

“ **My darkness came from my memories** of being a child soldier in Sudan, and seeing the violence that no one should ever see...being in the darkness means you can't see the happiness in the world...You just sit there, alone in your darkness, thinking that you are not anyone in this world. ”

MALE FASSTT MEMBER AGENCY CLIENT FROM SUDAN

From the darkness to the light

Australia's Program of Assistance for Survivors
of Torture and Trauma (PASTT)



“ [The FASSTT member agency] has helped me. People who suffer a lot can become a different person, **more open to the light.** ”

FEMALE FASSTT MEMBER AGENCY CLIENT FROM IRAQ

Acknowledgements



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Published by the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma

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Victoria 3056, Australia
Email: admin@fasstt.org.au
Web: www.fasstt.org.au

ISBN 978 0 9804358 6 3
(print version)

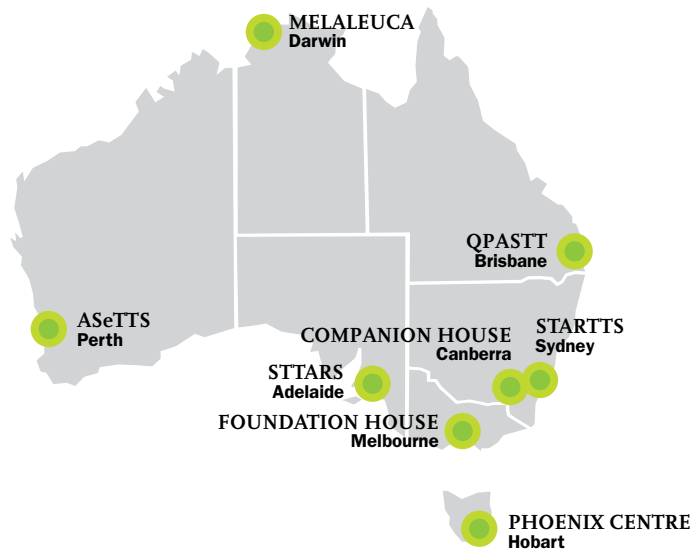
ISBN 978 0 9804358 7 0
(online version)

This Project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing through the Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma.

Throughout this report we have used quotations and stories of clients of FASSTT member agencies. Names and identifying information have been changed to protect our clients' privacy. We acknowledge the courage it takes to tell the often harrowing accounts of their refugee journeys and thank them for allowing us to use their words, stories and images.

This report was prepared by FASSTT National Coordinator Rebecca Cole and writer/researcher Tricia Bowen with input from FASSTT member agencies and their clients. Graphic design was by Mark Carter of markmaking. Thanks to all those who were interviewed and provided case studies, statistical data and information. Thanks also to Ida Kaplan and Peter Cruttenden for editorial input.

FASSTT member agencies



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Torture and trauma

Definitions

REFUGEE

A refugee is defined by Article 1 of the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees as someone who:

... owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country ...

Throughout this report the term 'refugee' is used to refer to people who enter Australia specifically as refugees as well as those who come from a refugee-like background.

TORTURE

Torture is defined by Article 1 of the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Cruel or Degrading Treatment as:

... any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity.

TRAUMA

The term 'trauma' is used throughout this report to refer to the pain, distress and suffering that our clients experience relating to, or arising from, their forced-migration journey. This usually includes war or civil conflict, and/or human rights abuses or violence motivated by religious, ethnic or political reasons.

Acronyms used in this report

ASeTTS Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors

CALD Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

CISSR Council for Immigration Services and Status Resolution

DEEWR Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

DFaHCSIA Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

DIAC Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship

DIMA Australian Government Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (now DIAC)

DIMIA Australian Government Department of Immigration, Multicultural Affairs and Indigenous Affairs (now DIAC)

DoHA Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing

FASSTT Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma

FICT Families in Cultural Transition

GP General Practitioner

IHSS Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy

IRCT International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims

ISHHR International Society for Health and Human Rights

MRC Migrant Resource Centre

NAYSS Newly Arrived Youth Support Scheme

NGO Non-Government Organisation

PASTT Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma

QPASTT Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma

STARTTS Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors

STTARS Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

VFST Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture

“ Even before interrogation,

I was brutally beaten. Afterwards, each question was systematically accompanied by punches, kicks, cigarette burns. Each of my replies provoked new blows. After the interrogation they hung me up, my body was suspended like a sandbag, defenceless against the kicks and punches of my interrogators. They entertained themselves by putting out their cigarettes on my body, which they used like an ashtray. They scored my back all over with the point of a knife.”

— Testimonies from East Timor



“My brother stood on a mine when we were crossing a field ... There was blood and skin on my face, I was screaming ... After some time my brother begged us to leave him ... He begged and begged us so we ran and kept running.”

“I wake up ... naked ... lying on a wet sponge mattress. Cords tie me on the mattress firmly. I am shivering. I cry out loud. As the voltage rises so does my voice ...”

“I was taken prisoner by militia ... I will never forget the beatings ... the bodies that I had to load on trucks ... the sleep which they withheld from me for days on end and the hunger which never passed. Every day I remember those times and am grateful that I survived.”

IN THE FACE OF SUCH harrowing stories it is reassuring to know that there is a network of agencies that specialise in working with survivors of torture and trauma from refugee backgrounds to help them recover from their experiences and build new lives in Australia. That network is FASSTT (the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma), and is made up of eight specialist torture and trauma rehabilitation agencies located in each capital city of Australia.

FASSTT is made possible through the Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (PASTT), funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA). PASTT is designed to improve access to mainstream services for survivors with high needs. PASTT funding contributes to the provision of short- and longer-term complex counselling and case management, as well as the infrastructure required to maintain a national network. State/Territory Governments also provide substantial funding to FASSTT agencies. As Australia's only specialist torture and trauma rehabilitation service providers, FASSTT member

agencies are the sole recipients of Federal Government PASTT funding. Further details about PASTT and the profile of clients of the program are provided on pages 6–8 of this report.

The national links made possible through PASTT are complemented by international links of FASSTT member agencies, including with the International Rehabilitation Council of Torture Victims (IRCT) and the International Society for Health and Human Rights (ISHHR).

This report provides an overview of FASSTT and its member agencies; a profile of clients assisted by PASTT, and more broadly by FASSTT agencies during 2009/10; and a series of case studies that give an insight into the experience of survivors of torture and trauma in Australia and the programs FASSTT agencies have implemented to work with them.

106

The number of countries where state-sanctioned torture is widespread

(SOURCE: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL)

“I was tortured for many years and spent two years in prison. I was tortured and watched my friends tortured and executed. They covered my eyes for six months. We were not allowed to sleep and were allowed only one shower per month. When I came to Australia I felt guilty for being here and I did not trust anyone, not even my family. At [my local FASSTT member agency] I got counselling and went to a support group. Over time they helped me to find the right doctors and specialists for physical help. They helped me to forget my past, and to trust people again, be independent and think there could be a future for me and my children. In the group I met people from other places who had been through the same experiences. I never thought I could trust a stranger, but I did. Now I feel something released from my body and I feel happier and more comfortable.”

— FASSTT MEMBER AGENCY CLIENT

The refugee experience

REFUGEES FLEE the violence of war or direct persecution. Such persecution can take many forms including torture, imprisonment and the denial of the right to express one's religious and cultural identity. Persecution and violence occurs by or with the complicity of the authorities. Many of Australia's refugee and humanitarian entrants also spend considerable periods in the harsh conditions of refugee camps in countries of asylum before being accepted for permanent residence in Australia.

Apathy, disbelief or complacency are the best friends of the torturer. If we do not recognise a survivor's need for support and provide services to assist them, the goal of the torturer is sustained and enhanced.

Survivors of torture experience its impact in many different ways. Torture has a profound, immediate and long-term impact on physical and psychological health. A high percentage of torture and trauma survivors suffer from extreme levels of depression and anxiety which manifest in many ways. These can include sleep disorders, recurring and intrusive memories, poor self-esteem, difficulty in concentrating, sadness, fear, anger, guilt, psychosomatic complaints, and breakdown in family and personal relationships.

These impacts can present profound barriers to settlement in a new community. They can make it difficult for survivors to learn a new language, seek and keep employment, and make new social connections. FASSTT agencies work with survivors, service providers and communities to overcome these barriers and assist survivors to build a new and productive life in Australia.

The fact that most refugees have survived horrific experiences, yet re-establish their lives in Australia, is evidence of their enormous survival strengths. Nevertheless, they suffer a higher incidence of physical and mental health problems than other migrants and people born in Australia.¹ This arises from negative influences on their health before, during and following their forced movement. They are less likely than other migrants to have family and community support in Australia to assist them in accessing mental health care and related services; generally have lower levels of literacy in their first language and are less proficient in English; and face greater challenges in finding housing and employment. Although FASSTT agencies provide training and consultations to health and community service professionals, Australian health care providers are not routinely trained to identify and deal with issues of particular concern to refugees. This makes specialist torture and trauma services such as FASSTT agencies an important part of the Australian Government's support for arrivals under the Humanitarian Program.

36.5 million

The number of people under the responsibility of the UNHCR at the end of 2009. This number has steadily risen since 2006. This includes an average of 10 million refugees each year and a rising number of internally displaced people.

(SOURCE: UNHCR)

1. DIMIA (2003), *Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants*, DIMIA, Canberra

FASSTT

● **From the darkness to the light** Australia's program of assistance to survivors of torture and trauma

A **KEY MEANS** by which FASSTT provides expert advice to government is through the representation of FASSTT members on advisory bodies and councils. FASSTT agencies are also routinely called upon by government to provide input to policies and strategies. FASSTT members are represented on or have contributed to the following national and international bodies:²

- Council on Immigration Services and Status Resolution
- Detention Health Advisory Group
- DIAC NGO National Dialogue

- International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims
- International Society for Health and Human Rights
- Panel on Australian Guidelines for Treatment of Acute Post Traumatic Stress
- Refugee Council of Australia
- Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council
- UNHCR Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (2001–present)
- UNHCR Executive Committee Australian Government Delegation (1997, 1998, 1999, 2003, 2006)

FASSTT member agency services

FASSTT AGENCIES work to reduce the impact of torture and trauma by providing direct services to survivors in the form of counselling and other therapeutic interventions, advocacy and group work. FASSTT agencies also:

- **train** other service providers who have contact with survivors of torture and trauma
- **develop** resources to assist health, welfare and education professionals in their work with refugees

- **work with State and Federal Governments** to ensure policies and services are sensitive to the needs of refugees (see Advisory Bodies)
- **build the capacity** of refugee communities through community development initiatives
- **conduct research** to enhance understanding of the needs of survivors of torture and trauma and to inform service development
- **raise community awareness** of the experience of refugees and the incidence and effects of torture and trauma

13,423

The number of people settled in Australia under the Humanitarian Program in 2009/10

(SOURCE: DIAC)

2. In some cases FASSTT members sit on these bodies as representatives of FASSTT or their agency; in others they are appointed in their own right.

● **From the darkness to the light** Australia's program of assistance to survivors of torture and trauma

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS OF FASSTT

- 1992** The National Forum of Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (subsequently renamed FASSTT) is established.
- 1995** Department of Health and Aging (DoHA) engages FASSTT agencies to establish PASTT to provide longer-term counselling and interventions to survivors nationwide and to improve access to mainstream services.
- 1996** FASSTT holds Australia's first national conference for staff working at specialist torture and trauma rehabilitation agencies (held again in 2001, 2005 and 2010).
- 1996** Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) funds the first national program of Early Health Assessment based on a successful pilot and proposal by FASSTT.
- 1997** DIMA funds FASSTT agencies to establish the national Early Health Assessment and Intervention program under the IHSS to provide short-term counselling and interventions to refugees soon after their arrival.
- 1999** DIMA engages FASSTT agencies to manage and provide torture and trauma counselling services and interventions to thousands of Kosovar and East Timorese refugees during the Government's Operation Safe Haven.
- 2001** FASSTT develops draft national standards to govern all aspects of member agencies' work to ensure clients receive the highest standard of service.
- 2002** FASSTT partners with Triple J radio station to mount a nationwide radio appeal to raise over \$400,000 to use in direct service work with our clients and to raise community awareness of the refugee experience.
- 2003** FASSTT partners with The Body Shop in a nationwide campaign to celebrate Australia's cultural diversity and highlight the positive contribution refugees and asylum seekers make to society as they get on with their lives with hope, courage and dignity.
- 2005** DoHA funds FASSTT agencies to develop a set of indicators to evaluate community development as a tool for healing and recovery from torture and trauma.
- 2006** FASSTT agencies receive a funding boost to the PASTT program of an additional \$12 million nationwide over four years.
- 2007** FASSTT website redesigned and upgraded, including intranet for staff of FASSTT member agencies.
- 2007** FASSTT agencies produce and contribute to the update of *Promoting Refugee Health Guide* and *Desktop Guides* – national resources for general practitioners working with clients from refugee backgrounds.
- 2008** FASSTT completes the first stage of a national minimum data set allowing comparison and analysis of data from specialist torture and trauma services to give a picture of the demographic profile of our clients.
- 2009** FASSTT members are elected to the Pacific council positions of the International Rehabilitation Council of Torture Victims (IRCT).
- 2009** DIAC engages FASSTT to deliver torture and trauma services to immigration detainees held on Christmas Island.
- 2010** FASSTT holds its largest-yet conference of Australian and New Zealand staff of specialist torture and trauma services with over 220 delegates.
- 2010** FASSTT implements stage two of a national minimum data set to collect nationally consistent psychological symptom data of PASTT clients.
- 2011** Funding for specialist torture and trauma services is consolidated into an expanded PASTT program (delivered by FASSTT agencies), securing the specialist focus of work in this area.

PASTT



THE PROGRAM of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (PASTT), funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA), contributes to providing interventions for survivors of torture and trauma with complex needs. PASTT was established in 1995 and originated from a pilot developed and undertaken by a number of FASSTT agencies. Until 2011, PASTT services were aimed at providing longer-term interventions for survivors of torture and trauma. Services for shorter-term interventions to recently arrived survivors were provided under the short-term torture and trauma counselling component of the DIAC-funded Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS). From April 2011 both funding sources were consolidated into an expanded PASTT program administered by DoHA. This consolidation will allow FASSTT agencies to deliver specialist services tailored to the needs of survivors of torture and trauma, whether these are short- or

long-term. The consolidation of these programs makes Australia's response to refugees who are tortured and traumatised prior to arriving in Australia one of the most extensive and effective programs of this type anywhere in the world.

In addition to direct services to torture and trauma survivors, PASTT funding is used by FASSTT agencies, in conjunction with funding from other sources, to support a range of activities such as training of other mainstream service providers, secondary consultations, community development and service infrastructure.

FASSTT member agencies also receive funding from State/Territory Governments for provision of direct services to survivors. The statistics presented in this section refer only to clients who have received services using PASTT funding and should not be read as representing all refugee survivors of torture and trauma who require assistance.

In 2009/10, 2734 people received direct services funded by PASTT, with just over

half (52%) being female. This represents a nearly 80% increase in the number of clients receiving PASTT services compared with five years earlier. This was made possible through funding increases announced by the Australian Government in 2006 by then Minister for Health, the Hon. Tony Abbott MP.

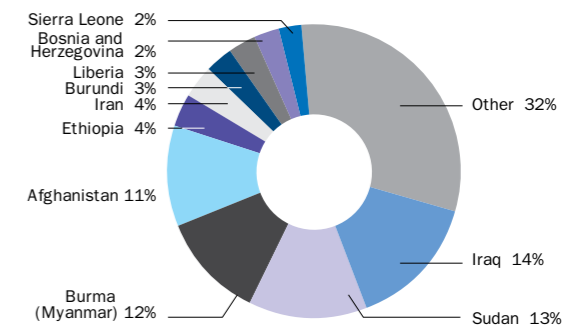
In 2009/10 PASTT clients came from 84 different countries of birth, reflecting the diversity of, and changes to, Australia's humanitarian intake over the last few decades. Half of all PASTT clients came from four countries: Iraq (14%), Sudan (13%), Burma (Myanmar, 12%) and Afghanistan (11%) (see Figure 1 for the top 10 countries of birth of PASTT clients).

PASTT supports survivors at any time after their entry into Australia and regardless of the visa class under which they enter (although the majority have entered under the Humanitarian Program). As Figure 2 demonstrates, some PASTT clients need therapeutic intervention in response to their experiences of torture and/or trauma very soon after their arrival in Australia. For others, symptoms can manifest long after their original cause.

Some clients only become ready or able to deal with their torture and trauma experiences once their immediate settlement needs (such as housing, employment, and learning English) are resolved. For these reasons, there is a spread of settlement periods before clients receive PASTT services; however, more than half (57%) of PASTT clients have lived in Australia for less than three years.

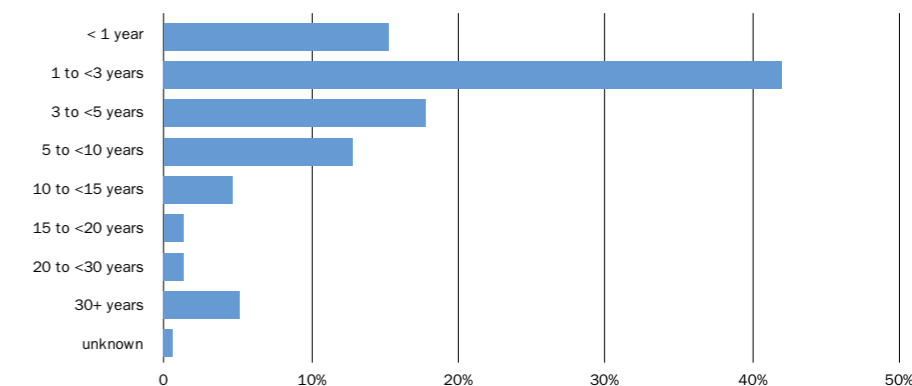
Clients were referred to PASTT services in FASSTT agencies from numerous sources (see Figure 3). This reflects the networks and partnerships that FASSTT agencies have established, as well as the value-adding that different programs within FASSTT agencies can bring to PASTT. A significant number of PASTT clients in 2009/10 (26%) were referred from the short-term torture and trauma counselling services funded by DIAC under the IHSS. In most cases FASSTT agencies held contracts

Figure 1: Top 10 countries of origin of PASTT clients 2009/10



SOURCE: FASSTT AGENCY DATABASES

Figure 2: Period of residence in Australia before clients were referred to PASTT in 2009/10



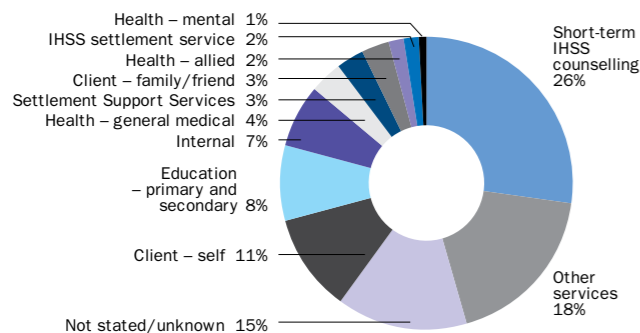
SOURCE: FASSTT AGENCY DATABASES

25%

The approximate proportion of refugees who have been physically tortured or subjected to severe psychological violation prior to their arrival in Australia. Seven in 10 will have been subject to less severe, but nevertheless traumatic, experiences in violent circumstances

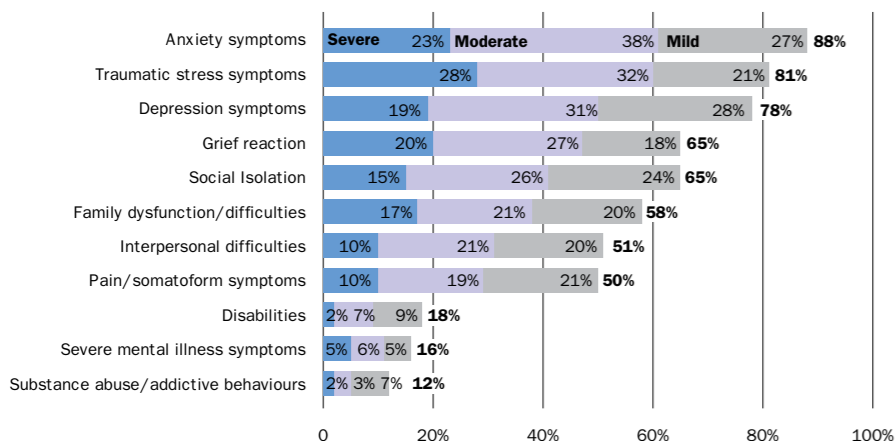
(SOURCE: FASSTT)

Figure 3: Referral pathways into PASTT 2009/10



SOURCE: FASSTT AGENCY DATABASES

Figure 4: Psychological symptoms of PASTT clients 2009/10



13,964

The number of clients directly assisted by FASSTT member agencies in 2009/10

(SOURCE: FASSTT)

to deliver the short-term IHSS counselling in all or part of their State/Territory. A significant proportion of PASTT clients approached the service themselves (a little over one in 10). In many cases this would be because of their familiarity with FASSTT agencies through early intervention programs in the initial stages of their settlement or through community development work undertaken by FASSTT agencies.

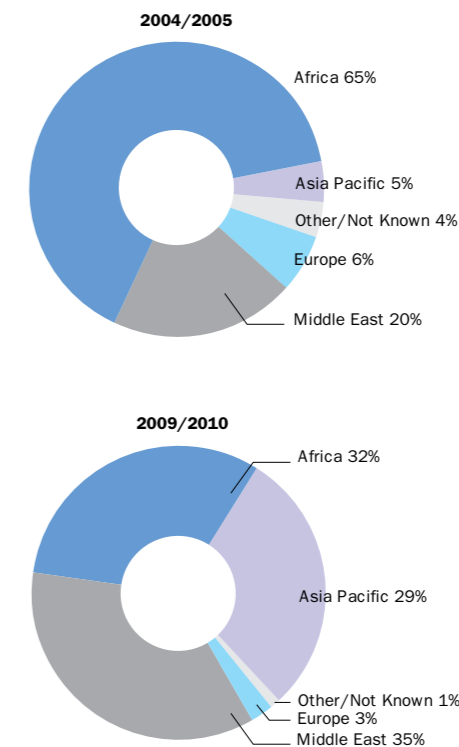
Clients receiving PASTT services present with a variety of needs and psychological symptoms (see Figure 4). The most common symptoms that clients present with that are having a severe impact on their daily functioning are symptoms of anxiety, depression, grief and traumatic stress. In responding to these needs and symptoms, FASSTT agencies are able to use PASTT funding to provide a range of interventions, including:

- counselling (individual, family and group)
- advocacy with other service providers
- psycho-educational groups
- natural therapies programs
- community development
- referral to medical and psychiatric services (some in-house)

By being able to provide this range of interventions, FASSTT agencies can take a holistic approach to torture and trauma rehabilitation and provide services in the most culturally appropriate manner to meet client needs.

FASSTT client profile

Figure 5: Significant changes in countries of birth of FASSTT clients



SOURCE: FASSTT AGENCY DATABASES

FASSTT AGENCIES DELIVER services to a wider group of clients than those who are seen under PASTT. The statistics in this section refer to the full range of FASSTT agency clients.

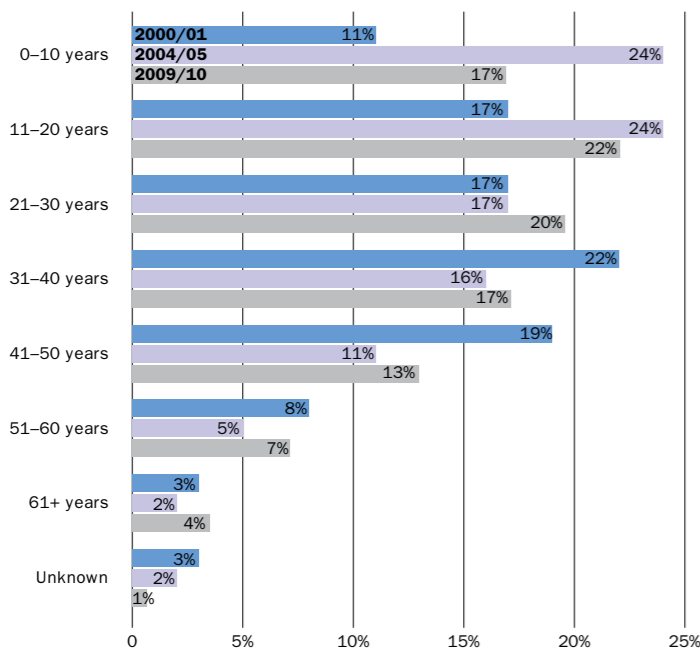
The national origins of people entering Australia under the Humanitarian Program have changed significantly over the last five years and this is mirrored in changes in the profile of FASSTT clients (see Figure 5). In 2009/10, 35% of FASSTT agency clients were born in the Middle East (the vast majority of these in Iraq and Afghanistan), 32% in Africa (a quarter of these in Sudan) and 29% in Asia-Pacific countries (half of these in Burma (Myanmar)). By contrast, in 2004/5, 65% of FASSTT agency clients came from Africa, 20% were from the Middle East and only 4% from the Asia-Pacific. Subsequent chapters of this report provide case study examples of the range of ways that FASSTT agencies have connected with the wide variety of ethnic communities represented by their client groups.

As Figure 6 demonstrates, the age profile of FASSTT clients has changed slightly since 2004/05 with the majority of clients (59%) still aged 30 or younger. While the proportion of children and young people has decreased since 2004/05, it still remains significant (39%) and



Introduction

Figure 6: Age groups of FASSTT clients



SOURCE: FASSTT AGENCY DATABASES

substantially higher than 10 years ago. FASSTT agencies are finding that the extent of traumatic loss experienced by children and adolescents of recent refugee arrivals is greater than previous intakes. Chapter 2 of the case studies in this report provides examples of programs that FASSTT agencies have undertaken to assist children and young people.

Although their demographic profile has changed over the past 10 years, the needs of FASSTT clients continue to be complex. Throughout subsequent chapters of this report you will read, including in their own words, the experiences of clients and the FASSTT workers who engage with them. A high proportion of clients have experienced:

- lengthy periods in refugee camps
- extreme trauma, torture and loss
- family groups with a high degree of dislocation and single-headed households
- lack of familiarity with Western health systems

In addition to these complexities, Commonwealth and State Governments have sought to increase the level of refugee resettlement in rural and regional communities. These changing settlement patterns mean that there are significant challenges for metropolitan-based FASSTT agencies working to develop and augment service provision in rural/regional areas. Chapter 5 of the case studies in this report provides examples of how FASSTT agencies have responded to the challenge of providing services in geographically dispersed locations.

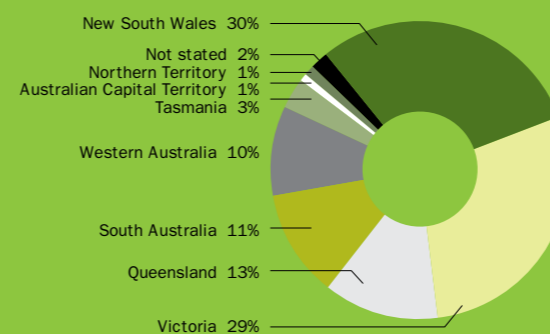
FASSTT Agency profiles

THE FOLLOWING PAGES provide a brief overview of each FASSTT agency. The size of FASSTT agencies, the number of clients each sees, and their operating budgets

(all are non-profit) reflect the proportional refugee and humanitarian intake into each state and territory over the last decade. In 2009/10, 13,423 humanitarian entrants settled in Australia. As Figure 7 shows, NSW and Victoria received the majority of these entrants (and therefore have the largest torture and trauma agencies seeing the most clients), while the Northern Territory, the ACT and Tasmania received the smallest proportions of such settlers (and have respectively sized torture and trauma agencies and client groups).

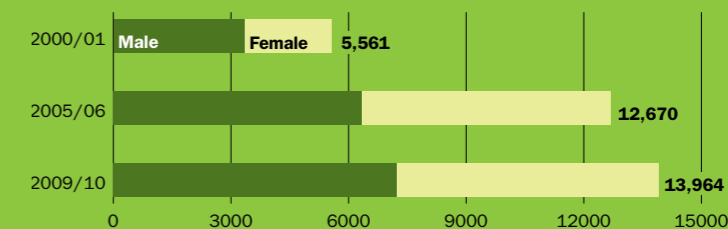
Over the last ten years the number of clients who have received FASSTT agency specialist torture and trauma services has increased significantly with almost 14,000 survivors receiving services in 2009/10 – almost three times the number who received services 10 years ago (see Figure 8). While slightly more males than females received FASSTT agency services in 2009/10, the ratio has remained close to 50:50 over the last five years.

Figure 7: Humanitarian intake 2009/10



SOURCE: DIAC SETTLEMENT DATABASE
Note: These proportions have been relatively consistent over the past 10 years

Figure 8: Increasing number of FASSTT clients



SOURCE: FASSTT AGENCY DATABASES



ASeTTS

asetts

AGENCY

ASeTTS (Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors)

LOCATION

Perth, WA

DATE ESTABLISHED

1992

INCOME 2009/10

\$3.88 million

EQUIVALENT FULL TIME STAFF

March 2010

30.5



● From the darkness to the light Australia's program of assistance to survivors of torture and trauma

ASeTTS' MISSION is to assist refugees affected by torture or trauma through the process of recovery and rebuilding of their lives.

ASeTTS is a non-profit, independent association managed by a voluntary Board of Management. The agency receives funding from State and Federal Governments as well as from philanthropic sources and donations.

In 2009/10, ASeTTS provided direct service and support to approximately 1500 survivors of torture and trauma from 54 countries.

SELECTED KEY ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE 2000

- 2001 Established a client reference group, United Voices, of which the Chair is a voting member on the ASeTTS Board
- Established a volunteer service, Project Connect
- Participated in a consortium to form CASE for Refugees, a legal advisory centre in Perth
- 2002 Established a client support group program facilitated by paid bicultural workers trained and supervised by ASeTTS staff
- 2003 Accredited by the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)
- Supported the early community development of the Liberian, South Sudanese and Sierra Leonean communities in WA
- Co-founded the Western Australian Refugee Health Network
- Established a bi-cultural home-visiting service
- 2003/04 Established a Youth Leadership Program, Connect 2 Leadership, a finalist for Best Project with Social Ventures Australia
- 2004/05 Contributed to a greater understanding of family violence within the African communities in conjunction with the Department of Community Development

- 2005 Established a Men's Group and a Former Yugoslavian Group
- 2007 Won the WA Multicultural Service Award
- Began a series of annual public lectures to mark International Day in Support of Victims of Torture (26 June)
- 2008 Founded Enrichment Award, granted to refugee clients to pursue their ambitions
- Won Community Services Industry Award
- Won Mental Health Research and Education Award
- 2009 Awarded Premier's Australia Day Active Citizenship Award
- Won a three-year contract from DEEWR to pilot a specialist employment innovation program known as First Steps
- 2011 Participated in the consortium for the Place of Reflection in Kings Park, Perth, dedicated to those who have lost someone and need a place to remember, reflect and grieve

Companion House



AGENCY

Companion House

LOCATION

Canberra, ACT

DATE ESTABLISHED

1989 (originally named Transact)

INCOME 2009/10

\$1.35 million

EQUIVALENT FULL TIME STAFF

March 2010

13



● From the darkness to the light Australia's program of assistance to survivors of torture and trauma

COMPANION HOUSE provides services and support to people who have sought refuge in Australia from persecution, torture and war-related trauma. We believe that people who have survived torture and trauma and human rights violations should have access to services which respect, support, empower and promote recovery.

Companion House is a non-profit, incorporated association managed by a voluntary Board. The agency receives funding from State and Federal Governments as well as donations.

In 2009/10 Companion House provided direct service and support to approximately 520 survivors of torture and trauma from 33 countries. Additional clients were supported through Companion House's Medical Service.

SELECTED KEY ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE 2000

- 2001 Launched Regional Refugee Health Services Network in Greater Murray and Riverina region
- 2003-05 Expanded community development and capacity building programs including health and nutrition, physical health and parenting programs
- 2004 Published and launched *The Sound of Hope*, an anthology of writing from refugee survivors of torture and trauma
- 2007 Established the Refugee Transitional Housing Program as a tripartite agreement with ACT Housing and CatholicCare to provide transitional housing for six months for refugees and asylum seekers

- 2009 Established the ACT Asylum Seekers Network and ACT Housing Working Group as networks to work collaboratively on key areas of need
- First non-government organisation to opt into the ACT *Human Rights Act*, agreeing voluntarily to be bound by the Act
- Celebrated 20th anniversary with performances and an exhibition of children's art
- 2010 Facilitated a Community Exchange Forum, bringing together representatives from the major refugee communities in Canberra to exchange experiences
- Received an Australia Day Achievement Medallion for the Companion House Medical Service

Melaleuca Refugee Centre



AGENCY
Melaleuca Refugee Centre

LOCATION
Darwin, NT

DATE ESTABLISHED
1996

INCOME 2009/10
\$1 million (torture and trauma-related programs only)

EQUIVALENT FULL TIME STAFF
March 2010
11 (torture and trauma staff only)



● **From the darkness to the light** Australia's program of assistance to survivors of torture and trauma

MELALEUCA REFUGEE CENTRE'S mission is to provide an environment for resettlement and healing of refugee survivors of torture and trauma, their families and communities through confidential, high-quality, holistic services.

Melaleuca Refugee Centre Torture Trauma Survivors Service of the NT Incorporated is a community-controlled, non-profit Association. The Association was first established in 1996 as the Torture Trauma Survivors Service of the NT Incorporated to cater for the small numbers

of refugees and asylum seekers settling in the Northern Territory. In 2002 it expanded to include settlement services under the IHSS (funded by DIAC) and became known as the Melaleuca Refugee Centre Torture Trauma Survivors Service of the NT Incorporated (Melaleuca Refugee Centre). The agency receives funding from State and Federal Governments as well as philanthropic sources.

In 2009/10, Melaleuca provided direct service and support to approximately 330 torture and trauma survivors from 24 countries.

SELECTED KEY ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE 2000

- 1999-2000** Conducted the Sticks and Stones community development program
- 2001-03** Developed and implemented the Strong People Strong Stories community arts project
- 2002** Became the central settlement service provider for newly arrived refugees in the Northern Territory
- 2003** Awarded the National Bank Volunteer Award
- 2003-05** Secured funding from DFahCSIA to implement the Families in Cultural Transition (FICT) program
- 2007-08** Celebrated 10th anniversary and the introduction of the NAYSS program to Melaleuca's young clients

- 2008-09** Secured NT Government funding for the FICT program for three years and introduced a new module to the program, Welcome to Country, an initiative for families of refugee background to get to know and experience Indigenous culture
- 2009-10** Introduced a family program and Tips and Ideas for Parenting Skills
- 2010** Partnered with Nightcliff Primary and won a national Australia Bank School First grant to support refugee students at the school

● **From the darkness to the light** Australia's program of assistance to survivors of torture and trauma

THE PHOENIX CENTRE is a program within the Migrant Resource Centre (Southern Tasmania) in Hobart, and provides services to people who have suffered torture and war-related trauma. The MRC's mission is to provide leadership in the community to embrace cultural diversity by delivering responsive services for migrants, particularly those who are socially and financially disadvantaged. Phoenix Centre staff collaborate with other MRC staff to ensure that clients access programs which support their participation in society and their trauma recovery.

The MRC is a non-profit, incorporated association managed by a voluntary Board. Phoenix receives funding from Federal and State Governments.

In 2009/10 Phoenix provided direct service and support to approximately 150 survivors of torture and trauma from 29 countries.

SELECTED KEY ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE 2000

- 1999** Established a natural therapies and massage program
- 2000** Employed professionally qualified bi-cultural workers as health workers and counsellors located at the Launceston Migrant Resource Centre, allowing integrated state-wide service delivery for torture and trauma counselling
- 2001** Formalised the interaction between Phoenix and the MRC, with the Phoenix coordinator taking a management role within the MRC, and joint projects being undertaken between MRC and Phoenix staff
- 2002** Established a multi-disciplinary specialist team including a natural therapies practitioner, counsellor/music therapist, psychologist/narrative therapist, social worker, qualified sexual health counsellor and qualified bi-cultural workers
- 2007** Received funding from DoHA to develop programs to reduce the risk of suicide in Tasmania's CALD communities, with a particular focus on refugee communities

- 2008** Received funding from the Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services to develop a support program for young people from humanitarian backgrounds and for the coordination of the Tasmanian Transcultural Mental Health Network
- 2009** Partnered with MRC North (Launceston) to provide short-term torture and trauma counselling under the IHSS program
- 2010** Moved to a central city location independent from other Migrant Resource Centre (Southern Tasmania) Inc programs
- Developed a partnership with Anglicare to deliver the DFahCSIA-funded Personal Helpers and Mentors program to people from humanitarian backgrounds

Phoenix Centre



AGENCY
Phoenix Centre

LOCATION
Hobart, Tasmania

DATE ESTABLISHED
1991

INCOME 2009/10
\$0.75million

EQUIVALENT FULL TIME STAFF
March 2010:
10



QPASTT



AGENCY

QPASTT (Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma)

LOCATION

Brisbane, Queensland

DATE ESTABLISHED

1995

INCOME 2009/10

\$4.4 million

EQUIVALENT FULL TIME STAFF

March 2010:
30



● From the darkness to the light Australia's program of assistance to survivors of torture and trauma

QPASTT'S VISION is to be recognised for leadership in supporting refugees, especially survivors of torture and trauma, to attain health and well-being through training, individual advocacy, counselling and developmental activities enacted by processes of engagement, capacity-building and connections.

QPASTT is a non-profit, incorporated association managed by a voluntary Board. The agency receives funding from Federal, State and Local Governments.

In 2009/10, QPASTT provided direct service and support to approximately 1760 survivors of torture and trauma from 56 countries.

SELECTED KEY ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE 2000

1997-2007 Established outreach programs throughout South Queensland including an office in Toowoomba and services to Logan, Gold Coast and the Greater Brisbane region

2001-07 Established the Queensland Integrated Refugee Community Health Clinic to provide GP services to refugees and asylum seekers and then supported this service to receive funding and operate state-wide as Refugee Health Queensland

2005 Received additional funding from DFahCSIA to provide a family relationship program for Humanitarian Entrants. This has been further developed to provide enhanced integration of holistic services to families across both the PASTT and Family Relationship Programs

2005 Developed a dedicated Children's Program

2005-11 Further developed the NEXUS Program, a suicide prevention program for young people from refugee backgrounds. Including counselling and support, this program has enabled the incorporation of research on the risk and resilience factors for this target group

2007-11 Responded to increasing regional settlement with commencement of services to Gatton (2007), Rockhampton (2010) and Cairns and Townsville (2011)

2010 Developed the Stronger Families Program, a cross-cultural parenting and family relationship educational program which operates from a community development framework incorporating existing parenting frameworks alongside new skills needed to parent successfully within the Australian context

2009-11 Developed the RESP-ECCT Program, funded by DFahCSIA, to provide flexible and culturally relevant respite services to people caring for someone with a mental illness

● From the darkness to the light Australia's program of assistance to survivors of torture and trauma

STARTTS' MISSION is to develop and implement ways to facilitate the healing process of survivors of torture and refugee trauma, and to assist and resource individuals and organisations who work with them to provide appropriate, effective and culturally sensitive services.

STARTTS is an Affiliated Health Organisation of the NSW Department of Health and is a non-profit Company Ltd.

STARTTS receives funding from Federal and State Governments.

In 2009/10 STARTTS provided direct service and support to approximately 4900 survivors of torture and trauma from 78 countries.

SELECTED KEY ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE 2000

1999-2000 Awarded commendation for establishment and provision of on-site mental health services for Kosovar and East Timorese evacuees at East Hills and Singleton during Operation Safe Haven

1999-2002 Participated in PRADET (Psychosocial Recovery and Development East Timor) as expert torture and trauma rehabilitation service advisers

2003 Opened Liverpool office

2004 Began Neurotherapy Clinic

2005 Officially opened \$1.7 million extension to existing headquarters

Established Clinical Master Classes program

Established office in Coffs Harbour servicing Northern NSW

Established trainee Bi-cultural Counsellor program

STARTTS Executive Director, Jorge Aroche, elected to the position of Secretary-General of the International Society for Health and Human Rights (ISHHR)

2005-06 Became a member of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) and Jorge Aroche elected as Pacific Region representative

2006 Started Clinical Seminars program attracting world-renowned experts in the field of trauma rehabilitation

2007 Organised Sharing Our Stories, Sharing Our Strengths Conference

Established Enterprise Facilitation Program for refugee survivors of trauma

Partnered with Psychevisual to establish on-line resource library for working with trauma survivors

2008 Celebrated 20th anniversary of first client seen at STARTTS

Developed Capoeira Angola program in several schools in Western Sydney

2009 Changed governance model and established STARTTS as a non-profit legal entity and Affiliated Health Organisation

First live online broadcast of Clinical Master class program, with the participation of several torture and trauma services nationally and internationally

STARTTS Executive Director, Jorge Aroche, elected to Council of IRCT and subsequently elected by Council as Vice President of the IRCT and a member of the IRCT Executive

2010 Opened \$300,000 extension to Liverpool office

Established Communities in Cultural Transition program

STARTTS



AGENCY

STARTTS (Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors)

LOCATION

Sydney, NSW

DATE ESTABLISHED

1987

INCOME 2009/10

\$10.1 million

EQUIVALENT FULL TIME STAFF

March 2010:
100



STTARS



AGENCY

STTARS (Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service)

LOCATION

Adelaide, South Australia

DATE ESTABLISHED

1991

INCOME 2009/10

\$1.04 million

EQUIVALENT FULL TIME STAFF

March 2010:
18



● From the darkness to the light Australia's program of assistance to survivors of torture and trauma

STTARS' MISSION is supporting survivors of torture and trauma to lead secure, productive and fulfilling lives.

STTARS is a non-profit, incorporated association managed by a voluntary Board. The agency receives funding from Federal and State Governments and donations.

In 2009/10, STTARS provided direct service and support to approximately 685 survivors of torture and trauma from 53 countries.

SELECTED KEY ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE 2000

2001 Started a contract with DIMIA to provide early health assessment and short-term torture and trauma counselling to new arrivals

2002 Became a founding member of the South Australian Refugee Health Network

Became a founding member of the Mental Health Coalition of SA

2003 Established a partnership with the South Australian Migrant Health Service to provide an integrated response to the physical and psychological health needs of refugees

2004 Employed a counsellor/advocate to provide group and on-to-one support to Temporary Protection Visa holders

2005 Employed a dedicated Community Development Worker

Employed a dedicated children's counsellor and established a partnership with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services to provide an integrated response to the psychological health needs of refugee children, including capacity building in schools

2006 Expanded Child and Youth Team (working closely in partnership with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, the Department of Education and Multicultural Youth SA) to provide services in schools to staff and to refugee young people and their families

2007 Established a Refugee Mental Health Clinic providing clinical services with casework support to STTARS clients on STTARS premises

Extended premises to provide additional counselling spaces and meeting room

2008 Published *A Practical Guide to Providing Services to Muslim People* in partnership with the Muslim Women's Association

Implemented Mosaic Project in partnership with Adelaide Secondary School of English and Families SA

Developed a drumming/narrative therapy program running regularly in schools

2009 Established annual Peace Camp for young people from refugee backgrounds in partnership with Toc H

2010 Facilitated the Imagine the Future Program for at risk youth from refugee backgrounds in collaboration with Baptist Community Care

Opened second premises specifically for families and children and youth

Started providing support services to asylum seekers who are survivors of torture and trauma being held in Immigration Detention in South Australia

2011 Established Client Reference Group and celebrated STTARS' 20th Anniversary

● From the darkness to the light Australia's program of assistance to survivors of torture and trauma

THE MISSION of the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (also known as Foundation House) is to advance the health, well-being and human rights of people from refugee backgrounds who have experienced torture and trauma.

VFST is a non-profit, incorporated association managed by a voluntary Board. The agency receives funding from Federal and State Governments, philanthropic sources and donations.

In 2009/10, Foundation House provided direct service and support to approximately 4100 survivors of torture and trauma from 69 countries.

SELECTED KEY ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE 2000

2000 Received award for Innovation and Excellence in Primary Health Care

Received Victorian Public Health Award for *Food and Nutrition Project for Recent Arrivals from Refugee Backgrounds*

2001 Published *Refugee Resettlement: An International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration* in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

2002 Received high commendation for *Off to a Healthy Start* – research work in collaboration with Deakin University to identify factors that promote social connectedness, health and well-being for refugee youth

2004 Established the Refugee Mental Health Clinic
Published a recommended Refugee Health Strategy for Victoria that was subsequently adopted by the Victorian Government

2005 Moved in to new purpose-designed building constructed by the Victorian State Government in Brunswick

2006 Established annual oration by a prominent person to mark the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture – inaugural oration by Lex Lasry QC

Began the IHSS program for the provision of short-term torture and trauma counselling

Based on a partnership with VFST, the Victorian State Government implemented the Refugee Health and Wellbeing Action Plan and the Refugee Health Nurses Program

2007 Celebrated the agency's 20th anniversary and published *More Than Just Words*

Established the Ucan2 and Family Strengthening programs

Established the Quentin Buckle Study Grant in memory of founding VFST member, Quentin Buckle

Undertook a pilot project in partnership with UNHCR and Centre for Refugee Research, University of NSW in Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh to develop, trial and finalise a Heightened Risk Identification Tool for the early identification of at-risk people in a refugee community to improve protection, prevention, responses and solutions. This tool is now used by UNHCR all over the world

2008 Completed extension of Brunswick site
Established Research and Policy Program
Schools Support Program developed through philanthropic funding is adopted and funded by the Victorian State Government

2008-09 Became a member of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) with Director Paris Aristotle elected as a Pacific Region Representative

2009 Hosted a major community function for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr Antonio Guterres

Opened new Dandenong office

Ministerial Advisory Council for Immigration and Status Resolution (CISSR) is formed and Director Paris Aristotle appointed Chair

Received the Victorian Police Multicultural Community Exemplary Award at Victoria's Multicultural Awards for Excellence

Director Paris Aristotle and Direct Services Manager Ida Kaplan visited Indonesia at the request of the Federal Government to help resolve the 'stand-off' between the Government and asylum seekers on board the *Oceanic Viking*

2010 Hosted national conference of FASST agencies
Developed the Vulnerability Identification and Assessment Tool to assist DIAC assess vulnerable asylum seekers in the community and target services that enable them to finalise their immigration status

2011 Opened new office in Sunshine

VFST



Foundation House

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture

AGENCY

Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture

LOCATION

Melbourne, Victoria

DATE ESTABLISHED

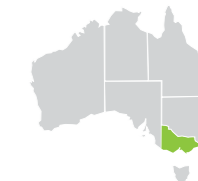
1987

INCOME 2009/10

\$10.5million

EQUIVALENT FULL TIME STAFF

March 2010:
85



1

Supporting families to rebuild their lives

Stories of client cases, community partnerships and innovative programs

“ Everywhere there are checkpoints, so many checkpoints. How they treat people. The humiliation. They ask vulgar, rude questions. Even young girls, your sister, your friend, someone, they strip search. All soldiers, male soldiers, you feel like your blood is boiling. But you can't do anything. You can't even change the expression on your face. If you change your face, that is it, they will take you away. It is a very dangerous place. Every day there were killings. Every day your family is in danger.”

FASSTT MEMBER AGENCY CLIENT



A Family Relationship Program at work

IN 2008 a mother was referred to QPASTT (the FASSTT member agency in Queensland) for individual counselling for past trauma. She and her partner had witnessed and experienced violence, had fled to find safety many times over a 20-year period, and had lost a child in a horrific accident.

After arriving in Australia, the mother presented as depressed with suicidal ideation, poor sleep and hypervigilance. Over a two-year period, the mother received individual trauma counselling. During this time, new concerns developed within the family about employment, education, significant health issues and disabilities. These concerns led to relationship and communication problems between family members. The counsellor working with the mother referred the family, which included five children ranging in age from newborn to 16, to QPASTT's Family Relationships Program (POUCH).

As a result of her individual counselling, the mother's symptoms were reduced, enabling her to communicate more effectively with her husband. The family counsellor provided the parents with information about parenting in Australia and, through work with the whole family, communication between all family members improved and stronger bonds were developed between the parents and children. Individual family members' concerns also received attention, with a child-focussed counsellor becoming involved to support the 10-year-old son and the 16-year-old being referred to QPASTT's youth community worker.

The work of each of the counsellors involved benefited not only the individuals with whom they were working directly, but also the family unit as a whole.

Phai's story

PHAI (not his real name) is a Karen man from Burma (Myanmar) who came to Australia in 2003. Phai experienced years of harassment under the Burmese Government, having been arrested on many occasions. Phai was exposed to prolonged interrogations and psychological and physical torture, including solitary confinement, threats to his wife and children, beatings and starvation. His wife and two small children witnessed his multiple arrests and the harassment.

From 1991, Phai and his family spent many years fleeing from place to place to avoid execution. In 1997 they fled across the Thai border, where they lived in refugee camps until 2003 when their application to settle in Australia was successful.

As a result of their experiences, Phai and his family were extremely anxious and wary. They felt unsafe, untrusting and feared that they may be arrested in the middle of the night. Having spent so much of their time fleeing and hiding, Phai and his family had been unable to earn an

income for much of the time and had lived in poverty as a result.

Phai has been working with a counsellor at a FASSTT member agency to help him deal with the effects of his traumatic past and to adjust to the new conditions in which he and his family now live.

His wife and children were also frightened and worried and the children struggled from sleeplessness and poor nutrition. Now the family is recovering and their post-traumatic stress symptoms are reducing. The children have settled at school and have made new friends. Phai and his wife have learnt English, and Phai is now employed full time and is supporting his family, something that provides him with deep satisfaction.

In late 2010, Phai and his wife were joined by community members and their counsellor in celebrating their joy at the arrival of a new child.

Families in Cultural Transition

FAMILIES IN CULTURAL TRANSITION (FICT) is an innovative program developed by STARTTS (the FASSTT member agency in NSW). It is specifically designed to involve participants in an experiential learning process to prepare them for the challenges of settling in a new country while overcoming the effects of their torture and trauma experiences.

The FICT program supports participants to anticipate and manage their psychosocial settlement needs and changing family dynamics during their period of cultural transition into Australia. It enables participants to recognise the differing perspectives that family members may develop in Australia in response to their new surroundings and interaction with a new culture. Participants are also able to develop an appreciation of the ideas behind Australian society and institutions, which help them understand their rights and ensure that these rights are upheld.

The FICT Program has been expanded by Melaleuca (the FASSTT member agency in the Northern Territory) to introduce a module entitled Welcome to Country – an initiative for families of refugee background to get to know and experience Indigenous culture.

The FICT Program is detailed in a resource kit that provides group facilitators with a comprehensive package of materials to run the program's 10 three-hour sessions, as well as information on running groups in general. Each module in the program covers a topic area of particular relevance to families trying to settle in Australia. FICT is delivered by staff who are themselves people of refugee background and who are trained to work as bi-cultural facilitators.

“FICT is a very useful program for helping people develop an understanding of the new environment they are encountering, and develop ways to make their way through some of the challenges contained in their new situation. It also addresses issues of the impact of trauma and how traumatic experiences can affect families and family dynamics. There are many FASSTT services using the program now. People can adapt it and make it specific to their situation and circumstances.”

— STARTTS STAFF MEMBER



Amira's Story

AMIRA (not her real name) is a 35-year-old single mother who was born in Ethiopia. Her four children are aged from six to 18 years. Her first husband was killed 12 years ago and she remarried. Her marriage to her second husband broke down once she had settled in Australia. She described him as having changed after he had been imprisoned and tortured.

The two oldest children had witnessed their father, Amira's first husband, being beaten and taken away. They also witnessed two occasions when their mother was arrested. As a result of her torture during imprisonment, Amira has permanently deformed feet. She described having to stand on her toes for 21 days and being beaten when she put her heels down. While Amira was in prison, and for some time afterwards, her children lived with their maternal grandmother. Before coming to Australia, the family lived in Egypt in very harsh conditions.

At the time of referral to a FASSTT member agency, Amira suffered from nightmares, disturbed sleep, very poor memory and concentration, extreme headaches and joint pain. She was only able to walk short distances. She was assessed as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.

Amira's oldest child takes on many of the responsibilities in the home and appears to be coping. Her second-oldest child is receiving counselling for problems with peer relationships and oppositional behaviour. Her youngest child has hearing difficulties and his school has expressed concerns about his behaviour. On visits

to the family the counsellor regularly observes the youngest child to be extremely withdrawn.

Amira has formed a trusting relationship with her counsellor and one interpreter in particular. Through therapeutic interventions, she is gradually achieving some relief from physical and

mental health symptoms. She very much wants to be the independent person she once was, is very active in responding to her children's needs and welcomes the support being provided by the schools her children attend. The children have also benefited from specific interventions aimed at addressing their needs.

A Place of Reflection

ASETTS (the FASSTT member agency in WA), along with several other community groups, is a partner in the Place of Reflection project. The purpose of the Place of Reflection, situated in Kings Park on the Swan River overlooking Perth, is to provide a location where people who have suffered great loss can seek understanding, peace, healing, hope and renewal.

The Place of Reflection recognises the extent of loss and grief experienced by many in the community. The intent was to create a public reflective space of significance.

“The aim was to set aside a beautiful place for people who had suffered enormous loss. We wanted to create a remembrance site. The Place of Reflection is now part of our therapeutic recovery process. For those families who have lost a child in particular, this place will be part of their recovery treatment program. We intend to take them there. It's landscaped quite beautifully and people are able to sit and reflect. We see it as an opportunity to assist them to heal some of that loss, trauma and grief.”

— ASETTS STAFF MEMBER

“ I always thank God, even though I struggle so much, because in the end there are good things. This is a place where my family can live peacefully. They won't see the military with guns surrounding them. My family is very fortunate.”

— FASSTT MEMBER AGENCY CLIENT

2

Working with children and young people

Stories of successful projects, partnerships, and creative resources

“ My childhood was stolen,

I didn't have a childhood where I could run in the street and ride bikes. I had to grow up quickly to survive ... My first memory is the time when my uncle was tending the cows at night. The cows were all my family had – they provided us all with milk and food. My uncle was trying to make the cows be quiet, because if the militia soldiers heard the cows they could work out where my family was hiding. The militia soldiers heard the cows anyway, and they came to us and shot my uncle in the head. I remember running to him and seeing all the blood.”

— FASSTT MEMBER AGENCY CLIENT



Therapeutic storytelling for children and adolescents

JUNGLE TRACKS is a program, produced by STARTTS (the FASSTT member in NSW), consisting of short stories that mirror real-life struggles related to the lives of children, adolescents and parents with a background of refugee trauma. The stories have been found to promote hope and empowerment and assist the reader/listener to process and reconcile their past experiences and ongoing difficulties in transitioning to live in a new country.

There are five stories in the program.

Sam and Sonia is a story about orphaned children, which helps to introduce the concept of counselling and the Jungle Tracks program.

Colours of the Wind follows a monkey named Charlie who is forced to leave his home to save his life.

Deano Learns to Smile Again features a young deer whose home is destroyed by fire. When he arrives at his new place he is ridiculed because he is different. The focus of this story is learning to deal with discrimination and building self-esteem skills.

Enter the Lion is a story about a metaphorical lion that lives with Sam, the orphan from the first story. Sam learns how to tame the beast and wave him goodbye. The focus of this story is learning to manage anger and stress, as well as dealing with flashbacks. It also introduces relaxation techniques.

Chui and Teeter follows a leopard and turtle dove that appear in the orphan Sonia's dreams. She learns how to take control of her dreams and not be afraid of them.

The stories and program are relevant for a range of ages from early primary upwards. The stories are also suitable for use in individual and group therapy.

Assisting children through community partnerships

IN 2010 MELALEUCA Refugee Centre (the FASSTT member agency in the Northern Territory) partnered with Nightcliff Primary School and won a National Australia Bank Schools First grant to support refugee students in school.

The goal of the partnership was to raise awareness within the school and the wider community about refugee children and families. A significant number of African refugee students had enrolled at the school, and the support needs of these students was quickly recognised. School staff approached the Melaleuca Refugee Centre for advice and support in the development of

various strategies. Melaleuca recognised that these students faced a range of issues related to a history of displacement and trauma, which impacted on their health, happiness and capacity to learn.

A program of professional development for school staff was developed, as well as two mentoring programs for children of refugee background. This included a boys' bike maintenance group and a girls' dance group, linking children of refugee background with other children in the school. As a result of the groups, participants said they felt "more proud and confident".



Supporting Karen young people living in western Melbourne

YOUNG PEOPLE from refugee backgrounds face challenges making a new life Australia. In 2010, VFST (the FASSTT member agency in Victoria) received funding and support from the nib Foundation to fund an 18-month pilot project focussing on the health and well-being of Karen young people (aged 16–24 years) who are at risk of becoming disengaged from their community and society. Some of these young people talk about having no hope, feeling misunderstood by family and community, and using alcohol and drugs as a means of coping with their difficulties. They often don't ask for help.

“We have been supporting a youth advisory group, consisting of about 16 Karen young people. Hopefully they can build a bridge between the community and disengaged youth. Our work is about raising awareness around issues of judgment, understanding that people have different experiences, and doing some training on drugs and alcohol and mental health. We are also going to be running two group programs. These programs will focus on developing self-awareness, understanding and a sense of identity. We will examine helpful and unhelpful coping strategies, and look at issues related to drugs and alcohol within that framework.”

— VFST STAFF MEMBER

This pilot project aims to work directly with Karen young people to find different ways of coping with problems and to develop ideas for future pathways. The project also aims to explore ways that families and the Karen community can support and reconnect with young people experiencing difficulties. Finally, the project will collaborate with service providers in finding helpful ways of supporting young people from refugee backgrounds, especially on issues such as the misuse of alcohol and drugs.

“We have all come from the same troubled land and generation but some have walked in different ways, different roads ... some helpful and some not so helpful”

— YOUNG FASSTT MEMBER
AGENCY CLIENT

“In Burma, the Karen are forbidden from speaking, reading or worshipping in their own language. Since the notorious military junta came to power in 1988, violations of their human rights have intensified. Villages have been bombed, burned or otherwise destroyed, the Karen forced from their homes, their food and crops destroyed and their way of life totally disrupted. Many Karen have been arbitrarily killed or raped, while others have been imprisoned without trial or following unfair trials. There is little

hope for those living in the United Nations-run refugee camps. Although children can attend school, there are no jobs once they finish their studies. They are not allowed outside the UN designated area. Most have been living in the refugee camps for 10 years or more. For many of the young adults, living in a refugee camp is the only life they have known.”

Hinchey, Rebecca (2007), ‘Oldest Burmese Group’, *Refugee Transitions*, Issue 18, STARTTS



The STTARS Child and Youth team

SINCE THE YEAR 2000 there has been a significant increase in the number of children and young people referred to STTARS (the FASSTT member in South Australia). Many of these children and young people have been exposed to violence and trauma in their homes, in war zones and in refugee camps, and have lost members of their families to whom they would previously have turned for support. Some have themselves experienced torture or witnessed this being inflicted on those that they loved.

As a response to the increasing number of referrals, STTARS introduced a dedicated Child and Youth team in late 2006. This team has worked closely in partnership with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, the Department of Education and Multicultural Youth SA to provide services in schools to staff and to refugee young people and their families.

The Child and Youth team have gone beyond the model of individual counselling to include activities that incorporate family members and

strive to build intergenerational connections. They also use activity-based therapy that allows the young people to experience a sense of fun and achievement while building trust and forming stronger connections with others. Young people have participated in activities such as rock climbing, mountain bike riding, ice skating, karate and dance performance. A partnership with Toc H has also enabled the establishment of an annual Peace Camp for young clients of STTARS and their siblings.

Informed by knowledge of narrative therapy and the neurobiological effects of trauma, the Child and Youth team developed a program which uses drumming as an engaging and connecting activity. It also modulates arousal and enables therapeutic conversations to occur in group settings. This program has been successfully used in a number of new arrival program schools and is currently being extended to other mainstream schools that support young people from refugee backgrounds.

“Currently we run regular therapeutic groups in all the new arrival program schools in Adelaide. These workshops provide a process to give the young people strategies to manage their own responses to whatever has happened in the past and whatever is happening for them now. We also pick up individual referrals of kids who are struggling, so that we can offer individual counselling.”

— STTARS STAFF MEMBER



Transformers – an early intervention program

THE EARLY INTERVENTION YOUTH Program of the Phoenix Centre (the FASSTT member agency in Tasmania) was named Transformers by a young Afghani woman who stated, “*when young people come to live in Australia from refugee backgrounds, they are forced to transform, whether they are ready to or not*”.

The main aims of the Transformers Program are to provide individual and group counselling and advocacy to young people under 25 years of age, and to facilitate the professional development of school staff in order to increase the support provided to young people from refugee backgrounds within the education system.

Transformers Program staff provide counselling to young people, drawing on techniques from narrative therapy, music therapy and trauma processing work in individual and group counselling.

A registered music therapist within the Phoenix Centre provides music therapy interventions through the Transformers Program to children and young people to meet unique client needs. Through singing, improvising with instruments or drumming, clients have the opportunity to communicate aspects of their stories, relay difficult emotions or facilitate the

processing of difficult thoughts and memories, when doing so verbally may be too difficult or impossible. STARTTS (the FASSTT member agency in NSW) also uses music therapy and is currently running two programs serving members of the Mandaean and Assyrian communities. One is a women's group run jointly with a counsellor and music therapists, and the second is an early childhood group for parents with babies, toddlers or pre-school children that uses music, movement and literacy activities to enhance the children's development.

Phoenix Centre staff are also trained to facilitate DRUMBEAT: Building Resilience Through Rhythm. The DRUMBEAT program is a 10-week psychosocial group program that focuses on reducing social isolation and increasing social skills by exploring issues such as affect regulation, self-esteem and peer pressure. The Phoenix Centre has had success providing this group program to young survivors of torture and trauma in high schools and colleges, leading to noticeable behavioural and emotional growth in participants.

Barunga Camp

IN EARLY 2010, a Youth Steering Committee working in the Northern Territory voiced their concerns regarding tensions between African and Indigenous young people. Young people suggested they have a camp in an Indigenous community to foster relationships and learning.

Barunga Festival, an annual Indigenous festival held at Barunga Community, south of Katherine, was identified as an ideal opportunity for such an exchange. Over the weekend visitors are invited to camp in the community, be part of dancing ceremonies, and enjoy the many cultural activities on offer.

The camp involved Indigenous young people and young people from a refugee background and provided opportunities for young people to participate in programs where they could learn new skills and socialise with peers in a safe and supportive environment. Through the camp, participants made new friends and learnt about respect and cultural diversity. The cultural exchange was facilitated by Melaleuca Refugee Centre, Darwin Community Arts, Anglicare-Reconnect, Multicultural Youth of the Northern Territory and Mission Australia.

“In disadvantaged and poor communities there can be friction between Indigenous and African youth. We always look for opportunities to take them out together. At Barunga Camp this group performed together, they did things together, and they bonded as a group.”

— MELALEUCA REFUGEE CENTRE
STAFF MEMBER



2

Connection – youth suicide prevention discussion with the Sudanese community

FOLLOWING A REQUEST to QPASTT (the FASSTT member agency in Queensland), Sudanese community leaders, including young leaders, elders, pastors and active community members, attended a discussion forum centred on youth suicide prevention.

At the discussion forum, QPASTT staff, in partnership with the Refugee Research Centre (LaTrobe University), shared professional and personal stories that explained suicide and self-harm. Some risk factors and protective factors were discussed and the strength of this community was seen as a great support for young Sudanese-Australians. The presenters acknowledged that sometimes suicide is

unexpected and that communities are left to try and recover from feelings of guilt and fear that it could happen again.

Members of the community discussed the supports available to young people who were at risk, and encouragement was given to leaders, elders and religious leaders, as well as to all community members and services, to continue reaching out to young people and listen to their needs. While the many contributing factors influencing people's lives were acknowledged, the discussion finished by talking about what each of us can do when someone wants to 'empty their heart'.

“We do a lot of work with young people around suicide prevention. But this forum came about because there had been two suicides in the community in a short space of time. We had a request from community leaders to host a forum.”

— QPASTT STAFF MEMBER

““ When we first arrived my children would just follow me and I would do the talking. They could not say anything. I used to tell them I want you to eat the language, speak as much as you can. I used to worry. But now they speak for me. They mix with other children and they understand everything. They are happy.”

— FASSTT MEMBER AGENCY CLIENT

CASE STUDIES

3

Supporting communities and connections

Stories of community development and engagement

““ Everything I do I am alone

in this country. But when you come to visit me,

I feel I have a friend and I feel proud.”

— FASSTT MEMBER AGENCY CLIENT



The Brisbane Refugee Women's Forum

THE BRISBANE REFUGEE Women's Forum, which has been held for two consecutive years, originated from a group of active women in the Sudanese, Congolese and Liberian communities who foresaw benefit in women coming together across the city. The agreed purpose of the Forum was to facilitate introductions and create dialogue between women from new and emerging communities, and Brisbane-based services, in order to discuss ideas, issues and share inspiration.

QPASTT worked with two other community organisations and the Brisbane City Council, which contributed to the planning and community development work prior to and following the Forum and met the costs of the event. Between 80 and 100 women participated in each Forum, representing more than 13 different ethnic communities and 15 different service and government organisations.

"I am encouraged, as everyone has felt empowered to say what they feel and what's been burning with them inside. The gates between services and communities are open today. You now know on whose door to knock ..."

— FORUM PARTICIPANT

"It came out of recognition that many women were quite isolated in their communities. The idea was to have some dialogue around the idea of life in Australia and the challenges women faced. The women planned it themselves, decided what the priorities would be and got together. The second gathering, in particular, ended up as a huge celebration. Participants talked about their work in their communities and what they had done over the year."

— QPASTT STAFF MEMBER

A Community Exchange Network

COMPANION HOUSE (the FASSTT member agency in the ACT) has worked for many years with the leaders of individual refugee communities, but it is only more recently that they have also started to bring leaders from many different communities together.

Initial efforts to build connections and exchange ideas between communities have flourished into a Community Exchange Network. Through the network, Companion House works in partnership with community leaders to support, encourage and enable communities to strengthen their capacities and increase their connection to each other.

"There are many layers to it. There is a capacity-building element to it – for example, with particular areas of interest, like governance structures appropriate to community organisations. Then it's also about facilitating linkages. But there is also the sharing and the mutual support, which often happens informally when you get a group of people together. You can see that flow-on effect where relationships are being built and nurtured."

— COMPANION HOUSE STAFF MEMBER

An Enterprise Facilitation Program

EMPLOYMENT PROVIDES an opportunity to find purpose, financial security and a means of contributing to society. As such, it can be an important pathway in the healing process for survivors of torture and trauma and be a good indicator of successful resettlement. The Enterprise Facilitation program at STARTTS (the FASSTT member agency in NSW) has been designed to assist survivors to realise their full potential through gainful self-employment, thus supporting their healing process.

Despite having many talents, FASSTT member agency clients can find it difficult to transfer these into marketable skills. This is particularly so in cases where those skills relate to products and services that could form the basis of viable small businesses, but where the client requires assistance with resources, marketing and financial know-how to make their skills work in a new context.

Enterprise Facilitation is a program developed by STARTTS based on the bottom-up approach of Dr Ernesto Sirolli, an international authority in the field of economic development.

The STARTTS program involves one-on-one engagement that is mindful of health and psychological factors, so that survivors with a potentially marketable skill, product or idea learn the basics of running a business including marketing, financial management and product development in a supportive environment. An enterprise facilitator works closely with new and existing businesses, without cost, to determine where the particular enterprise excels and where assistance is needed. The STARTTS enterprise facilitator is currently working with 25 entrepreneurs from refugee backgrounds. Successful enterprises include:

- a babywear enterprise formed by a group of Hazara women embroiderers and an Australian born woman
- a construction service enterprise formed by south Sudanese clients providing labourers to the construction industry
- an enterprise retailing home and kitchenware to Sydney's Tamil and South Indian communities

"This has been a very positive program. People have an incredible array of skills and abilities. That's very clear to us working with torture and trauma survivors. But people can find it hard to harness those skills in a situation where there are many new requirements placed upon them. They have to deal with the technical aspects of running a business such as marketing and financial management within an Australian context. STARTTS can assist in putting people in touch with other people who can help, and in so doing, develop networks that can be broadly supportive."

— STARTTS STAFF MEMBER



The African Elders Group

IN TASMANIA there are a high number of older and elderly people who are survivors of torture and trauma. Many are socially isolated and their skills, knowledge and status markers have less currency in Australia than they had before coming here.

In response, the Phoenix Centre initiated the formation of the African Elders Group, a group composed of older and elderly women and men from African countries. The group has been running successfully for around three years with activities being recreational, social, informative or consultative in nature. While activities are very much enjoyed by the group, an equally important key to the group's longevity is the recognition and respect members feel is shown by the Phoenix Centre to their age and traditional status as wise people and carriers of knowledge.

“One of the purposes of this group is to provide that sense of connection. We also ask for advice and views. This year Phoenix is working with the State Department of Health and Human Services around people's experience of services, in terms of accessibility and affordability. We asked the elders if they would share their experience. We also asked them to talk with people from their community, so they become the conduit for information. It's about trying to reinforce their status and importance in the community.”

— PHOENIX CENTRE STAFF MEMBER

X-Men group

THE X-MEN GROUP developed from a partnership between the Counselling Services Team at QPASTT (the FASSTT member agency in Queensland), together with Queensland Transcultural Mental Health Centre and Refugee Health Queensland.

Each organisation identified people from refugee backgrounds to attend the group. The aim was to work together to address psychosocial needs and improve quality of life, by exercising, building connections with others, discovering places in their neighbourhoods where they could exercise, and thus reduce stressful symptoms such as depression and anxiety.

The X-Men group is made up of male participants from various countries of birth including Iran, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Burundi and Ethiopia. Activities have included swimming, tennis, yoga and basketball, with stretching incorporated into the beginning and end of the activity. The group generally walks to and from the activity for added health fitness.

“I feel much better and I sleep better. I still have nightmares and flashbacks but have learnt to cope better.”

— X-MEN PARTICIPANT

“QPASTT identified current clients, or clients on the waiting list, who had indicated they wanted to participate in an exercise program. They meet at QPASTT every Tuesday and head off to a particular place. It's about using locally available exercise outlets, a park or tennis court or swimming pool,

rather than needing special equipment. Some of the men we work with find it difficult to get employment, so their self-image is impacted upon. Exercise is a great way for them to use their energies and address some of their frustrations, as well as the many issues related to their history. They get enormous benefit out of socialising, and they feel less isolated. English language skills vary within the group. In the beginning we were using interpreters, but we are using interpreters less and less now.”

— QPASTT STAFF MEMBER

Recording the stories

D*inka Folktales from Sudan*, published by Companion House (the FASSTT member agency in the ACT), contains six traditional Dinka folktales with full-colour illustrations, accompanied by an audio CD in English and Dinka. The Dinka people are originally from southern Sudan. They were caught up in civil war for many years. As a result, many have been forced to flee their country, living for years in refugee camps before coming to Australia.

Despite their trauma, the Dinka women who participated in this project have managed to keep many of their traditional stories from being lost completely. These folktales represent stories of hope, humour and strength, and provide an opportunity for intergenerational communication and cultural maintenance in a new land.

“The folktales were told to us by women from the Dinka community. Staff from Companion House worked with these women to get the stories written down. Dinka children created the illustrations. The project was about connection and empowerment. The process was so important and it has also resulted in a lovely publication.”

— COMPANION HOUSE STAFF MEMBER

“Now I help other refugees ... They call me and I go ... Some people are very sad ... It doesn't make any difference for me if they are from other countries. I help people as [the FASSTT member agency] has helped me.”

— FASSTT MEMBER AGENCY CLIENT



4

Nurturing health and well-being

Stories of comprehensive health care, integrated services and the power of relationships

“ To know that you want to help me even if you cannot, to know this is making me feel better. ”

— FASSTT MEMBER AGENCY CLIENT



Holistic health care and support

PROVIDING HOLISTIC health care and support to survivors of torture and trauma requires strong partnerships between counselling and medical services, supported by community development and training activities. Companion House (the FASSTT member agency in the ACT) is lucky enough to have all these services within the one organisation.

The close relationship between these services supports activities such as: integrated assessments of physical and psychological health for new arrivals; coordinated support to access referral health services; capacity-building for health professionals including training for other organisations and establishing a training position for GP registrars in refugee health; and coordinated health promotions and outreach.

“Within the GP clinic we also have a training position. Each year we have a GP registrar who comes and works in the clinic – and it is specifically focussed on refugee health. That's another way we build those individuals' knowledge of working with survivors of torture and trauma, and refugee health specific issues, so hopefully they take that with them whenever they go in the future. Some have stayed on and continued working for us. Others have gone on to do other things, but if they are in the ACT, we have maintained links with them.”

— COMPANION HOUSE STAFF MEMBER

Refugee Mental Health Clinic

PEOPLE FROM REFUGEE and migrant backgrounds, particularly those who have experienced torture or trauma, can face multiple physical and mental health problems as a result of their experiences prior to arrival and in response to the demands of settlement. Although most people from refugee backgrounds are eligible to access mainstream mental health care services, the barriers they face in accessing such service are well-documented.

In response to these challenges, VFST (the FASSTT member agency in Victoria) in partnership with the Victorian Transcultural Psychiatry Unit established a Refugee Mental Health Clinic. Some years later, STTARS (the FASSTT member agency in South Australia) followed the same model, in which psychiatrists and psychologists provide their services to clients from refugee backgrounds in partnership with the FASSTT agency acting as a specialist community-based mental health service. Specialist services are provided on VFST's and STTARS' premises, with the FASSTT agencies assuming responsibility for advocacy and support issues, and providing professional and administrative support to the visiting specialists.

In addition to providing much needed mental health services to refugees, a dedicated community-based clinic is seen as a way of providing professional, collaborative and administrative support to psychiatrists and other mental health professionals in working with this highly vulnerable group, as well as building bridges for clients to access other mainstream mental health services.

“Often mainstream services are not designed to give particular consideration to the anxieties of people who have had experience of torture. For example, it can be placing someone in a closed room and leaving them there for 20 minutes while they are waiting for the doctor. What we can offer is an organisational and cultural environment that is attuned to the needs of torture and trauma survivors. We can also support mainstream professionals to provide a sensitive and responsive service.”

— STTARS STAFF MEMBER

Yoga and meditation – community-based therapeutic services

THE PHOENIX CENTRE (the FASSTT member agency in Tasmania) has been working successfully to support and strengthen community-based therapeutic services to meet the specific needs of torture and trauma survivors. Phoenix has been working with the Hobart Yoga and Meditation Centre to pilot a yoga program developed specifically by the centre for people suffering war or persecution-related trauma. Afghani, Bhutanese and Burmese women from refugee backgrounds have participated in these classes, learning postures, breathing techniques and relaxation exercises, enabling them to manage and reduce their stress

and anxiety. Their response has been very positive and enthusiastic, and the classes are now being offered for a third time.

Through the classes a connection was also made between the Bhutanese and Afghani women and mainstream Australian students of the Centre, which resulted in the Australian students contributing funds towards running the classes. The classes also gained the interest of a local Lions Club, which made a donation towards the running of the group.

“This program provides an opportunity for people across the community to express all those positive elements of the human spirit. There is a wellspring of generosity in the community. People do have an understanding at a heart level, and are willing to acknowledge that this group have experienced great trauma.”

— PHOENIX CENTRE STAFF MEMBER

Neurofeedback

“Neurofeedback is not delivered in such a way that it's some form of remote technical therapy. The positive relationship between the counsellor and the client is crucial for the neurofeedback to be successful. It's a counselling relationship and this method is used in the context of this relationship.”

— STARTTS STAFF MEMBER

STARTTS (the FASSTT member agency in NSW) has pioneered a neurofeedback program that is breaking new ground in the treatment of survivors of torture and trauma, particularly children. Neurofeedback is a type of biofeedback that uses a computer to give clients information about the electrical activity in their brains, or their brainwave patterns. By using the technology clients can learn to change their brainwaves with a view to improving their mental state. While this may seem an intrusive method, the process relies on a principle with which most people are familiar: behaviour which is rewarded is likely to continue.

In neurofeedback, sensors are attached to the client's scalp and these record brainwaves while the client interacts with a computer game. Auditory and visual cues on the computer screen allow the client to receive moment-to-moment

information about the rhythmic electrical activity in their brain. The information is not processed consciously, but the client becomes aware of the impact of particular electrical firings, with visible results in the game. With this feedback and learning, clients are soon able to induce positive changes in their brain wave patterns.

The practical implications for STARTTS' work are considerable, as neurofeedback allows people to overcome negative brain wave patterns which can manifest in states such as anxiety and aggression. Clients gradually come to understand the relationship between sensations, thoughts and behaviours, enabling them to feel more in control of their responses and giving them a sense of grounding and confidence.

The Power of listening

AMY AND GIOVANNA, counsellor-advocates at VFST (the FASSTT member agency in Victoria), describe their experience in accompanying two Bhutanese families on a visit to a Hindu temple in Melbourne.

G: During our counselling sessions both Amy and I, like a number of the counsellor-advocates here at VFST, are working with Bhutanese families. Some of these families have been living in refugee camps for 19 or 20 years.

A: It is the older generation in particular, the parents and the grandparents, who have experienced such trauma and torture. The clients I work with were exiled off their land. They have described their life in the refugee camp as one of utter deprivation. Deprived of so many things, you are suddenly living in a life and death situation. You are having to fight for your life. You constantly have infections and illnesses. Both of my clients developed hearing problems, not because of a natural part of the ageing process but because they developed infections in the camps. They didn't get antibiotics, the infection spread and they lost their hearing.

G: The family I work with was in a camp where there were constant attacks and many terrible things happened to them. I have spoken with

them about what supported them and gave them the strength to go on through those difficult times, and they have told me that it was their religion that sustained them and gave them that courage. They said they would love to visit a temple here in Melbourne. For them it was very important. They are older, they have their individual needs, but they are family-oriented, and they very much wanted their children and their grandchildren to be part of this as well.

A: There was so much learning for Giovanna and me that day. The temple was surrounded by a beautifully lush garden, complete with all the herbs and flowers of significance. Our clients described their significance in the Hindu culture. I loved that sense of new ideas and information changing hands. It was also about connecting people to a great source of support. That feeds into recovery goals for people. It also means people have some agency in saying 'this is what we want to do'.

G: If they trust us as workers, and they want us to share their journey, they do share a great deal. They realised that we had heard what they wanted, so the mutual trust and friendship was intense. It was a very powerful experience for us all.

“I, with my Dad, Mum and sister, would like to thank you for organising the visit to the Temple for us ...It was a very wonderful day for all of us... Every person has their own belief system and faith. My parents believe in Hinduism and that religion has ruled their hearts throughout their lives. So they told me that you had fulfilled their utmost anticipation with great care and honour ... I consider the day was really historic in the sense that you as a sponsor showed benevolence to us as a client. ... Thank you and your organisation for being so generous to us to help us gain relief from trauma and the hardship of the past.”

— PARSU, TEMPLE VISIT PARTICIPANT

“ Before the war my life was like a vase that was then broken when the war came, never to be repaired. But instead of trying to mend the vase, so that it looked like it did in the past, it can be made into a mosaic, which is still beautiful.”

— FASSTT CLIENT DESCRIBING THE EFFECT OF COUNSELLING

5

Re-imagining a future

Stories of ongoing learning, new opportunities and regional outreach

“ The [FASSTT member agency] stops people from drowning.

They pull people up from drowning in deep water.

My situation was taking me down. They stopped me.

If people who are in those difficult situations can contact [a FASSTT member agency] they could be saved from that drowning.”

— FASSTT MEMBER AGENCY CLIENT



Ucan2

UCAN2, DEVELOPED by VFST (the FASSTT member agency in Victoria), recognises the need to provide additional support for newly arrived young people (aged 16 to 24) from a refugee background, as they make their way through the post compulsory school, training and tertiary sectors. The project has been developed with the specific goal of increasing education, training and employment opportunities for young refugees in the first 15 months of the resettlement, recovery and integration processes. It also aims to increase psychosocial support for the young participants and increase cooperation between service providers. It is a multi-agency project involving collaboration between VFST, Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES) and the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY). The program is now also being piloted by QPASTT, the FASSTT member agency in Queensland.

A Ucan2 participant shares his story here:

“I was born in Burma. I stayed in Burma till I was six years old and then because of the problems in my country, I moved to a refugee camp on the Thai border. I lived there for 13 years. It was not possible for us to stay in Burma so it was good that we got the chance to come to Australia.

I arrived here in March 2007 when I was 19 years old. I came with my mum and my two brothers. When I came to Australia I felt like I was lost. I went to the English language school. And then I joined Ucan2. It was really good for me. I now have more friends in this country. They taught me so many things. They taught me how to deal with the culture in Australia and Australian society. Through Ucan2 we have mentors. The mentors help each student. They guide you through so many things. I can have fun with my mentor. You can call the mentor and you can make a time to see each other and talk about any problems.

There were many students in my Ucan2 class so when we first joined together we didn't know each other properly. Once we were in Ucan2 we became very close friends. Sometimes we had picnics along the Yarra River. We'd eat hamburgers together. They would organise games as a way for us to introduce ourselves and make us more confident with one another. I've learnt so much about Australian culture and the people. Ucan2 also encouraged me to think about what kind of work I want to do in the future. I have decided that I want to study medicine. I will try. If I can't do medicine I will do nursing.

When I was in the refugee camp life was hard. After I got out of there things changed for me. Everything was new. Everything was so different. I have learned so much. Now I can enjoy life in Australia.”

Work in regional and rural communities

VICTORIA

Over the last six years, 10% of new Humanitarian Program arrivals to Victoria have settled in rural and regional areas. VFST has used a multi-layered approach to build sector capacity and provide direct services to people of refugee backgrounds who are settling in these areas. This includes establishing partnerships with local services (including community health services and family support services) to provide torture and trauma counselling. The VFST Rural Liaison Co-ordinator plays a crucial role in the provision of professional development in specialised torture and trauma counselling and related advocacy, case-specific supervision, secondary consultation and support to these services.

More broadly, VFST actively supports sector development through participation in local settlement planning committees, support for service coordination through practitioner peer meetings, supporting the establishment of refugee health working groups, and professional development for a range of health and community services.

VFST's Rural Schools Liaison Worker complements the work in the health and community sector. A successful Schools Network was conducted in the La Trobe Valley from 2008 to 2010 and a new network is now being established in Shepparton. Professional development, based on *Schools In For Refugees* (a whole-of-school program developed by VFST) is also provided to many rural and regional schools.

“We have travelled great distances to deliver training – for example to GP divisions to try and introduce an understanding and notion of refugee trauma.”

— VFST STAFF MEMBER

“It can be confronting for families moving into those smaller communities. There are areas in Victoria, for example, where there are only 20 Karen people settled. Their fate may depend on the goodwill of volunteers and service providers. There are some small towns where small groups of people have done a huge amount in alerting GPs and others and trying to create a positive atmosphere. In some areas this has worked quite well.”

— VFST STAFF MEMBER

NEW SOUTH WALES

In response to the increasing numbers of refugees settling in rural and regional NSW, STARTTS has established several outreach locations, from which STARTTS staff provide services including counselling, community development and advocacy and training.

STARTTS' Northern NSW office is located in Coffs Harbour where the number of refugees resettling continues to grow, with 80 new arrivals during the 2009/10 period.

However, refugees are settling in increasingly dispersed locations, and the Coffs Harbour office also operates an outreach service. Through this service STARTTS' staff make regular visits to Armidale, Lismore, Bellingen, Grafton and, most recently, Mullumbimby.

STARTTS also offers services in the Hunter, through a Newcastle office, as well as in the Illawarra and Riverina. Increasing numbers of clients in these areas are being referred to STARTTS for counselling, particularly in regional centres such as Wagga Wagga. STARTTS also provides regular supervision and training to staff of other organisations, supporting them in their work of providing torture and trauma counselling to refugees in regional NSW.

QUEENSLAND

Between 1997 and 2007 QPASTT extended their services to rural and regional Queensland with the establishment of outreach programs throughout South East Queensland, including an office in Toowoomba and services to Logan, Gold Coast and the Greater Brisbane Region.

The number of people settling in regional and rural areas of Queensland is increasing, with people now settling in a range of regional centres across the state. This growth in regional settlement is a challenge for service provision and QPASTT is considering how to best provide services to these areas. Much of this settlement is driven by employment. While employment is an important component of good settlement outcomes, access to adequate and appropriate

support services is also important. The size of Queensland, and the distance between settlement locations, poses challenges in determining regional service models, particularly given the limited nature of mainstream service provision in many regional areas. As well as the provision of direct services, QPASTT is working in partnership with local services in regional centres to build their capacity to provide the full range of support services needed. This supports the growth of services based in small regional locations to provide services not only to people from refugee backgrounds but also to the mainstream community.

“We are in the process of extending services regionally. It was about five years ago that we opened our office in Toowoomba. And for probably a longer period than that we started providing support services to Cairns, in the way of clinical support and supervision and training. Now with the expanded PASTT we'll have to have services to Gold Coast, Logan, Toowoomba, Brisbane, Rockhampton, Townsville and Cairns.”

— QPASTT STAFF MEMBER



The Role of Research

FASSTT AGENCIES recognise the invaluable role that research plays in developing a greater understanding of the needs of survivors of torture and trauma and to inform service development. Often FASSTT agencies will partner with a university to conduct research.

Selected research projects that FASSTT agencies are, or have been, engaged in recently include:

- a study to identify outcome indicators to improve understanding of client needs, planning and monitoring of service effectiveness for clients who are survivors of torture and trauma (VFST)
- a study of the impact of family separation and reunion in the settlement of recently arrived refugees and humanitarian entrants (VFST in partnership with the Refugee Health Research Centre, La Trobe University)
- a study of the psychosocial effects of long-term immigration detention (VFST)
- research to assess how adequately Maternal and Child Health Services meet the needs of families of refugee backgrounds (VFST in partnership with University of Melbourne)
- research into the risk and resilience factors for young people from refugee backgrounds – used in the development of a suicide prevention program (QPASTT in partnership with the Refugee Research Centre, La Trobe University)
- research into family and domestic violence within African communities and its impact on individuals, family relations, the community and settlement (ASeTTS in partnership with the University of Western Australia and Edith Cowan University)
- a study of mental health literacy among refugee communities examining the differences between the wider Australian public and the Iraqi and Sudanese refugee communities (STARTTS with Macquarie University)
- research into the impact of prolonged immigration detention for unauthorised arrivals and the issuing of temporary protection visas to those found to be bona fide refugees (including a two-year follow up study) (STARTTS in partnership with Psychiatry Research and Teaching Unit, University of NSW)
- a collaborative research study to validate the Posttraumatic Diagnostic Scale (PDS) within Somali traumatised refugee population in NSW (STARTTS with the University of Konstanz, Germany)
- a study trialling the Multilingual Computer Assisted Self-Interview (MultiCASI) – a computer-based method of administering questionnaire-based, standardised assessments of clients who speak diverse languages and have limited literacy skills (STARTTS in collaboration with the Psychiatric Department University Hospital of Zurich and Centre for the Treatment of Victims of Torture, Berlin)
- a scoping study on the experience of refugee children and their families in their transition to life in Australia (Companion House and the Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University)

Ali's Story

ALI (not his real name) was born in Afghanistan. His father held strong political opinions in favour of democracy. One day Ali was arrested by the Taliban, imprisoned and tortured. He was then forced to witness his entire family being burned to death in their own home. He later escaped while still handcuffed.

He fled to Pakistan and with the help of people smugglers eventually arrived in Australia by boat as an unaccompanied minor. He was sent to an Australian immigration detention centre. His refugee claims were rejected and he became increasingly depressed and suicidal. He began to manifest extreme behaviours and experience transient dissociative episodes. He was fearful of sleep because of the terrifying nightmares. He felt emotionally numb and detached from those around him.

After an extended time in detention he was released into the community and he was referred to a FASSTT member agency by a local refugee health clinic. Over the next three years he was provided with counselling and support.

Although much happier and healthier than before, he still suffers occasionally from the physical and psychological effects of torture and the years spent living with fear and uncertainty in detention and on a temporary visa. Today he is studying at university. He continues to meet with his counsellor once every few months.

“ I had very difficult and dangerous experiences in my country. I lost all my belongings. I escaped from a mob attacking people, and I was in a camp set up for refugees. In a desperate situation you will find something in you, when there is no other way. When I arrived here I had to find a place to live. I found the very cheapest available at the time, just so there was somewhere to put my bags. Slowly I started from there. I had no vehicle but I found an old street directory at the temple and I located the schools in my local area. The school had reservations about my children because I didn't have a visa. So I had to wait for three months. For three months my children were sitting at home, but I found them old story books for one dollar and that is how I kept them learning. Now my eldest is 18 and the youngest is 16. My eldest daughter was the dux of her high school, and now she is studying at university. My children like it here and I can see a future. ”

— FASSTT MEMBER AGENCY CLIENT

FASST Member Agency Selected Publications

Please see individual agency websites for a full list of their publications.

ASETTS

Fisher, C. (2009), *The Exploration of the Nature and Understanding of Family and Domestic Violence within Sudanese, Somalian, Ethiopian, Liberian and Sierra Leonean Communities and its Impact on Individuals, Family Relations, the Community and Settlement*, ASeTTS, Perth

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COMPANION HOUSE

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