

# Diversity: it's our strength

**MDA's 30 Year Vision for Queensland**



# Our Vision

Imagine 30 years into the future...

**Queensland will be a stronger multicultural society where all new arrivals have the opportunity to fully contribute to and participate in a society where diversity is our strength.**

**Realising untapped economic potential:** Queensland should recognise and harness the existing talent and future potential that migrants and refugees bring to Queensland's economy. By linking employers with new arrivals and their language, skills, international approaches and connections, as well as nurturing their entrepreneurial spirit, Queensland will be well positioned to thrive in the globally-focussed economy of the future.

**An education system that empowers:** Queensland's future depends on universal access to schooling that provides the foundations for learning and employment pathways. Young people of migrant and refugee background are eager to learn. Given the right language, literacy and career pathway support to overcome initial barriers, these students will make the most of opportunities and become some of Queensland's brightest minds.

**Communities connected through diversity:** Queensland's migrant and refugee communities are resilient, internally connected and supportive. Queensland can build on this foundation to improve cross-cultural understanding, create avenues for inclusion and leadership within the mainstream community and learn from each other's approaches.

Realising this vision requires a whole-of-state approach, where everyone takes part. We believe the Queensland Government has an important leadership role to play. Government should lead on initiatives as promoter, broker, facilitator or partner. Communities and businesses also need to respond.

Working together, we can build a stronger, multicultural Queensland.



# Introduction

If the last 30 years is any guide, the next 30 years will bring immense change to every corner of the world. We cannot predict what the future will look like, which is why it is important for us to seize the opportunity the Queensland Plan process offers and start taking the steps to shape our destiny.

Whatever the future holds, Queensland will continue to be a multicultural society. What cannot be left to chance is how productive and harmonious that multicultural society will be.

Multiculturalism has been successful in Queensland but there are challenges that we must continue to address to ensure all new arrivals have the opportunity to contribute and participate fully, so Queensland benefits from the new ideas, new languages and skills they have to offer.

Today, people born overseas make up just over one fifth of Queensland's population. A further 10.5% have one parent born overseas and 10% speak a language other than English at home. In the next 30 years, these figures are expected to grow in an ever more global society where the focus of world affairs is shifting to the Asia Pacific region.

We need to embed recognition and acceptance of cultural diversity in the way we work and live each day. This means grass roots education in schools and workplaces about the real impacts of racism and discrimination, tackling media sensationalism and misrepresentations about migrants and refugees and seeking to replace it with a positive dialogue and stories that make the benefits of multiculturalism visible in mainstream media. It also means making sure new arrivals can access the services they need to become successful Queenslanders – such as by requiring all essential services to use interpreters.

MDA brought together 28 people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, representing 16 different ethnicities, and including women and men, young leaders and people from regional Queensland. The issues, opportunities and ideas they put forward underpin this 30 year vision for a strong, multicultural Queensland.



# Realising untapped economic potential

## In 30 years time...

**Migrants and refugees will be valued by Australian businesses for their language and cross-cultural skills, new ideas, international connections and unique problem solving capacity.**

## The potential

Many new arrivals bring qualifications, work experience and specialised skills, including abilities to form and maintain international connections. Additionally, entrepreneurship amongst refugees and migrants is well-documented, with higher rates of business ownership – and success – than Australian-born populations. These skills and attributes, if harnessed effectively, will be invaluable to developing Queensland's globally focussed economy.

## How to get there

- **Provide support for** new arrivals to register on an accessible and searchable skills database (like Linked In) where businesses can search for skills sets, including languages spoken and cultural knowledge
- **Market** Queensland's cultural diversity overseas to encourage international business and tourism, especially for our multicultural regional centres
- **Partner** with educational institutions to develop a plain English 'How to set up a business in Australia' course, catering for the educational needs of new arrivals and provide mentoring programs
- **Reform** skill recognition processes to be accessible, affordable and flexible and provide pathways to meet Australian standards
- **Reduce** the legal and regulatory barriers to short-term, voluntary work experience

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*There's really a broad range of skills (amongst the refugee clients I support)... there's primary school teachers, secondary school teachers, we have business people, we've had general labourers, we've had people from civil engineering backgrounds, so there's a whole range of different skill sets.*

Eddy Isles, MDA Employment Advisor, Toowoomba””

““

*The thing that struck me is that I've never seen the enthusiasm or the willingness to work that I saw among the young (refugee) people I met. Once I saw that, I knew where I was going to get my productivity from, and that's going to ensure the survival of the business.*

Paul Kahlert, General Manager, All Purpose Transport (trucking and logistics company)””



# Opportunities in Regional Queensland

Queensland's regional areas are struggling to balance the needs of traditional industries, such as agriculture, with high growth industries, such as mining, while facing the global challenges of economic uncertainty, finding ways to improve sustainability and producing 'more from less'.

But with challenge comes opportunity. The skills and experience of new arrivals can reinvigorate the economic and social fabric of rural communities across the state. For example, many migrant and refugee communities come from regions that practice innovative and sustainable agricultural methods. With the right support, they are perfectly positioned to fill regional labour shortages and contribute to developing small scale, sustainable agricultural methods.

## How to get there

- **Broker** partnerships with agriculture employers and local training and employment services to facilitate work readiness support and matching people's skills to available work
- **Promote** farming entrepreneurship and explore innovative property ownership and leaseholds for newly arrived farmers
- **Facilitate** long-term settlement to regional areas through local community preparedness and ensuring strong regionally-based services, such as English as an Additional Language / Dialect (EAL/D) programs in schools, culturally-appropriate burial services, improved access to skills recognition services and affordable public transport







*Casey Brown is General Manager for Agri Labour Australia, a large, rural-sector labour-hire company with a strong track record in supporting new arrivals into rural employment.*

*In 2009, Agri Labour Australia worked in partnership with Warwick TAFE to set up a skills-training and employment pipeline for recently arrived migrants and refugees to explore employment opportunities in the bush. The program brought together accredited Jackaroo/Jillaroo training with 'work readiness' support, then Casey linked program graduates to employment opportunities.*

*Since then, Casey has continued to engage new arrivals from a wide range of cultural backgrounds to fill rural labour shortages. He believes this is not only benefiting primary industries, but is helping breathe new life into shrinking communities. "The resource boom has taken a lot of skills out of these regions, and the rural sector has dwindled away. There are generational farmers... where the younger generation don't want to farm anymore." He believes that new arrivals offer the perfect solution to reinvigorate regional communities while allowing generational farmers to hold onto their businesses.*

*"...the best thing for the communities that refugee workers have brought... is to try and integrate as much as possible, and by integrate I mean getting their children to go to the local schools, playing the local sports, attending local churches. [In Millmerran] in the afternoon, you'll see all the young Karen children in their school uniforms walking alongside local Millmerran kids... and it's a great sight, it's a great thing to see," he said.*

*Saw Patrick Maw (Patrick), of Karen ethnicity from Burma, was an active leader in a Sydney-based partnership that brought together Centrelink, a Job Services Australia (JSA) provider, the TAFE sector, farms and fruit and vegetable wholesalers to create an accredited training and employment pathway program for former refugees from the Karen community.*

*Farmer involvement came in the form of land lease agreements, allowing the Karen community to sublet small portions of land for newly-trained farmers. Farmers could then sell their produce directly to fruit and vegetable shops for fair market prices.*

*Now based in Brisbane, Patrick and the Queensland Karen community are already exploring ways to launch a similar program here, and believe Queensland provides the perfect environment in terms of climate and available employment opportunities.*

*"(We've) had discussions in Brisbane. They're interested in having a whole farm that just grows chilli. Chilli is quite expensive. It's productive and profitable. It's a good place for it here, humid and warm like Thailand and Burma. If you farm them the right way, they really grow," he said.*



# Aged Care Industry

As our population ages and diversifies, aged care services represent an employment opportunity for new arrivals as well as a low-cost, sustainable answer to the CSIRO's 'Forever Young Megatrend'. Increasingly older people want safe, dignified and affordable care at home. This is already the norm for many migrant and refugee communities, coming from collective cultures and cultures that live with extended family. Models of affordable, at-home care already exist. Attracting more culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) workers to this growing industry will be essential to meeting cultural and linguistic needs, especially as many of the ageing CALD population revert to first language in their retirement years.

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*...we [Liberian community members] are aged care workers anyway, in our own way. A lot of people do that in their homes. They don't put their parents into aged care. So in thirty years time, we'll have a lot of Liberian and [other] African elderly people living in the community... So why don't we give [people] skills so they can earn an income from fulfilling this important duty.*

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Joyce Taylor

MDA Community Development Worker and former refugee from Liberia

## How to get there

- **Promote** the broad skills and experience many new arrivals have in providing aged care
- **Develop** easily accessible pathways to up-skill at the same time as working in the industry
- **Provide** training in cross-cultural models of care to aged care service providers

*Vivienne McDonald is General Manager of Diversicare, an aged care service currently providing culturally competent, in-home aged care across forty-nine different cultural and linguistic groups between the Gold and Sunshine Coasts.*

*Vivienne sees a correlation between the emergence of new cultural groups and the difficulties in sourcing appropriate carers. This difficulty is exacerbated by financial barriers as many new arrivals are under financial strain, and course fees are deterring some people from aged care as a vocational pathway.*

*Vivienne's organisation has responded by supporting new carers to gain their Certificate 3 in aged care while they work.*

*Vivienne says, "We have home care workers (from culturally diverse backgrounds) who have been working with us for 25 years... The retention is good because people work with their communities and live in their communities. But they get paid by us. That's a good thing."*

*But Vivienne also believes that funded, accredited training options for vulnerable new job seekers is on the decline, and that this should be reconsidered given the rapidly expanding depth and breadth of needs for older people.*



# An education system that empowers

In 30 years time...

**Public and private schools provide young refugees and migrants with the foundations for learning so that students can participate effectively in their education.**

## The potential

Refugees and migrants strongly value education. The proportion of recent refugee arrivals aged between 12 and 24 attending educational institutions is higher than that for other migrants and the Australian born population. This is in spite of the barriers that stem from English language acquisition, cultural differences and significant disruptions in education prior to coming to Queensland. Newly arrived refugees' potential and eagerness to learn assures their future success and productive contributions if given the right foundations and pathways.



## How to get there

- **Provide** targeted support programs to transition young people into mainstream learning
- **Provide** best practice EAL/D programs, consistently and transparently, to ensure all refugee and migrant children have strong foundational language acquisition
- **Improve** flexibility in Queensland's age-based education system to accommodate the different levels of prior learning
- **Mandate** use of credentialed interpreters in schools to ensure effective communication between schools and parents and members of the community, including an initial orientation for parents and students to the Queensland education system
- **Facilitate** targeted school-based traineeships and tertiary partnerships to help young migrants and refugees navigate training and higher education pathways



*Jessica Walker, Head of the EAL/D Unit at Yeronga State High School, knows the challenges migrant and refugee young people face in education and thinks educators can play an important role by supporting them to prepare for and transition into the Australian workforce.*

*"Students who are born in Australia have this huge network of people who have lots of different jobs, so they can go and draw on some of those connections to get work experience or even just to know what sort of work is out there, whereas our students don't have that," she says.*

*"There was a boy last year who did some work experience with a mechanic and they offered him a full-time apprenticeship. There was another boy who did the automotive one, and someone, like a friend who was a plumber, saw him and how hard he was working and offered him a full-time plumbing apprenticeship. It's always when they have those links with people and people see them in action, that's what leads to work. It's about the connections, where people feel they need these people and have a relationship with them. That's what leads to jobs."*



# Communities connected through diversity

In 30 years time...

**Culturally and linguistically diverse communities will be recognised as active members of local and State-wide communities.**

## The potential

Celebrating and sharing culture brings people together and creates strong connections and networks of support. It allows cross-cultural understanding to occur incidentally. Members of ethnic communities become increasingly independent through strong leadership and opportunities to build understanding and contribute to local communities.

## How to get there

- **Ensure** the inclusion of migrant and refugee communities in public consultation, debate and community activities, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups such as refugee and migrant women and newer communities
- **Facilitate** local communities' access to public space to bring together community groups and offer important support such as tutoring
- **Provide** spaces and support for communities to build communal gardens, to improve community unity and social inclusion, develop knowledge of healthy food and create sustainable food production at a local level.
- **Provide support** for community volunteer groups (e.g. SES, CWA) and corporate volunteering programs to actively target and link with refugee and migrant communities



Seventeen-year-old Frozan Sadat arrived in Australia three years ago as a refugee from Afghanistan. Frozan, like many other young former refugees, has endured experiences far beyond those normally encountered by young people. This difficult past has left its scars but it has also equipped Frozan, and other young people like her, with a world view and vision well beyond her years. This makes Frozan a natural leader.

Frozan believes that building a strong and inclusive Queensland community requires building bridges between smaller, disconnected communities so that dialogue and mutual understanding are allowed to grow. "By moving away from thinking always in terms of 'me' and 'you', we will work it out. It's not the thought of 'me' and 'you'. It's the thought of 'us', or 'we'" Frozan says.

She has the goal of developing school-based programs that encourage stronger connections between young people from different cultural backgrounds in the school-yard context.

"We all have strengths and weaknesses. Maybe the strengths I have are different to those from someone else born and raised here, and the strengths and skills that they have, having been raised in this country, are strengths I don't have. If I interact with them somehow and get to know them and recognise their problems, and how their problems exist according to their experiences, and if they understand why we are here – which is their main question, 'why are you here?' – maybe we can give a hand to each other somehow."





## More 30 year vision stories

Visit our website for more stories about migrants and refugees in Queensland who have innovative ideas and are already working towards our vision for a stronger multicultural society.

[www.mdainc.org.au](http://www.mdainc.org.au)



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