

# A New Partnership



Helen Zimmerman, Hon Gary Hardgrave and Jorge Aroche

STARTTS and the Australian Centre for Languages (**acl**) will join efforts to better assist survivors of torture and trauma in NSW. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed August 7 by the heads of both organisations, Jorge Aroche from STARTTS and Helen Zimmerman from **acl** and witnessed by the Hon Gary Hardgrave, Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs. Among other areas of cooperation, **acl**, a well known educational institution providing English language classes for newly arrived migrants and refugees in the Western and South Western Sydney, will provide professional development materials to STARTTS voluntary English language teachers and STARTTS will be training **acl** teachers and **acl** Consortium staff on torture and trauma issues.

"The MOU is a formalisation and expansion of the existing relationship between STARTTS and **acl**" Mark Lack, **acl** Community Relations Coordinator says. "It goes a long way to integrate the Adult Migrant English Program and the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy, in this case the Early Intervention Program." According to Jorge Aroche, STARTTS Executive Director, the aim of the MOU is to ensure that our common client group is able to derive maximum advantage of the knowledge, expertise and resources of both organisations. "There are many areas where this partnership

has already lead to more accessible, appropriate and effective services, and has enormous potential for further gains."

Other areas covered by the MOU include arrangements for STARTTS to support **acl** Consortium counsellors through training and regular meetings to discuss clinical matters and look at appropriate referral practices. Another area of collaboration with tremendous potential is the implementation of the Families in Cultural Transition (FICT) program across all **acl** centres, with key **acl** Consortium personnel being trained on the nature of that program. The FICT, which is part of the Early Intervention Program, aims to assess the needs of refugees soon after their arrival in Australia and ensure they are connected to appropriate services to address those needs. Research shows that the earlier problems associated with torture or trauma are identified, it is more likely survivors will experience a successful recovery.

A pilot for school student homework centres, within existing **acl** Consortium AMEP teaching colleges, is another of the initiatives included in the MOU. The aim of this project is to better assist young people survivors of torture and trauma with homework and other school related issues. **acl** will also support the Balkan Express radio program targeting refugee

youth from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro. This program was conceived, developed and implemented by a group of young refugees from these countries with STARTTS support. School student homework centres, within existing **acl** Consortium AMEP teaching colleges, will be established to better assist young people survivors of torture and trauma with homework and other school related issues. STARTTS' Specialist Migrant Placement Officer will also provide outreach services at **acl** on a part time basis, to better assist professional jobseekers currently learning English. The MOU also flags the potential for collaboration in joint research projects focussing on the interface of resettlement, language acquisition and torture and trauma issues.

Finally, and certainly of great importance to this magazine, **acl** will also make a financial contribution to sponsor Refugee Transitions.

At the signing ceremony, Helen Zimmerman cited the MOU as another example of **acl**'s efforts to work in close partnership with settlement service providers in NSW. "All AMEP and STARTTS clients can potentially benefit from this partnership, which demonstrates the importance of integrating the AMEP within the settlement context."