

Project Officer's Report

Settlement Assistance to Dependants of Skilled Migrants

This project has been funded through the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) under their Community Settlement Services Scheme (CSSS). It looks at assisting the dependants of skilled migrants in the Darwin area by building linkages with relevant services, for example, health, education or employment services.

The consultation stage included a Survey of Settlement Needs with replies from migrants from 8 countries. Half of the dependents have not yet arrived in Australia. The broad indication was that the two core needs were:

1. Visa information on permanent residency and sponsoring families, with the latter implying hidden future needs such as health, housing, education and childcare; and
2. qualified dependents finding employment with little support services, as there is no access to Centrelink for two years.

The first orientation information session was held in December 2005 and was a joint effort between MCNT and the Filipino Australia Association of the NT (FAANT). It was attended by 50 members of the Filipino community and key speakers were:

- Mary Kenny - Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) who spoke on visa categories, applying for permanent residency, and sponsoring family members on migrant visas in order to migrate to Australia.
- Mary Cunningham – Department of Business Economic and Regional Development (DBERD), discussing the skilled migration program and the benefits of this program.
- Sharon Blandy – Department of Employment and Work Place Relations, discussing worker rights and responsibilities, work place harassment and complaint procedures.

A second orientation information session was held in May and Mary Kenny and Mary Cunningham were again the key speakers. Fifty (50) attended from Filipino, Thai, Papua New Guinea and Indian backgrounds.

In conjunction with the project, a Settlement Resource Group (SRG) has been set up. This consists of people from various government and non-government organisations who either directly or indirectly assist migrants in the Darwin area. Their combined knowledge has assisted in identifying issues facing dependants of skilled migrants and they will report on strategies to resolve these issues by the end of September. Mary Cunningham hopes to link these findings into the



“Commonwealth State Working Party on Skilled Migration” reporting to the Ministerial Council of Immigration & Multicultural Affairs (MCIMA) in September, which she is attending.

Overall there is little access to services for dependents on a temporary business 457 visa. Skilled migrants may not stay if their dependents are unhappy. There is a particular need to create employment pathways to effectively target, utilise skills, maximise potential, to the economic advantage of this country and individual migrants. The SRG has been working to raise awareness and advocate for the settlement needs of this client group to service providers, government and other organisations.

Jenny Milne