



Employing Refugees video

STEPS Employment and Training Solutions, Hobart, Tasmania

The *Employing Refugees* video features employers and recently arrived refugees and humanitarian entrants in a variety of work environments. The video aims to raise awareness among employers and encourage them to consider employing refugees and humanitarian entrants. It describes the positive impact they have in the workplace and their enthusiastic attitude to work and presents positive examples of them making a successful transition to the Australian workforce.

STEPS Employment and Training Solutions, an employment, training and community development organisation, with the support of the Office of Post Compulsory Education and Training (now Skills Tasmania) developed the video as part of a broad strategy to encourage local employers to consider recently arrived refugees when recruiting staff.

The broad strategy included conducting an awareness-raising function at an African restaurant for Job Network providers, Australian Apprenticeships Scheme and group training companies to meet African employees and their employers. The video was shown after the meal.

Transition to employment for African refugees in Southern Tasmania, like in many other parts of Australia, has been difficult. Settlement of refugees from Africa has been relatively recent. The current strategy began in Tasmania in 1997. Tasmania generally has more limited job opportunities than other states and, as elsewhere, employers place great importance on a potential employee's record in the Australian workforce when recruiting.

New arrivals face the dual disadvantages of not having the connections that can help secure a job, and of employers' concerns about how they will adjust to Australian working culture. Obstacles to employment may include communication problems, inadequate access to transport, unrecognised overseas qualifications and a mismatch of skills with the work available.

Discrimination is also an issue. A bicultural employment consultant for STEPS Employment and Training Solutions, Moses Lado, said:

There is a cultural view that tends to deviate people away from employing Africans. I think

there is a general fear about how this person is going to work. Will they be able to do the job?

The video was designed for use across Australia. It assists employment agencies, training organisations and refugee support agencies, by providing a valuable tool for their advocacy with employers on behalf of refugee job seekers.

Identifying a need

The Tasmanian Department of Education's Office of Post-Compulsory Education and Training contacted STEPS Employment and Training Solutions in 2004 to discuss strategies to boost employment prospects for newly arrived refugees and humanitarian migrants, particularly those from Africa. STEPS was keen to be involved as it had already noticed an increase in the number of African refugees using its services.

Adopting a strategy that had proven successful elsewhere

An organisation called Employers Making a Difference set up by business people with a successful record of employing people with a disability had produced a video that had positively influenced employers to recruit people with a disability. The Office of Post-Compulsory Education and Training discussed with STEPS Employment and Training Solutions the idea of providing funding for producing a similar video to encourage employers to consider employing refugees.

The video

In a region where African refugees were finding it difficult to gain entry to the employment market, the video focused on local successes; the employment of people in a fish processing company, a restaurant, a shop, a school and at STEPS itself.

Phil Leed and Laura Della-Pasqua of STEPS Employment and Training Solutions approached the employers and employees featured and gained their agreement to appear in the video. Five employers were drawn together and interviewed about their experiences of employing African refugees. They were asked how they had addressed any perceived or

real issues. Six refugees spoke of the impact of unemployment on their lives and what being able to work now means to them.

A first draft of the video was launched at a promotional lunch for employers, held in the African restaurant featured on the video, where one of the refugees was employed. Footage from this lunch was included in the final version of the film, launched in September 2005.

Two media students helped the STEPS team produce the seven-minute video. It was deliberately produced without branding to encourage wide use by other agencies.

The video includes footage of the featured employees at work and brief interviews with the five employers and six recently employed African refugees. Music by Sudanese-born musician from Hobart, Ajak Kwai, is featured on the video.

The lunch was held in the Afritas Restaurant in Hobart and was organised with the involvement and support of the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Each provider of Australian Government employment services was invited to participate and encouraged to invite employers who could potentially be interested in employing refugees.

At the lunch, employers saw footage from the video and had the opportunity to meet African refugees keen to find stable employment.

General Manager of Novaris, Diane Tompson, launched the final version of the video in September 2005. Novaris, which develops lightning surge protection equipment, was one of those that employed African refugees as a result of the project.

Free copies of the video were made available to Job Network agencies, training organisations, the Australian Apprenticeship Centre and other relevant agencies in Tasmania and in other states. The video is available in both a high- and a low-resolution format at www.stepstas.com.au/news.php. Copies are available from Marion Wilcox at Skills Tasmania at marion.wilcox@skills.tas.gov.au.

Achievements

The project directly resulted in a boost in employment among African-born people in Southern Tasmania. For example, the workforce of one employer grew to include 38 refugees.

STEPS Employment and Training Solutions assisted four African refugees to gain employment in 2005–06. Forty African refugees found jobs through STEPS in 2006–07. STEPS Chief Executive Officer, Ken Langston, said:

The promotional lunch and the video helped to produce greater awareness of the possibility of employing refugees. Prior to the launch, people knew that there was a growing African community in Hobart but weren't aware that there was an issue with these people getting employment. When employers could see so many people in the room without a job and with a keenness to work, this helped to create more of a genuine interest.

Anne Hamilton of the Migrant Resource Centre of Southern Tasmania says that her organisation and other agencies in Hobart value the local impact the video and promotional activities have had in starting to shift perceptions about new arrivals from Africa. She is continuing to use the video in her awareness-raising work with employers, landlords and real estate agents.

As a result of the success of the video, the Office of Post-Compulsory Education produced a 30-second television commercial featuring an African employee and his employer to promote the employment of Africans in Tasmania. STEPS facilitated the participation of the employers, Novaris and Woolworths, and a male and female African employee that were featured. The advertisement was shown on the Southern Cross television network in Tasmania in August 2007.

Challenges

The video boosted job opportunities for African refugees but alone could not remove the many employment barriers refugees face. Bicultural Employment Consultant for STEPS, Moses Lado, said:

A number of people have moved from Tasmania to the mainland to seek work and they are still moving. More needs to be done. In employment, Africans are still very disadvantaged.

Contact details

STEPS Employment and Training Solutions
12/39 Murray Street
Hobart Tasmania 7000
Phone: 03 6213 4011
Website: www.stepstas.com.au

Profile > Joseph

Joseph, who is featured on the *Employing Refugees* video, came to Australia in 2003, having spent the previous 16 years in a refugee camp in Uganda. He became a refugee at the age of seven, forced out of Sudan by the nation's long-running conflict.

After completing seven years of primary school and four years of high school in the refugee camp, Joseph became a volunteer untrained teacher. He studied teaching for the next three years through distance learning and in-service training.

When Joseph and his wife Teddy came to Australia, he was concerned about whether he could find a job and make the adjustment to the Australian workforce. After completing Certificate 3 in Written and Spoken English, he participated in the Tasmanian Government's *Work Placement Program* and gained confidence through it.

Joseph then trained for three months as a teacher's aide before completing a second work placement at Lansdowne Crescent Primary School. The placement led directly to employment, with principal, Peter Marmion offering Joseph part-time work as a multilingual teacher's aide. Joseph said, 'I realise that people now accept me as a fellow employee.'

The success of Joseph's work at Lansdowne Crescent Primary has encouraged the Tasmanian Department of Education to employ more multilingual aides in Hobart schools.

Joseph is now studying part-time for an Arts degree at university. He then plans to complete a Diploma of Education to become a qualified teacher.

photo > Ali, Issac and Joseph who are all featured on the *Employing Refugees* video



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