

# ssi news

SETTLEMENT SERVICES INTERNATIONAL NEWSLETTER



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## From the CEO Violet Roumeliotis



It's hard to believe we are already one month into the new year.

Last year ended with a flurry of activity at SSI, details of which you will read about in this newsletter.

Notably, a visit from Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash was a highlight, and we are pleased that the new department is taking time to hear about the work happening on the ground.

During 2014, SSI will have more of a focus on activities specific to our female clients and also for our young clients, aged 18 years and younger, whether here with their families or Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors.

Families will also be a focus, and the June 5 symposium *Cultural shift: supporting migrant and refugee families through settlement* will bring together experienced practitioners and organisations in the field to share stories and knowledge. Registrations open soon so keep this day free in your diary.

Coming up in the events calendar are numerous events including Clean Up Australia Day, Harmony Day, National Youth Week, Childrens' Festival and Refugee Week. These are all occasions which we will mark, together with SSI clients.

SSI continues to provide a diverse range of support services to assist our refugee and asylum seeker clients in maintaining morale and participating in the Australian community. We will also continue to tell our clients' stories and promote their many achievements and aspirations.

On this note, I would like to welcome Callan Lawrence, who will be taking up the new role of Online Communications Coordinator at SSI, and our first Arts and Culture Coordinator Carolina Triana. With Callan's input, you will be hearing and seeing a lot more about SSI through our growing online presence and Carolina will be implementing a range of cultural activities and projects that will tap into the rich vein of artistic experience and skill of our clients.

My warm wishes to you for a safe and happy 2014, and I look forward to working closely with many of you to continue our valuable work in humanitarian and child and family services.

# Soccer unites but who will give them a game?

Soccer, or football, is often called the game that unites the world.

However, for a group of refugees and asylum seekers living in Sydney, financial obstacles are creating a barrier to unite as a team.

Unofficially known as Auburn United FC, the players have come to Australia from Afghanistan, Africa, Nepal, Turkey and Tajikistan to find asylum.

Most of the team members are on bridging visas, which means they are unable to work. SSI provides case management and other support services to many of the refugee and asylum seeker members on the team. Other players are full-time overseas students.



Living on a tight budget, these players have no funds to pay registration fees of between \$200 and \$300 each to join an organised competition.

*Essa Khan, far right, with Auburn United FC team members*

A public appeal for support by SSI this week however, has resulted in phone calls and emails from generous members of the community wanting to donate money to help fund the team.

Until eight months ago, they formed only ad-hoc to play with whoever turned up to Auburn Park on any given night.

But when Afghan asylum seeker and soccer coach Essa Khan, 44, found them kicking a ball in the dark while out walking, he quickly rounded them up in to a team.

“It helps their health, they can engage in an activity and avoid anti-social behaviour,” Essa said with his SSI case manager Archana Ghale interpreting.

The two dozen or so players now train every week and play regularly against other social clubs.

One of Auburn United’s players, Syed Rafi Musawi, said football has been the perfect vehicle for helping refugees and asylum seekers engage in Australian culture.

“Australia is multicultural and this is a multicultural game,” he said.

Both Syed and Essa said the team is desperate to register in an official competition so they can play regularly and participate in an Australian way of life.

Organisations, and individuals, with an interest in sponsoring the team can contact SSI on (02) 8799 6746.

## First day at school causes jitters of a different kind



Like most children, Noran Zahrooni was terrified of starting school last week.

But it wasn't teachers or lessons that had him anxious. The six-year-old and his family, clients of SSI, arrived in Australia late last year after fleeing war-torn Syria.

Interviewed by SBS last week, father Farhan Zahrooni said his son had been traumatised by the conflict and struggled to understand he was now safe.

"In Syria they usually targeted schools, so he thinks that if he goes to school he will be in danger and no one will save him," Mr Zahrooni said through an interpreter.

Originally from Iraq, Mr Zahrooni and his wife, Ebtisam Al-Zuhairi, fled to Syria seven years ago after the family was targeted in violent attacks because of their Mandaean religion. But escaping to Syria provided only short-term relief from violence.

"The first three years were okay but after the war started, the situation became worse," Mr Zahrooni said.

The family's house was twice the target of attacks, and in one event Mr Zahrooni and his young son were crushed by a window that fell during an explosion.

After a number of unsuccessful applications for refugee status, the family were finally able to move to Australia in December 2013 after being recognised as genuine refugees.

The couple have four sons ranging in age from six to 17 years - and son Raghdan, 16, said the older boys had not been to school for at least four years due to the conflict.

Parents Farhan and Ebtisam said that despite his fears, their son's first day at school had gone off without a hitch.

"His experience was really positive because he saw all the kids playing and smiling and he didn't feel the danger around there," Mr Zahrooni said.

"I can see how happy he is and this of course, as a mother, brings me happiness," Mrs Al-Zuhairi added.

The couple hope it's a sign of things to come.

**Note:** This story by Sylvia Varnham O'Regan first appeared on [SBS News](#).

# NEWS AND EVENTS



SSI case manager Najeeba Wazefadost has been awarded Local Young Australian of the Year by Auburn Council.

Najeeba has been with SSI for three years, working in the Humanitarian Settlement Services Program with newly arrived refugees.

Najeeba, a former refugee from Afghanistan, has worked extensively in the Auburn Council area through the activities of the Hazara Women of Australian Association, of which she is president.

"I'm so happy my work is recognised, and that I can help women from my community, some who are in similar situations that I have also experienced."

The award was presented by Auburn Mayor Hicham Zraika at a ceremony at Olympic Park on January 26 - Australia Day.

Also acknowledged on the day for his contribution to the Auburn Council community was SSI Bilingual Guide, Philip V Sebaratnam. Philip was nominated for Local Citizen of the Year for his voluntary work with seniors, his involvement in organising forums for young people and asylum seekers, and his efforts with the Auburn Tamil Society.



*Above: Mayor Zraika presenting Najeeba with her award.*

*Right: Philip, far left, with Member for Reid Craig Laundry MP, and fellow Tamil community members.*

Registration will open soon for SSI's families' symposium: *Cultural shift: supporting migrant and refugee families through settlement*

The symposium will be held on June 5, 2014 at the Parramatta Novotel Hotel and will feature a line up of the leading thinkers and operators in the sector, participating in a series of presentations, workshops and panel discussions.

Topics to be discussed include cross cultural issues in parenting and child protection, interagency collaboration and cooperation, and models for case managing refugee young people. Case studies will also be presented.

The symposium will explore the issues and challenges faced by families during their settlement. Also on the agenda will be solutions and positive pathways available.

## NEWS AND EVENTS cont...



The SSI Community Kitchen, now located in Auburn, was held on January 29, this week with Indian food featuring on the menu.

SSI Case Manager Mini Batra, together with her husband Dany and brother-in-law Brian, both professional chefs, donated their time and ingredients to cook a range of Indian dishes. Dany and Brian also taught a small group of SSI clients and staff how to make chicken biryani and rajma, a red kidney bean curry.



A musical jam session was arranged with the help of ['Music for Refugees'](#) founder and volunteer music teacher Philip Feinstein. Philip has been collecting donated musical instruments for the past few years and is a volunteer music teacher at the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre. Philip kindly gifted a couple of guitars, a keyboard, a flute, a clarinet and a couple of recorders for future jam sessions at the SSI Community Kitchen.

Free haircuts were an offer from a client who was a professional barber in Iran, with about 12 'customers' taking up the opportunity.

The Community Kitchen is run by dedicated volunteers, under the guiding hand of SSI Community Engagement Coordinator Trina Soulos, and SSI is grateful for the time and support they put in to make it such an enjoyable day.



The generosity of local Department of Human Services staff put a smile of hundreds of children's faces who received toys collected at Centrelink customer service centres around Sydney.

Organised by Mount Druitt Multicultural Services Officer David Jacquin, three van loads of toys were distributed by SSI staff to refugee families, many of whom are financially vulnerable and cannot afford luxury items such as toys.

## NEWS AND EVENTS cont...



SSI hosted Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash at the Ashfield head office on December 6.

Senator Cash met with SSI executive staff and members of the board, who presented an overview of SSI program areas and SSI initiatives, particularly in the area of Women at Risk visa holders. Refreshments were prepared by volunteer chefs from the SSI Community Kitchen.



SSI thanks Caringbah volunteer organisation Dandelion Support Network, for its overwhelmingly generous support of needy families during the past few months.

Refugee clients have received used but good quality items for their children including prams, children's cots and beds, toys, clothing, and breast pumps.

The network members accept, sort, clean and safety check pre-loved nursery equipment and children's clothes for distribution through local hospitals and support agencies, such as SSI.



To celebrate International Volunteer Day and formally recognise the invaluable contribution of the 350 plus SSI volunteers, a lunch event in Parramatta Town Hall was held on December 5.

SSI staff and volunteers enjoyed a meal together and shared their experiences.

Volunteers are an essential part of SSI service delivery and help support clients as they adjust to their new life in Australia.



Spurred on by a colleague at Ryde Police Local Area Command wanting to donate some of his children's unused toys, a toy drive was coordinated by Multicultural Liaison Officer Chanta Mau resulting in a mountain of toys and games donated to SSI families seeking Australia's protection.

Ms Mau also invited staff of Ryde City Council who generously joined in the toy drive.

SSI appreciates the ongoing support and generosity of the Ryde Police Local Area Command.



In the spirit of Give Well, several CEO Wellness Awards were presented to SSI staff members over the December/January period. Congratulations to each of them for embracing Be Well in their own unique way.



**From left to right above:**

**Lynette Racheti** has been a dedicated and active Be Well champion. Based at SSI Auburn, she has generously coordinated the Auburn team for yoga, training and spreading Be Well messages.

**Nils Bethke**, Be Well Committee Chair, pictured with **Marcela Hart** who kindly volunteered her time as a zumba instructor, teaching classes to SSI staff .

**Michael Hazell** has embraced the Move Well principle of getting active with a lunchtime run three times a week, and a weekly yoga class, offered to all SSI staff.

**Geneen Reyna** also kindly volunteered her time as a zumba instructor, and both Marcela and Geneen will continue classes in 2014.

**Haneen Abdel Khaleq (below)** has been on a healthy eating and exercise regime, including SSI yoga and zumba classes, and has lost 10kg in the first month. **Natalie Taha (not pictured)** wakes before the birds to go on a power-walk and supports and motivates her colleagues in their healthy choices.

