

SSI and the Multicultural Foster Care Service

Formed in 2000, SSI is the state-wide representative body for 11 Migrant Resource Centres and Multicultural Services across NSW. SSI is the second largest humanitarian settlement organisation in Australia and the largest in NSW, servicing more than 8,000 clients per year on refugee and bridging visas.

Our Vision and Mission are encapsulated in the phrases Settlement – Support – Independence. Our aim 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 reach their maximum potential.

A particular focus for SSI is the safety and welfare of children, young people and their families and we hold these at the forefront of our planning, actions and decisions.

Following several years of development, SSI was provisionally accredited at the start of the year as a provider of out-of-home care services prior to the establishment of the Multicultural Foster Care Service, funded by the NSW Department of Family and Community Services. The program is the first of its kind in NSW where a multicultural not-for-profit organisation has been contracted to develop and deliver a culturally appropriate model of foster care for CALD children and young people.

The Multicultural Foster Care Service is staffed by bilingual workers with cross cultural and out-of-home care casework skills and knowledge.

SSI believes that children in care who are supported to learn about and maintain a connection to their culture, religion and language have better outcomes as they grow up. These connections help children to understand where they have come from and to develop their sense of belonging and identity.

Helping children stay connected with their culture, language and religion also helps if and when children are returned to their birth parents.

Foster carers have access to a range of support services including:

- a bilingual caseworker to support them and the children in their care
- monthly visits and regular phone contact with their caseworker
- access to 24 hour on call phone support for crisis situations
- initial and ongoing training
- support groups
- respite care
- financial support to meet the cost of caring for their child
- referrals to a range of support services for them and the child.

The Multicultural Foster Care Service currently operates from SSI's head office in Ashfield, Sydney and from the offices of Northern Settlement Services (an SSI member agency) in Hamilton.

Other SSI services include:

- Humanitarian Settlement Services Program – casework and housing support for humanitarian entrants who have been granted a permanent protection visa during the first 12 months (Federally funded)
- Community Support Program (Community Assistance Scheme and Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme) - casework and financial support for asylum seekers granted bridging visas while their claim for asylum is assessed (Federally Funded)