

A Family Daycare that is Truly Amazing

By Isabelle Roe

Amazing Family Daycare was created to address the issues of ethical child-rearing within the refugee and migrant communities, and provide refugee women with a means to become self-sufficient.

Established in 2011 by Somali refugee Deeqo Omar, Amazing Family Daycare was Australia's first multicultural day-care centre.

Its aim is to give members the means to become functional participants in society and contribute to their communities. Amazing Family Daycare is a low-cost service, ready to help anyone without discriminating on the basis of ethnic background or religious belief.

The majority of its members come from war-torn countries such as Somalia, North and South Sudan, and Pakistan.

The centre's main office is in Mount Druitt and is staffed by Omar, alongside her husband Mohamed Baaruud, who works as both deputy director and accounting manager. They are joined by the centre's co-ordinator Teresa Ganner. Two ex-childcare workers-turned-field-officers, Mandy Ayad and Ahlam Alkin, perform monthly checks on the childcare workers. They also carry out home safety checks before the childcare workers are allowed to start their own centres.

"Deeqo is the best employer I have ever had," says

Ganner. "She has achieved so much but she does not want to take any credit for it, saying that we work as a team." Deeqo was recently awarded a 2012 Humanitarian Award for her hard work within the community.

For refugee and migrant children, the opportunity that Amazing Family Daycare provides in allowing them to be exposed to their own home-language and culture outside their home is a very important one. Without that opportunity, children lose a tangible connection to their roots and an important part of their cultural identity.

"Now they are able to be taught culturally specific songs and stories in their native language," explains Omar. "They are exposed to specific cultural traditions, such as a wider community, that they would not have had otherwise."

The centre has fulfilled its aim of empowering refugee women, many of whom did not have the necessary qualifications to enter the workforce, nor the English-language skills, by giving them the tools necessary to become fully functioning members of society.

This was done by registering Amazing Family Daycare, as a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) with the Australian Government. As an RTO, the centre is able to provide the necessary accreditation and



Empowering ... Deeqo Omar with Aqil Barruud, 4, left, and Hamza Abdullahi, 6, at a home childcare centre in Granville.
PHOTO: Wolter Peeters

training to equip its members with a Certificate III in Childcare.

The benefits have been immense. Many refugee and migrant parents were struggling to find childcare centres that were both affordable and culturally appropriate. Now they are able to give their children, many of whom were infants when they arrived or were born in Australia, links to their home language and culture.

Another benefit is that each member is certified and a subcontractor, which means that they are able to open their own day-care centres. With the extra income, members are able to pay for English lessons and so develop more employable skills. The success has enabled all members to become more financially independent, where before they were dependent upon Centrelink benefits. Six of them have now bought their own homes.

For refugee women, coming to Australia can be very isolating, because when they first arrive, they often do not speak English well. They don't know how to ask for help, or even how to catch a bus.

"The number one thing refugee women want is to be included," says Ganner. "They feel unable to attend to their children's school activities, such as PTA meetings or prize-giving ceremonies. They feel embarrassed, as if they were a burden. Once they are able to learn

English, they can contribute at their children's school by attending meetings there, and at home by helping their children with their homework."

In order to fund her original idea, Omar was provided with help from STARTTS and their Enterprise Facilitation Program run by Felix Ryan.

Enterprise Facilitation works one-on-one with entrepreneurs of new and existing businesses, linking them with people who can help with the basics of running a business, such as marketing, financial management and product development.

It works in tandem with a community-based Volunteer Resource Board to provide confidential assistance in business management and networking advice, all while strengthening community ties.

The marketing was by word of mouth and there are now over 100 family day-care operators, in both Sydney and Canberra.

Amazing Family Day Care has been so successful that new offices have been created in Sydney's West, Outer West and South West, with negotiations underway for more offices to open in the ACT. **R**