NSW Settlement Partnership

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In Focus

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Foreword

It is my pleasure to present the *NSW Settlement Partnership In Focus*.

The publication provides an overview of the NSW Settlement Partnership (the NSP) and showcases its work, from the establishment of the partnership in 2015. Readers will find case studies highlighting best practice and innovation in service delivery as well as stories from clients who have received support from the NSP.

The NSP works proactively and collaboratively to deliver settlement services to migrants and refugees in New South Wales. The NSP builds on the unique sector position SSI occupies and the knowledge, experience and relationships that consortium partners have developed at the local level. These relationships support the client group and facilitate their effective integration into the fabric of their new community.

The partnership is a unique service model that I am proud to say has facilitated sustained quality settlement services and significant outcomes and reinforced community engagement and innovation across most of the state.

I hope you will enjoy learning more about the NSP and its work.

Violet Roumeliotis
CEO, Settlement Services International

From Concept to Practice: The NSP Journey

The NSW Settlement Partnership (NSP) began in 2015 as a consortium of organisations, led by Settlement Services International, to deliver settlement services for refugees and migrants in NSW, as part of the Department of Social Services' Settlement Services Program (SSP).

The NSP represents a unique and innovative model for the delivery of settlement services. It provides organisations with a long and proud history in service delivery to migrants and humanitarian entrants, with the opportunity to share and build on best practice in service delivery from across the sector.

The SSP provides the delivery of core settlement support for humanitarian entrants, and other eligible migrants, in their first five years in Australia. It aims to assist eligible clients to become self-reliant and participate equitably, while maximising the productivity of our diversity and the economic well-being of clients by enabling them to become fully-functioning members of society as soon as possible and thereby, minimise longer-term reliance on social services (Families and Communities Program: Settlement Services Guidelines, DSS, April 2017).

Settlement grants activities focus on fostering social participation, economic well-being, independence, personal well-being and community connectedness.

Settlement services activities include casework/ coordination and settlement service delivery, community coordination and development, youth settlement services, and support for ethno-specific communities.

Partnership
Benefits and lessons

The NSP is characterised by diversity

The consortium comprises of SSI as the lead partner, SSI's 11-member Migrant Resource Centres and multicultural services and 11 locally based generalist and ethno-specific organisations.

Partner organisations deliver services in metropolitan Sydney and key regional locations. Furthermore, the consortium delivers services both in areas with high concentrations of migrant and humanitarian entrant arrivals and in those with a lower number of settlement target group arrivals.

NSP Snapshot 2016-17

1,176 group sessions delivered

Over **3,200 casework** sessions delivered

More than **180** sessions of sport and recreational activities delivered for youth

Over **400 volunteers** engaged

11,622 instances of referral, advice and information provided

74 Youth Collective activities and meetings were coordinated to support young migrants and refugees

NSP Partners

Advance Diversity Services
(formerly St George Migrant Resource Centre)

Auburn Diversity Services

Bathurst Information and Neighbourhood Centre

Community Migrant Resource Centre

Community Northern Beaches
(formerly Manly Community Centre and Services)

CORE Communities Services
(formerly Cabramatta Community Centre)

Dubbo Neighbourhood Centre

Great Lakes Agency for Peace and Development International (GLAPD) Int.

Gymea Community Aid and Information Service

Illawarra Multicultural Services

Khmer Community of NSW

Lebanese Community Council of NSW

Macarthur Diversity Services Initiative

Manning Valley Neighbourhood Centre

Melkite Catholic Welfare Association

Metro Assist

Mt Druitt Ethnic Communities Agency

Nepean Multicultural Access
(formerly Nepean Migrant Access)

Northern Settlement Services

Sydney Multicultural Community Services

SydWest Multicultural Services

Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre
(formerly Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre)

Casework standards and practice

The NSP is committed to supporting best practice and consistent delivery of quality SSP services across the partnership. We have developed a common understanding of casework, and agreed standards and principles to inform and strengthen casework services delivered by the NSP.

The standards and principles facilitate streamlined approaches to casework and are outlined in the *NSP Standards and Principles Guide* (the Guide).

The Guide includes core benchmark standards that caseworkers within the NSP aim to achieve with their clients. These were developed with reference to the outcome measures set out by the Department of Social Services, SCOA and through consultations with the NSP.

Templates and a self-reflection tool have been included in the Guide, which NSP staff are able to use or modify in their own practice.

A community of practice

The benefits and lessons from the NSP during our first two years of operation have been many. We have all learned more about each other, how to work more effectively together, and most importantly, learned more about providing strong settlement services for our clients. The capacity to cross fertilise project and program ideas across the partnership is strengthening, as we learn more about each organisation's specific strengths and capacities.

NSP collaboration builds on the combined knowledge and experience of partners. We come together to develop and share learnings and resources, to reinforce good practice against agreed service standards and principles, and to support sole workers.

Collective perspectives

The NSP meets regularly to address policy issues and to promote coordinated approaches to service planning and design. These forums also enable partners to respond collectively to social policy as it impacts on the settlement target group.

Comments from NSP partners

"The NSP is allowing all of us to deliver better services and to grow together in unity."

"It (the NSP Quarterly Meeting), is very comprehensive, well organised and delivered. Chairing is great and time management 100%. Thought and feedback is constantly sought from participating members."

(In relation to the development of communications collateral for the NSP). "When you ask what you can do to help this is amazing for me. It's the sort of thing I would have always loved but never had the time to do."

Impact for the community

Community and client voice

Community and clients are actively engaged in determining NSP service priorities and approaches.

At a local level, the NSP implements various strategies to ensure client and community voice is heard e.g. by establishing community reference groups, through the host of community roundtables and facilitating focus group discussions.

As the NSP, we have undertaken work to reach communities within the settlement target group that are small and dispersed. For example, funding was allocated to Sydney Multicultural Community Services and Advance Diversity Services for a caseworker focused on the Thai community, to work from an agreed work plan across both organisations. The Thai Welfare Association is a partner in this initiative, providing input in relation to work plan priorities and approaches.

Migrant and refugee youth are actively engaged in informing service planning, implementation and outcomes at the local level, through the operations of the Youth Collective. The Collective also coordinates cross-regional efforts of youth workers within the multicultural youth space, with a focus on the settlement sector (For more information, see Education Page 19 - The 20 Voices Youth Symposium).

Housing

The Parramatta Housing Access Project

The Parramatta Housing Access Project is a collaboration between local real estate agents, homelessness service providers and government agencies, including housing and community services in Western Sydney.

The project began with two objectives: to develop stronger relationships with local real estate agencies and to build capacity among CALD tenants and community leaders. However, the focus of the project has grown to incorporate another goal. Project workers have sought to bring about lasting change for CALD tenants within the rental market by shifting the culture of support services from one of crisis management, toward one of early intervention and prevention.

The aims of this project were met, not through the provision of additional services, but through improved access to existing services. The project has demonstrated that tenants can be helped to maintain their own accommodation by providing advice and referral for services such as hardship relief and financial counselling.

This project underscores the importance of supporting tenants at risk of eviction, as this has wider ranging benefits. By preventing people from unnecessarily entering the homelessness service system, this program is able to help the client maintain their independence, reduce the likelihood of ongoing welfare dependence, and prevent additional load on overstretched services. Supporting tenants to maintain their rental accommodation, also benefits real estate agents by reducing the unproductive amount of time and expense that is required to execute an eviction.

Mission Australia, as one of the community service organisations involved in the project, hosts the referral service within its premises and links individual referrals to member organisations. These member organisations then arrange support, for clients facing difficulties.

This project has brought together a range of organisations to deliver durable outcomes for clients. Through the project's steering committee, workers have built a coalition of dedicated and engaged stakeholders i.e. government and non-government community service organisations, including; the Community Migrant Resource Centre and SSI, together with advisers from local real estate agencies and CALD communities.

As a result of this collaboration, there has been increased streamlining and improved flexibility in the delivery of services.

Employment

Lead the Way

Lead the Way is an employment preparation program, undertaken by Western Sydney MRC (formerly Liverpool MRC). It seeks to improve the job readiness of newly arrived migrant and refugee participants, through workshop activities and with linkages to industry mentors.

A series of workshops were co-developed by Western Sydney MRC and Love Your Work, a career consulting agency, that harnessed Love Your Work's specialisation in career coaching with the MRC's understanding of the key challenges and needs of newly arrived migrants and refugees.

Workshops were delivered to 21 adults, linked in with employment mentors, and 12 high school aged participants, linked in with the Western Sydney MRC youth worker for mentoring support.

Workshops addressed the Australian job market, transitioning careers, overseas skills recognition, how to begin the job hunt, resume preparation, interview techniques, networking, job pathways, recruitment agencies, building resilience, building confidence and action plans.

Mentors provided industry specific advice, feedback on participants' resumes from an industry perspective, and established relationships that provided positive, objective and valued information and advice.

Participants derived greatest benefit from learning how to write a cover letter, knowing the process of looking for work and of putting together a resume. Addressing selection criteria is not a norm in many countries overseas, so bringing this requirement to participants' attention was seen as a significant achievement.

The value in a career pivot

Bilal arrived in Australia from Syria a little under four months ago. He had studied mechanical engineering, worked as a computer programmer and owned his own business.

While there was no shortage of demand in his industry, pursuing work in his field would, in the short term, be challenging due to language barriers and skills recognition requirements. Bilal was referred to Lead the Way from Western Sydney MRC's casework services.

It was time critical that Bilal gain employment in Australia and through the program, he began to carve himself an employment pathway with attainable goals. Wanting to do something positive towards his professional future, Bilal enrolled in TAFE aged care training as a first step in his new found pathway.

Shortly after his final Lead the Way workshop, Western Sydney MRC was approached by an aged care provider about employment opportunities for aged care support work. The assigned Lead the Way facilitator advised Bilal of the opportunity and negotiated with the organisation for Bilal to be considered as an applicant upon submission of his resume.

Bilal was supported by his Lead the Way facilitator in preparing and reviewing his resume. His facilitator was also listed as his referee due to a lack of local referees.

As a direct result, Bilal was successful in obtaining an interview and landing a job with the aged care organisation. He has since been flagged as an outstanding employee.

Bilal commented on the support that he received and expressed that he would have not succeeded without the support of Lead the Way. He explained how the program was able to help leverage his strengths and identify areas where he needed improvement, enabling him to land a job in a short period of time.

His gratitude was palpable: "When migrants receive support from people who care in a great country like Australia, settlement gets easier."

Never underestimate the power of a suit

Ali arrived in Australia from Myanmar a little under five years ago. Like many newly arrived migrants, he first tasked himself with securing a job.

After working in a string of cash-in-hand jobs, Ali enrolled in Metro Assist's dual qualification, Furniture Removal and Warehouse Operations, delivered under the SkillMe program.

With job seeking assistance support from Metro Assist, Ali had the opportunity to refine his resume and cover letter, and it was not long before Ali was getting called to attend interviews.

Getting past the actual interviews and securing a job, however, proved more difficult for Ali. With countless interviews yet no job offers, Ali's caseworker suspected that his presentation could be a factor, so the caseworker referred Ali to Dress for Work.

Dress for Work worked closely with Ali and issued him with several shirts, ties and trousers and, through information and role play scenarios, provided him with some practical presentation tips for future interviews.

Ali stood up straighter and projected a sense of confidence and professionalism that had just been waiting to be uncovered.

The day after his visit to Dress for Work, Ali, clothed in his new attire, attended an interview. The following week he was offered the job.

His excitement was evident: "I'm so happy I finally got a job. I can't wait to take my payslip and get off Centrelink. Thank you so much everyone at Metro!"

Job Seeker Workshops

Sydney Multicultural Community Services (SMCS) partnered with Community Migrant Resource Centre (CMRC), with the aim of supporting new arrivals living in the lower North Shore and Northern Region of Sydney to gain employment.

The project ran for five months, with two workshops conducted in each partner's area.

Each workshop was attended by 15-25 migrants with overseas gained skills and qualifications. The majority was attending TAFE English classes and had been living in Australia for one to two years.

The partnership between SMCS and CMRC provided a good opportunity for NSP partners to work together in reaching more members of the target group.

The workshops provided the nuts and bolts of what a job seeker is required to do to gain employment in the Australian job market. The workshops also focused on the support that is available in the community, guiding each participant through their employment journey.

Guest speakers provided information about courses related to hospitality, administration and accounting, what employers are looking for, how to dress for an interview, how to dress for work and mainstream services for individuals living with mental health issues and or living with a disability.

The project succeeded in highlighting appropriate next steps when looking for work in an Australian environment, with participants saying they felt more confident in their search for work after attending the workshops.

English

Talking Around the World

Talking Around the World, is a free English conversation group provided by Northern Settlement Services (NSS) on the NSW Central Coast that aims to support migrant and refugee community members, especially new mothers, who find it hard to access mainstream English programs.

This program provides a relaxed and supportive environment, in which participants can practice their English conversation skills, as well as build social connections. The program is supported by volunteers, the majority of whom are retired teachers.

Through the English class, group members are also able to connect with local community service organisations, channeling information on local activities and events, and other forms of settlement support.

The program is particularly popular among young parents and grandparents to preschool aged children. These participants are able to practice their English, while their children are supervised by a qualified childcare worker at a crèche nearby.

The sharing of culture and experience is also an important component of the English class. Participants exchange cultural information and practices from around the world, practicing English through directed conversation on familiar topics, including transport, housing, food and traditions. Group members discuss these topics as they relate to their home country and to Australia. This supports the development of social networks and fosters a collective bond within the group.

The group has been attended by more than 60 people, aged between 17 and 74, from 19 different cultural backgrounds. As a result of their participation in the program, many have gone on to further study, employment or volunteering roles. A number of people who were once considered isolated have formed lasting connections and friendships.

Satisfaction from participants runs strong: “This program made me confident to meet new people. I made friends. It helped me a lot. It also helped my baby not be so afraid and shy by playing with other little children.”

The language of resilience

Abbas came to Australia from Iran in 2014 under the Humanitarian Entrant Program. It was very difficult for him to communicate in English and he had problems with his vision.

Abbas joined Sydwest’s English conversation class and markedly improved his English skills. Despite his vision problems, he attended the English class every week. His language skills improved, he became more confident to express himself and was able to make friends from different cultures.

Abbas said SydWest had made his life easier since he came to Australia.

Successful refugee immersion begins at the local level

Nora arrived with her family from Iraq in 2015 as a humanitarian entrant. They lost everything in Iraq, including their jobs, house and family connections. Life became very different, from renting a home to finding a job. It was particularly difficult without the support of relatives. This struggle affected their family, resulting in feelings of isolation.

A NSP worker met Nora and her husband through one of Macarthur Diversity Services' (MDSI) orientation sessions for AMEP students at NAVITAS. The worker encouraged Nora and her family to join MDSI's programs, such as school holiday activities, events and social groups.

Participation in MDSI activities boosted Nora's self-confidence and she was inspired to improve her English. She started to volunteer in multiple MDSI programs and activities, and accelerated her education pathway undertaking a Diploma of Community Services Case Management at TAFE. While studying, she completed a placement at a local community organisation, which subsequently, offered her a part-time job.

Nora and her husband's lives have turned around for the better.

Nora said: "The support of the SSP program gave me the chance to provide information sessions about my journey to Australia to Campbelltown community through the *SWARM program. Through these MDSI activities I gained more confidence to connect with the community."

Nora's satisfaction was clear: "I was able within a very short time to study, volunteer and find employment. The most important part is that now I feel I belong and I am part of the Australia community."

*The SWARM program is a partnership between MDSI and Campbelltown Art Centre.

Education

20 Voices Youth Symposium

The 20 Voices Youth Symposium provides an opportunity for young people from culturally diverse backgrounds, particularly those from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds, to come together to voice their concerns, ideas and initiatives.

The event was organised by the Youth Collective, a combined initiative of Settlement Services International (SSI) and 11 Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) that focuses on addressing the needs of young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds with the specific aim of bridging gaps in service delivery.

Symposium events are intended to provide young people from CALD backgrounds, with meaningful opportunities to promote creative ideas and projects designed by young people for young people.

Since it's commencement in 2015, the 20 Voices Youth Symposium has engaged over 200 young people who arrived as migrants and refugees. Thirty young people have received leadership training and subsequently, participated in the 20 Voices Youth Leadership program.

The leadership program offers a space where young people can play a role in direct service delivery planning processes. Through their involvement, young people provide input to shape the direction and key priorities of projects, programs and activities of the Youth Collective.

One of these young people is Simon. Simon is originally from Syria and came to Australia two years ago as a refugee. Now, a 20 Voices Youth Leader, he has attended, coordinated, organised and been involved in numerous 20 Voices symposia, other workshops and Youth Collective events.

"This experience built my skills and has motivated me to pursue and take part in other youth leadership programs where I'm being involved as a Youth Peer Facilitator in delivering similar workshops for the newly arrived young people from multicultural backgrounds," he said.

Youth workers from the NSP, particularly the MRCs, collectively participate in the organisation of each of the Youth Symposium events. Youth workers have been able to share expertise, insights, resources and workload, fostering improved outcomes for the young people involved.

Success for 20 Voices requires that the voices of young people are heard, and that issues that matter most to them are addressed.

The SSI Youth Projects Coordinator who coordinates the Youth Collective said "Young people from diverse cultural backgrounds often experience issues and barriers around community integration, and these consultations are an ideal platform to develop a greater understanding of the needs of multicultural youth, to better understand their aspirations, and to help them achieve their goals."

Domestic and Family Violence

Safer Relationships Project

CORE Community Services applied for Settlement Innovation Fund support to address domestic violence in the Fairfield LGA in a new and innovative way, specifically by challenging the attitudes that are directly linked to domestic violence.

While domestic violence occurs across all communities, cultures, religions and socio-economic groups, CORE Community Services decided to work with two communities that have a significant number of settlement target group arrivals and close relationships with the organisation.

Initially the project sought to focus on developing a critical mass of proactive men bystanders, however, based on the research conducted, the emphasis shifted to challenging gender roles with the overall aim of reducing the use of violent and controlling behaviour in the home. Two project groups were formed: Me, Her and Them and Fathers and Families.

Interviews were conducted with 25 key informants and four focus groups, allowing women and men from the targeted communities to contribute in the design of the project.

A program was developed based on information gained from those interviewed. The program activities were interactive and educational, with no lectures or prescriptive content. A safe place was created, where men could talk openly and honestly. The activities allowed the participants to visualise and experience gender inequality, put themselves in the shoes of women and question their current attitudes towards women and men, and their roles in the family and in society. Bilingual workers were recruited and rigorous training was provided on gender and the gendered nature of violence.

Me, Her and Them was successful in terms of participants holding more gender equitable attitudes following the program. Attendance levels and the high level of passionate interaction reinforced that the program was well received by the participants. All the participants said they would value more sessions that explore other topics.

The program content did not generate the same level of interest for participants in the Fathers and Families project. Group members were confronting employment and financial pressures that impacted both on attendance and their willingness to engage meaningfully with the program content. While all of the intended aims were not achieved, the program provided a safe space for men to discuss their immediate issues of settlement, government policies, family matters etc., build trust amongst each other and be exposed to a new perspective on gender balance, child protection and positive parenting.

Overall, the Me, Her and Them and the Fathers and Families projects contributed positively to the education of men within the Fairfield LGA relating to the nature of gender and gendered violence. It is expected that these results will help our communities work towards the eventual elimination of family violence within Australian society.

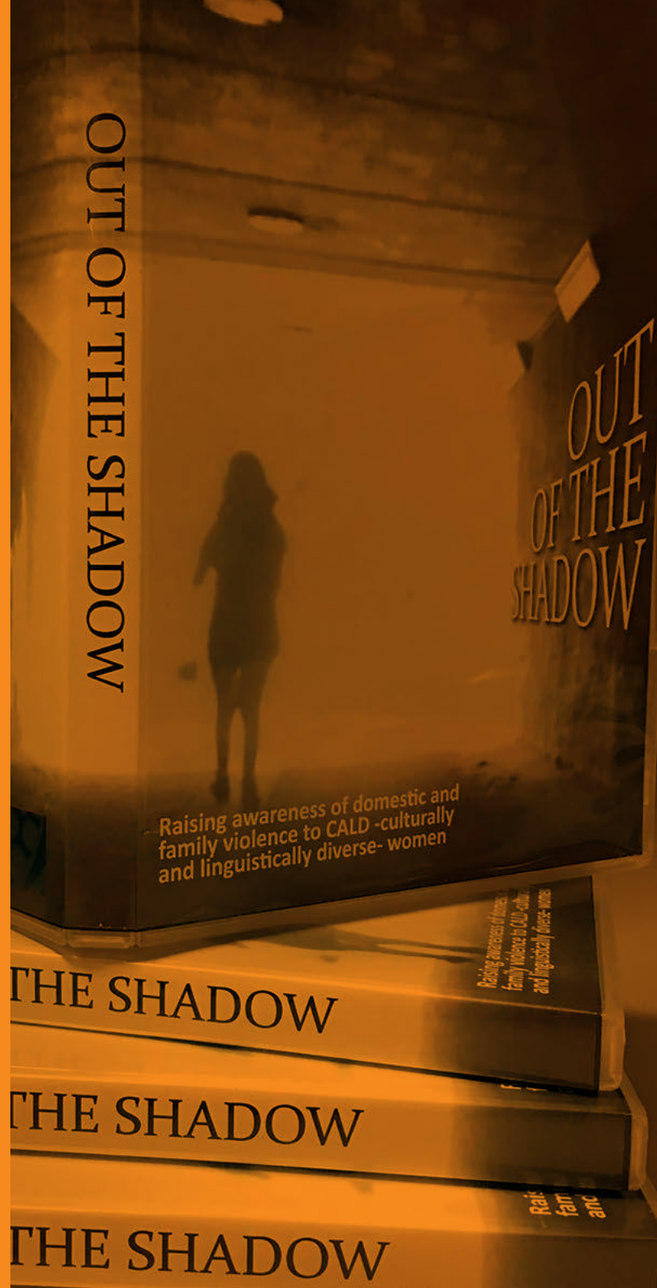
Out of the Shadow

Out of the Shadow is a visual resource aiming to raise awareness of domestic and family violence amongst women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. It provides over 20 short acted examples of the forms of abuse that women and children may experience in a family or domestic relationship, as well as information on the consequences of the abuse.

The DVD resource was produced by the Central Coast DV CALD Sub Committee, which includes staff from Northern Settlement Services (NSS). The sub-committee has produced easy-to-read written material in English, as well as community language resources to raise awareness of domestic and family violence in migrant and refugee communities. NSS and other organisations represented on the sub-committee have also run workshops for newly arrived CALD community members as well as women from established communities.

A settlement worker from NSS took the lead in developing a facilitator's guide for service providers. This guide provides step-by-step instructions on how to sensitively present the resource, as well as tips and hints in aiding appropriate responses and delivering services to CALD women experiencing domestic and family violence.

The resource was well received within the community, with participants commenting: "Now I know what to tell my friend" and "I feel more safe and able to help now."



Youth

Girl SKILS

Young women of a refugee background living in Mount Druitt were supported by MECA's Girl SKILS (Smarts, Know-How, Intelligence, Leadership, and Strength) program. Girl SKILS is a goal oriented, strengths based program that supports skills development and personal growth for those who have experienced torture or trauma.

The program targeted young women of a refugee background between the ages of 14-16, who were experiencing difficulty with settlement and feelings of exclusion and isolation.

The young women involved in the program were provided nine weeks of education and mentoring that focused on the development of their social and emotional skills. Through this program, the young women built their confidence and learnt how to respect others and promote healthy relationships.

One participant, aged 15, said:
"I was surprised it was so fun. Over the weeks we did heaps of activities, learnt about ourselves and each other and I felt like I opened up a lot and grew in confidence. It's really hard coming to school from another country, I felt like I had some breathing space to understand myself and this helped me to plan for the future. I also learnt how to stand up for myself without getting angry and responding badly to others. I feel really happy that I have learnt all these new skills and that I now have an idea about what are my really great strengths and what I can do with them for my future career. It's nice to feel included."

Success story of young man turned UN Refugee Youth Representative

Arash, a young man originally from Iran, arrived in Sydney in May 2015 after spending five years in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, as a refugee.

Upon arrival, Arash spent most of his time looking for work. He found this task incredibly difficult due to a lack of local work experience.

Arash was referred by SSI to Auburn Diversity Services (ADSi) for youth casework and support. ADSi provided Arash assistance in finding employment, accessing education advice, and expanding his personal networks.

The ADSi youth worker sought out opportunities to help Arash achieve his goals and supported him through different processes by providing him with quick responses to his needs.

Arash attended employment skills and career development workshops and he was regularly involved in recreational and community activities including excursions and a youth camp organised by ADSi.

The ADSi youth worker also helped him in developing his skills in advocacy and community leadership. As a result Arash was able to become an ADSi Young Advocate. This position saw him involved in the planning of the 2016 ADSi Youth Summit, where Arash hosted a series of consultations.

The youth worker then supported Arash's application for a scholarship to participate in the Global Refugee Youth Consultations, hosted by UNHCR in Geneva. Arash was successful and travelled to Geneva in June 2016 to represent refugee youth of Australia.

Capacity Building

Mid North Coast Cultural Exchange Trip

A two-way learning exchange program developed by NSP partners is helping high school students to break down cultural barriers, improve their cultural understanding and eliminate prejudices and misconceptions.

Established in 2011, the Mid North Coast Cultural Exchange Trip acts as a mini student exchange program for high school students from a refugee background living in Newcastle, who visit high school students from the Mid North Coast of NSW.

The program is a partnership between Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services, Northern Settlement Services and the Multicultural Neighbourhood Centre Inc.

It recognises that while the Mid North Coast is a diverse area, it lacks the large cultural groups found in other areas, which reduces students' opportunities to meet people from a refugee background. Often, this means their views on refugee issues are based on information from the media or their parents, rather than personal experience.

The program also gives students from refugee backgrounds the opportunity to learn about life in regional NSW and make new friends.

The program was established in 2011 with a one-day visit to Taree High School involving discussion groups and performances by Newcastle students including a Burundi girls' choir. In 2012, the trip expanded to two days, and in 2013, it also included Port Macquarie.

This year, the trip took students to Charles Sturt University in Port Macquarie for paramedic and police training activities and St Columba Anglican School for discussion groups and soccer. They then moved west to Wauchope High School for a rural experience with the resident animals, lunch and some unique sports.

To date, the exchange trips have involved informal, fun opportunities for students to get to know one another through facilitated discussion groups, soccer and basketball games, dance and singing performances and Aboriginal education groups.

The trips give students an opportunity to discover what they have in common, such as school subjects, sport, homework, music and after school jobs. Over the years, many friendships have blossomed between Mid North Coast and Newcastle students, which they've continued through social media and visits in their own time.

Thai Women's Group

The southern Sydney suburbs of Hurstville, Kogarah, Rockdale and Sutherland are home to a thriving Thai community, comprising both new arrivals to Australia and well-established community members.

To help facilitate the sharing of language, cultural norms, and values, Advance Diversity Services has established a Thai Women's Group. This group, comprising 35 members, provides an important structure through which Thai women can socialise with each other; strengthen their sense of community identity; and promote and enhance their experience of belonging to Australian society.

Some of the most amazing outcomes from these fortnightly meetings are the networks and support that have developed among the group. Group members help each other in many ways, including exchanging tips for growing vegetables and Thai herbs, and cooking food to share with the group.

The group has also supported members to find work. For example, one member works at St George Hospital as cleaner and she has supported some of the other members to find work.

Thai Reference Group

Established in 2016, the Thai Reference Group comprises a diverse mix of local Thai residents, recently arrived migrants and established community members, who support the creation of community activities for people of Thai background in the St George and Sutherland Shire areas.

The group consults with the community and channels that feedback to Advance Diversity Services, which creates activities to engage with the Thai community.

The group has been the driving force behind a range of successful sessions delivered to the Thai community in the St George and Sutherland areas such as cooking demonstrations and a Thai sweet and a colouring competition for Thai kids

A great example involved committee members Benchawan and Theerasak, who own a local Thai restaurant. They supported Advance Diversity Services to organise a traditional Thai dessert making day in October 2016, which was so successful that many attendees submitted requests for more cooking demonstrations in future.

Community Engagement

Community Friends

Community plays an important role in successful settlement. It offers the warm welcome and sense of belonging that is so critical to refugees and migrants feeling at home in Australia. A great example of this in practice is the Community Friends project at Gymea Community Aid & Information Service (GCAIS).

Funded by the Settlement Innovation Fund, this mentoring project connects newly arrived migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants with individuals and community organisations that are keen to offer support to new settlers in the Sutherland Shire area. At the core of this project's success is the generosity and desire to help, which sits at the heart of so many communities.

Community Friends has two core elements: one-on-one mentoring with community volunteers, and sport and health activities run with community partners.

Under the mentoring component, newly arrived community members — known as "New Friends" — are matched with volunteer mentors, or "Community Friends". Community Friends come from all walks of life and bring skills and experience that can help their New Friends during settlement. Many of the Community Friends are from migrant backgrounds themselves, but they are at a later stage in their settlement journey so they're able to help others overcome challenges that they themselves faced.

As one New Friend said of his Community Friend: "She encourages me to walk. If I walk alone, I don't always go. We walk along the beach, it is very beautiful."

Under the second component of the Community Friends project, GCAIS links with sporting partners to create opportunities for newly arrived young people to get involved with sports. So far, Community Friends has partnered with organisations in providing subsidised or free swimming lessons, gym membership, and introductions and registrations with local netball and soccer teams.

For example, 15 young people attended two netball workshops run by the Miranda Magpies Netball Club, and subsequently five young people signed up for the 2017 season with support from the club. The young players were linked in with other team members whose parents were then able to help with transport to and from training and the games. Gaining access to a sports club like this gives young people a link into an established community, helping them to forge new social connections and build a sense of belonging.

One volunteer beautifully summarised the dual benefits of this fantastic project: "[My New Friend] has taught me much … about religion, about her culture but mostly just how difficult it is to come to a new country and to settle."

The SURF Project

When refugees are forced to seek safety, they leave behind their homelands, their communities and, unfortunately for some, their family.

Recognising the importance of reuniting families separated by war and forced displacement, Illawarra Multicultural Services (IMS) has collaborated with University of Wollongong (UOW) and Wollongong City Council to establish the Supporting the Unification of Refugee Families (SURF) project.

Under the project, UOW Law students provide administrative assistance to help refugees supported by IMS to complete citizenship applications and offshore humanitarian claims that will facilitate family reunion.

Refugees can get referrals to other legal services and guidance in basic legal steps such as having documents certified by a Justice for the Peace.

The SURF Project has also expanded to offer refugees support to lodge Freedom of Information (FOI) applications, which ensures the information in their citizenship applications is consistent with information they've submitted during prior visa applications.

Settlement Innovation Fund

The Settlement Innovation Fund (SIF) has been established within the NSP to develop and test new approaches in delivering settlement grants activities, consistent with the aim and purpose of the SSP and to build capacity in responding innovatively, in areas of emerging and unmet need.

The focus of the Fund is to provide opportunities to develop and trial new collaborations and partnerships, and to support engagement and input from settlement target groups themselves. The Fund gives NSP members the opportunity to innovate in key priority areas while building on their areas of expertise.

Settlement Innovation Fund – Outcomes and learnings:

One of the greatest benefits of the Fund has been the spirit of experimentation that has been fostered within the NSP. NSP partners have been able to replicate ideas across geographical boundaries, experiment with new service models, and try new approaches in working with clients and community to achieve settlement outcomes.

The SIF projects have fostered job prospects for clients through workshops and mentoring, and a total of five projects have had an employment focus. These projects have given newly arrived migrant and refugee job seekers an opportunity to learn more about employment in the Australian context. The activities have assisted them to identify and achieve their employment goals, providing practical support through workshops and one-on-one support.

The Fund has created novel partnerships that have helped to foster inter-cultural understanding and social inclusion. It has also reinforced and strengthened links within the NSP through joint projects and provided innovative ways of engaging with youth.

The Fund has fostered a space for collaboration, generating new partnerships and links between related services and agencies in key areas.

Settlement Innovation Fund – Case Studies:

Courageous Journeys – Melkite Catholic Welfare Association and Western Sydney MRC

Courageous Journeys: A Family Portrait was a two-stage project coordinated in partnership by the Melkite Catholic Welfare Association and Western Sydney MRC, in celebration of Refugee Week.

The first stage of this project involved the production and exhibition of a series of family portraits, reflecting the settlement journeys of refugee families. A professional photographer took photos of families over two days at Bigge Park in Liverpool and Bankstown Memorial Park. The portraits were framed and showcased at Bankstown Arts Centre throughout Refugee week.

In the second stage of the project, a short narrative was developed outlining the life stories of the participating refugee families, with accompanying photos chosen by participants to symbolise their hopes and aspirations for the future. The portraits, photos and stories were compiled into a photography book and launched in November 2016. Proceeds from the sale of the books were used to support existing projects of the Melkite Catholic Welfare Association and Western Sydney MRC, directly benefiting newly arrived refugees.

More than 150 people attended each event, and an exceptional sense of community was created as people engaged with striking portraits and the family stories associated with the photographs.

The two very successful and well attended exhibitions fostered a sense of understanding and comradery between the newly arrived participants and those who attended the exhibition.

Significantly, the project assisted to build community connection, belonging and hope among refugees and the wider community through photography and storytelling. As a celebration of diversity, Courageous Journeys acknowledged the tenacity of refugees and reignited a community spirit, countering negative and deficit-based portrayals of refugees.

some feedback from participants:

"I am very happy to sing in English"

"Exercises were good – face, breath, and all the body. You feel happy and strong"

"We made people cry of joy, everyone grew and became more confident"

"I'm proud that in the chorus, to sing in English and I'm proud to say I am Australian, this class makes me feel I am Australian." (We are Australia song)

"Got to make lovely relationships with people that made me happy every week. I learnt Iraqi!"

"I would go home and feel in myself that I have improved in my life, that at this age I proved to myself that I could learn something new, happy that the teachers push me"

Women in Harmony – CORE Multicultural Communities

To address settlement challenges faced by women, CORE proposed the Women in Harmony (WIH) initiative. The main aim of the project was to build social cohesion, a sense of belonging, meaningful connection and promote resilience and self-belief amongst women through music.

The project started in May 2016 with 29 newly-arrived women from diverse cultural backgrounds, including women of Assyrian, Chaldean, Iraqi, Syrian, Armenian, Iranian, Afghan and Vietnamese background. Sirens Big Band, a jazz ensemble, contributed their musical expertise as a project partner and facilitated weekly sessions with set lesson plans. The project ran for two hours a week from the CORE Fairfield Office. Participants were provided a platform to learn new skills in playing an instrument, understand basic music theory, express their views, communicate with their peers as well as the facilitators, and collectively work towards a music concert that took place in December 2016.

The project created a safe space where refugee women from diverse cultural backgrounds could interact, share their stories, build social contacts outside of their families, and learn from each other. Through the sessions women explored and developed their music knowledge and skills and developed new friendships.

The Women in Harmony project went beyond activities implemented within the Fairfield LGA and aimed to respond to community needs in a non-traditional way, using an innovative approach with music. A unique feature of this project is that it brought women together that shared a common interest and love (not necessarily skills), for music under the same roof every week. These women would probably never have met, under other circumstances. Their interest for music united and connected them as they learnt, enjoyed and shared a universal language of music.

Both young and older women participated in the project, creating a need for intergenerational collaboration and an opportunity to gain an appreciation of a different generation's views and perspectives.

The project also required women from diverse cultural backgrounds to collaborate towards a common goal, facilitating inter-cultural understanding. There was a great appreciation evident of the diverse languages, cultures, norms, values and ideas held by the women. The group was very cohesive and relationships harmonious throughout, especially when the women were collaborating on their songs. One song in particular - Women in Harmony was written about the names of the women. In this song, the lyrics do not just explain the meaning of the participants' names, but also provided the women an opportunity to express their cultural identity with pride.

The Women in Harmony project has demonstrated how social cohesion can be reinforced and the risk of isolation reduced, at the same time as skills and knowledge are being developed.

Participants went on a personal journey collectively; they learned a lot about themselves and each other and articulated their experience with collaborative writing, which took patience and an appreciation for one another.

The Mingoola Resettlement Initiative – Northern Settlement Services and Great Lakes Agency for Peace and Development

This is a partnership project that focuses on documenting the challenges and practice solutions generated in supporting refugee families to resettle in a remote area.

Learnings from "The Mingoola Project"

In November 2015 the Great Lakes Agency for Peace and Development International (GLAPDI) embarked on an exciting journey that gave birth to what has become known as "The Mingoola Project" or the "Field of Dreams".

GLAPDI had identified that many of the Great Lakes African families were yearning to get back on the land and farm, as they had done in their country of origin. A chance meeting put Emmanuel Musoni from GLAPDI in touch with Julie Harpham from the small township of Mingoola on the NSW - Queensland border.

By April 2016 two African families had moved to Mingoola and another followed in September. The Mingoola community have welcomed the families, and have been able to keep their local primary school open, which had been in recession. The families have begun farming on small plots of land made available to them by local farmers and the children are loving growing up with greater freedoms in the bush, and there is even a new Mingoola baby!

These families finally feel at home in Australia.

The adults report feeling healthier and happier being in the countryside; they are less stressed about life and their children, as they are away from the hustling city landscapes. Children can wander around without fear and engage in new experiences, like learning to ride a quad bike and playing in the creek.

Ever since the Australian Story "Field of Dreams" featured Mingoola on ABC in November 2016, nearly 20 rural communities across Australia have contacted GLAPDI, eager to explore settlement of African families into their region. GLAPDI has been following up with each community, and have developed a process for engagement.

This initiative has taken an enormous investment of local community support in Mingoola and other communities, as well as from GLAPDI. Accessing funding to support such initiatives has however, been complex because most of the African families have been in Australia for more than 5 years, leaving them unable to access settlement services program funding for support.

GLAPDI is now looking for funding sources to further the goals of the resettled families, and to support the resettlement of new families in other areas.

Northern Settlement Services was invited to partner with GLAPDI, in order to assist in reflecting on and documenting the Mingoola project, the outcomes for the families and the community, and the challenges of regional resettlement in this form.

The project has expanded to document some of the new regional settlement options undertaken and under exploration, by GLAPDI. This provides a platform for reflection for GLAPDI and the communities involved, a chance to identify opportunities to add value to the regional resettlement outcomes, and to inform other organisations who might seek to pursue the resettlement model GLAPDI has developed.

This SIF Project is still being undertaken, but some initial reflections are shared below.

Key to success

- **Strong community support from the receiving community**

  The Mingoola Progress Association and some key individuals have anchored the project and problem solved with the families involved. GLADPI is reinforcing the need to have a consistent core working group in place, and when in discussions with new interested regional communities, it is highlighting the expectation and level of commitment required to the project, from the onset of the relationship.

- **On-going support from the community whose members are relocating**

  GLAPDI has maintained contact with the families and the Mingoola Progress Association. Regular phone calls and visits are made to manage any issues that arise. Regular visits ensure support for the families through the discussion of emerging issues, and interpretation for deeper conversations with the Mingoola community so that issues, ideas and plans are clearly understood.

- **Local opportunities for engagement**

  Families are members of the Mingoola Progress Association and of the school Parents and Citizens committee. These meetings bring together the adults from African families and local community members. The same community of families meets again, during the Sunday church services.

  Participation in local community events provides an opportunity to share food and to build intercultural understanding. Primary school pick-up and drop-off times provide important opportunities for the families to connect and talk.

On Tuesday afternoons, the local teenagers take the high school bus from Tenterfield and hang out together at the primary school for the afternoon, playing soccer, having a BBQ and enjoying each other's company. Similarly, playgroup at the primary school is popular with the small children and their parents.

Challenges to be managed -

- Transport costs

  Mingoola is void of any local shops and families travel 65 kilometres into Tenterfield (or further), for petrol, food and other regular essentials. Travel related expenses have a significant impact on family budgets.

- New methods of farming in a new climate

  Limited water and frosts, are among the new environmental challenges that families have not faced before. Learning how to use heavy machinery for farming is also new, but many of the crops are the same as their country of origin.

Reflections

Families need settlement support beyond five years - the adults in these families had never held a permanent job in Australia, and had no outlet to use their skills in urban locations. They feared the impact on their children, who had rarely seen their parents working. Many of these families' settlement needs had not been met, even though they had already lived in Australia for over five years. This initiative reinforces that many refugee and migrant communities need support beyond this nominal settlement period.

For many seeking to resettle in regional areas, it may be beneficial to spend some time on arrival in a larger community or city with sufficient access to intensive settlement services, and to then move to a regional area. There is a much needed balance between access to services, and access to meaningful engagement and activity.

Isolation from their own community can be overcome to some extent by access to mobile phones and the internet; however families value and also need face-to-face contact. To be able to engage in this way, families need to be prepared to travel a considerable distance e.g. travel to Brisbane is approximately four hours and is a costly exercise.

Many regional communities are more welcoming of people from refugee and migrant backgrounds than is expected of the commonly perceived stereotypes of regional communities. The strong family welcome, and care for others, has trumped the concerns for people of difference.

Not all refugee families have the desire and inclination to relocate to rural areas, but it is often an appropriate choice for many African families with farming backgrounds.

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