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HOMESTAY ISSUES PAPER

The Australian Homestay Network (AHN)

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ISSUES IDENTIFIED AT HOLMESGLEN TAFE SEMINAR IN 2007

A paper was presented by Sylvia Lewohl on Homestay three years ago (May 2007) at Holmesglen TAFE where over 70 Industry representatives from all parts of Melbourne participated. David Bycroft led a discussion workshop regarding the Homestay issues of that time.

The issues from the Seminar in 2007are summarised below:

ISSUE IDENTIFIED IN 2007	2010 UPDATE
Different culture/lifestyle expectations between host and student	Some organisations have improved their communication and training here by using workshops and orientation sessions.
Lack of resources for supervisors of Homestay	The Homestay Coordinator's role is often attached to a member of staff who does not have the necessary skill to perform well in the position. Now that the Government has acknowledged Homestay as an ideal entry point for International students and recognised and acknowledged its importance significant attention and investment has been made to improving resources available for Homestay Coordinators.
Lack of support staff	There has been improvement in this area in some quarters. The small operators can benefit from working with larger support groups. Often small operators are unaware of National Code standards, believing that befriending hosts and being available for debriefing constitutes best practice.
Poor systems / processes	There are now excellent systems and processes available. Again the smaller operators who cannot establish appropriate support and systems, may benefit from working with larger groups and share access. This would reduce their risk level and provide for a safer environment for their students.
Need to maintain local individuality	This is still important and will always remain so. It is not so much an issue but a statement. Australia's largest network of Homestay Managers meets this goal by including local information in their student orientation package and encourages the personality of the Manager and staff to be prominent in the business.
Changing demographics of the students	Vast improvements in response to this are now evident in most areas.

Supply of trained hosts to deal with these issues	Training has remained vital but needs to be delivered by professionals in the industry. Many training packages are available now covering students from different countries including the Middle East
Need for nationally accredited processes, benchmarks and standards	The Australian Government has now recognised appropriate standards and the next step is Industry self regulation. The standards commended by the Government and deemed appropriate include: • An online compliant and accessible/fully trackable/auditable system • An acceptable industry Advisory Board overseeing the integrity of systems and processes • Professional 24/7 phone support including emergency and critical incident management • Appropriate insurances for both hosts and students • Part of a national homestay network committed to continuous improvement by providing staff, hosts and students with training, orientation and support
Need to educate agents	This is an ongoing process however the ESOS confirmation regarding screening of agents will go a long way to improvements for communication here. Documentation has improved greatly in some places including the supply of 'language of origin' Homestay fliers. ISANA and AHN conducted a series of focus groups for hosts of Saudi students which has gone a long way to improving education of agents re Homestay for this culture.
Varying levels of service provided to homestay students	This is still an issue however the creation of larger network groups and Government support for guidelines has gone a long way to moving the levels of service to a common offering. Many smaller operators are secretive of their service and processes and rarely network which draws attention to the fact that they are unaware of how the industry is moving forward and the importance of sharing information, discussion groups and networking opportunities.
Limited choice, lack of supply and quality of hosts	Advertising and training support for hosts has seen host pools increase dramatically in some places. Hosts need professional support as Homestay captures more culturally diverse students. This support should come from experienced Homestay Coordinators who receive professional development themselves, especially in cross cultural issues.
Need for better information and resources for parents/guardians	This is still an issue however the creation of larger network groups has seen improvements in communication here. More work is needed.

Need for compulsory insurance (hosts and students)	Post Senate, this is now starting to occur, however many Supervisors are leaving it up to the host to arrange without proper controls. It needs to be standardised and groups should band together to create a National Insurance buying group. Controls should also be set up for hosts who are renting and often not insured in any way
Need for professional 24/7 emergency support	Still a major issue in most places. Homestay Coordinators are put in the position of being on call 24/7 and the first point of call after hours to sometimes serious emergencies. One solution which works extremely well is a professional help desk. The Call Centre has access to necessary contacts in emergencies some of whom may be professionals. The Homestay Coordinator and other staff at the education provider are included in the list of contacts.

2010 ISANA HOMESTAY WORKGROUP ISSUE	INDUSTRY UPDATE
Advocacy and managing difficult situations	Homestay in Australia is in the midst of some very important changes. The numerous Government Taskforces combined with the Senate Inquiry and ESOS review have all assisted greatly in the move towards proper standards. It is recommended that in the future students do not pay fees directly to hosts (or landlords) so that financial problems are eliminated. Properly trained Homestay coordinators with experienced ongoing professional support ensure that students' and hosts' rights are properly represented and upheld
Student communication regarding their rights	It is a requirement that all Homestay policies and contracts are submitted as part of the CRICOS re-registration process. Transparency, proper documentation, accessibility, record keeping, and upfront information regarding rights and grievance procedures apply under the National Code.
Institution processes and policies regarding outsourcing/referring accommodation	Post ESOS (2010) and Senate Inquiry (2009) Institutions must do a complete audit of their accommodation practices and referral program. It is no longer appropriate to promote rental properties or homestay organisations who have not been properly vetted, contracted and meet the new industry standards. Outsourcing should only be done if schools are happy to approve the arrangements through checking all compliance requirements are being met.
Improving the quality of Homestay Hosts	Many operators use personal friends and acquaintances and have no process in place for refusing a host. Success comes by having a solid promotional program, formal online documented process for processing the application as well as including compulsory training, followed by a personal home interview. A host agreement which is a legal document and covers all aspects of the hosting arrangement must be signed.
Need for a Central Authority to refer for Homestay	This is important for Institutions who manage their own Homestay program however it is the right of all schools to join or not join industry groups and to maintain their independence in decision making.
Need for an Ombudsman in each State	This has now been resolved through the Senate Inquiry with an extension.

Continued:

2010 ISANA HOMESTAY WORKING PARTY ISSUE	INDUSTRY UPDATE
Problems with unscrupulous and unaccountable Homestay operators	ISANA needs to support industry to close down these operators. They can be beaten and with increased obligations now being demanded on Education Institutions to improve accommodation practices, combined with the requirement to vastly improved education agent quality, it is expected that there will be a large reduction in unscrupulous and unaccountable operators.
Ongoing Management of Student issues	Transparency, proper documentation, accessibility, record keeping, and upfront information regarding rights and grievance procedures are essential now for good Homestay Coordinators. This is important for Institutions who manage their own Homestay program however it is the right of all schools to join or not join industry groups and to maintain their independence in decision making.
Need for National Guidelines for Homestay	Post ESOS (2010) and Senate Inquiry (2009) this is now happening. with the Australian Government recognising the need for appropriate standards and the next step is Industry self regulation. The standards could include • An online compliant and accessible/fully trackable/auditable system • Professional 24/7 phone support including emergency and critical incident management • Appropriate insurances for both hosts and students • Staff training • Host training However, not all are applicable to all providers, it is important to recognise the scale of operation.
National Register of unacceptable Homestay Hosts	As the industry moves towards larger and fewer Homestay Managers this becomes easy to achieve but remains an issue of choice.
Clarification of definitions (e.g. homestay vs. rooming, tax and social security ramifications of homestay, acceptable student numbers per household, etc.)	Taxation and the Homestay issue has been misinterpreted over time and there is need for formal documentation to be in place and accessible to industry.

Loopholes (e.g. Parent nominated and when a family's visa status changes to permanent residence)	Within the student visa program, DIAC should be requested to check that student guardian visa holders comply with their visa conditions. There is a recommendation from Industry that parent nominated homestay students become part of the Homestay program offered by the education provider.
Online unsupervised Homestay	Good providers should be able to demonstrate that they are meeting the agreed industry standards. Industry should be aware that web based advertising by unscrupulous hosts is becoming widespread and therefore we need to educate students to ONLY use agencies promoted by their institution. Pressure needs to be put on Government to help shut down inappropriate Homestay programs.