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MEDIA RELEASE

Monday, 21 June 2021

When having a job can change a life: social enterprise celebrates National Refugee Week

National social enterprise **Soft Landing** is tackling disadvantage in local refugee communities by providing employment opportunities at its mattress recycling warehouse in Smithfield.

Celebrating National Refugee Week this week, Soft Landing State Manager NSW Joe Rasmussen said: "It can be tough for refugees to find opportunities, even if they were highly qualified in their countries of origin.

"Only 31 percent of refugees have a job five years after resettlement in Australia. Every day we see examples of how having and keeping a job can change someone's life."

Soft Landing collects and recycles mattresses to keep waste out of landfill and creates jobs for people experiencing barriers to work. It services 14 local Councils in greater Sydney, from the Sutherland Shire in the south, to the Hawkesbury in the north.

When the mattress recycler needed more hands after a move to manual processing at its Smithfield site in 2019, it looked to refugee communities in the local Fairfield area, which resettles the largest number of humanitarian migrants in Australia each year.

Two years later, most of the site's employees are on temporary protection visas or at different stages of attempting to become permanent residents – 33 out of 47. Mr Rasmussen won a Settlement Services International (SSI) Community Appreciation Award in late 2020 for his contribution to refugee employment, with SSI recognising his "dedication to the learning, growth and success" of staff.

Soft Landing employee 27-year-old Noor Kamal has been working at the Smithfield site since 2019 and says his job has helped him financially and socially.

"If I didn't have this job I wouldn't be able to support my family back home, and all of the friends I have made in Australia have been through my work," he said.

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Mr Kamal arrived in Australia in 2013 after fleeing Myanmar, where his Rohingya background saw him face persecution for being an ethnic minority. He spent five years in detention at Christmas Island and is now on a bridging visa.

Mr Kamal says the freedom of Australia is something he will always appreciate.

“I love Australia and I have a lot of freedom here compared to what I used to have, I even get to play local football.

“I’m very grateful to be here – it’s peaceful and I feel safe.”

Refugee Week is from Sunday 20 June to Saturday 26 June 2021. The theme for 2021 is Unity – the way forward. The week is an opportunity to raise awareness and establish dialogue in our communities about the refugee experience.

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