

# Bright Ideas



Refugee Council  
of Australia

Local strategies to support  
refugees and asylum seekers

## 08. THE WATER WELL PROJECT

Two volunteer  
doctors deliver  
a nutrition  
session to  
Wyndham  
Ambassadors  
of Multicultural  
Youth (WAMY).

(Photo courtesy  
of The Water  
Well Project)



### What?

*The Water Well Project* is a not-for-profit volunteer-run organisation that was established in 2011 to improve the health and wellbeing of refugees and migrants by improving health literacy. The initiative aims to improve access to, and utilisation of, Australian healthcare services by working with established migrant and refugee organisations to provide free, culturally-appropriate, interactive health education sessions to their clients and communities.

### Who?

Health education sessions are available to interested refugee and migrant communities throughout Melbourne.

### Why?

Through extensive consultation with partner organisations and recent migrant and refugee health research, the founders of *The Water Well Project* identified a need within migrant and refugee communities for health information, including how to access appropriate care.

The interactive nature of health sessions delivered by the project encourages a valuable two-way dialogue. Through these sessions, migrant and refugee community groups are able to engage with doctors and build trusting relationships. At the same time, volunteers delivering health education sessions gain invaluable experience from working with and assisting culturally diverse groups within Victoria, strengthening communication skills and enhancing understanding of health issues specific to migrant and refugee communities.

- How?**
- Volunteer healthcare professionals (doctors, allied health and final year medical students) deliver sessions directly to communities within community settings.
  - The first session with each group, entitled “Navigating the Australian Healthcare System”, provides information about the components of the Australian healthcare system and how to access different services effectively, thereby aiming to address pertinent socio-cultural barriers to accessing healthcare.
  - Subsequent sessions are tailored to the needs of the community and include topics such as healthy eating, maternal and child health, sexual health, chronic diseases and mental health.
  - The project has been funded through City of Melbourne, Ross Trust and Australian Medical Association (Victoria) grants, as well as through fundraising and donations.
  - The project works closely with established migrant and refugee organisations, including the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre, Foundation House, Victorian Refugee Health Network, Wesley Mission, AMES, Social Studio, New Hope Foundation and Drummond St Services.

- Successes**
- In its first two years, the project has delivered over forty sessions to more than 300 people.
  - The project has established a dedicated Steering Committee and over 100 enthusiastic volunteers.

- Challenges**
- The Steering Committee and volunteers – the majority of who work or study full-time – all contribute to the project in their spare time in an unpaid capacity. As a result, allocating volunteers for all session requests and the work required by the Steering Committee can be challenging at times. To address this, the project is seeking to increase its volunteer base to over 150 individuals.
  - Coordinating on-site interpreters with volunteers and participants for particular session times can be difficult. Fortunately, the project has been able to receive exemption for interpreter fees through the Australian Government’s Translating and Interpreting Services.

- Advice for others**
- We would recommend developing relationships with established organisations to determine the need for your project and to establish relationships with communities. Do not reinvent the wheel but bring something new and required to the community.
  - Establish a dedicated Steering Committee and project plan then run a pilot project to determine logistics etc – you will soon learn so much!
  - Use Justice Connect (formerly PILCH) for legal assistance in setting up a not-for-profit.
  - Enjoy working on your project!

**More info** For further details and to register for sessions visit: [www.thewaterwellproject.org](http://www.thewaterwellproject.org)

**Bright Ideas** *Bright Ideas* highlights innovative programs, initiatives and projects developed to support refugees and asylum seekers. It provides a way to share ideas, success stories and good practice to improve service provision and assist organisations and communities in addressing key issues and challenges.

If you have an initiative you think could be profiled in *Bright Ideas*, please contact the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) on [info@refugeecouncil.org.au](mailto:info@refugeecouncil.org.au) or (02) 9211 9333.

For other *Bright Ideas*, go to: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/brightideas.php>