



INCREASING THE PARTICIPATION OF SINGLE MOTHERS IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

An International Specialised Skills Institute Fellowship.

VERONICA KIORIA

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1. Acknowledgements

The Fellow, Veronica Kioria would like to thank the Board and staff of Diamond Valley Learning Centre for the great support including providing leave off work to complete the Fellowship program. The Fellow also wishes to acknowledge David Ling (Chairman, DVLC Board) for his support, expertise and his time during the Fellowship period.

Awarding Body – International Specialised Skills Institute (ISS Institute)

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The Victorian Government, through Higher Education and Skills (HES) of the Department of Education and Training, is responsible for the administration and coordination of programs for the provision of training and further education, adult education and employment services in Victoria and is a valued sponsor of the ISS Institute. The Fellow would like to thank them for providing funding for this Fellowship.

Personal acknowledgements

The Fellow also acknowledges Jane Nduati for providing in-depth information of her experience as a refugee single mother in Germany, Jens Liebe – Senior Programme Expert, UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for TVET for giving her an opportunity to participate in the UNEVOC TVET Leadership Programme. The Programme created a platform to connect and network with other International VET practitioners. Kerstin Christ – Hessian Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration Labour Market Integration and Promotion of Vocational Education and Training for information on the JAMBA Pilot Program.

2. Executive Summary

“Becoming a single parent can be like arriving with your children in a foreign country” (Single Mothers, a Resource for Parenting Solo); The Fellow has experienced both situations, having been exposed to various barriers single mothers are confronted with when accessing employment, training and workforce participation.

There are complex issues surrounding young mothers’ engagement with education including, but not limited to, access to suitable childcare during study/class time, adequate housing, financial support, and time to engage in studies are just a few impediments single mother students encounter on the road to procuring education and training.

Veronica Kioria has worked in the VET sector for over 15 years and her focus has been on single mothers from an African/Australian background. The Fellow has been involved in facilitating various activities and forums aimed at empowering single mothers from the local community in areas of leadership, entrepreneurship and financial management.

As a career single mother from a migrant background, the Fellow knows firsthand how difficult it is to undertake any training due to the above barriers. The Fellow had to navigate the language barrier, lack of family support, understanding the new and complex education system for both herself and her children. In addition, the lack of skills recognition; having studied and worked for a significant period of time in her country of origin was both challenging and disheartening. The Fellow pursued her studies while raising children, forging different means of support that were not government dependent, as well as always aiming to be a role model for her children.

This Fellowship took place in Germany for a period of 3 weeks. The Fellow visited government institutions, training organisations, employers and interviewed students as well as senior office holders and VET practitioners. The Fellow also attended the UNESCO-UNEVOC’s TVET Leadership Program 2019

Fellowship learnings

The Fellow learned:

- » VET institutional leaders need to be equipped with skills and tools that are required for innovation and effective leadership to implement change in their institutions, localities, regions and nations
- » Developing the transversal skills of learners ensures learners can transfer these skills to a wide variety of situations and work settings
- » A simplified skill and qualification assessment process encourages learners to engage in the process
- » The importance of solid partnerships between employers and the state and federal governments to ensure that a variety of skills training is available to learners
- » Employers must be well funded and equipped with the most current machinery and technology to ensure learners have access to current skills and remain competitive in the world market. This situation must be utilised more effectively in the Australian context.

Personal, professional and sectoral impact

From a personal perspective, the Fellow increased her sense of security, self-confidence and self-worth. The Fellowship forged both personal and professional networks drawn from different corners of the world exposing the Fellow to life outside Australia. The Fellow also feels more equipped to tackle personal challenges to achieve her dreams and to be a better role model to her adult children.

Professionally, the Fellow further developed her innovation and leadership skills and intends to challenge herself further by pursuing a PhD degree. The Fellow has increased her knowledge and skills which will make her a more skilled and knowledgeable VET practitioner. The ripple effect will be felt in the VET sector and in the wider community

The Fellow has shared her learnings with her employer, her staff and she has had the opportunity to build professional international networks. The Fellow has increased her sense of feeling valued and acknowledged as a professional with specialist expertise and improved her professional profile and credibility. The Fellow is deeply considering joining the ACFE Board to be able to share her experience and use her skills to influence change in the sector.

From a sectoral perspective, the Fellow, has observed critical it is to streamline and simplify skills and qualification assessments, and build solid partnerships with employers, the government and TAFE providers to support learner engagement. The Fellow plans to engage with the Department of Education to advocate and develop policies aimed at implementing these learnings.

Considerations / recommendations

- » VET leaders should be equipped with strategic knowledge (vision for change), thematic knowledge (knowledge for change) and leadership and management skills (skills to drive change), to become effective, innovative change agents in their institutions, localities and regions.
- » It is important to build not only technical but also transversal skills to ensure single mothers have skills that can be applied in a wide variety of situations and work settings
- » Simplify the skill and qualification assessment process to encourage single mothers to participate in the process and combine with short classroom training programs
- » Identify single existing services to form “alliances” to provide holistic, tailored provision of support to single mothers
- » Implement solid partnerships between employers and the state and federal governments and equip employers with the most current machinery and technology to ensure learners are endowed with the most current skills and remain competitive in the marketplace.

3. Fellowship Background

There's a widely-known African proverb that says "If you educate a man, you educate an individual. If you educate a woman, you educate a nation". This is because when you educate women the benefits are felt throughout the whole community. It's a magic multiplier in the development equation. When women gain access to education, they also become more aware of opportunities, more self-confident, open-minded and competitive.

This Fellowship aimed to identify strategies for increasing the participation of single mothers in education and training through the VET system. Data from the ABS (2007) shows that single parents tend to have lower levels of educational attainment. In 2006, 39% of single parents, compared with 24% of partnered parents, had left school prior to the completion of year 12 and had not completed a school qualification. There are complex issues surrounding young mothers' engagement with education including, but not limited to parenting, housing, employment, and previous educational experiences and outcomes including early school leaving. They often find it difficult to fit into the mainstream education environment.

The Stanford Social Innovation Review report by Barbara Gault & Jennifer Zeisler (May 3, 2019), says that lack of access of single mothers in education is an equity issue in society. "Unless colleges and policymakers do more to support single mothers in college—of whom 90 percent have low incomes—they will continue to struggle to access the education that is essential for economic success and a more equitable society".

In Germany, like in many other countries, the share of households categorised as single parent households has steadily increased since the 1970s. It was at about 19% of all households with children in 2013. This is 1.6 million households with children under 18, about 90% of which are headed by a mother (Support to lone parents; Discussion Paper. France, 21-22 October 2015).

The success of Germany's VET system both nationally and internationally is due not only to the country's national quality approach but how the system is able to integrate disadvantaged groups into education and training and the measures taken to support their successful completion.

Fellowship methodology

When undertaking the pre-Fellowship research, the Fellow noted that the German federal government, employers, stakeholders and even international organisations have worked together to provide tailored services to support single mothers in education and training. The Fellow organised meetings and interviews with both employers and students, site visits to VET Providers and employers and panel discussions to further investigate the mechanics of this successful approach.

During her international Fellowship, the Fellow participated in the following activities:

- » Visited and interviewed staff of the UNESCO-UNEVOC on the JAMBA Pilot Project

- » Attended the 2019 UNEVOC TVET Leadership Programme
- » Visited the Cologne Chamber of Skilled Crafts and Small Businesses understand how partnerships between employers, unions and government institutions support student engagement and participations
- » Observed employees upskilling using current machinery and technology
- » Visited the Federal Ministry of Education and Research to understand the key features of the German dual training system
- » Visited the Brewery Sunner to better understand the role that employers have in embedding transversal skills and in developing technical skills for their employees
- » Interviewed a VET student (single mother) on the support available that enables her to participate and engage in VET
- » Met with senior governmental representatives to gain a better understanding of the German dual training system
- » Formed a network of VET practitioners to share best practice on the engagement of single mothers in VET
- » Interacted and interviewed fellow international VET practitioners on their strategies in increasing VET participation and engagement of single mothers
- » Engaged in a panel discussion with UNEVOC Leaders on leadership skills to drive organisational change.

Fellowship period

The Fellowship period lasted 3 weeks, between the months of June and July 2018.

Fellow biography

The Fellow has been working in the VET sector for over 15 years. Her focus over the years has been on disadvantaged members of the African/Australian community. In the last three or four years, Veronica Kioria has been working with disengaged young people and has established systems and programs that support re-engagement of young people.

As a career single mother from a migrant background, Veronica Kioria knows first-hand how difficult it is to undertake any training due to various barriers single mothers face including lack of suitable childcare, housing, financial constraints etc. The Fellow has had to navigate the language barrier, lack of family support, understanding the new and complex education system not only for herself but for her children and lack of skills recognition having earlier graduated and worked for a significant period in her country of origin.



Abbreviations / Acronyms / Definitions

DVLC	Diamond Valley Learning Centre
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNEVOC	International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training.
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
VET	Vocational Education and Training
ACFE	Adult, Community and Further Education
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
CT	Credit Transfer
CECE	Spanish Confederation of Private Schools
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

4. Fellowship Learnings

Germany's vocational education and training is highly regarded internationally. It provides plenty of opportunities for everyone, from young to old, male or female, trainees to master craftsmen, technicians to self-employed entrepreneurs. It integrates all participants into education and training through putting in place adequate measures so that everyone can successfully complete their training. In the case of single parents (mothers), they are offered part-time training, qualifications-oriented training and return-to-learn training (e. g. through modules offering partial qualifications, retraining and external examinations) including support from jobcentres. This national approach is one of the reasons why the female labour force participation in Germany has been rising significantly, from 57 per cent in 1991 to 72 per cent in 2018 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2019).

The purpose of the Fellowship was to investigate different strategies that can be applied in Australia to increase the participation of single mothers in VET.

1. Attended UNEVOC TVET Leadership Programme

The UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training is one of 8 UNESCO institutes and centres working in the field of education, and the only organization working to promote the United Nations' mandate through TVET. As UNESCO's designated centre for technical and vocational education and training (TVET), UNESCO-UNEVOC supports UNESCO's Member States in their efforts to strengthen and upgrade their TVET systems. TVET is focused on the acquisition of knowledge and skills for the world of work, and helps youth and adults develop the skills needed for employment, decent work and entrepreneurship whilst supporting inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

The Fellow attended the 2019 TVET Leadership Programme held 24th June to 5th July 2019. The Leadership Programme provided the Fellow with the opportunity to interview and hold discussions with UNESCO-UNEVOC staff and TVET Leaders from 22 different countries. The Fellow learnt different strategies of engaging single mothers in Education and Training to increase their participation.





2. Visit to the offices of UNESCO & phone interview Head of the Dept - Hessian Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration Labour Market Integration and Promotion of Vocational Education and Training

The purpose of the visit to UNESCO (Bonn) was to learn more about the JAMBA Program. The JAMBA program was established as a pilot project by the Ministry of Economics, Transportation, Urban and Regional Development in 1998. The aim of the project was to improve the opportunities of young mothers into the labour market.

The Fellow learnt about integration strategies applied in the program to the participants to improve their independence and engagement in VET. These are discussed later in the report.

3. Visit to The Gebruder Sunner Brewery - Employer

Founded in 1830, the Gebruder Sunner Brewery is the oldest family-owned brewery in Cologne. The brewery employs young low skilled workers, drawn from the local community as a way of giving back to the community.

The purpose of the visit was for the Fellow to learn how the employer develops employees' both technical and transversal skills to ensure they can transfer these skills into a wide variety of situations and work settings if they choose to leave the brewery.

4. Visit to The Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany

The German VET system also known as "Dual VET" provides an excellent approach to skills development. The system is well-resourced, combining public and private funding. It has a well-developed and institutionalised VET research capacity, which includes the Federal Institute for VET, and a national network of research centres that study different aspects of the system to support continuous innovation and improvement.

The purpose of this visit was for the Fellow to understand why the German system of vocational training makes it much easier for refugee women to integrate into the labour market and German society.

5. Visit to Cologne Chamber of Skilled Crafts and Small Businesses

Established in 1978, the Butzweilerhof Training Centre has established a solid partnership between employers and the Federal Government to offer different trades to partner employers. Trainees are drawn from employment and are provided skills to match the job requirements. The Butzweilerhof Training Centre is equipped with the most current machinery and technology to ensure trainees are endowed with current industry skills and remain competitive in the world market.



6. Interview with Student (Single Mother)

For a year spanning 2015–2016, Europe experienced sudden and massive arrivals of migrants and refugees. Germany’s open-door policy towards refugees during this time was motivated by a humanitarian rationale when it decided “not to close the German borders during a humanitarian emergency.”

Jane Nduati came to Germany during this period. As a refugee and single mother, Jane would benefit from various innovative approaches Germany took to accommodate her and many others like her.

The interview with the student enabled the Fellow to hear from someone who had participated in VET and understand how she had benefited from the system.



5. Personal, professional and sectoral Impact

From a personal perspective, The Fellow was exposed to other VET practitioners from different parts of the world where she established both personal and professional relationships and networks. This exposure increased her sense of security and self-confidence. Being in a country that speaks a language other than English, the Fellow was faced with communication challenges. She was able to learn some German words and IT skills to translate information and documents from German to English via the internet. She developed self-confidence and better communication skills as she had to engage and interview people from different countries and social statuses. The Fellow also feels motivated and more equipped to tackle personal challenges in her life.

Through the Fellowship, the Fellow identified the need to develop her innovation and leadership skills and has decided to pursue her dream of completing a PhD degree to improve on these skills. The Fellow increased her knowledge of the VET sector and her skills as a VET Practitioner. She now employs these skills in supporting single mothers and disadvantaged learners. The Fellow is now more agile and adaptable to change and quick to implement change within her organisation. She has been able to share her experience and skills with TAFEs, other RTOs and Learn Local providers.

From a sectoral point of view, the Fellow acknowledges there is support provided to single mothers in education and training in Australia. Examples include the Parenting Payment, Family Tax Benefit Part A and B income support, Child Care Subsidy, Rent Assistance, partial participation requirements in employment and education and subsidised tuition fee for those who are undertaking training. However, in the direct context of education, this support is limited to partial participation requirements and tuition fee subsidies. More targeted support for

single mothers to engage in education and training should be provided. The Fellow identified strategies, that if implemented, could assist to increase the participation of single mothers in education and training. The Fellow intends to engage with the Department of Education to advocate and develop policies aimed at implementing these learnings.



6. Recommendations and Considerations

It is evident that low participation of single mothers in education and training is not unique to Australia. Many countries including Germany have faced the same challenge over many years. Looking at how these countries have tackled this challenge enables Australia to implement those strategies and build on what is already in place and what has worked elsewhere.

1. Equipping VET Practitioners

There is a need to equip VET practitioners with the skills required to be able to face the challenges of the enormous diversity of student cohorts found in the classroom as well as the ever-changing VET landscape. VET in Australia has experienced an unprecedented rate of change in recent times driven by the need for the VET system to meet the emerging needs of the economy so that Australia can compete in the global market.

VET practitioners need a wide range of teaching capabilities in their role including, understanding the theory and practice of learning, and curriculum design and evaluation; how to teach creatively and imaginatively to engage learners; how to assess effectively as well as understand how the VET system works. VET practitioners must also maintain digital currency in the technologies used in teaching as well as in their industrial practice. They must maintain their occupational expertise and hone their personal attributes, including professionalism and skills in the relational and dispositional aspects of their work. This is what is required to be a great VET teacher..

It is important that VET practitioners also be equipped with strategic knowledge (vision for change), so that they can be innovative and visionary in their role. The

strategic direction of VET is generally left to policy makers in state and federal government, is driven from the top-down and does not always reflect what is happening at the VET provider level. VET practitioners need to be equipped with leadership and management skills and the capacity to advocate for change so that they are able to influence the direction of their sector.

2. Building both Technical and Transversals Skills

It is important to equip single mothers with both technical and transversal skills (transferable skills) to ensure they have skills that can be applied in a wide variety of situations and work settings.

Technical skills are the abilities and knowledge needed to perform specific tasks. Transversal skills (transferable skills) are skills typically considered not specifically related to a particular job, task, academic discipline or area of knowledge that can be used in a wide variety of situations and work settings.

For so long, students have been equipped with technical skills, allowing them to take jobs based on these technical skills. With the technological innovations that continue to be made many employees will end up losing their job. They must be prepared to upskill, since they often lack the skills required to move into other job roles. Building transversals skills alongside technical skills ensures employees have a broad range of skills that can be transferred and adapted to different work needs and environments. This cannot be done by VET practitioners alone. There is need for all stakeholders to be involved in discussions on concepts, policies and implementation of transversal skills in the light of changing national, regional and global contexts.

3. Simplification of skills and qualifications assessment processes

Australia uses RPL and CT to assess a learners' existing knowledge, skills and experiences (including formal and informal learning) gained through life experiences and/or other employment to demonstrate their competency in a particular program.

The process of assessing skills and qualifications by RTOs can often be complex, time consuming, tedious, sometimes clumsy, and labour and resource intensive. There is also the element of cost the learner has to pay for the process which is determined on a fee-for-service basis, unless a learner is in receipt of government funding. Due to these complexities, costs and confusion, learners tend to forego the process, hence missing out on an excellent opportunity. Simplifying this process will encourage single mothers to participate in it.

4. Short classroom training programs

Many single mothers attending VET face challenges in attending classes, completing assessments and even doing work placements along with going to work, childcare and housework. Single mothers do more than double and triple duty to make a better life for their families, but too few have the support needed to juggle the competing time demands of school and parenthood. Providing shorter classroom training programs may contribute to improving their participation and engagement.

5. Holistic and tailored partnerships

Identifying single existing services to form "alliances" to provide holistic, tailored provision of support to single mothers. This includes forming solid partnerships between employers as well as state and federal governments to ensure employers are equipped with the most current machinery and technology and that learners have access to these via work placement or similar arrangements. This will ensure learners are endowed with the current skills and remain competitive in the marketplace. This requires all partners to take responsibility in supporting single mothers to complete education and training.



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ISS Institute
Level 1, 189 Faraday Street
Carlton VIC 3053

T 03 9347 4583
E info@issinstitute.org.au
W www.issinstitute.org.au

Published by International Specialised Skills Institute, Melbourne | www.issinstitute.org.au

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