

ASHRA Newsletter

Agencies Supporting Housing for Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Volume 1, Issue 2

12/1/06

Special points of interest:

- Driving lessons
- Humanitarian visa story
- Competition announcement

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Apology

In our first edition, Vol 1, Issue 1, we stated that Temporary Protection Visa Holders were unable to receive assistance from Centrelink, or Medicare and are not permitted to work. **This is incorrect.**

Changes to the regulations in 1999 now allow work entitlements and job matching, access to Centrelink, Medicare, and are eligible for the Commonwealth funded ESL—New Arrivals program. For more information about the range of visas available, go to www.immi.gov.au and our sincere apologies for printing misleading information.



Refugee or migrant?

The terms 'refugee' and 'migrant' are often used interchangeably as though meaning the same thing. However, at ASHRA we would like to clarify the difference as we understand it as it impacts upon the way we, and organisations like us, operate.

Quite simply it is about choice. A refugee did not choose to leave their home, their country and their families. As the Refugee Council states: "Refugees often have little idea about where they are going. They are running away, not running to. Those who come to Australia often have scant understanding about our country and the nature of society here. They have had no opportunity to prepare themselves physically or psychologically for their life in Australia. A significant proportion of refugees have experienced severe trauma. It is estimated that 60% of refugees are survivors of torture and trauma."

Migrants have made a conscious choice to come to Australia. "One of the most important differences is that migrants are able to pack up

Their precious belongings and say goodbye to the important people in their lives. Migrants are also able to go 'home' or back to their mother country, if things don't work out as they had hoped or they get homesick.

Getting the statistics in perspective

Australia's annual quota of refugees is 12,000 and we have never received much more than 4000 unauthorised arrivals in any one year, according to the 'Rural Australians for Refugees'. In contrast, Sweden (with about half our population) receives a similar number, and Iran and Pakistan (two of the world's poorest countries) host over a million Afghan refugees. According to the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, 'over 90% of Asylum Seekers receive no support of any kind from the Federal Government. It has been left to non-government funded community organisations, churches, community groups and concerned individuals like Circle of Friends to provide the safety net and care for asylum seekers'.

Directory

ASHRA is currently working on a multicultural directory of services and organisations that celebrate and support multicultural South Australia. We would like to include information for all cultural groups in South Australia, so if you know or are involved in any activity or organisation that the rest of South Australia

should know about, then let us know.

Included in the Directory will be a toolkit that Multicultural Youth SA (MUSA) have been working on to help agencies become more culturally responsive and inclusive. The directory will also include activities and organisations in regional and rural SA as one in

every ten TPV holders is living in regional SA.

We hope to have the first edition ready for ASHRA's first birthday in August and will cover everything from housing assistance to English Language Classes, from festivals to museums! We will keep you informed through this newsletter.



**1 in every 10
Temporary
Protection Visa
Holders are in
regional areas**

**“Aspects of life
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Refugees on Humanitarian Visas: Margaret's Story

This interview is part of a series of stories we wish to present to ASHRA members in order to more clearly understand the impact of government policies and agendas on refugees and asylum seekers and those who support them. This interview, our first in the series, seeks to explore the participants' experiences, how they understand, negotiate and respond to situations they are confronted with. Wherever possible we will present updates to our readers on the people in our stories, where they are now and how they are going. The following is a record of an interview with a young woman, who arrived in this country a year ago. Margaret's story, as a young woman and as a recent arrival to this country, raises a number of issues which are discussed in the conclusion.

Margaret is the third child (of six) born to Sudanese parents in the Sudan. Because of the war in the Sudan, Margaret went to live with relatives in Kenya to continue her schooling when she was 10 years old. Margaret would regularly return home to check on her mother who was very ill. At eighteen, Margaret's mother died. When Margaret finished high school she decided to attend a Computer College. She felt there was little future for her in Sudan or Kenya and after meeting up with an old friend, decided to apply for a humanitarian visa to migrate to Australia. After waiting two years in Kenya, Margaret and her friends were granted their humanitarian visa in 2004. An Australian sponsor paid for their airfare to Australia. The airfare is repaid by the sponsored (like a loan) that is deducted each fortnight upon arrival in Australia. In July 2005 Margaret finally paid back all of this debt. In the first four weeks after arriving in Australia, Margaret and her friends stayed with

relatives in Coff's Harbour, a little seaside town with only a few Sudanese people. Margaret felt isolated: 'Everybody minds their own business, I didn't know who to ask for help'. Their sponsor looked for accommodation for them but the rent in this area was very expensive (approximately \$250 per week for a two bedroom unit). The friends finally agreed on a unit and four of them moved in. A local organisation (similar to the Australian Refugee Association in South Australia) helped them with furniture, refrigerator, beds and a television, and staff also explained what a lease was and what it meant. After two months Margaret left Coff's Harbour to visit her sister who had migrated to Adelaide in 2002, while her other three friends stayed in the unit in Coff's Harbour. Margaret stayed with her sister for about four months who introduced her to a local businessman who offered her some work experience in his store. Margaret wanted to move into her own place, and with some help was able to find a fully furnished bed-sit close to the city. She did not sign a lease (she was not really sure what a lease was), however she felt safe there. After six months, her old friend from Coff's Harbour asked her if she would like to share a place together in Adelaide, and Margaret agreed. When she told the owners of the property she was currently renting of her plans to move, they gave her three days to vacate the premises. Fortunately, Margaret had secured another property with her friend and was able to move in sooner than was planned. She was able to secure a bond from the SAHT, sign the lease and get the electricity and telephone connected without assistance. Margaret uses the direct debit scheme to pay her rent and also chose a similar

system for the electricity. Margaret wants to be a nurse and is currently studying at TAFE.

Margaret's story raises a number of issues which can be common among new arrivals: the importance of maintaining a sense of community, integration issues, and awareness of Australian rules and regulations in general and particularly around securing and maintaining accommodation. Australia's Humanitarian Program was set at 12,000 new places, and increased to 13,000 in 2004-2005. The majority of these individuals intend to settle in NSW or Victoria. (In contrast, Australia's Migration Program was set at 120,000 for 2004 – 2005). As previous generations of new arrivals have experienced, the process of integration can be overwhelming and exhausting. Aspects of life we take for granted can appear insurmountable without appropriate supports. Where do you buy bus tickets, how do you write a resume and where are the food stuffs available that I am familiar with? Everything can be both foreign and novel. There were so many things for Margaret to get used to, including getting her drivers licence, signing a lease and applying to study. Margaret has achieved all of this in one year. Organisations such as the Australian Refugee Association do much to ease the integration process by holding 'Taste of Australia' workshops covering things like general living skills, shopping, budgeting, local council services and how to be a good tenant. Unfortunately these workshops were stopped as a result of funding cuts, however ARA are hoping to be running them again in the middle of next year. Of particular import in the integration process is ongoing support for new arrivals. Despite receiving initial assistance with securing a home

Margaret's Story (Continued)

required assistance with her subsequent tenancies. As Margaret's story suggests, (moving five times in a twelve month period) the impact of moving to a new country especially as a young woman with little family support, is overwhelming and not all of the information given at the outset can be absorbed. Having community and a sense of belonging are so important to the successful integration of new arrivals. Policies of geographical dispersal have compounded many refugee group's ability to sustain ethnic specific welfare organisations and as studies in the US have long held, supportive ethnic communities

are more desirable for refugees than isolation among well intentioned majority community carers. Margaret's example certainly supports this. Proficiency in the English language was not a concern for Margaret, having studied for a number of years in Kenya. However, Margaret has attended some ESL (English as a Second Language) classes as a way of connecting with others in her community and of similar experiences. Australian English is quite different to the English she learnt and it has taken quite a few Proficiency in the English language was not a concern for Margaret, having studied for a number of years in Kenya.

However, Margaret has attended some ESL (English as a Second Language) classes as a way of connecting with others in her community and of similar experiences. Australian English is quite different to the English she learnt and it has taken quite a few months to pick up the Australian accent. Margaret had greater difficulty with Australian culture, the processes involved and accessing the appropriate services. Acknowledging and highlighting these concerns and developing appropriate responses, linkages and processes to address them is one of the key strategies of ASHRA. Stay tuned for updates on Margaret's story and others.

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Driving License Help

Getting your drivers license can be one of the more exciting rites of passage for young people. For new arrivals, it is all that and much more. Try explaining road rules and the language associated with driving to someone with limited English language proficiency can be an exhausting (and very funny) task. You will realize very quickly how much we take for granted in our

own language. For new arrivals, having your license can mean you are able to support others in your community, It can mean, greater freedom and choice for accessing education and employment (for yourself and your family), and an opportunity to visit friends, and explore Adelaide. Getting your license can also build self esteem and confidence. Rob from Blackwood Circle of Friends is

only too aware of these issues from his work with new arrivals and has been offering AFFORDABLE driving lessons. At the moment this important work has come to a standstill due to mechanical problems, so if anyone knows of a friendly mechanic tell us and we can forward the information on. We will let readers know when Rob is able to take on new learners (at the moment he has 15!)

Multicultural Mental Health: No More Mualagh Project

The No More Mualagh Project was developed to support Afghans living in rural Australia to learn more about depression, how it is treated and how to safely use antidepressant medication. The project was also developed to educate health professionals about the Afghan experience of depression and what they can do to assist. Afghani refugees have fled their country due to tragic, violent and potentially fatal circumstances. It is typical for Afghani refugees to leave the majority of their family and friends and to make the journey to Australia alone. The torture and trauma suffered by the Afghani people in their country, coupled with intense loneliness in a new country, puts enormous pressure on the individual. Through the process of applying for a Permanent Protection Visa (PPV), some individuals are issued with Temporary Protection Visas (TPV). The temporary nature of this visa, lack of opportunity to plan for the future, the fear of being returned home, increases experiences of stress. As a result of these circumstances, those holding Temporary

Protection Visas are at high risk of developing depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. The project has developed fact sheets in English and Dari called 'Understanding depression and antidepressant medication'. A fact sheet for health professionals is also available called 'Understanding depression and antidepressant medication: Information for health professionals'. These resources are available to download from the Multicultural Mental Health Australia website at: www.mmha.org.au **Beyond Words, Lessons on translation, trust and meaning** for the No More Mualagh Project provides a model for delivery on promoting mental health issues learning from culturally diverse communities. Multicultural Mental Health (MMHA), National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA) and Associate Professor Nicholas Proctor for the University of South Australia conducted the project, with funding from the National Prescribing Service (NPS) under the Community Quality Use of Medicines Rural Project Scheme. Beyond Words is available from Multicultural Mental Health Australia for \$10 (plus GST where applicable) email: admin@mmha.org.au or telephone (02) 9840 3333 (order form available online)

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Important contacts

Centrelink's
Multilingual Call
131202

Australian Refugee
Association
8354 2951

Multicultural Youth
SA
8212 0085

Migrant Women's
Support and
Accommodation
Service
8346 9417 or
Crisis Care 131 611

**"Never doubt
that a small
group of
thoughtful,
committed
people can
change the
world. Indeed,
it is the only
thing that ever
has"**

Margaret Mead

Housing: a basic human right

ASHRA Vision Statement

ASHRA is committed to developing our network of interested groups and individuals working with refugees and asylum seekers. We wish to provide greater opportunity for leadership and skill development, create strong, informal networks between organisations, provide greater transparency in information sharing and potentially reduce the duplication of services and more readily identify the gaps in services.

2006 Meeting dates

19th January	25th May	21 September
22nd February	21st June	18th October
23rd March	20th July	23rd November
19th April	23rd August	

Meetings are held in the Torrens Building between 3-5pm, 220 Victoria Square Adelaide. If you are interested in attending, please contact Cheryl or Margo on 8221 6488 or email margo.johnson@sheltersa.asn.au

ASHRA Logo Design Competition

ASHRA needs a logo!

First Prize \$200

Do you have computer design skills ? Feeling creative? ASHRA needs a logo to help establish our identity through an easily recognisable symbol. The winner will receive \$200 ! All ages welcome and enter as many times as you like.

Entries will only be accepted in jpeg, gif or bmp format.

❖ Entries close April 28th ❖

Further reading

Good Practice Principles: Guide for Working with Refugee Young People Victorian Settlement Planning Committee Victoria

Housing and Support Services for Asylum Seekers and Refugees: A Good Practice Guide Joseph Rowntree Foundation UK

Refugees and Regional Settlement: Balancing Priorities Brotherhood of St Laurence Victoria

Culturally Appropriate Housing Options: Refugee Young People and Housing Issues Working Group July 2002 Victorian Settlement Planning Committee