

# Refugee Week 2006



There are so many amazing people working and volunteering with refugees and asylum seekers that for this year's Refugee Week STARTTS, and Friends of STARTTS, decided it was time to formally and publicly acknowledge some of the people that go the extra mile.

Twenty Humanitarian Awards for people working with refugees and asylum seekers were presented, including four special awards. A very brief summary of the winners' achievements are listed below.

**1. Elisabeth Pickering**  
**Outstanding contribution to the wellbeing of refugees and asylum seekers**

As a counsellor with the Cabramatta Intensive English Centre, Elisabeth helps refugee children and young people feel comfortable and happy at school. She goes above and beyond the call of duty everyday. Whether assisting a family to get health services they need, developing programs to help children learn about Australia or providing a listening ear for the many issues her students face, Elisabeth can be relied upon to always be there.

**2. Angelo Makuac Cawoup**  
**Outstanding contribution to the wellbeing of refugee communities by asylum seekers and refugees**

Angelo's work with the Sudanese community is legendary. As chair of the Southern Sudanese Community he was on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year to help anyone who needed it. From liaising with the police to helping others understand his community's needs, Angelo does it all.

**3. ALIV Charity Program Kids**  
**Outstanding contribution to the general community by refugees and asylum seekers**

These amazing four boys, Mike Chaw, Ian Hwang, Ali Alfaaz and Tony Men, all yet to reach 19 and recently out of immigration detention facilities, are already performing amazing work with other children in need. Every month they are bringing cheer to sick kids in hospital with their clowning and ballooning routines.

**4. Ilijana Matic and Bojan Banjac,**  
**Balkan Express**  
**Outstanding contribution to the wellbeing of refugees and asylum seekers by young people**

The Balkan Express Youth Radio Program, which they present, grew out of a support group for youth from the former Yugoslavia. The young people involved were keen to develop a program that promoted community harmony. The radio program they created and ran, Balkan Express, is aired on community radio 2GLF, 89.3FM, from 3pm to 5 pm on Sundays. It has been running for two years and has gained respect and wide popularity in former-Yugoslavian communities.

**Dr Ahmed Ali Ali**

A psychiatrist in his native Afghanistan, Dr Ali has, since arriving in Australia in 1999, been using his considerable skills

in a voluntary capacity. His volunteer work facilitating STARTTS' Elderly Afghan Men's Group during a difficult period has seen the group grow and be transformed. But his work hasn't stopped there, he is also a volunteer counsellor with the Afghan Community Association, has set up their library, facilitates a group at the Merrylands Community Health Centre and is a volunteer with Parramatta Meals on Wheels. Dr Ali recently landed his first paid job with the Auburn Migrant Resource Centre.

**Linda Bartolomei**

Linda's research work into refugee policy has produced a number of significant policy outcomes, reaching as far as the United Nations Commission for Refugees. She has been particularly influential in policies in relation to refugee women at risk.

**Steve Canane**

A presenter and journalist with JJJ and now ABC TV, Steve's support for refugees and STARTTS has helped our clients enormously. The fundraising drive, Triple J's Real Appeal, collected hundreds of thousands of dollars for trauma-affected refugees across Australia. This money has helped us provide services to young refugees as well as chipping in for the little things all kids in Australia enjoy, such as school excursions.

**Father Jim Carty, House of Welcome**

Jim has been working with refugees for 16 years, coordinating all of the House of Welcome projects for the last eight years. The House of Welcome was formed to serve people with temporary protection visas (TPV) but has expanded to help other visa holders. Among other things, the House of Welcome co-organises TAFE courses for recently resettled refugees, including teaching English and first aid. Without the House of Welcome many asylum seekers and TPV holders would have no one to turn to.

**Lyn Chaikin**

Lyn has been volunteering with refugees since joining the Sydney Indo Chinese Support Group (SICSG) 20 years ago. As well as volunteering with SICSG, Lyn works with the Asylum Seekers Network Australia Inc (ASNA)

and Bridge for Asylum Seeker, which financially support more than 100 families who have no income and are not allowed to work.

**Anna Dimo**

Since arriving in Australia in 2000, Anna has helped sponsor 30 refugee families to come to Australia. Over 70 people in total, from Kenya, Egypt, Lebanon and Vietnam, have made Australia home thanks to Anna. She meets refugee families when they arrive at the airport and then helps them to settle into Australia, starting with taking the families into her own home.

**Dorothy Hoddinott**

Principal of Holroyd High School, Dorothy has created special programs and services for her many refugee students, including establishing a special fund to help young asylum seekers and refugees cover their education costs. A dynamic and innovative leader, Dorothy's empathy with her students has helped create a welcoming and supportive environment for young refugees.

**House of Welcome volunteers**

The volunteers that work at the drop-in centre are a lifeline for refugees and asylum seekers. They provide the administrative support required by the organisation as well as giving emotional support to clients. Volunteers also organise and take people on holidays and day outings, support them at interviews and medical appointments, and transport furniture for them. They visit families and regularly act as advocates on their behalf. Put simply: They are marvellous.

**Mark Green**

From 1998 to 2002, Mark was a member of the Board of the Australian Jewish Refugee Service (JRS) and its chair in 2001. More recently he has worked with the Refugee Council of Australia as settlement policy officer. Since May 2004, he has been the co-ordinator of the Refugee Advice and Casework Service, providing free, expert legal assistance to people seeking asylum. Mark is a member of the Auburn Migrant Resource Centre's management committee, the Asylum Seeker Centre Board and a former chair of the NSW Refugee Support Network.

At 9 pm, after receiving his award for services to refugees Mark had to head back to the office to finish an application on behalf of a client -- a testimony to his enormous dedication to refugees.

**Angela Jankovic**

Working with refugees in northern Sydney can be a fairly isolating business, but that doesn't stop Angela from doing all that she can to help refugee children grow, develop and enjoy their years at school. Her greatest joy is seeing families start to enjoy the Australian environment, but perhaps her finest achievement has been the building of support for her refugee clients in a community that knows little about those who have had to seek refuge in another country.

**Salim Jafari**

Salim has worked as a volunteer with the Afghan community over a number of years, giving both emotional and practical support, particularly to temporary protection visa (TPV) holders. As well as helping fellow Afghans build their cases for the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Salim refers people to STARTTS for support and recently advised a TPV holder in gaol.

**Mary Mamour**

Even though Mary has only been in Australia three years she has become an essential figure in her Sudanese community. She helps families whose children are experiencing difficulties, speaks with young people about their problems and generally will do whatever is needed, at whatever hour of the day. Mary is also an accomplished performer with a magical voice and great sense of rhythm.

**Sr Maureen O'Connor**

Sr Maureen, who became involved with refugees through a migrant support network and the Dominican Sisters Justice Committee, is an advocate on justice issues for refugees. She has been working as a volunteer English teacher with STARTTS since 1992, helping them to understand Australian culture and customs along the way. As one of her students put it, "without STARTTS and the English teachers, I wonder if we would have made it in the early days".

### Dr Ben Saul

Ben's work for refugees and asylum seekers in the legal field has been highly influential. A university lecturer, researcher and publisher he has been working tirelessly for the past eight years to further refugee causes, including publishing Future Seekers 11 Refugees Irregular Migration in Australia.

### Edward Smith

Edward is the director of Next Level Basketball Australia. He coaches and mentors more than 100 young Sudanese basketball players. He has secured more than \$200,000 in academic scholarships for Sudanese youth. Edward is also director of SAYES a mentoring program that focuses on the creation of positive sporting activities that encourage academic and social achievement. His work has been recognised in major publications such as the Sydney Morning Herald, the Daily Telegraph, Foxtel and Handle Magazine.

### Sr Helen Barnes

For close to 30 years, Sr Helen Barnes has been doing everything and anything to help refugees and asylum seekers. No problem is too large or complex for Sr Helen to tackle. The kindness she has shown to refugees has given hope to all.

# Dario Palermo Refugee Week Art Exhibition



## STARTTS' Inaugural Humanitarian Awards Presentation

First of all, I would like to thank you, on behalf of STARTTS, Friends of STARTTS and Triumphant!, for being here tonight to support the opening of Friends of STARTTS

Dario Palermo Refugee Week Art Exhibition and the Inaugural night of STARTTS Humanitarian Awards Presentation.

One of the things that sustains us in our work, which so often brings us face to face with some of the most horrific aspects of the world we live in, is that it also brings us into contact with some of the most extraordinary people. Working to heal horror, we also see a lot of good.

Tonight is about sharing that perspective and recognizing at least

some of those extraordinary people, both refugees and non-refugees, who continue to inspire us through their deeds.

Luckily, we will need many, many more nights like tonight to recognize all those that deserve to be recognized, which is just as well, since I understand that Friends of STARTTS intends to continue to put on this night as part of Refugee Week for the foreseeable future.

Before I tell you more about tonight and about Dario, I would like to tell you a little bit about STARTTS. (I trust those of you already familiar with STARTTS won't mind too much.)

STARTTS stands for the Service for the Treatment And Rehabilitation of

Torture and Trauma survivors.

We commenced our work in 1988 and provide a state-wide service from Sydney, with offices in Carramar, Auburn, and Liverpool, and from further afield, with offices in Wollongong, Newcastle and Coffs Harbour.

Our mission is to assist people from refugee-type situations, whose lives have been affected by torture and other traumatic events in the context of their refugee experience. To assist them to regain control over their lives.

We do this in many ways, by providing counseling and other psychological interventions, backed by physiotherapy, family therapy and group interventions and through a variety of community development interventions.

We believe that torture and trauma can affect the individual's mind body and spirit, and can also disrupt the family, the social group, the community and society at large.

We have found that working with our clients, at all these levels, is most effective. We also believe that in regaining their enjoyment and control over their lives and their future, survivors obtain the ultimate victory over those who traumatized them. Therefore we see our role as that of working in partnership with individual refugees and refugee communities to achieve this in a way that potentiates their own healing and empowers them.

We work with people of all ages, and increasingly children and young people form a larger section of our client group. We also work with people from all over the world, who speak more than 60 languages and many more dialects.

Through our different programs, we work with new arrivals and people who have been here for decades, regardless of migration status.

Over the years we have assisted well over 10,000 refugees and have participated in special programs such as Operation Safe Haven assisting evacuees from Kosovo and East Timor, and in the training of mental health workers

and later the establishment of a mental health system in East Timor.

We have grown a lot since the small service that employed just five people when STARTTS was established in 1988. We have faced and continue to face many challenges, which we have been able to meet thanks to the commitment and ingenuity of our staff, the inspiration provided by our clients and the support of Friends of STARTTS, both official and unofficial.

And talking about friendship brings me back to Dario, a good friend of mine, and also a great friend of STARTTS, who sadly passed away a few months ago. This event is largely a tribute to Dario, and to the things he was passionate about.

I met Dario shortly after he arrived in Australia, when STARTTS was a very small organization struggling for survival, and for refugee issues. Torture and trauma seemed to be far off the radar for most people, and certainly for most politicians.

Dario had lots of ideas about how art, his lifelong passion, could help STARTTS further the general public's awareness about refugee issues and about the impact of torture and trauma, as well as the needs for services to assist refugees affected by these.

Dario was not only a talented artist, but he was also one of those rare individuals who are able to combine artistic talent and creativity with a talent for motivating and organizing others and make things happen.

This is how STARTTS Refugee Week Art exhibitions took place from 1990 to 1993. They would not have happened without Dario coming up with the idea, motivating other artists to participate and putting in enormous amounts of work and dedication to make it all happen against all odds. Of course, they were a great success.

Dario also helped STARTTS and other organizations such as the Asylum Seekers Centre in many other ways, by conducting sculpture classes for asylum seekers, playing music at public events and donat-

ing to STARTTS the beautiful sculpture that graces STARTTS reception foyer in Carramar and which everyone can see as they visit our head office.

STARTTS owes a lot more to Dario than most people know. Back in the early nineties, when STARTTS desperately needed more funding to address a burgeoning waiting list for services, it was the beauty of Dario's sculptures that first caught the attention of Peter Collins, then Minister for Health and also Minister for the Arts, to the plight of our clients while launching our Refugee Week Arts Exhibition

The Minister ended up buying a couple of sculptures from Dario, but he also developed an interest in the work of STARTTS, which later translated into the funding we so desperately needed.

## We miss Dario a lot

One of the last conversations I had with him was about the possibility of getting the Refugee Week Art Exhibitions going again. He was very keen on the idea, and once again, he seems to have managed to provide the inspiration for this project to come together; motivating his friends, both artists and non-artists, like myself, and the friends of STARTTS, to put together this exhibition.

I trust that the Dario Palermo Refugee Week Exhibition will hopefully become an icon of refugee week for years to come, both honoring and celebrating Dario's memory in the most suitable way I could dream of.

Dario was also a talented musician with a passion for Tango, one of the other things we had in common. Over the last few years he had set himself the task of mastering the bandoneon, an instrument often called the soul of tango. It is therefore a very special pleasure for me to conclude this tribute by introducing his fellow musicians from Cambalache, Jacinta and Justo, who will delight us with a few chosen Tango pieces. ■