

# ssinews

SETTLEMENT SERVICES INTERNATIONAL NEWSLETTER



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## From the CEO



For those of us working in service delivery in the not-for-profit domain, shifts in public policy and volatile global economies can impact tremendously on an organisation's ability to provide services. It brings many challenges but it can also bring an abundance of opportunities.

SSI has welcomed our work in the area of asylum seekers, as it allows us the opportunity to help first hand in their transition into the Australian community. Inevitably, the issue of finite resources and infinite need is a challenge and the resilience and optimism of our staff is only matched by the clients themselves.

Our next focus is the smooth transition of families on bridging visas into the community and SSI has initiated a strategy to assist our clients to be engaged and feel productive while awaiting their status outcome.

Together with agencies including Navitas, the Asylum Seeker Centre, Settlement Council of Australia, and the Refugee Council of Australia, we have established an action oriented working group that will run a range of activities for our clients such as a Men's Shed, community kitchens and cooking classes, and opportunities for volunteering.

SSI could not be an effective agency without collaborating and working in tandem with other professional services and support organisations. SSI also greatly values the community leaders, volunteers, religious and cultural organisations, and active individuals who play such an essential role in assisting our clients in settling into the community and making that transition as smooth as possible.

SSI's internal focus has been the strengthening of our core base such as the establishment of new premises in both Parramatta and Ashfield and also improving space at offices based at MRCs. Further, considerable resources have been allocated to the upgrading of infrastructure such as our ITC strategy and website. Such initiatives will facilitate more productivity and improve communications across our organisation. The development of an intranet, planned for July, will ensure that all SSI staff is connected with the ability to share and disseminate information that will support them in their challenging professional roles and thus helping provide better outcomes for our clients.

We have welcomed the new funding by Minister Kate Lundy that can be allocated to social inclusion type projects, which will benefit the community as a whole and we are exploring opportunities. SSI also looks forward to its AGM and launch of its Ashfield Head office in early July.

*By now you will have noticed the new SSI logo, featuring a dandelion seed head. The dandelion, an edible plant with medicinal properties, represents hope and change. When the plant's seeds are scattered by the wind, they begin a new life. The plant starts again – sometimes very far from where it started. The many seeds are a symbol for community.*

# Happy anniversary HSS



On April 18 SSI celebrated the second anniversary of the establishment of the Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) program.

HSS Service Delivery Manager Yamamah Agha remembers a challenging and exciting start to the program, with few staff and borrowed office space. The team, however, stuck together and the HSS program now has around 150 staff that has helped over 10,000 clients in the past two years.

"I'm so proud of how the program has grown, and the dedicated and passionate staff that services the clients and the organisation; it shows such commitment and is really rewarding," said Yamamah.

The SSI HSS program provides a range of case management support including on-arrival pick up and food assistance, information about the local community and life in Australia, a mobile phone or credit to assist in contacting support workers or emergency services, assistance to find and settle into suitable accommodation, connection with important services such as Centrelink, bank accounts, medical services and education, and a range of other support services to plan a new life in Australia.

Congratulations HSS!

## Arzhang wrestles above his weight



Arzhang Janipour,  
centre

SSI client and wrestling enthusiast Arzhang Janipour has won his second championship since arriving in Australia as an asylum seeker.

On May 19, Arzhang, who weighs 109kg, won the 120kg weight division at the Australian Cup Wrestling Championships in Melbourne. He thanked his caseworker Ali Reza Razmi and SSI staff who raised money to allow him to travel to Melbourne.

SSI's **Winter Warmer's campaign** has been incredibly well received by staff, community and volunteers. Donations have been steadily streaming into Parramatta and Ashfield offices. However more is needed as the cold weather settles in.

After just two months into the campaign we have received donations of enough bedding for 300 clients. One member of the Tamil community came with a car full of blankets and men's clothing, including enough woollen jumpers and jackets for 50 men.

Thank you to everyone who has donated items, spread the word about the campaign or who has assisted with the distribution of items.

If you haven't done so already, clean out those cupboards and donate any unwanted blankets, bedding or warm clothing for our clients. For more details on the campaign or where to drop off items please contact Honey Muir [hmuir@ssi.org.au](mailto:hmuir@ssi.org.au) or 0422 394 401





# Refugee mothers celebrate hard won freedom

To help celebrate Mothers' Day, Settlement Services International (SSI) invited a group of 50 refugees and mothers to a special lunch event held in Auburn.

Many of the mothers have Women at Risk visa status, which protects women in vulnerable situations. Two women who escaped their countries and who are now living in Sydney talked of their personal journey to Australia and what made them leave their home countries.

Ruby\*\* fled to Australia from Iraq with her four children. "I came with nothing...I have now managed to find accommodation by myself, and my children are in school. God has helped me and Australia has helped me and I'm so happy."

Tara\*\* a young Iraqi woman in her early 20s who fled Iran, is not technically a mother but is the main carer for her two younger brothers. "I am both mother and father to my brothers - 16 and 17 years old. I give thanks that I am celebrating this day with you and I hope that my mother will be able to join us one day soon."

Special guest speaker, researcher and consultant Margaret Piper AM touched the hearts of many in the room when she made the point that refugee mothers are called on to do much more than what most of us see as the role of a mother.

"You had to confront the painful realisation that home was no longer safe for you or your children. Each of you set off on a journey not knowing where or when it would end."

Also in attendance was the Hon. John Murphy MP, Member for Reid, and several community leaders and representatives of refugee support services.

After lunch the women were treated to some Mothers' Day pampering including manicures and henna hand decorating.

*\*\*Names have been changed.*

*Photography: Charles Rich*



The SSI Be Well program was launched in April in true SSI style great food, dancing, back massages and fun for all the staff.

As part of the Be Well program, a CEO Wellness Awards will be presented on a regular basis to an SSI staff member who has taken the Be Well message to the heart of their of lifestyle choices.

Making positive healthy changes takes a lot of effort and courage and the first recipient of the SSI Wellness Award was Yamamah Agha, for giving up smoking. As a result, many in her team have also quit smoking so the wellness message has spread.



Any SSI staff member can nominate a colleague for a Wellness Award. You can do this on the be well website: [bewellssi.org.au](http://bewellssi.org.au) or by emailing [bewell@ssi.org.au](mailto:bewell@ssi.org.au). The be well committee will announce the winner each month in the SSI newsletter.



## Celebrating our Volunteers

SSI celebrated National Volunteer Week on May 17 with a presentation of certificates followed by "Thanks a Million" morning tea. Forty volunteers were in attendance to receive certificates of appreciation, presented by SSI volunteer coordinator Tabitha Chepkowny. Also present were SSI Team Leaders and HSS Delivery Manager Yamamah Agha.

A million thanks were given to all female volunteers who are part of the Sisterhood program. In particular, Hema Thushe and Basireh Heidari were nominated by SSI team leaders for going the extra mile.

A million thanks were given to all male volunteers who are a part of the Mateship program. Volunteers Hussein Alkadamani, Patrick Dako, Nawaf Al-Saegh Taher were recognised for their outstanding dedication and contribution to the mateship program.

Tabitha Chepkowny said that all SSI volunteers contributed to ensuring that refugees and asylum seekers were settled into the community by giving their time to assist in a wide range of tasks including interpreting, receiving asylum seekers from the airport and orienting them in Sydney, home visits, escorting clients to appointments and administrative duties.

The volunteers come from a wide range of backgrounds encompassing almost 50 languages groups, with many volunteers themselves having been clients of SSI.

The dedication of SSI volunteers and the friendship that they provide new arrivals is invaluable to the work of SSI and we say THANKS A MILLION.



# NEWS AND EVENTS

SSI client Seyed Mojtaba Azadi was recently asked by a friend to interpret for a group of Iranians taking part in a photography workshop being run by the Salvation Army for people in community detention.

Seyed enjoyed it so much he joined the group and his photos were included in the 'Beyond the Boat' exhibition, shown as part of the Head On Photo Festival.

The collection of images provided insight into the lives of five asylum seekers who had risked everything to seek safety in a foreign land.

Seyed said: "During the workshop, we were able to look at people with freedom. This was remarkable for me. Back home there are too many red lines to cross for freedom."



Seyed's Case Manager Carlota Arias attended the launch of the exhibition. Below is a translated extract from a note that Seyed gave to CSP Service Delivery Manager Mantimin Ala, a testament to the wonderful work of SSI Case Managers.

*"... you have been guiding me for the past three months. During this time, you have shared my pain, my joy and my sorrow. I have found the love of a mother in your eyes. What a great joy it is, when you are assured that you have someone who cares for you, and will extend a hand when you need it... I do appreciate your efforts and your energy you have been trying to help me. I am forever, grateful to you."*

Federal Member for Parramatta Ms Julie Owens MP recently visited the SSI Parramatta office for an informal afternoon tea.

Ms Owens met with staff to discuss how they can work together and what contribution her office can make to help the work of SSI.



When an Auburn rug shop owner heard from SSI Quality/Exit Coordinator Nasiba Akram that clients needed furniture, he sprang into action.

After making some enquiries of Nasiba he called his assistant to bring a trolley. He proceeded to load five thick rugs on to the trolley and take them to the car park to load into Nasiba's car.

"He wanted to give me more but I said 'no more I will cry'," explained Nasiba. "His generosity and concern was overwhelming."

He has since donated another four rugs, each worth hundreds of dollars, and has asked Nasiba to come again to collect more when needed.

SSI acknowledges and greatly appreciates this generosity and community spirit.

By invitation of the Commissioner of Police, Andrew Scipione APM, CEO Violet Roumeliotis has joined the core membership of the NSW Police Force Police Multicultural Advisory Council.

Council members are selected for their expertise, skills and ability to contribute to the NSW Police Force's work with emerging community issues.

Appointment to the Council is for a two year period.

