

STARTTS' fundraiser the Refugee Ball has grown into one of the biggest and most diverse events on the calendar. This year the Ball supported STARTTS' work with kids in school, and raised more money than ever before. RICHARD WALKER reports.

Supporting Kids and Having a Ball

It was humbling to see the show of support for our work at this year's Refugee Ball which took place on October 8. This is STARTTS' annual fundraiser and has been completely sold out in the past three years. Once again it was inspiring to see the room filled to capacity with people from different walks of life coming together for the common cause of supporting our work with trauma survivors.

Guests at the Ball this year came from across the spectrum – refugee community leaders, settlement services, support workers, law firms, sporting organisations, politicians, government agencies and many more.

Our guest speaker was Dr Munjed Al Muderis – Iraqi refugee and also one of the world's foremost orthopaedic surgeons – a living example of the amazing contribution refugees can make to society if given the chance.

His speech was a heartfelt reflection of his personal journey on what he calls the 'wheel of fortune'. The wheel of fortune, he explained, is life's way of taking you from the highest highs to the lowest lows and back again. We are grateful to have had him at Refugee Ball 2015.

This year the Ball raised money for the important Settling In project, which is part of the STARTTS School Liaison Program. As usual, our wonderful guests rallied behind the cause and gave generously and won great prizes in the process.

To cap the evening off, in true Refugee Ball style, the band had the crowd moving to a multicultural musical bonanza. Rising star C Major, backed up by our long-time supporters Son Veneno, kicked off the dancing with some funky Latin tunes and chart-topping favourites.

Special guest Edmon Lazar wowed the crowd with his unique blend of Syrian, Lebanese and Egyptian music to add a different note to the evening. The Refugee Ball crowd is always ready for a dance – so much so that we might need a bigger dance floor next year!

Thank you to everyone who came along and especially those who provided additional support on the night – as volunteers, sponsors, prize donors, speakers and performers. Special thanks to our Gold Sponsors Network of Caring, SSI and Stacks Goudkamp, and our Media Partner SBS.



ALL PHOTOS BY ISABELLA LETTINI

Refugee Ball: Supporting our work with schools

All refugees face great loss and trauma, but this experience is especially bewildering for young children. Violence has forced them to leave their homeland, and they are now trying to find a place in a new culture and forge an identity of their own.

Young people have incredible resilience, but we cannot underestimate the alienation and dislocation that many young refugees feel.

At a time when 12,000 refugees are soon to arrive in Australia – many of them children – a program focusing on helping kids to settle in, overcome their trauma and do well at school is of vital importance.

We asked our guests to give generously and they did. In a new record for Refugee Ball, more than \$40,000 was raised, all of which will go towards giving our newest young Australians the best chance possible of a bright future. **R**

“Thanks for the great event. Well done to all the team on what again was a fabulous evening.”



“I was a young boy. I lost my father, I lost my friends, I lost the home I was born in. Somebody cut my roots. Every day you have to fight to survive.”



“LOVED the ball. What a great experience! And Dr Al Muderis – could have heard a pin drop. So engaging. If only more people knew the stories of refugees,”



“I didn't have anyone, but I wanted to talk to someone. If it wasn't for STARTTS, I don't know what I would be doing.”

