

WCC News

Issue 1

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Welcome to the first edition of the WCC Newsletter. This Newsletter is intended for our volunteers, association members and staff and will be produced 4 times a year.

As either a volunteer or Association member (or in most cases both) WCC values your contribution to our organisation and your commitment to our work. I am delighted that almost 200 of you care enough about our work to formally join us as Association Members, helping to shape our programs and services for the future. We are keen to keep you informed and this newsletter will provide regular up-dates on our programs and services and let you know of up-coming events. We will also promote further opportunities for you to become involved in both our on-going work and in new initiatives.

It would assist us greatly if you could up-date your details and confirm your on-going desire to remain as a member of our Association. If you are happy to receive up-coming issues of the newsletter by email it would mean that we can get the newsletter to you more efficiently whilst also saving us valuable time and money. A **Renewal of Membership form** is included with this Newsletter along with a stamped-addressed envelope. I hope you enjoy reading about our work.

Raziye Baftiyar, Chairperson

Manager's Message

It is with great pleasure that WCC is able to introduce a newsletter specifically aiming to keep our members and past and current volunteers informed about our activities and work.

2009 is already proving to be a busy and productive year for us. Implementation of our strategic plan, consolidation of new projects and programs and the response to the tragedy of the Black Saturday Bushfires has focused much of our efforts in these first hectic months of the new year.

Our involvement in assisting bushfire relief efforts has included volunteer coordination, providing legal help and advice and delivering financial assistance to those who continue to face hardship as a result of the bushfires. Much of this work is being carried-out with help from many community volunteers as well as in partnership with community agencies and the City of Whittlesea Council.

We know that much of the need for assistance is going to outlast the media interest and public attention currently given to the bushfire disaster and we are committed to be involved into the long-term. With support from both Federal and State governments we will soon be employing workers (and volunteers) to provide targeted legal advice and casework and to coordinate volunteers and volunteer led initiatives as communities begin to recover and rebuild. We are keen to recruit volunteers to help out in all aspects of this work including administration, database management, emergency relief assessment and in training and support of other volunteers. Please contact either Annette or Peta on 9401 6666 if you are interested in being involved.



On a (much) happier note, Emma Sampson (Coordinator of our Volunteer Resource Service) has given birth to a beautiful baby girl, Ava Louise on February 17th. Ava has been in to say 'hello' a couple of times and she even made it to the annual Whittlesea International Women's Day Awards (due to the bushfires, held late on 3rd April this year).

WCC Program News

Harmony Newsletter

The Harmony Newsletter, funded through City of Whittlesea Community Grants, was launched on 5 February 2009. The Harmony has been developed with local community members with previous experience in newspaper writing and editing. The Harmony is a free monthly publication for all Arabic speaking communities living in Whittlesea. The paper is distributed to the City of Whittlesea, Centrelink, Lalor & Thomastown Libraries, NMIT Epping, Arabic shops in Lalor and Arabic speaking GP clinics. The paper focuses on raising awareness of services available in the local area, community events and cultural exchange.

Settlement Services

The Arabic Women's Group is planning to become an incorporated association with aims and objectives to be confirmed and a committee of management to be elected. This will give the group greater independence, develop leadership and ensure greater sustainability of the group.

The Refugee Support Group continues to meet every Saturday and expansion of programs to include sewing, children's activities and homework support means that a diverse range of refugee communities access the service.

Driving Program

The driving program is well under way. Pre and Learner drivers make up the first 20 participants and most learners have completed six formal driving lessons. A couple of participants have just started to gain additional driving practice with the support of volunteers and our newly leased vehicle. The pre-learners need intensive support, particularly as most have low English proficiency and three driver education sessions were held in February alone. A group test at VicRoads with an interpreter will be booked soon for the group of pre-Learner's. There is a list of 20 people waiting to undertake the next course, as this program has proved to be very popular.



Refugee Playgroup

A refugee playgroup was established in January and families originate from diverse communities including Sudan, Liberia, Burundi and Papua New Guinea. This is a supported playgroup, funded through City of Whittlesea Supported Playgroup Initiative and meets once a week. In April a trip to the zoo was enjoyed by all.

Police Project

The police and young people project, aimed at developing better understanding and relationships between local police and new arrival youth is nearing completion. One of the project outcomes is to visually document the project to identify what participants have gained and to share this learning with others. The young people involved are currently working with Majid, a professional actor and newly recruited volunteer, to develop a short DVD about the project. The DVD will be available shortly for those interested in seeing what happened from the perspective of new arrival youth.

WCC Program News

Learning Support Program expands with funding from Centre for Multicultural Youth

Learning Support Programs for new arrival students have been established in four schools this year with financial support from CMY. Schools include Lalor North, Epping, Reservoir District and Merrilands Secondary Colleges. The two schools in Reservoir have been targeted due to a significant proportion of new arrival students with many living in the City of Whittlesea. The program will focus on literacy skills and 3 tutors have been recruited to help deliver this program. Philippe has also met with LaTrobe University Education Unit and recruited students to volunteer as tutors. The program runs over lunchtime to address issues around access and transport and an additional program has been established on Saturday mornings for learning support for new arrival students undertaking VCE.

Community Transport

The community transport service has continued to increase in popularity and we are still looking for more drivers and assistants to meet the need. So far this year two training sessions have been provided to transport volunteers, one on Safety and the other on Cultural Diversity. We have also started using the new car, when it is not being used for driving lessons. This is more efficient than using the bus, when there is only one pick up and allows us to transport more clients. Anyone interested in joining the Community Transport team of volunteer drivers and escorts, please contact either Lucinda or Peta.

International Women's Day Award Ceremony

Whittlesea Community Connections held its annual International Women's Day Awards Ceremony to recognise the voluntary contribution that women make to the local community. This year, the ceremony was postponed from its original date in March to Friday the 3rd of April due to the devastating bushfires in February. This allowed those many volunteers that helped throughout the bushfire period to have an opportunity to nominate or be nominated for an award.

WCC Volunteers Deepty Cusima who assists us as a tutor with the refugee support group, Gail Short who provided invaluable information and assistance in our bushfire efforts and Janet Bismyf who has volunteered as a mentor of other new arrivals were honoured by the independent selection Committee. WCC is extremely proud of their achievements.

Dawn Ciechowski of Epping CFA was awarded the Whittlesea International Women's Day Award for her commitment to community safety and the local brigade.

The following awards were also distributed:

Young Achievers	Deepty Cusima
Rural Women's Award	Gail Short
Senior Citizen Award	Elizabeth Pratt
Personal Achievement Award	Grace David
Newly Arrived Women's Award	Janet Bismyf



Community Information and Client Services

Community Information Volunteers are currently working on updating the Whittlesea Community Directory for the 2009-2010 period. This year, WCC will introduce an online directory which will be accessible to agencies who register with us via our website.

Our front desk volunteers had a very busy start to the year assisting over 1,000 community members with queries about community affairs and support services. Access to services providing support for housing and employment were in high demand. New volunteer community information workers are currently undergoing training both on the 9 week course run at Lalor Living and Learning Centre and at WCC with their mentor supervisors.

WCC Program News

Emergency Relief

The Emergency Relief Service assisted a total of 328 people facing financial hardship from January to March distributing a total of \$18,013 during the period. In addition, our ER assessors were able to assist single women by accessing financial support from the Queens Fund, which added an additional \$1,100 to our total for the first quarter.

Tax Help 2009

The Tax Help Program is back again this year and will run from July 14th to October 31st. Tax Help is delivered in partnership with the Australian Taxation Office, helping people on low incomes to complete their taxation forms. The service is free of charge, and generally available for people on low incomes (less than \$35,000 per annum). We will begin taking appointments from July 1st. As usual the service will be run by appointment only and people should contact us on **9401 6666 to book**.

Volunteer Resource Service

We are well on our way to completing the delivery of the training calendar for the first half of the year. We have already run six 'Introduction to Volunteering' sessions as well as training in First Aid Level 1, Working with Interpreters and Food Handling Level 1 and have upcoming sessions in Working with Senior Citizens, Basic Computer Applications, Emergency Response and Reception and General Office Work.

In response to the recent bushfires we have been maintaining the bushfire volunteer database and responding to requests for volunteers from relief agencies working in the bushfire effected areas. This has been operating with our existing stretched resources, however recent funding now means that we are able to expand this work. We expect that there will be a need for volunteer coordination in response to the bushfires for at least the next 12 months.



Volunteers at Bushfire Relief Information Desk In Whittlesea

Whittlesea Community Legal Service

WCC's Community Legal Service has been undergoing a period of staff turnover over recent months. Most recently our Principal Solicitor and Team leader Silvana Prestia has had to resign for personal reasons. However our dedicated team have done a great job in managing and delivering their essential services.

Most recently we've welcomed Celeste Brierty in the role of Outreach Solicitor and she has begun to make important contributions to all our legal services. With Celeste's appointment we have recommenced our outreach services at the Mill Park Community House (68 Mill Park Drive) and Anglicare (8 Hurtle Street, Lalor) to add to the outreach service provided at Whittlesea Township.

In recent months, the legal service has been active in assisting those affected by the tragic Black Saturday fires, and the outreach service at the Whittlesea Township has been a key way of ensuring that those affected have access to legal assistance. With funding received from the federal government, WCC will soon be able to provide a dedicated full-time position for bushfire-impacted individuals.

Our drop-in Monday night service continues to be busy and popular with those who need quick, free and unbiased advice as well as with those unable to make daytime appointments.

Overall, the legal service continues to handle a high volume of client enquiries and cases.

Feel free to promote the service and encourage community members to call us on **9401 6655** for more information or to make an appointment.