



IN MEMORIAM – MARY DIMECH

STARTTS pays tribute to Mary Dimech, former Early Intervention Program Co-ordinator and a much loved colleague. **Melanie Timbrell** talked with some of those who knew her best.

Mary has long been a well-recognised champion of civil rights in the Australian social justice arena.

Born in Malta in 1951, Mary immigrated as a child to Australia, where she would later establish herself as a lifelong advocate for the marginalised and disempowered in our communities.

Dedicated to justice and inclusion; the theme of both her working and personal life was Mary's stalwart commitment to the basic respect and rights owed to all, and a fundamental humanity and goodness unhampered by political agenda or her recent personal illness.

Before managing the early intervention program for refugees at STARTTS, Mary worked as director for the Racial Discrimination Policy Unit at the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, and as National Program manager for Multicultural Arts with the Australia Council.

It was in this role that Mary effected change for a number of artists through grants, while also pioneering the way to the first multicultural arts policy, which includes a requirement for ethnic representation on the Australia Council

These were just some of many significant career achievements for multicultural affairs to which Minister for Community Services, Linda Burney, recently paid tribute.

"Through her persistence and strength of personality Mary gradually changed the culture of community services and how it worked with culturally diverse families ... Mary achieved so much because of her intelligence, strength ... and generosity of spirit," Minister Burney commented of Mary's time with DoCS.

Mary's tenure at STARTTS saw her counsel refugees with compassion and manage with equanimity a team coming to terms with an array of new challenges, including the disconnect and anxiety experienced by holders of temporary protection visas ineligible for DIMA-funded services.

Her personality and unique managerial style left a legacy in the dedication of the staff privileged to work beside her at STARTTS.

"She was a great inspiration to me," says Social Worker Robin Bowles, "She was one of those rare gentle people who gave other people confidence and believed in you when you didn't really believe in yourself."

STARTTS clinical team leader Gordana Hol-Radicic said: "She was a loving, passionate and understanding person with a warm heart who dedicated her life to human rights."

Clinical psychologist Deb Gould expressed her thoughts this way "Mary's compassion and generosity of spirit went beyond her commitment to human rights and social justice. She lived it in her connections with people. I remember at the funeral of one of her close personal friends it was she who was comforting others, reminding us of our relationships to one another and how important these are. Even though it must have been so hard for her the words she shared with my partner and I spoke of her deep attunement to others that was not diluted by her own pain."

Mary was diagnosed with lymphoma in 2002 and passed away at the end of last year.

All who were touched by her selfless kindness and courageous pursuit of equality will sorely miss her.

Thanks to both the Sydney Morning Herald (16/12/09) and the Hon Linda Burney, Minister for Community Services, for allowing us to reprint parts of their material.