

Melbourne Water Pathways Program

Supported employment and training opportunities for skilled migrants and refugees facing barriers to finding work in their field of expertise.



**Jesuit
Social Services**
Building a Just Society



**Melbourne
Water**

The beginnings of the Pathways Program

In 2018, Niru Gosavi, General Manager of Major Capital Delivery at Melbourne Water, struck up a conversation with his Uber driver, an accomplished accountant from Pakistan who had recently moved to Australia. Despite sending out two hundred job applications, the driver had not received a single interview.

This chat sowed the seeds for Niru and another colleague, Edyta Grzyb, Portfolio Manager for Medium Risk Capital in Major Capital Delivery. They were moved to collaborate with Jesuit Social Services after witnessing the positive impact of a supported employment program the organisation was running with John Holland. That very year, they conceptualized the Melbourne Water Pathways Program, a joint effort with Jesuit Social Services. This initiative aimed to provide skilled migrants and refugees with opportunities for supported employment and training.

“Melbourne Water Pathways Program opened doors for me as a new immigrant, helping my family and me settle in, integrate, and thrive in Australia. Encountering supportive leaders who champion diversity and inclusion empowered me to embrace new challenges and grow in confidence. The program also connected me to a lasting network of colleagues who continue to offer support even after its completion. Grateful for the remarkable opportunities and connections it provided.”

Evelyn Mugisha

Manager, Governance and Program



Skilled migrants and refugees face many barriers to employment

People from refugee and migrant backgrounds who hold overseas qualifications and experience often struggle to gain relevant employment in Australia, even when there is a labour shortage in their field of expertise.

Barriers such as a lack of experience in the Australian workforce and limited knowledge of Australian workplace cultural norms and job-seeking processes are often intensified by recruitment system bias, where hiring managers disregard overseas qualifications and experience.

“I applied for between 150 and 200 jobs when I arrived in Australia. But without local experience, I wasn’t a contender.

The program helped me to kickstart my career in Australia, and that is exactly what I was looking for. Though it was a one-year program, I was able to land onto another role because of this opportunity.

Tapiwa Makuise
Project Manager



“I had hoped that my qualification from the UK, as well as my extensive experience as a technical manager and site engineer in Nigeria and the UK would stand me in good stead. But I came to realise that ultimately what matters in Australia is local experience.”

Christopher Daramola
Bridge Engineer



“Melbourne Water [Pathways Program] set my career path in Australia... and offered the best work culture, field experience and opportunity to work under great leadership.”

Arvin Khadem Samimi
Project Process Engineer



Recent research from Engineers Australia shows that 47 per cent of qualified migrant engineers in Australia were unemployed in 2021.

Without a concerted effort to break the cycle of disadvantage faced by skilled migrants and refugees, industries are losing access to much-needed professionals, and the settlement process for newly arrived people and families is more difficult.

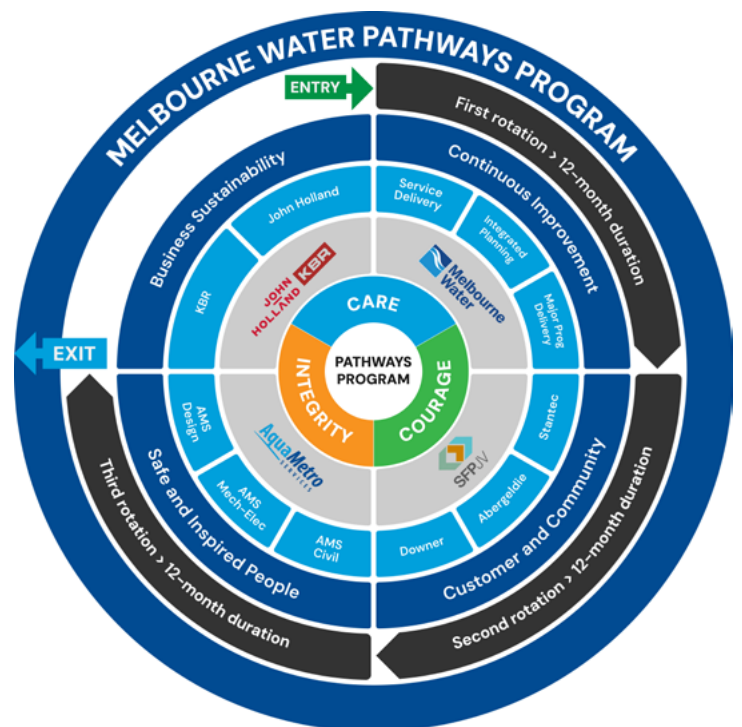
“Australia has an engineering skills shortage exacerbated by COVID-19, an engineering job vacancy rate that has gone up 97 per cent in just 12 months, and an economic recovery hinging on major infrastructure projects. [And yet] skilled engineers are driving taxis and delivering takeaway. This report clearly shows industry bias, a lack of a local networks and pathways to securing work as the biggest barriers to migrant engineers finding employment.”

Dr Bronwyn Evans AM
Engineers Australia CEO

Providing the work experience opportunity participants need to start careers in Australia

The Pathways Program offers paid, supported employment and training opportunities for skilled migrants and refugees who are facing barriers to finding work in their field of expertise, delivered in partnership with Jesuit Social Services. Strongly tied to Melbourne Water’s strategic vision of enhancing life and liveability, the program provides individuals at risk of marginalisation with valuable work experience needed to start their career in Australia, growing participants’ professional networks, capabilities, transferable skills and confidence. Beyond individual participants, the program has flow on effects for families and communities, increasing recognition of self-worth and positive role modelling.

The program provides Melbourne Water and the broader water industry with ready access to a pipeline of talented people for future vacancies, and helps foster a culture of inclusion and build internal business capability to work with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It continues to assist Melbourne Water in becoming a more diverse and inclusive organisation, characterised by the core values of care, courage and integrity.



The program has operated under two models:

- Model 1** provides participants with opportunities for rotation to industry contractors over three years (no longer current).
- Model 2** provides participants with experience within their field of expertise at Melbourne Water for two years.

Both models have been trialled for over four years. Under Model 1, participants have gone on to work at Stantec, Downer and Aqua Metro Services.

The impact

Between 2019–2022 the Pathways Program placed a total of 23 participants in supported employment at Melbourne Water, from a range of countries including Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Egypt, Uganda, Zimbabwe, India, Rwanda, Sudan, Sri Lanka and Syria.

A total of 23 participants:

- 7 participants were retained by Melbourne Water
- 11 found employment elsewhere in their field of expertise
- 2 left the program to seek other opportunities
- 3 are current program participants

The success of the Melbourne Water Pathways Program was recognised by the Australian Water Association and received the Organisational Excellence Award 2021 for 'Disrupting the status quo'.

There is a positive ripple effect for family members and the community as a whole as a result of the program. Several employees outside of the Program have been referred to Melbourne Water by Melbourne Water staff and alumni who have participated in volunteer, networking and advocacy events to support and encourage jobseekers to consider Melbourne Water careers.

"Regular check-ins, necessary support, and balanced workload were invaluable. The program enriched my profession with local experience and vital workplace ethics, opening doors for foreign professionals facing job market challenges."

Olusola Ajayi
Project Engineer



Pathways Program Partner: Jesuit Social Services

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation with over 45 years' experience working to build a just society where all people can live to their full potential. The organisation partners with community, government and business to support those most in need and work to change policies, practices, ideas and values that perpetuate inequality, prejudice and exclusion.

Corporate Diversity Partnerships

Over the past 14 years, Jesuit Social Services has initiated and implemented a range of employment programs for people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and asylum seekers and people with refugee backgrounds under its Corporate Diversity Partnerships (CDP).

The initial CDP program was the African–Australian Inclusion Program (2009–2019), a joint initiative of Jesuit Social Services and National Australia Bank (NAB), providing qualified African–Australians in Victoria and New South Wales with six months paid, supported work experience at NAB,

and a pathway to ongoing employment in the Australian business sector. The highly successful program was the model for subsequent Melbourne Water program, as well as programs with John Holland, Australian Taxation Office and other organisations, supporting 606 Participants into placement with an employer across 14 years.

Jesuit Social Services' employment programs are participant centred, providing a pathway for participants from initial engagement through to placement. The organisation provides holistic support to both participants and employers, from recruitment of participants, to arranging pre-employment training for candidates, and cultural agility training for workplace managers and supervisors.

A support framework is a standard part of Jesuit Social Services' service in each of our employer partner programs. This support framework timetables checks-ins with applicants and employers at regular intervals throughout the placement to ensure both the participant and employer have a successful program experience.

Scan QR code to learn more about Jesuit Social Services' Corporate Diversity Partnerships program.

