

MINISTER launches new STARTTS program

The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Mr Phillip Ruddock, launched a new STARTTS program to a crowd of more than 500 clients and service providers at Ashfield town hall on July 22.

The Early Intervention and Case Management program is part of a national initiative, launched by the Minister at the same ceremony, which provides a comprehensive assessment of the needs of refugee and humanitarian entrants to Australia. The aim is to facilitate the settlement process for new entrants by linking them to appropriate health, welfare and settlement services. "Resettlement is a tremendously complex task," said STARTTS Executive Director Jorge Aroche, who spoke at the launch. "This is particularly so where the background of the people concerned includes exposure to highly traumatic situations involving personal losses, and long term



consequences for their physical and psychological health."

A team of highly skilled staff has been employed to implement the program. Over the course of several, in-depth interviews, they will collect detailed information regarding the physical and psychological health of newly arrived refugees and ascertain their settlement needs.

"We have learned much over the last decade or two about what is involved in this process of resettlement. When it works well, people are able to develop a sense of safety, and a measure of control over their new environment,"

said Jorge Aroche.

In his keynote address, Mr Ruddock stressed the importance of forming EICM partnerships with schools, health services, voluntary groups and non-government bodies.

"It says something about us as a nation if we are prepared to open our doors to those people who are being persecuted. And it says more if we are able to assist those people who have the greatest need for our support. And that must be those people who have experienced some of the greatest and unimaginable horrors that one individual can unleash upon another," said Mr Ruddock.

Mr Ruddock also announced that STARTTS would receive \$780 000 funding in the 1998-99 financial year.

Paris Aristotle of the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture spoke about the national program, which provides funding to services in each state. A speech was also given by Ken Brown, chief executive officer of the South Western Sydney Area Health Service, who commended STARTTS for their new initiative.

Rathika Sivapatasundram of the Natanalia Dance Company closed the launch with the performance of a traditional Tamil dance. ■

NOBEL PEACE PRIZE WINNER at STARTTS

by Helen Basili

Nobel Peace Prize winner Jose Ramos Horta visited STARTTS on 12 August to learn about the organisations' work with East Timorese survivors of torture and trauma.

STARTTS Research Assistant, Kristina Tang outlined a study on the East Timorese community in NSW, a joint venture between STARTTS and the Psychiatry Research & Teaching Unit of the University of NSW. Ms Tang said that preliminary results

showed that 85% of East Timorese interviewed for the study had experienced the murder of a family member or friend, 69% endured forced separation from their family and 46% had been tortured. As a result of these events, many displayed varying levels of psychological distress.

In addition to collecting information from the participants, the researchers also responded to their mental health, psychosocial and adaptational concerns ensuring participants received the services most appropriate to their needs.

"The pioneering work of STARTTS is extremely important...I hope these programs will eventually be brought to East Timor itself," said Ramos-Horta in response to the presentation. He discussed the difficulties of engaging the East Timorese in counselling. "In the East

Timorese vocabulary the word for 'counselling' does not exist. Many people don't know what a psychiatrist is, particularly among the older generation. Those who do know reject the idea of seeing a psychiatrist because they think it means you are crazy. It is difficult to encourage people to seek assistance," he said.

Ramos Horta, who is also the Permanent Representative to the United Nations for the East Timorese Independence Movement, has visited numerous war-torn countries in Latin America, Africa and the Middle East however he said "none have been so thoroughly affected by violence as East Timor."

Despite this, Ramos Horta is optimistic regarding East Timor's future: "I am hoping for a referendum for self-determination within a year." ■