

ssinews

SETTLEMENT SERVICES INTERNATIONAL NEWSLETTER



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From the CEO Violet Roumeliotis



The recent announcement by the Prime Minister Tony Abbott of his new Cabinet was highly anticipated and has been much discussed by the media. Of note and concern is the removal of multicultural affairs as a core ministerial portfolio. SSI will work with its peak bodies in the sector to try to influence the new government about the importance of re-establishing such an important portfolio.

The second change to note is that SSI will now be dealing with two different departments: the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, led by Scott Morrison (for ASAS/CAS programs), and the Department of Social Services, led by Kevin Andrews (for the HSS program). Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells is the Parliamentary Secretary for the Minister for Social Services and she will have special responsibility for multicultural affairs and settlement services.

SSI and our member MRCs will work closely with this new department in relation to SGP and HSS funding. SSI will seek to meet with Senator Fierravanti-Wells as soon as possible to ensure that this department develops a significant long-term relationship with CALD organisations, charities and mainstream organisations. It is important that the enormous contribution that immigrants and refugees have made to Australia is recognised, and to ensure the development of inclusive policies that empower these significant minority groups in Australia.

The SSI Board and I will actively engage with the department to progress discussions on how services to our constituencies can be provided in a considered and humane way.

I recently met with the CEO of the Australian Council of Social Services, Dr Cassandra Goldie, and we had a robust discussion on how organisations such as SSI can work closely with ACOSS to promote and ensure the policies and resources that target vulnerable members of the community are not neglected. CEO of Refugee Council of Australia Paul Power also visited SSI, and we discussed long term strategies to secure our sector's capacity to respond and influence public policy.

The Australian Red Cross has invited me to a round table discussion with other ASAS/CAS providers nationally. As you are aware, the new Federal Government made policy announcements during the election campaign that will have a significant impact on asylum seekers and on the work we do to provide support in the community.

The issuing of Temporary Protection Visas, the introduction of work-for-the-dole type arrangements for people receiving government-funded support, and changes to processing arrangements will all have an impact on our clients. Although it is early days and we do not know the policy detail, it is important that organisations such as SSI, in collaboration with large national bodies such as Australian Red Cross, work together to provide meaningful contributions to policy and programmatic directions for the new government.

SSI Foster Carers open their hearts and minds



SSI's Multicultural Foster Care Service celebrated the vital role played by foster carers in the lives of children and young people in their care during Foster Care week.

Around 20 foster carers and children of Vietnamese background attended a special lunch event hosted by Hai Au Lang Nuong Restaurant in Canley Vale, in south-west Sydney. SSI CEO Violet Roumeliotis attended the lunch to personally thank and acknowledge the dedication of the carers.

In the Hunter region, SSI joined other out-of-home care providers in organising a picnic for local carers and children at Speers Point Park.

More than 500 children and carers enjoyed traditional picnic fare as well as a sausage sizzle, and received toy giveaways and show bags. Activities such as hair braiding and a workshop on making beaded necklaces were held to show case the African culture of many of SSI's clients in the region. These were very popular and there was even a queue!

SSI CEO Violet Roumeliotis told the gathering in Canley Vale: "The Multicultural Foster Care Service is based on the belief that children and young people from non-English speaking backgrounds are strengthened through knowing about and having connections with their cultural heritage.

"I acknowledge your efforts in maintaining the cultural connection for your foster children through activities such as language classes, visiting places of worship and youth groups.

"As foster carers you help create a safer community. As foster carers you open your doors to children and young people who are complete strangers to you and your family, yet you welcome them into your home.

"And for the time they are with you, the children in your care become part of your family, and feel safe and loved.

The Multicultural Foster Care Service is a provider of out-of-home care services specifically for children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.



SSI Community Support Program celebrates first anniversary



Around 200 SSI staff celebrated the first anniversary of the Community Support Program (CSP)* on September 24.

The CSP was established last September with just a few staff in a small office in Auburn's industrial heartland. In one year, it has grown to a staff of 160 case managers, team leaders and coordinators in offices across Sydney, who support about 4000 asylum seekers living throughout metropolitan Sydney.

The rapid yet successful growth of the program was acknowledged by SSI CEO Violet Roumeliotis, who remarked

that SSI's strength is in its people and that the CSP team has achieved outstanding results for their clients. Humanitarian Services Manager David Keegan and CSP Service Delivery Manager Mamtimin Ala were thanked for their leadership.

The afternoon celebration featured many dance performances from a variety of cultural styles including Afghani, Tamil, African, Arabic and Bollywood, performed by talented SSI staff. The performances provided an opportunity for staff to enjoy the multicultural fabric of the organisation and enhanced the sense of belonging to the SSI family, which strongly embraces unity in diversity.

*The Community Support Program encompasses two federally funded programs - the Community Assistance Scheme (CAS) and the Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme (ASAS). It supports asylum seekers who are living in the community on a bridging visa until their status as a refugee has been assessed and determined by the Department of Immigration.





The recipient of the September CEO Wellness Award is Thanh Nguyen who has quit smoking.

Thanh is Manager of Early Intervention and Capacity Building, based in Ashfield head office.

Influenced by the Be Well workshop he attended, Thanh says he realised he wasn't getting any younger. "I knew the longer I left it the harder it would be to give up so I just went cold turkey."

After more than 20 years of smoking, Thanh has been tobacco-free for three months but admits "it's hard at times". "The first few days were surprisingly easy, but the novelty and pride of quitting is wearing off and I'm now faced with the reality of not smoking. My family is very supportive though and I know I'm doing the right thing so I'm determined to keep cigarettes out of my life."

Congratulations Thanh. We wish you the best on your wellness path and for being a positive role model.

In fact, SSI offers quit smoking sessions. Read about this and other activities to help SSI staff on the Be Well journey:

Quit smoking

There is no time like now to quit smoking. Be Well wants to assist and will be running quit smoking sessions at SSI offices.

Move towards your goals - workshop

Would you like to lose weight? Start exercising regularly? Learn a new language? Meet deadlines without having a panic attack? We all have goals but whether we achieve them or not depends on a variety of factors.

The *Move towards your goals workshop* will help you identify, map and sustain positive lifestyle changes. You will also learn an effective 10 minutes exercise practice designed to build strength and flexibility. We encourage you to bring your wellness buddy to the workshop so you can support each other in achieving your goals.

Free lunchtime yoga classes

We are half way through the first five-week course, but enrolments are always open for the two, five week courses, offering different styles of yoga:

- Tone up for spring: a dynamic yoga practice to help build strength and confidence
- Stress less: a soothing yoga program, to help calm the mind and build resilience

For more information on any of the above visit: bewellssi.org.au



NEWS AND EVENTS



The SSI Community Kitchen was pleased to have Sue Dahman return to cook for a group of 95 clients who were joined by 10 volunteers, bilingual guides and case managers. Also joining the lunch were representatives from the Arab Council of Australia and Settlement Council of Australia, who remarked on the inspiring and enjoyable initiative. The clients helping in the kitchen learnt to make traditional Lebanese inspired dishes such as fattoush salad, kofta, and lentils with rice, while others enjoyed playing soccer and some general 'time out'.



SSI Quality and Exit Coordinator Nasiba Akram was the joint winner of the Zonta International Woman of Achievement award, presented at a dinner event at the Killara Golf Club on September 11. Founded in 1919, Zonta International is a global organisation of executives and professionals working to advance the status of women worldwide through service and advocacy. It has more than 30,000 members in over 1,200 Zonta Clubs in 65 countries. Zontians all over the world volunteer their time, talents and support to local and international service projects.

Also in September, Nasiba was invited by Soroptimist International to present to the Hornsby group about her personal work in the community as well as her work at SSI. Ninety-thousand women belong to Soroptimist International, a worldwide service organisation committed to a world where women and girls together reach their individual and collective potential, realise aspirations and have an equal voice in creating strong, peaceful communities. Both organisations have expressed great interest in and support of SSI, and donations of blankets, pillows and crockery have already been gratefully received by our clients.



SSI was successful in receiving a grant in the 2013 Auburn ClubGRANTS Scheme. The grant will be used by SSI to purchase items from Foodbank NSW that will be given to clients. This will help ensure clients have access to staple items such as rice, oil and flour. The high cost of living in Sydney is an added challenge faced by many of SSI's clients. The need for a source of additional food items for clients has inspired SSI to register with Foodbank NSW, a non-denominational, community supported not-for-profit that collects unwanted food and re-distributes it to people in need through welfare agencies who can purchase items at a bulk rate.