

New Settlement Services Youth Bill 2008

Explanatory Notes

Short title of the Youth Bill

The short title of the Youth Bill is the *New Settlement Services Youth Bill 2008*.

Objectives of the Youth Bill

The objective of the Youth Bill is to provide a State-wide framework and shared space to existing support services for newly-settled immigrants and refugees in Queensland.

Settling into a new environment can be a taxing time. Immigrants and refugees arriving to Queensland are faced with the daunting prospect of acclimatising to a new culture, a new society and, in many cases, a new language. This makes the settlement extremely difficult, especially as many refugees arrive after experiencing traumatic events.

There are a number of non-government organisations (NGOs) that aid refugees' settlement. However, many of these organisations do not work with refugees on a long term basis, which reduces their effectiveness. In addition, many NGOs with overlapping purposes compete for the same scarce funding and resources. This means that they are stretched thin and understaffed, which again reduces the efficiency of the service. Moreover, many of the language classes are not tailored to the needs of the students, and as such are poorly attended. The *New Settlement Services Youth Bill 2008* aims to address these inconsistencies.

While immigration may be under Federal jurisdiction, the purpose of this Bill is not to affect immigration into Queensland, but to introduce a new framework to migrant and refugee settlement services that will bring together NGOs so that they may work collaboratively and more effectively.

This will provide newly arrived immigrants and refugees with the opportunity to adequately enter the system and acclimatise to Australian culture and society. The implementation of this framework and associated

infrastructure will not only benefit newly arrived immigrants and refugees, but also the wider community. Tensions between the cultures will diminish as a result of increased understanding. This, naturally, is advantageous to the State as it will reduce the instances of cultural misunderstandings and conflicts, which leads to deeper and more significant benefits.

The framework proposed includes a State Coordinator and board to oversee the proceedings, regional officers to focus on particular regions and report back to the board and branches, governed by branch boards.

There will be a branch created in each local government area of Queensland. Each branch will be either a fixed or mobile centre in which NGOs in the industry can set up office, conduct classes, provide extra support and conduct wider community engagement activities. Services for immigrants are available but they are not sufficient, and as such this framework will allow for collaboration and increased efficiency of the system.

The State board will set a syllabus to be implemented in all branches. The board will be given scope to create a syllabus to help the acclimatisation period, and is expected to include citizenship rights, language courses and basic skills to adapt to our unique way of life.

Each branch will also have a services registry. Assembling a registry of NGOs that can aid immigrants and having a localised branch for immigrants to access means that they are supported on many levels. In addition, the branches are encouraged to have extra services above what is prescribed. Each branch can then create community-specific programs. In an area of high refugee density, a branch may implement a mentoring program between newly arrived families and established families in the community. This also deals with the issue of bridging the gap between cultures and increasing harmony in society.

This Youth Bill will establish a framework to ease the strenuous settlement process into Queensland by supporting refugees and immigrants every step of the way. The implementation of the framework will mean that NGOs work better together, increasing their effectiveness and the quality of settlement aid received by their clients. In addition, the system is set up so that immigrants and refugees can enter the mainstream system as soon as possible, but still provides services and support after this. This Youth Bill will not only benefit the newly arrived immensely, but the wider community as well, working towards a more harmonious and truly multicultural society.