Change Makers Refugee Forum arranged for two CV workshops for refugee communities. Interpreters were provided to support the 13 refugee participants.

- (c) *Any skill deficiencies experienced are identified at the initial assessment stage and are addressed. This can include facilitating other interventions by third parties who have skills and experience to achieve positive outcomes for the participant*

The project has referred four project participants to the ESOL¹ Assessment and Access Specialist Services. In these instances, the project co-ordinator made the referrals because routine daily conversation interactions with these participants were very difficult to understand.

¹ English for Speakers of Other Languages

- (d) *Meaningful Career Pathway Plans are provided, leading to career opportunities within a specific industry or area within local/regional councils*

The project faced limitations with respect to this outcome in that meaningful career pathway plans became meaningless when most of the project participants were pre-occupied with just getting any job to earn an income. One IT participant, with dependents, became discouraged by multiple unsuccessful IT job applications and chose instead to study massage therapy.

Another limitation with respect to this outcome was that councils do not have a career brand programme that would complement career pathway plans that would be developed by the project. In a strategic response to this finding, the project undertook a process in consultation with council human resource personnel to identify champions, in particular managers who would agree to participate in initial work experience programmes targeted at project participants. Managers would host a project participant in their business unit over four weeks.

- (e) *The number of jobs that provide opportunities to increase potential and enhance productivity in the workplace are maximised by addressing skill and labour shortages*

The project faced limitations with respect to this outcome in that there was an overall mis-match of skills and experience required for local councils' vacancies and the skills and experience of the skill set of project participants exacerbated by almost half requiring assistance with cover letter writing skills and CV writing in a New Zealand context.

- (f) *Persistent disadvantage in the labour market is minimised and the sustainability of employment enhanced*

See below response to (h).

- (g) *A flexible, highly skilled workforce that is responsive to the needs of the labour market and an innovative economy is developed*
- (h) *Participation in employment, earning and quality of employment for disadvantaged groups is improved*

The project has developed a proposal to establish a refugee employment pathway scheme as an enabler to increase its participants' employability. Research shows that refugees are among the most marginalized group in terms of access to labour markets. In New Zealand Immigration Service (NZIS) research the main source of income for 89% of the recently arrived refugee group was a Work and Income benefit.

- (i) *An inventory database is developed that will capture evidence based information on refugee and migrant skills, experience and qualifications. Other important data indicators may also be captured.*

The project inventory database records 112 participants that were referred to the project. Of these, 81 participants were assessed as those fitting the target group criteria. The database shows 15 (18%, total n=81) participants with no formal qualification, also showing 66 participants (80%) with formal university undergraduate and post-graduate qualifications.

5. Work in progress

5.1 Databases review

Greater Wellington entered into an agreement with the Change Makers Refugee Forum to provide support for the project in the management and review of current databases. This partnership has since developed a proposal that describes an over-arching employment pathway scheme that includes interventions from all of the region's newcomer service providers.

5.2 Employment pathway scheme

5.2.1 General

The employment pathway scheme would rely heavily on a database that would track and progress newcomers through the pathway to achieve employment outcomes. A newcomer service provider forum is planned to take place in late March to work through a coordination process model that the employment pathway scheme proposes.

In developing an over-arching regional refugee employment pathway scheme the project has compiled a stock-take of the region's current newcomer service providers that focus on refugee employment support initiatives.

The benefit of having an employment pathway scheme is that it would step newcomers through a methodical process/pathway toward employment outcomes.

Below is one overseas "pathway" example:

Researchers at the University of Birmingham have developed a structured 'pathway' to help refugees and migrants gain and retain suitable employment in areas of skills shortage. CURS, the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, carried out an in-depth analysis of the educational attainment and the employment needs of asylum seekers and refugees in this country. They found extremely high levels of unemployment and underemployment within the migrant population, despite around 50% of those surveyed having been in skilled or professional work in their native countries.

Researchers at CURS have developed an Employability Pathway model to help refugees into education, training or employment. The

Pathways are bespoke, integrated packages that offer welfare and practical support, in addition to work experience or training. Investigators created a number of pilots in five different vocational areas: construction, general maintenance, social research, business administration and health care. For each separate discipline, a different method was used to select potential trainees and a bespoke Employability Pathway applied.

According to the Change Makers Refugee Forum, there are two pieces of New Zealand research that support consensus views gathered from the Refugee Resettlement Forum 2008 that focused on employment. *The journey to Work: Jobs for Refugees*, JR McKenzie Trust (2004) report concluded that:

- Refugees are among the most marginalised group in terms of access to labour markets.
- Refugees have little knowledge of New Zealand work culture and career options.
- There is a need for individualised approach to supporting refugees in to employment

The Refugee Voices: A Journey Towards Resettlement, Department of Labour (2004) report concluded that:

- A large percentage of refugees in employment are dissatisfied with their jobs, this is due to the low pay, lack of career opportunities and poor job satisfaction.
- In NZIS research the main source of income for 89% of the recently arrived refugee group was a Work and Income benefit.

Many of these issues and the actions that evolved from them are part of the Wellington Regional Refugee Action Plan for Health and Wellbeing. This stream of work is led by Work and Income.

5.2.2 Local council contribution to the employment pathway scheme and work experience programme

Attention is also drawn to the value that local councils would contribute to the employment pathway scheme. A local example is the current Wellington City Council (WCC) refugee and migrant work experience programme offered to newcomers that settle in the WCC area.

The project in discussion with the regional group of local council human resource managers and advisors has progressed to developing four-week work experience programmes for Porirua City Council and Upper Hutt City Council as a possible prelude towards undertaking an internship.

5.2.3 Porirua City Council (PCC) work experience programme partnership

PCC have confirmed their support to establish a work experience programme at the Porirua City Council in conjunction with the Work and Income service centre at Porirua. Job Connect has previously nominated two project participants to the PCC staff induction programme. The PCC staff induction programme would be incorporated into the work experience package. The next

steps will include MSD (Work and Income) engaging with the Council and pooling internal resources to support the implementation of the programme.

5.2.4 Upper Hutt City Council (UHCC) work experience programme partnership

UHCC have confirmed their support to establish a work experience programme at the Upper Hutt City Council with the Upper Hutt Work and Income service centre. In particular, the council's HR manager canvassed discussion with UHCC senior management and advised that their library manager has expressed interest to participate in the work experience programme. The next steps will include MSD (Work and Income) engaging with the Council and pooling internal resources to support the implementation of the programme.

5.2.5 Self-employment focus

The project received several interests relating to self-employment concepts. On the advice of the Change Makers Refugee Forum, the project undertook to focus on existing refugee enterprise and has meant working with individual refugee business owners to canvas forming a refugee enterprise network/support group. It is intended that the group will be linked to main stream business and networking opportunities, for example Chamber of Commerce 'After 5' events.

5.2.6 Refugee skills database

The project has identified a starting point of an immediate large critical mass of refugee people.

Among the project partners, the MSD (Work and Income) data of refugee clients is the most current and populated. This initial data reveals over 1000 refugee clients living within the MSD Wellington region boundary. Note that the MSD region area excludes the possible number of clients living in the Greater Wellington areas of Kapiti, Masterton, South Wairarapa and Carterton local authorities.

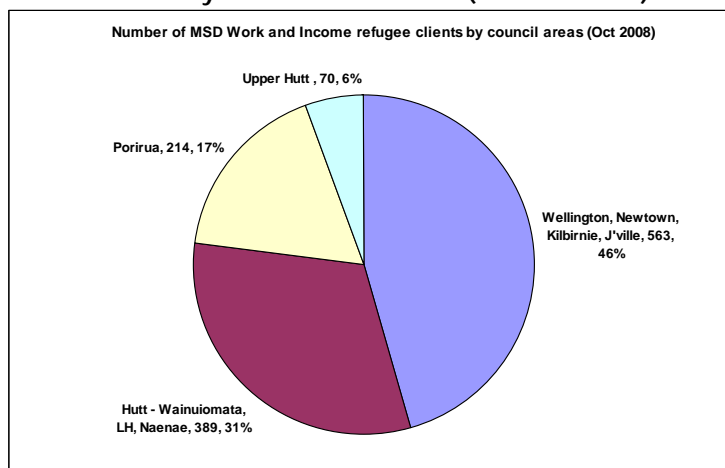
Filter testing reveals up to 700 refugee clients are classified as "work tested" meaning they are obligated under MSD guidelines to job seek. The next important and most difficult step for the project is to work through each service centre client data to assess their employment pathway programme eligibility. This step will help service providers quantify where refugee individuals are on the un/employment continuum that would include a record of candidates' learning and skills.

5.2.7 Baseline service data

The data retrieved from MSD is an important starting point for developing the pathway scheme as the refugee clients can be identified by their local council areas and corresponding MSD (Work and Income) service centres for that region. Having MSD data available has helped the project enormously in reducing the time taken to track Case Managers to allow more time developing interventions for refugee clients.

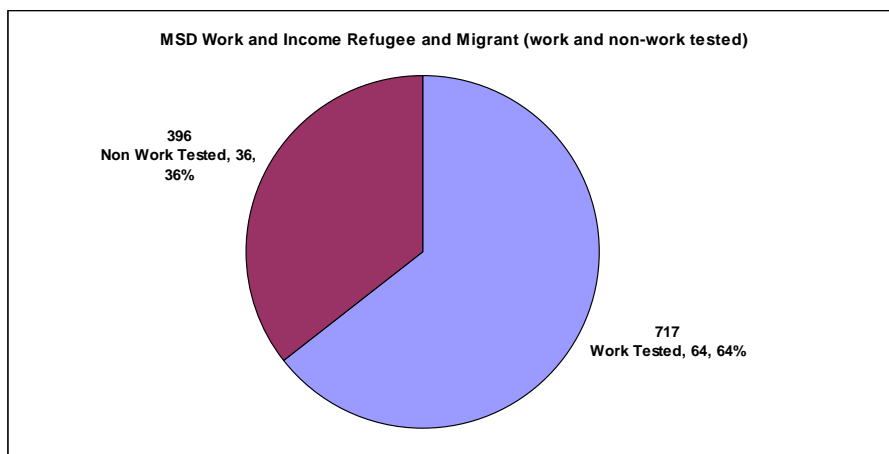
Graph 4.3.6(a) below shows the number of MSD (Work and Income) refugee clients by local council areas as at October 2008. The WCC area includes three MSD (Work and Income) service centre branches (Newtown, Kilbirnie and Johnsonville) and shows almost half (46%) of the MSD (Work and Income) registered refugee clients live within the WCC area. The HCC area includes three MSD (Work and Income) service centre branches (Lower Hutt, Wainuiomata, Naenae) and shows the second largest proportion (31%) of MSD (Work and Income) refugee clients registered live within the HCC area.

Graph 4.3.6 (a) - Number of Ministry of Social Development Work and Income refugee clients by local council areas (October 2008)



Graph 4.3.6(b) below shows there 64% (n=717) (MSD W&I) refugee clients who are work-tested and 36% (n=396) non-work tested as at October 2008.

Graph 4.3.6 (b) - Number of Ministry of Social Development Work and Income refugee clients by local council areas (October 2008)



6. Highlights

A milestone for the project has been two councils (Porirua City Council and Upper Hutt City Council) confirming their participation in the work experience programmes partnering with MSD (Work and Income). The project has assisted in brokering these partnership discussions and has progressed at varying speeds and specific to the needs of each participating council.

Thirteen refugee participants attended the CV workshops arranged for them between the project, Change Makers Refugee Forum and Career Services. These participants are now registered with the database.

One participant has been employed by Upper Hutt City Council and with feedback shown below:

“I’m adapting well on my new role with the support I’m getting from XXX and XXX as well as the rest of the UHCC staff. I always appreciate your offer of assistance and continuous support. Later this month, I intend to file my application for permanent residency and I might probably need some supporting docs from UHCC and the project, or Immigration NZ might give you a call, I’m not sure yet. Having the permanent residency status will constitute the continuance of my contract with UHCC until its termand would really settle things down in regards with my family’s status. Again, many thanks for your and the project’s continuous support.”

Other participants’ responses received from time to time reflect the pastoral nature and aspects of the pilot project as shown in **Attachment 1**.

The project has assisted a participant, arriving in Wellington as a former crown prosecutor (employed part-time postman), into a role that utilises his legal practitioner skills at one of the local community local centres. In the meantime, the participant is studying towards his legal practising certificate.

One refugee participant, arriving with oil rigging and mechanic experience, advised the project he is now employed using his language skills to interpret for his community as a Refugee Services cross-cultural worker.

7. Human resource implications

The employment pathway scheme shows that work experience programmes is a part of the pathway. The success of the work experience programmes for Porirua City Council and Upper Hutt City Council would heavily rely also on the commitment of MSD Work and Income resources. Feedback received from local council human resource managers to the project is that a clear process of implementation and communication between these partners is developed.

8. Strategic implications

The pilot project has been an industry partnership model between local and central government, and NGO newcomer service providers. Much of the coordination function housed at Greater Wellington acted as a strategic invaluable interface and enabler to achieve co-operation from all of the region's partner councils. With the benefit of hindsight, the project has helped develop and strengthen some structures and relationships that were not evidently in place but needed in order to enable greater partnership success of councils attracting, recruiting and retaining staff from refugee and migrant newcomer backgrounds, and MSD (Work and Income) newcomer clients' employability.

Throughout out this partnership, local and regional councils have demonstrated regional leadership in newcomer employment settlement strategies and programmes.

9. Communication

The project will continue to be communicated as provided for in the Communications Action Plan. The project will host an event of reflection for all stakeholders who have been involved in all aspects of the project that will take place on 9 April

10. Next steps and the way forward

Over March, MSD (Work and Income) and Greater Wellington will identify responsibilities that will continue after the project ends and will agree on a handover strategy to manage stakeholder and candidate expectations.

11. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. *Receives the report.*
2. *Notes the content of the report.*

Report prepared by:

Report approved by:

Joy Sipeli
Project Coordinator

Jane Davis
Divisional Manager

Attachment 1: Responses from project participants