

# ssinews

SETTLEMENT SERVICES INTERNATIONAL NEWSLETTER



JULY 2013 e [info@ssi.org.au](mailto:info@ssi.org.au) | [@settlmntservice](https://twitter.com/settlmntservice) | [f](https://www.facebook.com/settlementservicesinternational) settlement services international | [www.ssi.org.au](http://www.ssi.org.au) | t (02) 8799 6700

## SSI Marks Major Milestone



*Senator Matt Thistlethwaite & Violet Roumeliotis (centre) with special guests*

The launch of the SSI head office in Ashfield on July 3 was a special and significant milestone for the organisation.

The celebrations were shared with around 120 guests including SSI staff, welfare organisations, partners, community leaders and Federal, State and Local Government representatives. The head office was officially launched by the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs, Senator the Hon Matt Thistlethwaite with the presentation of a plaque and ceremonial cake cutting.

SSI is the second largest humanitarian settlement organisation in Australia and the largest in NSW, servicing more than 6,000 clients per year on refugee and bridging visas. The organisation grew from a staff of one in April 2011, to around 300 employees and 300 volunteers to date.

SSI's predominantly bilingual and cross-cultural workforce enables the organisation to overcome many cultural and language barriers which can inhibit access and good service delivery. The organisation's key achievements to date include the successful establishment of the Community Services Program for asylum seekers and the expansion of the Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) Program. These programs now provide support to approximately 8,000 clients. The total number of services provided to date under HSS and CSP is 17,350.

Speaking at the launch, SSI CEO Ms Violet Roumeliotis said there was a need to bridge gulf between perception and reality in the public discourse in relation to refugees and asylum seekers.

“The past 30 years have changed very little in the public understanding of the refugee experience...With each new wave of refugees we are told that this last group won't fit in; that they will create social problems, and they will be a burden on the economy.

“Yet, each group works hard in jobs that others don't want to do; they commit to Australia through Citizenship and encourage their children to become educated and upwardly mobile and to take their place in our society.

“In order to achieve understanding and acceptance it is important to put a human face on the experience and to tell the stories of survival and resilience,” Ms Roumeliotis told the gathering.

A particular focus for SSI is the safety and welfare of children, young people and their families. At the start of 2013, SSI was accredited as a provider of out-of-home care services following the establishment of the Multicultural Foster Care Service, funded by the NSW Department of 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.



*Speaker Sayed Reza Moosawi*



*Members of the Sierra Leone Cultural Dance Group*



*L-R: Senator Matt Thistlethwaite, Violet Roumeliotis & Peter Zographakis from SSI*



*L-R: SSI Treasurer Rosa Loria with Aunty Ali*

# Refugee Week 2013 Celebrations

SSI had a lot to celebrate during Refugee Week 2013.

Currently working with more than 8,000 refugees including humanitarian entrants and asylum seekers, SSI takes great pride in acknowledging and supporting the contribution that refugees make to Australian society.

SSI celebrated Refugee Week with a picnic lunch at Campbell Hill Reserve, Guildford. About 300 SSI staff and clients were there to share food, music and stories.

SSI client Arzhang Janipour spoke of his journey, which began in Iran. Since arriving in Sydney last October, Mr Janipour, a junior wrestling champion in his home country, has won two Australian wrestling championships in the 120 kg weight category.

Sayed Majid Rabet, SSI client and artist, told the gathering that he was thankful for the support he had received as it had allowed "the seeds of hope and survival to grow".

Hillsong's The Colour Sisterhood Foundation generously donated \$25,000 worth of gift vouchers to SSI clients. The vouchers were recently collected at the annual colour conference in Sydney, where SSI was nominated as a recipient of the conference collections.

Hillsong City Church, which regularly donates fortnightly food packs to be distributed through the SSI food bank, was also present at the event to hand out 'kilo of kindness' food hampers to SSI clients.



Above: SSI staff and clients

Photography by Charles Rich



### Due recognition for 30 years' invaluable contribution

Kicking off Refugee Week on a high note was the presentation of a STARTTS NSW Humanitarian Award to SSI Exit and Quality Coordinator Ms Nasiba Akram.

Validation of over 30 years' working in the community sector in Australia, Ms Akram won the Refugee Community Worker category.

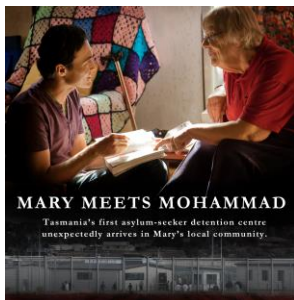
SSI CEO, Violet Roumeliotis said she was extremely proud of Ms Akram's achievement. "The STARTTS Humanitarian Award has recognised something all of us at SSI know, that Nasiba is an amazingly generous and compassionate citizen, and we are fortunate to have her in our

Each year, as part of Refugee Week, the STARTTS NSW Humanitarian Awards are an acknowledgment of outstanding positive contributions towards refugee issues in NSW.

Ms Akram herself fled Afghanistan with her son as a political refugee and arrived in Australia in 1979.

Starting at SSI in 2011 as a part-time bilingual worker, Ms Akram's skills and dedication were quickly recognised, and within two weeks she was given more complex arrival cases to manage. "Working with SSI has fulfilled my passion to help those in need," said Ms Akram.

The Awards were presented on Saturday June 15 at the Pitt St Uniting Church during the launch of Refugee Week 2013. Awards were given to 10 people across various categories that are making exceptional and meaningful contributions to refugee issues in NSW.



### Mary Meets Mohammed film screening

A special film screening event of the wonderful documentary *Mary Meets Mohammed* was hosted by SSI at the Ryde Bowling Club on June 21.

The film was followed by a Q&A session. On hand to answer questions from the audience of about 40 people was SSI Community Support Program Service Delivery Manager Mamtimin Ala, and Information and Policy officer for Refugee Council of Australia Lucy Morgan.

The film follows the establishment of Tasmania's first detention centre in 2011 and is viewed through the eyes of local Christian woman and knitting club member Mary, and Muslim Afghan Hazara asylum seeker Mohammad, who is detained inside the centre.

It is a touching and honest portrayal of how, with a little knowledge and humanity, people can overcome their often perceived differences.

The overwhelming feeling from the evening was that all Australians should see this film, so that a more meaningful and truthful debate can occur.





## Walking Together

Saturday June 22 saw 20 SSI staff and friends brave the weather to meet in Parramatta and join thousands across Australia to walk for equality and dignity for all who come to Australia.

The Walk Together event is organised by Welcome to Australia, an organisation formed in 2011 to be a non-political and positive voice in the public conversation around asylum seeking, refugees and multiculturalism.

Pastor Brad Chilcott is the Director of Welcome to Australia, which is run by a team of volunteers and is supported by over 35 partner organisations, including SSI.

## Client Orientation Program

As the SSI Client Orientation Program transitions to a new manager, it's a good opportunity to review what the program is about and to reflect on what it has achieved over the last 12 months.

Outgoing manager Ms Daria Rzasa shares her story...

I began at SSI 12 months ago as the Training and Client Orientation Program (OP) Coordinator.

The OP comprises a mix of classroom, one-to-one and in-the-field practical education. Its goal is to help clients adjust to life in Australia and to assist in ensuring the best settlement outcomes for them.

Presentations in the program include 'Australian Law and Culture', 'Tenancy, Safety and Money', 'Education and Employment' and, in conjunction with NSW Refugee Health Service, a presentation on the 'NSW Health Care System and Dental Care'.

The amazing and dedicated OP team have answered hundreds of questions ranging from "where do I buy a train ticket?" to "how do I bring my family to Australia?" and "how can I help my children with homework when I don't understand it".

Although participation in the OP is voluntary, the popularity of the program is evident in some locations where groups as large as 30 or 40 attend on a regular basis. Clients unable to attend because of cultural, health, accessibility or mobility issues are still provided with as much information as possible. This can include one-on-one sessions conducted by a case manager or orientation trainers, written materials, pamphlets, and web-based information.

In the past 12 months the OP team has delivered around 300 group sessions, equalling over 900 hours of face-to-face sessions. On average, 100 clients attend sessions every week, with sessions delivered across Sydney.

It's an amazing program and I hope that staff and clients continue to embrace it.





Congratulations Virginia Kaia, recipient of this month's *Wellness Award*. Virginia made the decision to trim down and over the past six months has lost weight by making healthier food choices and exercising regularly. Virginia was nominated by Natalie Taha, her team leader, because Natalie and other members of the team have been so inspired by Virginia's transformation that they have also started on the healthy path. Together they are making positive changes, the weight is coming off, confidence is increasing, and as a team they have been able to share ideas on what works and what doesn't when trying to stay healthy. Congratulations again Virginia for your inspiration and motivation.

The SSI *Be Well* program continues to grow and offer great opportunities to all staff. Workshops being offered over the next months include 'Stress Less' and 'Super Foods'.

As well as the weekly yoga classes to keep you warm and relaxed, all staff, volunteers and clients can enjoy a discounted membership at Gold's Gym in Parramatta. The rate is just \$12.95 per week. Please email [hmuir@ssi.org.au](mailto:hmuir@ssi.org.au) if interested.

You can nominate a colleague for a Wellness Award, find out more about workshops and yoga, and register for activities on the *Be Well* website @ [bewellssi.org.au](http://bewellssi.org.au)

## NEWS AND EVENTS

SSI Multicultural Foster Care Service has been nominated for the Premier's Awards 2013 in the *Excellence in Public Service Delivery* category.

SSI is one of six nominees nominated by Community Services Regional Directors across the State.

Read the next edition of the SSI newsletter for further exciting details!

.....

On June 21, SSI hosted a workshop facilitated by NSW Police to address policing issues relevant to CSP clients.

The workshop, attended by stakeholders and NSW Government Departments who work with asylum seekers, discussed issues facing people on Bridging Visa E and how NSW Police

can strengthen relationships with organisations working to support CSP clients in local communities.

Four key recommendations emerged from the workshop including: creating social opportunities for clients to meet local police and attend a police station; invite police to attend and address client orientation sessions; SSI to host a roundtable meeting that addresses the concerns of police officers working with asylum seekers living in the community; and that SSI keeps NSW Police updated in relation to strategies designed to assist, inform and empower clients in issues of policing and law.



On behalf of SSI, restaurant owner Mr Mushtaq Ahmed was recently presented with a certificate of appreciation by Community Support Program Service Delivery Manager Mamtimin Ala and Exit and Quality Coordinator Ms Nasiba Akram.

Mr Ahmed has been donating hundreds of meals each week to asylum seekers newly arrived to Sydney.

Such generosity and kindness provides hope and optimism to our clients and staff.

