

ssi news

SETTLEMENT SERVICES INTERNATIONAL NEWSLETTER



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From the CEO Violet Roumeliotis



I write this article on the eve of a Federal election and a time of great policy uncertainty in the area of asylum seekers. SSI always has at the heart of its work the best interests of its clients, and I have spent a considerable amount of time over the past month in meetings with CEOs of other humanitarian settlement organisations and charities discussing the need to have one voice on a number of these issues so that we can aim for considerable influence in policy decisions of the Federal Government.

The SSI Board and I hope that post-election we will be able to engage with the Government in a productive way that will benefit asylum seekers and refugees in Australia, and as a result the whole community .

The SSI Community Kitchen, which has been operating for the past five weeks at the Ryde Bowling club, has been an outstanding success in many ways. The aim of the Community Kitchen was twofold; firstly an opportunity for some positive media stories about asylum seekers and secondly an opportunity to bring together our asylum seeker clients to have a meal, to engage, socialise and relax; to help them forget the daily concerns of visas, accommodation and filling in time.

The SSI Community Kitchen has received considerable interest from the media, and Minister Victor Dominello has said he will attend the community kitchen with his mother to cook a meal for our clients. The work of Community Regional & Community Engagement Coordinator Trina Soulos, and Events Planner Camilla Palamo has been extraordinary in making this project a success. Also, I acknowledge the important contribution of the CSP Service Delivery Manager Mamtimin Ala, and the CSP team including team leaders and the wonderful case managers who have encouraged their clients to come along and benefit from this great project that SSI has led.

Many of you would know that as of August 30, the HSS program is no longer available to asylum seekers who receive protection visas on shore. They will be entitled to a suite of services but not HSS and this is something that we will be monitoring and raising with the Government post-election. I have had a number of meetings with the Department of Immigration about these policy changes and I have also spoken to other CEOs across Australia on this issue and we hope to have one voice on how we can address this policy shift.

I am currently chair of the Sydney Alliance, and the leaders of the Alliance have agreed to include asylum seekers as an issue for their agenda for the common good. This is an exciting development as it engages faith agencies such as the Catholic Church, the Jewish Board of Deputies, Muslim Women's Association, Unions (such as Unions NSW) and community organisations such as SSI to collaborate to bring the voice of civil society to Government and to the public domain.

SSI Community Kitchen

A place to nourish the body and the soul



CWA members cooking up an “Aussie” lunch

The Country Women’s Association (CWA) Phillips Group was the latest in a line-up of chefs and cooks who prepared a nutritious meal for Settlement Services International (SSI) clients in Ryde.

The lunch event is part of SSI’s Community Kitchen initiative – which is part cooking class, part social outing for up to 100 asylum seekers living in the community.

Each week a different chef or group of cooks holds a cooking class and, with the help of their

assistants, cooks a basic yet nutritious meal for the guests. Other participating chefs have included Luigi De Luca of Cremeria De Luca, Tony Sharpe of Educating Palates, Sue Dahman of Tatya’s Lebanese Kitchen, and Siva Kumaran from Blue Elephant restaurant.



Tony Sharpe, second from left, with SSI clients



Sue Dahman, second from left, with SSI clients

The participants are in Australia seeking asylum, and currently living in the community supported by the Federal Government’s Community Assistance Scheme. Most are not entitled to seek employment and receive less than the Newstart allowance.

The Community Kitchen is aimed at providing a social day out where clients, many of whom experience isolation, can learn how to prepare a healthy and nutritious meal, as well as interacting with other community members and case managers by playing a game of soccer, watching a movie, or playing cards and chess.

The initiative is also proving to be an innovative way for SSI case managers to consult with their clients outside an office setting and provide valuable information on living in Sydney in a more relaxed and social environment.

Community kitchen continued...

Likewise, it has provided an opportunity for community groups and leaders to participate in the event and engage with the new arrivals.

SSI Regional & Community Engagement Coordinator Trina Soulos said the idea of the community kitchen arose after SSI decided to look at ways to counteract the negative public discourse around asylum seekers by developing initiatives that are humane and practical.

“We believe that the SSI Community Kitchen has successfully achieved this goal, and due to its success, what began as a pilot will now continue as a regular event,” said Ms Soulos.

SSI is currently seeking sponsors to ensure the Community Kitchen continues to provide not only healthy meals that nourish the body, but the equally important nourishment of the soul that comes with the experience of feeling welcome. For more information please phone Trina Soulos on 8799 6720.



*Above right: SSI client preparing dessert
Above left: Luigi De Luca (second from left) with aspiring chefs
Below: Freshly baked scones
Left: An SSI volunteer (left) relaxing with a client*



NSW Police extend a friendly welcome to asylum seekers



L-R: John Giannaras, Tabitha Chepkwony, Nasiba Akram, John Duncan

NSW Police officers are available to help members of the community and that living in Sydney is generally safe for newcomers – this was the message delivered by Gladesville police recently to a group of asylum seekers now living in the city.

The Settlement Services International (SSI) Orientation and Life Skills meeting of about 80 asylum seekers in Ryde, was also welcomed by NSW Police Superintendent John Duncan and Senior Constable John Giannaras from Gladesville Local Area Command (LAC).

Supported by the Federal Government's Community Assistance Scheme (CAS), the clients were taking part in SSI's Community Integration Program (CIP) which involves regular meetings addressed by NSW

Police officers where they outline the role of police in the community, often markedly different to the home countries of many asylum seekers, and how to uphold Australian law.

The involvement and support of the NSW Police is testament to the need for and importance of delivering this information to people new to Australia and often in vulnerable and challenging circumstances.

CIP program coordinator Tabitha Chepkwony said the information sessions have been developed to help asylum seekers recently released into the community acquire the knowledge needed to adjust to life in Australia.

"SSI greatly values the support of the NSW Police in our endeavours to make the transition of our clients as smooth as possible," said Ms Chepkwony.

Other life skills information sessions include tenancy, nutrition, budgeting, improving English language competency and staying healthy.

The four-hour sessions are delivered in language or with the aid of an interpreter.

Community leaders are also invited to meet the newest members of their community and offer support where possible.



Some of the workshop attendees with NSW Police officers and SSI staff



The recipient of the August CEO Wellness Award is Monica Gong.

Monica is a case manager at the SSI office based in the Hills Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Resource Centre. Monica was nominated by a colleague for bringing physical activity to her daily routine.

After attending the Be Well workshop Monica was inspired to start riding her bike to work. "Not only do I feel healthier but it also saves me time by riding rather than using public transport," said Monica. Nervous at first about riding on roads and through traffic, Monica is now a confident rider and even rides her bike to visit clients who live locally. Another benefit of riding that Monica has experienced is that it is very relaxing and a good way to de-stress after a busy work day. "I come home feeling much calmer."

Congratulations Monica and we hope you continue on your wellness path and being a positive role model.

Monica is already a step ahead of the next focus of the Be Well program - **Move Well**. This warmer weather is the perfect time to get an extra spring in your step. Over the next three months Be Well wants to encourage staff to get active for at least 30 minutes a day, as recommended by the [National Physical Activity Guidelines](#). We know from the workforce wellness survey (conducted in April 2012) that SSI employees are interested in exercise and fitness. Move Well will help bring this physical activity target within reach:



Free lunchtime yoga classes

Running weekly at the Parramatta, Auburn and Ashfield offices, Beginners are most welcome. On offer this term are 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

Zumba

By popular demand we are starting Zumba classes soon. A hit around the world, this Latino dance fitness program is a great way to get moving and laughing! Zumba classes will be at a discount rate, and an even bigger discount if you bring a friend - a wellness buddy - to save money and stay motivated.

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 depend 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.

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

NEWS AND EVENTS



Ramadan was a focus during the month of August for many SSI staff and clients. Ramadan is a period of prayer, fasting, charity-giving and self-accountability for Muslims.

Fasting occurs between sunrise and sunset. Once the sun has set, Eftari, the evening meal is served.

SSI staff, volunteers and community organisations worked together to celebrate Eftari by preparing an evening meal on two occasions to share with SSI clients.

The two gatherings were enjoyed by about 160 clients including families. Gifts were presented to the children and the food was delicious and plentiful.



An SSI Volunteer presenting a blanket to an SSI client

This beautiful hand-knitted blanket was one of eight 'friendship quilts' that were generously donated by the Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association of Australia.

The rugs were presented as lucky door prizes at the most recent SSI Community Kitchen event which specifically catered for SSI family clients.

Actions such as those by the Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association of Australia inspire SSI to continue its work with humanitarian entrants knowing that there is such genuine spirit and charity in the community.