

**Reaching Out: Enhancing the  
Accessibility of the Queensland  
Working Women's Service (QWWS)  
for Migrant Women**



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project was initiated with the aim of enhancing the existing services that the Queensland Working Women's Service (QWWS) provides for Migrant working women in Queensland. QWWS is a community-based organisation which provides information and support for all Queensland working women. Since its formation in 1994, QWWS has provided job placements and training for Migrant women, and Migrant women and Migrant organisations have been, and currently are represented on the QWWS management committee. While QWWS strives to provide work placement and work experience for Migrant women, the organisation's statistics showed that Migrant women were under-represented in its client population. The project was funded by Griffith University under the Community Partnership Scheme and the research was conducted in 2009 by Dr. Kaye Broadbent, Associate Professor Janis Bailey, Professor Glenda Strachan and Ms. Susan Ressia from the Department of Employment Relations, Griffith Business School, Griffith University, Queensland. *Reaching Out: Enhancing the Accessibility of the Queensland Working Women's Service (QWWS) for Migrant Women* provides an overview of Migrant working women in Queensland, discusses the issues raised by Migrant women themselves who participated in the focus groups conducted for this research, and provides recommendations for QWWS to consider.

## Recommendations

This report makes the following recommendations:

**Recommendation 1:** That QWWS lobby, where possible, for increases in expenditure by state and Federal governments on structured programs to assist Migrant women to enter the workforce.

**Recommendation 2:** That QWWS assist Migrant women with pre-employment matters by providing workshops on employment rights and the options available to address unfair and illegal treatment, including discrimination.

**Recommendation 3:** That QWWS continue to present submissions to relevant inquiries on the problems facing Migrant women in the workplace, and their solutions.

**Recommendation 4:** That QWWS continue to network in a collaborative way with local, regional and state Migrant organisations to assist Migrant working women in Queensland.

**Recommendation 5:** That QWWS improve awareness of its services amongst Migrant women by:

- Placing brochures in as many of the places listed on pp. 39-40 of this Report as is practically possible;
- When revising its brochure, take into account the issues set out on pp. 23-33 of this Report;
- When redesigning its brochure and website, take into account the issues discussed on pp. 34-38 of this Report;
- When considering places and/or media via which QWWS could be promoted, consider the suggestions on p. 40 of this Report, and
- Conduct events in conjunction with organisations listed on p. 41 of this Report.

Suggestions under Recommendation 5 include the following:

- Extend the provision of information sessions to Migrant communities in regional areas to enhance awareness of, and access to, QWWS's services.
- Increase the visibility of QWWS, for example, through the use of information booths at important local and state events attended by Migrant women. Advertise or sponsor announcements on Migrant community radio stations throughout Queensland and in Migrant and community newspapers.
- Further develop connections and contact with Migrant organisations, at both state and local levels, to strengthen and develop support networks for Migrant working women in Queensland.
- Identify the organisations and sites that are frequently accessed by Migrants in their search for advice and assistance including the Immigration Office, Centrelink, local libraries, shopping centres and existing Migrant networks in order to communicate information more widely.
- Modification of QWWS's marketing approach further emphasising the services QWWS provides for Migrant women. This approach may include announcements that interpreters in a range of languages are available, photos of a diverse range of Migrant women, a welcome message on the website in many languages, more website links to a range of specific ethnic and Migrant work-related organisations and job search agencies, and TAFE and university careers services.
- Changes to the QWWS website to reflect the ways Migrant women are likely to search for assistance with employment, including attention to the specific terms they may use for web searching. The website should include representation of Migrant women from a diverse range of backgrounds and occupations. In addition, it should provide profiles of QWWS staff so that women feel more comfortable in talking with staff. The website should incorporate visual information to assist people where English is their second language, translation of critical parts of the website into other languages, and advertise that interpreters are available for assistance.
- Changes to the QWWS brochure to include photographs that show a greater representation of women from a diverse range of backgrounds and occupations. It should include the website address, be clear about what is a

'free service' and what is a 'fee for service', and emphasise and assure prospective clients of confidentiality.

## **Acknowledgements**

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We are indebted to the many women who generously gave their time and participated in our focus groups, and thank them for their insights and the time they spent with us.

## **The Research Team**

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## **Abbreviations**

ANZSCO	Australia and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations
ANZSIC	Australia and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CARM	Caboolture and Redcliffe Multicultural Forum
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
IWAQ	Islamic Women's Association of Queensland
MAQ	Multicultural Affairs Queensland
MDA	Multicultural Development Association Inc
MESC	Mainly English Speaking Country
NESB	Non-English Speaking Background
QWWS	Queensland Working Women's Service
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TIC	Townsville Intercultural Centre
SCADD	Sudanese Community Association of Darling Downs Inc

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## **PART 1: SETTING THE SCENE**

This report has been prepared for the Queensland Working Women's Service (QWWS), a not-for-profit, community-based organisation providing work-related advice and advocacy services for working women in Queensland. To date, there is little research on how Migrant women gain access to information on work-related issues in Queensland. Not much is known about Migrant working women's experiences in Queensland, and little is known of how, or even whether, Migrant women access information about their rights at work, whether they are aware of services offered by organisations such as QWWS or how they would interact with such services.

This project was initiated to enhance the existing services QWWS provides for Migrant working women in Queensland. The research project was conducted by members of the Department of Employment Relations, Griffith Business School, Griffith University, Queensland.

The report

- provides some background about the services which QWWS offer to working women of all backgrounds, here in Queensland;
- provides a brief overview about the history of Migrant women's access to the Australian labour market and in particular in Queensland;
- discusses the research methodology and provides details about the conduct of the focus groups;
- presents the findings of the focus groups conducted in three Queensland cities;
- provides a series of recommended strategies that will improve upon and enhance QWWS's services for Migrant working women and job seekers in Queensland.

### **What Does QWWS do?**

The Queensland Working Women's Service Inc (QWWS), in operation since 1994, is a not-for-profit government funded organisation that provides a free, confidential service to assist women of all backgrounds with employment related matters (QWWS

2007). Specifically, QWWS provides advice and assistance about matters relating to industrial relations issues such as employment rights, minimum conditions and pay, as well as issues that are discriminatory in nature. The organisation also provides a referral service for women where issues may require further investigation and action. In addition, fee for service/training programs can be provided to organisations that want advice about a range of workplace and employment issues. The majority of client contact received by QWWS is from outside of the Brisbane Metropolitan area. Clients from rural and regional areas total 57%, while access from Brisbane clients totalled 21%, the remainder didn't specify their place of residence (QWWS 2008, p. 16).

There is now a growing body of research that suggests that types of advocacy based organisations like QWWS, termed in the UK literature as 'Civil Society Organisations' (CSOs), are important in providing employment advice and worker representation to people from a diverse range of backgrounds and those that are in more precarious employment (Heery, Abbott & Williams, 2009, pp. 2-3). In addition, these organisations can fill gaps or be accessed in addition to other services offered to workers, such as services offered through trade union membership (Heery et al, 2009, p. 3). Civil Society Organisations concentrate on providing services within four key areas:

- equality and anti-discrimination;
- employment rights and worker advocacy;
- work-life balance, and
- employer regulation (Heery et al 2009, p. 2).

In the 2005 QWWS Strategic Plan, women from Migrant backgrounds have been identified as a key priority for the organisation, as the number of Migrant women using the service had dropped significantly (by 48% since 2004 figures). As a result of this, QWWS are concerned that they do not adequately understand the issues faced by Migrant women in the workplace, and therefore need to gain a better understanding of issues relevant to Migrant women. In the 2007-2008 Annual Report, QWWS reported that the number of clients accessing their service from CALD backgrounds was 6.3%, compared to 74% of English speaking backgrounds, and 1.1% of Indigenous Australians, the remainder didn't specify their language

background (QWWS 2008, p. 16). This research project therefore aims to assist QWWS in gathering information that will assist the organisation to better meet the needs of Migrant women in Queensland.

## **PART 2: MIGRANT WOMEN IN QUEENSLAND**

### **What Does ‘Migrant’ Mean?**

In this report, the term ‘Migrant’ women will be used to represent women from all non-Australian born backgrounds. The emphasis is on Migrant women for whom English is not their first language. We have limited the use of terms such as ‘Non-English Speaking Background’ (NESB) or ‘Culturally and Linguistically Diverse’ (CALD) unless referring to specific documents or references that use these terms.

### **Overview of Migrant Women in the Australian Labour Market**

Australia has always had a diverse population. However, Australia has been slow in recognising the specific disadvantages faced by Migrant women (Sawer 1990, p. 107; Vasta 2005, pp. 14-15). Historically, Migrant settlers were viewed as male as they were ‘assumed to be the primary workers’ (Cobb-Clark, Connolly & Worswick 2001, p. 13). Consequently, many employment and language based post-arrival services were focussed on assisting the male, as head of the household, to make transitions into employment, while the needs of Migrant women were primarily ignored (Sawer 1990, pp. 107-108).

Migrant women experience significant change between their social and familial roles upon settling into their new, industrialised home (Alcorso & Harrison 1993, p. 33). Research in the 1980s and 1990s showed that Migrant women sought employment after arrival to ensure greater economic stability for their families because, more often than not, they needed to supplement the income of their male partners who were likely to be employed in the lower skilled and low paid sectors of the labour market (Alcorso 1991 p. 20; Montague & Stephens 1985, p. 7). Women who found employment were, like males, more likely to be employed in lower status positions that attracted low rates of pay, within the low and unskilled segments of the labour market (Collins 1991, pp. 78-79).

The post World War II immigration program from 1947-1972 further diversified the ethnic composition of Australia, many of whom took factory jobs. From 1971-1986, Migrant women were more than twice as likely as Australian-born women to hold jobs in the manufacturing sector (Alcorso & Harrison 1993, p. 39). These women were employed in industries such as textiles and clothing, food, beverages and tobacco, metal products, electronic and electrical components, plastics, rubber and paper products, furniture, and cleaning industries (Alcorso 1991, p. 20; Asian Women at Work 2006, p. 1), a trend that was evident throughout the global economy (Wichterich 2000, pp. 1-2). Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) Migrant women were considered 'cheap, flexible and dispensable sources of labour for the manufacturing industries in Australia' (Alcorso 1991, p 20). Apart from being low paid, the jobs often consisted of monotonous and laborious tasks. Migrant women were also more vulnerable to losing their jobs, as well as being at a greater risk of injury in the workplace than the general workforce (Alcorso 1991, p. 20). Furthermore, it was found that 'women who tend to be from middle-class or educated backgrounds tend to be more "fatalistic" towards their jobs, have less power to change their situation, and have low expectations of paid work generally rather than as an objective assessment of the job itself' (Alcorso 1991, p. 17). The literature also confirms that issues of disadvantage, barriers to employment, and poor employment outcomes continue to persist to this day for Migrants, particularly Migrant women (Ho & Alcorso 2004; Shamsuddin 1998).

In more recent times, Australian migration policy has focussed upon intakes of immigrants who fit the category of skilled Migrants. Queensland is the state with the third largest intake of new Migrant settlers, with more women settling than men during 2005-2006, particularly in the 15-24 and 25-34 year old age brackets (DIAC 2007, p. 9). However, while emphasis is on skilled migration and intakes are increasing for women from Migrant backgrounds, we know little about their work related concerns and the issues they face once in employment, and more specifically how they handle workplace problems in the context of the Australian industrial relations system. Recent research undertaken in the United Kingdom suggests that women from Migrant backgrounds are less likely to know or access information that will assist them with work related matters. In cases where Migrants have access to

trade union representation, there can still be problems with issues being followed through in full, particularly in cases where there has been discrimination in the workplace. Furthermore, access to assistance within community-based organisations has also been problematic, as resources for these organisations tend to be limited (Holgate, Pollert & Keles 2009, p. 6).

## The Labour Force Status of Migrant Women in Queensland

Census data collected in 2006 (Table 2.1) reveals that the total number of women in Queensland of working age (i.e. 15 years and over) totalled 1,576,498: 72% were Australian-born, and 21% were born overseas, while 7% did not state their birth country (see Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1 Women of working age by Migrant status, Queensland, 2006**

<b>Migrant Status</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Females 15 years and over	<b>1,576,498</b>	
Australian-born	<b>1,136 154</b>	72.1
Overseas-born	<b>332,527</b>	21.1
Not stated	<b>107,817</b>	6.8

Source: ABS 2006a.

Of the 332,527 Migrant women of working age residing in Queensland in 2006, half (51%) were employed, while 3.4% were unemployed. A further 43% were recorded as not being in the labour force, and 2% did not state their labour force status (see Table 2.2). The unemployment rate for NESB women and Mainly English speaking country (MESC) born women residing in Queensland were both recorded at 4% (DIAC 2009, p. 121).

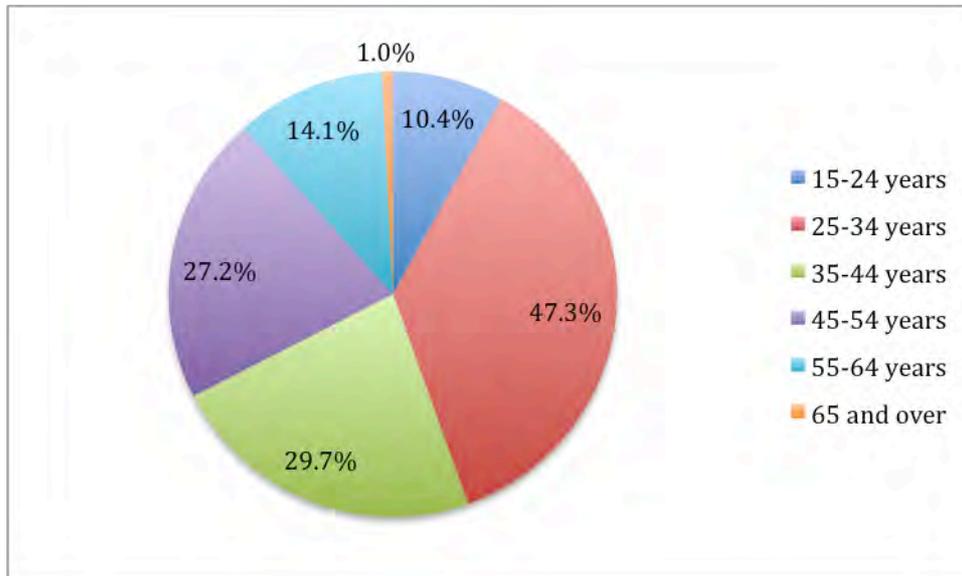
**Table 2.2 Overseas-born women of working age by labour force status, Queensland, 2006**

<b>Labour force Status</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
All Overseas-born	332,527	-
Employed	169,435	51
Unemployed	11,320	3.4
Not in the labour force	144,441	43.4
Labour Force Status not stated	7,331	2.2

Source: ABS 2006a.

The majority were aged 25 to 54 years, with nearly half aged 25 to 34 years (see Figure 2.1).

**Figure 2.1 Percentage of all Migrant females in the labour force in full-time and part-time employment by age, Queensland, December 2006 (N=187,800)**



Source: ABS 2009a.

## **PART 3: RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Research Methodology**

The research focussed on the ways in which QWWS could increase their interaction with Migrant women in Queensland, as QWWS recognised that this group of women was under-represented among its clients. The reasons for this were not clear, therefore it was necessary to ask a Migrant women themselves about the issues they faced in employment and how QWWS might reach out further to assist them. Focus groups were chosen as the most appropriate method for gaining information on these issues. Six focus groups were conducted in three different locations in Queensland: in the capital city of Brisbane (three focus groups); and in the large regional towns of Townsville (two focus groups) and Toowoomba (one group). The research team aimed to include a diverse range of Migrant women's experiences, incorporating different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and length of time resident in Australia.

The focus groups offered the women the opportunity to share their employment and pre-employment experiences, as well as to generate ideas about a range of issues related to QWWS's approach to Migrant women. The focus groups allowed the project team to collect specific information from women from over 20 different Migrant backgrounds. A range of questions were used to enable the participants to discuss topics related to employment, access to employment, access to employment services, and taking into account cultural issues. In addition, participants were asked to comment on QWWS's brochure and website.

The focus group method was an important tool in collecting information for this project, for reasons stated by Morgan (cited in Flick 2002, p. 120):

The hallmark of focus groups is the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group.

The focus group also enabled the 'exploration' (Neuman 2000, p. 274) of the understanding of Migrant women's knowledge about the broader industrial relations

system and identified how or where they would seek assistance if they experienced problems in the workplace. This method also assisted in the ‘generation of new ideas’ (Neuman 2000, p. 274) about how QWWS can raise their profile and awareness among Migrant women via the use of materials including their brochure and website. A short questionnaire was also used to collect regional and demographic information from participants to provide an overall profile of participants’ ethnicity, length of time resident in Australia, age, and employment history, including employment status, occupation and industry.

## **Focus Group Locations**

Collecting information and hearing the views of Migrant women throughout Queensland was important, thus we did not limit data collection to Brisbane. Consequently, three locations were chosen for the focus groups: Brisbane, Townsville and Toowoomba. These locations were identified after consultation and feedback was received from a community-based organisation that indicated where there were specific concentrations of Migrant groups that would be valuable to obtain feedback from for the purposes of the research project. The chosen localities were also discussed and confirmed with the Director of QWWS. Six focus groups were conducted: three in Brisbane, two in Townsville and one in Toowoomba.

***Brisbane*** is the state capital, located on the south-east corner of the Queensland. In 2006 the population was 1,676,389 (ABS 2008, p. 2). Almost one quarter of Brisbane’s population (370,958 or 23.6%) were born overseas. Of these residents, the majority were from South East Asia (10.7%) and China (9.1%) (ABS 2008, p. 17). The area where overseas born migrants are more likely to settle are the suburbs of Robertson, Sunnybank, Runcorn and Stretton, which are all located south of Brisbane city, and the western suburb of Darra. Two of the focus groups were organised with the assistance of the Multicultural Development Association (MDA) located in South Brisbane, with participants coming from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. The other Brisbane focus group targeted a specific cultural group, women from Muslim backgrounds. The Islamic Women’s Association of Queensland (IWAQ) provided access to this group.

*Townsville* is the second largest city in Queensland, with a population of over 175,000. Situated on the north-eastern coast 1300 kilometres north of Brisbane (ABS 2009b), 18.4% of Townsville's population are born overseas (ABS 2009b). The top five NESB source countries of migrants in the Townsville region are Papua New Guinea (0.5% of the population), Philippines (0.4%), Germany (0.4%), Italy (0.3%) and the Netherlands (0.2%) (Townsville City Council 2009, p. 16). Two focus groups were run in Townsville with Migrant women coming from a wide range of multicultural backgrounds. These focus groups were facilitated by the Townsville Intercultural Centre (TIC).

*Toowoomba* is a regional city approximately 130 kilometres to the west of Brisbane. Its population is estimated at 155,000 (ABS 2009b). Ten per cent of the population were born overseas. The Townsville focus group involved members of the Sudanese community who form the largest number of NESB migrants settled in the region, that is 0.4% of the total population (ABS 2007b). The Director of the Sudanese Community Association of Darling Downs Inc (SCADD) was contacted, and the team were able to undertake one focus group with women from Sudanese and Liberian backgrounds.

## **Focus Group Participants**

A total of 44 Migrant women participated in the six focus groups, 21 in Brisbane, 17 in Townsville and 6 in Toowoomba. One third (32%) of participants were aged 25 to 34 years and 27% aged 35 to 44 years. Almost two-thirds (64%) of the participants had been in Australia for 10 years or less, and 40% had been in the country for three years or less.

Participants came from 21 different countries. The largest groups represented were 10 women from the Philippines and six women from Sudan. This was an outcome of the use of both convenience and purposive sampling, in particular the focus group that was convened through the Sudanese Association of Darling Downs. The remaining participants came from a variety of countries (see Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1 Focus group participants by county of origin**

<b>Country of origin</b>	<b>Number</b>
Bosnia	1
China	2
East Timor	1
Egypt	3
Fiji	1
Philippines	10
Germany	1
Korea	1
Indonesia	1
Iran	1
Italy	1
Liberia	2
Malaysia	1
Nepal	1
Pakistan	1
Papua New Guinea	1
Portugal	1
Russia	1
Sri Lanka	3
Sudan	6
Vietnam	3
Not Stated	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>

More than half of the women (26) in the focus groups were employed, with the majority on a part-time and/or casual basis (see Table 3.2). A further 11 participants were on work placement. Six were unemployed (see Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2 Focus group participants by employment status**

<b>Employment status</b>	<b>Number</b>
Employed permanent full-time	4
Casual full-time	1
Permanent part-time	9
Casual part-time	4
Casual	1
Permanent not stated	2
Full-time not stated	1
Part-time not stated	4
Work placement	11
Unemployed	6
Not Stated	1

Over half the participants (24) worked in the health care and social assistance industry (see Table 3.3). The most frequent occupation was clerical and administrative work (17 participants), followed by community and personal service workers (9 participants) and professionals (6 participants) (see Table 3.3).

**Table 3.3 Focus group participants by industry and occupation**

		<b>Number</b>
Industry	Manufacturing	3
	Arts and Manufacturing	2
	Public administration & safety	1
	Education & training	6
	Health care & social assistance	24
	Inadequately described/Not stated	8
Occupation	Managers	1
	Professionals	6
	Community & personal service workers	9
	Clerical & administrative	17
	Technicians & Trades	1
	Labourer	2
	Inadequately described/Not stated	8

Source: ABS 2006b; ABS 2006c.

Industry was coded to 2006 Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC). Occupation was coded to 2006 Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO).

## **PART 4: FINDINGS FROM THE FOCUS GROUPS**

This section reports the findings from the six focus groups conducted with Migrant women in the three locations (Brisbane, Townsville and Toowoomba). It examines their experiences of gaining work, their experiences in the workplace, how they gained information on employment conditions and finally their impressions of the kinds of support and information QWWS currently provides, and their suggestions for the future.

### **The Pre-employment Phase**

For many of the women, simply finding a job, any job, let alone a job that fully used their qualifications and experience, was extremely difficult. The barriers that migrant women face in finding employment have been extensively reported in the literature (see Alcorso 2003; Alcorso & Ho 2006; Birrell & Rapson 2005; Colic-Peisker 2002; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2007; Hawthorne 2001; Ho 2006; Syed & Ali 2005), and leads to the persistence of poor employment outcomes for many (Ho & Alcorso 2004; Shamsuddin 1998). Consistent with the findings of other studies, Migrant women in all six focus groups reported difficulties gaining work, due to one or more of a complex set of factors: inadequate language skills (real, or perceived as being so by employers), discrimination, non-recognition of educational qualifications in some fields by the Australian authorities and, in other fields, perceptions that qualifications were not as good as Australian qualifications, and little or no recognition of the extensive employment experience the women may have had in their home country.

Many, especially newly arrived Migrant women, spoke of the frustration of being sent on numerous unpaid 'training' courses in order to gain work experience which simply resulted in them receiving a piece of paper which was not officially recognised. A woman from Liberia commented:

*I went for a job that went for 3 months and [was] very disappointed [a work experience position that lasted 3 months with the hope of gaining employment]. We were told that if we did work experience the train[ees] would get a job. My mother, my aunty they pay my transportation to come to work experience because I don't*

*have money. I worked every day and they only give me a certificate which is worth nothing. There is no government stamp on it.*

Many women articulated a strong belief that there was direct discrimination in recruitment and selection that was nevertheless difficult to prove. Toowoomba is a rural town with service jobs and a significant meat working industry. As noted, it has a small but significant community of people from African countries, particularly the Sudan. It has some church-run and other community support services. Acknowledging the difficult economic circumstances at the time in the town (one of the large meatworks was about to close), a woman said:

*You know it is hard. . . . people say there are no more jobs in Toowoomba, but sometimes you get on the internet and they advertise some jobs, but when you are going to apply for the jobs, you can't get in.*

The women perceived that at times employers only took account of their distinctive racial or cultural features (including skin colour, strong accent, and dress). A South African woman in Brisbane described a situation her friend had faced:

*I have a friend of mine, she wears a hijab [veil] now. Her English is very good. When she was applying for a job she approached many childcare centres. When she phoned they say 'oh come in, we do have a position for you as a Group Leader, please come in'. When they see her with her hijab, they said 'oh sorry, you know what, it has been taken'. So many places [like this].*

An Egyptian woman commented on the multiple barriers she faced as a Migrant woman:

*I think with migrant people we have a few barriers: woman, migrant, Muslim, wearing a hijab, and yeah old . . . and colouring.*

A common experience was being unemployed for a long period on arrival, despite the generally buoyant economic conditions in the state. An articulate Russian woman from Brisbane was highly discouraged by her experiences:

*This is my third year in Queensland. And I couldn't get a job. I've been applying for hundreds of jobs.*

Even names make a difference. One of our gatekeepers in an organisation we visited, an experienced community development worker, said he had conducted his own experiments in applying for jobs. With an 'Anglo' first name, and two family names, one 'Anglo' and one not, he had applied for jobs using one or another of his family names. He received many more offers of interview where he used his 'Anglo' family name.

Often multiple barriers confronted women, including lack of recognition of qualifications and lack of relevant Australian work experience. A Filipino woman from Brisbane told a common story:

*Well the first time I applied for a job, . . . I told them I don't have any Australian work environment experience yet, and then my qualifications have not been assessed, so because I didn't know that, so they said 'I'm sorry, we cannot hire you' and 'you don't have any references and everything, so'.*

There are limited programs to assist Migrant women to gain experience. However, two of our Brisbane focus groups were conducted with participants involved in just such a program conducted by the Multicultural Development Association. This program provides structured workshop-based training according to well-defined adult education principles, accompanied by well-designed work placements with organisations. These women were overwhelmingly positive about this experience; a strong, supportive camaraderie had developed amongst them, they looked optimistic and spoke in empowered, enthusiastic terms about what they had learnt during the program. Although resource-intensive, such programs can significantly improve the confidence and self-efficacy of individuals, and should be extended to a much larger number of Migrants. However, the focus group findings still reveal significant structural and attitudinal barriers to Migrant women gaining employment, despite the multiple (although often fragmented) services available to assist them. The barriers are the result of persistent employer discrimination – possibly some of it unconscious – which are best tackled by the combined and strategic action of governments, alongside employers with a strong sense of corporate responsibility, and in partnership with the not-for-profit organisations that service migrant workers' needs. While QWWS with its limited resources would be unable to initiate such a strategy,

we recommend that it support where possible via lobbying, increases in expenditure by state and Federal governments on structured programs to assist women enter the workforce.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

**That QWWS lobby, where possible, for increases in expenditure by state and Federal governments on structured programs to assist Migrant women to enter the workforce.**

### **RECOMMENDATION 2**

**That QWWS assist Migrant women with pre-employment matters by providing workshops on employment rights and the options available to address unfair and illegal treatment, including discrimination.**

### **Discrimination in the Workplace**

Discrimination in the workplace is a problem that continues to affect Migrant women's employment (Alcorso 2003; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2007). Discrimination is frequently not reported due to lack of knowledge about mechanisms of redress (such as anti-discrimination laws), lack of language skills, cultural issues and some migrants' vulnerable residency status (Syed & Ali 2005). Women from migrant backgrounds can be disadvantaged due to several intersecting factors – not only their identity as migrants – including gender, culture and religious beliefs (Syed & Ali 2005, p. 50). In the focus groups, we found that once Migrant women secure work, if they are lucky enough to do so, some perceive that some employers treat them differently from other workers or take advantage of them because of poor language

skills, or lack of knowledge about working conditions and employment rights. Given the difficulties of finding work, especially in regional areas, Migrant women who may already be suffering from a lack of confidence due to their vulnerability on several fronts are unlikely to be able to voice their concerns about workplace treatment. The focus groups revealed a number of instances of unfair or illegal treatment in the workplace, including:

- a Townsville woman faced discrimination when returning from maternity leave. Her supervisor had re-organised the workplace, her job had changed and she was harassed by her supervisor who wanted her to leave;
- a Toowoomba woman had suffered injury due to poor occupational health and safety in the workplace, and was discouraged from formally reporting it;
- several Brisbane women reported abuse from other colleagues due to their cultural background;
- women reported that they were expected to do more in their jobs and be paid the same as Mainly English Speaking Country (MESC) women, and
- problems over the correct payment of wages and superannuation.

In some cases the issue was addressed or rectified. However, women responded that the experience exacerbated their feelings of vulnerability.

Some instances of significant underpayment were mentioned, with women fearing job loss if they insisted on their rights. A Sudanese woman from Brisbane commented on the case of woman from her own cultural background who endured standover tactics from her employer, because she feared her job opportunities were limited:

*I got a lady she has been here for like just a few months . . . and she was like desperate looking for a job and so she found like a kitchen hand job in a café. And the guy was, paid her only \$10 an hour, and after a while she asked him and she said ‘well why you paying me that much while other people get like \$15 an hour?’ And he said ‘I pay you casual, so that’s why I pay you \$10 an hour’. She was working really hard in the kitchen, like doing everything, cleaning, helping in the kitchen, cooking and everything. And she said to him, ‘well if I provide you with like my tax file number and pay my tax, pay me more’. And he said ‘no this*

*is the only offer I have for you or you lose the job'. So she doesn't have a choice, she still in this job for \$10 an hour.*

Youth and migrant status could combine to exacerbate Migrant women's difficulties. A young woman from Vietnam talked about illegal working conditions in her workplace, and her lack of knowledge about where to go for assistance:

*I am doing hospitality . . . and I think they underpay. . . . one of the thing[s] that I found is really common with all my friend[s] as well, because when people are young they don't know how much to get paid and in the workplace. So they tend to pay you like \$5 an hour, when I was 19. . . . So that's what I mean about by I'm young, like I don't understand. You don't know where to find the right information and no-one is actually telling you what your rate's meant to be. That's what I mean by young, vulnerable migrants kind of thing.*

Often unfair (and potentially discriminatory) treatment was subtle and difficult to label and therefore to address. A Filipino woman from Townsville discussed the discriminatory treatment she received from her boss, when she approached him about another employee (not a migrant) who was not 'pulling their weight':

*I've been in different jobs like hospitality . . . You sort of, I mean, you get paid the same and you're doing the same, you're supposed to do the same job, but other people, but you don't get treated the same. . . . they [the boss/manager] just turn around and just say 'look, you're a workers and she's not'. And I just say 'is that because of the colour or it is because she's not reliable you don't make her do that?' . . . It's the way they look at us, like you know, can you do this, this and this and how come the other person is not being treated that way?*

Similarly, a South African woman commented about how she was treated differently from other staff:

*My first experience when I was working at a childcare centre . . . there was just all Australian ladies. I was the only . . . first Muslim lady. I said 'yeah I do have a diploma in childcare'. . . . So the group leader, she made me do all the rooms, all the mopping every room, she made me do all the nappy bins in all the rooms. She made me do the kitchen work. . . . She made me do the playground duty, clean the toys away. At the end of the day my feet were burning. . . . I was exhausted when I*

*went home I cried. I told my husband 'I can't go back'. . . . When I used to get phone calls from that centre I would just say 'sorry I am not available' and I never went back to that centre.*

Despite these negative experiences, many women commented that they felt overall satisfaction about living in Australia, often expressed as freedom from economic, political and even physical tyranny, and said that Australia was a good place to raise their children. At times however, this somewhat muted their willingness to complain about their treatment at work. A number of women commented that many Migrants worry that, if they do complain, they will receive a negative reference, or no reference at all. They know that references are important when applying for future work. Alternatively, their employer may report them to the employment agency through which the person was recruited, thus adversely affecting future job prospects.

A number of women related experiences about their lack of knowledge on employment rights and regulations. A Bosnian woman explained how her knowledge of her rights developed over time:

*When I came to Australia here and was a problem with English. . . . I start working in hotel that was just across the road from my house. . . . I work really hard. No one even tell you 'look, this is not the way how to do it'. After four years working there I see I was doing more than I should, and they didn't pay me. . . . I work in the restaurant, in the kitchen and the rest. . . . And you know like, not pay [for working in different areas] and, you know I discovered those things after four years.*

Some women had had positive experiences where they raised an issue with a manager or supervisor and it was addressed. For example, in relation to an issue of interpersonal relations in the workplace, one Brisbane woman said:

*Sometimes people are really jealous if you are working or you do some job and you know that you are doing a good job, but the people can't look at that, and they want to disturb you anyway. . . . but I'm doing the job just professionally and people just doesn't like [that], they try to disturb you. . . . So I talked to like the co-ordinator and from that I solved the problem.*

Lack of knowledge of Australian workplace culture caused difficulties for some women. An Egyptian woman from Brisbane commented how this could play out in the workplace:

*I think I have a very nasty experience that led to being sick . . . 14 years ago. I was moving from a woman's organisation which was [a] very good environment to a white, purely white Australian, what we call blue collar. . . . I think it was the flavour at time to have multicultural support so they . . . employ me, and I think there was [a feeling of] 'OK, 'let her sit in that corner, as long as we satisfy the funding body'. I was supposed to supervise someone, an Australian young man who I thought was stealing, and I was really upset. I gather evidence he was stealing things from the organisation, and he's under my supervision so I went to the Head of the organisation. . . . I found instead of punishing him or investigating him, he didn't get into trouble because it was considered that there's, you don't dob somebody in. I felt really, really bad and I was so sick because of the way they treated me . . . so I resigned.*

Similarly, the norms of Australian workplace culture affected a Sudanese woman from Toowoomba, who related her experience of being injured at work and the advice her co-workers gave her:

*I applied to . . . better job in a dryclean, it was a commercial dryclean . . . it is a small company. But the people there, they most of them, they have a long time like 20 years so when you get the people that have a long time there, you will get problem like that . . . maybe someone they did mistake but they will report your name and you don't know why. Some of the time the Supervisor come to me and shouted to me, I don't know what to do. . . . One day I was too stressed, the machine caught me and I broke one of my ribs. They did not put protection here [pointing to rib area], to protect the people. So when that girl was annoying me, and she went down and she talked to the boss, and the boss came and shout at me, and when I came back . . . my ribs went through the machine. . . . When I asked the people around me, they say 'here if you report now to the . . . health and safety, sometime maybe you will not get a job again.*

Focus group participants shared many experiences concerning the difficulties they encounter in the labour market. For those who find work, there is workplace

discrimination relating to maternity leave, abuse or more subtle negative treatment from supervisors and co-workers, and problems with payment of wages and other entitlements. These problems in many cases go unreported because women fear job loss, because they lack information about opportunities for redress, and because of, issues around language and/or culture that prevent migrant women from speaking out. The research underlines the multiple problems that confront Migrant women in the workplace. It will not be news to QWWS that discrimination persists, in direct and indirect ways, for Migrant women workers in Queensland workplaces. The next section explores how women gain knowledge about their workplace rights.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3**

**That QWWS continue to present submissions to relevant inquiries on the problems facing migrant women in the workplace, and their solutions.**

### **RECOMMENDATION 4**

**That QWWS continue to network in a collaborative way with local, regional and state Migrant organisations to assist Migrant working women in Queensland.**

## **When Do Migrant Women Gain Information About Their Workplace Rights?**

Participants emphasised that there are multiple points in the Migrant's journey where information could and should be provided. Many women said that

information about work-related rights and services should be included in pre-migration information sessions, and for newly arrived Migrants. A Nepalese woman resident in Brisbane for a year commented that she would have liked information about employment issues at the time her visa was granted:

*My view is it would be really helpful that we get information once a visa is granted. Because at that point if there is some information on suppose they say, ask that your visa has been granted and whatever, and later we get information that if you have any problems, if you have any employment issues, you can go through this website.*

For Migrant women who had been in Australia for a period of time, it was suggested that information about employment rights and where to seek further information should be provided when first commencing employment (e.g. in induction training and associated materials). However, this is dependent on the practices of individual employers and is thus highly variable. While it is mandatory to provide a copy of the relevant award or agreement in the workplace, in some workplaces it is not readily accessible and, even if it is, it may be difficult to interpret by Migrant workers. Material provided by employers is usually only in English and focus group participants said it was very difficult, especially for newly arrived migrants, to understand everything all at once. It would be anticipated that the Federal government's award modernisation process would improve this situation: the new Modern Awards are all in a reasonably standardised format, and structure and language has been improved to make them easier to understand. The new 'Fair Work Information Statement' is a useful step, although it does not provide detail about workplace-specific issues such as pay rates, penalty rates and loadings, breaks and the like. Hence, providing some information to Migrants in their own language or advising them where to access information in their own language would be helpful.

An Egyptian woman from Brisbane said:

*Mostly you get the information in English and people don't even bother to read it . . . If it is in your language, maybe you will have a look at it.*

Many women commented they would have liked to have known more about employment rights and anti-discrimination legislation before they commenced work.

Many were also uncertain about how interviews would be conducted and how to act in an interview (recognising that of course there are many formats and approaches to interviewing, depending on the employer). Finally, the need for information often only becomes apparent when women experience a problem at work; which is where QWWS and its services are important.

## **Where and How do Migrant Women Gain Information About Their Workplace Rights?**

How do Migrant women seek out information about their rights at work? What do they believe the best sources of information are? Are they aware of and what do they think about existing advocacy and assistance services relating to work issues?

Migrant women workers are highly reliant on resources within their own communities. Focus group participants relied on friends, family or others in the community, especially migrant support services, to assist them with workplace issues. While they found that such support services were excellent and assisted them regarding many issues, they spoke about the need for specific work-related information, referral and support services. Participants were able to name a range of sources of work-related information: Wageline, multicultural community groups, women's information services, and websites with industrial relations information. Many women were IT-savvy and identified '*the Internet*' as a resource for finding out information about work and rights at work. An Egyptian woman from Brisbane commented:

*If you don't know where to go, just Google it!*

However, women also said pamphlets and other print-based promotion were important, an issue that is discussed below in relation to QWWS's existing print materials. In one case, a Brisbane woman reported that the only organisation that she would think to call with a workplace problem would be the police.

Only one woman, from Toowoomba, reported that she had approached a union for information but she was unclear of the role of unions:

*When I'm working in a meat factory about 6 years ago. I got no problem but the union all the time they write the letter to me because I'm a member. . . . But I do not understand how [what] kind of help they're going to help someone in trouble from work. . . . I don't know what I pay my money for, I don't know what to do.*

From each focus group, it appears that many of the women are technologically savvy, and are able to search for information through the Internet. Knowledge about the specific search terms used when searching for help assistance would be useful, so that the QWWS website can easily be located in search results.

### **How Well-known is QWWS to Migrant Women?**

It was apparent that there was a lack of knowledge about QWWS and its services. Only two of the 44 participants had seen the QWWS brochure ('Need Advice About Work') before, and/or had accessed QWWS's website ([www.qwws.org.au](http://www.qwws.org.au)). One woman from Townsville (Focus Group 2) said that she 'thought' that she had seen it within her workplace (which is a community-based organisation). One woman from the Islamic Women's Association of Queensland focus group had seen the brochure at Women's Infolink, and organisation based in Brisbane city. No one had used QWWS or knew of anyone who had done so.

However, once the aims and activities of QWWS were explained to them, focus group participants thought that the organisation provided valuable advice and assistance on workplace issues and was a worthwhile and necessary service. The women universally felt that the service should be easily accessible and free, particularly for vulnerable workers in lower paid occupations.

One Toowoomba based woman thought that the organisation's name was confusing, as she felt that there was no indication that the service helps with workplace problems.

## **Migrant Women's Views on the QWWS Brochure**

Focus group participants were asked to read QWWS's brochure ('Need Advice About Work') and provide feedback about its look, the information it contained, and the type of message the brochure was trying to portray. An overarching, positive response came from a Brisbane woman who said:

*I think they are problem support, if I had seen this brochure and then I have a problem with my work, I think it will help me a lot. I think I would be able to call this number and tell them and can you give me advice about the problem in my workplace.*

For some participants, the title of the brochure was confusing. For example, two women, one from Brisbane one from Townsville, commented that the title 'Need advice about Work?' made them feel that the brochure was for an employment agency, rather an organisation that advised on problems in the workplace. It was suggested that QWWS needed to include the words 'Advice about your rights at work' in a prominent position. Other suggested additions to the text were that QWWS's office hours needed to be given, and that those hours should also be available on the website so people know the most appropriate time to ring. This would improve the likelihood of women using QWWS's services; as a woman from Brisbane said:

*You know if they have their working hours in the pamphlet, I would prepare myself that I could call now, I'm angry but I couldn't call now because no-one would be there.*

Women from the focus group conducted at IWAQ said that they were confused about what was meant by the term 'Fee for Service', and suggested that this should be removed from the brochure. This was also raised by women in the Townsville focus groups who stated that the brochure needs to be clear about what is 'Free' and what is 'Fee for Service'.

A number of women said that the issue of confidentiality should be emphasised in the brochure, particularly as cultural norms may make it difficult for women to disclose

issues of a sensitive nature (e.g. sexual harassment) (Syed & Ali 2005, p. 50). A woman from Brisbane stressed the importance of confidentiality:

*May I suggest to include somewhere to explain about the confidentiality and the complaint, the procedure for complaint... For me, usually these kind of things when it is included in a website, give me a kind of trust and assurance... That if I go somewhere, they know how to deal with confidentiality and they have a procedure for complain[ts] and all those things... Honestly for me, just the word confidential is not enough... that is why some people do not want to risk about complaining.*

There were varying responses to the visual images used on the brochure. A few did not recognise the 'Venus' symbol or associate it with women, although most did. Some women felt that the representation of women in different jobs on the front of the brochure was sufficiently wide, while other groups felt that more women from Migrant/ethnic backgrounds should be represented, including Islamic women. The Townsville focus groups suggested that the brochure should represent more occupational diversity (e.g. low paid workers such as cleaners and café staff). Regarding the brochure's imagery, an Egyptian woman from Brisbane commented:

*For me if I look at this [brochure] yes there is a burqa [veil] person but it's not telling me that it is for persons from non-English speaking background. It needs to be more cultural[ly] appropriate and attract . . . maybe if you can give a hint that you can provide language support by putting a different language on it will give you the sense that you know 'oh yeah' that maybe have someone who can speak my language. . . . So image[s to be] a bit [more] attentive, maybe a South African woman or an Indian woman can speak better English than anyone else [referring to images already on the brochure]. . . . Maybe under 'freecall' you can say 'We speak your language'.*

Women from Townsville suggested about the brochure:

*It's just kind of look a bit more European . . . because like women from CALD [Culturally and Linguistically Diverse] are more different, backgrounds . . .*

A few women thought that the colours were too dark, even depressing, although the majority liked the colours.

Other suggestions were made about the detail of the text and images in the brochure. While the QWWS brochure is available in several languages – Italian, Tagalog, Bahasa Indonesian, Vietnamese, Chinese and Arabic - participants in all focus groups commented that it would be useful for the brochure to be available in other languages. Some suggestions included: Farsi, Japanese, Hindi, Bosnian, Croatian, Somali and some languages from the Sudan and Afghanistan. Women suggested that the QWWS website address should also be included on the brochure.

### **The QWWS Website**

Almost every participant said that they knew how to use the Internet. As noted above, only two participants had prior knowledge of QWWS. Participants in two of the focus groups, those conducted in association with an MDA training program, had been shown the website as part of their training.

Focus group participants were given a page-by-page viewing of the QWWS website. In two locations, there was direct access to the website via the Internet. In the other locations, a simulation of the QWWS website was created with the use of screen shots which were discussed with participants.

In general, the women were pleased that QWWS staff seemed to be from a range of backgrounds, but they would like to know more about them. The Brisbane and Townsville groups suggested that a photograph and a short biography of each staff member, including their qualifications and experience, be included on the website. This would indicate the diversity of QWWS staff and ensure that women accessing the service felt more comfortable with the person giving them advice. Participants also emphasised the importance of speaking to someone who was well qualified and experienced – while it was a bonus for them that QWWS employed a diversity of staff, and encouraged their trust in the service, the skills and qualifications of the staff were paramount.

Participants suggested translation of the website – or at least parts of it – into other languages. Some women also mentioned that there needed to be a message indicating

that migrants were able to contact QWWS perhaps listing some of the languages where interpreters were available.

Participants also suggested that the QWWS website have links to a wider range of agencies, including the Multicultural Development Association; ACCES Services Inc; the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland; Refugee Health Service; Refugee Immigrant Legal Service (RAILS), and TAFE and University Careers Services as well as regional events such as the Townsville Multicultural Festival and Conference. Where appropriate, QWWS should also request that organisations link to QWWS's site.

### **Would the Migrant Women Approach QWWS?**

Participants indicated that, having been made aware of QWWS, they would feel comfortable contacting the service if they had problems in their workplace and would be very confident in recommending QWWS to their clients, friends, family and colleagues.

Some women had a preference for Internet access as they felt they could write down their problems more clearly than they could communicate them orally, and could better comprehend a written response because they could take their time to read and understand it. A Filipino woman from Townsville commented:

*Because sometimes I would admit though I can comprehend English, but the other party when they speak to you too quickly and the absence of the face, it sometimes is hard to understand.*

Most participants said that they would ring for assistance. However, they wanted to know whether, when they rang the 1800 number, they would speak to a person or be directed to an automated voice service. If they could only leave a message they were concerned as to the amount of time it would take to receive a call back. The women also raised concerns that many newly arrived migrants who may need to contact QWWS might not have a landline, and would find themselves having to listen to long recorded messages or be placed in a telephone queue on their mobile phones, which would discourage people from calling.

Some women living in regional areas suggested that QWWS should conduct regular visits in the form of workshops or advisory sessions so women could learn about work-related issues generally and/or ask about specific issues.

Overall, women felt the service QWWS provided, as a confidential, women-only, community-based agency, gave them confidence and made them very comfortable with making an approach for help. A woman from a Brisbane focus group explained:

*So you get Government support, unlike other countries... But I see that it helps, even the migrants coming in, they're have had some support from Centrelink and you know, everybody's willing to help and it's such a, you know, privilege to live them. When I come to know this one [QWWS], even though I find work environment problem, I know that I'm not alone, there's always someone there, so it gives me the courage... and it makes me feel like I'm a woman respected.*

A woman from the same focus group added:

*Add on top of that, it gives you the hope... You can do whatever you want [in this country], like study or do something, but still it's like you're not recognized or, men are always on top or something like that. But here, it's your hard work. If you are hard working you can get wherever you want to be. So with this help also, like this one specifically for women, it gives you that freedom and the courage of not hesitating or not holding back, because you know that this is a woman like me, and she's here to help me to get to where I want to be, or to take me to my goals. So that's really really something which is so good...*

### **Advertising QWWS's Services**

Given the overall endorsement of QWWS's services by the focus group participants, the issue for QWWS is making its services more visible. Many of the women, especially those who had been in Australia for a long time, were surprised QWWS had been around since 1994 as they had never heard of the organisation. All participants suggested that QWWS should disseminate its brochures widely, and had many suggestions for locations:

- public venues such as hospitals;

- women's clinics;
- doctors' surgeries;
- women's shelters;
- libraries;
- girls' schools, universities and TAFE colleges;
- Centrelink;
- job network providers (e.g. ACCES Service Inc);
- the Australian Taxation Office;
- the Immigration Office;
- migrant community organisations' directories, information booklets and databases (such as the 'Freshmail' mailing database, operated by the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland);
- advertising through cultural websites like the Chinese community website [www.freeoz.org](http://www.freeoz.org);
- community notices in shopping malls (which may be difficult to organise in a large scale way and are often subject to time limits), and
- advertisements on the back of 'shopper docket's'.

Fridge magnets were also suggested as very useful way of advertising the service.

Participants suggested advertising on multicultural radio stations throughout Queensland and in local community newspapers including those of specific ethnic communities. The Townsville women mentioned there are 22 different languages represented at the ethnic community radio station in Townsville which also covers Proserpine – the station broadcasts as 4K1G in Townsville and Triple T all over the north. Many of the women participating indicated a willingness to translate the brochure/advertising into community languages and 'plug' them on their shows. The Toowoomba group also advised that advertising was available through their local radio station, Radio Africa 4DDB FM 102.7 Toowoomba. Brisbane has 4EB Community Ethnic Radio Brisbane. Stories about the service in local free newspapers were also suggested, such as 'The Sun' in Townsville, MX in Brisbane and other community newspapers (e.g. 'Quest'), which migrants read to improve their English language skills.

It would also be useful for QWWS when they conduct workshops in regional areas to invite community workers so QWWS staff can introduce themselves and their services.

Where possible, QWWS should provide printed brochures, workshops and/or information stalls at events which focus on or bring together Migrants and their communities – for example, Townsville’s 5-day Multicultural festival in August; events run by the Caboolture and Redcliffe Multicultural (CARM) Forum; the Multicultural Development Association (MDA), and at local and state annual Migrant events such as the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland’s Multicultural Summit and at Multicultural Affairs Queensland (MAQ) advertised events.

### **Other Services QWWS Could Offer**

In addition to the services already offered by QWWS, focus group participants suggested free talks to women about employment related issues. Women suggested workshops on ‘Discrimination Issues’ for both employers and employees, and information sheets which could be accessed via the website, on topics such as ‘return to work’, especially for older women, and advice about pregnancy and maternity issues and work. A page on the QWWS website could also provide women with information about interviewing skills and putting a résumé together, including links to other useful web-based resources.

## **RECOMMENDATION 5**

**That QWWS improve awareness of its services amongst Migrant women by:**

- **Placing brochures in as many of the places listed on pp. 39-40 of this Report as is practically possible;**
- **When revising its brochure, take into account the issues set out on pp. 23-33 of this Report;**
- **When redesigning its brochure and website, take into account the issues discussed on pp. 34-38 of this Report;**
- **When considering places and/or media via which QWWS could be promoted, consider the suggestions on p. 40 of this Report, and**
- **Conduct events in conjunction with organisations listed on p. 41 of this Report.**

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