



# Response to **Evaluation of the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) Program** Provider submission

May 2023

## ***Acknowledgement of Country***

*The St Vincent de Paul Society acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live and work, with deep respect. May Elders, past and present, be blessed and honoured. May we join together and build a future based on compassion, justice, hope, faith, and reconciliation.*

## About the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW is a member and volunteer-based organisation that has been assisting people experiencing disadvantage and hardship for 140 years.

The Society works with the most vulnerable groups, those experiencing chronic unemployment, settlement difficulties, food insecurity, poverty, trauma, social isolation, family dysfunction, mental health, addictions, domestic violence, as well as those impacted by natural disasters.

We provide people with holistic support and compassionate care which respects the dignity of the whole person. We support people to take control of their own lives, through providing agency and recognising their strengths.

We are a leading provider of frontline services, with 100 local services provided across the state. These include homelessness and domestic and family violence services, disability and inclusion services, settlement support as well as alcohol and drug services.

Our more than 3,000 members across NSW also assist people experiencing disadvantage with practical resources and financial assistance as well as vital emotional support and referral services as needed.

## How we support migrants refugees and people seeking asylum

We have a long history of supporting newly arrived refugees, migrants and people seeking asylum as they settle in Australia, and of advocating to Government on key issues.

Our members provide practical assistance, as well as information, referral and help to navigate new systems and connect new arrivals with others in their local community.

We help families build the skills, knowledge and community connections they need to become self-reliant.

In addition to our North Coast Settlement Service, we were recently funded to deliver an Economic Pathways to Refugee Integration (EPRI) program providing pathways to employment in the retail and logistics industry across South Western Sydney.

## Our Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) Program

Our North Coast Settlement Service (NCSS) has operated for 15 years, with well-established relationships and trust built with local communities, businesses and services.

We are funded to deliver both SETS Client Services (SETS CS) and SETS - Community Capacity Building (SETS CCB) programs.

We are based in the regional centre of Coffs Harbour and our service areas include Coffs Harbour - Grafton, Richmond - Tweed in the far North Coast of NSW. We operate across three local government areas.

NCSS is open Monday to Thursday, staffed by 5 part time staff (3.5 FTE) comprising:

- 3 x Migrant Settlement Workers (0.9, 0.7, 0.6 FTE)
- 1 x DFV Education Worker (0.4 FTE)
- 1 x Team Leader (0.9 FTE)

and supported by a network of volunteers, members and students.

As a regional provider, and the only SETS provider, we provide a 'one-stop-shop' of support across all nine settlement priority areas<sup>1</sup>, although housing, DFV, employment and family support are key areas of focus due to the current demand. Our approach is person centred, strengths-based and trauma informed.

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<sup>1</sup> (ie. language services, family and social support, employment, transport, housing, civic participation,

health and wellbeing, justice, financial literacy, education and training)

## Response to the Evaluation Questions

Our submission responds to evaluation questions 2, 5, 6-10.

### Client profile and need

## 2. How would you describe the profile and needs of your organisation's clients?

### Referrals and client intensity

Most referrals are received directly from the Humanitarian Support Program (HSP), through local provider NSW Settlement Services International (SSI). These are referrals that are deemed by HSP as needing additional support post the HSP period. However, we also receive many self-referrals from people who may not have needed immediate settlement support upon exiting HSP but require support 12 to 18 months later.

The pre-SETS assessment to determine whether a client will be low, medium or high intensity is not always adequately done during the HSP period. Consequently, high intensity needs are not always picked up prior to accessing our SETS service.

### Key cohorts

The largest cohorts of people we assist in our service are:

1. Yazidi/Ezidi (Iraq and Syria)
2. Burmese (Myanmar)
3. Anuak (Ethiopia)
4. Congolese
5. Eritrean

Other communities include people from: Rwanda, Burundi, Yemen, South Sudan and others.

### Women at risk and experiences of trauma:

Most people we assist have experienced significant trauma. We see many 204 (Women at Risk) visa holders with histories of sexual/physical violence, and many have spent many years in refugee camps before arriving in Australia.

### Low levels of English, literacy and skills:

Many of the cohorts being settled in Coffs Harbour have low English levels and are often illiterate in their own language. Many also have no prior qualifications or skills. This brings an added complexity to learning English, as well as applying for citizenship. Digital literacy or exclusion is also a barrier.

### Small and emerging communities:

Many communities are small and emerging and have little social infrastructure or established community networks. They are often dealing with complex issues. The Burmese community is the most established community.

Within the **Yazidi/Ezidi** group, many community members are significantly impacted by the ongoing process of separation from family still in Iraq with high levels of concern for their safety. Many have sought to sponsor immediate family members. However, lacking English language and literacy skills, and unable to independently navigate the legal service landscape in Australia, we find they need significant help and advocacy from settlement services. NCSS assists to collate documentation, check forms, and refers to and liaises with Legal Aid. The community has high levels of digital exclusion, and many community members were isolated, not accessing services or support during COVID. It is a community with complex, ongoing settlement needs requiring support well beyond the current SETS 5-year eligibility period.

The **Anuak** (ethnic minority from Ethiopia) community in Coffs Harbour is the largest anywhere in Australia. They have recently formed and incorporated an Association.

Anecdotally we find many clients from **Myanmar** go straight into working upon their arrival in Australia (usually picking blueberries 6+ days a week). With their primary goal being to get set up financially and repay family or community members who sponsored their visas or paid for their airfares, etc., this group rarely accesses Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) initially, nor any settlement services unless they have an immediate issue. However, after a few years, they are finally able to focus on other settlement needs for themselves and their families. It is often only at this point that they begin accessing SETS, however under the current 5-year eligibility they are almost at or are beyond the cut-off point for access.

**5. In the absence of SETS, what support do you think your organization's clients would be receiving (if any)?**

*"If we didn't come here there would be no one to help. This is the only place that will help us - we have no one else." (Focus group participant, 2022)*

*"The service is good, and they help me a lot. In Coffs Harbour it is hard to get support - very different to being in the city, it's a good service so I tell my friends to come here." (Focus group participant, 2022)*

The people we assist are very resourceful and resilient however, without the critical connector role that SETS provides, many would struggle to form the links with local services, beyond just Centrelink or the Job Network.

The SETS service acts as a 'one-stop-shop' and a common referral point for clients to access and navigate the services and supports available and helping overcome barriers.

It is likely that many clients would struggle on their own or have to rely on support from volunteers or community members, who may not have the knowledge, skills, language or resources to provide appropriate support. Many people would never become Australia citizens. Others may miss out on the opportunity to learn English, access childcare, participate in education or training and remain isolated rather than connected into the community.

There are no comparative or available services that focus on building key settlement knowledge and skills, with the ultimate goal of independent access to mainstream services, as the SETS program does.

There is a lot of movement within new arrival communities, especially in regional areas. This is impacted by a range of factors. However, finding secure, affordable housing, is a particular challenge for communities settling or relocating to the area (as it is across NSW) and requires a high level of support and advocacy. The support provided through the SETS program, particularly across the breadth of settlement issues that the SETS service can assist with including housing, employment, language support as well as other domains of settlement, is key to retaining people in Coffs Harbour.

As a regional area, there is a limited availability of specialist services and often lower levels of cultural competency or culturally sensitive practices. Many of the people we assist are referred from local mainstream services, simply because they are from a culturally and linguistically diverse background (regardless of eligibility). The SETS program plays a key role in educating, advocating, and capacity building of local mainstream services to facilitate access and connection for the people we assist.



## Enablers and barriers

### 6. What do you think is working well in your organization's program and how does it determine effectiveness?

#### ENABLERS:

Factors that have helped support an effective SETS program include:

- **Long term relationships and credibility** - Our longevity (15 years) providing settlement services in the area, has enabled us to establish trusted, long-term relationships with local communities, community leaders/advocates, businesses and service providers.
- **Localise, tailored response** - The ability to provide a place-based approach that responds to the unique needs of our community, which is particularly relevant in a regional community.
- **Skilled, connected and consistent staff** - We have highly skilled, professional staff that are committed, capable and well-connected in the community. Our investment in training and skill development has helped to broaden their skills and expertise across the breath of settlement issues.
- **Integrated, specialist services** - As a result of the 2021-22 increased funding for SETS providers to deliver enhanced support to address the safety needs of vulnerable refugee and migrant women, we have established a Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) Support as part of our SETS service. This has enabled us to employ one bi-lingual/bi-cultural Family and Domestic Violence Education Worker with lived refugee experience and strong connections with local communities. The program enables us to embed DFV education, prevention and support into programs in a holistic way and address a priority issue within our community.
- **Sustainable support networks** - We have a network of committed, long term volunteer members who provide ongoing support and connections to the local community for the people we assist. We have collaborative operational partnerships with Vinnies other services, referral settlement partners and other services across the sector. We host and convene the North Coast Multicultural Network, an information exchange platform which provides connection and peer support for services and communities. Our mentoring/peer support programs have proven effective in building community and social networks.
- **Responsive and accessible service** - Our service is underpinned by a 'no wrong door' approach for community members who need assistance. In addition to the SETS service, we provide a range of complementary supports, such as our volunteer run form-filling program, in response to service gaps or emerging needs in the community. The SETS team provide the cultural and subject matter expertise to support and oversee these services to ensure quality of service delivery.
- **Quality systems and support** - Our SETS service is supported by SVDP's state-wide support teams ensuring high quality compliance, quality management, risk management, audit and governance processes, and outcomes reporting.
- **Adapting approaches to scale our reach and impact** - We have learnt from past experience that an appointment-heavy approach to client services is a not sustainable model, nor meets current demand. We are shifting from 'one-to-one' towards 'one-to-many' programmatic sessions. These are community informed and directed, embed key settlement knowledge and skills to complement the HSP orientation modules and support our focus on building individual and community capacity toward self-agency. For example, we deliver group Rental Application sessions to build the capacity of clients to apply themselves now and in future, with applications checked by a Caseworker/trained Volunteer prior to submission. This approach has enabled us to provide services more effectively and scale our reach and impact. It has also built the capacity and knowledge of community members and their self-efficacy and self-advocacy.
- **Community development approach** - Opportunities to align our approach with community development principles have proven to deliver better, long term settlement outcomes. NCSS team members are trained in Asset-Based Community Development and continually seek to

be guided by clients' identified goals in service design. One goal that clients identify is Citizenship. We assist clients to apply for citizenship by checking their forms for them and collating their supporting documents. As they approach the time when they become eligible to apply, however, we note a wide range of citizenship test readiness. Some are English proficient and attend AMEP's citizenship test preparation classes. Others, who do not believe they have sufficient English skills to pass, begin to panic and seek alternatives such as applying for a test exemption, or start to believe citizenship is out of their grasp. Our weekly "English for Citizenship" class arose out of communication with the latter and is a supportive group that builds confidence in spoken and written English using the language and concepts of citizenship.

## BARRIERS

Factors that have impacted delivery of the SETS program include:

- **5-year max funding eligibility** - settlement is not a linear process and many communities, especially those with trauma and other complex needs, require ongoing support beyond the initial 5-year period. This also applies to supporting people with citizenship applications. Normal life setbacks, which can be experienced at any point, are compounded when one is a refugee or other humanitarian/vulnerable migrant. There is no timeframe for needing support.
- **Limitations on interpreter use** - paying for interpreter services is a significant cost. It is extremely challenging providing interpreting services needed by clients when restricted by a limited budget. In regional areas, this is exacerbated as very few bi-lingual staff are available, clients often have complex needs, low literacy or language proficiency and access to interpreters in some languages can be limited.

Other service providers and real estate agents have access to fee-free interpreting services however they are often reluctant or do not utilise the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS). As a result, SETS providers must determine what situations necessitate use of an interpreter or rely on volunteers or family members which is not good practice and reduces the ability to provide the services really needed by clients.

- **High demand, intensive caseloads, and staff burnout** - the demand for settlement assistance, especially medium intensity case work supporting clients with complex needs, is far greater than services are funded for.
- **Volunteer burnout** - there are challenges in sustaining some volunteers due to the complexity of what people need help with and particularly the challenges of supporting people with complex needs and trauma.
- **Adequate resourcing** - current SETS funding is limited to covering wages, rent, interpreter services and basic operational costs. Any additional initiatives are outside the scope of funding and providers need to seek external funding to deliver these.
- **Tools for measuring impact** - impact is measured (as per the funding contract) against performance indicators ranging from the number of people assisted to the percentage of clients achieving improved independence, participation, and wellbeing. There is no consistent evaluation tool or qualitative reporting framework which measures long-term settlement outcomes for people (not just outputs).
- **Housing supply** - Significant housing supply issues continue to impact our region, disproportionately affecting refugee and other low-income communities. This has presented multiple challenges for staff and volunteers in supporting clients to find and maintain affordable, accessible rental tenancies. In our "post-pandemic" context although migration from cities has lessened, vacancies in regional rental markets have remained tight and have become less affordable for anyone on government benefits and/or low wages. Real Estate Agencies' insistence on all rental applications going through their online portals (which differ between agencies) means staff and volunteers spend significant time assisting clients to apply for rentals, and these lengthy applications are generally not transferrable when applying for multiple properties through different agencies. While traditionally our service would refer specific cases to Mission Australia, they are currently at capacity with a long waitlist and can

provide minimal support. Waiting lists for social and public housing are currently 10+ years.

**7. How would you describe the nature of your organization's interactions with sector stakeholders, noting what is working well and what could be working better?**

**SECTOR COLLABORATION**

Examples of some effective sector partnerships:

- **Form filling service** - we work together with the local Neighbourhood Centre to train volunteers to provide a free form filling service for people who have been in Australia for more than 5 years. Cultural awareness training is incorporated with this collaboration.
- **Sector development** - we deliver training to staff at Mission Australia on using the interpreter service and building cultural inclusion in their service delivery.
- **Information exchange** - we convene the local North Coast Multicultural Network, an (online and in person) information exchange platform which also acts as an advisory body supporting services and members of the multicultural community in their work with the migrant community. The Network includes over 100 members comprising representatives of organisations who work directly with migrants, local and state government representatives, Multicultural NSW, Department of Home Affairs and others.
- **Job search support and employer connections** - our volunteers help provide quality and tailored resume support for the people we assist. We also have great relationships with local businesses and employment providers. We have a WhatsApp group where we send out job opportunities to community members looking for work.
- **Settlement partnerships:**
  - **Citizenship classes** - we partner with TAFE AMEP to deliver citizenship information classes onsite in response to identified need.
  - **Women's group** - we partner with NSW STARTTS to establish a women's group, STARTTS provide a therapeutic focus and NCSS provides settlement information.
- **Student placements** - we partner with TAFE, UNE and Southern Cross university to offer students placements which also enhance our delivery of programs.

**CHALLENGES**

- **High intensity/Tier 3 client needs** - High intensity client needs are not always picked up during the HSP assessment/pre-SETS period. Additionally, there is no Tier 3 caseworker based in Coffs Harbour. As a result, the only option for high intensity needs clients is to work remotely (online) with someone from Armidale. This presents a range of barriers for the people we assist and raises concerns for clients around confidentiality within small communities.
- **Referral constraints** - most mainstream services in the region are currently operating at capacity and there are limited, if any, referral options for clients.
- **Cultural competence of mainstream services** - Due to limited specialist services in regional areas, local mainstream services lack the cultural competence required to meet the needs of clients beyond settlement-specific supports. New arrivals often get sent to us by more appropriate and specific services (e.g. the domestic violence service will send us a client because she doesn't speak English rather than assist her themselves). We frequently identify opportunities to provide training and assistance in working with our client group to sector stakeholders. For example, DFV service, housing services such as Mission Australia, and even private real estate companies, etc.

## Cost and cost drivers

### 8. What are the costs associated with delivering your program?

The program is delivered with lean principles and with the majority of funding, over 70%, allocated towards staff costs. This is also supplemented by volunteer and student placements. We utilise 56 regular weekly volunteer/student hours (valued at \$135,757 per annum) to support the delivery of the program. This includes volunteers with the same cultural backgrounds as the people we support, which reduces the dependency on TIS translation. TIS costs are the key cost for client services. Grants are sourced to fund other programs and community events. In the last two years this has included a \$120,000 grant in partnership with Coffs Harbour Council for a place-based project for women from settlement backgrounds, and \$25,000 of grants to deliver programs and events for settlement communities.

After 12% of funding being allocated for broader resourcing such as quality and risk management, people and culture support and governance, all other funding is allocated to operational costs such as rent, electricity, phone data and office supplies.

## Funding considerations

### 9. To what extent does the funding received to deliver the program meet the costs associated with delivering the program?

The demand for client services (especially intensive 1:1 casework) greatly exceed what is possible with the resourcing provided through the current SETS funding.

Funding for interpreter services is grossly inadequate and requires selectivity in choosing what and when interpreters are provided for clients.

There is no SETS funding for additional program delivery, which may deliver more effective settlement outcomes. External funding is required.

The costs associated with attending the annual SETCoP conference, which could be hosted anywhere in Australia and which SETS providers are required to attend, consume a lot of the budget and does not leave much funding for other professional development.

However, in a region where:

- there are no other settlement services (other than HSP and AMEP providers);
- often mainstream services lack the cultural competence (and/or will) to address barriers to access for clients from CALD backgrounds;
- most services are currently operating at capacity and there are limited, if any, referral options for clients; and
- there are complex settlement needs requiring intense ongoing support;

the SETS program provides a vital connector role for humanitarian entrants and other vulnerable migrants.

In order to respond to demand, particularly being in a regional location with limited referral services, we draw on our strong network of volunteers and students to help fill these gaps.

In addition, we collaborate with Vinnies Services and our members at a program and operational level to ensure wrap around support from the Society to amplify outcomes for the participants.





## Future program design

### 10. How could the SETS program and/or funding model be improved going forward?

- **Removal of the 5-year eligibility cap** for access to SETS services, especially for those with complex trauma and other needs, and in recognition that settlement is not a linear process.

Ideally this would also apply to the SETS Community Capacity Building program in recognition of the various and changing capacities, priorities, readiness, community dynamics and make up of small community organisations.

*Note: We welcome the removal of the arbitrary 5-year eligibility for SETS as announced in the Federal Budget. This has been one of the most significant barriers to successful settlement for many communities with complex needs and ongoing issues back home, for communities who focus on getting themselves established economically and paying off debts in the initial years, and female/caregiving clients. We also recognition that this will increase demand and workload for SETS providers.*

- **Providing access to the free Interpreting Service for SETS providers** - paying for interpreter services is a significant cost. It is extremely challenging providing interpreting services needed by clients when restricted by a limited budget. In regional areas, this is exacerbated as very few bi-lingual staff are available, clients often have complex needs, low literacy or language proficiency and access to interpreters in some languages can be limited.

In the absence of access to fee-free interpreting services for SETS providers, there is a need for at least an increase in funding for interpreting services within contracts with regard for the challenges face by providers in regional areas.

- **Focus on longer term outcomes and community determined outcomes** - the SETS program (both service delivery models, performance indicators and outcomes measures) currently has a very short-term focus (primarily on short-term, task-based outputs), rather than an approach based on community development principles that emphasises individual skills, knowledge, and capabilities leading to long term outcomes. We would welcome an outcomes framework for SETS delivery that put emphasis on sustained outcomes, not just outputs, and bringing consistency and alignment for the sector.

The Community Capacity Building guidelines would benefit in being realigned with a community development approach, recognising the assets that communities have and valuing their self-determination to decide what community capacity building looks like, co-designing services and determining their own outcomes.

- Review of the current output **reporting requirements** with a view to reporting within an outcomes framework and allowing more qualitative reporting to demonstrate outcomes. The SETS program requires a lot of detailed information to be collated from clients to meet reporting requirements. Focusing on output rather than outcomes leads to an emphasis on reporting over relationship. Enhanced use of qualitative reporting can be achieved by sharing case studies through a settlement outcome reporting framework. These case studies can be used to demonstrate how organisations are delivering person-centred, strengths-based, culturally responsive services through collaborative practice which leads to enhanced outcomes.
- **Continuation of the targeted DFV funding stream** - the targeted funding stream, introduced in 2021/22 to address the safety needs of vulnerable refugee and migrant women, has enabled provision of a range of effective, responsive DFV education, prevention and support initiatives to be embedded and delivered as part of the SETS service. There is a need to continue this targeted funding within the SETS program.
- **Adequate resourcing:**
  - **Funding contracts to include money for programs** - these deliver great outcomes for clients but are not currently provided within the scope of SETS funding contracts (which

just cover wages, rent, interpreter services and basic operational costs). SETS providers need to seek external funding to deliver these programs as add-ons to SETS services, however they are often a more cost effective and sustainable way of building skills, knowledge and self-efficacy to support long term settlement outcomes.

- **Increased funding** to meet the reality of the demand, especially in regional areas where there is limited support as well as often low cultural competency. This includes staffing to support **intensive, ongoing case work** for clients with complex needs, the need for **specialist workers** in the area of domestic and family violence and employment, as well as to support coordination between services. There is also potential for the funding model to consider a **regional-specific funding stream** that recognises the unique content and challenges of settlement provision in regional contexts.
- **Funding for community education** to build skills, knowledge and capacity of other organisations and businesses to create more inclusive communities. This would assist in bridging current gaps, and long-term see stronger outcomes for the whole of community,
- **Promoting innovation and locally responsive, place-based programs** - Due to the challenge of vast differences in settlement locations, the design of the SETS program needs to allow flexibility to respond to the needs of specific cohorts and place-based initiatives. Place-based responses should be designed based on the needs within an area. Seeking evidence-based input and proposals from service providers for dedicated and locally responsive programs that can be funded and implemented as part of the settlement service delivery could be considered as part of future program design. Additionally, consideration should be given to funding contracts which recognise the different context, constraints and benefits of providing settlement support in a regional context.

### Further information

Thanks for the opportunity to contribute to this evaluation. Should you have any questions please contact Jessica Davidson, Manager, Disability and Inclusion, at [jessica.davidson@vinnies.org.au](mailto:jessica.davidson@vinnies.org.au).