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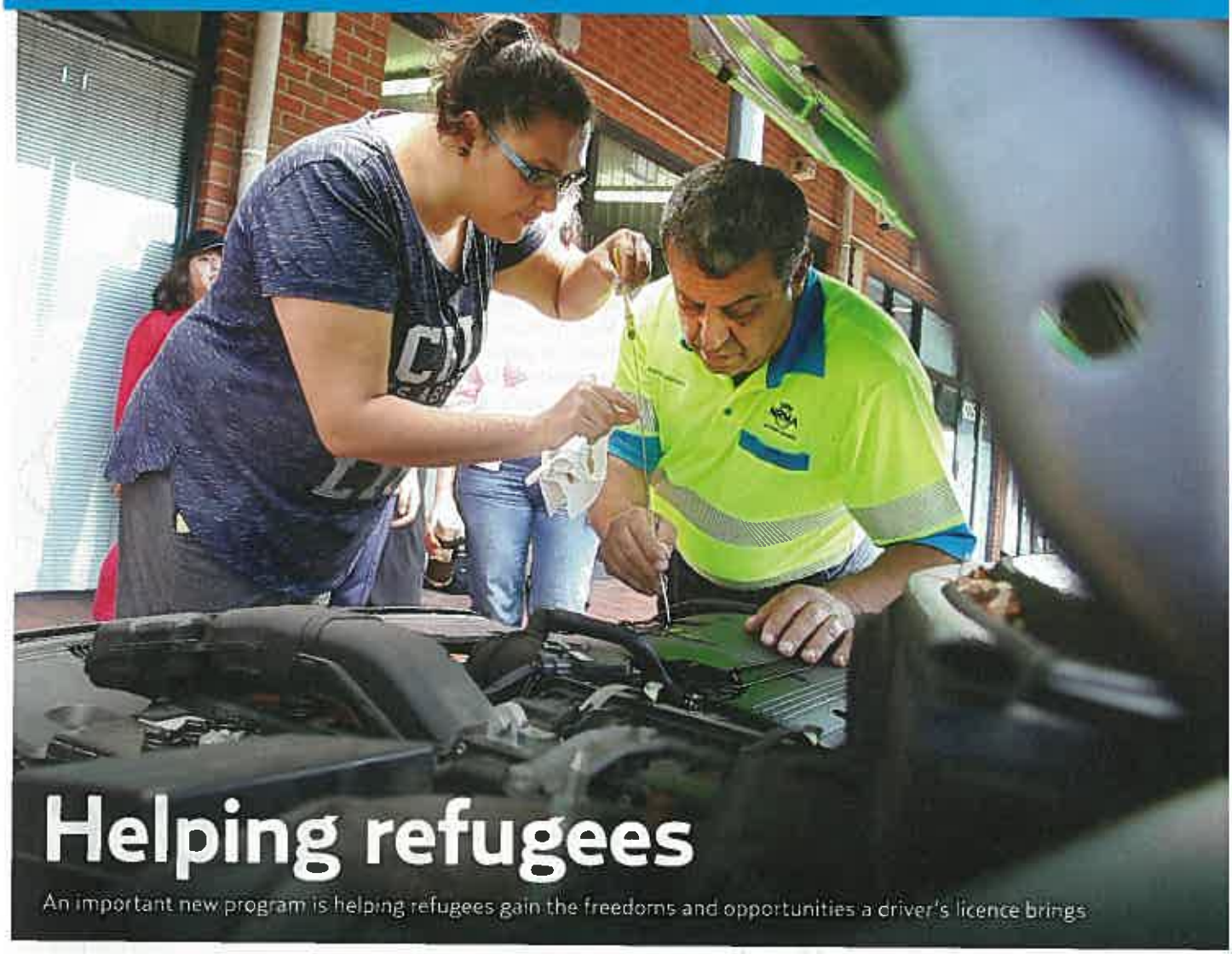

Helping refugees

An important new program is helping refugees gain the freedoms and opportunities a driver's licence brings

THE NRMA has launched a volunteer-led program to help newly settled refugees gain the confidence and skills required to obtain a NSW driver's licence.

The learner and provisional licence process, as many Members know, can be a time-consuming and resource-heavy activity. But for refugees who are starting a new life in a different country, often without much support, that process can be close to impossible.

The NRMA has partnered with the Gymea Community Aid & Information Service to deliver 'Drivetime', a driver licensing support program for refugees in Wollongong and Fairfield. NRMA Director David Bentham says the partnership is a natural fit for the NRMA, which has the expertise of Patrols and Members to help deliver the knowledge and resources many young Australians embarking on obtaining their licences may take for granted.

"While some of these refugees may have held a licence before, the Australian road rules and licensing system, and the hours required to pass tests, are all very new," Mr Bentham says.

"By helping these people, who may have come from very vulnerable situations, we're giving them the opportunity to settle into their new lives with the increased opportunities that driving allows, like accessing places of work or education."

Volunteer program co-ordinator, Robert Lindsay, says the program has already been running successfully in Gymea. "One young man I work with lost his parents when he was just five years old. If he gets his licence, he'll be able to get an apprenticeship," Mr Lindsay says.

As part of the program, Arabic-speaking Patrols, John Diab and Bassam Elakhras, delivered the NRMA's My First Car workshop to refugees from Syria and Iraq. The workshops helped teach participants the basics of safe car ownership, like how to check oil levels and tyre pressure, as well as what to do in the case of a mechanical emergency.

Members wanting to help participants prepare for their learner licence test, or supervise driving hours in preparation for their provisional test, can phone the Gymea Community Aid and Information Service on **0478 748 387** or email **drivetime@gcais.ngo.org.au**.