



## **Submission to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment re: Proposed licensing system for the New Employment Services Model**

### **Introduction**

The NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture & Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) is a non-profit organisation established in 1988 to assist refugee survivors of torture and trauma rebuild their lives in Australia. STARTTS' services form a part of the NSW public health system through its recognition as an Affiliated Health Organisation (AHO). STARTTS is the NSW member of the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT), with a proud 30-year history of successful services and projects; funded through a variety of government and non-government bodies including NSW Health, and the Commonwealth Departments of Health and Home Affairs.

STARTTS' clients are survivors of torture and trauma in the context of organised violence and state terrorism, the majority of whom have arrived in Australia under the Refugee and Humanitarian Program. STARTTS' service model incorporates a large range of clinical and psycho-social interventions informed by the latest advances in neuroscience and evidence-based practice in relevant fields. Our service provision philosophy is predicated on a bio-psycho-social framework, in recognition of the complex interaction between this essential building block for personal and collective wellbeing, and pre-migration and 'normal life cycle' events post-settlement, which have the potential to impede the recovery of individuals from their traumatic experiences<sup>1</sup>. As such, our service offer is broad in scope and includes assessment; counselling for all age groups; psychiatric assessment and interventions; family therapy; group interventions; body-focused interventions such as nutrition, massage, physiotherapy, acupuncture and pain management groups; support groups; programs for children and youth; advocacy and policy input; training for service providers; and various strategies to increase the capacity of support networks and refugee communities to sustain their members.

The focus of the STARTTS approach is on building capacity and empowering people and communities to take control over their own lives, using a strengths-based approach and building on individual, family, community and cultural strengths. Further information about STARTTS' services and programs can be found at <http://www.startts.org.au/>

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<sup>1</sup> Aroche, J., & Coello, M. (December 5-9, 1994), 'Towards a systematic approach for the treatment and rehabilitation of torture and trauma survivors: The experience of STARTTS in Australia.' *4th International Conference of Centers, Institutions and Individuals Concerned with Victims of Organized Violence: "Caring for and Empowering Victims of Human Rights Violations"*. DAP, Tagaytay City, Philippines, available at: <http://www.startts.org.au/media/Research-Doc-Towards-a-systematic-approach.pdf>



STARTTS welcomes the opportunity to respond to the '*Proposed licensing system for the New Employment Services Model: Discussion paper*' released by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment. We offer our contribution in the form of answers to the guiding questions we are best placed to respond to from the position of expert knowledge and deep community engagement:

## **2.1 Should generalist and specialist organisations be included on the same panel?**

STARTTS is highly supportive of the introduction of specialist providers on the panel. It would go some way towards ensuring stronger staff expertise, more targeted staff recruitment and training, and better quality service provision for particular jobseeker groups. This can be complemented by a suite of generalist providers who may also be able to service the same jobseeker group if they receive training and support and if certain segments of the jobseeker group have lower levels of disadvantage. As long as vulnerable cohorts have access to specialist providers, it may be acceptable to place both generalist and specialist providers on the same panel. However, if the single panel model results in specialist services not being allocated to work with the cohort they specialise in, it may be necessary to create two panels – Specialist and Generalist.

## **2.2 How long should the panel be in place for?**

The Panel should be initially in place for at least two years to ensure staffing and service continuity. There should be strong monitoring and evaluation strategies in place during that time to enable an informed review at the end of 2 years cycle.

## **2.3 In what circumstances should a panel refresh occur?**

It would be essential that refresh occurs when there is a requirement for a particular specialist in a specific geographic region. The Panel should be closely monitored for gaps and refreshed accordingly to ensure the right mix of specialist services is available.

## **2.4 How else could the panel be used?**

The Panel could be used to deliver specialised, innovative projects with the relevant cohorts. Specialist providers could be engaged to enhance capacity of generalist providers to work with the specialist's cohort. STARTTS was a specialist Personal Support Program (PSP) provider in the past and both of those tasks were undertaken by STARTTS PSP staff.

## **3.1 How long should licences be issued for initially?**

## **3.2 Should an organisation be allowed to service areas smaller than an Employment Region?**

STARTTS recommends discretion be exercised on a case-by-case basis to ensure specialist skillsets can be quickly harnessed and utilised where pockets of highly disadvantaged job seeker groups emerge and whose unique needs cannot otherwise be catered for within an existing Employment Region provider panel arrangement.

## **3.3 Should the number of licences be capped in each Employment Region?**



STARTTS recommends discretion be exercised on a case-by-case basis to ensure specialist providers catering to the needs of various disadvantaged groups are available in all Employment Regions.

### **3.4 When should new licences be added to a region?**

New licence should be added when a gap is identified in relation to a particular specialist skillset.

### **3.5 In what circumstances should short-term licences be issued?**

In general, short-term licences should not be issued as that may negatively impact on service delivery and staffing continuity. However, there may be some specific circumstances:

- When previous track-record of a particular provider indicates a need for close monitoring and supervision by the Contract Manager. A short-term licence could be issued as a form of a trial.
- When a specific innovative project is identified and funding is available for a short-term period, coupled with lack of appropriate providers on the existing Panel.

## **Chapter 4 – Guiding questions**

### **4.1 How many performance groupings should there be?**

### **4.2 How frequently should Licence Reviews occur?**

Licence reviews should occur on a bi-annual basis to ensure staff quality and continuity as well as service provision continuity. After the initial two years and if the provider track-record indicates high quality service delivery, the Licence Review periods could be lengthened.

### **4.3 How often should providers receive performance data?**

It would be useful to receive this data on a monthly basis particularly during the initial rollout of the new model.

### **4.4 Should provider performance be publicly accessible?**

Yes as this would ensure transparency.

### **4.5 When should the first Licence Review occur?**

Two years after the initial Licence grant.

### **4.6 Should the first Licence Review be any different to later reviews?**

The outcomes of the first Review should guide the content and frequency of any subsequent reviews. High quality service provision in the first period should indicate lower frequency of reviews.

## **Chapter 5 – Guiding questions**

### **5.1 Should cohort specialists only be referred job seekers from their target cohort?**



Yes as that would ensure targeted and appropriate service provision and ensure best outcomes for the clients.

## **5.2 Which cohort types should have specialists?**

In addition to other vulnerable jobseeker groups, Refugee torture and trauma survivors require access to a full suite of enhanced employment services including additional support to address specific psychosocial barriers, and increase both social and economic participation.

STARTTS' clients have the potential to make significant contributions to Australian society with the achievement of settlement outcomes; employment being one of the most important aspects. Gaining access to employment plays a crucial role in the settlement and trauma recovery processes. It is essential for the economic and social wellbeing of the individual and the broader community, but finding suitable employment still remains a significant challenge for STARTTS' clients. Research has revealed that the employment rate for those who enter via the family and humanitarian migration streams is relatively lower than that of native born Australians. This is usually linked to a number of factors including protracted periods in refugee camps and trauma, but even those with some form of education and good English proficiency skills experience persistent barriers to gaining employment (Hugo, 2011). STARTTS therefore recommends that the Australian Government design its enhanced employment services by providing resources for long term wraparound (holistic) support based on personalised case management and collaboration between service providers. The reasons for this include that STARTTS' staff have observed that for some of our clients, a client-centred approach has been absent in JobActive practice and significant pressure is placed on our clients to find jobs. STARTTS staff reported that detailed regulations and individualized assessment do not allow some eligible clients to be exempted from job-search requirements in certain circumstances, which subsequently increases demands on JobActive providers and reduces their effectiveness. It appears that the Job Capacity Assessors and Employment agencies have a limited understanding of the complex interaction between gender, culture, impact of torture and trauma, settlement challenges and physical health issues. STARTTS staff are aware of the limitations of the job capacity assessment process and understand that systematic pressures often limit an assessor's ability to conduct objective assessments.

STARTTS clients have often reported frustration with JobActive providers, many of whom do not appear to consistently provide the kind of pre-employment preparation or post-recruitment back-up needed to support successful placements, nor using interpreters or not using interpreters appropriately. Job seekers from refugee backgrounds need more intensive support before they enter the workforce, especially around Australian workplace norms and other soft skills. Individual job seekers need regular, consistent availability of professional interpreters if real and in-depth communication around experience, interests, personal barriers to seeking employment, educational aspirations and opportunities and meaningful understanding of Australian employment is to happen. This is an access and equity issue and we encourage the Australian Government to underscore with providers the importance of delivering services that are culturally appropriate in their dealings with clients, especially refugees.



In order to work effectively with STARTTS' clients, employment service providers need to understand the possible effects of torture and trauma on an individual's ability to take part in social and economic life, as their experiences as refugee torture and trauma survivors can impact concentration levels, memory retention and speed of English language acquisition. It is important for enhanced employment services to be aware that refugee families are dealing with significant challenges in relation to family stability and security. Family relationships and structures are damaged by refugee experiences and re-building strong families is an essential part of making a new life. Refugee parents require time, space and support to bring their families to a recovery from trauma and they should not be forced to seek employment if they do not feel ready (as it could lead to adverse physical and mental health outcomes). The ideal situation for refugee job seekers is a combination of support with qualification recognition, employment and training. For STARTTS' clients who have spent protracted periods in war situations, relevant education and training before they start working is expected. This challenging combination of pre and post-migration experiences, necessitates the training of service provider personnel who seek to work with communities of refugee background, including how to work with accredited interpreters, or alternatively employing bi-lingual and bi-cultural staff in locations of high refugee population from particular backgrounds. These measures, if incorporated into the design and implementation of the new employment services scheme would go some way towards ensuring clients with torture and trauma experiences do not fall through the gaps.

It is anticipated that enhanced social participation contributes to enhanced economic participation as this has been STARTTS' experience when delivering the Personal Support Program (PSP) in the past. Thus, STARTTS believes that people from refugee backgrounds require specialist providers who would be able to:

- Deliver specialist trauma-informed and culturally safe services to this cohort
- Deliver training to generalist providers to enhance their capacity to work with this cohort.

### **5.3 What factors should determine where specialists are located?**

Specialists should be located in areas where there are established or emerging populations of highly disadvantaged jobseeker groups; as per available Census and other relevant data, including community sources.

STARTTS also wishes to highlight the specific needs of refugee torture and trauma survivors settling in rural and regional areas as they too will require access to specialist support in the new employment model.

The difficulties experienced by all Australians living in rural and regional NSW are magnified for STARTTS clients due to their exposure to trauma in the context of organised violence coupled with the impact of the resettlement process and associated challenges. Some of the challenges identified by STARTTS for refugee communities living in rural NSW include:



- Lack of public transport – difficulty accessing services and attending programs. Staff are usually required to organise transport for any activities or events they plan. Cost of public transport in rural areas to access health services is prohibitive when it is available
- Lack of some mainstream and specialised services required by refugee communities that are available in metropolitan centres for example legal services, mental health services and youth health services. Even when services exist, they are reluctant to use interpreters or may not understand the difficulties clients may have in contacting them or attending appointments.
- Social isolation of clients – very small numbers of some refugee communities and widely dispersed.
- Limited interpreting services – staff in most regional centres only have access to phone interpreting. This is likely to be an issue for enhanced employment service providers.
- Access to specialist doctors is difficult with long waiting periods and costs unaffordable for clients. This impacts on the general rural and regional population but it has a particular impact on STARTTS clients due to a number of other disadvantages including lack of English, social isolation and lack of knowledge of Australian systems.
- Lack of knowledge of CALD issues in general and refugee trauma related issues in particular amongst employment providers in rural and regional NSW.

STARTTS has five rural/regional offices including Wagga Wagga, Newcastle, Armidale, Coffs Harbour and Wollongong with outreach provided from Maitland, Singleton, Tamworth, Lismore, Leeton, Griffith and Albury. STARTTS training is available to service providers in these areas. STARTTS staff welcome the opportunity to participate in the development of place-based employment solutions where appropriate to ensure refugees settling in these areas do not fall through the gaps due to their small numbers relative to the total population.

#### **5.4 How should the new model interact with complementary programs (e.g. Transition to Work, Work for the Dole)?**

A place-based model should be in place to ensure local service coordination networks and encourage cross-referral pathways.

#### **5.5 How should workforce specialists operate?**

### **Chapter 6 – Guiding questions**

#### **6.1 How should market share operate?**



Market share may be an important concept when it comes to generalist providers. Specialist provider market allocation should rely on the cohort requirements being matched to the specialist skillset.

## **6.2 How should tolerance work?**

## **6.3 Should a portion of market share remain unallocated?**

# **Chapter 7 – Guiding questions**

## **7.1 How can the licensing system help cut red tape?**

Licensing system will ensure that once a provider receives the licence, they might not be required to provide the same information on a frequent basis. However, licensing should not result in reduction in performance and outcome monitoring.

## **7.2 What would assist smaller organisations to enter the provider market?**

STARTTS suggests consideration of compulsory subcontracting arrangements as one option of a broader strategy to ensure equitable access to the provider market by smaller organisations. Many refugee community organisations have demonstrated their capacity to source employment for their community members through existing social capital within those communities particularly connections with small businesses. Refugee community organisations should have access to either sub-contracting or direct Licensing to harness their existing strengths and networks.

Should a dedicated subcontracting strategy be adopted at a policy level, STARTTS recommends a Merlin Standards <sup>2</sup> framework around the production of quality supply chains.

STARTTS also recommends an initial upfront payment to initiate cash flow for smaller organisations assessed as capable of delivering services, alongside a monthly baseline fee to cover administration costs.

# **Chapter 8 – Guiding questions**

## **8.1 What measures could be included in the Provider Performance Framework?**

In general, STARTTS recommends adoption of the 'Market Stewardship'<sup>3</sup> approach to measuring provider performance and, in relation to actual employment outcomes, utilisation of indicators contained in the Handbook Measuring Quality of Employment, produced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, particularly those relating to the seven 'Dimensions of Quality Employment'.<sup>4</sup>

More specifically, STARTTS suggests that demonstration of suitable job-matching processes and outcomes, relevant and tailored to the individual jobseeker's interests, educational

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<sup>2</sup> <http://merlinstandard.co.uk/about-merlin/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_613479.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_613479.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/publications/2015/ECE\\_CES\\_40.pdf](https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/publications/2015/ECE_CES_40.pdf)





and/or professional background, be included in the range of measures included in the Provider Performance Framework. This is especially important for communities of refugee background, whose overseas qualifications and/or professional backgrounds are often overlooked in the job-matching process. Providers should be able to demonstrate strong collaboration and partnerships with relevant industry bodies and professional associations so that jobseekers have the opportunity to enrol in relevant bridging courses; whilst simultaneously working in a related role in the field of their primary profession or trade. Innovative practices such as establishing new bridging courses where they don't already exist should be encouraged, rewarded and documented through relevant performance measures. This strength-based approach would ensure that vulnerable jobseeker groups, including those of refugee background, are supported to confidently pursue employment opportunities which harness their unique skillsets and educational backgrounds, and in turn more likely to lead to dignified employment outcomes.

### Case Study: Arif

Arif\* arrived in Australia earlier this year under the Refugee and Humanitarian Program. A university graduate and current PhD candidate with an extensive work history, Arif registered with a local jobactive provider; eager for their support in helping him to find work commensurate with his interests and skillsets.

Unfortunately, Arif found the service provider to be anything but helpful. He was not offered any guidance on how to update his resume to suit local employment market demands, nor was he assisted with the preparation of cover letters for jobs he was interested in. Instead, he was pressured to apply for cleaning jobs, and was even advised to remove core skillsets and qualifications from his resume to make him a more appealing candidate for these roles. Arif could only deduce from this experience that the service provider's sole focus was on meeting its employment targets, and that he merely represented a statistic in their reports to funding bodies.

The apparent lack of interest in Arif as a person, and what he had to offer potential employers, was a disheartening experience, and so Arif decided to go it alone. With guidance and support from STARTTS and other community contacts, Arif recently successfully applied for a full-time position with a company whose profile appealed to him and with whom he could confidently showcase his particular skillsets relevant to the particular industry. He remains extremely disappointed at the lack of genuine support and guidance he expected to receive from the jobactive service provider, but which was not in the least forthcoming.

\*Client's name has been changed to protect identity.

## 8.2 What features in the Provider Performance Framework would support the classification of high, medium and low performance?

As above.





Also, for communities of refugee background, the capacity to negotiate and introduce diversity quotas with employers is a particularly important indicator of market success, in the context of systemic barriers to employment, due to racism and other biases that may exist in recruitment practices.

### **8.3 How can the department ensure job seekers and employers are receiving a quality service?**

For communities STARTTS works with, the following would help ensure provision of a quality service:

- Specific qualification and experience requirements when employing employment services consultants. This could include spoken and written language criteria.
- Tailoring enrolment in courses suitable to the individual jobseeker and, wherever possible, facilitating work experience opportunities to ensure interest and skill are compatible with course expectations and outcomes.
- Ensuring adequate support and remuneration of the consultants to reduce turnover.
- Reduction in a number of clients per Consultant to ensure adequate time is spent with each disadvantaged job seeker and adequate time is dedicated to follow-up.
- Changing the schedule of incentives for services to include payments for social as well as economic participation outcomes, and also ensuring all disadvantaged clients receive adequate support even when their level of disadvantage prevents fast and easy employment outcomes.
- Ongoing professional development for the Consultants. It is essential that this includes training in working with interpreters, cross-cultural communication and cultural awareness and understanding the impact of trauma and experiences of refugee torture and trauma survivors. This would contribute to the Consultants delivering trauma informed services.
- Adequate self-care provision for Consultants working with highly disadvantaged job seekers particularly those who have experienced trauma.
- A well-resourced national contract management team, appropriately qualified to undertake a rigorous quality assurance program over the course of the licensing period. This should include a dedicated customer service/feedback team who members of the public can contact for advice, as well as provide feedback, on their job-seeking experiences with individual employment providers.

### **8.4 How can providers' cyber security be improved in the new model?**

## **Chapter 9 – Guiding questions**

### **9.1 What would ensure an effective transition from jobactive to the new model?**

### **9.2 What lessons can be learnt from previous program transitions?**

Mechanisms need to be put in place to:

- Ensure seamless transition from the client journey perspective



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- No clients should be allowed to “fall through the gaps” particularly clients as vulnerable as torture and trauma survivors
- Extensive information provision in multiple languages and across both written and audio-visual platforms will be important to ensure CALD communities are engaged and aware of the new program.