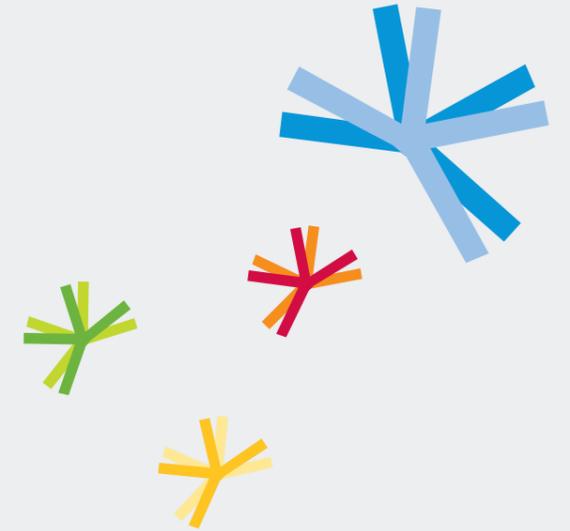




All in for Armidale: A whole-of-community approach to Ezidi settlement

Settlement Services International

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Foreword by SSI CEO Violet Roumeliotis

Settlement Services International (SSI) recognises that migrants and refugees have a critical part to play in supporting Australia's regional development goals.

In this paper, you will read first-hand accounts of newcomers and host community members in regional Australia coming together with a shared passion and on common ground over the past year. This is a direct result of SSI's 'whole-of-community' approach to settlement, that adopts a partnership approach to delivering on-arrival services to refugees, complemented by SSI's unique Community Engagement Framework.

Under the Federal Government's Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP), we provide on-arrival services to refugees in Armidale, Coffs Harbour, Newcastle and Greater Sydney region. Case managers support families to achieve their settlement goals, to become familiar with the local community and to connect with essential services, such as housing, education, English programs, health and employment assistance.

Working through an integrated model, SSI has added value to the funded settlement program, facilitating opportunities for newcomers to come together with Armidale locals with a common purpose. Our shared goal is to foster self-determination so that these newly arrived families become permanent, productive and valued members of the Armidale community.

Our standout achievement from this first stage of refugee arrivals in a new settlement location is the extraordinarily high retention rates among families settled in Armidale. This is a wonderful outcome

for us as a provider and, more importantly, this is a wonderful outcome for these families, who are growing roots and rebuilding their lives in a welcoming new home.

My own parents migrated to regional Australia from post-World War II Greece. At that time, Australia did not have organisations like SSI to help newcomers and to connect them to the broader Australian community. My parents were active contributors to our Greek community, but they needed my sisters and me to bridge the gap to the wider mainstream. This experience taught me the value of social connections and the critical role these play in integration.

We know achieving integration is not simple. It has many dimensions and it is a two-way process of mutual adaptation by the whole of the community, with each party having a shared responsibility for their own contribution, be they newcomers, host communities or government at all levels.

As CEO, I am very proud of SSI's dedicated investment to ensuring newcomers are active participants in the Armidale community. I'm equally proud how the Traditional Owners of the land and other members of wider Armidale community have, in turn, embraced the Ezidi community with warm hearts, compassion and respect. As a result, the host community and newcomers are building solid foundations for their new lives and shared future in Armidale.

Violet Roumeliotis

SSI CEO

2017 Telstra Australian Business Woman of the Year



Executive Summary

A unique approach to regional refugee settlement is delivering strong results in the new settlement location of Armidale, offering insights that will guide other regional centres seeking to welcome newcomers as long-term members of their communities.

Community organisation and social business SSI has overseen the settlement of over 300 refugees from Iraq and Syria in Armidale since February 2018 under the Federal Government's Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP).

SSI provides new arrivals with contracted HSP services, such as housing, orientation to community, links to education programs, training and employment assistance. In tandem with these services, SSI has implemented an integration model that includes community engagement, arts and culture, volunteering, project management, and marketing and communications.

Early results from this unique whole-of-community approach are extremely positive, with a high retention of new arrivals to date. This approach could be instrumental in the success of regional settlement strategies across Australia, if duplicated in other areas.

The Armidale community has forged countless connections with newcomers through community events, a volunteering service, newcomer-driven initiatives, and connections with sporting groups. At the same time, positive community attitudes toward the Ezidi refugees have strengthened.

SSI's success in Armidale shows the benefits settlement brings for both regional host communities and those on humanitarian visas. Welcoming newcomers to regional sites can stimulate local regional economies, boost workforces and offset population decline. For the newcomers, a regional environment can offer a warmer, less confronting settlement experience than that available in cities.

As an advocate for stronger pathways to regional communities, SSI recognises that regional settlement arrangements must accommodate the needs of both new arrivals and host communities. To realise the full potential of such arrangements, it is essential that the host community finds meaningful ways to welcome and support newcomers in their settlement and that the newcomers feel empowered, welcome and at home in their new environment.

This paper explores how SSI's whole-of-community approach is doing just that and the opportunities this brings for regional settlement right across Australia.



About SSI

Settlement Services International (SSI) is a leading community-based, social-purpose organisation that provides services in NSW across areas including refugee settlement, asylum seeker assistance, housing and multicultural foster care. SSI's vision is to achieve a society that values the diversity of its people and actively provides support to ensure meaningful social and economic participation and to assist individuals and families to reach their potential.

The organisation is contracted to deliver Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) services in a region that encompasses Sydney, Newcastle, Coffs Harbour and Armidale. In the 2018-19 financial year, SSI provided settlement support services to more than 9,000 refugees, including nearly 800 in regional Australia.

SSI believes in a collaborative, partnered approach to service delivery. It leads the NSW Settlement Partnership, a consortium of community organisations that helps deliver settlement services in NSW under the Department of Social Services' Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program. The consortium comprises 21 organisations, including SSI and its 11 member Migrant Resource Centres and multicultural services, as well as nine community organisations. In Armidale, SSI works with NSP member organisation Northern Settlement Services to deliver SETS.

One of the hallmarks of SSI's approach to service delivery is to provide self-funded initiatives that address gaps that it notices in support networks. For the past several years, SSI has delivered community engagement practice to foster the inclusion of newcomers in social, economic and community life.

About HSP

The Federal Government provides refugees with assistance on arrival and beyond through the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP). Services under the program are delivered by five contracted providers (including SSI) nationally, with a focus on establishing a foundation for newcomers to become self-reliant and to thrive in Australia. Service providers support refugees in areas including employment, education, housing, physical and mental health, managing money, community participation, family functioning, justice, and links to English language learning. Participation in the HSP is voluntary and services are delivered to clients through a needs-based case management approach. When refugees have achieved the HSP outcomes they are exited and referred to a longer-term settlement program called SETS.

About the Ezidi

The Ezidi (or Yazidi) people are a distinct ethno-religious group who have traditionally lived in areas of northern Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran, and speak Kurmanji. The Ezidi are an ancient minority who have passed on religion, culture and customs through oral storytelling from generation to generation. In 2014, Islamic State began a systemic series of attacks on northern Iraq's Ezidi people, slaughtering thousands and forcing many women into sexual slavery. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has termed the killings genocide. In September 2015, the Federal Government announced that it would make an additional 12,000 humanitarian program places available in response to the conflicts in Syria and Iraq.

About SETS

Northern Settlement Services (NSS) has delivered migrant support programs and case management services in Armidale since 2004. NSS delivers the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program, which equips and empowers refugee and migrant communities to address their settlement needs during the first five years of arrival. Funded by the Federal Government, SETS provides newcomers with settlement-related information, advice, advocacy and assistance to access services. Community capacity building initiatives help new and emerging community groups support their community to increase the social participation, and economic and personal wellbeing of community members. SETS aims to ensure longer-term positive settlement outcomes are achieved.

About Armidale

The city of Armidale is located approximately halfway between Sydney and Brisbane in the NSW Northern Tablelands. The region has a population of about 30,000 people. Armidale's primary industries include agriculture and education, with the University of New England (UNE) and schools including NEGS making it a regional educational hub. The largest employment sector is education and training. Armidale's levels for secondary and tertiary education completion are slightly above national averages, and considerably higher than many comparable regional cities. Armidale has had a generally positive view towards the settlement of Ezidi refugees from the outset of the process. Telephone surveys conducted by UNE Senior Lecturer in Psychology Dr Susan Watt indicated that a majority of residents were either 'enthusiastic' or 'positive' about the newcomers (see Community Outcomes section).

Refugee Settlement in Armidale

Australia has a long history of accepting refugees from global conflicts through its humanitarian program.

In recent years, successive federal governments have turned to regional areas to settle newcomers, with humanitarian regional settlement rising from three per cent in 1981, when humanitarian visas were first introduced, to 22 per cent in 2018.

With bipartisan support, governments and settlement providers have developed a more sophisticated, bespoke approach to regional settlement, with settlements currently under way in regional NSW, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania.

In August 2017, the Turnbull Government announced that the NSW city of Armidale would become the newest regional settlement site. Federal Member for New England and then Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce announced that some 200 refugees fleeing conflict in Syria and Iraq would be settled in the city. It soon emerged that the refugees were members of the Ezidi ethno-religious minority, a group targeted by Islamic State and subjected to genocide and other atrocities.

In November 2017, community-based organisation SSI was granted a contract to manage the settlement of the Ezidi refugees and provide services through the Federal Government's Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP).

The first refugees began arriving in Armidale in February 2018, at which time SSI had already set up a local office staffed with case managers, an orientation trainer and support staff. In addition to staff tasked with delivering HSP services, SSI also appointed a Community Engagement Coordinator to work on facilitating interactions with the local community and empowering the newcomer community to have a say in decisions affecting their settlement.

SSI has since provided settlement services to over 300 refugees in Armidale, assisting in areas such as meeting newcomers at the regional airport, finding them housing, and referring them to services for their mental and physical health. SSI has helped them to manage money, linked them to training including English lessons, helped them to seek employment and to navigate the key points of contact in the community.

In mid-2019, some 300 refugees were residents of Armidale with close to 200 more expected to arrive by the end of the year.



Unlocking the Benefits of Regional Settlement

The settlement of refugees in regional Australia has much to offer both host communities and newcomers. Many parts of regional and country Australia are experiencing economic and population decline, as younger people leave seeking opportunities in capital cities. Welcoming refugee families to a regional township has the potential to address labour shortages, to boost local economies, to revive flagging schools and to enrich local cultures.

For refugees, who have often experienced trauma, a regional town can offer a softer landing into Australian society. The more intimate scale offers rich opportunity for interpersonal connections, for developing a sense of community and for feeling at home.

A key prerequisite for unlocking the benefits of regional settlement is the attitude and involvement of the local community. A community that is well informed, welcoming, positive and actively involved in the settlement process provides a solid foundation for newcomers to build new lives and thrive. A community that is not supported can be less engaged, suspicious, frustrated and even hostile, and is likely to discourage more permanent settlement. Newcomers can be inclined to drift away, often to urban areas.

Also critical is newcomer self-determination and empowerment. Refugees who feel a sense of power in shaping their futures in their new community are more likely to step up and become engaged than those who are not empowered to make life choices in the settlement process.

One challenge to developing and maintaining positive community attitudes and empowering newcomers during regional settlement is that settlement service providers typically have little scope to address those community-based aspects of the process. The Humanitarian Settlement Program does excellent work in addressing the immediate and ongoing needs of refugees. The key deliverables for providers such as SSI include housing, links to services including health, education and training, and employment assistance. However, there is little or no scope for engaging and managing relationships with the local community, for coordinating volunteers, for developing dialogue between stakeholders, and for enabling newcomers to make important decisions about their futures in their new community.

What is needed are mechanisms to optimise the settlement process by enhancing the host community's perception of the newcomers, building bridges between all parts of the community, facilitating the work of volunteers and empowering newcomer communities to take more control of their futures.



Community Integration, Belonging and Participation

At its heart, SSI's community engagement approach recognises that no single organisation can address all the needs of newcomer communities. What are needed are collaborative and innovative solutions that involve a wide cross section of the community.

Successful SSI community engagement initiatives in Sydney include: the Community Innovation Fund, a small grants program for community leaders in Western Sydney who have a bold vision for realising their community's aspirations; and the Welcome2Sydney program where volunteer ambassadors host excursions for newcomers to visit the sites and landmarks of Sydney. Others include the Community Kitchen in Auburn, an intercultural gathering where people of different backgrounds share recipes and meals, culture, dance and music; and the annual New Beginnings Festival that celebrates of the creative work of artists, performers and craftspeople from refugee and migrant backgrounds living in NSW.

Integration is usually defined as the capacity to participate fully in economic, social, cultural and civic life (Fozdar & Hartley, 2013¹). SSI's approach to regional settlement sets out to ensure newcomers are encouraged to take part in local community life. It also aims to avoid challenges potentially created by a disengaged host community and a disempowered newcomer community.

Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework (Ager and Strang, 2008)² states that quality social integration is a two-way process between host communities and newcomers, which is largely shaped by access to community resources, exchanges between social groups, and is a shared responsibility of all members of society, including the three tiers of government.

A clear community engagement strategy was established in Armidale at the start of the settlement process, focusing on five strategic pillars. This was delivered by Community Engagement Coordinator Samantha Airs. "A community engagement approach means finding ways that both the new and the host community can have meaningful engagement that encourages sustainable, long-lasting settlement," she says. "It means listening to the new community first and being led by them, but also listening to the local community and what they have to offer."

The first pillar of the community engagement strategy was to harness voice in the newcomer community. That involved consultation within the Ezidi community to allow them to shape their settlement journey and to identify aspirations and cultural observances they wanted to share with the wider community. This helped shape the remainder of the strategy.

¹<https://espace.curtin.edu.au/handle/20.500.11937/47213>

²<https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article/21/2/166/1621262>

The second pillar of the strategy involved optimising stakeholder engagement. Civic leaders were enlisted to champion regional settlement, and relationships were developed with local service providers on whom the newcomers relied. Also crucial was developing a strong relationship with Armidale Regional Council, through measures including workshops with senior council staff and meetings between council and newcomers, and maintaining ties with local charities and advocacy groups.

The next pillar was to foster inclusion and belonging. Strategies included encouraging newcomers to participate in community events, supporting community groups to deliver projects to newcomers, and fostering cultural exchange between members of the Ezidi community and local Aboriginal family groups.

Pillar four was a strong volunteer program that encouraged local volunteers to carry out meaningful work that not only enhanced settlement and integration but also enriched newcomers' experience of community. The training offered ensured volunteers were skilled and confident to undertake their duties, and volunteer contributions were captured in media profiling and local award nominations.

The final pillar was looking at the role the arts and cultural expression play in settlement, integration and, more broadly, in multicultural society. That involved the production of high-quality cultural events that showcased culturally and linguistically diverse artists, as well as the pairing of newcomers with established artists and cultural practitioners.

Strategic Pillars

**Harness
community voice**

**Stakeholder
engagement**

**Foster inclusion
and belonging**

Volunteerism

Arts and Culture

Stakeholder Engagement Testimonials



Stakeholder Engagement: Armidale Mayor Simon Murray

In 2015, Armidale Regional Council unanimously voted to apply to welcome refugees from the conflict in Syria and Iraq to Armidale. Simon Murray has been Mayor since 2017 and witnessed and participated in the settlement of the Ezidi.

Why have people in Armidale generally been so receptive of the Ezidi?

Thanks to the University [of New England] we have about 57 different nationalities in Armidale. Because of that there's a high level of multicultural awareness. On top of that, you have community groups that have been advocating for refugees, and I think these factors have come together. People have had no concern in having refugees coming because they have experienced multiculturalism already.

What do the Ezidi settlers bring to the area?

They bring wealth in that they are a different culture coming in that is mixing with the other cultures we have and enriching the whole melting pot. They make Armidale more diverse. And they're not just sitting back – they're involving themselves in the community, and that to me is a very positive thing. Armidale and the region will benefit from that.

How has Council worked with SSI to support the settlement?

We've let SSI take the lead role and we have been supporting that work. For example, we have got a Youth Coordinator who has been working with them.

If ever an issue comes up, I know I can ring [Community Engagement Coordinator] Sam Airs at any time and say, 'how is this going?', or 'do you need help?' or 'can you help us?'. It's a relationship built on respect. There's no treading on toes. It's been a very mutual relationship.



Stakeholder Engagement: President of Armidale Sanctuary Lucinda Wright

Armidale Sanctuary helped pioneer refugee settlement in the Armidale area, sponsoring a number of refugees from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo from the early 2000s. Lucinda Wright is the current President.

What difference has SSI's Community Engagement approach made to the settlement of the Ezidi in Armidale?

I think it's an essential role. The Community Engagement Coordinator provides a very good link between SSI and other organisations and for liaising with the general community. Without that sort of community engagement role, you wouldn't get those more disparate sections of the community coming in. You might get the organisations and agencies who are contracted to do something, but not the people who would like to do something but may need some suggestions or some guidance.

What are some of the ways Sanctuary has worked with SSI to support the settlement?

We organised excursions for groups of Ezidis when they arrived, particularly in the beginning when they were first learning to use transport. As the children have settled into school, we have organised home reading volunteers to assist them with their reading. Our Vice President Jeff Seigel is an SSI volunteer who helped organise for some of the boys and later on the girls to link up with the soccer teams and play soccer. And we have had individuals who have signed up to the volunteer tutor program or have gone into TAFE to assist in English classes.

Community Outcomes

SSI's whole-of-community approach to regional settlement has contributed to positive outcomes in terms of the Armidale community's perceptions of settlement and the experience of the Ezidi community.

The outcomes of SSI's community engagement efforts show enormous engagement of the local community and countless positive interactions between the Ezidi newcomers and other groups.

In the area of harnessing voice in the Ezidi community, SSI's efforts have had many tangible results. Two 'community-voice' consultations in 2018 clearly established the Ezidi community's priorities and goals in their settlement, and resulted in outcomes such as the development of a dedicated burial site for the Ezidi community (page 19). The celebration of the Ezidi New Year attracted 250 participants, including 30 stakeholders, while the observation of the fourth anniversary of the Ezidi genocide attracted 200 participants. More than 20 community groups have come together to coordinate cultural celebrations.

In the stakeholder engagement area, SSI has participated in more than 200 briefing sessions, engaged 32 civic groups, and formed relationships with 25 community leaders. SSI has also delivered Culturally Responsive Practice training to upskill local service providers, and relationships have been established with three local charities who support newcomers, as well as other vulnerable community members, through times of hardship.

In terms of fostering inclusion, several events have been organised, including Armidale Picnic in the Park, while monthly meetings have been held with local settlement advocacy group, Armidale Sanctuary.

The volunteer program has attracted 27 active volunteers. Four volunteers were nominated for the New England Volunteer Awards 2019 and 10 were nominated for the Certificate of Appreciation for International Volunteer Day 2018. Both award ceremonies were organised through Armidale Regional Council.

In the arts-and-culture space, key events included a tour to Armidale by the SSI-organised Homelands World Music Tour, featuring refugee musicians who drew a crowd of 180 locals to the concert and music workshop. To mark Refugee Week 2018, 90 people attended the local screening of *The Staging Post* with a Q&A panel featuring the documentary filmmakers Muzafar Ali and Khadim Dai. A photography mentorship has also been established between a local commercial photographer and young novice photographer from the Ezidi community (see page 21).

Tim Gray, HSP Coordinator for SSI Armidale, said the cumulative impact of those measures had greatly enhanced the delivery of the HSP program in Armidale. "I believe that without community engagement the Armidale community's positive perception of settlement would not be quite as high," he said. "SSI's focus would be on delivering those front-line essential services such as sourcing GPs or issues with education or employment agencies. But, longer term, it's the wider social connections that create the 'glue' and relationships with the local community and better outcomes for all."

An interim report from an independent evaluation of SSI's delivery of HSP services in Armidale which is currently underway has stated that "early reports through [stakeholder] interviews indicate that progress has been good."

The report concludes, "The community engagement and volunteer efforts provided by SSI are separate from HSP but clearly complement the program and support its operations. The HSP could not have been as successful as it has been without the contribution and investment in these services by SSI."

Monitoring community attitudes

Dr Susan Watt, Senior Lecturer in the School of Psychology at the University of New England, began to monitor Armidale community attitudes shortly after the first refugees arrived in early 2018. She subsequently surveyed residents on two further occasions, in September 2018 and in February 2019.

Dr Watt's work involved random telephone surveys of 200 residents, with a new sample each survey. The initial survey showed high support among residents for the refugee settlement, with an overall positivity rating of 68/100. The majority of residents surveyed were either 'positive' or 'enthusiastic' about the settlement with a minority 'concerned' and fewer still were 'negative'.

By the time of the most recent survey in February 2019, the positivity rating had risen to 73/100 and the level of concern about the impact of refugees coming to Armidale was significantly lower.

"The community monitoring program suggests very positive responses from the Armidale community to the refugee resettlement program," Dr Watt says. "This is tempered by a minority of people who feel negatively about the program, but this number has decreased during the first 12 months of settlement."

Ancient Cultures Connect: Steve and Khalaf

On 26 May 2019, members of the Armidale Ezidi community turned out in great numbers for the city's Reconciliation Bridge Walk. One of the most memorable sights was local Anaiwan elder Steve Widders, who is vision impaired, walking arm in arm with Ezidi community member Khalaf Bari

“He’s now my mate,
and a big brother I
can ask for advice...”

Khalaf Bari: “I knew very little about Aboriginal people before we came to Australia, just some basic information. But since we have been in Armidale, the local Aboriginal people have supported us and been very welcoming. I’ve learned that, like us, they have been exposed to some very hard situations. And we try to support other people who are suffering and struggling.

“On the day of the bridge walk, I got to know more about Aboriginal history and what has happened to them. Steve and I talked about the Aboriginal flag and the Ezidi flag, and that both flags have the sun in them. We talked about the meaning of the bridge walk. It was very natural to link arms with Steve. I wanted to show sympathy and it was just my way of showing my feelings. He’s now my mate, and a big brother I can ask for advice if something happens.”

*Told via a translator.

Steve Widders: “I know a few members of the Ezidi community and while their English may be limited, a handshake says it all. They have shown a great willingness to become involved and they turned up to the local Survival Day event. The Ezidi population also invited the local Aboriginal community to dinner in the park, and Aboriginal kids have invited the Ezidis to play soccer.

“On the day of the bridge walk, about 70 members of the Ezidi community turned up – that was about one tenth of the crowd there. Khalaf and another man came up. They said, ‘Please can we walk with you?’ It wasn’t planned. It happened because we have the same heart and we have empathy for each other. Khalaf is my brah. Communication isn’t a barrier. We stand the same, walk the same, and walk hand in hand. This is the beginning of a friendship that will expand through our families and through our respective communities.”



Fostering Agency in the Newcomer Community: Ezidi Burial site

When SSI brought together members of the Ezidi community with local stakeholders for a ‘community voice’ meeting in 2018, one of the topics that quickly emerged was the importance of a place of burial for their community members.

Given their recent experiences with trauma and loss, the Ezidi representatives explained that being able to properly care for family members who pass away in Armidale and Australia was crucial to feeling at home. “Just as life is continuous, so is death”, says one senior Ezidi community member who attended the meeting. “The Ezidi have been subjected to 74 genocide attempts throughout their history. We now feel Australia is our future and we want to build our lives here. Part of that is being prepared for death.”

The Ezidis have since worked with Settlement Services International, Northern Settlement Services, Armidale Regional Council, mortuary operators and other stakeholders to develop strategies for understanding burial practices in the community in culturally appropriate ways. Armidale Regional Council has allocated a plot of land at the Armidale Cemetery for use by the Ezidi community, and negotiation is continuing around helping them to find ways of carrying out other funeral practices, such as preparation for burial.

The Ezidi tradition is for mourners to regularly visit the gravesite of the deceased. To provide a degree of privacy, the Ezidi representatives have asked for a boundary wall on their burial site. The Rotary Club of Armidale is helping them achieve this. “In consultation with community members, it was determined that a small bush and dry stone wall were appropriate,” says club President Peter Lloyd. “This is really a joint community exercise. We’re sourcing materials at the moment and then the whole community, including children and parents, will collect the rocks and move them onto the site.”

A member of the community has expressed that while getting used to the requirements of Australian bureaucracy can be frustrating, the consultative nature of the whole process is empowering. “It makes a big difference, having a choice. It’s not just this this is what you have to do.”

“This is really a joint
community exercise.”



Fostering Inclusion and Belonging: Ezidi Pop-up Restaurant

Learning the English language can be hard under the best of circumstances, let alone as a refugee having just arrived in a new country. But there are often other ways of communicating – like food.

In April 2019, a group of Ezidi women were provided the opportunity to create a pop-up restaurant in Armidale's Café Patisserie, showcasing their traditional fare for members of the wider local community. The 60 tickets on offer quickly sold out, with guests queuing up to try foods including biryanis, stuffed vine leaves and peppers, naan breads and curries.

"Food is important to us, and we wanted to share our culture and to let people try something new," Ezidi settler Zuhour Khudhier, explains via a translator. "The people who came were very happy. They tried everything and didn't leave anything behind."

Café owners Nathan Walker and Enora Chantepedrix happily handed over their venue to the Ezidi women for an evening, and came up with the idea for the event in the first place. "When I'm working in the kitchen, I can hear everyone's conversation, and one of our customers was talking about the Ezidi

refugees," Nathan recalls. "I'd heard about [pop-up] restaurants in Coffs Harbour and Melbourne, and so we just threw it out there that it would be cool to do something similar here."

Nathan says the event crystallised with the help from SSI Community Engagement Coordinator, Sam Airs. "SSI got involved, and it all sort of came together in two weeks. Other people give shoes, bikes and clothes and all those things, and this was our way of welcoming the newest group into town. I was born in Armidale, and I think it's great."

After the success of the first pop-up restaurant, Armidale's Ezidi cooks are now planning a follow-up, possibly in the spring of 2019 when warmer weather returns. So, with the people of Armidale clearly in love with Ezidi food, would the women consider opening a restaurant? "Maybe in the future," says Zuhour with a smile.

👉 *Food is important to us, and we wanted to share our culture and to let people try something new* 🍴



Arts and Culture: Simon and Salwan

When professional photographer Simon Scott tasked his Ezidi student Salwan Qasm Muhi to photograph objects that were unfamiliar to him, the results were surprising.

As Salwan, 21, walked through the streets of Armidale with a camera, he gravitated towards traffic signs and other items of street furniture. "I asked him to photograph things that were new to him, and he took pictures of roundabout signs and give-way signs," says Simon. "He was intrigued by zebra crossings. When any photographer is in a new area, there's a wealth of things to discover, and it was fascinating to see what someone who's seen a harder side to life found different in this environment."

Salwan and Simon came together at the end of 2018 when Simon approached SSI hoping to volunteer and Salwan expressed an interest in developing his photographic skills. "I like cameras and I like taking pictures, and I want to learn how to be a photographer," Salwan says.

When Simon has time free from his work shooting across New England and overseas, the pair wander the streets, Salwan equipped with one of Simon's hefty Canon SLR cameras. They swap words in English and

Kurmanji, sometimes resorting to charades to get the point across. One of Salwan's funniest images is a picture of Simon with his arms spread out, mimicking a plane to ask Salwan how he arrived in Australia.

Simon says Salwan's passion for photography is growing, while his own understanding of the Ezidi culture is also getting better. "It's nice to work with someone who genuinely wants to learn something new," he says. "And this is my way of welcoming someone to the community, by helping with English and photography."

Simon is now keen to offer photographic workshops to the wider Ezidi community to provide them with another means of self-expression and to document their new life in Armidale.

Salwan, meanwhile, remains determined to make it as a photographer if he can. "I'd like to keep getting better to study and improve myself," he says.

👉 *This is my way of welcoming someone to the community, by helping with English and photography* 🍴



Participation in Community Life: Girls Join Soccer Team

One of the many things that Armidale's Ezidi newcomers have in common with the wider community is a love of sport. Many of the younger community members are passionate – and skilled – soccer players, and they have been embraced by local clubs.

Jean Bone, Operations Officer for Northern Inland Football – the soccer competition that takes place in Armidale – says the male players came forward in 2018 to express their interest in getting involved. In response, she organised referees for informal matches, and then a coach to help the new players get accustomed to local rules. By mid 2019, more than 50 Ezidi males between the ages of 15 and 50 were playing with three local clubs.

"Most of the men play for South Armidale in the first and second divisions, and they are doing really, really well," she says. "They have needed some help with translation, but having said that, their English is improving."

It took a little longer to find opportunities involve the female players, but the results are equally positive. "[SSI Community Engagement Coordinator] Sam Airs contacted me about the girls in late February,

and I attended a meeting at the SSI office," Jean says. "I think 14 or 15 girls were there, and we talked about what they wanted to do. Then we organised a training session and a coach, and that all happened within a few days of the meeting."

Some 13 Ezidi female players between the ages of 6 and 16 now play in local teams. "We asked them if they wanted to stay together as a team, but what they wanted was to play in other teams. So, that was what we went with. There's a handful of five-, six-, and seven-year-olds, and a couple of nine- and 10-year-olds playing in the junior girls with East Armidale. And at the Demon Knights [club], there are players in the senior teams, as well as some in the under sixes and under sevens."

Jean says while no stars are yet to emerge from the girls' ranks, "they're enjoying it, and that's what we want."

“They're enjoying it, and that's what we want.”

Volunteer Profile Jess Schmidt

Jess Schmidt's course work for a master's degree in Development and Humanitarian Action taught her all about the theory of refugee resettlement. But it's been her time as a volunteer and then an intern with SSI that has taught her about the reality.

Through her connection with SSI since 2018, Jess has worked closely with members of the Ezidi community, gaining an understanding of both their challenges – and triumphs – as they adapt to life in their new home.

"I have been able to see what I have been learning about in my degree put into practice," says Jess, who grew up in Armidale. "Sometimes the theory works, and sometimes it doesn't, and you have manoeuvre around or try a new approach. I have learned so much about engaging with the community and about the Ezidi."

Jess's involvement with the Ezidi community began in mid 2018 when, via SSI, she began volunteering with an eight-member family, helping them to practise their English and providing emotional support. "I would go to their house twice a week and we would have conversations," she says. "I would go over some of their TAFE work with them and if there was anything they didn't understand I would help. I think it made a difference knowing that they had someone in the community that they could connect with – someone that they trusted and who they could talk to and be quite open with."

Jess says the relationship had two-way benefits. "I found the Ezidi to be really open and accepting as well, especially as a young woman," she says. "They obviously have suffered trauma and have some issues, but it's always very positive when I'm around this community."

Since January 2019, Jess has worked as an intern with SSI in Armidale, helping Community Engagement Coordinator Sam Airs liaise with community stakeholders. "I've learned a lot from Sam, watching how she talks to people and opens networks, which I think is pretty fundamental to regional settlement."

“I have learned so much about engaging with the community and about the Ezidi”

All in for Armidale: A whole-of-community approach to Ezidi settlement

Settlement Services International

Vision and values

SSI's vision is to achieve a society that values the diversity of its people and actively provides support to ensure meaningful social and economic participation and to assist individuals and families to reach their potential.

Social Justice

Equity and access to all

Diversity

Respecting diversity and being non-discriminatory

Compassion

Caring, empathy and respect for the dignity of others

Respect

Cooperation and mutual respect

Quality

Dynamic, flexible and responsive service

Ethics

Professional practices and accountability

Innovation

Commitment to partnerships and excellence



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