

# Job link program a win-win for asylum seekers and employers



BY BRIAN  
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AROUND TWO YEARS AGO, NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANISATION THE BROTHERHOOD OF ST LAURENCE LAUNCHED THE 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 who work with us sing its praises.

We have exceeded our targets, with 257 jobs found so far for asylum seekers across industries such as retail, trade, hospitality, administration, cleaning, manufacturing, finance, warehousing, transport and construction, as well as community services including aged care. We also provide mentoring, life and job-readiness skills and English classes.

With more than 9000 asylum seekers in Victoria, and more people granted work rights due to changed legislation, the demand is growing. At the time of writing we have 521 enthusiastic and



Given the Chance for Asylum Seeker program participant Tayo now works full-time at the Kathleen Syme Library and Community Centre

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Asylum seekers that are involved in the program are on bridging visas with work rights. Around 30 per cent of the client base that we work with right now are 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 Australian working culture and hopefully provide career pathways in the future.

We are making sure that we've done our homework in terms of individuals' motivations and skillsets. We are dealing with a group 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 gets skilled, loyal and motivated individuals to work with. It's a win-win situation.

Tayo, 23, left his home in Nigeria two years ago, arriving in Melbourne with his mother and brother seeking asylum from religious persecution.

"I had been in my final year of university studying computer science in Nigeria and I was looking for work here, but couldn't find it and was eventually referred to the Given the Chance for Asylum Seeker program," he says.

"My Brotherhood case worker, Wennie van Riet, taught me how to act in an interview, about the Australian workplace culture and how to write a résumé."

After working for the City of Melbourne in library maintenance, Tayo is now employed full-time by the Kathleen Syme Library and Community Care in Carlton as a community support officer. He says he feels "absolutely grateful".

"Having a job helps me to forget my past and helps me to concentrate on my future," Tayo adds.

Tayo's supervisor, Natalie Warren, describes him as "super-keen and fantastic".

"Tayo was identified as someone who worked very hard," she says. "He was seen as a great fit to the library and he is representative of the cultural diversity in Carlton.

"He's always on-task and is very diligent. We've really tried to encourage him. We tell him to always ask questions and he always does."

Visit [bsl.org.au/advocacy/asylum-seeker-employment-program](http://bsl.org.au/advocacy/asylum-seeker-employment-program) to find out more.

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hardworking people in the program and 154 people 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 including ANZ, Woolworths Group and the Windsor Hotel offering paid work. The overall response from employers has been very positive. Many of them re-contact us as new vacancies arise to hire more asylum seekers, and some have also promoted our program to their networks.