



TALENT BEYOND  
—BOUNDARIES—

# Talent Beyond Boundaries Australia Pilot Evaluation

## Summary Report

27 November 2019

Evaluation conducted by Margaret Piper AM.

Talent Beyond Boundaries would like to sincerely thank Margaret Piper for her conducting this evaluation. We are incredibly grateful for your time and thoughtful consideration of our program.

For this summary report TBB has removed names and confidential material to enable external publication.

#### About Margaret Piper

Margaret was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 2011 in recognition of her decades of service to the community through leadership and advocacy roles assisting refugees and asylum seekers. Margaret is a consultant with over 30 years of experience working in the refugee sector, including as an Executive Director of the Refugee Council of Australia (1991- 2005). She is involved in policy and program planning through her work on various government and non-government committees and boards. She is a member of the Advisory Board of Multicultural NSW and of the Board of MYAN NSW. Since October 2015 Margaret has participated in the joint committee that supports Professor Shergold and the Department of Premier and Cabinet to identify and implement reforms in refugee settlement in NSW. Previously, Margaret was a Board Member of the Australian Red Cross and a member of its Audit and Risk Committee (2012-18) and continues to chair the Red Cross' Service Committee and sit on its Migration Policy Advisory Committee. She has written extensively on refugee issues and is the author of numerous reports and studies, as well as four training packages for VET-courses linked to working with refugees. In 2018 she was awarded the Red Cross' Distinguished Service Medal.

*The TBB project is unique. It's an awesome idea. It's easy to think about connecting skilled refugees to companies but the execution is hard. TBB have done this perfectly. They have overcome the many challenges when other people might have stopped.*

Reflection from entrant

*It's a great idea to bring refugees on work contracts. It's good for the people and it's good for the government that the person has skills and can settle into a new job and help their family.*

Reflection from spouse of entrant

*There were many comments from staff saying things like how proud they were to work for a company that is doing this. It was massively positive. We got a lot of credit from staff for our involvement in TBB.*

Reflection from employer

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Having supported five people from refugee and refugee-like backgrounds (and in three cases their families) to relocate to Australia to take up skilled positions secured for them in advance of their arrival, Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB) was keen to learn from the experiences of those who have come and the companies that have employed them.

I was asked to undertake an informal review the objectives of which were to:

- capture the experiences of refugees who have come to Australia under the Talent Beyond Boundaries Program, both as primary applicants and the spouses of primary applicants;
- capture the learnings from the companies that have employed these refugees;
- inform Talent Beyond Boundaries' future work;
- assist Talent Beyond Boundaries to advocate for well-targeted support for their entrants from settlement service providers;
- assist Talent Beyond Boundaries to raise its profile and secure ongoing funding.

Interviews were conducted with the five primary applicants, three spouses and at least one representative of each of the employing companies. None of the entrant's children were old enough to be interviewed. Interviews were conducted roughly six months after the entrants began work and after they had passed their probationary period.

Prior to the interviews commencing, agreement was reached with TBB about the research instruments. These consisted of the following:

Interview Questions for TBB Primary Entrants

Interview Questions for TBB Primary Entrant's Spouse

Interview Questions for Employers

Information sheet for Primary Entrants

Information sheet for Spouses (available in English and Arabic)

Information sheet for Employers

Consent form for Primary Entrants  
Consent form for Spouses (available in English and Arabic)  
Consent form for Employers

The following report summarises the findings. It consists of three parts, each representing the perspective of the major stakeholders: the entrants, their spouses and the employers.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: that TBB think of ways to raise their on-line and on-the-ground profile and to differentiate themselves from the scams.

Recommendation 2: that TBB modify their on-line registration form to accommodate stateless people still living in their country of birth.

Recommendation 3: that (if it is not already done) TBB have an automated response to on-line registrations, acknowledging receipt and giving as much information as is possible about what will happen next.

Recommendation 4: TBB should note the importance of their honest and transparent approach to those with whom it is dealing, not just because this is ethically sound but also because they are dealing with very vulnerable people.

Recommendation 5: TBB should continue to provide well-targeted and much valued support to those going through the job application process.

Recommendation 6: that the following principles underpin any negotiations TBB has with the Government about possible visas. The visas should:

- be permanent;
- not be required to be linked to a particular employer in the event the employment relationship breaks down;
- be an additional numerical allocation and not included in the humanitarian program numbers;
- afford immediate access to Medicare for all entrants and to Centrelink and AMEP (for non-working spouses and children) and settlement support.

Recommendation 7: When providing IOM's Cultural Orientation Program (AUSCO) handbook to TBB entrants, TBB should ensure that entrants are aware of entitlements related to their visa subclass.

Recommendation 8: TBB staff should warn entrants that they are likely to go through a time when they feel out of control and wonder what they are doing, and that this is very normal.

Recommendation 9: On an as-needs basis, TBB should assist companies to organise support through IOM or another means at any transit stops during the journey to Australia.

Recommendation 10: As TBB's program moves from its pilot phase into 'business as usual', consideration should be given to developing a sustainable and equitable support model.

Recommendation 11: A case by case assessment should be done about the amount of time an entrant needs prior to commencing employment. TBB should assist the candidate to negotiate the best possible outcome with the employer.

Recommendation 13: TBB should stress to those on a visa pathway the importance of practicing English and talking to as many people as possible.

Recommendation 14: TBB needs to consider the individual circumstances of each family group and consider the nature of additional support that might be required by the spouse and/or children.

Recommendation 15: TBB should support refugees awaiting departure to fill their time with relevant and meaningful activities to prepare themselves for the Australian workplace.

Recommendation 16: that TBB investigates additional support that can be provided to spouses of TBB applicants who require additional support to enhance their language skills, build confidence and connect to the wider community.

Recommendation 17: TBB explore with the existing entrants the feasibility and merits of establishing a formal mentoring arrangement between them and new entrants and that consideration be given to establishing similar links between spouses.

Recommendation 18: that TBB give some thought to setting up corporate alliances and test whether this is something that could be used to enhance their reach.

### 3. THE ENTRANTS' PERSPECTIVES

#### 3.1. Talent Beyond Boundaries Offshore

It is relevant to begin by looking at the entrants' engagement with Talent Beyond Boundaries prior to their arrival in Australia and also to be reminded that this was not just an academic exercise for those involved but it involved a huge leap of faith and was underpinned by a plethora of emotions.

##### *i. Finding Talent Beyond Boundaries*

Most of the entrants found TBB when trawling the net.

It's important for TBB to recognise that they are but one of many websites targeting refugees and that those who contact them will probably do so from a position of scepticism.

One entrant said that she did not believe that TBB was 'real' and if they were, that they would be able to do anything. She had lost faith in organisations/people offering things because in the war there were so many scams, one of which the family had fallen victim to.

Another entrant spoke about the very many websites that target refugees, most of which promise much and deliver little. He said that this makes it very hard to find TBB "amongst the noise".

Recommendation 1: that TBB think of ways to raise their on-line and on-the-ground profile and to differentiate themselves from the scams.

##### *ii. Registering with TBB*

Most did this on line and said that there were no problems with it. One sent an email to which he had a prompt reply.

One entrant, however, raised a very valid issue. He said he was not able to fill in the form on the website because one of the mandatory fields is 'when did you come to [country of first asylum]?' as he was born in Lebanon as a stateless person, he was not able to answer this.

Recommendation 2: that TBB modify their on-line registration form to accommodate stateless people still living in their country of birth.

##### *iii. TBB contact with clients*

The interval between the entrant contacting TBB and hearing back from them varied considerably. For one person it was very quick (about one week) and others did not hear back for several months.

It is recognised that capacity issues impact on the timeliness of responses but it is also relevant to note that everyone registering is making a leap of faith and pinning their hopes on the possibility that something might come of it.

Recommendation 3: that (if it is not already done) TBB have an automated response to on-line registrations, acknowledging receipt and giving as much information as is possible about what will happen next.

The entrants were uniformly impressed with the contact they had with people from TBB. Reference was made to staff being friendly, encouraging and supportive. One entrant gave some interesting insights into what sets TBB apart from the many less-reputable agencies:

- TBB does not mention money up front. The others say things like 'the solution will cost'. TBB didn't ask for money.
- TBB's questions are different. The others say 'how can we be of assistance?' but TBB asked 'what are your skills?'
- TBB did not offer an immediate solution. They explained it would take time and there was no guarantee.

Recommendation 4: TBB should note the importance of their honest and transparent approach to those with whom it is dealing, not just because this is ethically sound but also because they are dealing with very vulnerable people.

*iv. TBB support for clients*

All of the entrants spoke glowingly about how much they valued the support TBB provided for them during the job application process. Reference was made to:

- how much the mock interviews prepared them for the real thing;
- the technical and logistical support provided;
- the emotional support and encouragement.

Of the three, the last should not be underestimated. One entrant said that she didn't imagine she could get a job [in Australia] after 2½ years of being treated like an alien and spoke about how important the support she received was. Another entrant said from his perspective it would have been easier for him to have won the lottery than to manage to secure a job in Australia.

Recommendation 5: TBB should continue to provide the well-targeted and much valued support to those going through the job application process.

*v. Selection of Clients*

There is no way that TBB can assist all of the skilled people displaced in the world, or even in the Middle East, so some selection process has to be put in place.

TBB might be interested to learn about what the entrants suggested was relevant for TBB to consider in this context:

- TBB should consider the circumstances of the applicant in the country of asylum. Some refugees have been able to bring money with them and create for themselves a relatively comfortable and safe life in exile. Some of these refugees are also the ones with agency and a sense of entitlement and who are seeking out even better opportunities. It was argued that TBB should be alert to this and try, wherever possible, to focus on those who are struggling and who have no real prospects where they are.
- TBB should investigate whether it is possible to target people who are internally displaced.

vi. *Future of the program*

Currently two visa subclasses are used:

- Temporary skilled visa (visa subclass 482): which can fairly quick to process but are expensive, are not immediately permanent and have few entitlements (no access to Medicare, Centrelink, free schooling or Adult Migrant English Program etc).
- Humanitarian visas (subclasses 200 through to 204): These have longer processing times and unless there is acceptance of additionality, any places given to TBB entrants would eat into the existing humanitarian program numbers. However application costs are lower and entrants have access to a wide range of entitlements and settlement supports.

Recommendation 6: that the following principles underpin any negotiations TBB has with the Government about possible visas. The visas should:

- be permanent;
- not be required to be linked to a particular employer in the event the employment relationship breaks down;
- be an additional numerical allocation and not included in the humanitarian program numbers;
- afford immediate access to Medicare for all entrants and to Centrelink and AMEP (for non-working spouses and children) and settlement support.

### 3.2. Preparing to come to Australia

Most entrants prepared for coming to Australia by searching the internet. One knew people who had lived here and asked them. As useful as such endeavours might be, they are unlikely to provide the very practical information that is really important in the initial post-arrival period.

Those who entered with a humanitarian visa attended IOM's Cultural Orientation Program (AUSCO) prior to arriving in Australia to assist in pre-departure preparation. For candidates who were not eligible to attend, TBB advises they provided a copy of the online AUSCO Handbook in Arabic. This being said, for entrants not on a humanitarian visa, the AUSCO materials can be misleading (for example, they contain information about programs and entitlements candidates are not eligible for).

Recommendation 7: When providing IOM's Cultural Orientation Program (AUSCO) handbook to TBB entrants, TBB should ensure that entrants are aware of entitlements related to their visa subclass.

Another important thing that TBB can prepare people for is the emotional upheaval they will probably experience in the period after arrival. Most people are focused on 'getting away' and believe that once they 'arrive' everything will be fine but as one entrant said, "no one tells you about the crash. Now we are falling from the cliff, missing home. When I was in Jordan I didn't think about going back [to Syria] but here I do. But at least we have a life here. We are safe and secure."



Another entrant said "I felt lonely for the first few months. I didn't know anyone. The worst time was the first two weeks. I didn't expect it to be so hard at first. I had been so focused on leaving, I hadn't thought much about what would happen next."

Another entrant who is clearly a very confident and self-assured person admitted to having a difficult time. "I got confused by many things ... how to catch a train or bus ... I was out of my comfort zone. I am used to being on top of things. Not knowing was humbling. Tell them that this will happen."

Recommendation 8: TBB staff should warn entrants that they are likely to go through a time when they feel out of control and wonder what they are doing, and that this is very normal.

### 3.3. Travel to Australia

For some entrants, receiving travel assistance at transit points from IOM was seen as very valuable. This is especially valuable for families and those with little experience of large airports such as Dubai. Irrespective of what visa entrants come in on, IOM can be engaged by companies to book travel and provide this assistance.

Recommendation 9: On an as-needs basis, TBB should assist companies to organise support through IOM or another means at any transit stops during the journey to Australia.

### 3.4. Initial arrival

All of the entrants spoke in glowing terms about the greeting they received on arrival at the airport. This was something seen as being very special and affirming.

The question to TBB is whether this can be sustained if the numbers increase? And if not, how can the essence be retained? Potentially TBB could look at creating an arrangement whereby TBB alumni entrants play a leading role in welcoming the next arrivals.

### 3.5. Initial support

It was clear that all of the entrants benefitted from a great deal of assistance after they arrived, with this coming – in varying mixes - from a Humanitarian Settlement Program provider, their employer and TBB.

Those who came on humanitarian visas were generally the most advantaged in terms of the level of support they received due to their eligibility for the Humanitarian Settlement Program, their permanent visa status and their eligibility for all of the complementary services available to refugees.

The absence of this support for the single entrants did not seem to be a big issue as they received considerable support from their employers (including initial accommodation and a financial package). For the family on a temporary skilled visa, not having entitlement to Medicare, free government schooling, AMEP, Centrelink and the full suite of humanitarian settlement services was a significant disadvantage.

Entrants acknowledged the support provided by their employers. Each candidate had a different package of support depending on their employer and circumstances - and included a mix of the following items:

- Free initial accommodation (between 2 weeks and 2 months)
- Cash allowance/transition payment
- Provision of furniture or furniture allowance
- Rent subsidy and payment of electricity bills
- Provision of a bicycle to get to work (before candidate received drivers license)
- Assistance with home search
- Subsidising English language classes for spouse
- Free tax advice

All entrants also mentioned with considerable gratitude the practical and emotional support they received from TBB.

Key issues to consider for future candidates are:

- Irrespective of the visa they come in on, TBB should ensure entrants and their families have access to the same settlement support as refugees coming through the humanitarian program, if and when they need it. TBB should negotiate with the Australian government for any future Displaced Talent Visa scheme to include all these services.
- TBB should ensure entrants have sufficient cash until their first pay is received. One entrant spoke very poignantly about the feeling of insecurity during the first few days until her relocation allowance came through because of delays occasioned by a holiday weekend.
- The entrants in Melbourne speak about having benefited greatly from TBB's presence there – in terms of practical assistance but also the social engagement and friendship clearly they value. Entrants elsewhere miss out on this. For some, this does not seem to be an issue but for one, the lack of face-to-face contact was raised.

Recommendation 10: As TBB's program moves from its pilot phase into 'business as usual', consideration should be given to developing a sustainable and equitable support model.

### 3.6. Commencing work

#### i. *Timeframe*

Most entrants commenced work two or three weeks after arrival. The single men appeared to relish this time to explore and get themselves sorted and the time frame was good for them. For families, this time was probably not sufficient to get themselves settled. It was much harder for the working partner to leave the other at home.

Recommendation 11: A case by case assessment should be done about the amount of time an entrant needs prior to commencing employment. TBB should assist the candidate to negotiate the best possible outcome with the employer.

#### ii. *Workplace Orientation*

All of the entrants had been very well supported by their employers.

A number had been introduced to the workplace and their colleagues before starting and all had gone through a formal workplace orientation program.

The value of this was reinforced by one entrant who spoke about the huge gap between the work environment in Lebanon and that in Australia, referring in particular to the relationship with his manager (much more formal in Lebanon), work flexibility (non-existent in Lebanon) and team work (not required in Lebanon).

Adding to this the entrant said teamwork was one of the biggest challenges he faced when he began work. He is now really enjoying being part of the team, referencing learning about diversity (not like Lebanon) and those with whom he works are no longer just colleagues but friends.

Another entrant was amazed and delighted to discover that he had rights at work, something he had never had before, and said about the support he received from his employer: "they went above and beyond. Nothing was missed. It was more than enough and exactly what I needed."

There are clear advantages to selecting employers that are used to recruiting from overseas and which have comprehensive orientation programs for new recruits.

Recommendation 12: that TBB selects employers used to recruiting from overseas and which have comprehensive orientation programs for new recruits.

### *iii. Colleagues*

All of the entrants spoke about how welcome their workmates had made them feel and how supportive they had been.

It is possible that this was a direct result of the high-level commitment from their employers and the ethos within the organisations. In this regard one entrant's comments are telling: "At Iress we are not just employees. We are 'one Iress'. People connect. This is beyond my expectations."

This entrant also said that he had gone to a conference and met people working for other companies. He had told them about his experience at Iress and they were surprised. He realised then just how special Iress is and how lucky he is to be working for them.

Another entrant made the comment that because of his workmates' response, he was relishing the fact that he no longer had to lie about his identity and can be proud of being a refugee.

### *iv. English*

All of the entrants spoke very good English but a couple made the point of saying that they found it challenging to understand the heavily accented English spoken by their (very many) workmates for whom it was not their first language.

A very sound point was also made by two of the entrants. Those who have been accepted for a job – or even those who register with TBB – should be encouraged to use the time they have before migrating to enhance their English skills.

Recommendation 8: TBB should stress to those on a visa pathway the importance of practicing English and talking to as many people as possible.

### 3.7. Partner and family

Only three of the entrants had family with them - two on humanitarian visas and one on a skilled visa. For each there were different complicating issues.

- One candidate is now expecting the arrival of a second child and has some concerns about financial pressures.
- Spouses not being able to speak English - this is a particular issue for the spouse who came in on a 482 visa without access to the Australian Migrant English Program (AMEP).
- The entrant who came in on a 482 visa was also concerned about the financial cost of his family's medical insurance and his son's schooling (his son is due to start primary school in 2020 and they will be required to pay international student fees).

Recommendation 14: TBB needs to consider the individual circumstances of each family group and consider the nature of additional support that might be required by the spouse and/or children.

### 3.8. Interaction with the broader community

#### i. *Safety*

All of the entrants said they feel safe in Australia. For some, this was far from being a trivial concept. They had spent years, and in one stateless entrant's case his entire life, fearing authority and worrying about the consequences of being found to be working/travelling or doing anything else that was not permitted.

Notwithstanding the comments of feeling safe, one entrant noted that he was upset that his wife had been targeted for Islamophobic harassment. As will be discussed later, his spouse seemed to be resilient and pragmatic about it.

#### ii. *Welcome*

Everyone spoke about being connected, in varying degrees, to the wider community. The single men had clearly embraced the opportunity to socialise and get to know people from many backgrounds. The social activities in their workplace clearly formed the basis of this and one entrant had supplemented this with many other avenues.

Another entrant and his spouse had clearly benefited from being in a regional town and from the support they have received from the Australian Red Cross. They both made the point on more than one occasion that they have been forced to mix and speak English, comparing this to the refugees they know in Perth, and acknowledging that this has been very good for both of them.

#### iii. *Faith community*

Faith was of varying levels of significance to the entrants. All for whom faith was important to said that they had been able to connect to a faith community and most said that there was provision within the workplace to pray.

### 3.9. The future

All of the entrants spoke with optimism about the future, tinged only by the concerns of two of the candidates about supporting their spouses and children to adjust to life in Australia.

The strong message from all was that since arriving in Australia they can envisage a positive future, something that they had not been able to do for many years and were beginning to think was impossible. They also spoke about how exciting it is to be able to make plans. One entrant said: "the really big thing for me is being able to plan long term. I now have a reason to be happy and optimistic about the future".

### 3.10. Their advice to others

#### i. *To refugees thinking about connecting to TBB*

When asked what they would say to refugees thinking of connecting to TBB, some of the responses were as follows:

*"It's the easiest thing they must do. Imagine there is someone who will find you a job, help you to travel, help you to settle, check in with you regularly ... what more could anyone need?"*

*"Even if I was dreaming, I wouldn't get so much help. My dream would not go that far."*

#### ii. *To refugees thinking about moving to Australia*

The following advice was given:

*"You can trust TBB. Our dream came true because of them."*

*"Don't hesitate. It's a beautiful country, amazing people, freedom and rights. I love being in such a place where you are respected, where you can walk on a beach for free, where there are gardens, where you have privileges."*

*"A man is not a tree to stay standing in the same place. We have a mind, let's use it. You need the will to make an adventure."*

*"You must be ready to learn new things. It is so important in life to keep learning."*

#### iii. *To those in the pipeline*

The following advice was offered to those who have been accepted for a position and are waiting to travel:

*"Forget everything you know. All the rules don't apply. You need to adapt to the way of life here. Survival is for those who can adapt, not the strongest."*

*“Engage in meaningful waiting” i.e. use the time to improve English and workplace skills to keep motivated and active.*

*“You must think about your qualifications and also about how you communicate” i.e. communication style and soft skills like teamwork.*

Recommendation 15: TBB should support refugees awaiting departure to fill their time with relevant and meaningful activities to prepare themselves for the Australian workplace.

### 3.11. Their Advice to TBB

Other than TBB should keep doing what they have been doing, it was suggested that TBB organise a retreat so that those who have come in through the program can spend some time together and share experiences. In this context there was reference to the “TBB family”.

## 4. THE SPOUSES’ PERSPECTIVE

Two of the employers made very important observations about the entrants’ spouse:

*“It’s crucial that you don’t lose sight of the person’s partner. If they don’t like it here, it won’t work.”*

*“If the spouse is not happy, things will fall apart.”*

### 4.1. Settlement support

It was in the context of the spouse and family that the impact of visa type became most apparent. Two of the families had entered under a humanitarian visa and thus not only received support from the Humanitarian Settlement Support provider but were also entitled to the full range of services available to refugees.

One entrant’s family entered on a temporary skilled visa but received support from Humanitarian Settlement Support provider Settlement Services International (paid for by the employer, Iress). This was welcomed in part - but also served to reinforce to the family that they were excluded from many services available and recommended to others (eg. Medicare, AMEP).

### 4.2. Building connections

One spouse noted that he has been able to make some friends through AMEP classes and had also met some people who come from his region Syria who live nearby. The family is, however, planning to move to Sydney at the end of the year to be closer to friends (the employer is able to accommodate relocation, but many other employers would not be able to do this). The spouse also recognises and relishes the multicultural nature of Australia, noting that at his children’s school, there are students from 35 nationalities. “It’s good that people come together”.

Another spouse who settled in Harvey, regional Western Australia, seems to be adapting very well (noting that a single interview cannot give you the full story). Despite being the most isolated from her own community and living in a country town where she is the only hijab-wearing woman, it would seem that she is very connected to her local community.

Much credit for this goes to her Humanitarian Settlement Support provider, Australian Red Cross, and to a local Red Cross volunteer in the town. The spouse is also volunteering at a newly established support group for migrant women established by the Red Cross thanks to a *Fostering Integration Grant*. Having this wrap-around support has meant that the spouse was not left alone at home all day when her husband started work.

In the not too distant future this spouses' sister and brother-in-law are likely to join them in Harvey (her husband's brother also secured a job at Harvey Beef). She is looking forward to this, saying that she gets on well with them. It will probably also give her the chance to be 'the guide' for her sister-in-law, introducing her to the town and helping her settle. This will enhance her own confidence and reinforce how much she has learnt. TBB also advises Harvey Beef is looking to recruit more candidates to join their team in Harvey, which is welcome.

While the entrant in Harvey has had some concerns about a few racist taunts and incidents directed at his spouse, she herself appeared less concerned: "I am new here, he doesn't know me." One suspects that the support she has from the women in the town has helped her put these isolated incidents in perspective.

Another spouse has had a very different experience. Her relocation to Australia meant being separated from a large family - including seven sisters still in Jordan - for the first time. This family separation coupled with the fact she is on a 482 visa so not eligible for much support, the isolation of not speaking English, and having her husband start full-time work within two weeks of arrival, has clearly been very challenging. TBB has recently secured some funding which can be used to provide some additional support to this spouse, however a more sustainable solution will need to be found for future families on skilled visas.

### 4.3. English language

All of the spouses highlighted learning English as a priority for them.

One spouse had only a very little bit of English instruction at school in Syria and none in the seven years she was displaced in Jordan. The fact that she has come on a visa subclass 482 means that she is not eligible for the same level of English support (with associated child care) as a humanitarian entrant. Her husband's employer Iress voluntarily paid for 10 English night sessions which she has completed, however this is not enough to make significant progress. As above, TBB has now accessed funds to assist. Still, this spouse said:

*"Learn English before coming here. It is big difficulty to come without English".*

TBB advises they have also started providing spouses in the visa application process with referrals to English language support in Jordan and Lebanon.

Another spouse is eligible for AMEP but has not yet had the chance to do classes as these are not available in Harvey, and the family has only recently acquired a car enabling her to travel to and from Bunbury. She is scheduled to start English classes at TAFE in Bunbury in early 2020. Despite

this, her English capacity and confidence has developed rapidly. It is clear that this comes from the fact that she is immersed in a supportive English speaking environment. She recognises this herself, saying "thank God I am in Harvey and have to speak English. The people in Perth don't learn."

The other spouse speaks good French and German in addition to Arabic, but spoke very little English when he arrived and was totally dependent on his wife for negotiations with the 'outside world'. His wife had to leave work to help with getting the children into school, doctor's appointments etc.

Now he has found a good AMEP provider and is studying English 5 days a week from 9am till 3pm, and outside those times looking after the children and the house. According to this spouse "the classes are good". He also recognises the widespread use of interpreters in Australia as a good thing.

#### 4.4. Future plans and aspirations

All spouses have aspirations for their lives in Australia.

One spouse left Syria before finishing high school and is now focussed on her young children, but wants to learn English and do further study in Australia.

Another spouse seems to be very optimistic about the future. She is expecting a second child and it is reasonable to assume that the support she is receiving from other women in the town will compensate for the lack of immediate family at this time. She also has ambitions to study nursing initially and then dentistry so she can set up her own dental practice.

When asked about what was the best thing about being in Australia, she replied "being legal. We can move around and not be scared. In Lebanon, I was scared all the time; scared that the police might catch me".

When asked what advice she would give to others she said "it's amazing. It's safe. You are human. You are legal. You can study in Australia".

The other spouse is a trained physiotherapist but has been told since arriving that you need to have good English to get into physiotherapy in Australia which is "scaring me a little'. If it's too hard, he thinks he might study to be an electrician as he has also done this work before.

That said, he pointed to some of the systemic problems in Australia's support services that are not helping:

- "Centrelink is really killing me." He referred to the payment received, saying that he has given them all of the documents about his wife's hours, pay etc but sometimes they overpay and sometimes under pay. Different staff members give him different (and contradictory) advice and some seem really shocked that his wife is working and he is not.
- "jobactive" have told him to come in for interviews and that he must look for 7-10 jobs each month but he is studying full time and looking after the children "so how can I do this?"



Recommendation 16: that TBB investigates additional support that can be provided to spouses of TBB applicants who require additional support to enhance their language skills, build confidence and connect to the wider community.

## 5. THE EMPLOYERS' PERSPECTIVE

### 5.1. Rationale for participation

It was very clear that each of the employing agencies saw their involvement with Talent Beyond Boundaries as something much more than a way to recruit staff.

Iress is an international company and well accustomed to recruiting overseas. Iress' CEO Andrew Walsh noted that while it is clearly cheaper and faster to recruit locally, they are interested in attracting talent and "don't care where people apply from".

Iress has many staff members who have moved to Australia to take up employment with the firm and they are well accustomed to the visa process and on-boarding procedures. It was not such a big step for them to embrace the idea of recruiting refugees and they were attracted to the TBB model in part out of respect for John Cameron and in part "because it's what's right".

Being the first organisation to recruit a refugee through TBB was clearly a strong motivator for Iress. They recognised that they could contribute to setting up procedures and developing recruitment processes, such as the video interviewing which is now used by others. Reference was also made to developing ways to test technical skills and engineering capability.

Andrew then went on to say "diversity has to be an important criterion for the employer. If they are thinking that way, participating in this is not a big step. Iress have made it everyday" but after saying this he added "it's an enduring reminder of what we can do. It's not just for cash or something temporary".

EY were quick to point out that they were motivated by corporate social responsibility factors when initially hiring through TBB, and they saw the program as providing a practical humanitarian impact. TBB advises that since EY made their initial hire, they are now looking to hire more people. They are currently looking for candidates to fill a number of roles they struggle to fill locally.

Accenture is also a global company well acquainted with seeking talent from outside the country. They understood the TBB model and after successfully hiring a Management Consultant through TBB, they are currently in the process of recruiting ten more people.

Harvey Beef currently have a labour agreement with the government involving sourcing skilled workers overseas and bringing them in on 482 subclass visas. In the past most have come from the Philippines and more recently from China. It is 'a given' that the company needs to import people to fill the jobs as they are not able to source skilled labour locally – especially with competition in WA from the mining industry.

Their overseas recruiting is done through the Munderoo Group, a large multi-faceted company closely linked to the large (\$1.5b) philanthropic body, Munderoo Foundation. It was Munderoo that

first brought the TBB model to Harvey Beef. They saw their involvement with TBB as another pathway for doing this, albeit one where they were able to help people in need.

TBB advises so far Harvey Beef have brought one butcher, and subsequently they've recruited his brother (also an experienced butcher) and they are currently in the final stages of recruiting another Syrian butcher.

## 5.2. Contact with TBB

All of the employers were very complimentary about Talent Beyond Boundaries, both in terms of their interaction with them and their procedures.

Accenture said "what's great about my interaction with TBB is that we have the same objectives and intentions. They are committed to collaboration and open to exploring how to make things work. They are also open to learning about my challenges".

EY said that TBB was "easy to deal with; very well engaged, able to articulate the process, clear about deliverables – and delivered on these ... TBB made the process look possible. They explained that there could not be an exact timeline but gave us an indicative idea."

Harvey Beef spoke of TBB as being very professional, with "lovely people". "They are very welcoming, understanding and not condescending". Reference was also made to TBB's "grasp of the IT world". "It is quite sophisticated compared to others" i.e. the other recruitment agencies. To this they added that TBB are very caring about the entrant and have provided "overwhelming support for him," when compared to other recruitment agencies.

Iress said that the relationship with TBB has been very productive. The relationship was described as "quality, rich and partnering".

## 5.3. The employment model

All of the companies involved are well acquainted with overseas recruitment, either through external recruitment agencies or through internal processes.

The one thing that was emphasised is that given visa processing timelines are so unpredictable, the TBB model is currently not suitable for a company that is seeking someone for a specific position. It only works where a company can be flexible about commencement date and is continuously recruiting people to fill roles within teams.

In relation to this Andrew Walsh said that the focus currently has to be on function not role. "We can fit people in when they commence ... You have to want to do it. You have to want to be involved in TBB."

While this approach has worked for Iress, TBB advises it seriously limits the pool of viable employers for TBB candidates. Ideally visa processing would be made much more predictable to enable TBB to match candidates to roles within reasonable timeframes.

#### 5.4. Recruitment process

Most of the companies were used to remote recruitment using video calls and other technology, though some needed to think it through. It did not appear to be a significant barrier to any.

Each company had its own recruitment process, most involving a series of interviews and opportunities to demonstrate practical skills.

While clearly looking for candidates who had the right skill set for the role, all of the employers spoke about the equal importance they placed on soft skills. EY said that they offered the job to their preferred candidate over another qualified individual because of her personality and because they felt that she would be the 'right fit' for the company.

The importance of the candidate being able to adapt to the new workplace and wider environment was also identified as being significant.

It was apparent from even a short time with each of the entrants that all were very outgoing, flexible and personable and it is clearly this, as well as their technical skills, that helped them secure their positions.

When asked about recruitment on merit, Andrew Walsh from Iress said that he was not aware of any positive bias in recruiting the two software engineers they selected through TBB, but he was completely confident that they would not have been offered jobs if they were not technically capable. He went on to say that if there are two equally qualified candidates, positive discrimination is very legitimate, citing how it is used in South Africa for black applicants.

Accenture advised that the recruitment process was "as standard as possible" with some minor adjustments to the weight given to things that would normally be of interest to recruiters. For example, in their preferred candidates' case his lack of work rights in his country of first asylum meant it was not possible to get an official written work reference, and his statelessness also limited his ability to demonstrate a wide range of extracurricular activities. Accenture took this into account.

#### 5.5. Orientation

Because recruitment of staff from overseas is business as usual for all of the companies, few changes were required in their orientation process. The appointment of a buddy and mentor for the new recruit are standard practice, though it was noted that more attention than usual was given to selecting the right people to fill these roles.

It was apparent from speaking to the entrants that they felt very welcomed and supported by the company and their colleagues and that the on-boarding assistance they received was well targeted.

#### 5.6. Holistic support

There was a clear recognition that the role of the employer went beyond that of simply offering a job. All of the companies had provided significant financial, practical and social assistance to their recruits and had been prepared to be more flexible than they might otherwise have been when it

came to time off to deal with settlement challenges. There was a clear sense that they cared about the entrants as whole people and that they genuinely wanted to them to succeed.

### 5.7. Preparing colleagues

Each of the companies informed workers of the refugee backgrounds of the new recruits in slightly different ways. Harvey Beef, EY and Iress run briefing sessions on the refugee experience and cultural awareness considerations for those who 'needed to know'. These were run by the settlement providers in each of their locations (Australian Red Cross, AMES and Settlement Services International).

Accenture gave their TBB recruit the opportunity to speak to staff more broadly when he was ready, and Iress used their internal communication network to announce the arrivals of their two recruits (giving them a chance to review and edit the announcements before they went out).

None of the employers said that there was any negativity to their targeted employment of refugees and in the case of Iress, it was the exact opposite. Andrew Walsh said of the message that went out on their intranet that "it was definitely one of the most engaging topics we have had. Over 200 people responded to the post. There were many comments from staff saying things like how proud they were to work for a company that is doing this. It was massively positive. We got a lot of credit from staff for our involvement in TBB".

### 5.8. Benefit to company

When asked to reflect on what the involvement with TBB has meant to their company the following was said:

*"If we look at it from the perspective of what we can do to impact on their life – yes. If we look at it from the perspective of ensuring our people feel that they work for a company that cares – yes."*

*"We were very proud to be the first to work with TBB. It means we stand for something. We can set the scene for others."*

*"The program is unique and exciting – giving people a chance. The team are extremely highly skilled"*.

### 5.9. Advice to Talent Beyond Boundaries

Other than suggesting that TBB should continue doing what they are doing, employers had advice relating to using the entrants who have arrived as coaches for new arrivals. Already the entrants link informally through Facebook and other means but it was felt that this could be enhanced if there was a formal connection.

Recommendation 17: TBB explore with the existing entrants the feasibility and merits of establishing a formal mentoring arrangement between them and new entrants and that consideration be given to establishing similar links between spouses.

Another suggestion is on a grander scale.

EY suggested that TBB could think about creating an alliance between groups of corporates, with one offering a position, one sorting the bank account, one putting up the cash: shared social responsibility. He added that this could be a great networking opportunity (between corporates) and would expand the number of openings/opportunities, especially for people coming in on non-humanitarian visas (i.e. entrants who cost more to bring and have less post-arrival support). It was suggested that TBB market “the concept, not the individual”.

This suggestion was tested with Iress and elicited a lukewarm response. The fact that Iress is so large and so used to overseas recruitment could well be behind this response. They do not need assistance from others so see no reason to enter into partnerships.

Recommendation 18: that TBB give some thought to setting up corporate alliances and test whether this is something that could be used to enhance their reach.