



Scully Fund - Refugee Volunteer Project Report Friends of STARTTS, 2005



The Eagles performing off field at the Gunnadah Refugee Soccer Tournament. These young men came to Australia from Afghanistan as unaccompanied minors and with help from the Friends of STARTTS formed their team



1. Introduction

The Refugee Volunteer Project funded by the Scully Fund in 2005 and early 2006 was designed to provide opportunities for volunteers to assist refugees on Temporary Protection Visas and asylum seekers in Western Sydney by providing English classes, one-on-one casework, homework support, social support groups, small business mentoring and other projects identified by refugee communities and volunteers involved. A second objective was to enhance the skills and leadership capacities of the refugee community volunteers and enable them to support their community self-help initiatives now and in the future. The project also aimed to give non-refugee community participants an opportunity to assist a highly isolated, vulnerable group of people and to enhance connections between TPV Holder, asylum seeker communities and mainstream community in Western Sydney thus increasing social capital in the region as well as enhancing community harmony between those groups. Finally the project aimed to contribute to Western Sydney's economic development through building on already existing strength within Hazara community, namely small business skills and aptitude.

These goals were to be accomplished by ensuring that the Friends of STARTTS volunteers were well trained and supported with a particular focus on recruiting and supporting volunteers from refugee backgrounds who in many cases would require additional support. Another strategy was evaluation of the existing Volunteer FOS initiatives to ensure they continue to meet the needs of our clients. Finally the project aimed to recruit and train volunteers from the Tamil and Iraqi TPV Holders and Asylum Seekers communities to support members of their own their communities

2. Current and Projected Volunteer Programs

The Friends of STARTTS Volunteer programs include an extensive English language program in Auburn, the Tamil Mentoring Group based in Western Sydney, volunteer support for STARTTS programs for young people and a new and exciting partnership between STARTTS, FOS and A.L.I.V. (Australian League of Immigration Volunteers) to work with asylum seeker children and families released from detention. New projects being developed include a major small business-mentoring project for refugees in Auburn, with a particular focus on members of the Hazara community. This project involves establishing an Enterprise Facilitation initiative and is based on the work of Ernesto Sirolli and will be supported by the Sirolli Institute based in Sacramento California. FOS is also about to enter a partnership with two new homework support initiatives



established by the Sierra Leone community at Granville and Lakemba to support their community.

3. Volunteer English Classes

“We need English more than we need food...”

(Hazara woman, statement made during a conversation with an Auburn Council Councillor)

The Volunteer English classes for TPV Holders were established in 2001 because TPV Holders were not entitled to attend the free AMEP programs available for refugees with permanent visas. The FOS English classes helped fill that gap but quickly took on a wider role of helping to connect TPV holders to the wider Australian community by offering friendship and supporting with the many difficulties they experienced in their initial settlement in Australia. The volunteer teachers also were a great support to their students in late 2003 and 2004 when the bulk of the TPV Holders were applying for permanent protection, with many of the teachers writing letters of support and attending Refugee Review Tribunal hearings.

During 2005 it appeared likely that the English class program would need to be wound back, as the bulk of the students gained their visas and were encouraged to enroll in AMEP English classes. In addition the majority of students took advantage of their Permanent Protection Visa to leave the country and visit their families. However there has been a steady trickle of asylum seekers joining the classes and a large number of wives of ex -TPV holder students, many not literate in their first language, who have come to Australia as Humanitarian Entrants and who upon completing their AMEP English classes have joined these classes to further their English language skills. It is tribute to the quality of the Volunteers that we are now in the difficult position of having more students than we can cope with six of the seven weekly classes absolutely full. Consideration is now being given to find additional resources for these students by working with them to establish an Afghan or Hazara Women’s Association in Auburn that can advocate for their needs.



The Hon. Barbara Perry MLA for Auburn meets Friends of STARTTS English Students on a visit to the NSW Parliament

Weekly Classes	Student numbers	Teacher numbers
Monday morning	15	2
Monday evening	6	1
Tuesday morning	15	2
Tuesday evening	8	1
Wednesday morning	15	2
Thursday morning	15	2
Friday morning (childcare provided)	20	3
Total	94	13

4. Tamil Volunteer Mentoring Service

The Friends of STARTTS and the Blacktown Migrant Resource Centre, with the support of the Australian Council of Tamil Refugees, have established the Tamil Volunteer Mentoring Service. It was tasked with recruiting volunteers from the Tamil community who could provide help for Tamils refugees, particularly asylum seekers who because of their visa status cannot access help from Migrant Resource Centres. The volunteers role is to help newly arrived members of the community access services provided by government and non-government agencies. Tamil Volunteering Service managed to recruit approximately 12 volunteers who helped 50 people.

5. FOS/A.L.I.V. Partnership

STARTTS supported A.L.I.V. work with children and families when they were located inside Immigration Detention Centers. Now that these children and their families have been released, STARTTS and FOS have been able to formalize its links with A.L.I.V. to assist these families on Bridging Visa E, who are not eligible for Medicare, have no work rights, or any Social Security entitlements by providing family days, children's excursions and camps for their families, family support especially those with children, by enabling asylum seeker community to give their time to other Australian Charities and by monitoring the families and children's welfare on a fortnightly to monthly basis. During the course of 2005, A.L.I.V. recruited 150 volunteers who assisted 20 families with 45 children.



'Kids Afloat' Free Harbour Cruises supported by volunteers from the Friends of STARTTS and ALIV

6. Sirolli Institute/Enterprise Facilitation

As the project to establish a small business-mentoring project for members of the Hazara community was researched, it became apparent that members of other communities were also in need of similar support. Additionally, an internationally recognized practitioner in 'Enterprise Facilitation', a successful, bottom up, person-centered approach to supporting communities in this way exists in the work of Ernesto Sirolli and the Sirolli Institute. The STARTTS and FOS and the Sirolli Institute are in the process of organising an Enterprise Facilitation Seminar



in Sydney in 2006 where Ernesto Sirolli will speak about his work. In return for this support Ernesto Sirolli will begin the process of mentoring the working group that includes former TPV Holders from Iraqi and Afghanistan and an asylum seeker from Sri Lanka and which will take on the Enterprise Facilitation project.

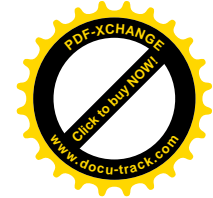
7. Evaluation, Training and Resourcing of Volunteer Programs

An external consultant commenced evaluation of the STARTTS/FOS Draft Volunteer Policy and Procedures and the Volunteer Training Program to meet the needs of an expanded volunteer base with volunteers from increasingly diverse backgrounds.

English Teachers designed and implemented their program evaluation. This consisted of small student focus groups and evaluation of individual students' progress. Overall, the students expressed an overwhelming satisfaction with the classes as they felt their learning needs were met. They indicated they wanted the classes to support their job search efforts and increase their ability to assist their children with schoolwork. Furthermore, more classes with childcare were requested. All students stated that they "liked their teachers" because of their commitment, professionalism, flexibility and attitude towards the students and refugee issues overall. Significant interest was expressed in attending TAFE classes in the future and the students felt that FOS/STARTTS classes were very helpful in meeting this objective. As a result – the teachers started placing more emphasis on providing stepping stones to TAFE courses and a partnership with local TAFE colleges was initiated.

With the partnership with A.L.I.V, volunteer induction and training has been expanded to meet those needs. Additional training requirements include: improving OHS training, providing a more comprehensive overview of FOS/STARTTS work and an increased responsiveness with provision of the child protection training. Volunteer programs are evaluated on an ongoing basis however specific evaluation tools for community development projects that include feedback from volunteers and clients are still being developed. All volunteers have access to support from STARTTS staff and debriefing if required. One indication of volunteer satisfaction is the low burnout rate of volunteers.

The FOS Committee is now more effectively resourced and more able to carry out its role. Secretarial support has been provided by STARTTS to ensure that its financial records are maintained, additional committee members have been recruited and the Committee in consultation with STARTTS has developed a strategic plan to promote the work of STARTTS and the refugee communities it supports and more effectively fundraise and support FOS volunteer projects. The Sirolli Enterprise Facilitation working group, with the inclusion of refugee members who will have the opportunity to work alongside and network with



representatives from government, NGO's and business to establish this project. With these additional resources and committee development the FOS Committee is now better placed to support STARTTS and the refugee community.

8. Major Achievements

The Scully Foundation's grant to FOS has allowed the Committee to work with STARTTS to resource and develop its structures. The FOS Volunteer English program has been successfully transformed from a TPV Holder class, mainly for men to a mixed class for asylum seekers and the wives of ex-TPV Holders. Because of the great need of these newly arrived refugee women an opportunity exists to assist them in organising themselves so that they can access better services for their community. The partnership with A.L.I.V. will allow FOS to support its important work and together provide additional human resources to this most disadvantaged group.

9. Ongoing Projects

The Sirolli Enterprise Facilitation project for refugees based in Auburn, Western Sydney promises to be an exciting innovation not only because it is a proven Community Development model with a carefully structured way of working that will not only benefit many refugees by generating income and employment, but become an important part of the process of healing that refugees must experience as they establish a new life for themselves and their family in Australia. The development of this project will also be an opportunity for refugees to take part in a Community Development process with all the knowledge and contacts that that process will bring to them. The contact made by FOS to the Sirolli Institute and the support of the Sirolli Institute seminar will bring the work of Ernesto Sirolli to the fore and may lead to the establishment of a number of other Enterprise Facilitation projects. Without the generosity of the Scully Fund it is unlikely that this unforeseen and exciting project would have happened.