

Ready, willing and able

Around two years ago, not-for-profit organisation the Brotherhood of St Laurence launched its Given the Chance for Asylum Seekers program in Melbourne. Funded by a private philanthropist, it is an innovative recruitment model that works intensively with employers and jobseekers.

The program's primary role is to help asylum seekers with full working rights find employment. Employers sing its praises.

Around 30% of the client base is tertiary qualified and above. Given the Chance for Asylum Seekers serves as a great opportunity for them to earn a wage, gain an insight into the Australian working culture and hopefully provide career pathways in the future.

In return, employers find a group of people whose motivation is off the scale. They want to work. The vast majority of asylum seekers are delighted to obtain paid legitimate employment. At the same time, the employer finds skilled, loyal and motivated individuals.

Kathy, 31, arrived here as a political refugee from Uganda 12 months ago.

"In Uganda, I was a social worker with a degree in psychology," she said.

"Through the Brotherhood, I gained my Certificate III in Aged Care. I wanted very much to work in this area as I am truly passionate about aged care. I love the work. I'm so blessed to be here."

Robin Fuller is the manager of Sumner House, a fully accredited facility in Fitzroy that provides high quality residential care. It caters for 43 residents with low and high-care needs, offering a warm, homely environment and an innovative lifestyle program with activities for learning, socialisation and personal development.

Mrs Fuller said she has found Kathy a "joy to have on my staff".

"Kathy is such a smart woman. She is valued. What she does above and beyond for our residents is wonderful. Her life experience makes her empathetic and she has built some great relationships here. It's a win-win situation for me."

The Brotherhood has so far found 257 jobs for asylum seekers across various industries and community services, including aged care. Mentoring, life and job-readiness skills and English classes are also provided.

With more than 9,000 asylum seekers in Victoria and more people granted work rights due to changed legislation the demand is growing. There are currently 521 enthusiastic and hardworking people in the program, and 154 waiting for their first intake appointment.

Over the past 12 months, the program has engaged with more than 90 employers to create positions specifically for asylum seekers, with 30 employers such as Australian Unity, Majestic Cleaning, and the Windsor Hotel offering paid work. The overall response from employers has been very positive. For more details, please phone (03) 9288 9904 or email bfinnigan@bsl.org.au



Kathy



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