

MEDIA RELEASE

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ACL celebrates contribution of refugees

2008 Refugee Week provides an opportunity to celebrate the contribution of refugees to Australian society, ACL Government Programs General Manager Michael Cox said today, on the eve of the annual initiative.

In recognising Refugee Week, from Sunday 15 June to Saturday 21 June, and World Refugee Day (20 June), Mr Cox said the personal qualities and skills refugees and humanitarian entrants bring to Australia enhances the communities in which they live and contributes to Australia's growth and prosperity in the long term.

ACL will celebrate Refugee Week across its colleges and consortium partners with a variety of cultural displays and entertainment.

"We recognise and celebrate the contribution that refugees and newly arrived migrants make to society – ACL has some shining examples of humanitarian entrants who have had the qualities, skills and drive to make a new beginning for themselves and their family and this is truly inspiring," Mr Cox said.

Mr Cox said Refugee Week was important to not only celebrate this contribution, but to assist the wider community understand the many challenges refugees face.

"Many refugee and humanitarian arrivals face a number of barriers when they come in to the country. They may be highly skilled but don't have the recognised Australian credentials. They may lack the work experience in Australian workplaces," he said.

Mr Cox said ACL has responded by providing employment opportunities and pathways (as well as English language learning) to refugee and humanitarian entrants as a first step in their settlement.

ACL has been assisting refugees' settlement since 2005 through the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS), a Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) funded program.

Throughout 2007/2008, ACL has assisted more than 3,500 humanitarian entrants through the IHSS.

In 2007-2008, some 9,108 humanitarian entrants arrived in Australia. The top five countries of birth were Sudan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Burma and Zaire.

In the past 60 years, Australia has offered permanent residency to 700,000 refugees.

The IHSS is designed to help humanitarian entrants rebuild their lives in Australia by providing them with support designed to meet their initial settlement needs. Emphasis is placed on sensitivity to cultural differences and minimum intrusion into entrants' lives. A case-coordination approach is provided to ensure that the special needs of humanitarian entrants are identified and addressed, which ensure their settlement services are well integrated.

The IHSS helps entrants gain access to mainstream services such as Centrelink, Medicare, banks, general and specialist health and medical services, education, training and employment, as well as links to the community.

In addition, ACL has been assisting refugees and humanitarian settlers enrolled in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) since 1998 in NSW to provide English language and settlement support to connect with their local communities and create education and employment pathways.

2008 Refugee Week – with the theme of 'A Place to Call Home' – encourages Australians to think about the global themes of protection and human rights by focusing on the fundamental right to a secure place to call home.

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