



Media Release

Wednesday 30 July 2008

MIGRANT & REFUGEE MENTAL HEALTH: BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN SERVICES & COMMUNITY LEADERS

Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre (SMRC) and the Mental Illness Fellowship of Victoria (MIF) invites community leaders and services providers in the health and community services sector to workshops aiming to raise mental health awareness in the Sudanese and Arabic communities. On the weekend of 9-10 August, workshops will be held with people working within these communities, who are often vulnerable to mental illness by virtue of their migration experiences and any prior torture and trauma. The workshops will aim to increase knowledge, reduce barriers in accessing services, and build bridges between the sector and the community to ensure culturally-responsive services.

The idea for the workshops arose after SMRC staff had interactions with many community leaders who noticed members of their groups suffering depression. They felt helpless in being able to offer any guidance or pick up on the symptoms. In one case, a young man committed suicide. After discussions with community leaders, it was felt some training to empower community leaders would be helpful. Grant applications were submitted and the joint project is now being funded by the William Buckland Foundation and the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust.

“In addition to daily life stressors, migrants and refugees face additional challenges, including the experience of conflict and social upheaval in the country of origin, the trauma of migration, and challenges of acculturation. However, local psychiatric and psychological services are not always able to cross the cultural divide to ensure culturally appropriate and effective service delivery. On the other hand, migrants and refugees may be unaware of how to navigate services or not trusting of them. This project’s intervention aims to unite community members and service providers to begin bridging this cultural divide,” says **Project Co-ordinator, Mr Tymur Hussein**.

“This is truly a strength based approach as it acknowledges the wisdom and practices within the Arabic and Sudanese culture, not just western perspectives of mental health and western treatment options. These practices have existed pre-contemporary psychology and have assisted generations of individuals, families and communities survive tribulations beyond the appreciation of most western counsellors. It will be a great opportunity to share ideas, as well as develop relationships between services and community leaders”, said **Mr Tymur Hussein**.

Whittlesea resident, **Anwar Halfawi**, a Sudanese community leader, believes the workshops will ensure he can be a better community leader in the Sudanese community. “Many members of the Sudanese community have lived in refugee camps, so are prone to mental illnesses. It will be great to find out more about what the signs and symptoms of various mental illness are, so that we can notice these and provide assistance to people in our community.”

SMRC Arabic Community Worker, Mohamed Al-Idani, believes that the workshops will assist his work with the Arabic community. “The Arabic community is diverse and the migration experience and the social isolation upon arrival can potentially impact on the mental health of refugees. The workshops will allow workers like me to gain and share knowledge and skills to pick up the signs and appropriately refer people”.

WHAT: Mental Health and Mental Illness in the Sudanese Community

WHEN: Saturday 9th August, 2008, 10am – 3pm (lunch provided)

WHAT: Mental Health and Mental Illness in the Arabic Community

WHEN: Sunday 10th of August 2008 10am – 3pm (lunch provided)

VENUE FOR BOTH: Spectrum Employment Services, 187-189 High St. Thomastown

Inquiries or RSVPs for catering purposes: Mr Tymur Hussein – tymurh@spectrumvic.org.au or 0403 526 275

Media contact: Hutch Hussein 0438 507 103

www.spectrumvic.org.au