

# Space2b Social Design inc.

EPRI Report & case studies 2025



*Please Note: Participant names have been changed for privacy and safety*



Space2b Social Design  
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**TOGETHER WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

# ABOUT SPACE2B

Space2b is an art and design social enterprise established in 2013 by founders Mariam Issa, a Somali refugee and Janine Lawrie, an established designer from a mixed cultural background.

Their vision informed from their lived experience was to create a safe, welcoming space supporting **New & emerging Communities (NEC)** CALD migrants, refugees, people seeking asylum & International Students to thrive by connecting people, facilitating creative enterprise, and providing workplace training and business mentoring.

Operating from a vibrant, creative hub in Chapel St, St Kilda, Space2b has become a popular retail outlet, Artspace, employment, training and business hub and laneway café.

Its unique model is fully inclusive as every aspect of the business provides opportunities for locals to connect and train with new migrants and refugees.

*Space2b makes me feel I can do anything, SH*

## THE SPACE2B EXPERIENCE

Space2b's flagship program THE SPACE2B EXPERIENCE offers four connected employment pathways meeting participants wherever they are on their journey toward confidence, connection and employment:

**SPACE2FLY** Individually designed creative and business mentoring for artisans and entrepreneurs.

**SPACE2WORK** On the job work experience at Space2b across retail, hospitality, gallery, events, & marketing.

**SPACE2CREATE** Craft & English conversation meetups for those most vulnerable & isolated.

**SPACE2CONNECT** Activities, workshops and events that connect culturally diverse communities with the wider public.

**English for work & English support** Is provided across all programs

# The EPRI Program at Space2b

## THE SPACE2B APPROACH - A MODEL THAT MEETS PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

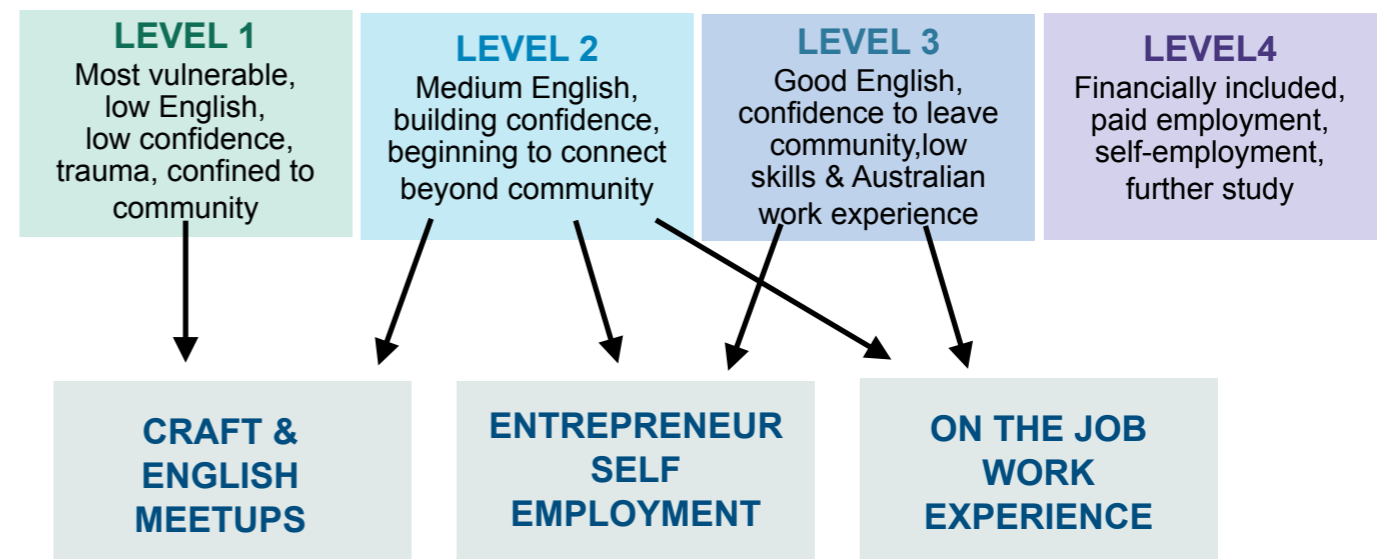
Funded by the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, the Economic Pathways to Refugee Integration (EPRI) program primarily supports refugees, humanitarian entrants and eligible migrants with **low English language proficiency and/ or low skills** to build pathways to economic participation.

Space2b is the only community hub supporting New & Emerging Communities in the City of Port Phillip. Our approach is built on 12+ years of sector expertise, deep community trust, and a model that meets people where they are, recognising that every step forward is a meaningful outcome, not just employment numbers.

*'Space2b helps me breathe'*

## OUR STAGED PATHWAY TO EMPLOYMENT & INCLUSION

We work with participants across four stages - from the most isolated and vulnerable, through to financial inclusion. We recognise and celebrate progress at every stage:



## OUR NEW OFF SITE PROGRAM

Thanks to the EPRI funding we now have a strong Off Site Program of Art, Craft & English that supports participants at Stage 1 - the most isolated and vulnerable. We work with partners supporting existing groups that meet in the security of a known safe space. We recognise and celebrate progress at every stage.

## EPRI PROGRAM IMPACT 2025

40 Women Participated in our EPRI program in 2025 across our four pathways

10 Participants gained hands-on work experience in our shop, gallery and café

27 Entrepreneurs were supported in product and business development through our Space2Fly program.

32 Participants took their first steps through our art, craft and English meetups

36 Participants improved their English language skills

39 Participants built confidence, made new connections and stepped outside their immediate community for the first time

11 Participants found paid work or moved into further training - 4 in part-time work, 2 in full-time employment and 4 into further study

26 Participants set up their own micro business. 25 are now selling their products at Space2b and 24 are selling elsewhere in the community

32 Experienced and skilled mentors supported our participants.

3018 Estimated Volunteer hours supported the program in 2025

\$13,580 Volunteer financial annual contribution (\$45/hr)



Women's sewing Circle

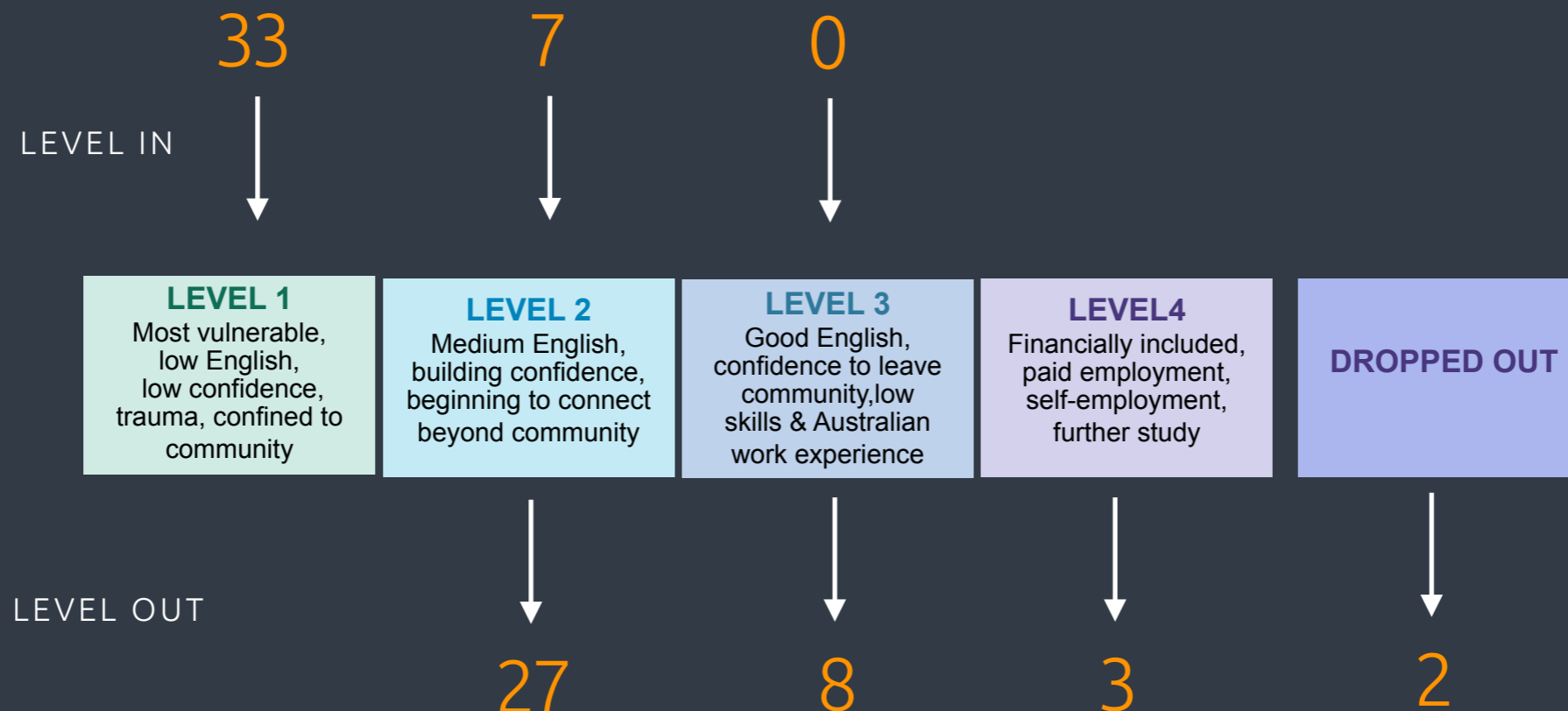
# EPRI OVERVIEW OF OUTCOMES 2025

## OUR STAGED PATHWAY TO EMPLOYMENT & INCLUSION

The chart below tracks every participant across our four stages - from their level of English, confidence and community connection when they first came to us, through to where they are now on their pathway to social and financial inclusion. It shows not just where people end up, but how far they have travelled.

Every participant is recorded - including those who stepped back due to family responsibilities or health. We believe these stories matter too. Leaving the program is not a failure; for many, the fact that they came at all, built trust and took those first steps is a significant achievement in itself. All outcomes, at every stage, are recognised and counted.

### 40 TOTAL EPRI PARTICIPANTS IN 2025



## Stage 1: Off Site Art & Craft Program

BUILDING CONFIDENCE, CONNECTIONS, ENGLISH & JOY

Our outreach and meetup programs are designed to meet the most isolated women exactly where they are - in spaces they already know and trust, through partner organisations.

In partnership with **South East Community Links (SECL)**, Space2b delivered a bespoke ten-session program for 23 female Afghan refugees from Melbourne's southeast. The group included grandmothers, daughters, granddaughters and sisters aged 21–65, with 21 participants having minimal education, very low English and trauma. Nine of these participants arrived in the last 5 years with the remaining in the last 10 years.

### WHO THEY ARE

23 Afghan refugee women - multi-generational family groups. All skilled artisans using traditional hand embroidery and sewing.

21 participants with minimal education and very low English. 2 with good English who assisted with coordination and translation.

Sessions held alternately at Little Croft Community Centre, Narre Warren, and at Space2b St Kilda.

### WHAT WE DELIVERED

- ✓ Product design & craft skills: hand embroidery, sewing, quality assurance
- ✓ Business skills: creating brand 'Collective Threads', labelling, selling on consignment
- ✓ English for life & business: very basic level
- ✓ Train journey from Cranbourne to St Kilda: navigating Myki and the Metro rail system
- ✓ Group lunch at Space2b: connecting across food and culture

## COLLECTIVE THREADS

Afghan women's collective



*Thank you for your partnership and openness - it has been a valuable experience for us and the participants! It was incredibly rewarding to see the ladies find their items in your store and smile*

Carla Ripepi, Community Development Practitioner, SECL (South East Community Links)



**COLLECTIVE THREADS**  
Afghan women's collective



## COLLECTIVE THREADS

Afghan women's collective

## OUTCOMES - OFFSITE ART, CRAFT & ENGLISH

### CONFIDENCE & WELLBEING

For many participants this was the first time they had left their immediate community to engage with people outside their language group. Several described feeling happier, less isolated and more hopeful - with one participant noting the program lifted her out of depression.

- All 23 participants reported increased confidence
- First time engaging in creative activities outside the home
- Certificate of achievement presented at public launch

### ENGLISH & COMMUNICATION

Participants built very basic but meaningful English through business vocabulary - labelling, pricing, customer interaction - practised in a safe and encouraging environment.

- English for business introduced - labelling, pricing, transactions
- Group coordination and translation modelled by more confident participants
- Public speaking: one participant shared her story at the product launch

### SKILLS & KNOWLEDGE

- Product design, quality assurance and craft skills development
- Brand creation - 'Collective Threads'
- Selling on consignment, labelling, basic business knowledge
- First experience of the Australian retail environment

### Connections & Community

The group navigated two train journeys from Cranbourne to St Kilda - a significant step toward independence. A shared lunch at Space2b allowed women to connect across food and culture beyond their immediate community network.

- First independent travel on Melbourne's public transport system
- New connections formed with local Australians and other cultures
- Partnership with SECL strengthened referral pathway

### Financial & Employment

- 41 products sold at launch - \$800 in sales at the launch
- Products continuing to sell in the Space2b shop
- Several participants planning a market stall at Space2b
- Small income earned with potential to grow
- One participant with greater English skills transitioned to our retail retail work experience program.

*I went to the doctors by myself, and I could do it all because of this program*

*Before this project I was so sad - now I am happier*

*The program gives us the chance to come out of the house. It's the only time we come out and do activities and laugh*

## Stage 2 : On the job Work Experience

BUILDING CONFIDENCE, WORK SKILLS, ENGLISH & CONNECTIONS

Space2b's 12-week paid retail training program is designed to reach participants who would not otherwise engage - payment is a crucial enabler for women balancing family responsibilities and financial pressure. Trainees work directly on the shop floor, trained by our retail manager and supported by a volunteer buddy mentor who builds skills, trust, English and genuine friendship alongside them.

### ROLE PLAYS FOR SALES AND CUSTOMER LIAISON

Training includes role plays and video scenarios covering real customer conversations - how to greet customers, talk about designers and products, handle sales and respond to questions. Practising in a safe, supported environment before stepping onto the floor builds both sales skills and the confidence to communicate in English with a diverse Australian public.

### PROFILE

Arrived 2 years ago, Originally from Central America. High trauma, low confidence, low spoken English and poor written English. Mother of 2, 55 years old, living locally, unemployed.

### WHAT WE DELIVERED : 12 WEEK PAID WORK EXPERIENCE

- ✓ Retail sales, customer liaison, Point of Sale(POS) system
- ✓ Product labelling, shop administration
- ✓ Inhouse communication, public speaking
- ✓ Working in Australia skills



**GRUELDA**  
Retail work experience



EPRI participant with mentor buddy

## OUTCOMES - PAID WORK EXPERIENCE 12 WEEK PROGRAM

### CONFIDENCE & WELLBEING

Grimaldi's transformation was one of the most visible in the program. She arrived with high trauma and very low self-esteem, and left as a confident team member who took initiative and supported other participants. Her growth had a ripple effect within her family and friendship networks.

### ENGLISH & COMMUNICATION

- Significant improvement in spoken English through daily customer interaction and English for work program
- Developed written communication skills for shop administration
- Built capacity for public speaking and team communication

### SKILLS & KNOWLEDGE

- Full retail training - sales, POS, customer service, merchandising
- Coordinated new designers and their stock within the shop
- Understanding of Australian workplace culture and expectations

### CONNECTIONS & COMMUNITY

- Built relationships with local customers, volunteers and staff
- Extended connections beyond her immediate community
- Skills and confidence created a ripple effect in family and friends

### FINANCIAL & EMPLOYMENT

- Completed paid employment at Space2b
- Secured part time employment at Air bnb
- In the process of setting up micro business - a sole trader, offering domestic and commercial cleaning services.

*Thank you again for assisting and so kindly taking Grimaldi on board. She is newly arrived in Australia from turbulent and unstable conditions in Venezuela. Her time with Space2B has had a significant impact - it has boosted her self-confidence and self-esteem, and has helped her gain an introduction to the Australian job market and local work culture. Her English skills and confidence have improved tremendously over the past few months. Amazing!*

Jose - Job Provider

## Stage 2 : Entrepreneur & Micro Business

BUILDING CONFIDENCE, BUSINESS SKILLS, ENGLISH & CONNECTIONS

For participants with medium English and confidence, our Space2Fly entrepreneur pathway builds real business skills alongside a growing income and professional network .

### PROFILE

Originally from Ethiopia. Single mother with medium level of English and education. Medium confidence, highly motivated

### THE BUSINESS: UNIQ HIJAB

Keja developed an import business selling women's scarves and dresses made in Ethiopia using traditional slow-fashion methods, families growing cotton, spinning thread and dyeing using natural colours before weaving. Proceeds are returned to the producing communities, women artisans.

### WHAT WE DELIVERED

#### 12 WEEK BUSINESS & PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

- ✓ Business skills
- ✓ Product development
- ✓ Costing & Finance
- ✓ Promotions
- ✓ Visual merchandising
- ✓ Retail sales, customer liaison, POS system



**KEJA**

Founder of Unique Hijabs



EPRI participant with mentor buddy

## OUTCOMES - ENTREPRENEUR 12 WEEK PROGRAM

### CONFIDENCE & WELLBEING

Keja arrived as a single mother with limited networks and no Australian business experience. By the end of the program she was presenting her brand publicly, speaking at a product launch and building a customer base - a transformation that extended well beyond business skills into her identity and sense of possibility.

### ENGLISH & COMMUNICATION

- Improved business English - presentations, customer communication, social media
- Delivered a public speech at the Uniq Hijab product launch
- Marketing and storytelling skills to share her brand's cultural story

### SKILLS & KNOWLEDGE

- Product development, quality assurance and market readiness
- Costing, accounting and finance fundamentals
- Visual merchandising and branding
- Understanding of Australian consumer markets, retail and wholesale systems
- Event planning, networking and social media strategy

### CONNECTIONS & COMMUNITY

- New personal and professional connections through the Space2b network
- Connected with other culturally diverse entrepreneurs
- Built visibility within Australian fashion retail community
- Ethical supply chain linked back to women producers in Ethiopia

### FINANCIAL & EMPLOYMENT

- Launched Uniq Hijab - now selling at Space2b and other retail outlets
- Increasing income through product sales
- Business model supports women artisans in Ethiopia
- Pathway toward sustainable self-employment established

*Thank you again for helping me with my dream to 'build a business selling my beautiful products from Ethiopia to sell to Australians'. I feel so happy seeing my products in such a beautiful shop next to professional designers. Makes me so proud!*

Keja

## Stage 1 : Crafts & English Conversation

BUILDING CONFIDENCE, SKILLS, ENGLISH & CONNECTIONS

For participants with low English and confidence, our in house Craft & English conversation women's circles are perfect for building confidence, friendships, English skills and bringing a little bit of joy into ones life.

### PROFILE

Khadis is a recent arrival to Australia (2024). She arrived with low English, low confidence and limited experience outside her immediate community. A skilled embroiderer with a love of sewing, she had the interest but not yet the courage to walk through the door alone. Her daughter brought her to Space2b for the first time - sitting with her until she felt safe enough to stay.

### WHAT WE DELIVERED

#### WEEKLY CRAFT & ENGLISH CONVERSATION

- ✓ Weekly craft sessions - sewing, embroidery and textile skills
- ✓ English conversation practice woven naturally through creative activity
- ✓ Supported by staff and volunteer buddy mentors who build trust over time
- ✓ Gentle introduction to Australian community life through shared making
- ✓ Encouragement to attend independently as confidence grows
- ✓ Using public transport

# KHADIS





EPRI participants with mentor buddy

## OUTCOMES - ART & ENGLISH CONVERSATION SESSIONS

### CONFIDENCE & WELLBEING

Khadis arrived unable to visit Space2b alone. Within weeks she was returning independently each week - a quiet but significant shift in confidence and self-belief. The Women's Circle became a safe anchor point in her new life.

- Now attends weekly sessions independently - travels to Space2b alone
- Visibly increased confidence and sense of belonging
- Reports feeling connected and welcomed

### ENGLISH & COMMUNICATION

- Conversational English improving through weekly interaction with other participants, volunteers and staff
- Communicates with women from different cultural backgrounds
- Building vocabulary through practical, purposeful activity

### SKILLS & KNOWLEDGE

- Sewing and embroidery skills developed and refined
- Learning about Australian product design and retail
- Beginning to understand what makes a product market-ready

### CONNECTIONS & COMMUNITY

- Has moved from Stage 1 to Stage 2- no longer confined within her immediate community
- Building friendships with women from other cultures and backgrounds
- Daughter has seen her mother grow in independence and confidence

### FINANCIAL & EMPLOYMENT

- Setting up her own small embroidery business - personalising clothing and making products to sell
- Products being considered for sale at Space2b
- Early steps toward financial independence and self-employment

*I was very lonely and feeling shaky in this new and strange country. Not speaking the language is very frightening, even to go and buy food. When my daughter took me to Space2b I was so nervous but the minute I walked through the door they made me feel happy, and safe and welcomed. I now look forward to our sessions every week.*

Kadis

EPRI participant - retail world Experience

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