

# ssinews

SETTLEMENT SERVICES INTERNATIONAL NEWSLETTER



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## Safe at last after a century of conflict

A very special client of SSI's featured in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on August 21, in a story that highlighted the significance of Australia's humanitarian settlement program. The feature could only touch on the life of 102-year-old Yasmi Houmi, who had seen too much violence for one lifetime. Her story is remarkable but, sadly, not unique.



*Yasmi Houmi, 102, arrived in Sydney in January as a humanitarian refugee. Photo: Tamara Dean.*

By Kim Arlington, SMH

She was born before the outbreak of World War I and has spent much of her life in war zones or fleeing conflict. But Yasmi Houmi, who turned 102 this month, has finally found safety.

Escaping the civil war in Syria, she arrived in Sydney in January as part of Australia's humanitarian settlement program. "All my life I feel like I was running away," Mrs Houmi said, as a friend translated. "I'm not scared any more." [Read more.](#)

## From the CEO Violet Roumeliotis



I'm excited to say the Steering Committee of Multicultural Youth NSW met for the first time during August. SSI announced earlier this year that it would drive the establishment of an independent multicultural youth organisation to focus on the needs of youth from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Multicultural Youth NSW has been established to respond to an unmet need for an organisation focused on the specific needs of multicultural youth in NSW.

The Steering Committee consists of two representatives from SSI, five from migrant resource centres, one from Blacktown Youth Services Association, one from Auburn Youth Centre and three young people from refugee migrant backgrounds. I was lucky enough to sit in on the inaugural meeting.

Committee members set out to define where the gaps in services were, what the organisational capacity to meet those needs was, and what the vision should be. It's still early days but clear objectives were identified. A special mention must be made of the youth representatives on the committee, who have already shown exceptional leadership skills.

On the subject of young people, it's important to mention here that the [SSI Multicultural Foster Care Service \(MCFS\)](#) will take responsibility for another 50 children from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Responsibility for these children in foster care will be transferred from NSW Department of Community Services to SSI in phases from August to December.

The MCFS operates under the belief that children in care who are supported to learn about and maintain connection to their culture, religion and language have better outcomes as they grow than those who do not. The addition of more children who SSI can oversee the care of is recognition of the strength of this service and its positive results for young people in care.

I am also happy to report that SSI was a finalist in two significant awards recently. It was pleasing to see SSI getting recognition for all the hard work undertaken.

One of those awards was for Business Excellence (for a business employing more than 20 full-time employees) at the [Western Sydney Awards for Business Excellence \(WSABE\)](#). Being a finalist in these awards was acknowledgement that not-for-profit organisations can be leaders in innovation, business sustainability and financial management, and best practice service delivery, within an ethical and values-driven framework.

SSI was also a finalist for an Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) Innovation Award for the Pacific Community Foster Care [recruitment campaign](#). This campaign has encouraged interest in foster caring from people from a Pacific background, including Samoan, Tongan, Fijian, Cook Island and Maori. The ACWA Awards acknowledged the quality of the campaign materials developed by SSI and the success of the campaign's recruitment strategy.

Congratulations to the award winners, Nepean Regional Security and Evolve Housing, which won the WSABE award, and The Aboriginal Child, Family & Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec), which won the ACWA award.

Finally I would like to warmly welcome SSI's new Government and Member Relations Manager Esta Paschalidis-Chilas. Esta has been an advocate in the multicultural settlement area for more than two decades. Esta has led Metro Migrant Resource Centre, has been employed at the Ethnic Communities Council of NSW and in State Government in the Health portfolio. Esta's new role is to bring a strategic approach to building strong relationships with the key SSI stakeholders in government and our member organisations.

# Crucial humanitarian support to continue



Settlement Services International (SSI) is pleased to announce it has been awarded the tender to deliver Status Resolution Support Services in NSW and ACT.

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) has worked with stakeholders over the past 18 months to bring four existing support programs for asylum seekers together into a single program to deliver support services to clients while their immigration status is being resolved.

The resulting program is known as Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS)

The SRSS program will include new services that are not included in the Community Support Program currently being delivered by SSI. These will include:

- Community Detention – managing detention placements in the community for unaccompanied minors and families
- Support for youth in onshore detention – providing welfare support to unaccompanied minors in alternative places of detention
- Transit services – supporting clients moving between states via Sydney
- Orientation – comprehensive community orientation program
- Assessment of support for arrivals by plane – assessment for ASAS for clients who arrive by plane and seek asylum
- Meaningful engagement – activities for clients to remain meaningfully engaged whilst their status is determined
- Independent observers – provide support to young people during immigration interviews

SSI CEO Violet Roumeliotis congratulated colleagues and staff, and said the success was a testament to the skill and dedication of staff who work in the existing Community Support Program.

“Under the SRSS program, SSI will continue to be a leader in the delivery of critical support services to asylum seekers who are living in the Australian community on temporary visas.” said Ms Roumeliotis.

## Supporting asylum seekers two years on

August marked the second anniversary of SSI delivering support programs to asylum seekers in NSW. From about 15 staff supporting 75 clients in 2012, SSI now has 160 employees supporting almost 5,000 asylum seekers living in the community.



*SSI Community Support Program staff members at the first anniversary in August 2013.*

Manager Humanitarian Services David Keegan said it was a testament to staff that the organisation had successfully negotiated the large growth in such a short timeframe.

“Over these two years, our Community Support Program (CSP) successfully provided a high level of case management for people seeking refugee protection in NSW,” Mr Keegan said. “This has been evident in the care and commitment our team has invested in making the lives of these vulnerable people as secure and safe as possible.”

“The program has changed over this time, with case managers increasingly focused on supporting clients to be self-sufficient and connecting them with communities. Our staff has collaborated and worked closely with communities to support clients to meet their needs.

“People seeking asylum have usually suffered extreme circumstances that can leave them socially isolated. SSI has implemented strategies to support them to embrace opportunities that reconnect them with wider social networks. We have created special programs that have empowered clients to be socially engaged and to display their skills and talents, including Community Kitchen, Playtime, arts projects and exhibitions such as Art Is Our Voice, and sports.

“SSI will continue to work with governments to refine the delivery of its services and the collaboration with our stakeholders. Thank you to the staff, volunteers, collaborators and clients who have contributed to the successful outcomes over this time.”

# Broken Time: the experience of Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors

A short film exploring the real life experience of homelessness faced by refugee youth living without their families in Sydney was launched last month to coincide with International Youth Day. The film *Broken Time* is the story of Ali, an Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minor (UHM), who falls back on his survival instinct when he finds himself homeless on the streets of Sydney.



Honey Muir, Riz Khan, Seema Naem, Burhan Khan, Dilber Hussain, Daniel Hopkins, and director Barry Gamba.

The film was developed by SSI with funding from The Australia Council for the Arts.

Dilber Hussain played the role of Ali, and was all too familiar with the experience of his character in the film. Dilber is from Pakistan and arrived in Australia in 2012 as a UHM at the tender age of 17. When his circumstances rapidly deteriorated and he was faced with homelessness, Dilber said he was frightened.

“Staying in a different place every night, and with strangers, it was hard,” said Dilber. “I didn’t know how to get help, and I feel very lonely here without my family.”

SSI Manager Humanitarian Services David Keegan said the organisation’s reason for filming *Broken Time* was to highlight the distinct challenges faced by young refugees who find themselves in this situation. The production was supported by Yfoundations, a peak body representing young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

“Many unaccompanied youth have been separated from their family due to violent conflict or persecution, and have experienced or witnessed significant trauma, instability and a broken, if any, education,” said Mr Keegan. Read the [full story here](#). For a copy of the film, please email [hmuir@ssi.org.au](mailto:hmuir@ssi.org.au).

# Ignite

small business  
start-ups  
AN SSI INITIATIVE

Ignite: Small Business Start-ups continues to support passionate entrepreneurs from a refugee background through ever-expanding professional networks. The Ignite team has now supported 10 clients to establish their own businesses, including two social enterprises, and has received more than 80 referrals in the first 12 months of the project.

SSI and the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) have now formed a solid partnership through a number of Ignite projects. The relationship with UTS was established after Professor of Social Economics Jock Collins, of the university's Management Discipline Group, approached SSI.

The first partnership project with UTS involves researchers evaluating Ignite during its first three years of operation. Another project involves Master of Business Administration (MBA) students mentoring Ignite clients who have established enterprises. The student mentors will work with Enterprise Facilitator Dina Petrakis to recognise existing challenges and risks within the business, conduct market research, provide support with budgeting and look for ways to ensure viability of the enterprise in the long term.

Ignite has also partnered with [UTS Shopfront](#). The university's Shopfront program has been connecting community organisations to professional expertise and resources at UTS since 1996. Shopfront projects are initiated by community organisations and must have goals that benefit the community at their forefront. Through this partnership, a team of four MBA students will work with SSI Senior Project Officer Honey Muir to focus on building potential partnerships that will add value to the program and ensure its sustainability and longevity.

Each program with UTS MBA students will run from August to November 2014 as a pilot.



Three of SSI's Ignite Small Business Start-ups participants who have launched their businesses.

# Perception is reality: what the experts said

SSI's third Speakers' Series event for 2014 explored the theme: Perception is reality: How do we form our perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers?

SSI CEO Violet Roumeliotis explained the significance of the theme. "In recent years we have seen a hardening of views, particularly towards asylum seekers, and the existence of these negative views has resulted in refugees and asylum seekers experiencing discrimination, isolation and not feeling safe in their communities," Ms Roumeliotis said. "So SSI is committed to understanding public opinion and undertaking initiatives to influence and to try to change negative perceptions. To address these negative perceptions we need to understand how they are formed: to what extent are these negative views shaped by political discourse, media or by our own values as Australians?"



Speakers Series panel: Chris Rau, Superintendent Mark Wright, Professor Andrew Markus and Oliver Laughland.

The panel discussion featured three experts with experiences in three different social institutions: academia, the media and the police. Professor Andrew Markus, a refugee himself who came from Hungary as a boy in 1957, is a lecturer at Monash University and head of the Scanlon Foundation Social Cohesion Research program. He presented research to the audience of 80 or more from his longitudinal studies on perceptions of migration found in the Foundation's *Social Cohesion* reports. Following the keynote presentation, Professor Markus joined a panel with journalist and author Chris Rau, NSW Police Superintendent Mark Wright, and discussion mediator Oliver Laughland, journalist for *The Guardian*. [Read more.](#)

Some intriguing points from Professor Markus's recent research included:

- 25 per cent of Australians think the government's asylum seeker policies are "too soft"
- 22 per cent think they are "too tough"
- Most people agreed the policies are about right
- Yet 79 per cent of respondents support humanitarian resettlement in Australia

# Asylum Sneakers



SSI joined forces with Welcome To Australia on August 30, to distribute 80 pairs of sports shoes and soccer boots to people on bridging visas. The footwear was funded through the [“Asylum Sneakers”](#) campaign that has so far raised more than \$26,500.

[Welcome To Australia](#)’s Leila Druery said the campaign idea grew from seeing the affect sport could have. “Asylum Sneakers came about after seeing the incredibly positive impact of sport on young asylum seeker children in detention centres and in the community,” she said. “Sadly, many children’s participation in sport is limited by not being able to afford shoes and sports equipment.”

SSI targeted the footwear to its young clients up to the age of 25 but the campaign was not exclusive to youth. Staff and volunteers from both organisations distributed the shoes and boots and then joined the recipients in a game of soccer.

SSI CEO Violet Roumeliotis said the campaign had done a wonderful thing for people. “The fact these people are here on bridging visas means they cannot work and, for the younger people, neither can their parents in most cases. They often live on an average of just \$32 a day.

“The benefits to young people that come from participating in community activities like sports and having fun shouldn’t be overlooked. It can boost confidence, connect youths to community networks and keep them healthy. The shoes and football boots provided by Asylum Sneakers will allow them those opportunities.”

## News and events

### Ability Links NSW – a new way

It has been two months since SSI’s Ability Links Program was established to link people with disability to community services and contacts. SSI’s program area covers the Sydney Metro South, Metro North and Southern NSW regions. The program started with 22 employees in various roles located at Metro, St George, Parramatta, Auburn, Liverpool and Illawarra Migrant resource Centres and at SSI Head Office in Ashfield. This team will soon grow to 58 staff members when stage-two recruitment is finalised.

Ability Links NSW is a new way to help people with disability, their carers and families to develop links in their local and extended communities and enhance people’s access to opportunities. It is designed to ensure people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds can access the program and that it is sensitive to their needs.

Since the start of Ability Links on July 1, the SSI team has made more than 1000 contacts with community organisations, the general public and other bodies. The program has already successfully linked more than 60 people with services and community connections.



## New domestic violence resource for migrant communities

SSI is proud to announce the launch of the new DV-Alert website and programs to combat domestic violence.

SSI partnered with Lifeline Australia and other organisations to produce response training, research and other resources for the website. DV-Alert provides targeted information and training for health and other front-line workers as well as victims.

Workshops and resources specifically for people from diverse cultural backgrounds are available through the website. Visit the [website here](#).



Images courtesy of DV-alert website.

## Money raised for refugees in an Action Hour

SSI staff in six Sydney offices stopped work briefly to raise money for refugees on United Nations World Humanitarian Day, August 19. Offices in Ashfield, Auburn, Campsie, Fairfield, and Parramatta raised more than \$1180. The money was donated to the [Action Hour campaign](#), which distributes resources to refugees in, including those in Syria, Iraq and South Sudan.

World Humanitarian Day has been nominated by the UN to commemorate humanitarian workers who have died while supporting refugees around the world.

## Art and craft for sale

SSI clients showcased their visual art at the Sydney TAFE Open Day on August 30. The clients involved in the exhibition are working with SSI's Ignite Small Business Start-ups project to establish businesses, while the other is supported by SSI's Community Support Program. The artists' work, which included paintings, glass art and copper etchings, was for sale in stalls at the Creative Mile street fair.

## Thanks to the organisations that support SSI and its clients

SSI's Community Support Program (CSP) teams have made a special effort to thank some of the charitable organisations that support their clients with morning teas recently. One of those benevolent organisations was [Dandelion Support Network](#). Dandelion provides new and pre-loved items for babies and children, including prams, cots, change tables, clothes, toys, breast pumps and nappies to mothers who need them. Everything is checked and cleaned by dedicated volunteers to meet safety and compliance standards and regulation. Dandelion is 100 per cent volunteer driven, and the organisation goes to great efforts to ensure only the best items are provided to families.



Dandelion volunteers with SSI CSP team members.

SSI staff members have been using Dandelion's service since September 2013, and are always very thankful for the organisation's vital support. A group of CSP case managers showed their appreciation by hosting a morning tea for some of the Dandelion volunteers and presenting thank you certificates.

For more information on the Dandelion Support Network, contact: Zoe Bell at [zbell@ssi.org.au](mailto:zbell@ssi.org.au).

## Knox Grammar and Auburn Cricket Club get the ball rolling

With cricket season just around the corner, a group of enthusiastic clients from SSI support programs for refugees and asylum seekers have been fine-tuning their skills. The group has taken part in cricket clinics at Auburn District Cricket Club each Saturday, when weather allowed. Members of Knox Grammar School "Old Boys" association participated in the clinics to help out.

Knox Grammar Old Boys member Marco van Westing said he and some of his fellow alumni enjoyed playing and training with the group. "It's just a great way to get involved in something that helps people," he said. "Sport connects the Australian community and allows asylum seekers and refugees to connect on that same level. It has been a very fun and fulfilling experience and one we hope to continue.

Mr van Westing and members of the Knox Grammar alumni also joined an SSI soccer tournament for Community Support Program clients earlier this year. Read [that story here](#).

## Unity in Music: a showcase of talent in exile

An ensemble of musicians from Iran and Burma formed from a partnership project between SSI and the [Cultural Performing Arts Network](#) (CPAN) during August, and has already been invited to play shows. The musicians involved in the group came together after participating in a series of workshops on presentation and production skills run by CPAN. The workshops were specifically for artists who are recently-arrived refugees or people seeking refugee protection in Australia and who are supported by SSI. The workshops were facilitated by artistic director of Sydney Sacred Music Festival Richard Petkovic.



The ensemble of SSI clients that formed from the music skills and development workshop.

The group will perform at an SSI Community Kitchen in September and, despite forming just weeks ago, has been invited to perform at the [Elements Community Celebration](#), at Parramatta's Riverside Theatres, as part of the Sydney Sacred Music Festival. The group does not yet have a name but their performance has been called *Unity in Music: a showcase of talent in exile*.

More [information here](#).

## A championship in sight for soccer players

Thanks to some kind and generous support from the community, a soccer team of young men who are seeking asylum or who have come to Australia as refugees has a championship firmly in its sights.



Newington Gunners players, in red and green, with club officials, SSI staff and supporters.

The team that likes to be known as Auburn United FC but is formally The Newington Gunners finished the season on top of the table in the Granville and Districts Soccer Football Association second division competition. At the time of print, the team was waiting for a break in the weather so the finals series could begin.

At the start of 2014, this group of 20-odd young men from around the world wanted to participate in Australian culture through their passion for soccer but faced financial barriers. Most of the players are seeking refugee protection in Australia and are on bridging visas, so cannot work. Many of them are supported by SSI. When SSI publicised the challenges faced by this team, a campaign to fund their registrations was generously supported by the public and the team soon took to the field. Their success has surpassed all expectations.

The team has not only found success on the field, its players have also found a welcome home with the [Newington Gunners Soccer Club](#). SSI CEO Violet Roumeliotis said the club had been incredibly supportive of the team.

“These men have come from extreme circumstances in crises all over the world,” Ms Roumeliotis said, “and the club has been very supportive and sensitive to their needs. There have been many other sponsors involved in supporting this team and we would like to thank all of them.”

To top it off, the team received a visit from Sydney FC players Peter Triantis and Milos Dimitrijevic at training session on August 2. To see a photo of the Newington and Sydney FC players, and footage of the meet and greet, visit SSI's [Facebook](#) page.

To read some media coverage of this group, follow the links: [Auburn Review](#), [SMH](#), [SMH 2](#).

## Wrestling champion hangs on to hope and new friends

Mohamadreza Ashori, 30, dreamt of competing at the Olympic Games, and still holds on to those hopes despite many setbacks throughout his life. In May he won the 74 kilogram division at the Australia Cup of Wrestling. He would have qualified for the Commonwealth Games but he is on a bridging visa seeking refugee protection, which made him ineligible to represent Australia.

But Mohamadreza's skill dedication was acknowledged when news publication *The New Daily* featured him in a story about the diets of elite athletes. You can read [The New Daily feature here](#): and read more of SSI Community Support Program client [Mohamadreza's story here](#).



Mohamadreza, in red, on his way to winning gold at the Australia Cup of Wrestling.