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Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration

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The Filipino Australian Affiliation of North Queensland (FAANQ) is an organisation that fosters harmony and unity between the Australian and Filipino cultures. We also promote Filipino culture through festivals and events. Projects which benefit Filipino new arrivals and contract workers are also encouraged. We aim to help Filipinos to settle happily in their new Australian home.

Our group has 170 members and FAANQ has contact with 1800 individuals in the Townsville, Charters Towers, Bowen, Ayr and Ingham regions. FAANQ has existed since 1986 and is managed by a committee elected by financial members. We have formed a sub-committee to assist newly arrived contract workers from the Philippines.

**Re: Filipino 457 Visa holders in the North Queensland region**

FAANQ is in touch with at least 100 457 Visa holders from the Philippines at the moment and this number is increasing everyday. The following are points and issues which these workers have raised with our members. These workers who have talked to us are very secretive and don't want to be identified because they don't want to risk their job security.

Below is a brief list of concerns raised to us by 457 workers, these points are expanded upon in the rest of the submission:

1. Desire for clarification on their work contracts in the areas of entitlements, superannuation, annual leave and other company benefits
2. Learning Aussie English in the workplace
3. Bullying by some Australian workers especially tradespeople
4. Lack of a good transport network
5. Workers want to know if sports injuries will jeopardise their job security
6. Information on financial planning and the Australian finance/savings system
7. Assistance in preparing tax returns both in their country of origin and in Australia
8. Concerns about personal safety at home
9. Orientation about Australian society including emergencies, laws, regulations

10. Workers being fired and sent home with no notice
11. Employers should offer orientation of the workplace before workers start their jobs
12. Workers are unaware of the conditions under which they can be fired.
13. Better accommodation arrangements
14. Workers want more specific in explanations of their rights and responsibilities in relation to their work contract and immigration status
15. Workers want to know under what conditions they can be sent home
16. Desire for workplace orientation by employers before starting work
17. There should be deeper exploration into the reasons for workers' binge drinking and misbehaviour in public outside of work hours
18. Workers want to be able to take second jobs to relieve boredom and fill the spare hours at weekends especially in regional towns
19. There is friction between workers from different companies

The following are details of issues related to conditions as 457 Visa Holders that workers have raised with us:

1. **Desire for clarification on their work contracts in the areas of entitlements, superannuation, annual leave and other company benefits:** Their conditions are written in complex (to them) or legal language which the workers don't understand. They don't want to ask for help for clarification at their workplace because they think the employer will believe they are too forward. They don't want to be seen to be 'rocking the boat' or be seen as demanding. They would like someone impartial to help them to understand what is written in their contract. Workers want to know about:
  - Tax minimisation schemes
  - Superannuation contributions and how to access them when they leave Australia
2. **Learning Aussie English in the workplace:** Workers don't understand some terms, slang and colloquial language used in the workplace. They are reluctant and embarrassed to ask what these mean but they feel that learning these type of words is essential to fitting into the workplace. Although most workers from the Philippines speak English well they would like some assistance or tuition to understand what is being said.
3. **Bullying by some Australian workers, especially tradespeople:** Workers say they have experienced bullying from co-workers and some say they are bullied every day. Types of bullying reported include:
  - Raised voices

- Saying things with sarcasm
- Messing up arrangements of tools or work that's already been completed
- Saying they are stupid and other insulting comments
- Threats eg 'If you don't do your job well, you'll be going back to your country in a wooden box.'

This bullying results in poor job performance, lack of confidence, increased shyness and quietness, no confidence in communication with other workers. Workers think they are being bullied because they are doing a good job and out of jealousy or insecurity other workers are trying to bring them down.

4. **Homesickness:** Workers say they resort to binge drinking and gambling to battle homesickness as most workers are living in Australia without their families. Other contributing factors to their homesickness are:
  - Boredom
  - Lack of friends outside of work
  - Lack of social activities
  - Lack of a good transport network
5. **Lack of a good transport network:** Worker suffer isolation as a result of not regularly going out after work and being limited by transport options. There is a very poor public transport system in Townsville and the region. Some workers are not encouraged to purchase a vehicle as they are picked up to come and go to work, taken shopping and anywhere else they need to go, hence they don't see need of a car. Not having a car limits social activities and opportunities for outings.
6. **Workers want to know if sports injuries will jeopardise their job security:** Workers want to join sports clubs to play basketball or other sports in competitions however they are unsure that if injured in sports they may be sent home because they are unable to work.
7. **Information on financial planning and the Australian finance/savings system:** Workers want to know of reputable financial institutions to help them in their financial planning. They would be happy to pay service fees for this information although they would prefer a more inexpensive option or free information sessions. They want this so that financial planning can be effective and they can maximise their financial outcomes.

8. **Assistance in preparing tax returns both in their country of origin and in Australia**
9. **Concerns about personal safety at home:** Some workers express that they feel unsafe at their arranged accommodation which is often groups of men lodging together. Some are worried about drunken violence and feel they cannot leave the accommodation because it is part of their work contract. Especially on weekends, they feel that in an emergency they have nowhere to turn.
10. **Orientation about Australian society including emergencies, laws, regulations:** Workers are unaware of regulations regarding traffic, fishing laws, wildlife regulations are some of the examples mentioned. Workers in the Townsville region did not even know to dial 000 when a recent life threatening emergency occurred recently and took an injured person in a car and then drove around looking for a hospital while the injured man lost blood.
11. **Workers being fired and sent home with no notice:** 2 workers were sent home to the Philippines by their employer on a Sunday, they were taken to the airport and put on a plane and not given any notice. They were asked to put on their work uniform and they assumed they were going to an alternative workplace, but the flight was one to the Philippines. Essentially they were tricked into going to the airport and sent away.
12. **Employers should offer orientation of the workplace before workers start their jobs:** Workers have requested training introducing their bosses and co-workers to them. Without this training workers don't feel confident in their knowledge of their work environment.
13. **Workers are unaware of the conditions under which they can be fired.**
14. **Better accommodation arrangements** – workers want to find their own independent accommodation and not be forced to stay in a place that their employer has arranged in their contract. Some workers have expressed that after the first year of their contract they want to be free to leave accommodation their employer has arranged and to move into a place they rent themselves.
15. **Workers want more specific in explanations of their rights and responsibilities in relation to their work contract and immigration status:** Some workers have expressed that they would be able to understand better if this information was written in the Tagalog language.
16. **Workers want to know under what conditions they can be sent home**

17. **There should be deeper exploration into the reasons for workers' binge drinking and misbehaviour in public outside of work hours** eg homesickness, boredom, unhappiness
18. **Workers want to be able to take second jobs to relieve boredom and fill the spare hours at weekends especially in regional towns –** workers want to do this if allowed
19. **There is friction between workers from different companies –** they don't know why.

#### Recommendations.

We would like to recommend that the Migrant Resource Centre and the Filipino community to be involved in the process of transition of workforce from overseas to Australian workforce. This involvement will be on a level of only orientation and cultural awareness for both sides the workers and the employers.

Our role will be mainly preventative and educational. We will be able to provide the following services with a minimal cost.

Information session for their workers about accessing emergency services, Australian law, workplace culture, Australians slangs and proverbs and culture and how to access transport.

Information session for the employers including managers and supervisors regarding cultural transition and issues involved with their particular culture that they are dealing with.

The above preventative measures will prevent many disasters and undesirable outcomes of recruitment of workers from overseas.