

## Introduction

Welcome to the first edition of Settlement News – the newsletter of the Settlement Council of Australia.

The last few months have been a busy time. Andrew Cummings was employed as Executive Officer of SCOA in January, and since then has been responsible for setting up the new SCOA office in Surry Hills, and co-ordinating the practical and administrative things needed for a new organisation.

SCOA's new office is at

**Suite 333  
410 Elizabeth Street  
Surry Hills NSW 2010**

The office is well located, as it is a five minute walk from Central Station, and is also five minutes from DIAC's offices in NSW. We are also in the same building as the Refugee Council of Australia, and close to many other peak organisations, including ACOSS.



SCOA's new office – inside ...

## UNHCR visits Fairfield MRC

Antonio Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, visited Australia at the end of February. During his time here, he attended a variety of meetings and events in Melbourne, Canberra and Sydney. One of these events was a visit to Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre to meet some refugees settled in the area. He was accompanied by Mr Peter Hughes, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. Around 65 people attended the meeting including around 45 who were refugees from a variety of countries including Burma, Sudan, Iraq and East Timor.

Mr Guterres said that during his four day visit to Australia, he had met Australian government and NSW and Victorian government representatives, service providers and non-government organisations, the Australian Red Cross, schools and members of the public. He has been amazed at how competent, well prepared and committed all these sectors of Australian society are to helping refugees.



... and out

Mr Guterres said that he has been heartened by what he has seen in Australia and the people he has met. He has been impressed by the commitment and generosity of both professionals and volunteers working with refugees. He now has an even stronger warm impression of Australia.

Mr Guterres was welcomed to the Cabramatta Community Centre by the President, Julio Grutilini and watched a presentation about the history of Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre and demographics of the area by FMRC coordinator and SCOA Chair, Ricci Bartels.

Several refugees addressed the meeting about the warm welcome they had received in Australia and the high regard they have for this country. They also spoke of their anxiety and deep concern for family members suffering in refugee camps overseas. They stressed the need for UNHCR to improve registration processes in refugee camps and their urgent need to be reunited with their relatives in Australia soon. Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre is following up one of these cases with UNHCR and several other cases with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.



**Ricci Bartels meets Antonio Guterres**

## SCOA National Conference

SCOA will be hosting the first national settlement conference in Canberra on **May 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>**. The theme of the conference is “**Settlement Services - building a future for social inclusion**”. The conference will explore the “social inclusion” agenda, and look at ways of making sure that settlement services and migrant communities are central to this agenda.

Speakers at the conference will include:

- Laurie Ferguson, Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services
- Catherine Branson of the Australian Human Rights Commission
- Elleni Bereded-Samuel of the Australian Social Inclusion Board
- Andrew Metcalfe, Secretary of DIAC



**Laurie Ferguson, MP**

There will also be a range of interactive workshops, performances and opportunities to discuss the future direction of settlement services in Australia, and of SCOA.

If you are interested in presenting a workshop at the conference, there is still time to express your interest. Workshops should cover one of the following themes - Arts / culture; Regional and rural issues; Youth; Women’s issues; Employment pathways; Governance; Advocacy; and Community development. The closing date for proposals is **Monday 27<sup>th</sup> April**.

For more details about the conference, to find out more about presenting a workshop, or to register to attend, please contact Andrew Cummings at [andrew@scoa.org.au](mailto:andrew@scoa.org.au) or on 02 8065 5225.

## **Humanitarian Program Review**

In February, SCOA submitted a paper in response to the Federal Government's Discussion Paper on Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program. The paper highlighted the key issues and concerns faced by our member organisations, and made several recommendations for improving the Refugee and Humanitarian Program. These included:

### ***Multi-year Planning Framework***

SCOA supports the establishment of a multi-year planning strategy by the UNHCR and the Australian Government. This would provide agencies the opportunity to prepare the local community for newly arrived refugees, link into existing networks and develop strategies in advance for new and emerging communities.

### ***Size and Composition of Australia's Humanitarian Program***

SCOA fully supports the recommendations of the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) for a larger refugee intake, increasing the offshore and humanitarian program over the next five years from 13750 places in 2009-10 to 20,000 placed in 2013-14.

### ***Family Reunion***

Evidence from SCOA's member agencies indicates the need for an urgent review of the processes of the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP). Currently many refugees are finding it extremely difficult and distressing to settle, knowing loved ones have been left behind in horrendous conditions and/or all alone.

### ***Health Care***

Evidence and experience indicates that refugees and humanitarian entrants continue to experience difficulty accessing appropriate health care. This is due to a number of factors, including

- lack of service provision and poor access to

GPs and other practitioners

- lack of culturally sensitive and trained frontline medical practice staff
- no access to interpreters or use of interpreters by medical staff
- lack of understanding of the medical system including calling ambulances for non emergencies
- no access to bulk billing

SCOA recommends the introduction of standardised health screening tools for all newly arrived refugees and humanitarian entrants. This would include dental, full immunisation (to Australian minimum requirements) and mental health assessments.

### ***Family Issues***

SCOA recommends a range of measures to help address family issues and prevent family breakdown amongst refugee and humanitarian entrant families. These include:

- funding for increased culturally appropriate intervention and prevention, and relevant training programs for newly arrived families and for government and non-government agencies;
- development of training programs for cultural elders/leaders who could become liaison officers for police and children's services;
- encouraging the multicultural community to become foster parents to ensure children remain connected to their community.

All of the above needs to be high on the government's agenda if we are to improve the settlement processes and improve family unity and relationships.

### ***Barriers to Employment***

SCOA highlighted a number of obstacles to employment, including a lack of driver's licence and the financial costs in obtaining a licence; lack of public transport to workplaces; poor recognition of qualifications; the expense of undertaking recognition of trade qualifications or RPL processes; and lack of availability of quality work experience

Given all of the above, SCOA expressed strong support for the new Employment Services model recently tendered through the Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)

Finally, SCOA requested that the government acknowledge and recognise that best practice service delivery is usually delivered by local service agencies that understand their community as a whole and work for the community to achieve outcomes at a local level.

A full copy of the report will be available soon on SCOA's website.

### **DIAC / NGO Dialogue**

DIAC hosted the latest DIAC / NGO Dialogue on Humanitarian Issues in Melbourne on 6<sup>th</sup> March. The meeting involved senior DIAC staff and representatives of key national NGOs, who came together for updates and discussion about issues relevant to DIACs departmental responsibilities. SCOA was represented by our Chair, Ricci Bartels and Executive Officer Andrew Cummings.

The meeting included the following sessions:

- Multilateral developments in the International Protection System
- An update on global resettlement needs
- Progress towards the arrival targets for the Humanitarian Program for 2008/9

- An update on settlement initiatives
- Information and statistics with regard to detention centres, including plans for a new Community Care pilot

The NGOs present at the meeting praised the DIAC representatives for the culture of openness and transparency in which the meeting was held, and the sense of partnership that this has promoted.

Peter Hughes, Deputy Secretary of DIAC, assured those present that DIAC was committed to continuing to build on this spirit of partnership, but asked that organisations be prepared to be patient, as some proposed developments may not be possible during the current economic crisis.

### **ACOSS Conference**

The Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) held its annual conference in Sydney on April 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. The conference included a long list of high profile speakers, including Geraldine Doogue, Frank Brennan, and past and present government ministers such as Jenny Macklin, Tony Abbott and Susan Ryan.



**Geraldine Doogue**

The theme of the conference was “Building a Fair Australia in Tough Economic Times”.

Unfortunately, there was little emphasis on settlement issues or multiculturalism within the program. The highlight of the conference in this regard was a presentation by Rosemary Young of Frontier Services. Rosemary’s presentation looked at issues affecting rurally isolated communities, and included very positive comments about the impact of new settling communities, such as the Malay community from Cocos Islands that settled in Port Headland.

Rosemary also highlighted the importance of well planned settlement services in helping to address skills gaps and in reinvigorating rural communities.

The conference finished with a lively debate about whether or not Australia needs a Human Rights Act. Speakers included Susan Ryan, Frank Brennan and Greg Craven. Many good points were raised about whether or not having a human rights act or charter would make Australia a fairer place, and convincing arguments were given on both sides.

SCOA was represented at the conference by our Executive Officer, Andrew Cummings. SCOA has been concerned about the lack of attention being paid to multiculturalism and settlement issues by ACOSS, and is currently raising these issues with ACOSS.

## Consultations on Human Rights

The Federal Government has recently commissioned a major consultation into whether or not Australia would benefit from a human rights act or a bill of rights, as some like to call it.

The committee that is carrying out the consultation is being chaired by Father Frank Brennan. The key questions being asked by the consultation are:

- Which human rights and responsibilities should be protected and promoted?
- Are human rights sufficiently protected and promoted?
- How could Australia better protect and promote human rights?

If you wish to share your views on these questions, you can do so by preparing a written submission, or by attending the meetings being held around Australia in the coming months. For more details, go to

[www.humanrightsconsultation.gov.au](http://www.humanrightsconsultation.gov.au)

## Tenders

DIAC have issued a call for tenders from organisations wishing to establish a panel to undertake the provision of a specialised English language training course for immigration officials from foreign governments. Tenders close **May 1<sup>st</sup>**.

For more information contact Amber Pacey at [amber.pacey@immi.gov.au](mailto:amber.pacey@immi.gov.au)

## FECCA Conference

The Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA) will be holding their national conference in Shepparton, Vic on **29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> October**. The title of the conference is “Strengthening Multiculturalism and Building Social Inclusion”. FECCA have issued a call for papers. Details can be found on their website at [www.fecca.org.au](http://www.fecca.org.au)

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