

ASVET

Asylum Seeker Vocational Education and Training
program support and referral services

Final Report 2016-2018



The ASRC Team

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ASRC acknowledges the contribution of the Participation Branch in the Department of Education and Training, Government of Victoria to improving the lives and futures of people seeking asylum.

Cover Image: Victorian Minister for Training and Skills, **The Hon Gayle Tierney MLC** at far right, with, from left: VET student **Amir Abdi**, ASRC Ambassador **Corinne Grant**, VET student **Somayeh Farahani**, ASRC Innovation Hub Director **Abiola Ajetomobi**, VET student **Sarvenez Almasi**, ASRC CEO **Kon Karapanagiotidis**, VET student **Mujahid Hussein**.

Presenting the 2016-2018 ASVET Report

Kon Karapanagiotidis

CEO, Asylum Seeker Resource Centre

It is with great excitement and pride that we present this report on two dynamic years of our ASVET program, providing educational access for people seeking asylum and refugees.

In this report you will read of exceptional achievements along the journey. They reveal the incredible resilience and tenacity demonstrated by the students and the commitment and passion of our staff, volunteers and partners across the education and refugee sectors.

In particular I convey my congratulations to all of the hardworking students currently studying, and those who have completed their studies and gone on to contribute to our community and economy. You inspire me every day.



Abiola Ajetomobi

Director, ASRC Innovation Hub

This report tells the story of the most accomplished stage of the ASVET project. In the last two years, our team of staff and volunteers have delivered an expanded program to meet the great desire of people seeking asylum to access education. At the same time, challenges have come for both students and the program as Federal Government policies regarding people seeking asylum have become more punitive.

Our achievements include the first ever ASVET conference in partnership with the Victorian Department of Education and Training and significant capacity building in the education and refugee sectors. Our new Community of Best Practice brings together a wealth of knowledge and expertise.

I express my profound gratitude to our team for their dedicated work and sincerely thank the Department for their ongoing support and guidance. Following the pledge made at the ASVET Conference, we are excited about the next 3 years of increasing the economic and social participation of people seeking asylum through access to vocational education.



Gillian Meek

ASRC Education Program Manager

The ASVET program has been described as a journey of learning, responsive strategies and achievements; for people seeking asylum, VET providers, community stakeholders and the ASVET team.

As well as the initiatives, strategies and outcomes outlined in this report, we hope to convey the extraordinary determination of the people who have engaged in study through the ASVET program.

I would like to extend the ASVET team's sincere thanks to all stakeholders, and the Victorian Government for making the journey possible with their positive, inclusive and action-based approaches to assisting people seeking asylum.



ASVET 2016-2018

In the past two years, ASVET has transformed from a small initiative to a ground-breaking program, leading the nation in providing opportunity through education for people seeking asylum.

The Common Funding Agreement between Victorian Department of Education and Training and the ASRC detailed two key objectives;

1. Refer up to 1000 eligible people seeking asylum holding Bridging Visa E (BVE), Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEV) and Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) to VET subsidised courses.
2. Provide Helpdesk Services and Professional Development opportunities to assist training organisations support eligible students to enrol and engage in government subsidised VET courses.

This Final Report, along with the previous progress report demonstrates that the ASVET program has more than met the requirements of the Agreement.

Since 2010, the Victorian Government has contracted the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) to refer people seeking asylum to subsidised Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses. In the previous contract, 2014-2016, this was for a total of 300 places, in a restricted number of courses.

In 2016 the program was expanded. Between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2018 it allowed subsidised places for up to 3000 people seeking asylum who held eligible visas.

2000 students could enrol directly into TAFE or Learn Locals. 1000 could come through referral from the ASRC, including all enrolments into VET courses provided by private training providers.

The ASRC's also took on a broader co-ordinating role. Drawing on its 16 years' experience working directly with people seeking asylum, it was also to provide information and professional development to the education sector to support the success of the program.

The positive engagement of the education sector has been a feature of the last two years. All providers show increased understanding of the challenges facing people seeking asylum and the factors that influence their success in education and most have developed a range of new initiatives to support the ASVET program. These featured strongly at the May 2018 ASVET Conference *Celebrate the Journey* and are showcased throughout this report.

Views from the Sector



People seeking asylum come to Australia with a range of educational and employment backgrounds. Some are highly qualified and experienced; some have experienced profound and prolonged educational disruption.

Many are really keen to undertake tertiary study, but the requirement to pay international student fees had put this out of reach until now.

Thanks to this initiative and RMIT top-up funding, around 60 students have been able to enrol into fee-free VET programs over the last two years. We also provide additional support including counselling, mentoring, financial aid, jobs on campus, and individual employment assistance.

RMIT is proud to work in partnership with the Victorian Government and the ASRC to provide access and support for these students. It is a truly life-changing opportunity and its importance cannot be overstated.

Lara Rafferty

Manager, Equity and Diversity Unit, RMIT University

ASVET student story



Meisam's journey

At University in Iran, Meisam joined an activist group, campaigning against the government's strict laws. He soon became aware that he was being monitored by authorities, even after he left the group. He grew increasingly concerned for his safety and the safety of his family.

Meisam and his wife decided to flee Iran. This was a challenge for many reasons, including that they now had a two-year-old daughter. The family arrived in Darwin by boat in 2013 and were placed in detention there.

During detention, Meisam enjoyed helping people with translation particularly when they needed medical attention. After three months, Meisam and his family were sent to Adelaide where they lived for about seven months before coming to Melbourne.

For close to three years Meisam didn't have the right to work, or to study. Finally, in 2016, their case was reviewed and the family was granted a Temporary Protection Visa (TPV).

Meisam first visited the ASRC in 2016. He met with an ASRC Education Adviser and became interested in studying Nursing. But after further thought and research, with support from his Education Adviser, he decided to first enrol in Certificate III in Pathology.

A critical factor was that this qualification can be achieved more quickly, and so provides an income much sooner. Meisam's long-term plan is to pathway into nursing when more financially secure. Meisam's course finishes in July 2018, following a work placement and he's hoping he'll be able to move into employment quickly.

Meisam's personal goal? For his family to be happy and to contribute to Australia.

Year 1: 2016-17

With the increased scale and scope of the project, Year 1 saw a huge increase in demand. The ASRC and education providers responded quickly and effectively and looked to ways to share best practice.

The changes to the ASVET program were significant. The ASVET team moved quickly to undertake the consultation, planning and co-ordination needed to identify factors that would contribute to successful outcomes; for people seeking asylum, external stakeholders, DET and the ASRC.

Significant outcomes included referrals, timely identification of challenges and strategies and the introduction of the Community of Best Practice.

Alongside managing ASVET student interviews and referrals it was crucial to meet the limited timeline for completing contract-related tasks, including;

- Recruiting and training volunteers to deliver referral services
- Developing new and updating existing interview and referral tools
- Designing processes and tools for the Helpdesk, including Helpdesk cards
- Creating a dedicated webpage with key resources
- Ensuring reliable data entry protocols and tools were developed and in place
- Designing workshops and related resources

The First Objective: Referrals

Demand for appointments with education advisers increased dramatically by October 2016, creating the need for more advisers, and strategies to manage the influx. By 30 June 2017, ASVET education advisers had met with approximately 1000 people and 521 people had been referred to VET courses.

The most significant challenge in the area of referrals came as a result of the new option for students to directly enrol into TAFE or Learn Locals.

A significant number of people presented to the ASRC after having been told they were not eligible when trying to enrol directly.

Two strategies were pivotal in addressing these challenges:

- The establishment of a streamlined direct referral process for people applying to TAFEs and Learn Locals.
- The development and /or strengthening of relationships between the RTOs and the ASRC ASVET team.

There have been great improvements in this area since then, but we continue to find that supported referrals provide a smoother process.

Views from the Sector



Victoria Polytechnic has offered places to more than 100 asylum seekers, and the ASVET program has been integral to that achievement.

This critical access to training and preparation for the job market has been in a range of vocational Certificate and Diploma courses ranging from hair and beauty to brick laying, legal practice and nursing. Eight have gone on to undertake Bachelor programs by accessing scholarships.

It's been a journey for us, coming to identify and understand the barriers this cohort of students face. We now have a specific coordinator who works with all applicants, walking them through the whole student experience. But we are only scratching the surface and realise we have to do much more.

Wayne Butson

Director, Service Industries and Transition Education, Victoria University

A further pleasing outcome was the decision of some TAFEs and Learn Locals to 'top up' all or part of the student fees. Two TAFEs also topped up the Skills First payment for Diploma's and Advanced Diplomas, making it possible for people to pathway to further VET opportunities.

The Second Objective: Helpdesk and Professional Development

Helpdesk Services

The ASVET Help desk and Webpage and related resources were launched by on time in January 2017. However because of strengthened relationships between ASVET staff and VET practitioners, inquiries were often directed to a specific person, making it difficult to quantify the precise numbers of Helpdesk calls. Overall feedback on the service was positive and the Helpdesk service logged 53 direct calls by June 2017.

Webpage

The ASVET webpage was developed to make all resources readily available to download and share or print.

Our earlier reports indicated 158 page views, with 96 unique users during Year 1, but new analytics, now retrospectively applied, show that the period actually saw 2261 page views from 1127 unique users.

Through ongoing review and improvements, these resources have come to represent significant elements of the ASVET program.

Professional Development

The first PD workshop focusing on administrative processes for RTOs was delivered twice in 2016, ensuring broad dissemination with a focus of eligibility requirements. It included:

- How to undertake a VEVO check
- The issues and challenges experienced by ASVET students
- The importance of giving timely and appropriate course advice

The second workshop in May 2017, explored stakeholder interest in establishing a Community of Best Practice (CoBP); a platform for ongoing support for RTOs to share learnings and strategies.

People seeking asylum are so keen to learn, be financially independent, and connected with the broader community. Access to vocational training through the ASVET program ticks all of those boxes and makes a fundamental difference to the lives of so many people living in our community while they wait for an outcome on their refugee visa.

Red Cross values our collaboration with ASRC on this and many other projects to support people seeking asylum.

Our focus is always on the best outcomes and experience for our clients.

Kim van den Nouwelant

State Manager, Migrant Support Programs, Red Cross



ASVET student story

Sarvenez

Because of their Kurdish ethnicity, Sarvenez (Naz) and her family had to escape from Iran, the country where she was born. When they fled, Naz was 21 years old and two years into her degree at Tehran University.

They arrived in Australia by boat in 2013, seeking asylum. The family had very little English and that was their first challenge in accessing any form of education and from there finding employment.

There were other barriers for Naz. Returning to University studies would be at international fee level; more than \$100,000 and impossible for a family who has lost everything.

But Naz was determined to find a way to get an education. "To get back into the mindset of studying, to feel hopeful," is how Naz puts it.

The Victorian Government's ASVET funding initiative eventually provided the opportunity Naz was looking for. Not only did Naz complete Certificate III in Aged Care, she also completed a Certificate III in Home and Community Care.

After completing her VET Certificates, Naz successfully applied for a Swinburne University scholarship. She is now undertaking a Bachelor of Health Sciences, majoring in Psychology. Her ultimate goal is to contribute back to the community, as a social worker or a psychologist.

Currently Naz works part time as an interpreter and as a Data Services Officer at Swinburne University of Technology.

Meanwhile, Naz's mother has completed a Driving Instructors Course. "She did great, I'm very proud of her, now she can be independent. She's still working on her English, but she has a pathway for a future".



ASVET student story



The Teacher

Education is Mujahid's passion. He holds two Master Degrees and taught high school level history and Urdu literature for many years. Before he had to leave Pakistan, Mujahid had been a School Principal for two years, and was living with his family in a small town.

Trouble came with the Taliban. Mujahid says thousands were killed in his area, including his father. Due to the conflict, his small daughter was unable to receive medical help and also died. Along with many others, Mujahid fled, intending to find a safe place for his family.

Arriving in Australia by boat in 2012 to seek asylum, Mujahid was sent to Nauru. After spending 13 months in detention on the island, Mujahid was then sent to Australia, where he spent another four months in onshore detention.

Mujahid was eventually granted a Bridging Visa E. However, he did not receive work or study rights until 2015. He made the most of this situation by volunteering at AMES Australia teaching English to adult migrants and also at the Salvation Army. "To feel like a vital part of the society", he says.

When he came to the ASRC in 2016, the ASVET team assisted Mujahid with a referral to enrol in Certificate IV in Education Support at Victoria University. He successfully completed the course and quickly found work.

Currently working as a teaching assistant at Emmanuel College Altona, Mujahid is proud to have work, an income, independence and the ability to contribute back to the community.

His family is still in Pakistan, including a daughter who was born whilst he was on the way to Australia. She is now six years old and Mujahid's greatest desire is to finally meet her and "to give her better education she deserves".

Year 2

As the new ASVET program hit full stride, a Federal Government policy change affecting basic income support for asylum-seeker students provided a significant challenge.

Objective 1 - Referrals

At the start of the second year, ASVET referrals were still in demand as people were applying for places in courses beginning in second semester.

However, by November 2017, appointments were being cancelled or missed at a higher than usual rate.

This coincided with announcements of changes in Federal Government policy affecting eligibility for Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) payments when studying. In simple terms, the new policy meant that those studying could lose their small supporting payment, and would have no means of support unless they could immediately find employment.

Those already engaged in study had to consider how they could survive and whether they could stay engaged in their course. Those looking towards a VET course enrolment as the best possible path towards sustainable employment naturally had to reassess their options.

The Community of Best Practice (CoBP) held meetings to discuss the crisis; to find strategies to mitigate the situation so

people seeking asylum could still participate in VET courses.

Initially it was difficult to establish specific conditions of the policy regarding study, so establishing a definitive strategy proved challenging.

Suggestions and actions included:

- Providing people receiving SRSS with honest clear information
- Referring people back to SRSS caseworkers for further information
- Exploring part-time study opportunities allowing people to work and study
- Ensuring people had agency over their decisions to study or not study

The SRSS crisis impacted on the number of referrals in the second year.

At 15 June 2018 referrals reached 903. Considering the potential impact of these policy changes, 903 referrals against a target of up to 1000 referrals is very pleasing.

Views from the volunteers



I have been volunteering at the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre for a year and enjoyed every moment.

It is so rewarding to know that someone's life has been benefited from my contribution.

Volunteering has been very gratifying for me as it is a way to do good. It is always so satisfying to see the smile on the faces of the members who come seeking help in the Education program.

Lina Shaaban

ASRC Education Administration Volunteer

Objective 2: Helpdesk and Professional Development

Helpdesk Services

The Helpdesk received more calls in the second year; 36 calls were logged by June, a total of 89 calls during the two years.

Webpage

The ASVET Webpage was continually reviewed and updated and new analytics and consistent tracking applied. In year two we saw 2046 page views by 1499 unique users. It continues to provide ready access to resources for VET providers and practitioners.

Professional Development

The third workshop, held in October 2017 focussed on establishment of the ASVET Community of Best Practice (CoBP). This workshop showcased the ability of a CoBP to:

- Facilitate networking and collaboration
- Identify responses and strategies
- Address current and emerging challenges

Terms of Reference were agreed and the ASVET CoBP has continued to meet.

In November 2017, the fourth ASVET workshop revisited the range of administrative and regulatory requirements in the enrolment process.

The key purpose was to assist new participants in RTOs, whilst participants who had attended previous workshops were able to review, revise and share their understanding and experiences.

The Conference

Celebrate the Journey, the ASVET conference, was held in May 2018. A resounding success, it provided tangible and powerful evidence of the resilience, learnings and achievements gained on the 'ASVET journey' by people seeking asylum.

It also demonstrated the learnings and achievements of VET providers, refugee and community stakeholders and the commitment of the Victorian State Government to the inclusion and empowerment of people seeking asylum.

For people seeking asylum, studying for a qualification is so important - not just to improve their chances of getting a job, but also to find a place for themselves in the Australian community.

The ASVET program guides them into the Australian education system and workplace culture, and reinforces their learning of English. Compared to 2-3 years ago, they now have access to a much wider range of courses and training providers.

Our members come from many different countries with diverse skills and experiences. Starting a new life has many challenges, and we give a helping hand.

Tim Patton

Volunteer Education Adviser, ASRC



Statistics

These statistics show key outcomes of the project between July 2016 and June 2018. Trends over time show an increasing range of course referrals, and a very strong uptake of training options by women.

Range of courses and referrals

VET Course	Number of Referrals	% of Referrals
EAL	241	26.7%
Pre-apprenticeship (painting, bricklaying, cleaning, mechanics, carpentry), mechanics, carpentry	94	10.4%
Building and Construction	77	8.5%
Hairdressing	73	8.1%
Allied Health / Health services	49	5.4%
Business and Accounting	36	4.0%
Beauty therapy/services	31	3.4%
Early Childhood Education	28	3.1%
Hospitality/ Cookery	28	3.1%
Diploma of Nursing	27	3.0%
Dental Assistant	25	2.8%
Individual Support (Aged Care)	21	2.3%
Community Services	18	2.0%
Security	18	2.0%
Information Technology	16	1.8%
Design	14	1.6%
Logistics	12	1.3%
Pathology Collection	9	1.3%
Others	86	9.5%
Total Referrals	903	100%

Commentary around courses

Whilst EAL remains the course with the most referrals, since 30 June 2017 referrals have declined by 10%; from 36.7% to 26.7%. The timing of this decline aligns with the changes to Federal Government policy and the likelihood of many people losing SRSS payments when studying. Employment becomes an urgent priority.

Pre-apprenticeships courses have remained the second most-preferred courses, reflecting the need for VET courses that provide skills and the job-readiness to obtain an income in the short term. This approach also provides people with the opportunity to pathway into trades as they gain experience and become more financially secure.

Gender of referred people

Gender	Number Referred	% of Referrals
Female	426	47.2%
Male	487	53.8%
Total	903	100%

Commentary around Gender

In the 2016 -2017 report the ASVET referrals achieved close to gender equity (difference of 0.6%); an excellent outcome considering the gender breakdown of people seeking asylum living in the community. Of the 9,616 people in Victoria on Bridging Visa E in March 2017, approximately 25% were female and 75% were male.

In the final aggregate data, the gender gap in referrals has widened to 6.7%, but contextually this remains a pleasing result. It is reasonable to assume this shift occurred due to a high referral rate of males between July and December 2017 to building and construction courses.

Age of referred people

Age range		% of Referrals
18 - 25 years	193	21.4%
26 - 35 years	399	44.2%
36 - 50 years	278	30.8%
50+	31	3.4%
Unspecified	1	0.2%

Commentary around Age

The age range of people referred to courses has remained relatively constant with slight increases reflecting people moving into older age brackets.

Ages of people referred through the program continues to be largely consistent with the age breakdown of people seeking asylum in the community.

Country of Origin of referred people

Country	Number Referred	% of Referrals
Iran	618	68.4%
Afghanistan	72	8.0%
Pakistan	48	5.3%
Sudan	43	4.8%
Sri Lanka	39	4.3%
Iraq	18	2.0%
Ethiopia	14	1.6%
Myanmar	11	1.2%
India	10	1.1%
Others	30	3.3%
Total	903	100%

Commentary around Country of Origin

People from Iran continue to constitute the largest ethnic group accessing the ASVET program, which is largely consistent with the makeup of the community of people seeking asylum in Victoria.

The distribution of asylum seekers / refugees between the different visa categories of Bridging Visa, Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) and Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) is now changing, as applications for protection are currently being processed by the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) (previously Department of Immigration and Border Protection).

As processing continues, people will transfer from Bridging Visas to either a 3-year TPV or a 5-year SHEV. However the DHA projects this processing will not be completed until 2020.

Looking Ahead

Strong partnerships will contribute innovation, consolidation and sustainability to ASVET initiatives. These will be the key factors in the successful delivery of the 2018 -2021 ASVET contract.

During the last few months, the ASVET team has reflected on the significant achievements, learnings and challenges experienced throughout the term of the current funding agreement, which concludes on 30 June 2018.

This practical and humanitarian initiative has had a positive impact on people seeking asylum, and also on RTOs and a wide range of other community stakeholders, including the ASRC.

Looking forward, the ASVET team is excited about the continuing and new opportunities the 2018 - 2021 contract will offer to people seeking asylum, VET providers and other stakeholders.

The term of the new contract has expanded to three years. This is really welcome news! The three-year time-frame will support the further development and consolidation of existing ASVET program activities and initiatives. It also allows time to develop and implement new strategies and progress towards sustainability.

Core elements of the 2016-2018 contract will remain in place for the first year of the new contract. Additional 'Activities' in the new contract will continue to focus on assisting people in a holistic way to follow a successful pathway to employment through education and training.

Referral of eligible people seeking asylum to courses remains the pivotal objective for the ASVET team. Continuous improvement of processes, resources and tools will aim to ensure the referral process is as supportive and seamless as possible. The ASRC will also continue, independently, to explore education and or training opportunities for people holding non-eligible visas.

Professional development activities will continue to be developed and delivered by the ASVET team. The team will work with stakeholders to ensure new, updated or revised workshops and a range of related resources are made available for VET providers and cross-sector stakeholders at timely intervals.

Views from the Sector



PRACE is an RTO and a Learn Local. Through the ASVET program, we can enrol people seeking asylum and refugees into a wide range of English classes, at the best level for their language ability.

Through being in classes with our diverse student cohort, they are connected into community, instead of feeling isolated and like they are marked out as 'different'.

People seeking asylum offer a unique look at the world as they have suffered injustice and discrimination at a level that many of us will never know. Their dignity and willingness to be part of their new country is something to be deeply respected.

Deb Vallely

Projects Co-ordinator, Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education (PRACE)

Helpdesk services and the Webpage will also continue to be reviewed, updated and refreshed regularly to ensure easy access, currency and relevancy. Logging of Helpdesk calls will be streamlined to capture more accurate data. The ASVET team will also develop a new promotional strategy for the Webpage.

The Community of Best Practice (CoBP) is a new addition to the core elements of the ASVET contract. The ASVET team will maintain and further develop the Melbourne metropolitan model. Consultation with relevant regional stakeholders will be initiated to consider developing a regional CoBP.

In the first year of the 2018-2021 contract, the ASVET team will also scope a program evaluation, to consider if it will add value and is within our resources

Reports and documentation provided during the 2016-2018 contract

September 2016: Referral proposal
October 2016: Helpdesk and Workshop proposals
November 2016: RTO Resource Support proposal
December 2016: Workshop 1 Report
March 2017: Helpdesk and Website report
June 2017: Workshop 2 Report
July 2017: ASVET Conference proposal
July 2017: Progress Report July2016 -June 2017
November 2017: Workshop 3 Report
December 2017: Workshop 4 report
January 2018: ASVET CoBP Terms of Reference
February 2018: Progress Report-July-Dec 2017
May 2018: *Celebrate the Journey* conference
June 2018: Conference report
June 2018: 2016-2018 Final Report

The Victorian Government's 2016 – 2018 ASVET funding initiative provided unprecedented opportunity for up to 1000 people seeking asylum and refugees to access subsidised VET courses.

In expanding the program under the new contract, the Victorian Government has acknowledged the effectiveness of the ASVET program; and affirmed its continued commitment to support people seeking asylum to achieve tangible and potentially life-changing outcomes.

The flow-on, as more people complete the subsidised VET courses and engage in the workforce, will foster greater social and economic inclusion for people seeking asylum and a significant contribution to the Victorian community.

Vocational education and training is critical to the advancement of people from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds.

In 2016 Swinburne committed to the provision of up to 75 VET concession fee waivers per year and this was made possible by the generous contribution of the Victorian State Government's Asylum Seeker VET funding initiative.

With education and training, refugees and asylum seekers can gain the skills and qualifications necessary to participate in Australian society and make a positive and valued contribution to our nation.

Anthony Garnter

Associate Director, Student Equity & AccessAbility Services,
Swinburne University of Technology





June 2018

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