

ssi news

SETTLEMENT SERVICES INTERNATIONAL NEWSLETTER



August 2014 | e info@ssi.org.au | @settlmntservice | settlement services international | www.ssi.org.au | (02) 8799 6700

From the Acting CEO Peter Zographakis



I recently had the opportunity to attend the Refugee Women at Risk Forum held in Sydney on July 11. Listening to the stories of two women who have come to Australia under the Woman at Risk visa category was an emotional and engaging experience, and one that significantly impacted the forum.

SSI endeavours to provide opportunities for our clients to tell their own stories, in their own words, and this was one such occasion.

The forum was well attended with valuable participation from about 120 sector specialists and service providers, creating a meaningful event that delivered some significant recommendations.

I'd like to thank Senator Michaelia Cash for her support by attending the forum and delivering the opening address.

SSI supports about 1,000 vulnerable women, and consultations have highlighted a greater need for support services, particularly in employment, affordable housing, health and education.

In light of this, SSI has been working on a program to help relieve the housing burden on Women at Risk and their families, and I acknowledge SSI Manager, Housing Services Patrick Yeung, for the work he has been doing with other housing providers to explore affordable, long-term housing assistance for this group of women.

SSI plans to start placing its Women at Risk clients into appropriate and affordable housing in September, where rent will be closer to 25 per cent of household incomes rather than the current 55 per cent.

The Ability Links NSW program began on July 1, and to date SSI has recruited 22 new staff to help deliver the program to people with disability, their families and carers, across Greater Sydney and Southern NSW.

A second recruitment phase is currently in progress and, by mid-September, SSI should have a total of 58 staff delivering the Ability Links NSW program. Keep an eye on our website for [positions available](#).

Peter Zographakis is SSI General Manager

CEO Violet Roumeliotis is on leave.

Forum highlights barriers for refugee women

Australia has a long and proud history of resettling some of the most vulnerable refugee women and their families, however, major gaps in support services for these women have been identified and need to be addressed.

Speaking at the Refugee Women at Risk Forum hosted by SSI on Friday July 11, SSI Manager Humanitarian Services David Keegan said that based on consultations with refugee women, it's clear the current level of support should be reviewed.

Research conducted by the UNSW Centre for Refugee Research suggests refugee women in Australia under the Woman at Risk visa category experience higher levels of post-traumatic stress and face greater challenges on resettlement.

As the largest provider of services to refugee women in NSW, SSI has observed that a significant number of refugee women who enter with other visas have also suffered extreme physical and sexual violence and trauma prior to their arrival and require higher level specialist support services during settlement in Australia.

The Woman at Risk visa can be accessed by women living outside their home country, who have lost a male relative or provider, and who are in danger of victimisation, harassment or abuse because of their gender. A recent report by the UNHCR suggested 145,000 women fleeing the Syrian conflict alone could be experiencing those circumstances right now.

The forum brought together more than 120 sector specialists and service providers to raise awareness of the specific barriers and issues impacting Women at Risk, many of whom are also single mothers.

Assistant Minister Immigration and Border Patrol and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women, Senator Michaelia Cash remarked in her opening address that she was proud Australia had a program that welcomed vulnerable women and their children to Australia with open arms.

"In terms of the Woman at Risk visa, refugee women particularly are at far greater risk than others and these women are recognised by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as the most vulnerable women in the world," she said.

"They have suffered exploitation from security threats, sexual and gender-based violence, torture, and exploitation. In recognition of this, the Australian Government said in 1989 that it would put in place a specific program to recognise these women.

"We are one of the few countries in the world that has a specific allocation for Women at risk, which is something we can be very, very proud of. But it's one thing to say we are prepared to be a safe haven, but as we all know, when these women and children arrive in Australian it is but the beginning. We need to ensure that we have the appropriate services in place that they need."



L-R: SSI Humanitarian Services Delivery Manager, Yamamah Agha; Senator Michaelia Cash; SSI Manager, Humanitarian Services David Keegan; Director, Immigrant Women's Health Service. Eman Sharobeem

Professor Eileen Pittaway, Honorary Associate of UNSW Centre for Refugee Research, called on government and non-government service providers to break the 'silos of support' and link housing, education, employment and counselling services.

"As we can imagine, it's very difficult for children to get a decent education or for a woman to get a job, if they have to move three or four times in a few months," Prof. Pittaway said, "and if you have to worry about putting food on the table constantly then you are not going to do well in counselling sessions."

The forum concluded by making recommendations for the sector, which included:

- work together to secure more funding and resources;
- consult with Women at Risk to deliver the services they need and want;
- support Women at Risk to have a public voice;
- highlight the need for specialist, targeted services by professionals who have shared cultural, linguistic and refugee backgrounds;
- link those services to provide a holistic approach to support;
- support Women at Risk to feel respected and dignified with pathways to constructive occupations.



SSI Community Kitchen celebrates Ramadan

Each person who asked about Ramadan is sure to describe its meaning in their own considered, subjective terms.

Jawad Hussain described what Ramadan meant to him, as about 120 SSI Community Support Program (CSP) clients broke their daily fast at the SSI Community Kitchen Iftar meal on July 16.

“Ramadan means to fast, but not only from food; it’s to fast with eyes, with mind; we have to be good person,” he said. “It means to be really nice, gentle man. You make a special effort. If you practise Ramadan, you believe it will bring some change in your personality.”

Jawad came to Australia from Pakistan and, like most people at the Iftar, is awaiting assessment of his refugee status. He is a regular at the SSI Community Kitchen who volunteers to prepare food, and set up and tidy the community centre.

SSI Coordinator Janna Sharples observed the Ramadan fasting period for the first time. “I wanted to have some understanding of what my staff and the clients go through during Ramadan,” she said. “It was an opportunity to learn more about Ramadan.”

“I’ve learnt that you really can’t live without water,” she said, “going without food has been fine, but water is a struggle. I actually watered the office plants hoping that it would somehow quench my own thirst.”

Food for the Iftar meal was donated, prepared and served by [Mission of Hope](#) and its volunteers. Mission of Hope also donated food hampers and new fleece blankets for families.

Mission of Hope Executive and Project Coordinator Feroz Sattar said the organisation had collected some 30,000 donations and packaged about 1,000 food hampers during Ramadan.

Celebrations continued on July 30 with more than 200 clients, staff and volunteers sharing an Eid al-Fitr meal to celebrate the end of Ramadan.

[Australian Relief Organisation](#) kindly donated the meal, and CEO Cihan Tumen said he looked forward to working more closely with SSI in the future.

Hillsong and Life Link generously donated hundreds of food hampers.

An incredibly generous donation of homemade Rohingya sweets was made by Mala, a client being supported by SSI. Mala refused to accept reimbursement, saying the sweets was her gift to the community and contribution to the Eid al-Fitr Festival.



Mahdia relishes her school work

Mahdia, 18, could not attend school in Iran because of social and financial barriers. But since she arrived in Australia with her mother and brothers, she has thrown herself into school work with vigour.

“I really, really love going to school,” Mahdia said, “because I had so many barriers in the country where I came from. I love my school, I love my teachers and subjects and I love to study. I like to go to the library to study whenever I can and if I don’t, I feel like I have missed out on something.”

Mahdia was born in Iran, where her family had fled from war-torn Afghanistan. Attending school in Iran was all but impossible, she said, because of her gender and ethnicity. “But I studied by myself and went to an institute to study English,” Mahdia said. “Then we came here to Australia. We were so broken. We had a lot of issues but we did it.”

Mahdia is now in Year 11 at Holroyd High School and looking forward to sitting for her Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR). She wants to study medicine or midwifery at university. After years of isolation from a school system, Mahdia has quickly caught up on her education through hard work and enthusiasm. Her proud mother Fatima said her daughter spent all of her spare time with head down in her books.



But Mahdia’s challenges continue. She cannot afford a computer and she shares a bedroom with her mother. Mahdia completes school work and studies at a library but cannot always access the public computers or work as late as she would like. “If I want to get to uni I have to have a very, very high ATAR,” she said, “so I have to try my hardest because I don’t have some of the facilities that other students have.”

Despite these obstacles, Mahdia’s hard work was recognised by Auburn Diversity Services last month when the organisation presented her with a Western Sydney Refugee Youth Award for Academic Achievement.

Mahdia and her family have lived in the community for more than 12 months while their application for refugee status is assessed. They have been supported by the SSI Community Support Program during that time.

SSI Manager, Humanitarian Services David Keegan said Mahdia’s circumstances made her enthusiasm and achievements even more striking. “Mahdia and her family aren’t allowed to work in Australia while their refugee status is being assessed, so they can’t afford to support her with many resources, like a computer, internet connection, text books or even a desk,” he said.

“But she obviously has that drive to achieve that is often endemic in people who have escaped difficult circumstances overseas to find relative freedom and opportunity in Australia.”



Perception is reality: How do we form our perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers?

The topic of asylum seekers and the way in which they arrive in this country divides the community. The blame is often levelled at the media but we know that in reality public opinion and personal perceptions are influenced by a number of factors. Join us for an evening of engaging and stimulating discussion with a selected and eclectic panel of speakers.

Date: Tuesday August 26, 2014

Time: 6:00-7:30pm

Location: SSI Auditorium, Level 2, 158 Liverpool Road, Ashfield

RSVP: ssispeakersseriesaugust.eventbrite.com.au

ABOUT THE SSI SPEAKERS' SERIES: DURING 2014, SETTLEMENT SERVICES INTERNATIONAL (SSI) WILL HOST A SERIES OF TALKS AND PANEL DISCUSSIONS ON CURRENT REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKER ISSUES AND RELATED TOPICS. THE SSI SPEAKERS' SERIES AIMS TO INFORM, CONNECT AND CHALLENGE SSI STAKEHOLDERS AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY BY PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISCUSSION THAT ENHANCE KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS ABOUT RELEVANT ISSUES IMPACTING THE ORGANISATION'S CLIENTS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES. FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT WWW.SSI.ORG.AU



Speakers



Professor Andrew Markus

Andrew Markus is the Pratt Foundation Research Professor of Jewish Civilisation at Monash University and is a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia. He has published extensively on Australian immigration and race relations. Andrew heads the Scanlon Foundation social cohesion research program, which is to issue its seventh annual report in October 2014. He maintains the Mapping Australia's Population internet site.



Christine Rau

Chris Rau has worked as a print journalist for 30 years, full-time and freelance, for national and metropolitan newspapers and magazines in Sydney and Melbourne. She has also written a handbook for media newcomers, including students and community groups. It includes advice from more than 30 senior contributors across broadcast, print, new media, wire services, and specialist fields. (*Dealing With the Media*, UNSW Press, 2010). She has written about asylum seeker issues since 2005 for various outlets.



Superintendent Mark Wright

Superintendent Mark Wright is currently the Commander of Management and Leadership Development for the NSW Police Force. He is a white ribbon ambassador and maintained strong connections with the local community during his time as the Local Area Commander at Blacktown (2008-2013). In 2010 he was awarded STARTTS and Refugee Council Humanitarian Award and in 2012 was named a Paul Harris Fellow by Rotary (International) in appreciation of tangible and significant assistance given for the better understanding and friendly relations between peoples of the world. He is the founder and former chair of COM4Unity (connecting our minds for unity).

Igniting International Connections

While on holidays recently, Senior Project Officer Honey Muir caught up with Dr Sirolli of the Sirolli Institute, and some of their Welsh colleagues and clients at enterprise facilitation project 'Effect Blaenau Gwent'.

The county borough of Blaenau Gwent has the highest rate of unemployment in the UK, and Effect Blaenau Gwent, the first project of its kind in Wales, is seeking to address this.



Hallelujah; another !gnite small business start-up

After his recent participation and showing in the "Art is our Voice" exhibition, Victor Youssef has become the ninth client to successfully establish an enterprise.

The Virgin (pictured) was purchased by Rev. Dr. Theresa Angert-Quilter on behalf of the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn.

'Food Lovers Australia' at new Liverpool night markets

July saw the launch of a new initiative by Liverpool Council, [Liverpool Night Markets](#).

A special thanks to Resource Team member and Chair of the SSI Board, Kamalle Dabboussy for supporting !gnite client George Panayi with a subsidised stall.

George's delicious and healthy "Sesame Snacks" were very popular, and he will regularly have a stall at the markets which are held on the first Saturday of every month from 4pm – 9pm in Macquarie Street.

The next market will be Saturday September 6, so if you are in the area, why not take a look and support George and the new markets.



NEWS AND EVENTS



SSI CEO Violet Roumeliotis and Quality Assurance and Audit Manager Michael Hazell were presented with the ISO 9001 certification of SSI on July 1.

The certificate was presented by Global-Mark's Managing Director Herve Michoux and Client Manager John Mason.

Global-Mark is one of Australia's leading conformity assessment bodies, providing certification of management systems and product conformance. Mr Michoux said the certification recognised the high standards achieved at SSI.

"It's recognition that your organisation is well organised and efficient, and hopefully delivers what its clients need," said Mr Michoux.



SSI held an orientation day with a difference on July 10 in Liverpool.

Fifteen young people of refugee background were divided into groups and given a range of comprehension questions about different service providers in the area that they completed while on walking tour. Each group was accompanied by an SSI staff member or volunteer.

Services they visited included the Migrant Resource Centre, train station, police station, library, Centrelink and Macquarie Street Mall.

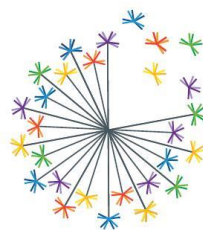
The session ended at Bigge Park in Liverpool where NAIDOC celebrations were taking place. Everyone involved enjoyed the day with some commenting that it was an interesting way to introduce SSI youth clients to services and to help them remember information.



SSI brought together a group of 37 young people of refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds on July 2, to participate in an Australia21 Youth Roundtable in Parramatta. The Roundtable included a mix of discussion and story-board work and was an opportunity for young people of refugee and asylum seeker background to contribute to the public discussion.

[Australia21](#) is a not-for-profit research company that specialises in addressing current issues facing Australia.

A summary of outcomes was presented in the Australia21 Expert Roundtable held in Parliament House, Canberra on July 11.



SSi**be**well

Congratulations to Rose Meduri, the July recipient of the CEO Wellness Award.

Rose is based in the Parramatta office, and is a team leader with the Community Support Program

Rose ensures that she looks after herself by exercising regularly. Rose also endeavours to inspire her team by providing a bowl of fresh fruit to help them make healthy food choices. Further to this, Rose organised for a recent team meeting to be held outdoors, near the Parramatta River. Rose is certainly employing many of the Be Well modules into her work life balance, and we wish her all the best on her wellness journey. Congratulations!

Be Well needs your input

Staff wellbeing is high on the agenda at SSI. The wellness conversation is driven by SSI Be Well - our unique workplace wellness program. A staff-run committee meets monthly to implement a range of wellness activities, several of which have been proposed by staff. While we always welcome your ideas and feedback, over the next few weeks we invite all staff to help design the next phase of Be Well.

Wellness survey coming soon

All staff will soon receive an email from the CEO asking them to complete a short online wellness survey. It will provide the opportunity to share which aspects of health and wellness are most important to staff.

Shaping wellness at SSI

The findings from the survey will help shape the range of activities included in Be Well for the coming year. SSI wants to ensure that its wellness program is relevant and reflects the needs and interests of all employees.

Find out more about Be Well

To find out more about Be Well visit: bewellssi.org.au