

# ssi news

SETTLEMENT SERVICES INTERNATIONAL NEWSLETTER



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## From the CEO Violet Roumeliotis



One of the main tasks that I've been focusing on recently has been the SSI Business Plan. It's allowed me the opportunity to reflect once again on our four key priorities as identified in our strategic planning last year:

1. Client voice:  
*To ensure that our clients have a voice and are heard.*
2. Stronger stakeholder relationships:  
*The non-negotiable imperative that for SSI to grow it must value and nurture its relationships.*

3. Quality services for vulnerable communities:  
*An acknowledgement that SSI needs to diversify its funding base and work hard to expand the depth and breadth of its business relevant to its mission, to be the framework for quality services for our people.*
4. A whole-of-client integrated service:  
*A collective desire to have one-stop-shop 'hubs' for our clients where they are offered a holistic service, and where they are treated with dignity and humanity, and not just as a 'client'.*

It has also reminded me about the values of SSI and that to achieve our organisational priorities we need to be able to have a sense of compassion and empathy for our clients and our communities; we need to be committed and loyal to our organisation and colleagues; and we need to have integrity in our approach. At SSI, irrelevant of government policies, we need to ensure that we are doing the best possible job we can for our communities and we do it without compromising our values.

In the next few weeks the Executive team and I will be developing a government relations strategy and I will give you more information on this exciting project in the coming months.

Our Refugee Enterprise Facilitation project has been running for just three months but has already achieved outstanding results. Thank you to the many case managers who have referred their clients into this fantastic program and many thanks to people from the community who have put up their hand to be part of the Resource Board to support the seeding of new enterprises. More details on this wonderful project are included in the newsletter.

I would like to warmly welcome our new People and Culture Manager, Judy Vergison, to SSI. Judy has hit the ground running, and her expertise and knowledge has been applied already in a multitude of ways.

# Overcoming employment barriers for refugees

The Refugee Enterprise Facilitation project aims to facilitate business creation for refugee clients eager to establish a small business.

Through this new SSI community-based initiative, clients will be supported by a Resource Board comprising stakeholders from the community, local business owners, members of councils and chambers of commerce. Members of the Resource Board volunteer their expertise, business knowledge and skills to the fledgling entrepreneurs with the aim of broadening their knowledge about local laws and networks.

Many recently arrived refugees face significant barriers to employment in Australia, in particular during the early stages of their settlement. Research shows that humanitarian entrants are the most disadvantaged cohort of immigrant arrivals and face the greatest settlement difficulties in Australia, particularly in the labour market.

In fact, even after three years in Australia, one third of refugee-humanitarian entrants will remain unemployed. Studies have also found that refugees display strong entrepreneurial qualities compared with other migrant groups, with a higher than average proportion engaging in small and medium business.

The Refugee Enterprise Facilitation project is targeting up to 5,000 refugees living in Sydney, utilising an evidence-based model developed by the Sirolli Institute. The service is free, confidential and mobile – with the Enterprise Facilitators travelling to the most convenient location for clients.

The project commenced in August and to date has seen almost 20 clients interested in establishing their own business, 75% of whom have previously owned businesses in their home countries.



There have been many interesting business propositions demonstrating the diversity of backgrounds and experiences of SSI clients.

The facilitators have met clients interested in starting businesses in photography, massage, IT, leatherwork, and even water desalination.

For more information on the project or how to get involved with the Resource Board, please contact Honey Muir, Senior Project Officer email: [hmuir@ssi.org.au](mailto:hmuir@ssi.org.au)

*SSI Enterprise Facilitators Dina Petrakis (L) and Rita Wilson*

# Acknowledging Anti-Poverty Week

SSI acknowledged the financial hardships faced by many of its clients by providing lunch prepared by chef Tony Sharpe for 50 SSI clients at its Community Kitchen in Ryde, during Anti-Poverty Week in October.

The SSI clients who attended the Community Kitchen are in Australia living in the community, many on bridging visas, while they await their assessment for permanent visas.

Most are not entitled to seek employment and receive 89% of the Newstart allowance which equates to \$445.89 a fortnight.

This amount is less than \$358 per week (50% of median disposable household income, minus housing costs), the benchmark used to define the poverty line as reported in the "Poverty in Australia" report published by ACOSS in 2012.

SSI CEO Violet Roumeliotis explained that SSI strives to alleviate the pressures felt by many of its clients.



"SSI funds several community and stakeholder integration and engagement programs which go beyond its contractual requirements to provide the extra support needed by SSI refugee and asylum seeker clients," said Ms Roumeliotis.

Tony Sharpe was asked to prepare a meal costing \$5 per serve, which is often more than the allocated budget of a person living in poverty, as food is one of the first things that is sacrificed in order to pay for other essential expenses.

"Poverty can also be measured by social exclusion and this is something keenly felt by many of our clients who struggle with resources and the access required to function in society," said Ms Roumeliotis.

"SSI does what it can to help clients maintain their dignity, alleviate the hardships, and uphold their human rights," she added.

Vouchers, provided by Hillsong, to the value of \$8000 were also distributed to SSI clients during the week to provide financial respite.



*Above: Tony Sharpe (left) with volunteer kitchen assistants*

*Right: SSI client preparing chilli's for Persian inspired lunch*

# NEWS AND EVENTS



The NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) Refugee Ball held on October 9, was a great fundraising event enjoyed by more than 400 people.

SSI were proud to sponsor the event, as well as having staff and board members attend the event.

SSI has a close working relationship with STARTTS, which provides help to many of our clients through referrals received from NSW Refugee Health to which all Humanitarian Settlement Services' (HSS) clients are referred to for assessment.

STARTTS also provides monthly group supervision to SSI HSS case managers' program, delivering invaluable support, advice and debriefing opportunities.



*Photographs courtesy of STARTTS*

The Hindu festival of lights, Diwali, was celebrated by about 130 SSI clients and volunteers at a special Community Kitchen lunch event. Traditionally, Diwali involves lighting clay lamps to signify the triumph of good over evil.

With the help of clients in the kitchen, the Tamil Womens Development Group cooked a delicious mix of curries to feed an appreciative crowd, who enjoyed a great day of traditional live music, games and dessert. The room was beautifully decorated with religious and cultural items by members of SAHELI, the women's arm of SEVA, a non profit social enterprise.



## News and events cont...



The SSI Multicultural Foster Care Service (MFCS) took part in the annual Riverlights Multicultural Festival in October. Held in Maitland City centre, the festival included an afternoon and evening of live performances, a fashion parade, panel discussions and a cultural village, ending with the releasing of hundreds of handmade lanterns on the Hunter River.

The MFCS marquee was popular with the kids, providing interesting craft activities including beading, and a children's area.

MFCS supports several families in the Hunter and Central Coast regions who foster children from a variety of cultural backgrounds.



Australian music icons The Wiggles donated thousands of nappies to the Welcome Centre, an initiative of Welcome to Australia, providing support to asylum seekers, refugees and new arrivals.

As a foundation partner of Welcome to Australia, SSI was proud to be able to distribute these nappies to vulnerable families across Sydney.

Welcome Australia exists to engage everyday Australians in the task of cultivating a culture of welcome in our nation.

If you would like to help, please donate to [The Welcome Centre here](#)



Following a recent presentation of a Zonta International Woman of Achievement to SSI Quality and Exit Coordinator Nasiba Akram last month, the women members of Zonta continue their generous donations of blankets and other household goods for our refugee and asylum seeker clients.

Ms Akram has been making almost weekly visits to various households across the North Shore to pick up the valuable donations. Zonta is a worldwide organisation of business executives and professionals working together to advance the status of women through service and advocacy.



Amanda Younan is the winner of the October CEO Wellness Award. Amanda is based in the Mt Druitt office and received a glowing nomination from a colleague for her all-round positive nature, including the positive healthy action of cutting down on smoking.

According to her colleagues, Amanda is dependable and always tries to lift the spirits of those around her. She also has remarkable patience and is great at resolving conflict.

Congratulations Amanda. We wish you the best on your wellness path, and encouragement to continue cutting down on cigarettes until you have given up smoking permanently. There is more information below for staff keen to quit smoking.

Be Well is SSI's workplace wellness program. It is designed to make SSI an even better place to work; where the healthier choice becomes the easier choice.

As we approach the end of the year and the gift giving season, the next module of Be Well-*Give Well* will be introduced.

### **Zumba**

The wait is over. A six-week introductory course of Zumba classes has begun. It's no surprise to hear that some of our wonderful SSI staff are also qualified Zumba instructors, and two of them have generously volunteered their time and skill to teach the Zumba classes.

Team Leader Geneen Reyna will teach the weekly class in Ashfield, and Parramatta classes will be taught by Case Manager Marcela Hart. No bookings are required - just show up.

"SSI staff will enjoy the opportunity to let their hair down after a hard day's work; the music and dance are very uplifting and staff will walk away from the class feeling energised," says Ms Reyna.

### **Quit Smoking**

SSI is committed to enabling its staff to quit smoking. All staff will soon be sent an email to gauge interest in quit smoking seminars. These seminars deliver key cessation messages and cater for all levels of motivation. It is ideal for the workplace setting, where evidence based information and advice can be clearly explained, with plenty of time to dispel myths and address concerns.

### **Free lunchtime yoga classes**

The second five-week course has commenced; a soothing yoga program to help calm the mind and build resilience. Feel free to join the class at any time.

For more information on any of the above visit: [bewellssi.org.au](http://bewellssi.org.au)



*Be Well Committee Member Romal Baluchzada presenting Amanda Younan with her CEO Wellness Award*