

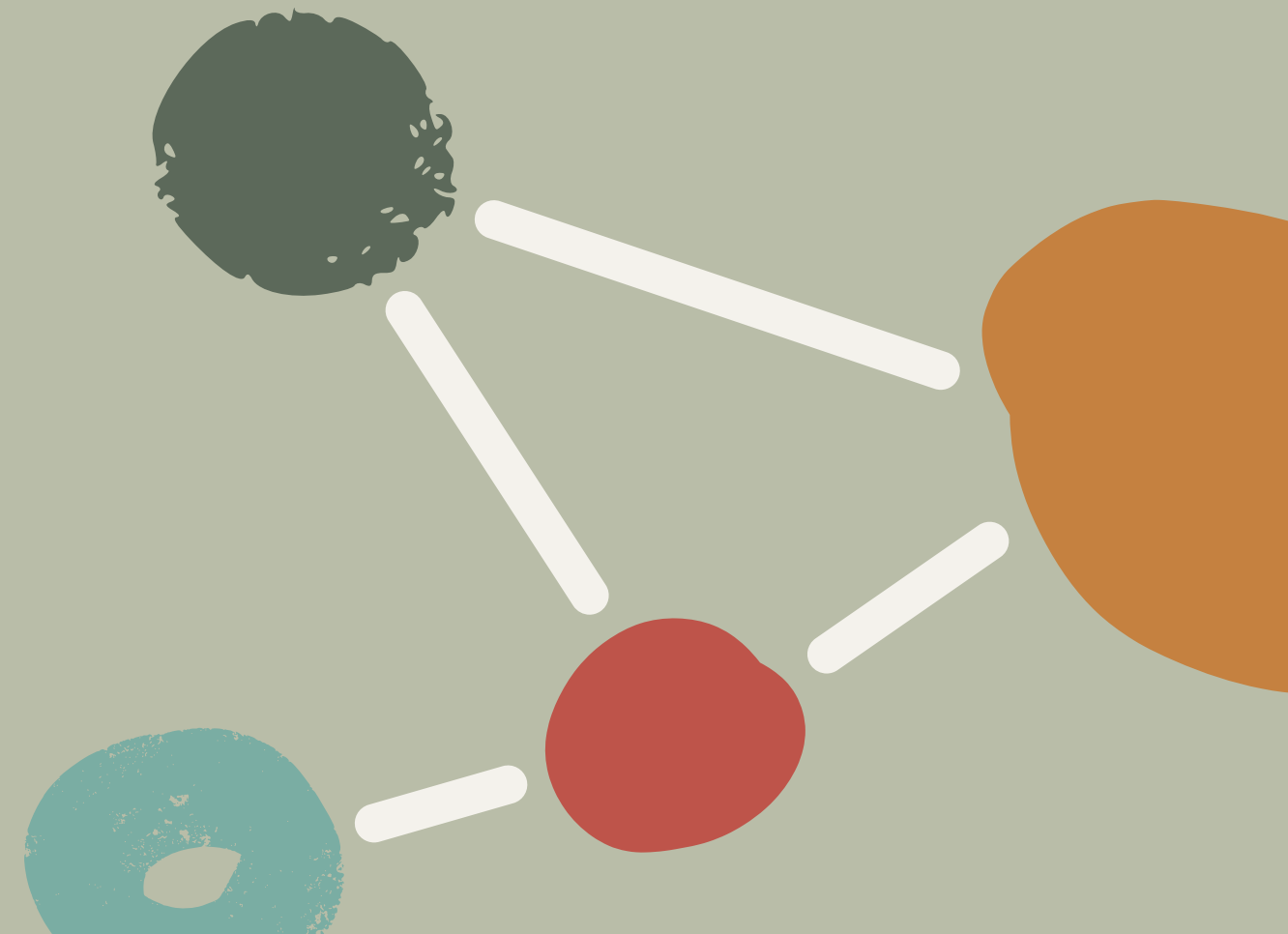


# **Economic Pathways to Refugee Integration (EPRI)**

**Program Case Studies 2025**



Introduction



## INTRODUCTION

### Background

In 2023, the Federal Department of Home Affairs (DHA) distributed \$17.7 million (approximately \$6 million per year) to 20 social enterprises (and auspiced partners) to deliver the Economic Pathways to Refugee Integration program (EPRI) over three years.

EPRI targets refugee entrants with low English language proficiency and/or low recognised skills and qualifications - a cohort that requires specialised economic participation support that fills identified gaps in existing employment and settlement services.

EPRI involves a diverse set of work integration social enterprises (WISEs) working collaboratively with settlement, employment and social enterprise networks, locally and nationally, to:

- Achieve employment and self-employment outcomes for participants.
- Develop leading practice economic participation pathways for participants.

### EPRI ecosystem of collective impact

EPRI providers vary in size, scale, industry focal areas, employment pathway models, operational locations (regional, metropolitan, national), and experience working with different cohorts of people excluded from the labour market.

EPRI recognises that no single provider or program can do this work alone - establishing strong cross-sector relationships to respond to the shared challenge of improving economic participation outcomes for EPRI participants.

Employment pathways include:

- Work readiness, vocational training, work experience and employment in a range of industries.
- Self-employment through small business start-up, focusing on those without a credit history in Australia.
- Supporting participants into work with large employers, brokering partnerships between corporate, public and community sectors to connect refugee entrants with employers and provide wrap-around support.
- Concurrently assisting EPRI participants to build English language proficiency, self-confidence, and capabilities to seek and secure employment.



### Early outcomes

Aggregated data shared by DHA show promising self-agency and self-efficacy outcomes. In less than two years of program implementation, 20 EPRI providers have supported 1,772 refugee entrants with low skills / low English to build skills, confidence, connection, and capabilities aligned with individually tailored employment pathways. Increases in SCORE data were seen in employment (+83%), education and skills training (+72%), financial resilience (+84%), and community participation and networks (+59%). Mental health and wellbeing saw a 51% increase.

### EPRI community development approach

EPRI providers pursue a strengths-based, community development approach. They:

- Engage the experience and expertise of refugee entrants in program evolution.
- Invest in sustained relationships with community groups and leaders to learn from them.
- Provide personalised employment plans with a focus on safety, wellbeing and dignity.
- Tailor on-the-job English language support and digital literacy skills to the individual and industry.
- Create jobs within WISEs that are suitable for participants with complex needs.
- Provide real-world work settings in which participants can build skills, relationships, and resilience.
- Mobilise networks and collaborate to create employment pathways - including non-traditional pathways - in line with aspirations.
- Work with *employers* to influence safe and inclusive employment practices.
- Maintain ongoing relationships with participants that support work and wellbeing outcomes.
- Build human rights literacy among employees and employers to prevent and respond to exploitation, racism and bullying.

### Program case studies

This compilation provides an overview of interventions that EPRI providers bring to the settlement and employment ecosystem. It shares EPRI program snapshots and responsive adaptations to enhance safety, wellbeing and dignity in the delivery of pre-employment, employment, and self-employment supports.

EPRI providers are investing in strong relationships with:

- **Settlement agencies**, including Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP), Settlement Engagement & Transition Support (SETS) program, Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) providers.
- **Refugee-led organisations**, associations and communities, centring lived experience expertise of refugee entrants.
- **Councils, businesses, services** to establish supportive employment ecosystems and build shared responsibility in this project.
- **Employers**: industry areas include administration, carpentry, labourers, driving instructors, property maintenance, hospitality, customer service, waste management, textiles, florist, retail, fashion design, events, bakery, horticulture, warehouse, forklift driving, childcare, artisan crafts, small business.

*Note: data referenced in this document was gathered throughout 2024. Updated data can be sourced directly from EPRI providers.*

### Opportunities for EPRI evolution

In a short time, EPRI has emerged as an ecosystem of diverse and specialist refugee employment interventions tailored to fill gaps in existing settlement support and employment offerings.

This is a robust base from which to deepen understanding of policy, program and system reforms that will contribute to effective end-to-end support for the EPRI cohort.

Key insights from EPRI implementation include:

1. The importance of social connection and confidence-building in 'warm' supportive workplace settings for specific subgroups within the cohort.
2. Safety, wellbeing and dignity as critical to economic participation support before, during and post-employment.
3. The value of flexible, purpose-led English literacy and digital literacy skills development for life and work.

The opportunity exists to:

- Embed human rights-respecting business practices within WISE and open employment contexts, in line with national and international frameworks.
- Identify impact costs for different sub-groups of EPRI participants to respond to specific barriers and distance from work.

- Evaluate medium-long term employment outcomes across WISE models to understand different impacts on diverse sub-groups within the EPRI cohort including work, wellbeing and welfare outcomes for participants, and government savings.
- Analyse cost and benefit data to guide future funding decisions.
- Consolidate findings from federally-funded employment and employability programs to inform how social enterprise adds value to settlement and employment systems.
- Explore tangible and intangible costs and impacts of EPRI for individuals, families, communities, providers, industries and the economy.
- Supporting refugee entrants in creating social enterprises and scaling-up community led social enterprises.

### Learnings for improved program settings

**Engage lived experience expertise in program design and leadership** as a required and remunerated part of program delivery.

**Align EPRI eligibility criteria with SETS visa categories for smooth referral.** Narrow visa criteria for EPRI participation results in many refugee entrants - referred from settlement or employment services - being ineligible for EPRI support.

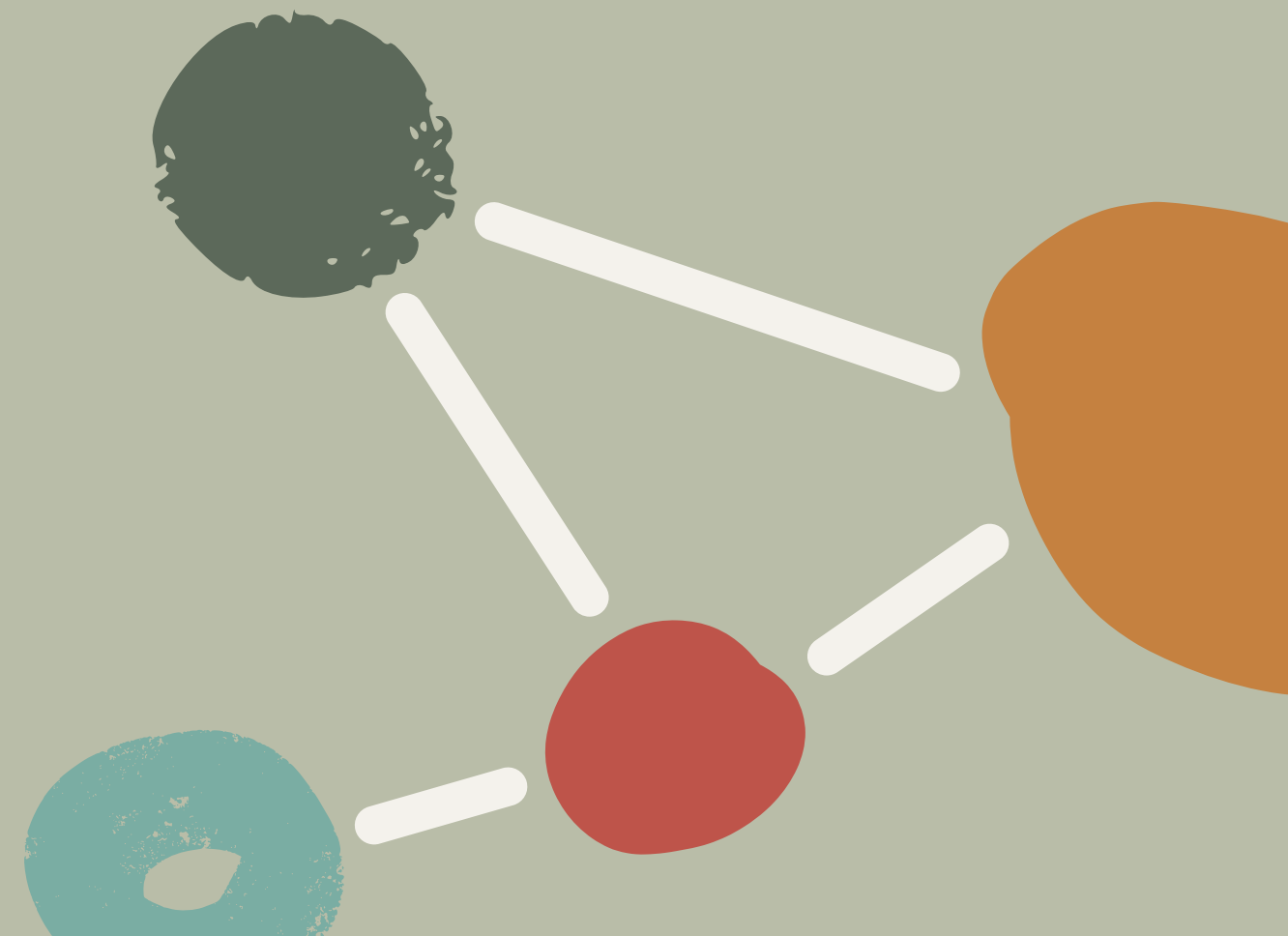
**Explore ways to collect meaningful outcomes data and measure program success.** DEX and SCORE reporting systems are designed for transactional reporting on 'one-size fits all' programs. They lack relevance and integrity when applied to specialised social enterprise contexts. Trial user-friendly monitoring and learning platforms (e.g. Seedkit and Folktale) that enable data collection of real-time value to EPRI participants and providers, as well as government funders, and do not to create unmanageable reporting obligations.

**Include language support as part of program delivery costs.** This is critical for the EPRI cohort to: gain essential confidence and social participation skills towards job readiness; enhance access to, and choice of, employment opportunities; and build capability for safe engagement in a safe workplace.

**Develop outcomes-based funding models.** EPRI funding is currently outputs-based. Implementation is discovering impact costs (ie. what it takes to recruit, retain and support this cohort into work). A focus on work, wellbeing and welfare savings outcomes for this cohort, should form the basis of future funding models.



# EPRI Program Case Studies



## BROTHERHOOD OF ST. LAURENCE

Holistic support and employment pathways

### Overview

Founded in 1930, the Brotherhood of St. Laurence (BSL) is a leading social justice organisation dedicated to combating and preventing poverty across Australia. BSL undertakes practical projects, innovative research and advocacy to achieve systemic change, promoting equitable opportunities for individuals regardless of socio-economic background. BSL's interventions encompass a range of employment pathways, including programs like Given the Chance, Building Pathways and the Work and Learning Centres. Project Care operates under Given the Chance, a certified social enterprise, group training organisation and labour hire company, as a supported employment pathways program.

### EPRI Program

Project Care was established in 2022 as part of the Jobs Victoria program due to an identified need to support people from refugee backgrounds with low levels of English.

Project Care transitioned seamlessly into EPRI at the beginning of 2023 with these key objectives:

- Increase the rate of employment for refugees and humanitarian entrants by creating job opportunities and pathways to employment and self-employment for refugees with low skill levels and/or low English language proficiency.
- Develop participant skill sets, qualifications and practical experience, including proficiency in English.
- Build an employment program and recruitment model which effectively meets the needs of participants and employers through a focus on employer engagement and training and a robust post placement support model.
- Utilise and build on existing community organisation relationships to maximise referrals opportunities both in and out of Project Care including with other EPRI providers.
- Develop a mapping tool to monitor participant journey with BSL and EPRI, as a part of a wider BSL impact framework program, to ensure continual review and improvement of the program, centred on best outcome for participants.
- Create a more holistic employment model (within the constraints of the contracts eligibility) incorporating key elements of BSL's employment programs and wraparound supports from its financial inclusion programs and other BSL services, including volunteer supports. This also ties to BSL's strategic plan of integrating a capabilities approach (utilising advantaged thinking) across all employment programs.
- To be a demonstration of best practice that can lead towards advocacy for future employment programs both within BSL and as a piece of the work aligning with BSL's approach to the wider community, State and Federal Governments.



BSL provides holistic support to participants.

"I felt more prepared and confident applying for jobs and was so happy when I got the job."

– Fatima (not her real name) from Somalia, who arrived with very little English and found a job as a kitchen assistant.



### EPRI Program Collaborations

Project Care works closely with BSL's employment and training programs and teams such as the Work and Learning Centres, Given the Chance, the Thrive Hubs in Frankston and Broadmeadows, inclusion teams and volunteers. Project Care leverages internal BSL programs and resources to deliver job readiness training workshops, financial and digital literacy training. BSL also partners with providers such as Banksia Gardens, Sister Works, Meals with Impact, CERES Fair Wood and other EPRI providers.



*Given the Chance training with ANZ.*

### EPRI Program Participant Journeys

Project Care conducts initial assessments to identify participant skills and aspirations, offering tailored language support via a senior project officer, development coach, volunteers or local community organisations, conducting basic skills workshops and holding job readiness training sessions. Qualitative outcomes gathered by impact surveys at various stages of engagement monitor and record improved language proficiency and increased confidence.

People seeking training and upskilling opportunities face challenges in adapting to Australian workplace standards and advancing their careers. Many participants express vulnerabilities such as skill mismatches, limited recognition of overseas experience and the need for specialised vocational training. Project Care addresses these challenges through personalised career counseling, industry-specific workshops, and partnerships with training providers like Kangan Tafe as well as utilising BSL resources such as 'money minded' and digital literacy programs. Participants benefit from hands-on experience and mentorship. Through BSL's network, opportunities are brokered for participants, who are supported through to their first six months of employment.

### EPRI Program Innovations

Because Project Care is a part of BSL, a unique charitable organisation that provides holistic support to participants, it can access a variety of resources. Participants have access to programs such as financial and digital training, job readiness sessions, mentoring support (peers and volunteers) and a range of supports, from clothing and administration (help with forms etc) to emergency relief and assistance.

A change or adaptation in the program is enhanced capacity of its employer engagement strategy through closer partnerships with local businesses and industries and a robust post placement support model focusing on the first six months of a participant's employment. This ensures that participant training and skills development is aligned with current employer needs, facilitating smoother transitions into employment and increasing job placement success rates. Building partnerships has provided valuable insights into effective collaboration models and the importance of community engagement. Key learnings include the significance of culturally appropriate programming, the impact of local community support, and the value of partnerships in accessing resources and opportunities.



*BSL presenting to Palestine Australia Relief and Action*

"The empowerment workshops helped me feel more confident interacting with locals and understanding Australian culture. It's made a big difference in my daily life."

– Ali (not his real name) from Syria.

## CERES FAIR WOOD

An inclusive work culture and experience in carpentry

### Overview

CERES is Victoria's largest environmental education provider. Over its 40 year history, CERES has become tightly woven into the fabric of the local community of Melbourne's inner north. It has a long history of employing people from a variety of backgrounds who traditionally face barriers to employment: asylum seekers, refugees, migrants, people with low English etc. CERES Fair Wood and CERES Carpentry offer locally sourced quality timber from sustainable sources, connecting small-scale growers and millers directly to timber buyers. It sells farm-forested, agroforestry and salvaged timber and offers a team of experienced carpenters manufacturing planter boxes, furniture and other products.

### EPRI Program

CERES Fair Wood's EPRI program engages refugee entrants aged 18 to 45 years old in apprentice-level skills training, combined with real life onsite work experience and support to transition participants into employment or further training.

The program facilitates pathways into carpentry, furniture making, and cabinet-making and actively supports women's participation in trades. Program successes include participants becoming general labourers, completing TAFE courses, and obtaining a full apprenticeship.

The program is designed to be small enough to be able to tailor it to each individual. It accommodates flexible working hours, uses a variety of training institutions, and connects participants with their specific areas of interest.

Participants engage in 12 weeks of paid work experience at the CERES workshop and on-site, with opportunities for additional casual work. During this time, participants acquire year one apprentice-level transferable carpentry skills and have the chance to visit big build sites to gain insights into the industry. Participants can also choose to gain certifications such as a white card, traffic control, and forklift operations as part of a skills pathway for employment as general labourers.

CERES Fair Wood provides open-ended, intensive support for participants pursuing a Certificate II pre-apprenticeship at TAFE. This support includes guidance, training resources, and assistance throughout the duration of the program. Additionally, the program facilitates connections and introductions to construction employment partners to expand participants' job prospects.

Following placement in open employment, the program offers ongoing support for participants with casual employment opportunities at CERES, workplace lunches to foster a sense of community, formal and informal check-ins to address immediate concerns, assess progress and provide further assistance.

Recognising the importance of employer support, the program prepares the employer and workplace for the new employee and conducts bi-monthly check-ins to ensure a supportive and successful employment experience for both the participant and the employer.



EPRI program participants.

"I like the kind, friendly employers - the team is like a family."

– Female, 21, from Afghanistan

"It's unusual to work with such consistently hard working and attentive young people. I'm certain they are going to take the experience and add a lot of value to the community."

– Carpentry supervisor



### EPRI Program Collaborations

CERES Fair Wood has positive external relationships with a wide range of organisations which reflects the broad scope of the program. It has developed its existing relationships as a timber supplier to John Holland, the Level Crossing Removal projects and the Northeast Link. It also works closely with education providers from English teachers, to accredited training institutes like Holmsglen, Melbourne Polytechnic, Origin Institute, START Training, Pinnacle Training and AGA.



*Engaging refugees to become carpenters.*

### EPRI Program Participant Journeys

While the program is open to all refugee entrants, CERES Fair Wood has developed a strong connection with participants from the Afghanistan Women's Soccer Team.

A dedicated program coordinator is available to assist EPRI participants in navigating the program and accessing other settlement supports. Individual employment goals and plans are co-developed and the program offers flexible hours. All work is conducted in English to promote contextualised learning.

Some participants enter with a clear interest in carpentry, others are keen to try something new and discover a love of carpentry or an interest in other trades. Offering paid work and training opportunities is critical for participant recruitment and retention, recognising that refugee entrants lack the support networks to be able to engage in unpaid work experience or training programs.

CERES Fair Wood maintains an ongoing connection with participants. Program alumni visit CERES staff and continue to seek and share support long after their participation has ended.

### EPRI Program Innovations

A core focus is encouraging and empowering women to pursue careers in carpentry and related trades. Coaching, mentoring and skills training are delivered by qualified carpenters and through partnerships with SheForce, Women in Construction, and Women in Trades.

Participants learn about environmental impacts and sustainable practices in carpentry and apply their skills to real-world projects, such as building fences or decks on-site. They also have the chance to work on professional projects and to design and build their own furniture.

The program addresses the construction-site culture and provides support for navigating life in Australia. Transition to a Certificate II pre-apprenticeship carpentry program enables exposure to intensive industry-specific Australian English.

CERES' warm, inclusive work culture creates an accessible space for EPRI participants to gain confidence in a workplace setting. CERES staff and supporter networks also create opportunities to connect socially. Participants share meals together, watch soccer games and play with the staff futsal team.



*EPRI program connects participants with areas of interest.*

"I saw the program outline and felt this was exactly designed for me. My dream is to become a carpenter."  
– Male, 23, from Afghanistan

"I am not surprised by how well they work together, but I hadn't expected them to be such a warm, positive and friendly group. This has been a key contributing factor to the success of the program."  
– Program coordinator

## CIVIK PEOPLE

Sustainable employment through a diverse business model

### Overview

In 2019, White Box Enterprises created a not-for-profit social enterprise called Hotel Housekeeping. Its original mission remains to this day, which is creating sustainable employment for refugees and humanitarian entrants. Through a pandemic and environmental change, the social enterprise has responded to market needs and the talents and aspirations of its job seekers by offering services to industries and employment opportunities beyond the hotel sector. In 2023, it was time for a new company name (Civik Group), and a new brand for its pathways division, being Civik People.

### EPRI Program

Civik People's operations are based across three capital cities - Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane - where it works with participants who are refugees and humanitarian entrants seeking employment or support with progressing their career in the face of barriers.

Participants at the time of this case study are 60% male and 40% female. The most common country of origin among participants is Afghanistan, comprising 29% of total participants, with the remainder of participants coming from a broad range of countries. In Brisbane 27% of local participants are from Ukraine.

Through the EPRI Program, Civik People supports participants by:

- Assisting with career coaching and job application support
- Helping participants engage with employers via its network of employer partners
- Preparing participants for the Australian workplace, including through employer onboarding processes
- Supporting participants and their employers once in new jobs

The team at Civik People are focused on meeting EPRI program objectives including:

- Increasing the rate of economic participation, with 140 participants entering employment to date, with a total of 310 participants who have benefited from a career coaching program.
- Increasing the number and types of pathways, by expanding into a total of 11 different industries, better enabling the program to meet the needs and aspirations of participants.
- Developing skills, qualifications, and experience in areas of workforce shortages, by coordinating the delivery of 52 plus tickets and licenses to date for skills shortage projects in telecommunication project infrastructure.
- Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of pathways to economic participation by focusing on customised career development and support for each participant with a network of inclusive employer partners, which sees participants into sustainable work sooner.



*Roma, now a proud employee of Toyota.*

"I heard about Civik in a community event and connected with them. They supported me a lot with my applications and the whole onboarding process."

– Roma, employed by Toyota

"The EPRI program has essentially driven sustainable job creation at scale for refugees across multiple states with some of Australia's most trusted brands and employers."

– Shannon Price, General Manager



### EPRI Program Collaborations

Civik has built strong partnerships in a variety of industries, offering a rich mix of jobs aligned with the needs and aspirations of participants. Partners include Australia Post, Accor Hotels, Ventia, Toyota, Ventia and Crown Resorts. At a community level, collaborative partnerships with Career Voice (career development services), AMES, Settlement Services International and Multicultural Australia are integral to sourcing participants for the program.



A Civik People career coaching session.

### EPRI Program Participant Journeys

Civik's People and Culture Team come from a background in humanitarian employment and bring strong community networks to their engagement with EPRI participants.

Through one-on-one career coaching sessions, Civik works with participants to develop a personal plan that identifies transferrable skills, strengths, barriers and solutions to barriers.

Civik provides resume writing support, interview coaching and job application support, customised to each participant and the nature of the opportunity. Participants are introduced to employers via organised interviews or through networking events, then supported through onboarding processes and into employment. Wrap-around support continues for the first six months, with routine check-ins with participants and support for employers that includes operations and human resources staff members.

### EPRI Program Innovations

The post-pandemic labour market has seen low skilled workforces in Australia stabilise with higher rates of retention and less opportunity for new (including entry level) staff. During the EPRI program, Civik has had to respond to this market reality and create more effective means of coaching and support to ensure greater success for participants in the recruitment process, both within its network of employer partners and beyond.

Civik People has worked closely with career development services company Career Voice to customise an interview coaching module for refugees and humanitarian entrants and following full implementation of this module in March 2024, monthly job creation figures have doubled. This initiative has given participants the tools and skills they need to be successful in the recruitment process for mainstream employers.

Civik's market repositioning in response to rapid change in its traditional base of hotel and property services has been a great success, and has helped ensure its EPRI program success, with a greater range of jobs, careers and industries to better meet the needs and aspirations of participants.



Alona at work with Australia Post.

"I had worked at DHL in Ukraine and this job was the perfect match. I feel settled now. With this permanent job, I can think about things like applying for rent or a mortgage."

– Alona, employed by Australia Post

COMMUNITY CORPORATE  
Connecting refugees to meaningful employment

Overview

Community Corporate is a national award-winning refugee and migrant specialist inclusion social enterprise. Based in Adelaide, it has led refugee employment partnerships with employers such as Woolworths Group and IKEA. Community Corporate works with employers to build cultural confidence, support inclusive hiring, and co-design everything from onboarding to post-placement support. Community Corporate works with refugees to build their job readiness and provide culturally customised training with a focus on soft skills. It undertakes a full recruitment service with extensive wrap-around support to transition refugees into open employment.

EPRI Program

Community Corporate’s EPRI project, The Refugee E3 Project (Engage, Educate, Employ), is customised to fill a critical gap in supporting refugees with lower skill levels and low English language proficiency. EPRI participants range from 16 to 62 years of age. A majority are from Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Iraq, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo. The program operates across South Australia, New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia.

Community Corporate’s process is demand-led and employer-led, focusing on engaging with employers upfront, before connecting EPRI participants with specific job vacancies. This involves working closely with employers to determine focus regions with skills shortages and develop location-based strategies.

For refugee entrants, the program includes skills assessments, customised training such as “English 4 Work”, employer-specific, pre-employment training, onboarding support, and post-placement job coaching.

For employer partners, Community Corporate provides cultural competency training and reviews employer recruitment and onboarding processes to enhance their capability and readiness to employ refugee entrants.

As of 31 December 2024, EPRI program achievements include:

- 1,022 referrals received for the program
- 430/250 eligible clients participated in the project activities
- 257/ 250 participants have participated in jobs and skills expos in SA, NSW, QLD, Vic and WA.
- 187/180 participants have completed English 4 Work training courses.
- 181/180 participants have completed employer-specific, pre-employment training programs.
- 133/150 participants have secured job outcomes. Of these, 87% have achieved a minimum 6-month retention rate.

Individual specialist job coaching has been instrumental to this success with 76% of participants receiving between 11 and 30 additional hours of support following English 4 Work training.



EPRI participants at a skills station at a QLD Refugee and Migrant Job Skills Showcase Event.

“Please continue your program, do not stop it. We need your help.”

– Program participant

“This has been so much fun and amazing to be connected to real jobs and employer companies. Thank you for doing this for us refugees.”

– Program participant



EPRI Program Collaborations

In the first year of delivery, Community Corporate engaged with more than 50 key stakeholders in delivering the EPRI project. They are: settlement agencies (34%), employment service providers (16%), community groups and leaders (24%), peak bodies (2%), government agencies (8%), general public (2%) and others (14%).

As a well-known refugee employment specialist provider, trust and the measurable delivery of outcomes has been pivotal to high referral numbers. A challenge has been alignment to the strict criteria of English language levels. In the first year of delivery more than 470 referrals were received with only 207 being eligible for EPRI.



Celebrating 6-months on the job for EPRI participant

EPRI Program Participant Journeys

The program begins with a comprehensive circumstances and skills analysis to understand short-term and long-term goals. Personal circumstances are carefully considered including factors such as trauma, mental health challenges, or being the sole English speaker or driver in a family – all of which can impact readiness for work. Based on this, a jobs support worker creates an individualised job support plan.

Jobs and skills showcases are held across all states generally featuring over 100 participants who are pre-screened for eligibility. An employer panel outlines job opportunities and participants are invited to express their interest. A phone screening is conducted to determine suitability, followed by interviews with a recruiter.

Successful participants are supported to prepare compliance documentation. This process includes assistance with tasks such as setting up a Tax File Number and support to ensure a smooth transition into work.

The program provides ongoing intensive support for six months with regular check-ins on career progression, income and wellbeing.

EPRI Program Innovations

The EPRI investment enabled Community Corporate to provide increased levels of social worker support for refugee entrants. At any stage of their settlement journey this ensures issues such as health and wellbeing, finances, parenting, housing, legal etc are addressed through case management, building on the customised ‘Job Support Plan’ framework.

The jobs skills showcases provide a unique platform for refugees to participate in skilling stations, network and connect with employers.

A total of 97.72% of participants reported the showcase increased their engagement and awareness of economic pathway opportunities.

A Workforce Australia provider said: “This showcase helped to connect employers with our refugee-migrant job seekers. The session enabled our job seekers to engage with the employers, participate in team-building activities and learn more about the roles that are offered. We want to thank Community Corporate for organising and providing a platform for our job seekers to be seen and be heard.”



Woolworths manager meet and greet with participants

“I enjoyed communicating with other people who have the same situation as mine.”

– Program participant

“We need this, it has felt there are no jobs for us ‘refugees’ but today you showed us we have a chance.”

– Program participant

COMMUNITY RESOURCES - GREEN CONNECT

Providing a safe place to work, tackling food sustainability and waste

Overview

Green Connect is a non-profit social enterprise and registered charity that supports former refugees, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and youth who are encountering multiple barriers to employment by providing work experience, training and a safe place where they can strengthen their capacity and start casual work in a supported environment. At the same time, Green Connect tackles unsustainable food production and waste management through its four business arms: fair food, op shops, zero waste and ethical labour. The heart of Green Connect is its organic urban farm where it grows food, provides training for new staff and welcomes volunteers.

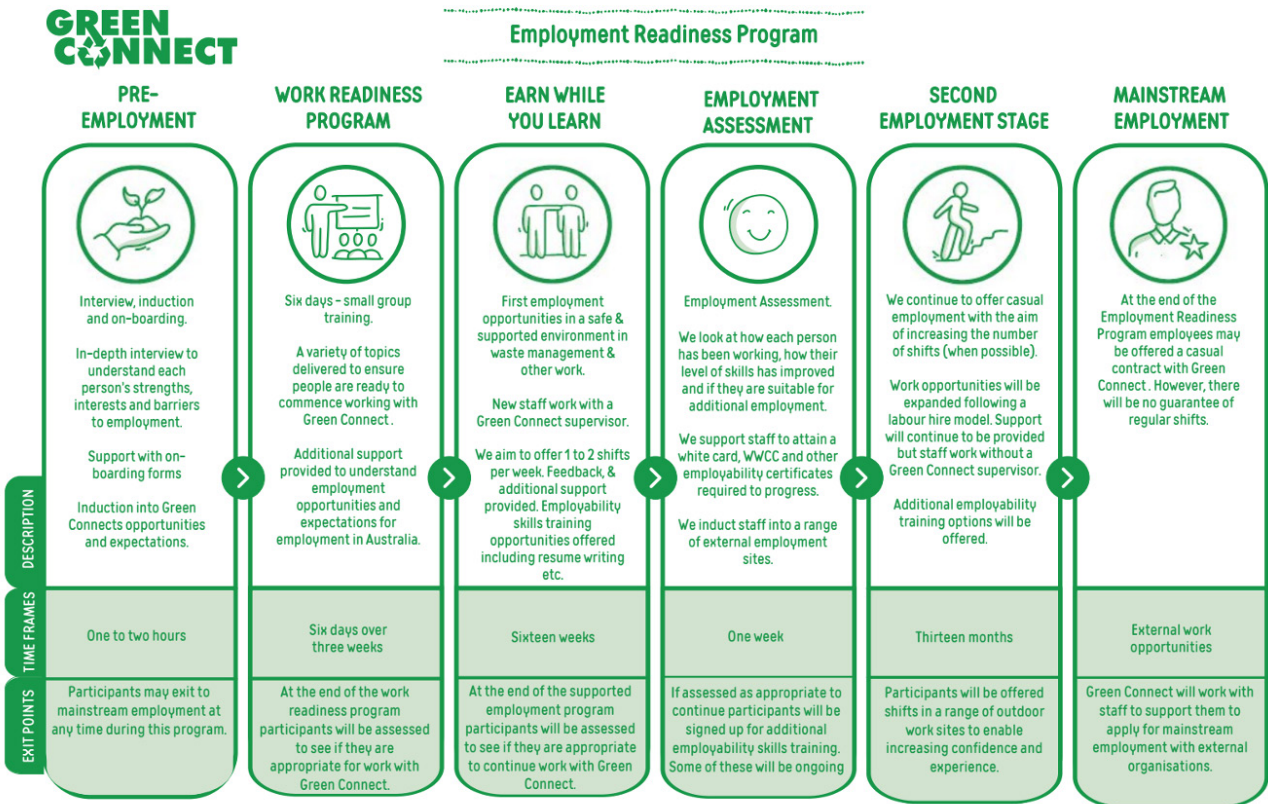
EPRI Program

Green Connect’s EPRI program provides an opportunity for people to “earn while they learn” through paid work in gardening, landscaping, or zero waste teams, and support participants to transition into mainstream employment.

The EPRI grant allows Green Connect to partner with former refugees for 18 months - a lengthy commitment that enables Green Connect to provide meaningful training and source work opportunities.

Through its Employment Readiness Program Green Connect works with participants over a substantial period to build their skills and assist them to find secure mainstream employment.

Here’s a snapshot and short description of the program:



There are places for 150 people to move through this program between July 2023 & June 2025.



The Green Connect farm.

“Mr Dee joined our employment pathway program as a 22-year-old refugee looking to enter the workforce. He’s a leader in the local Burmese community and is an incredibly reliable worker with a strong work ethic and willingness to learn. He’s personable, committed and, like all the people we support in our employment pathway, he’s always ready for a challenge. We’re thrilled he was able to secure permanent employment with King of Courts.”

– Charity Avery, Relationships Manager



EPRI Program Collaborations

Green Connect has strong relationships with refugee organisations in South West and Western Sydney, which have been pivotal in delivering the EPRI program. Building these partnerships took time and initial groups were small, but as trust and understanding grew, so did collaborative impact. A significant partnership was formed with CORE Community Services in Fairfield/Cabramatta, where a Green Connect worker is based in the CORE office to support employment initiatives.



Staff attend two days at Green Connect’s organic farm.

EPRI Program Participant Journeys

After applying for employment with Green Connect, participants attend an onboarding interview, complete a basic language and literacy assessment, and a ‘barriers to employment’ questionnaire. They then attend six work readiness sessions designed to prepare participants for the Australian job market. Training sessions cover topics such as SafeWork and Work Health and Safety (WHS), and protections against modern slavery, ensuring that participants are well-informed about their rights in the workplace.

When assessed as ‘ready for work’ participants attend an induction session and are invited to join Green Connect’s zero waste team. All are paid Award wages. Once they have worked at least three shifts with the zero waste team they can be assessed for the next level of employment with Green Connect which requires participants to have a White Card and a level of English suitable to work safely on external work sites without a Green Connect supervisor. It also requires staff to attend two days at Green Connect’s organic farm in Wollongong (transport provided) where they learn gardening and landscaping skills.

EPRI Program Innovations

Integrating Green Connect’s phased employment readiness program with local community services, such as CORE, not only broadens impact but also deepens understanding of the community’s specific needs, enhancing the program’s relevance and responsiveness.

To address any concerns participants may have about losing their Centrelink payments, a multicultural officer from Centrelink engages with participants on a monthly basis to provide individual guidance and respond to any specific questions from participants.

The “Earn while you learn” approach offers a supportive work environment where participants work alongside a Green Connect team leader guiding them through one to two shifts per week for up to 16 weeks, with opportunities to transition into permanent part-time roles as team leaders, fostering career growth within the organisation. A dedicated business development worker actively sources employment opportunities, carefully balancing the number of participants with the work available. Green Connect partners with various companies to provide an ethical labour hire service, acting as a stepping stone to permanent employment.



The Green Connect farm.

“Arriving in Australia without much work experience, I was struggling to find a job. Your trust and support in giving me a chance made all the difference and I’ll always be thankful for it. Working at Green Connect has been a truly wonderful experience for me.”

– Sahra, EPRI participant who recently transitioned to full time employment.



## DISMANTLE

Supporting at-risk young people  
into paid employment

### Overview

Dismantle is a social enterprise supporting at-risk young people across regional, remote and metropolitan areas of Western Australia to reach their full potential. Dismantle's programs include ReNew Property Maintenance - a gardening and landscaping business that employs up to 25 people facing barriers to work at any one time, with an average of 10 program participants transitioning to new employment each year. Dismantle's in-house case management program, Job Readii, provides individually tailored wrap-around support to help participants transition to education, training and work in line with individual aspirations.

### EPRI Program

Dismantle's EPRI program has evolved over the past two years of implementation, in response to EPRI participant referrals, capabilities and interests. It now offers an in-house employment pathway with ReNew Property Maintenance and an external pathway through an auspiced local partner, Loop Upcycling.

Both employment pathways provide:

- Individual interviews to understand capabilities, work readiness and specific support needs.
- Orientation site tours.
- Onboarding and industry-specific training including work health and safety inductions, hands-on training with tools and machinery, and continuous on-the-job learning and support.
- A trial shift and first paid shift.
- Award-wage employment opportunities.
- Transition support to external employers.
- Case management support for participants before, during and after completion of their program.
- Job-search support including resume-writing assistance and interview skills for EPRI participants seeking open employment opportunities.

Dismantle and Loop engage interpreters, where needed, to support tools and equipment training and ensure understanding for EPRI participants with low English language proficiency.

In order to progress to employment contracts for landscaping or textiles recycling work, Dismantle and Loop support interested participants to gain a level of English communication skills that enables clear comprehension of safety instructions and safe operation of equipment.



*Dismantle offers two different employment pathways.*

"Having a reliable job is very important and [the Dismantle team] help me to organise shifts. I have 3 children. I like to work early and go home at 3 o'clock. Zach [Job Readii Case Manager] helps me with transport, online forms and admin things. He is also helping me find a higher paying job, maybe gardening or landscaping I hope. I like this team - very friendly, good teachers."

– EPRI participant

### EPRI Program Collaborations

Working with refugee entrants was a new experience for Dismantle. It took some time to understand the network of support services for refugee entrants in WA, connect with new services and build collaborations to fill support gaps in response to participant needs. Partners include MercyCare, Red Cross, Communicare, CentreCare for referrals and tailored support for humanitarian entrants; Headspace, Youth Focus for mental health support; IPA and TAFE for career counselling and transitions to work.



EPRI program participants.

### EPRI Program Participant Journeys

EPRI participants who complete required training and meet minimum English language requirements are offered an employment contract (from day one on the tools) with ReNew Property Maintenance or Loop Upcycling. Following each shift, check-in conversations are available with in-house case managers. This may include conversations about further training, barriers to employment (e.g. drivers licence) and transitions to new employment. EPRI participants employed with ReNew Property Maintenance are engaged in waste management, planting and revegetation, lawn and garden care and tree works. Each ReNew crew includes an experienced property maintenance manager overseeing new recruits. EPRI participants employed with Loop are engaged in recycling and transforming textiles into a creative range of repurposed products.

For participants whose interests and/or English communication skills are not aligned with these pathways, alternative opportunities and referrals to partner agencies are explored. Dismantle collaborates with settlement agencies, private businesses and social enterprises across WA to seek and support paid work placements for EPRI

### EPRI Program Innovations

EPRI helped Dismantle broaden its scope and build capability to engage with refugee entrants. In year one, a key learning was that young people (age 18-25 years) from refugee backgrounds were more interested in tertiary education pathways than entry-level gardening and horticulture roles. In response, Dismantle extended the age range of EPRI to support participants aged 18-60 years.

Informed by the interests and capabilities of EPRI participants, Dismantle explored options to partner with a local Perth-based social enterprise to arrange work placements in the textile circular economy. A referral pathway with MercyCare and a partnership with Loop Upcycling were established. This included comprehensive induction, training and wrap-around case management support provided by Loop.

Dismantle recognised its grant administration capacity and enabling power to auspice a social enterprise partner to deliver supportive employment options in addition to its landscaping and property maintenance employment offering.



Participants are employed in a range of services.

“This is a great example of cross-sector collaboration and learning together. We’re pleased that we explored what we could offer in the refugee support space and that we could be an enabler in the Perth refugee support ecosystem.”

– Operations manager



## GREEN COLLECT

Delivering sustainability outcomes and jobs for those who need them

### Overview

Green Collect is a social enterprise dedicated to working for sustainable environmental and social change. It creates supportive jobs for Melbourne's most disadvantaged job seekers through sustainability and circular economy services which aim to achieve the highest environmental outcomes for items at end of 'first use'.

The aim of all work generated is to create new employment and training opportunities for people who have experienced barriers to employment including youth, people with disabilities, and those from refugee backgrounds. Green Collect is located at Braybrook in Melbourne's west.

### EPRI Program

EPRI participants include men and women aged 25-65 years from Afghanistan, Pakistan, South Sudan, Eritrea, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Syria, Iran and Congo. Participants have been in Australia from three months to 11 years at commencement, mostly less than three years.

Each of the fifteen participants to date have been engaged in employment at least one day per week and some up to four days per week. They have worked in warehouse and logistics, in retail services, and in Green Collect's Container Deposit Scheme depot at Campbellfield in Melbourne's northwest.

The participants bring a range of capabilities including good self-awareness, high motivation and organisational skills. Common goals are to find employment and become financially independent as they create a new life in Australia. Individual goals include learning to start and hold conversations with people, improving English literacy and furthering career prospects (including trade apprenticeship or office work).

Each participant was financially vulnerable and challenged in finding employment (for most this was their first formal employment in Australia). Most lacked confidence in relating in a workplace environment.

Green Collect's key intervention is supportive employment, real wages, a genuine workplace with a culture that is aligned with its stated values (Integrity - Respect - Innovation - Reconciliation - Sustainability - Collaboration). EPRI participants engage in skilled work to deliver best-practice sustainability outcomes. Team leaders check in with each participant regularly on their employment journey as well as providing formal and informal training and development.

All participants have noticeably grown in confidence and engagement with colleagues. One participant completed a pre-apprenticeship course alongside their employment at Green Collect before commencing a trade apprenticeship with a mainstream employer. Most have increased numbers of work shifts and have expanded their roles through skill development, demonstrating aptitude or transition to other roles in the organisation.



Sorting plastics at Green Collect.

"I am learning so much, I learn something every day. On days when I wake up and don't feel like going to work, I remember that people at Green Collect are kind to me and so I get motivated."

– Participant A

"The biggest difference employment at Green Collect has made is that I can save a little bit of money for the first time in my life and that means I can buy enough food and school uniforms for my son."

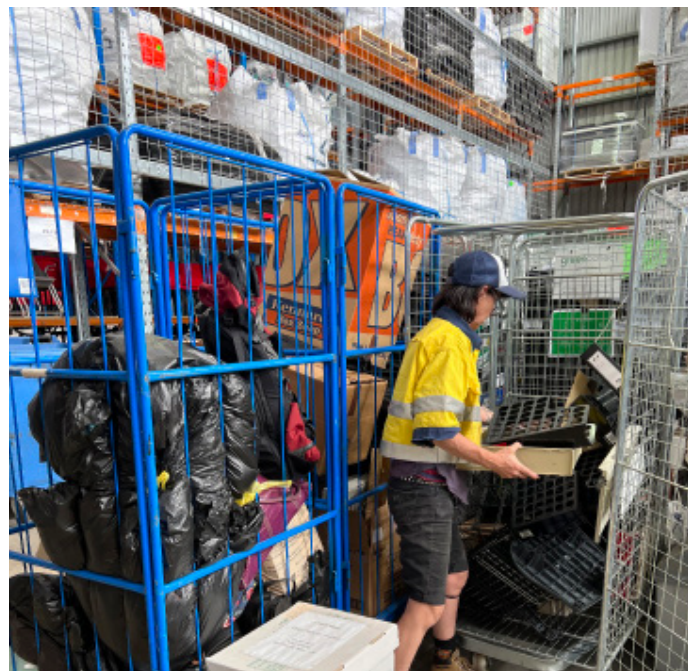
– Participant B

"I was surprised at how friendly and kind people are. They are ready to help. In other places I have been told, 'if you can do it do it, if not go home.'"

– Participant C

### EPRI Program Collaborations

Green Collect partners with employment agencies: Matchworks; Westgate Community Initiative Group; Multicultural Consulting Services (refugee-led); Wingate and community groups especially the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP), AKEA and Civik People. A key learning is that it takes time to build partnerships and shared understanding of the objectives of the program and a commitment to working together to support individual participants.



Unpacking collection cages.

### EPRI Program Participant Journeys

Initially, participants engage in site tours, work demonstrations and a mutual assessment with a team leader to explore personal goals and see if work in the circular economy sector offers suitable employment pathways for them.

Participants are employed from Day 1 for a minimum of 1 day per week for 12 weeks.

Training in collections, logistics, warehouse processing and retail is provided as part of paid employment. Coaching and individual mentoring on workplace culture and the circular economy is integrated into daily work. Check-ins are offered every 3-6 months to review goals and circumstances.

Team leaders hold daily 'toolbox' meetings where every team has routine work instructions with a standard operating procedure for each task. Each person receives training in set procedures and progresses through stages of being a learner under supervision, carrying out the task unsupervised, and training others on the task. Everyone is invited to provide feedback on work-related projects and procedures.

### EPRI Program Innovations

EPRI participants are employed in a diverse team environment including staff with social work, disability services, community development and lived experience of refugee settlement. This contributes to a safe and supportive workplace. From the first interview, participants feel at ease and free to ask questions without fear.

Most participants start in a team led by a former refugee. This team leader explains: "Week one, I need to build trust so I say I am 'E', not I am 'the boss'. I read people's feelings and let them know I care."

One of the program goals is English language improvement through immersion in workplace English. This means overcoming anxiety around English communication skills. Lunchtime spaces are intentionally created, bringing together office and warehouse team members, to engage in English conversation practice and to get to know each other.

Leaders within Green Collect have taken the initiative to engage with EPRI participants to help them feel valued as team members, contributing to the organisation's work and broader social and environmental impact.

A program coordinator reflects: "I really enjoy seeing our EPRI staff interacting with other staff members. Whether it's regarding a work-related issues or just having a laugh while working. I believe the majority of staff coming into Green Collect feel welcome and instantly accepted. That creates an atmosphere to learn and hopefully excel."

Green Collect is trialling new ways of doing things, learning from EPRI participants. An emerging practice is to conduct group interviews for potential program participants, including family members if that seems appropriate.



Sorting stationary at Green Collect.



## MYSA & MME

Events experience for young people from refugee backgrounds

### Overview

Established in 1997, Multicultural Youth South Australia (MYSA) is the state representative advisory and service delivery body for Culturally And Linguistically Diverse (CALD) children, youth, and young families. MYSA is the only youth-specific CALD organisation in South Australia and one of two leading youth-specific CALD organisations in the country. Miss MYSA Events (MME) is a social enterprise owned and operated by MYSA. It is a boutique event planning company offering a range of services including catering, floristry, caravan and bar hire, event styling, planning and coordination. MME was established as a means for skills development and economic and social participation for unemployed youth from refugee backgrounds.

### EPRI Program

Under the EPRI program, MYSA has been able to expand MME to directly support 75 refugee young people (aged 18-35) per year into guaranteed employment (a total of 225 over the life of the project). Program participants receive paid employment as well as hands-on training, work experience, networks, references and a range of transferable social, interpersonal, practical and job-ready skills. Young people referred to MME access their first paid work experience opportunity, after which they are transitioned into the hospitality industry through MME's corporate, business and hospitality sector partnerships.

MYSA's specialist expertise in refugee youth settlement enables the delivery of a highly targeted employment program, which provides more than just a job. MME is flexible and supportive, offering opportunities in various roles and intensive pre-employment training that covers workplace culture, personal development, and essential life skills.

The program is complemented by MYSA's broader youth programs, providing wraparound support to address issues which could hinder sustained employment. By linking young people with these resources, MME helps them overcome barriers such as language difficulties, mental health challenges, family and relationship breakdowns and housing instability, all of which are crucial for sustaining long-term employment. An integrated approach is central to the success of the program.

MME program coordinator: "I feel proud to be a part of MME. Young people really enjoy the work, they learn so much about what is expected of them at work in Australia and seeing them go from feeling overwhelmed to being confident and excited to come to work, is incredibly rewarding."

MYSA social worker: "It's really great to have a program like this for our young people, especially young women. So many of them really struggle with their confidence about finding work and so being able to do training and work from MYSA, a safe space for them, is a wonderful way to help them build their confidence."



MYSA offers experience in boutique event planning.

"When I first came to Australia, I didn't think I would find a job because I struggled with English and had no experience. MME showed me I have skills that are valuable, and Fatima (MME Manager) helped me build the confidence to use them. Now, I'm working in a job and can help my family."

– Halima, 23, three years in Australia

### EPRI Program Collaborations

The program thrives on strong partnerships with a diverse range of organisations. MME collaborates with local businesses, government and community organisations to create employment opportunities tailored to unique needs and skills of participants. It also works with educational institutions, mental health and health, housing, domestic and family violence services to address broader needs. These collaborations ensure the program is not just about finding a job; it supports the whole person.



EPRI program participants.

### EPRI Program Participant Journeys

Multicultural young people, particularly refugees, are overrepresented among the unemployed, with young refugees in South Australia facing significant challenges.

Many services focus on adult needs, overlooking the youth-specific barriers that young refugees face such as English language difficulties, limited education, lack of Australian work experience, and non-recognition of prior skills.

These challenges are even more pronounced for young refugee women, who often face additional barriers due to gender-based obligations and patriarchal social systems. The EPRI Program specifically targets these young women in Adelaide's Northern Suburbs, addressing their unique challenges and helping them overcome multiple barriers to employment.

This holistic approach sets MME apart and ensures the successful retention of young refugees in employment.

### EPRI Program Innovations

A key innovation is MME's holistic, person-centred model. While many programs focus solely on job placement, MME recognises that young refugees face a complex web of challenges that can hinder their ability to maintain employment.

To address this, it integrates comprehensive pre-employment training with continuous personal development, covering not only workplace skills but also life skills such as financial literacy, health literacy, and resilience.

Additionally, services are deeply personalised, with a multidisciplinary team offering tailored support that addresses unique needs from a youth-centred perspective. This includes mental health support, assistance with housing, and a driving program designed to increase employability.

By ensuring that these foundational issues are addressed, MME empowers young people to engage more meaningfully in employment, leading to better long-term outcomes.



EPRI program participants.

"As a young woman, I always felt that my responsibilities at home would prevent me from pursuing my own goals. The support from MME helped me see I can do both. I've learned much about myself, and I'm now on the path to becoming more independent."

– Sasha, 19, four years in Australia

"MME didn't just help me find a job; it helped me feel part of a community. The mentors and staff understood the challenges I faced, not just as a refugee, but as a young person trying to figure out my place here. I now feel more hopeful about my future."

– Ilana, 21, two years in Australia



## NCEC

Pathways to work, supported by an award-winning social enterprise

### Overview

Nundah Community Enterprises Cooperative (NCEC) creates meaningful employment and training for the most disadvantaged workers. It began as a small jobs club for people with disability who were long-term unemployed. In 25 years it has grown into a supportive member-governed workplace with about 70 staff, more than half of whom have a disability or come from a refugee background. NCEC's enterprises include two cafes in Brisbane, a catering business, and a large parks and gardens maintenance operation. It also hosts employment-related training in horticulture and hospitality for more than 60 people each year.

### EPRI Program

NCEC's program works with people from a wide variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, from all age groups 18 and over. The majority of current participants are women from Papua New Guinea and the Democratic Republic of Congo, many of whom are single mothers, or partnered with young children. Other participants have come from Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Ethiopia, Eritrea, South Sudan, Burundi, Rwanda, Kenya, Myanmar and Ukraine.

NCEC have recruited, trained and supported EPRI participants over and above our target numbers by more than 30%. This increase has been most pronounced in the East African community in Logan. This demonstrates that when meaningful relationships are nurtured with cultural groups, the capacity to scale up based on trust dramatically increases.

NCEC's EPRI activities are focused on three key areas:

1. Individual and family based work
2. Community led, group-specific training programs
3. Business and social enterprise development training

Individual and family based work is for people with complex needs requiring support to settle in Australia and navigate essential services. Barriers include language, low confidence, lack of transport, trauma and mental health issues, physical health issues, housing insecurity, poverty, loneliness and isolation. A significant part of the work is listening, and building relationships of trust. This takes time. Participant support needs vary over this time, from one month to a number of years.

Community-led training programs are delivered in partnership with local community groups to meet specific skills development needs. Feedback is that people become much more connected to their own community and the broader Australian community, as well as developing more confidence and self-esteem. Co-designed training programs allow groups to have ownership over the training they receive, their employment goals and to learn in a way that increases self-confidence, community capacity, resilience and connection.

Business and social enterprise development training assists refugees in exploring self-employment and small business options. As well as providing training NCEC links individuals with volunteer mentors and pro bono advisors to assist them in their entrepreneurship journeys.



A hospitality trainee from Syria in NCEC's 'Marhaba Cafe'.

"We used to find ourselves mixing together with our African community and feeling that we were separate from the rest of the Australian people. With the help of NCEC we now feel that we are welcome in this country, Australia, and that we can play a part to bring this country together."

– NCEC garment manufacturing participant

### EPRI Program Collaborations

NCEC draws upon diverse and well-established networks, from large refugee settlement agencies, government departments and corporate organisations, to small church and faith groups, and refugee-led community groups. Whilst working with large settlement-focused NGOs has been instrumental in building new relationships, the bulk of NCEC's day-to-day work is directly with refugee-led community organisations. Partnering with smaller, locally led groups has had the best outcomes, because they can provide flexibility for tailored programs.



*Sewing trainee in Logan, Brisbane.*

### EPRI Program Participant Journeys

NCEC staff work with EPRI participants to develop individual employment support plans. Participants have flexibility to select one or more pathways aligned with their interests.

Participants can undertake a VET Certificate traineeship program and gain on-the-job work experience in horticulture, hospitality and the care sector. This includes training in employment laws, rights and responsibilities. Participants receive a trainee wage and exposure to real work settings including skills-coaching by senior staff within the workplace. English language skills support is provided through flexible workshops, and as part of on-the-job training.

The program assists participants to identify and secure job opportunities including interview and job-readiness coaching. Regular communication with employers supports participants' progress. Work opportunities are also available within NCEC enterprises and through referral to other social enterprises.

NCEC staff and volunteers provide small business development mentoring and connection with potential funders to launch community-driven enterprises such as sewing co-operatives.

### EPRI Program Innovations

NCEC works with individuals and communities experiencing complex barriers to labour market participation and designs programs responsive to their needs. As a place-based organisation, NCEC leverages its deep networks throughout Queensland to create new partnerships and maintain existing relationships with other social enterprises and mainstream businesses. Strong relationships with cultural associations and local community groups support long-term engagement.

An example involves NCECs work with women from central and east African communities, living in Logan, QLD. In the outer suburbs of Logan, public transport is scarce. Many interested and eligible EPRI participants do not own a car or cannot drive. The risk of isolation and loneliness is high for this group, many of whom are caring for young children.

NCEC discussed these challenges with the community and co-designed a program that enabled women to participate in employment and English language training. Through a deep connection with local communities, NCEC found people to provide flexible childcare, transport and act as mentors, to train people in a culturally familiar way.



*Group sewing and English language training in Logan.*

"By participating in this program and having a place to come, we have increased our communication and we have confidence in showing other people how to find something they need, or teaching someone else the skills I have learned. We have increased our confidence to connect and communicate with leaders of other organisations. Now, I can do things by myself."

– NCEC garment manufacturing participant



## PARLIAMENT ON KING

Confidence and independence  
through culinary skills

### Overview

Parliament on King is a social enterprise focused on catering services, employing and training asylum seekers and refugees. The organisation specialises in preparing and serving food from the countries of origin of its employees. Established to address the social, cultural, and economic barriers that asylum seekers and refugees face in their new communities, Parliament on King utilises a 'paid work-to-train' model. Parliament on King has been providing education and employment to female refugees for more than six years.

### EPRI Program

Parliament on King's EPRI program is called First Shift Ready. It aims to remove barriers to work for refugee entrants with low English language literacy, and low recognised skills. First Shift Ready focuses on hospitality-related employment pathways for women aged 25-50 years old. Participants have been in Australia for various periods of time, ranging from six months to several years.

First Shift Ready uses a paid 'work-to-train' model that pairs skilled chefs - who may also be former refugees - with unskilled trainees, providing vocational training through hands-on work experience.

The program includes cultural orientation within a safe and supportive working environment. For many participants, this is their first job in Australia, or their first job ever. Key activities include increasing language confidence and competence for most participants, and developing technical expertise and professional practices for others.

The program provides each participant with 26 weeks of employment and vocational training in hospitality, food safety and customer service from a catering cafe and kitchen in Sydney.

Literacy assessments are conducted and internal processes are adapted to provide intensive support for individuals with low literacy levels (in English and in their own language), for employment.

The EPRI program has enabled us to offer targeted support to participants with low literacy and education levels, equipping them to transition into employment in the local hospitality sector.

Two participants are functionally illiterate and have gained knowledge and skills to safely navigate a range of roles in food preparation and catering.

As an example: B is a young woman who arrived in Australia several years ago. Initially, B was socially isolated, anxious, withdrawn, and unemployed. Parliament on King paired her with a skilled chef of similar age and background to provide social inclusion support and vocational training. This helped B gain work experience and social confidence. B was also connected with a local volunteer to provide mentorship in B's chosen field of study.



EPRI program participants.

"The challenge here is not just giving the team the skills they need to get their foot in the door, but in building the confidence they need to believe they can do it."

– Della Zhang, kitchen manager

"Unlike other programs, we don't start from zero, we take the skills that our cohort already has, and build on them. They know they can cook, we simply upskill them to the point that those skills are commercially valuable skills."

– Chef and kitchen mentor

### EPRI Program Collaborations

Parliament on King's most significant partner is the Asylum Seeker Centre (ASC), the primary source of referrals for the program.

This nine-year partnership thrives on four key dimensions:

1. Nuanced understanding of the needs of each referral.
2. Referrals that are matched to the services provided by Parliament on King.
3. Ongoing dialogue on progress and needs of each referral.
4. Constant feedback to on program delivery.



EPRI program participants.

### EPRI Program Participant Journeys

From their first day, participants receive an award-plus wage. Their training increases progressively over 3, 4, and 6 months, building up to the point where they are preparing meals for 100 people. The program utilises ingredients and recipes from participants' homelands, building on their existing skills and knowledge. A welcoming, informal environment is cultivated to feel like coming into someone's home, while also maintaining a professional setting.

Participants are responsible for logging their own hours and are accountable for their time, which helps them gain an understanding of workplace expectations and practice. Opportunities are also provided for participants to mentor new staff members.

Participants build language skills through interactions with other chefs and in the kitchen café setting. Informal discussions are held regularly to help participants articulate the skills they have acquired and understand their value. Participants receive on-the-job guidance in explaining different work strengths and capabilities.

### EPRI Program Innovations

A key innovation in the First Shift Ready program is its design, which builds on the existing culinary skills of participants.

Instead of starting from scratch, the program enhances and strengthens the participants' inherent skills, producing enduring outcomes based on experience and practice.

The EPRI program supports women with complex needs, including those with minimal literacy in their first language or in English. This enables participants who would otherwise struggle to find employment to secure meaningful, award-wage-paying jobs, significantly reducing their risk of exploitation.

Many participants often start a second job while still working with Parliament on King.



EPRI program participant: photo by Lorrie Graham.

"Our cohort have complex needs, many carry trauma and heavy hearts from their struggles, there is no 'one size fits all solution'. We're effective because we work with each individual to create a journey that works for them. The EPRI funding has been a game changer, it allows us to spend the time to understand and work with each of the cohort individually, and the difference is transformative."

– Ravi Prasad, program manager



PLATE IT FORWARD  
Combining premium dining with sustainable social impact

Overview

Plate it Forward is a for-purpose hospitality group with a vision to transform Sydney’s hospitality industry by combining premium dining experiences with sustainable social impact. To achieve this vision, it provides training, employment, and food relief to local and global underserved communities, primarily asylum seekers and refugees, migrants, and others from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who face barriers to entering the workforce.

EPRI Program

Plate it Forward’s EPRI program seeks to increase the rate of economic participation for refugees and humanitarian entrants with low skill levels and low English language proficiency by employing and training 46 participants from the target cohort at three Plate it Forward venues and kitchens.

Participants are aged 18 to 50, most are women, and most have arrived in Australia in the last eight years. Participants come from diverse countries, largely Afghanistan, Palestine and Ukraine. Plate it Forward pursues an ‘employment first’ model where program participants are employed across three hospitality venues from Day One. They receive training on Australian workplace culture, employee rights and expectations, and organisational policies. Participants are paid for their working hours and supported to gain formal qualifications and soft skills training.

Program activities and outcomes as of mid-2024 include:

- Participants employed at a hospitality venue: 22 participants are currently employed across three venues. Once employed, team members are provided with a structured training program to improve technical and soft skills, and personal wellbeing.
- Hospitality training: Plate it Forward has a team of six trainers across three venues who provide one-on-one and group training sessions to all participants. Participants also receive formal training from partner training organisations. At least a quarter of participants have been promoted to management positions based on their skills development.
- English language training: at least 75% of participants have done English language training, which is delivered at the venue where they are employed in a group format with other participants.

The EPRI program has provided substantial funding, contributing to Plate it Forward’s expansion and enabling the employment and training of an additional 22 refugees and humanitarian entrants, many of whom have progressed through their training into leadership and management roles for a sustainable career in hospitality.



Increasing economic participation for refugees.

“It is quite a special feeling when you look around a restaurant during service and realise that you’re not the minority. Being exposed to cultures that I would not have experienced otherwise also enables me to join the thread of commonality when it comes to flavours in food. And that is priceless.”

– Ahana, Training & Development Manager

EPRI Program Collaborations

Plate it Forward works closely with the community and community-led organisations and representatives. As 68% of participants are Ukrainian refugees, Plate if Forward works with a community consultant and the organisation Blue Peony to design its Ukrainian venue and training program, and recruit participants. It also recruits participants from Settlement Services International (SSI). Many other participants are recruited through word-of-mouth and referrals from family and friends.



Many participants are recruited through word-of-mouth.

EPRI Program Participant Journeys

EPRI participants are primarily employed across two Plate if Forward venues:

- Kabul Social (established in 2022) is run by a team of inspiring and courageous female refugees from Afghanistan. Every weekday lunch, these women bring their generational recipes to life, giving diners a taste of Kabul’s dynamic street food scene.
- Kyiv Social (opened in 2023) celebrates tradition and resilience, serving dishes prepared by a team of recently arrived Ukrainian refugees. Many team members began with no hospitality experience and rapidly advanced into leadership roles through a mix of hands-on training, mentoring, and sheer determination. These new leaders play an active role in creating new dishes and enhancing the dining experience. Throughout 2024, Kyiv Social became a hub for community events, providing a welcoming space for Ukrainian refugees and sharing their vibrant culture with the broader community.

EPRI Program Innovations

Guided by our four pillars - Food Security, Employment, Training & Education, and Connection - Plate it Forward tackles inequality by breaking down barriers to employment and creating meaningful connections through the shared joy of food.

Plate it Forward’s employment programs are long-term. Team members are provided training and support for as long as they are employed, with the opportunity to advance their hospitality career within the organisation.

Plate it Forward has built a supportive and experienced management team, including staff with shared lived experience, who are capable of building participants’ confidence, skills and independence throughout each stage of their career.

The team provides a range of training including structured, on-the-job and flexible training to accommodate different levels of experience and to ensure holistic training across ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ skills for all participants.



Participants are trained in ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ skills.

“We have formed a team whose members get along excellently, creating a friendly and supportive atmosphere at work - I appreciate this above all.”  
– Karyna, EPRI program participant

“I looked for a job and my financial situation was bad because we did not receive aid from the government. After four years I found Plate it Forward and I agreed to work with them. Here my whole life changed.”  
– Nehad, EPRI program participant



## SOCIAL ENGINE PARTNERSHIP

A unique partnership that delivers practical experience and support

### Overview

Social Engine Partnership’s job-ready program based in south-east Melbourne is a unique partnership with three organisations: Social Engine, L’Arte Central, and COACH Network. Social Engine equips young people and refugees with the skills and confidence needed to transition into employment in hospitality and warehousing. L’Arte Central, a not-for-profit cafe, catering and florist business, provides NDIS participants, young people and refugees with employment, training and participation opportunities. COACH Network empowers refugees through one-to-one mentoring. Together, these organisations support individuals in gaining practical experience needed to transition into sustainable employment.

### EPRI Program

The EPRI program is more than just a job ready experience, it’s a holistic pathway to employment. The program involves 81 hours of workplace training in hospitality or warehousing logistics. This training takes place in Social Engine Warehouse and L’Arte Central Cafe. Participants learn about the Australian workplace environment, relevant practical job skills and ‘soft skills’ they can take into any work environment. A placement support worker partners with the social enterprise managers to provide support for the participants during their training and as they transition into employment.

An integral part of the program is the COACH Network mentoring program.

Social Engine Partnership provides case management to the refugee participants and recruits, trains and supports volunteer mentors from the wider community. Mentors meet weekly for a period of up to 12 months and support refugees to achieve their identified goals which include pathways to employment, education and successful integration into the community.

The mentoring is tailored to support each individual and assists participants to take the next step/s on their journey. The focus is on early intervention and is an empowering and strength-based program.

The support that participants receive through the program is vital in this current economic climate. The volunteer and work experience, and ongoing support, is instrumental in helping participants maintain a level of hope and ongoing determination to find work.

Participants range from 18 to 50 years old. There is a larger percentage of females participating in the program than men while there is a similar number of men and women choosing to have a mentor. Almost all participants originate from Afghanistan and have been in Australia on average for 12 months or less.

Of the 48 refugees registered in Empowering Refugees into Employment:

- 35 have entered the work experience placement in either the cafe or warehouse
- 36 have a volunteer COACH mentor
- 29 have chosen to enter the work experience placement and have a volunteer mentor
- 7 chose to only participate in the COACH program
- From this cohort, many have either entered employment, been empowered to start studying or



EPRI program participants.

“I was very nervous starting the EPRI program. The program helped me see possibilities I never thought of before. The support I received helped me feel like I belonged and have a purpose.”

– Female participant from Afghanistan, aged 33

### EPRI Program Collaborations

Partnerships have been key in providing participants with support and ongoing work opportunities. There are 13 referral pathways including HSP and SETS providers, Employment Services providers, Chisholm AMEP, and through word of mouth from current participants and others. Social Engine Partnership works with Chisholm Jobs and Skills Centre to support participants with resume writing and job searches and has networked with employment partners including recruitment agencies to provide ongoing opportunities for participants.



EPRI program participant.

### EPRI Program Participant Journeys

Participant journeys show many similarities yet also demonstrate the importance of tailored individual support. Common goals for participants include finding a pathway into Vocational Education and Employment, support with English studies, improving their wellbeing and understanding how systems operate in Australia. Capabilities are varied. Some participants have come to Australia with high levels of education, employment and life experience, while others have very basic education and/or no work experience at all.

Most are willing to learn and gain new skills in many areas. Common vulnerabilities are lack of financial stability, low level-English and health constraints. For some, financial instability has also caused housing instability. Many have ongoing stress with safety concerns for family members in Afghanistan and /or other countries. This can make it difficult to focus on job training and employment. With ongoing support, participants have displayed increased confidence, particularly in communication, English speaking and understanding, and interactions with others in the workplace. There has also been increased capacity in skills, time management and increased hope for the future.

### EPRI Program Innovations

The unique partnership of the three organisations has been key to the program's success. It has enabled ongoing support and smooth transitions from the moment of referral through to placement in employment.

The ongoing mentor relationship has helped participants navigate life in Australia and feel more empowered to enter the workforce. This support has been extended into the workplace experience through the mentoring support role and placement support worker.

A partnership with Chisholm Skills and Jobs Networking ensures refugees are provided professional resumes and career counselling to further assist them in seeking employment. In addition, there is flexibility for refugees to choose to join both the Employment Ready Program with a social enterprise and COACH Mentoring or just one of those.

Experience has found those who actively engage in both programs improve their English skills more rapidly, grow in confidence and are more likely to find and maintain employment.



EPRI program participant.

"Before starting the program, I was feeling alone and aimless. Now I am trying new things like public transport and speaking in English to customers. The COACH mentor has helped me a lot. I am very happy."

– EPRI participant



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## Space2b

Inclusion and independence through art and design

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### Overview

Space2b is an art and design social enterprise that supports community inclusion and financial independence for newly arrived migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum. Space2b supports participants to thrive by fostering social connection, facilitating creative enterprise, and providing workplace training and business mentoring.

Its art, culture and cuisine training hub and community workspace includes a retail outlet, art gallery, design studio, workshop, business hub and laneway cafe in St Kilda Melbourne.

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### EPRI Program

Space2b's EPRI program primarily engages with women refugee entrants from 20 to 65 years of age. A personalised training plan is developed with each participant, in response to their expressed needs and long-term goals in Australia.

The EPRI program has enabled Space2b to support 30-40 refugee entrants per year into employment pathways. It provides help to navigate and access relevant government subsidies, assists with food and travel expenses to enable participation, and refers to specialists for additional needs.

EPRI program implementation demonstrates that paid work experience is essential to enable participation. Unpaid work experience is not an ideal option for EPRI participants, particularly women with low literacy, language, confidence and education levels. This specific EPRI cohort faces significant systemic barriers to work, along with challenges related to cultural norms and obligations. Paid work experience supports greater participation and better outcomes, and removes poverty itself as a barrier.

Pathways to employment vary from one month to six months and may take much longer for people with complex needs and circumstances combined with very low language and literacy levels. Providing a safe environment, with access to mental health support and trauma-sensitive care has been a core part of Space2b's work with EPRI participants.

Space2b pathways focus on empowering and supporting participants with work and wellbeing outcomes, matched to each person's readiness to engage in different steps along their social and economic participation journey.

The program also offers a buddy system that pairs participants with a local volunteer to provide English language and social inclusion support. This helps build long-term cross-cultural friendships and a caring community. Participants self-evaluate their progress with buddies, using a self-assessment plan and star system to track progress in areas of social connection, self-confidence, wellbeing and belonging.

Support with CV-writing and interview practice is provided by partner organisations, for participants who are ready to transition to employment elsewhere.

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*Space2b facilitates creative enterprise.*

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"Participant A arrived at Space2b homeless, frightened, unable to trust anyone and without work experience. She built her confidence, realised her skills (she was our best sales staff), learnt to trust and had a steep learning curve to gain knowledge of work ethics. Today she has a home, a paid job and is training to become a nurse."

– Program manager

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### EPRI Program Collaborations

Space2b's EPRI program involves many collaborations with private, public and community partners. These includes referral partners such as local health organisations and job providers, and project partners including Wyndham Park Community Centre, Men's Shed and the City of Port Phillip.

Space2b also has a strong network of local volunteers who pair with EPRI participants as 'buddies'. Every aspect of Space2b's business provides an opportunity for the local community and refugee entrants to gain work experience and connect.



*Every aspect of the business is an opportunity to connect.*

### EPRI Program Participant Journeys

Each participant journey is bespoke and developed with and for the participant. Space2b's program offers three supported engagement and employment pathways:

- **Space2Fly:** Business mentoring for artisan makers and creatives. This pathway targets participants with creative skills who are keen to start their own business. It offers an entrepreneur micro business and product development program for self-employment, plus mentoring opportunities with local business mentors. Participants are trained in preparing for a show, pricing and budgeting, writing a bio, and social media.
- **Space2Work:** On-the-job training and work experience in Space2b's retail outlet, café and catering business, and art gallery.
- **Space2Connect:** weekly craft and English conversation meet-ups for EPRI participants with low confidence and low English language skills. This pathway targets participants who lack confidence to leave their house, are unfamiliar with travelling on public transport, and rarely venture outside their community.

EPRI participants have ongoing opportunities to exhibit and sell their work in Space2b's retail outlet, community art shows, laneway markets, online shops and creative showcase events.

### EPRI Program Innovations

Over the past 2 years of EPRI program implementation, Space2b has adapted in creative, flexible ways to meet EPRI participants where they are, and provide meaningful support.

Two key innovations are:

- **Design and delivery of a bespoke 10-week product design and craft skills course** for 15 EPRI participants, originally from Myanmar, to showcase their artisan knitting, weaving, woodwork and ceramics skills. The course was tailored to the group's low levels of language and literacy combined with minimal formal education experiences. It included development of business skills (selling wholesale, budgeting, labelling products) and basic English skills for business communications. The group launched their brand 'Karen Creatives' and created new products for sale including ceramic plates, jewellery, wooden chopping boards, woven baskets, Christmas decorations and knitted baby clothes.
- **Storytime training for storytelling in multiple languages.** A group of participants completed 6 training sessions to develop skills for storytelling to pre-schoolers, public speaking, sourcing culturally appropriate stories and props, outreach & promotion to families, program administration, preparing invoices and setting up an ABN. Four participants are now employed as part-time storytellers in their language groups.



*A buddy system is part of the EPRI program.*

"Ja had little English but was confident to start her own import business with her community in Sri Lanka. Through our Space2Fly program she developed a small product range supporting artisan weavers in the hills in Sri Lanka. These products are now for sale at Space2b and Ja is learning English and administration skills to grow her business."

– Program manager



## STREAT

Supported work experience in  
Melbourne cafes, farms and gardens

### Overview

STREAT is a leading Work Integration Social Enterprise (WISE) with a decade supporting youth aged 16-24, 36% of whom come from CALD communities. STREAT offers supported work readiness and employment pathway programs for disadvantaged young people facing barriers, whose primary goal is to work. Its program is individually tailored with wraparound support including case management, work-readiness training, contextualised language training/support, work experience across STREAT's businesses (cafes, kiosks, bakery, catering, farms, gardens), and support into a real job (on average over 1000hrs of support a year).

### EPRI Program

- STREAT is delivering the Refugee Fast Track to Work (RFT2W) under EPRI funding. The target cohort are young people on refugee and humanitarian visas. RFT2W is a supported, eight-week work-readiness program for youth facing barriers to employment.
- A trainee in RFTW will have a key worker from STREAT's internal allied health team and meet with them weekly to develop and progress their individualised plan towards employment. Individual case support includes linkages to specialist service providers if/as needed. The trainee is rostered on up to three work experience shifts per week across several of STREAT's kiosks, cafes, catering, kitchen and bakery, and urban horticulture work sites.
- There is a group day of fun and interactive work readiness workshops which cover topics such as teamwork, group dynamics, coping and self-regulation, goal setting, employment skills, healthy work relationships and boundaries, interview skills, self-esteem, routine, diversity in the workplace, communication, customer service, mental health and alcohol and drugs in the workplace, employment legal rights, etc.
- Trainees also gain 'responsible service of alcohol', 'white card' and 'waiter skills and service' accreditations.
- RFT2W trainees also have access to workplace-based literacy and language support during the work readiness day and during work experience shifts. This contextualised language support enables trainees to participate in supported, inclusive and culturally aware job readiness training.
- Once the eight-week program has been completed, suitable graduates are able to access STREAT's Paid to Work program. STREAT partners with seven carefully selected partner employers who provide employment opportunities for graduates. Currently employment partners are in hospitality and horticulture; this is being expanded to other fields.
- STREAT staff include bi-cultural workers and complete 'young people and settlement' training to increase cultural competency.



Refugee Fast Track to Work trainees.

"STREAT helped me find employment, make friends during the Refugee Fast Track to Work Program, and make more friends here in my current job."

– Refugee Fast Track to Work trainee

### EPRI Program Collaborations

STREAT has developed networks with social enterprises, community organisations and settlement providers to establish effective cross-referral pathways for EPRI participants. Understanding local settlement services and available supports for humanitarian entrants across various visa categories has been both challenging and rewarding. These relationships have facilitated engagement with new communities, interest in STREAT programs, and enhanced responses to participant needs including new activities especially for them. Collaborating with social enterprises and settlement services is crucial for delivering economic participation support focused on refugee entrants.



Refugee Fast Track to Work trainees.

### EPRI Program Participant Journeys

Applicants for RFT2W undertake a comprehensive intake with a youth coordinator where suitability and eligibility are assessed. This includes ascertaining whether language and learning support is required, and assessing any other barriers that STREAT can help trainees overcome to successfully complete the program.

Once in the program, trainees are allocated a key youth worker for the duration of the eight-week program and they benefit from the individualised support. They meet with their key youth worker once a week and work collaboratively towards their identified goals.

During the eight weeks trainees undertake three, three-hour shifts of work experience in STREAT's horticulture and hospitality businesses. If required, they also have on-site contextualised language support. Here the trainees increase their confidence, capacity and communication and establish a comprehensive knowledge of the working environment in Australia. One example is a young woman who completed the RFTW program and was employed for more than nine months until she decided she wanted to study nursing as her next step.

### EPRI Program Innovations

**Holistic approach:** STREAT offers comprehensive support including skills training, mentorship, social integration, and ongoing support after external employment. This holistic approach addresses barriers to employment including lack of skills, social isolation or personal challenges. Trauma-informed practice places the young person at the centre and enables them to lead decision-making around their pathway.

Work experience in a safe and inclusive work environment offers young people of migrant and refugee background their much-needed first work experience in Australia. Training at STREAT provides references, access to professional networks and social capital so they can transition into employment with confidence and support.

**Social mission integration:** STREAT and other WISEs innovate by integrating a strong social mission into their operations. They prioritise the social impact of their work alongside economic outcomes, to create meaningful employment opportunities for marginalised groups. This integration results in tailored employment solutions that cater to diverse needs and promote inclusivity.



STREAT offers pathways across all its businesses.

"I like the support I received while in the Refugee Fast Track to Work Program, as well as having my key worker coming in once a week to check up on me."

– Refugee Fast Track to Work trainee



## THE BREAD & BUTTER PROJECT

Making bread with heart: hands-on training in artisan bakery

### Overview

The Bread & Butter Project is Australia's first social enterprise bakery. Its mission since 2013 has been to support refugees and humanitarian entrants into sustainable employment by providing workplace-based training in artisan baking plus wrap-around support. Refugees face extensive challenges in accessing skilled and sustainable work in Australia and the program enhances their prospects of successful resettlement, employment and sense of belonging in Australia. Recruits are drawn primarily from Sydney's Greater West and Southwest, and training takes place at our Marrickville NSW bakery factory.

### EPRI Program

The Bread & Butter Project provides six-month paid baker traineeships to humanitarian entrants. The ages of our program participants range from 18 to 60. All genders are able to work in the bakery and it tends to be close to a 50:50 male to female ratio.

The countries of origin include Afghanistan, Ukraine, Syria, Iran, Iraq and Rwanda. The duration of time in Australia ranges from as little as one month to up to a couple of years.

Key aspects of the traineeships which make them a success are:

- To ensure connection with potential program participants, the Bread & Butter Project engages in workshops and events related to employment, education or humanitarian entrants. It also connects with government agencies and other organisations in the food industry.
- The program involves full-time intensive hands-on bakery training, combined with English as a second language training onsite for one hour per week, and paid attendance to complete a TAFE accreditation for two days per week, within work hours.
- The caring work environment is one of happiness and enthusiasm. Connection with peers and colleagues allows trainees to build a sense of belonging in Australia and enables them to confidently navigate other challenges they may encounter living in Australia.
- The Bread & Butter Project provides ad-hoc support and referrals as required. There's always a staff member ready to help with any questions the program participants may have, within or outside the scope of their work.
- The Bread & Butter Project also supports trainees to secure employment with leading bakeries after graduation by assisting them with the entire process, including preparation of resumes, and job searching and job applications. Towards the end of the program, and whilst the program participants are still employed by The Bread & Butter Project, paid work trials with potential future employers are arranged, to ensure the new workplace is a good fit.



EPRI program participants.

"The Bread & Butter Project has taught me to be better and better. It's a group of lovely people and teamwork. Now I think I am ready. I'm confident in my new skills. I have even spoken to the Prime Minister, the Employment Minister and the Immigration Minister to tell them my story. I love my (volunteer) English teacher Rick. He helps me with my dreams. I have spoken with the Pilot Association."

– Parisa, Bread & Butter Project trainee

### EPRI Program Collaborations

The Bread & Butter Project reaches out to as many potential trainees as possible by collaborating with Settlement Services International (SSI) and other local Migrant Resource Centres, job providers, community groups and education providers. TAFE provides the Certificate II in Baking to program participants at no cost, and volunteers provide English tutorials. Through its partnerships the Bread & Butter Project achieves flexible arrangements that work for every stakeholder.



*The Bread & Butter Project.*

### EPRI Program Participant Journeys

Participants are from diverse backgrounds, each with unique goals, interests, capabilities, needs and vulnerabilities. Some participants have never worked before, while others were highly skilled professionals in their home countries, working as engineers, lawyers, teachers. Key vulnerabilities include the inability to find work in Australia and English language barriers. The program offers participants their first job in Australia, one-on-one English tutoring, assistance in obtaining their first qualification in Australia, and help to secure ongoing employment.

The English tutoring and day-to-day interaction at work significantly improve participants' English levels by the end of the program. Participants report that the program provides a crucial starting point, granting them financial freedom, resilience and employability. Female participants highlight the significance of traveling to work independently, earning an income and studying - opportunities they never had previously. All program participants are offered a job opportunity at the end of the program. While most commence roles in the food industry, others find employment in other industries as many skills learned are transferrable.

### EPRI Program Innovations

At the beginning of signing up for the EPRI grant, The Bread & Butter Project faced an initial challenge. Traditionally, TAFE provides education with a biannual cycle: a full intake participates in classes during March to June or July to November. But arranging for 12 trainees to start each semester would have created an enormous challenge, as it is very difficult to co-ordinate 12 program participants to commence at the same time. It would have also meant that the chances for a work placement and employment offers would have been reduced, as work opportunities are more likely to arise the whole year round.

The bakery would have also experienced operational challenges as, for the first three months, the program participants require one-on-one intensive training.

TAFE very kindly agreed to change their traditional model to accommodate the program's needs, by staggering the start date of each subject over the course of the year, to allow for two to six trainees starting each month. This change benefited the program participants and made their integration within the whole team more organic and organised.



*Haida making sourdough.*

“The Bread & Butter Project is very good for refugees. It's a great experience for me because I love baking. I like pastry best.”

– Kashif, Bread & Butter Project trainee



## THE DRAGONFLY COLLECTIVE & VALUE NATION

A strategic partnership that creates entrepreneurial pathways

### Overview

Value Nation is a refugee-led social enterprise that supports refugees through entrepreneurship. Co-founded by former refugees Mohammed Yassin and Omar Ponsot, its mission is to enable refugees to build their businesses, enhance economic participation, and integrate effectively.

The Dragonfly Collective is a for-purpose social business offering advisory services and training in Australia and previously in the UK. It specialises in for-purpose business models - from start-up to scaling and maximising social impact and outcomes for people and planet. Its approach is to challenge, imagine and transform.

This program is auspiced by Green Collect.

### EPRI Program

The EPRI Refugee Startup Program is focused on self-employment, delivered through a collaborative effort between Value Nation and The Dragonfly Collective, auspiced by Green Collect. This strategic partnership has been instrumental in reaching participants and ensuring the program's relevance and accessibility. It employs entrepreneurship as a catalyst for change and self-reliance, facilitating pathways from pre-employment to self-employment and supported pathways into mainstream employment.

Leveraging the lived experience and business acumen of its refugee founders, Value Nation has fostered a culturally safe and engaging environment. The Dragonfly Collective adds its experience working with refugees in London and Melbourne to support them with the skills required to start their own business.

The EPRI Refugee Startup Program has engaged a diverse cohort of 68 humanitarian entrants from Iraq, Syria, Somalia, South Sudan, Yemen, Ethiopia and Afghanistan, with an age range of 20 to 65 years. These participants, who have been in Australia between one and 20 years, vary widely in English proficiency from very limited to academic level.

Fifteen participants completed the first 10-week Program in May to June 2024, while 16 participants participated in the initial 2023 self-paced program - all receiving ongoing support and business mentoring. Key activities include tailored workshops focusing on practical business skills, from ideation to financial planning.

A continuous feedback loop from participants prompted Value Nation & The Dragonfly Collective to adapt communication and session design to better meet participant needs. At the end of each session a feedback form is provided, and combined post session feedbacks show 81% of participants rating the sessions at 5 stars, and 17% rating 4 stars. The program is delivered in a way that allows it to be agile and responsive, with sessions continuously re-designed based on participant feedback.



EPRI program participants.

"I have been through a few similar programs, but this one was different. The knowledge you have and the care you showed allowed me to fully engage with the program and develop my ideas clearly."

- Program participant (translated from Arabic)

EPRI Program Collaborations

Value Nation’s collaboration with The Dragonfly Collective is an example of a refugee-led organisation bringing personal lived experience and professional expertise to leadership and delivery of EPRI.

Partnering with migrant and refugee communities is key to implementing EPRI effectively. It supports deeper understanding of diversity within and across refugee communities and enables co-development of strategies to support program participants and real-time learning from them.



EPRI program participants.

Social enterprises and refugee-led enterprises are uniquely positioned to support and scale relational, place-based opportunities that strengthen community cohesion and lead to meaningful employment/self-employment outcomes for refugee entrants.

EPRI Program Participant Journeys

Participants in the program are varied in their entrepreneurial stages. They range from novices needing clarity and direction to established business owners who are seeking to scale their business.

The program’s practical, community-based approach provide personal values clarity, business model testing, and market implementation strategies.

Feedback from participants highlights the program’s relatability, inspiration and practicality. They note the benefits of a supportive community and accessibility of the program through multiple delivery modes including in-person, zoom and on-demand platforms.

EPRI Program Innovations

The program distinguishes itself through several innovative practices:

Technology integration: Value Nation & The Dragonfly Collective collaboration has implemented a robust digital strategy that includes a dedicated landing page for sign-ups, diverse channels to capture interested participants, automated communications for participant segmentation, and a virtual community platform (VN-Connect). This platform hosts session modules for self-paced learning and facilitates ongoing engagement among participants.

Flexible delivery options: recognising the diverse needs of participants, the program offers multiple delivery methods to maximise accessibility and engagement.

Personalised support: regular one-on-one mentorship sessions are conducted throughout the program to provide tailored support, enhancing the personal and business growth of each participant.



EPRI program participants.

“Omer’s and Mohammed’s journeys serve as a powerful lesson - with passion, one can achieve anything, regardless of formal education.”

– Program participant



## THE SOCIAL OUTFIT

'Kickstart your career in retail' for young refugee women

### Overview

The Social Outfit (TSO) is a unique fashion label and registered charity that has operated as a work-integration social enterprise for 10 years, with a mission to support refugee women to kickstart their careers in Australia. Customised training and employment pathway programs reduce disrupted settlement experiences, enhance social connections, and build confidence, knowledge and economic livelihoods. Programs build on existing skills while teaching new ones in a supportive environment. TSO is based in Newtown, Sydney, with programs in Marrickville and South Granville.

### EPRI Program

TSO's Retail Training Program (RTP) caters to young women from refugee backgrounds aged 18-29 years. Each year 12 to 16 women complete a three-month program which consists of:

- A minimum of 55 hours of paid on-the-job training and work experience in the retail store where practising English in a live workplace setting is supported and encouraged. The trainees build competencies across 10 areas relating to customer engagement, sales, visual merchandising, product knowledge and stock management.
- Weekly one-to-one mentoring sessions which focus on self awareness, career exploration and goal setting, deepening knowledge and understanding of Australian work systems, job seeking skills and supported transition to ongoing external employment.
- Access to TSO's bespoke online training school consisting of 12 modules of video learning.
- A professional resume review and interview preparation session with recruitment volunteers from Lotus People Recruitment.
- A workplace excursion to one of TSO's employment pathway supporters e.g. LUSH, The Iconic, IKEA, The Upside.
- A financial wellbeing/literacy workshop.
- Where suitable, a supported employment referral to one of TSO's employment partners e.g. The Iconic, Seventhwave Tea and Coffee, Telstra, Lush.
- Referrals to external support and services for issues outside of TSO's remit as identified during mentoring or work shifts.

Since the commencement of the EPRI grant, TSO has recruited and trained 22 young women. For 20 of these women, TSO was their first Australian job.

Of the 22 trainees, 18 have transitioned to ongoing employment. Countries of origin include Afghanistan, Palestine, Ukraine, Iraq, Myanmar and Syria.



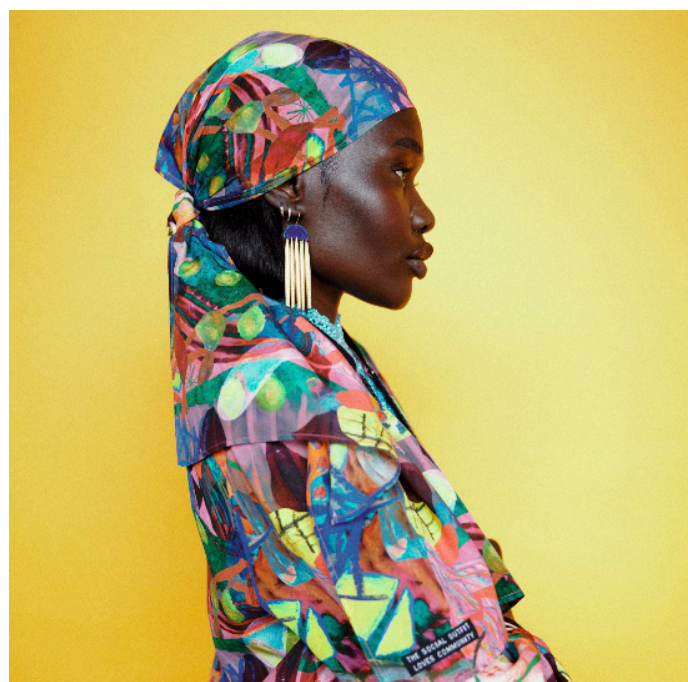
*The Social Outfit Retail Training Program.*

"The Social Outfit built my confidence through training and practising with customers. I feel more independent when getting my pay packet and being able to pay my own bills."

– Retail Trainee 2023

### EPRI Program Collaborations

TSO has developed and maintains relationships with community service stakeholders to promote and strengthen understanding of its program, cultivate referral of applicants and, where beneficial, to aid in the improved settlement of program participants. TSO maintains a contact list of approximately 140 agencies, community services and individuals which is used for program promotion and referrals. It continues to build partnerships with potential employers to secure post program employment for trainees.



Diego Lorenzo Jose.

### EPRI Program Participant Journeys

Each Retail Trainee's journey is unique. Some women join without any prior work experience, while others have lost their professional careers due to forced relocation. All face language barriers and lack recognised skills and qualifications which impacts future employment prospects. The RTP offers a chance to apply crossover skills while learning new ones in a meaningful and valued job, and gain a valid Australian work reference.

Challenges include limited knowledge of job seeking in Australia, limited skills/qualifications, lack of local work experience, and restricted networks. Personal stability can be compromised by financial hardship, trauma, mental health issues and isolation. Trainees often face a dilemma between attending English classes to improve their competitiveness in job seeking and the urgent need to find work to cover basic living expenses in Sydney. The program's supported transition to TSO's employment partners has significantly improved employment outcomes, however some trainees find that opportunities do not suit, leading to longer timeframes in achieving employment after graduation.

### EPRI Program Innovations

Central to the success of the program is its ability to meet the trainees where they are at, providing flexible, person-centred support through on-the-job paid work experience in retail and customer service and one-to-one mentoring sessions. The value of practising English in a live workplace while engaging with a supportive customer base cannot be underestimated. The ability to learn, practise, make mistakes and relearn with personalised support is integral to trainee success.

TSO's ability to build partnerships with external businesses for employment transition has also been essential to trainees' success in gaining and retaining ongoing employment. Giving women the chance to continue to explore and experience different employment opportunities, with employers who are supportive of their early journey to employment in Australia, is another key to their ongoing success especially while competencies in English are still emerging. To date 82% of trainees have transitioned into employment or short-circuited application pathways leading to employment at the completion of the program.



Retail Training Program workplace excursion.

"Thank you for everything you did with me and helped me with, teaching me how to speak English. Be bold and not afraid... You have stood by me in my new life and this is impossible to forget."

– Retail trainee



## THE SOCIAL STUDIO

Empowering refugee communities in ethical fashion and design

### Overview

The Social Studio (TSS) empowers new refugee and migrant youth through work and education pathways in the fashion industry. TSS is an educator, employer, producer and retailer supporting the artistic practice of young people in fashion, textiles, design and visual arts, crafting products that showcase local design and promote sustainable and ethical fashion practices. Since 2009, more than 800 young people have completed formal pre-accredited and accredited TAFE programs. Graduates gain employment in the TSS school, studio and store, create their own labels and small businesses, or move on to other areas of study and work. The TSS manufacturing studio and shop is based in Collingwood, Melbourne.

### EPRI Program

The Social Studio's *Designing Our Futures* EPRI program focuses on pathways to employment for refugee youth (18+ years) who face systemic barriers to economic participation. It extends and expands TSS core education and employment pathway with a focus on refugee entrants with low English language proficiency.

The EPRI program has enabled 20 students per year to participate in a two-year vocational training program resulting in a Certificate III in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles. The accredited program is delivered jointly by RMIT University and TSS, onsite at TSS. It includes a three-month paid work placement in TSS manufacturing studio. Wraparound support is part of daily work. The studio serves as a welcoming space where participants feel comfortable returning for support, before, during and after completion of the program.

The Certificate III is tailored for English as a second language learners with small student/teacher ratios and twice the learning time as a mainstream Certificate III. The lead teacher is a trained English language teacher. Volunteers assist students with more intensive language support needs, on a weekly or twice-weekly basis.

TSS provides psychosocial support, educational learning plans, and pre-employment training for all students. It supports EPRI participants to independently complete a basic skills and knowledge test required by RMIT to access the RMIT ecosystem. It also offers the opportunity to participate in a monthly sewing program as an entry-level activity for EPRI participants to determine if they want to develop sewing skills.

A trained social worker in the role of student pathways coordinator provides pastoral care and supports students in line with their needs including goal setting, exploring options beyond the TSS program, applying for further studies, job-seeking, CV writing, interview preparation, connecting with prospective employers and assisting with referrals for small business start-up.



*Designing Our Futures EPRI program.*

"This program has made me feel incredibly proud of myself. It has shown me I can do work that provides me with an income and a sense of independence. Being a part of this has given me financial stability and a sense of confidence and purpose."

– Sharifa (with interpreter support), participant in The Social Studio's 'Suzani Stories' Afghan embroidery project.

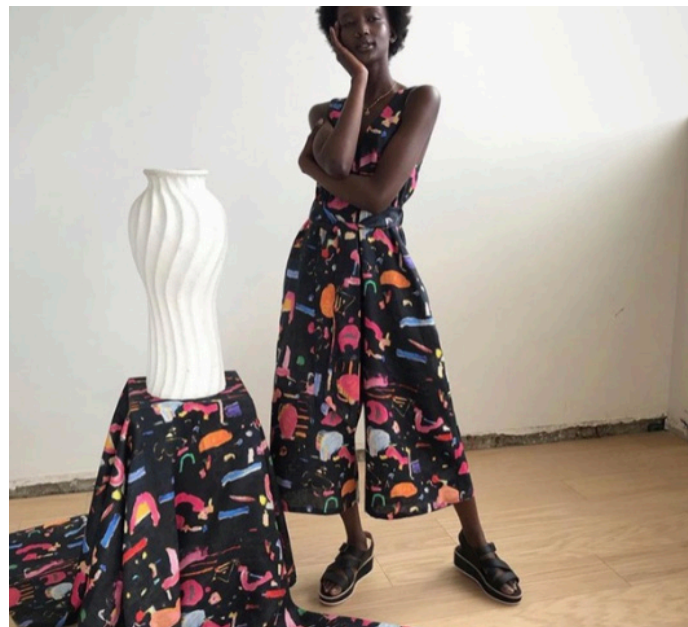
"Through this program, many participants have not only gained an income but also a renewed sense of dignity and community. It stands as a testament to the power of opportunity and connection in changing lives."

– Shegofa, bicultural worker and Dari translator for The Social Studio.

### EPRI Program Collaborations

The Social Studio has been working in the refugee support space for 15 years and works closely with settlement service providers, feeder secondary schools with refugee student populations, neighbourhood houses, the Centre for Multicultural Youth and South East Community Links among a range of education, settlement and employment support partners.

TSS builds relationships with local businesses for warm referral of EPRI participants who are interested in other creative and industry areas; three EPRI participants are currently employed by The Beautiful Bunch.



*Kuwail and Ken Done collaboration.*

### EPRI Program Participant Journeys

The Social Studio's Certificate III course is part-time and runs for two years with classes held two days a week. Students gain knowledge and skills in sewing techniques, fabric and textile performance, pattern making, sewing woven and knit garments, cut and layout of fabric, sketching techniques for fashion design, applying quality standards, professional finishing and alterations.

TSS also offers participants opportunities to take part in events and activities to help build their experience, networks and confidence. This includes:

- Excursions to exhibitions, industry tours, fashion shows.
- Participating in student runway shows.
- Talks from industry speakers and collaborative workshops.
- Student internships and work experience.
- On-site RMIT University classes.
- Textile design activities and folio preparation workshops.
- English language tutoring and support.
- Family days.

Participants take part in a three-month paid work placement program in the TSS manufacturing studio. TSS maintains a strong alumni community by hosting monthly open sessions. Graduates return regularly to participate in workshops and creative opportunities and to support career development.

### EPRI Program Innovations

The Social Studio introduced social sewing sessions to a sub-group of EPRI participants to provide a safe space for connection, conversation and support. It also started an Afghan embroidery program in response to participant interests.

TSS hired a team of 14 women, employed over six months, to embroider a TSS fashion collection. It engaged an interpreter/bicultural worker to facilitate communications and travel, and visits to other creative workplaces. Workplace rights training was provided by the Migrant Worker Centre (in Dari).

These flexible and responsive activities have helped build self-confidence and social confidence for participants. For the 14 women who participated in the embroidery program, they joined TSS with low feelings of self-empowerment, and low language and literacy levels. Several months on, they developed a strong sense of self through participating in the sewing sessions as a first step towards education and employment pathways.

Other innovations include providing financial literacy training and business workshops four times a year for interested students and graduates, including connection with small business training and loans.



*Students gain knowledge and skills in sewing techniques.*

"EPRI is not just about learning a skill; it's also about building relationships, confidence and self-esteem. At the beginning of our programs, participants were timid, lacked confidence and found it difficult to communicate with the teachers. After 6 months there seemed to be a transformation among the group. They were more confident, and able to assert control over their decisions and needs. They were speaking and connecting with others outside of their own group and even though none of the participants knew each other before the training, friendships were forged, and new connections made during and after the training"

– CEO, The Social Studio



## THRIVE

Pathways for refugees to thrive in the world of small business

### Overview

Thrive Refugee Enterprise (Thrive) supports refugees on their path to economic self-reliance. It does this by introducing small business pathways, providing information and support to navigate legal and other aspects of small business, assessing business ideas, developing business plans and providing access to start-up loans. Thrive's approach supports participant skill and language development, builds knowledge and understanding of working in Australia, facilitates social and work connections, provides low-risk entry into small business and self-employment and, importantly, builds confidence and independence.

### EPRI Program

Thrive draws on the entrepreneurial spirit, resilience and work ethic of refugees geared toward small business and self-employment. The program is delivered by a small team of credit experts and experienced small business client relationship managers with lived experience of refugee settlement. The diverse, multi-lingual client relationship team provides a relationship-based service model supporting participants over three years as they establish, sustain and grow a small business.

3,347 participants attended information sessions to learn about small business and self-employment pathways. Of these, 630 participants received further information and advice along with an individual assessment of their business idea and readiness to start a business.

- 289 participants were supported through business planning, cash flow modelling and business feasibility with one-on-one coaching and support.
- 183 participants started their small business receiving individual case management, business planning and establishment support (eg legal structure, leases, service agreements), access to start up loans ranging from \$5k-\$50k and ongoing business coaching.
- Businesses were created across a diverse range of industries - trades, building and maintenance, commercial cleaning, transport, education, hair and beauty services, food and beverage, retail.
- \$4.08m of loan capital was dispersed to participants supporting the establishment of 114 of the businesses. The default rate on the loans is less than 2%, well below industry benchmarks.

Thrive's impact survey reports improved participant confidence and outlook for their future in Australia, business and social outcomes including:

- Increased skills adoption and business knowledge
- Improved or significantly improved English language skills
- Increased confidence to manage small business
- Better access to services and support
- Improved connection to the community for families.



Samiulla Noori running his auto repair business.

"Thank you, Mr Gus and Ashraf, for your support, and a big thanks to Thrive Refugee Enterprise for helping me and so many other newly arrived refugees. I couldn't stand on my own without your help. It's a pleasure to start my third year and now, with stronger business skills, I feel confident in my work."

– EPRI program participant

### EPRI Program Collaborations

Thrive combines a national reach with a local placed-based approach. It is embedded in local communities, integrated with settlement providers and connected across mainstream services, government, industry and employers. Its client relationship team is embedded in the settlement system, often co-locating with settlement providers to open referral pathways; conducting joint training workshops and information sessions; collaborating on complex client needs, sharing knowledge and advocating for refugee economic participation.



Atefeh Hekmat running her art studio business in Sydney.

### EPRI Program Participant Journeys

Many participants engaged by Thrive arrived in Australia in the past five years from protracted refugee situations where the average period of displacement is 20 years and access to education, training and employment are limited or non-existent. Countries of origin: Syria, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, Congo, Somalia, Eritrea Ethiopia, Myanmar and Ukraine. Less than 20% of participants report any form of post-secondary education. 62% of participants have low-to-moderate English language proficiency. 26% of participants reported a reliance on government benefits.

Participants learn about Thrive via word-of-mouth from a family or friend or by referral from a partnering settlement service agency. Adopting a person-centred approach to intake, triage and assessment, the team gets to know participant aspirations, assesses strengths and tailors support. Participants are walked through a comprehensive one-on-one process for business start-up that may take six months, covering:

- Planning, goals, skills and risks.
- Education and compliance (running small business in Australia).
- Cashflows, business plans, feasibility, tax.
- Business establishment and ongoing support.

### EPRI Program Innovations

Given the economic landscape, and understanding the barriers faced by refugees, Thrive expanded a suite of “business-in-a-box” solutions providing innovative pathways into small-business in lower-risk, in-demand industries such as transport and delivery, rideshare, cleaning, gardening and maintenance. Thrive also launched Thrive Connect, a peer support model enabling participants to connect with fellow business owners, share knowledge, receive training in industry best practice and build their networks. Recognising the unique cultural and other barriers faced by women, Thrive is tailoring support for participants including providing access to micro-loans up to \$1500 to help kick start their business dream.

Establishing a small business is difficult and takes time, particularly for participants who are unfamiliar with the local operating environment and don't have access to capital from mainstream lenders. Thrive provides a relationship-based service model supporting participants over a three-year period as they establish, sustain and grow their business. The end-to-end model extends to the provision of small business loans (not available in mainstream self-employment programs) enabling participants to access capital and build their credit history.



Darwish Sido running his tailoring business Sido Tailor.

“For the first few years in Australia I worked any job, sometimes 2 or 3 jobs in one day just so I could pay the bills for my family. I knew I wanted to do something, and when I worked in someone else's small business I thought I can do this myself. So, I set up my own business. I did not get a job - I created a job for myself.”

– Ahmad, Thrive business owner



# VINNIES

Job readiness training in logistics, retail, ecommerce and sewing

## Overview

The St Vincent de Paul Society aspires to be recognised as a caring organisation offering a hand up to people in need. The sale of second-hand items through the Vinnies shops provides revenue to support the society’s work with vulnerable members of the community, including the provision of material and financial assistance to people in need, and the delivery of frontline services. It also helps prevent hundreds of thousands of garments and household items from ending up in landfill every year.

## EPRI Program

- The Vinnies EPRI program offers pathways into employment in the fields of supply chain logistics, retail, ecommerce, and sewing by offering participants a program combining training, work experience and individual employment support.
- Each pathway is different, but participants typically engage in specialised skills training such as forklift driving or HR truck driving, and complete the relevant license where applicable, followed by four-to-six weeks of work experience within the Vinnies retail and logistics network. In this supportive work environment, they have the opportunity to further develop their skills, learn about Australia’s workplace culture, and to practise industry-relevant English language skills. This is a chance not only to gain valuable skills and experience, but also to obtain an trusted employer’s reference upon completing the program.
- At the end of the program, participants are offered job readiness training to ensure they are able to navigate the recruitment process, as well as individual support to find employment. The program connects participants with employment opportunities, assists them to apply for jobs, and offers ongoing support throughout their first few months of employment.
- As of December 2024, 167 participants have enrolled in the Vinnies EPRI program. Afghanistan (54%), followed by Iraq (9%), Syria (6%), Iran (6%) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (15%), Other (10%) (Burundi, Central Africa, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Russia, Sudan, Rwanda, Uganda, Ukraine, Venezuela. Ages range from 19 to 60, and over half of the participants had been in Australia for less than a year at the time of enrolment.
- 96 participants have completed a VET qualification and work experience in Vinnies from the start of the EPRI program.
- 36 participants have found employment. From this group of participants, Vinnies employed 20.



Vinnies shop in Newtown Sydney.

“After many challenges and hardship following the fall of Afghan government three years ago, starting a new life in Australia was not easy for me. My English was not strong, I struggled. After being introduced to Vinnies program, things started to change. Working in Vinnies helped me in my new job. I see my English improving day by day, and I feel optimistic about the future. I am grateful for the opportunity Vinnies has given me to build a better life.”

– Waheja, retail trainee

EPRI Program Collaborations

Vinnies has been working with a wide range of organisations to deliver the EPRI program, including community organisations, refugee-led community groups, service providers, councils and employers. Partnerships and referral pathways have been key to understanding the needs of the target cohort, reaching potential participants and delivering positive outcomes for them. Referral sources now include recommendations from previous participants who have successfully completed the program.



Distribution in Auburn Sydney.

EPRI Program Participant Journeys

Participants vary greatly in goals, capabilities and support needs. They include young people who were unable to study due to displacement, but whose English is progressing quickly and who are eager to start work. There are also many older participants for whom English is challenging, but who are determined to support their families.

Some participants joined the program with little or no English. One participant with a learning disability and no English completed his work experience with the transport team, and was then hired as an offsider. This was possible thanks to the team's efforts to overcome communications barriers, and the participant's hard work and positive attitude.

For participants with language difficulties, Vinnies is trialling an ecommerce pathway into employment which provides a supportive environment to learn required skills. Several participants shared their frustration after months of fruitless job searching. Some described accepting work from unscrupulous employers and experiencing exploitation. All expressed relief and gratitude to be finally given a chance to improve their skills and employment prospects.

EPRI Program Innovations

The EPRI program prioritised wide community consultations with a range of stakeholders before starting to recruit participants, and these have informed program design and delivery from the start. Many changes to initial plans were made in response to the feedback received, such as the length and content of the work experience, the type of English language support offered and the content of the job readiness training. Pathways were adjusted based on the interest of participants and their relevance to employers and to the job market.

The program aims to remain flexible and responsive to feedback from participants, partner organisations and employers, and to continually adapt and improve.

As Vinnies offers work experience to the program participants through its own supply chain logistics and retail network, the organisation is able to tailor training to fill any gaps identified by employers and to ensure participants are equipped with specific skills based on market demand.



Distribution in Auburn Sydney.

"I was very lucky to have found this program because I was quite confused about where to start, where to find a job, and what skills to learn. But this program helped me, within two months, to both learn a skill and get hired by a good company. Thank you."

– Ali, warehouse manager

"The organisation supported and guided me step by step in all matters until I got a job, and now my life has changed."

– Zahir, warehouse trainee



WHITTLESEA COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Vibrant and inclusive community in a large growth corridor

Overview

Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC), established in 1973, is a vibrant place-based community led organisation in outer northern metropolitan Melbourne, one of Australia's major growth corridors. With a focus on supporting people experiencing barriers to participation, the WCC vision is for a connected and inclusive community where everyone has the opportunity to participate and achieve their potential. WCC delivers integrated services including food relief, legal and settlement support, transport, volunteering, youth support, pre-accredited training, and four social enterprises that ensure people's needs are addressed holistically.

EPRI Program

The EPRI program supports refugees and humanitarian entrants in overcoming barriers to employment by:

- Addressing multiple and intersecting barriers: lack of language and digital proficiency, cultural/ community expectations, social isolation, age, lack of skill and/or work experience and mental health concerns.
- Offering structured intake and assessment with tailored support that builds individual pathways to employment including pre-accredited training, volunteer opportunities, paid placements, casual and part-time employment.
- Working across four WCC social enterprises: Women in Work mobile childcare (WiW), driverED, Food Collective, Nugal Biik Plants and Seeds and a Small Business Project (SBP).
- Continuing to expand EPRI pathways in 2024-2025 through new Food Collective café/catering activity and expansion of Nugal Biik Plants and Seeds.
- Designing for specific industries such as horticulture, hospitality, childcare, transport/logistics, retail and small business, to offer choice and equip participants with necessary skills for employment in their preferred sector.
- Focusing strongly on building English language and essential digital skills tailored to workplace communication, helping participants enhance their proficiency and confidence, with one-to-one and small-group sessions to match each individual's learning style and pace.
- Building understanding of workplace rights, obligations and culture: program participants work across WCC to gain insight into Australian workplace culture and build job readiness through industry and sector orientation, job search strategies, resume building and writing, and interview techniques.
- Offering job placements with WCC social enterprises, local businesses and industries facing skill shortages.
- Helping participants acquire valuable skills in an encouraging environment.



Digital skills courses at WCC build confidence and create employment opportunities.

“WCC started working with me to turn my hobby into a small business that allows me to share my culture and create something special for others. It also provides a way for me to support my family and build a future here in Australia. It has been a life-changing experience and the support and guidance provided the necessary push. It is an amazing opportunity to learn, grow, and build something meaningful.”

– EPRI Program Participant

### EPRI Program Collaborations

WCC collaborates with a range of organisations to deliver and grow the success of the EPRI program. These include local businesses, education providers, support agencies, refugee leaders, community organisations and local governments. A key learning from these partnerships is the importance of ongoing communication and flexibility to adapt to the evolving needs of participants. By working closely with these partners, WCC ensures that participants receive the best possible support.



*Closing the gap: becoming a driving instructor.*

### EPRI Program Participant Journeys

**Journey 1:** driverEd is a multilingual professional driving school that provides high-quality and culturally appropriate lessons. driverED supports refugees to start their own business as certified instructors.

Hala was a primary teacher in her country of origin but her qualification is not recognised in Australia. After four months of volunteering and program participation, she enrolled in Certificate IV Motor Vehicle Driver Training to become a driving instructor. Her teaching skills are transferable and a strong foundation for her success.

**Journey 2:** Women in Work (WiW) provides a flexible mobile childcare service. WiW employs refugee women who are experiencing barriers to employment due to English level.

Bana arrived in Australia when she was 21. She pursued a Certificate 3 in childcare but faced challenges in finding employment due to limited English. Through EPRI, Bana secured paid work at WiW. She was assigned shifts with experienced workers, and secured a permanent job after six months of working with her EPRI mentor.

### EPRI Program Innovations

84% of EPRI participants are women and the program, particularly the Small Business Project, is developed in response to the barriers women from refugee backgrounds face. Responsive and multifaceted, it takes into account cultural, linguistic, religious, and psychological factors and includes:

- Integrated wrap-around support.
- Access to opportunities through the provision of childcare, transport and weekend activities.
- Targeting and encouraging female participation including women-only sessions.
- One-to-one support to tackle obstacles and build confidence.
- Leveraging peer learning and support.

Small Business Projects provides free business skills and training to inspire participants to turn ideas or skills into micro businesses. Food Collective utilises weekly fresh food markets, and more recently a café and catering enterprise, to provide training and employment in food handling, wholesaling, logistics and retail. Women in Work offers EPRI participants the opportunity to shadow experienced workers to learn from doing. WCC also offers participants secondments with WiW clients.



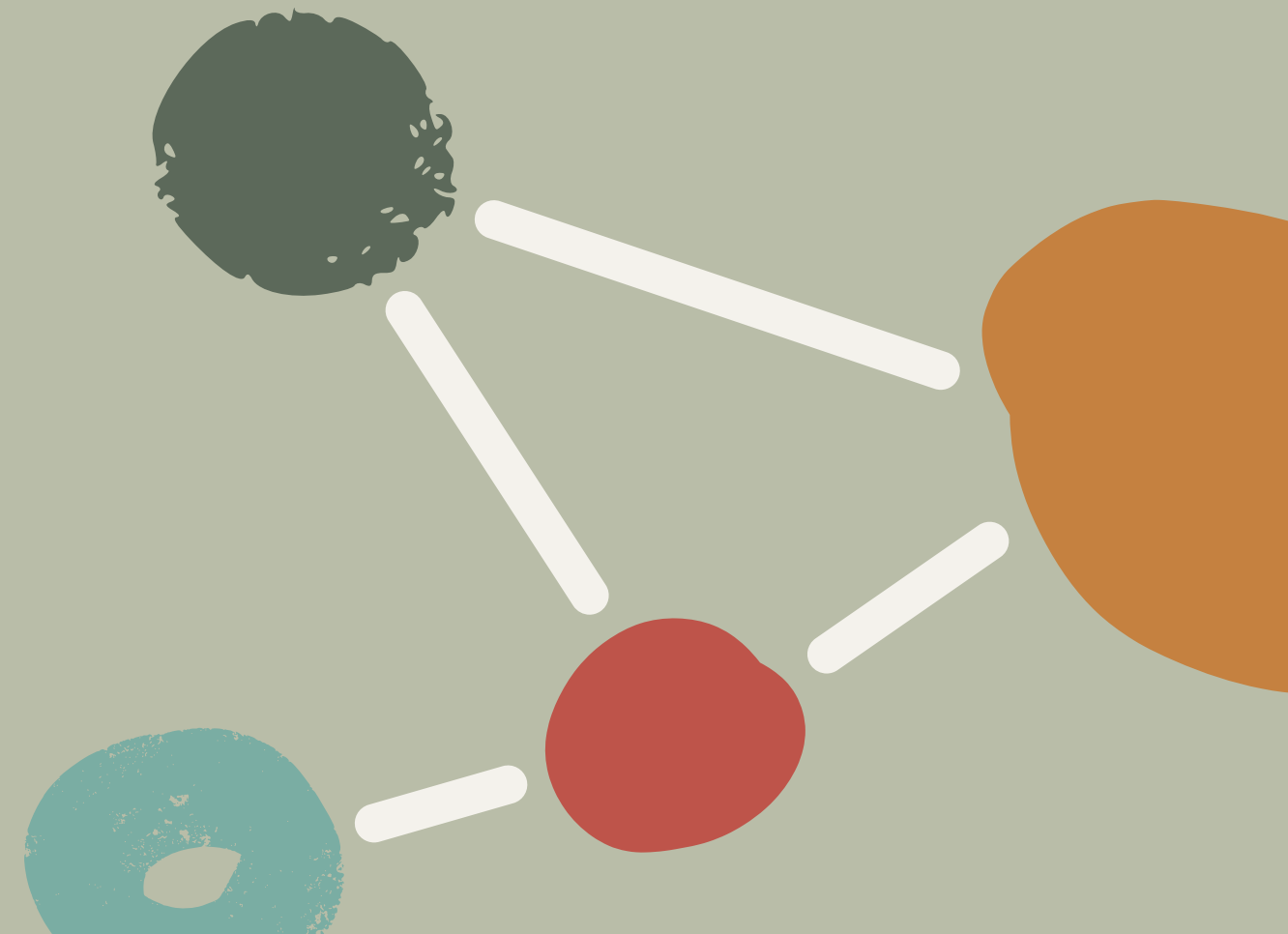
*Bringing community together through exploring diverse cuisines.*

“As the oldest son, losing my dad placed a huge responsibility on my shoulders with the family relying on me. I doubted my English and skills, thinking I wouldn't get far. WCC's support turned my dream into reality. Now I'm a full-time driving instructor and forever grateful”

– EPRI Program Participant



Acknowledgements







Wollongong Botanic Garden

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to:

- Participants across all EPRI programs for their courage, commitment, patience and resilience in facing systemic barriers to economic inclusion. It's their deep determination and trust in sharing their experience that helps service-providers, funders, employers to develop safe, supportive economic participation pathways for refugee entrants.
- The Department of Home Affairs for supporting EPRI social enterprises to innovate, learn and grow to maximise economic participation outcomes for refugee and humanitarian entrants.
- EPRI providers for their boundless energy in delivering EPRI, and their commitment to collaboration, flexibility and learning.

*"EPRI is more than just a program, it's hope for a brighter future for people facing real barriers and seeking support in their careers and studies, and for their families and entire communities. It's about transformation, empowerment and renewal - a chance for people to rebuild their lives with dignity."*

- EPRI provider

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this continent and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.



