



Multicultural Employment Service

MES Pathways to Employment

Hser Blu came to Australia when she was 15 years of age with her family who were from the Karen State in Burma. Hser Blu completed aged care studies but said she lacked confidence with her limited language skills to seek employment. Hser Blu subsequently enrolled in the initial Speaking Skills and Workplace Experience program developed by Multicultural Employment Service ACT.



Many people from migrant and refugee backgrounds are apprehensive about seeking employment due to lack of confidence in communicating and unfamiliarity with the job seeking process. Hser Blu had qualifications and motivation but lacked confidence and familiarity with the local work environment. Despite having undertaken English language training she felt that people couldn't understand her due to her pronunciation. This limited her to social contacts with people from her community.

Hser Blu enrolled in the initial MES Pathways to Employment program and work experience which focused on speaking techniques to be better understood supported by several weeks mentored work experience in an aged-care residence. In the first week, a phonetics trainer engaged participants in speaking techniques as well as introduced workplace (aged-care) terminology and guidance on effective workplace interaction. In the following weeks participants were mentored in their spoken communication including staff feedback as they engaged in work experience in various aged-care roles.

Hser Blu who had initially learnt English from text books said she was able to work confidently and she stopped having to repeat things. She said this enabled her to chat more freely with and have good interactions with aged-care residents and staff. The manager of the aged-care residence said that despite an initial lack of confidence to engage with English speakers, all participants in the program developed rapport with residents who also looked forward to their daily contacts. The confidence of the residents to engage with refugees was also increased when they got to chat freely and understand more about the refugees' background. On completion of the program, Hser Blu along with other participants was offered employment and she has chosen to work part-time while commencing studies in nursing. She is keen to be a qualified nurse in a hospital or in an aged-care facility.

While language and lack of work experience are issues for many people of migrant and refugee backgrounds, navigating the employment system is another significant challenge. Many people are giving up their search for employment and choosing not to receive Centrelink benefits they are entitled to. As part of the Pathways to Employment program, Multicultural Employment Service has engaged an employment specialist to develop direct links with potential employers as well as with Job Active services, recruitment agencies and labour hire companies. Information is provided on entitlements to training, work clothes and employer wage subsidies for certain eligible people. The employment consultant also introduces new employees to the organisation and monitors progress with both the employee and their employer particularly with the direct supervisor. The organisation's staff also received cultural briefings and hints on communication across cultures. This initiative has resulted in a significant increase in employment for our clients. In 2014-15, MES placed 85 young people in employment with another 60 placed in volunteer/work experience with a high potential of casual or long-term employment.

Resulting from the program, organisations that have not traditionally employed people from migrant and refugee background frequently ask for more potential employees. It is also noticeable when people start to find employment their friends and their community develop confidence to re-enter the job market.