





# Annual Report **2020-2021**







Printed on 100% recycled paper manufactured carbon neutral STTARS acknowledges the traditional custodians whose ancestral lands we meet and work on and pays respect to their (leaders) Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge their cultural beliefs and deep and abiding connection to country.



# **OUR VISION**

STTARS seeks a world where human rights are respected and violations are challenged

# **OUR MISSION**

To help survivors of torture and trauma to find their voices and rebuild their lives

STTARS is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation with no political or religious affiliations which has been providing services to torture and trauma survivors in South Australia since 1991.

> STTARS welcomes all people regardless of their age, ability, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, language or religious beliefs.







# Chairperson's Report

This has been another year dominated by the pandemic. Our staff have had to adapt to the changing conditions and environment.

Many of our clients have experienced increased levels of anxiety because of the additional stresses at home and concern for the health and safety of family and friends overseas. The closure of international borders has exacerbated the separation of families. STTARS has responded to this with flexible and innovative ways of delivering services. It is a great credit to staff and management that the quality and level of services has been maintained.

At the end of the 2020-2021 financial year, STTARS experienced a significant reduction in funding. This resulted in a number of staff having to leave the organisation. We had some notice that this was going to happen and so the organisation was able to prepare for this as much as possible; but STTARS is a relatively small organisation and so these kinds of losses are always keenly felt. We thank those who have left for their valuable contributions.

This has presented additional challenges for the remaining staff and management. They have responded with their usual energy and commitment to maintain both the quality and level of services. The Board's response has been to draw on some of our financial reserves to supplement the budget in order to maximise the number of service delivery staff.

At Board level, stability and continuity has been provided by the same reliable group of members. The only change was the resignation of Janine Harrison at the time of the last AGM. I would like to thank Janine for her valuable contributions over the years and we wish her well for the future.

I would like to thank all members of the Board for the work that they have done in the last year. The organisation is fortunate to have such a strong group at Board level. The members bring a wealth of expertise and knowledge to the governance and leadership of the organisation. They volunteer many hours of their own time to support STTARS.

We are, as always, grateful to our funding bodies for their ongoing financial support. Our primary funders are the Australian Government's Department of Health, the South Australian Department of Health and Wellbeing (a sub-portfolio of Government of South Australia – SA Health), the Government of South Australia – Department of Human Services, The Adelaide Primary Health Network and Country SA Primary Health Network.

I would like to thank our Director, Robyn Smythe, and all our staff for the work that they have done in the last year. This has been another challenging year and their expertise, passion and dedication have all contributed to the quality of services delivered to refugees and asylum seekers in South Australia.

John Oliphant

Chair

# 2020-2021 Board Members



John Oliphant Chair



**Gay Gardner** Vice Chair



Kaz Eaton



**Carol Irizarry** 



Muhammad Akram Treasurer



Sandra Gault



Perla Soberon-Brittle



Bernadette McGrath Secretary & Public Officer



Haidari Smart



David Wild





## Director's Report

A common phrase from the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims during the COVID pandemic has been "The World Stopped, Torture Didn't". Sadly, the need for services like ours has continued to increase.



Even with the closure of Australian borders severely restricting the arrival of people from refugee background the demand for service has remained very high. COVID has continued to have a significant

impact on the psychological wellbeing of survivors, particularly as many have been faced with the loss of loved ones overseas and restrictions have brought back memories of the past.

We were fortunate this year to have some additional funding to assist clients respond to the effects of COVID 19, to be able to use some roll over funding and for our Board to allow us to access funds from our reserves. This allowed us to temporarily increase our staff levels to the end of June 2021 and allowed our dedicated team of staff to provide support to a record number of counselling clients this year.

#### Highlights of this year included:

- Growth in STTARS community development team enabled us to increase our work with refugee communities facilitating healing activities, and enhancing capacity to develop support structures, respond to COVID and access external resources
- > Many of the people who use STTARS services experience persistent physical pain. This year we were able to introduce a new program specifically aimed at addressing this issue through culturally relevant small group programs including pain education, hydrotherapy and gentle exercise

- The opening of a dedicated STTARS office in Mount Gambier which served as a base for our counselling and nursing teams and provided a safe space for people to access support
- Strengthening of processes to ensure that the voices of people who have accessed STTARS influence service development
- Further development of STTARS school residency program and building of relationships in to new schools
- Accreditation against the National Mental Health Standards and Australian Service Excellence Standards
- > Project with Uni SA Mediating Meaning
- > STTARS representation on the International Council for Rehabilitation of Torture Victims executive committee

Many people contributed to our work over the past year. I would especially like to thank our Board, leaders, staff, interpreters and volunteers as well our stakeholder and government partners. I am proud to have worked alongside such a dedicated group of colleagues who do extraordinary work every day.

I am especially grateful for the clients we serve, who continue to place their trust in us and allow us the privilege of walking with them as they journey to recovery.

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Robyn Smythe Director



# Staff Acknowledgements

#### Dr Daya Somasundaram (retirement)

Dr Daya retired from STTARS this year after providing many years of support as a visiting Psychiatrist in our Refugee Mental Health Clinic.

Dr Daya is a fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists and Sri Lanka College of Psychiatrists. He worked extensively in Sri Lanka, in community health programs in Cambodia and served on international committees including co-chairing the subcommittee on PTSD formed under the WHO working group on stress-related disorders during the ICD-11 revision process. Dr Daya is the author of numerous articles and books about the psychological impacts of war.

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We were very fortunate to have had the benefit of Dr Daya's wisdom and experience for the time that he was with us. He has touched many lives and will be missed.

#### Lyn Butler (retirement)

Lyn has had a long association with STTARS. Her connection started as a volunteer in our Natural Therapies Program alongside Chris Rose many, many years ago. Her nurturing presence and skillful hands have benefited many clients and staff over the years.

In 2017 Lyn returned to revitalize STTARS Complementary Therapies Program. She not only reintroduced massage but brought an increased focus on helping others to develop their self-care strategies. Lyn has generously shared her skills and developed a range of resources to support both clients and staff, ensuring that her work will continue to benefit many people even when she is not present.

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As Lyn officially retires, we want to extend a heartfelt thank you for the gentle, warm and nurturing person that she is and for all that she has brought to STTARS.

#### Matthew Seabrook (10-year anniversary)

Matt has given more than 10 years of generous service to STTARS as an organisation and to the people that we support.

Matt's calm, empathetic and considered approach has meant that he is an absolute asset to the people with whom he works. Matt has been able to tackle the most challenging of situations in a way that makes people feel safe and confident that things can improve. Matt is not only a great counsellor but someone who expresses consistent care and concern for his colleagues, often acting as a mentor and support.

6, 6, 11

Thank you, Matt, for all that you have done and we look forward to many more years to come.

# Our Staff

**Director** Robyn Smythe

**Clinical Services Manager** Ana Maria Allimant Holas

**Counselling Team Leaders** 

Mtho Ngcanga *(to Aug 2021)* Maria Morales-Boyce Sarah Purcell Riziki Saidi

Intake & Clinic Coordinator Alica Varesanovic

South East Regional Coordinator Sophie Coote

#### Counsellor/Advocates

Adam Taylor\* Akar Pardedar Andrea Tschooner\* Dart Russell Donatien Ntikahavuye Gabriela Gonzalez Falcon\* Galawej Ebrahimi Ghani Nasery Gulshan Hussain Jacqueline Taylor Kerri Berardi Kimya Khan (to Feb 2021) Lisa Jenkins\* Lucy May\* Mehak Khandeparkar Melanie McGuigan Milijana Stojadinovic (to May 2021) Nellie Anderson Rhett McDonald (South East Region) Sharon Cochrane (to May 2021) Sonia Kiriyanthan Tanya Ott\*

**Counsellor/Nurse Lead** Matthew Seabrook

#### **Refugee Health Nurses**

Hayley Radford (*Project Officer*) Dianne Thompson\* (*Nurse - South East Region*) Bridgit McAteer (Nurse) Joanne Riddle (Nurse) Karl Schmitz (Nurse)\* Linda Galley\* (Nurse - South East Region) Muslima Huka (Nurse)

**Chronic Pain Counsellor/Therapist** Amritha Aparnadas

#### **Special Projects**

Abdul Stanikzai (Bicultural Worker – Persistent Pain Project) Fatima Shah (Bicultural Worker – Persistent Pain Project) Joseph Ndjeka (Cultural Advisor – South East) Razia Shah (Bicultural Worker – Persistent Pain Project) Sonia Kiriyanthan (Exit Interviews)

**Complementary Therapies** Lyn Butler Robin Mellors

Refugee Mental Health Clinic (Visiting Clinicians) Dr Anoop Sankaranarayanan (Psychiatrist) Dr Tushar Singh (Psychiatrist) Dr Vani Kaler (Psychiatrist) Dr Chloe Tolhurst (Psychologist to Feb 2021) Jessica Evans (Psychologist) Dr Miriam Posselt

(Psychologist to Aug 2021) Wendy Anderson (Psychologist)

#### Caseworkers

Nasim Mosaffa (to Dec 2020) Rima Abu-Assi Slavica Dedijer (Senior Caseworker) **Community Development Officers** Everine Munyonge Ratan Gazmere\*

ICT and Operations Manager Daryl Eckermann

Finance Officer Rachel Inness

#### Administration Assistants

Carol Cantlon Karen Bailey *(to Jan 2021)* Komang Sukraeni-Francis Kubra Ozsu Clarke Maria Siros Marina Lever *(Senior Administration Assistant)* 

#### Students

Adriana Bernardo

#### Volunteers

Jill Wilson (Garden Project) Richard Wilson (Garden Project) Robyn Mellors (Art Projects) Lyn Butler (Complementary Therapies) Kubra Ozsu Clarke (Community Development)





# About STTARS

Since 1991, STTARS has been providing flexible and culturally sensitive services to promote the health and wellbeing of people who have been tortured or who have suffered refugee-related trauma prior to their arrival in Australia.

We offer a range of services to address the physical, psychological and social needs of survivors of torture and trauma including:

- > Counselling (individual, family, child and youth) Supporting clients to manage and heal from the physical and emotional pain of past trauma
- > Refugee Health Programs

Building capacity for both people from refugee backgrounds and primary health care services to ensure that health needs are adequately addressed and barriers to accessing services overcome

#### A Refugee Mental Health Clinic

Providing access to trauma-informed and culturally sensitive visiting mental health professionals who use interpreters

#### > Casework/Advocacy

Complementing therapeutic approaches by facilitating access to mainstream services such as education, health, housing, employment and income support

#### > Groupwork

Offering opportunities to socialise and participate in activities, attend psycho-education information sessions, learn new skills, talk over problems and discuss coping strategies

#### > Complementary Therapies

Sharing gentle, non-invasive body therapies, to help alleviate the physical and psychological effects of trauma

#### > Living Well with Chronic Pain Project

Offering culturally informed group programs that support participants to better understand causes and responses to pain and develop management strategies to live a better life

#### > Community Development

Working in partnership with community groups and associations to undertake projects, events and initiatives that empower individuals and increase their community's sense of belonging

#### > Training

Offering training packages focused on understanding the refugee experience, the impact of torture and trauma and resettlement issues, and building key worker skills and techniques, self-care practices and cultural competence





## STTARS' services are free and available to individuals, families and groups.

We welcome survivors of torture and refugee-related trauma regardless of their age, ability, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, language, religious beliefs, visa type or length of time in Australia. Consultations at STTARS also include free professional interpreting services for non-English speakers. STTARS is committed to providing a safe, inclusive and culturally responsive environment while working to promote the health and wellbeing of clients. Our team consists of qualified, multicultural professionals who specialise in trauma recovery. As such, we value the experiences, culture and aspirations of each survivor. We recognise that every person has a different story, and our services are therefore carefully tailored to address the needs of each unique individual. We also arrange outreach counselling at various locations including homes, schools and community centres for clients who struggle to attend our premises physically.

# Our Work

#### Referrals and Intake

Our Intake Coordinator, Alica Varesanovic, is the first point of contact for all referrals. Due to a high demand for our services, STTARS operates a managed waiting list. We contact potential clients for an interview within 48 hours of receiving their referral to determine their eligibility for our service. Interviews are conducted face-to-face or by telephone, with free professional interpreting services if required.

Eligible clients are either allocated to a STTARS counsellor for assessment or placed directly on the waiting list to be seen by the first available STTARS counsellor. Priority on the waiting list is determined by the severity of a client's symptoms and the availability and adequacy of other supports in their life. Children, young people and sole parents are given special consideration and are assigned to a counsellor (or other STTARS professional) as quickly as possible.

We maintain regular contact with vulnerable clients on our waiting list which allows us to respond promptly to any significant change in their condition or circumstances. Those on the waiting list may be provided with self-care advice or referred to our casework service for help to resolve practical issues. They may also be linked in to mainstream services while they await allocation to a STTARS counsellor. If a person's needs are deemed to fall outside the scope of support offered by STTARS, we assist them to access a more appropriate external service.

Despite Australia's international borders being closed and fewer people arriving on humanitarian visa's this year the demand for torture and trauma counselling remained high. We received a high number of referrals for - and self-referrals from - clients whose history of torture and trauma was being exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the easing of lockdown measures at the beginning of 2021, our clients continued to suffer the impacts of ongoing restrictions and changes. They faced specific issues such as being fearful to leave their homes, maintaining safe distancing in overcrowded housing, and a lack of income support for those who had lost their jobs. Hence, they presented at STTARS with complex issues related to family dynamics, unemployment, and pervasive



feelings of anxiety, hopelessness and helplessness. Additionally, many were affected by grief after losing contact with family members living in conflict zones abroad. Our team worked hard to respond to those in need and were able to reduce waiting times this year.

A noticeable change in demographics this year was related to an increase in refugees from various Latin American countries including Honduras, Venezuela and Columbia. Our response included reconnecting with local Spanish-speaking communities to help address the needs of people who had suffered human rights violations and torture, often at the hands of drug trafficking gangs who exercise power across these regions through terror.

"There was always respectful and understanding... the door was always open for everyone."

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Counselling

Most people from refugee backgrounds have experienced traumatic events before coming to Australia. Many have been brutally tortured, seen loved ones killed, or have escaped from a war zone. Some may have experienced all three, but all of them have fled for their lives.





The physical and psychological effects of trauma are often devastating and difficult to overcome and, when combined with the challenges of settling into life in an unfamiliar country, can cause severe and complex challenges.

Our clients are people who have survived horrific situations, and they are also people with strengths, skills and resilience of spirit. By working with a counsellor, these strengths are drawn upon, making it possible to overcome traumatic experiences and rebuild lives that have been severely impacted by torture, brutality and exile.

STTARS provides a safe, respectful and culturally responsive environment in which our clients are supported to better understand, manage and recover from the physical and emotional pain of their experiences.

Working within a trauma recovery framework, our team of qualified, multicultural counsellors uses a wide range of interventions and therapies to address the psychosocial impacts of torture and trauma on individuals, families and communities.

Counselling at STTARS may take a number of forms. It may be supportive in terms of finding solutions to current settlement-related problems, or it may offer strategies that help clients cope with the painful or unpleasant psychological symptoms they are experiencing.

STTARS works with clients across the spectrum of their settlement journey. Those eligible for our services include people who arrive on a humanitarian visa and those who are seeking asylum, whether they are recent arrivals or have been here for many years.

The effects of the COVID-19 crisis have complicated the healing process for many of STTARS clients. We have continued to note a marked increase in psychological distress amongst clients we supported, with many former clients re-engaging our services for support during the crisis. Our team has worked with skill, compassion and flexibility to support the people we work with in responding to the challenges of COVID-19 while continuing on their healing journey.

This year we were fortunate to have some additional funding which allowed us to bring on some additional counsellors on contracts to the end of the financial year. This enabled us to respond to clients in a more timely way and reduce our waiting list. Without the continuation of that funding, we regrettably said goodbye to a number of skilled and dedicated people at the end of June. We want to extend a heartfelt thank you to all of the counsellors who worked with us this year.

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"I was in desperate need to be heard and someone to understand me. When I needed that person, I found my counsellor. She is very honest and straightforward; she didn't get upset when I talked to her about the bad things that happened. There some things I would not tell to anyone but I felt I could tell her".



"When you find people who make you feel comfortable you feel safe with them and can say everything that's bothering you."

"I remember I used to feel really, really down and they would talk to me, build my self-esteem and make me feel better. Before I used to cry a lot, I used to feel like someone was suffocating me and feel a lot of pressure but counselling helped. I still go through some of those moments. but I remind myself of what the counsellor used to say to me and that helps."

"I felt like I was drowning and there was a straw that was hung to save me and people at STTARS was the straw."

"We came from a war zone. STTARS helped us manage what we went through during the war. We were depressed. We experienced horrific things but you guys helped us to deal with it. I am very, very happy with STTARS. I don't know what I would have done especially because of our background, it's still in our minds."

"The problem I had I didn't think anyone else had. I escaped from the hands of Taliban. I have been through a lot. STTARS has helped me a lot, without all those counselling and services I wouldn't be standing here"

"I had a lot of nightmares but now things are better and I can sleep".

#### Asylum Seekers

Asylum seekers in Australia can be particularly vulnerable as distress arising from previous torture or traumatic experiences is often compounded by prolonged periods of uncertainty, concerns for family members still living in danger, and the threat of being returned to their home country.

Because asylum seekers are not yet in a position of safety, counselling support at STTARS focuses primarily on helping them cope with and contain trauma-related symptoms, building strengths and resilience to manage their current situation, and preparing for the future once their protection claim has been decided.

Working with asylum seekers can be particularly challenging due to the uncertainty of their future and the precariousness of their situation due to their lack of rights. This year has been a particularly difficult one for asylum seekers in Australia. Many of our asylum seeker clients have found themselves in positions where they are ineligible for any form of Government income support and have been entirely dependent on charity. Others are at the end of their visa determination process and facing deportation. In these cases there are very few services asylum seekers can access so they often rely on STTARS for intensive advocacy and emotional support.

STTARS has remained strongly committed to providing support to all survivors of torture and trauma who need it, regardless of their visa type. This commitment was demonstrated through the provision by STTARS of pro bono support to 62 asylum seekers this year.







In recognition of the complexities involved in working with this cohort, STTARS started a clinical practice support group in 2021 for counsellors working with asylum seekers. This group currently meets regularly to reflect on best practice, share resources and support each other with the therapeutic work they do in the most difficult of situations.

Monthly Asylum Seeker Community Network meetings were held at STTARS and attended by service providers including Australian Red Cross, Circle of Friends, Life Without Barriers, the Welcoming Centre, the Australian Refugee Association, Australian Migrant Resource Centre, Anglicare and Saint Vincent De Paul. This network coordinates emergency relief efforts and advocates for the basic needs of asylum seekers.

#### Supporting Rural & Regional Areas

Growth in STTARS South East team has seen the team open their own office space in the main street of Mount Gambier, allowing additional accessibility to conduct group sessions and meetings. We also acknowledge the proactive and generous support of the Naracoorte Hospital and Tatiara District Council in Bordertown in providing workspace and working with us to support communities across the South East.

STTARS South East team have continued to work closely and in collaboration with the local communities, supporting numerous events and gatherings in the region that have honoured newly arrived communities plus provided opportunities for connection, interaction and education between cultures. STTARS South East team engaged in over 72 Community engagement, liaison and consultation activities this year.

Highlights included:

- > Engaging Joseph Ndjeka as a casual Congolese Cultural Advisor
- Regular meetings held across the region with African, Hazara, Yazidi, Karen leaders and communities
- Collaboration with Country Health SA and Country Primary Health Network to host an African women's youth group, for an evening of fun, food, sharing stories and learning about women's health

- > Presentation at a community mental health awareness raising event attended by hundreds of people in Mount Gambier
- Education session held with the nurses from the Mount Gambier Hospital STTARS presented at a community mental health awareness raising event attended by hundreds of people in Mount Gambier (regional)

In recent years the South East has become home to a number of Yazidi families. Yazidi's have experienced significant trauma recently at the hands of ISIS. A particular highlight for STTARS South East team has



been working with families directly and also working with the community to come together in support of the Yazidi arrivals and welcome them to the community. One example of this was:

> International Women's Day celebrations, in collaboration with the Penola Wellness Group, Australian Red Cross, Radis Estate and Murray Cottages, celebrated women and brought the local community and recently arrived members of the Yazidi community together. STTARS supported members of the Yazidi community to share about their history, culture, music and food. In thanks for this event the Penola Wellness Group purchased a Tandoor Oven for the Yazidi community in Mount Gambier. The Yazidi community have since spoken about the significance of connection to homelands through sense of smell and how making traditional bread in the tandoor oven has provided this opportunity, aiding in healing and developing further their sense of belonging.



#### **Refugee Health Programs**

Refugees and asylum seekers often have low health literacy and difficulty navigating the Australian health system. They also come from a diversity of backgrounds and may have health issues specific to their refugee experience and migration journey. After having survived these experiences and resettling in Australia, refugees can find themselves in a position where health concepts are often completely foreign and potentially confronting.

The Adelaide Refugee and New Arrivals Program (ARANAP) is a joint program between the Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service (STTARS) and the Australian Refugee Association (ARA). We are a small team of Refugee Health Nurse Advocates and Bi-Lingual Bi-Cultural Workers who support new arrival communities and people from refugee backgrounds with unmet health needs. We assist them to access appropriate and timely health care through their primary health care provider and support their ongoing engagement with the Australian medical system. We work holistically with clients to build their confidence and empower them to advocate for their own health needs independently.

ARANAP also works alongside healthcare providers to advocate for patients of refugee background with complex health needs. We facilitate training and development for health professionals by offering support, collaboration and resources to assist in their provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate care. Since the program's inception in 2018, the ARANAP team has received 549 referrals for people from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds in the Adelaide metropolitan area. In the last year, the program has seen a significant increase in referrals and clients are remaining in the program longer. Increase in demand has meant that the program now maintains a waitlist. These factors are the direct result of the effects of the COVID-19 crisis as vulnerable people struggle to navigate restrictions and changes in access to the healthcare system.

The program has received excellent feedback from clients and practitioners alike and a few direct quotations have been recorded:

"You are like a God send. Thank you so much for your help. I feel I have no hope and do not know what is happening in my life. Every time something goes right it then turns and goes wrong. Thank you, you are a God send for helping me so fast." (Client)

Carer of ARANAP client - "We really appreciate your help to advocate for us. We would not be able to do it without you. It's such great support" (Carer)

"This has been a huge help with this complex client. Your help has been informative and helped me get up to speed around all her appointments, treatments and social needs and your support to her between appointments is helping her understand treatment and medication. It's a great program." (Psychiatrist)

#### Improving Refugee and Migrant Health in the South East Initiative

Thanks to a grant from the Country SA Primary Health Network to the end of this financial year, STTARS was able to employ Refugee Health Nurses, Dianne Thompson and Linda Galley with a focus on improving access to health care for people from refugee backgrounds in Mount Gambier, Naracoorte and Bordertown.

During this period, the refugee and migrant population in the South East have experienced additional barriers as health care practitioners continued to adjust to the COVID-19 situation. Bridging the gap between patient and practitioner has been the key focus of this project.





Despite the difficulties of commencing a new program in the midst of a COVID pandemic, the program had some great achievements including:

- > Advocacy and support to build capacity within local services which enabled
- Increased use of interpreters meaning that serious health concerns that have not otherwise been picked up were identified, diagnosed and treated
- The first non-English speaking person from a refugee background to access the Virtual Clinical Care program to manage his chronic health condition at home
- > A patient with an aggressive form of cancer to access treatment close to home
- > New arrivals during the pandemic to receive full health assessments

The development of a range of multilingual health resources including, a written resource on burns first aid, heart attack warning signs, the importance of vitamin D, tips to remember your medication and 'what to take to the doctor'. Two short animated films were also developed which were narrated and captioned in Arabic, Hazaragi, Dari, Farsi, Swahili and French making health information accessible to clients who could not read.

Refugee Health Nurses co-facilitated cultural competency training, alongside Dr. Toni Maldari of Refugee Health Service, international student doctors and resident medical officers. Dr. Maldari gave a presentation on the refugee experience and common health concerns.

#### Child and Youth Program

Children and young people are not spared the human rights abuses that cause people to become refugees. They may experience these traumatic events as part of a family or on their own, and be forced to flee their homes with little understanding of the reasons why.

STTARS has a specialised Child and Youth Team to ensure that children and young people get the care and support they need. The team also works closely with others that are important to their young clients such as family members, carers, schools and youth services. The Child and Youth Team:

- Provides individual and family-based counselling for survivors of torture and trauma
- > Supports young people and their families to connect with other services
- Provides opportunities for young people and their families to engage in activities that promote family connections such as Family Fun Days and School Holiday Programs
- > Provides a safe space for young people to realise their potential through group activities

This year, STTARS provided support to 221 children and young people under the age of 20.

2020-2021 has been a difficult time for many of the young people we support as COVID-19 continues to affect them in different ways. Whilst South Australia's lockdown period was short, it is worth noting that these disruptions can be unsettling and create confusion for young people. STTARS would like to acknowledge the resilience of the young people we work with during these uncertain times.

#### Support for Schools

STTARS acknowledges the integral role that teachers, welfare staff and school leaders play in supporting the recovery, resettlement and integration processes for children, young people, their parents and carers, whose lives have been disrupted by conflict, persecution and long-term displacement.





STTARS recognises that a supportive school culture can nurture the positive mental health and wellbeing of refugee students, enhance their educational outcomes, and promote social connectedness between refugee families and the school community. STTARS therefore offers:

- > In-school individual therapeutic interventions such as counselling
- Therapeutic and community developmentfocused group programs, such as Rhythms 2 Recovery Drumming Program
- > Partnerships with schools on school-led initiatives
- Interagency collaboration with school leaders and the establishment of collegial networks to address the needs of refugee students
- Flexible approaches to professional learning in response to specific needs e.g. providing trauma-informed consultation to better support young people and their families
- STTARS' School Residency Program has provided support to five schools with high populations of young people from refugee backgrounds, and we continue to establish new relationships with other schools seeking support. The program, in which STTARS counsellor is co-located at a school for an agreed period each week, allows support to be provided to individuals and also through wider consultation and capacity building - to the broader school community.

#### **Intensive Family Support Program**

This program focuses on families from refugee backgrounds living in the Eastern Adelaide region. The purpose of the program is to support families with children who are experiencing difficulties with cultural transition as a part of their settlement, and to provide them with skills to manage the problems and challenges they face using a strengths-based approach.

Implementing a holistic and family counselling approach to provide early intervention, with the aim of preventing family breakdown, child abuse and neglect, family violence and drug and/or alcohol abuse. It identifies and nurtures personal strengths and skills to build resilience, and assists family members to gain a sense of safety. Where appropriate, it provides psychoeducation, information and strategies to resolve conflict between individual family members. The program also aims to



increase social connections by encouraging families to get involved with their local communities and building their confidence to access mainstream services.

STTARS wishes to acknowledge the valuable contributions made by Tanya Ott during her time as the Intensive Family Support Counsellor, and in particular her warm, positive and compassionate approach towards the clients who accessed this service.

#### Refugee Mental Health Clinic (RMHC)

# Making Medicare-funded mental health services accessible for asylum seekers and people from refugee backgrounds.

Many people from refugee backgrounds find it difficult to access mainstream Medicare-funded services that understand the refugee experience and use interpreters. Medicare currently does not provide cover for interpreters for psychology, or mental health social work appointments.

STTARS hosts a number of registered visiting mental health practitioners with specialist expertise. These practitioners provide a dedicated service to asylum seekers and people from refugee backgrounds under Medicare funding, including the 'Better Access to Mental Health Care' initiative.

STTARS provides administrative, interpreting and casework support to help those accessing our RMHC to overcome practical and settlement difficulties. RMHC also connects clients to others services, support and group work opportunities within STTARS.





To be eligible for the RMHC a client must be an asylum seeker or from a refugee background and they must have a mental health care plan from their GP. Referrals are processed by the STTARS Intake and Clinic Coordinator.

#### Casework

STTARS' service model recognises that many people from refugee backgrounds need more than psychotherapeutic interventions alone to resolve their distress. They may encounter difficulties when attempting to access mainstream services, and additionally, the types of services that are available here in South Australia may operate differently than those in their country of origin, or they may not have existed there at all. Experiences of torture and trauma can also inhibit the survivor from accessing and negotiating essential services, either due to pervasive symptoms or because of past negative experiences with government authorities. When seeking support they may also encounter barriers in the form of a lack of cultural understanding, cultural sensitivity or interpreting services.

At STTARS the advocacy role provides a safety net, ensuring that survivors of torture do not 'fall through the cracks' in our health and welfare systems. Advocacy at both individual and systemic levels is considered essential at STTARS because a family without housing or income - or facing a legal crisis - will not respond to psychological support while their primary needs are not being met.

STTARS counsellors work from a 'Counsellor/Advocate' model, meaning they provide both therapeutic counselling and advocacy to address critical welfare and material needs. Clients accessing Medicare-funded services from psychiatrists, psychologists or mental health social workers through the STTARS Refugee Mental Health Clinic have equally significant needs. STTARS' team of specially trained caseworkers, Slavica and Rima, whose various cultural and linguistic backgrounds reflect those of the people who access our service, ensure that the critical welfare and material needs are met for this client group.

A significant area of support that clients of STTARS seek assistance with is applying for a Disability Support Pension. Caseworkers organised information sessions for clients, multicultural workers from Centrelink and STTARS counsellors.

While the primary focus of caseworkers is to address practical needs, the sensitive and trauma-informed way they approach this work is crucial in assisting clients to engage in therapeutic work and to hold onto hope in difficult times.

#### Living Well with Chronic Pain Project



# A wellbeing program for culturally and linguistically diverse groups focused on education, movement and mindfulness.

Many of our clients live with chronic pain and this has a profound impact on the quality of their daily life.

Studies have found a prevalence of chronic pain in refugee clients at levels three times higher than in the general population. Reasons for this include:

- Physical injuries sustained as a result of torture, war-related experiences or refugee flight
- > The complex interplay between pain and traumatic memories connected to the refugee experience
- Living in situations of extreme hardship for prolonged periods, resulting in neglected medical conditions leading to chronic pain



While there are services within the community to assist people experiencing persistent pain these are not always accessible to people from refugee backgrounds because of language or cultural barriers. Additionally, many cross-cultural studies confirm that the ways that pain is conceptualised and expressed differs between cultures. Cultural awareness and an integration of cultural knowledge is vital to the success of meaningful support programs for those suffering persistent pain.

This year with funding from Adelaide Primary Health Network, STTARS Trauma Counsellor and Pain Educator, Amritha Arpanadas, facilitated 'Living with Chronic Pain Program' for Bhutanese (Hearing, Deaf and Hearing impaired), Syrian and Afghani communities. Each session featured an educational and an exercise component involving multiple professionals. They included gentle exercise/movement activities along with opportunities to learn more about persistent pain and a range of management strategies. Sessions focussed on educating clients regarding lifestyle changes (food, sleep, routine) and managing stress that may contribute to chronic pain. Based on learnings in the groups, three films were developed featuring participants sharing the information they learned with participants' broader communities. Despite the challenges faced with COVID-19 restrictions (government restrictions), STTARS delivered a successful pain project which supported community members from the Bhutanese, Afghani, and Syrian community groups. Community members identified pain conditions, and were supported with a variety of self-management strategies which assisted with both physical and mental wellbeing. The project delivered an inspiring and informative video which showcased the project and gave voice to the community members involved. These videos supported participants sharing the information they learned with participant's broader communities.

Amritha presented this program at The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) held in Tasmania. The program was structured around the theme: Influencing and being influenced by the world around us.

"The group was very, very good for me, to break my loneliness. We had so much fun in the group with the games, laughter, and dance. I loved the hydrotherapy session with the Afghani women. Yesterday I saw my doctor and told him how good this program was. Before, I was sad, I had given up on my pain. You gave me hope that there was other ways to try. I started trusting you and with your encouragement, I started exercising every day and now I am noticing some changes. I remind myself of our discussion about looking after us and doing things/activities that brings happiness to me. All the games we played, brought me back to my happy childhood days." (Syrian client)





"The sessions were very good, now I feel my body is different now I have noticed my energy level is good compared to before due to exercises and hydrotherapy. I found this so helpful and wanted my daughter to join too. My sleep has improved and I am no longer taking the pain medication like before. I am more active than before for sure. I am using the massage cream that we made when I have pain. I now realize that I need to do all these to care for myself, which will enable me to relieve my pain, move and stay active"

Some participants were very socially isolated prior to the sessions. These sessions provided community members a safe opportunity to meet new people, socialise and to develop a self-confidence. The Bhutanese community also identified that dancing to the folk music supported them in reconnecting to the positive memories of their country and culture.

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"I enjoyed meeting others and socializing, our games, dance and laughing really helped me. Due to my pain, I never used to go out and meet my friends. Before joining the group, I used to feel so irritated and angry and I have noticed it's much less now. I had an injection for my shoulders today and when I was in pain, I imagined you (facilitator) saying to me to take long deep breaths and it helped me. I am using breathing to help me when I am in pain. I am drinking lots of water now and eating more vegetables than before. I have been trying to put all what we discussed in our group to practice. I felt safe to talk about my problems there. I loved hydrotherapy and wish there were more sessions"

#### Training

STTARS is committed to promoting a positive recovery environment for asylum seekers and people from refugee backgrounds. An important part of this commitment includes supporting service providers to better understand the context of refugee experiences of torture and trauma and how these impact on the process of settling into a new society.



#### **Professional Development Workshops**

STTARS offers high quality, full-day, professional development workshops which are scheduled throughout the year and are open to bookings from the general public. Topics offered this year were:

- > Core Concepts in Working with People from Refugee Backgrounds
- > Accidental Counsellors: Responding to Refugee Trauma-Related Behaviours

#### Training for Organisations

Each year, STTARS offers a number of professional development sessions tailored to the needs of specific groups and organisations.

The topics we offer include:

- > Information about STTARS
- > An introduction to the refugee experience
- Responding to refugee trauma-related behaviours
- > Working with families from refugee backgrounds
- Supporting trauma recovery in children from refugee backgrounds
- > Cultural competence
- > Working with Interpreters
- > Healthcare challenges for people from refugee backgrounds
- > Counselling ethics in working with refugees



This year, STTARS delivered tailored training sessions to various agencies including health and welfare services, employment services, non-government organisations, support groups and educational institutions at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. More than 420 people participated in STTARS training this year.

#### Interpreters

Interpreters are vital to the work that is done at STTARS. When talking about a sensitive or emotive topic it can be difficult to find the right words to express yourself, and this is even harder when speaking a second language. For clients who do not yet have sufficient grasp of English to engage effectively in counselling, access to professional interpreters is considered a matter of basic rights.

The contribution made by interpreters enables survivors and the people who work at STTARS to develop meaningful relationships and mutual understanding – an essential foundation for everything we strive to do. The role of interpreters at STTARS is valuable and complex. Interpreters not only translate the words of clients but also the nuances that accompany them. When asked, interpreters can also provide valuable insight into cultural, social and historical contexts that are essential to understanding what clients are saying. The resulting collaboration contributes significantly to our counsellors' knowledge base and capacity to respond to client needs in a culturally sensitive way. STTARS works with a collection of highly professional interpreters who understand the impacts of trauma and provide a high level of care for our client group.

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We thank our interpreters for their ongoing commitment and their flexibility in providing support in person, online or by telephone. This has enabled us to offer continuity of care throughout the ongoing challenges posed by COVID-19 restrictions this year.

Many interpreters come from the same communities as the people they assist at STTARS, and we appreciate the careful ways that they uphold the privacy and confidentiality that is essential for clients to feel safe. STTARS is aware that interpreters can be moved and distressed by the stories of injustice and suffering that they hear in the course of their work. STTARS therefore offers interpreters the opportunity to debrief with a counsellor following such sessions. Interpreters are also encouraged to attend special STTARS events. In these small ways, we strive to honour the important contributions made by interpreters at STTARS.





# WHO OUR CLIENTS ARE.... AGE & GENDER

2019-2020			2020-2021				
AGE	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL	FEMALE	MALE	OTHER	TOTAL
0-10	36	43	79	27	27	0	54
11-20	171	209	380	197	238	0	435
21-30	84	81	165	89	92	0	181
31 - 40	203	109	312	182	114	1	297
41 - 50	202	177	379	250	165	0	415
51-60	163	137	300	177	145	0	322
61 - 70	49	52	101	60	56	0	116
71+	13	12	25	15	19	0	34
Unknown	<b>1</b> 5	3	8	5	4	0	9
TOTAL	926	823	1749	1002	860	1	1863

# **VISA TYPE**

116

Asylum Seeker

91

Temporary Humanitarian Visa Holder 1446

Permanent Resident



198

Australian Citizen



Unfunded



# WHERE OUR CLIENTS ORIGINATE FROM...

<sub>Sy</sub>

E

Ke

Lebanon

Egypt

Congo

Burundi 23

Sudan/ South Sudan

Guinea

erra Leone

Liberia

COUNTRY	2019-2020	2020-2021
Afghanistan	439	465
Syria	392	406
Bhutan	200	236
Iran	141	145
Iraq	113	104
Burma (Myanmar)	69	67
Congo	50	56
Pakistan	31	47
Sudan/Sth Sudan	35	38
Sri Lanka	36	36
Other	267	263
Total	1742	1863



# **HOURS OF SUPPORT PER CLIENT IN 2020/2021**

OUTREACH		IN HOUSE 61%	
HOURS	2019-2020	2020-2021	
0-5	1171	1255	
5-10	191	238	
10-20	209	217	
20-30	92	104	
30-40	45	24	
40-50	16	9	
51+	25	16	
Total	1749	1863	

CLIENTS **BY SERVICE** 

ARANAP

157

Casework

27

Complementary

Therapy

39 **Refugee Health** 

Nurse Programs

122

489 Adult Counselling

291 Child, Youth & Family Counselling

> 385 Group Work

395 Visiting Mental Health Service

# **SOURCE OF NEW REFERRALS**

122 1 16 76 8 Accommodation Client – family/friend Asylum Seeker Client - self Centrelink Support Service Services 35 1  $\mathbf{261}$  $\mathbf{13}$ Δ Community Welfare DIBP Education: Education: Employment Primary/Secondary Organisation Tertiary 51 503 9 **69** FASSTT Family Violence Health: Health: Health: **General Medical** Other Service Allied Mental 277 86 2 324 HSS Legal: Legal: Other Settlement migration related Non-migration related Support Service



# Community Development

# Production and launch of COVID-19 Video

In collaboration with the Bhutanese Australian Association of SA (BAASA), STTARS hosted a community consultation with 23 members of the Bhutanese community. Understandings of mental health/well-being, the impact and management of COVID-19 within the community, barriers to accessing support services and how STTARS can support the community were explored.

Bhutanese community representatives believed that the current available COVID-19 information had not reached to the wider section of the SA Bhutanese population. STTARS and the Bhutanese Australian Association of SA (BAASA), worked together to produce and circulate a COVID-19 information video to address this need. The video included "actors" for various different groups within the Bhutanese community, increasing the reach of the messages. The 8 minute COVID-19 video in Nepali language with English subtitles and Auslan translation was officially launched in April 2021. Present were 50 community members along with various other stakeholders. View within the community quickly reached the thousands.







#### Congolese Women Sewing Project

In consultation with the Congolese women in SA, the community identified high rates of isolation and low unemployment among women were exacerbated by COVID-19. The women were supported to start a sewing group to learn new skills and reduce isolation. STTARS thanks CASSA, Circle of Friends, Rotaract Clubs in Salisbury and Eastern Adelaide, Junction Community Centre and volunteers from the Congolese and Kenyan community for their support in this project.

#### Uyghur Women's Yoga Project

STTARS has been working with the Australia Uyghur Tangritagh Women's Association (AUTWA) and Adriana Bernardo (Yoga instructor/facilitator) to run community activities that promote well-being and reduce social isolation through positive self-care strategies.

The Yoga project is a partnership between STTARS and AUTWA. The project aims to reduce social isolation, promote positive self-care strategies, therefore improving well-being in a safe environment. The Community Development Officer at STTARS has been working collaboratively with AUTWA's community leaders and Adriana Bernardo (Yoga instructor/



facilitator) to ensure that the project is tailored to the needs of the community.

"I really like the Yoga group, I am happy to do it regularly. It's good for my wellbeing, relaxing, good for the body and calms your mind and I feel refreshed and energetic after Yoga, sometimes I practice what we do during the session at home."



# 

#### Community Development Outreach Activities

Uyghur women at the Wandana Community Centre identified stress, anxiety, pain and panic attacks as significant issues and wanted to explore more selfcare strategies to help them manage these symptoms. STTARS Complimentary Therapists, Lyn Butler and Robin Mellors, hosted a series of self-care and visual art workshops with this group. The workshops provided a safe space for women to meet, laugh, share stories and food all while painting.

# Art Workshop and Friendship at STTARS Project

Regular supported art groups provide a safe and supportive environment for people to meet together, learn art skills and build connections with others in an informal setting. The project provides an opportunity for people transitioning out of counselling who would like to maintain a connection with the service and also as a soft entry point for people who have not yet engaged in counselling to learn more about STTARS and reduce the stigma in seeking help.







#### Community Engagement and Networking Activities

STTARS values ongoing relationships with various community groups and other service providers. This year, representatives from STTARS attended a range of community engagement and networking activities; some of these included Australian Uyghur Tangritagh Women's Association (AUTWA) launch celebration, Harmony Day celebration at the Vietnamese Community Centre, Bhutanase Australian Association of SA (BASAA) 13th settlement anniversary celebration, Support For Afghanistan Fundraising Dinner organised by Afghan Australia Women's Association in partnership with Human Appeal, Adelaide Sisters Association, The Islamic Society of SA and Islamic Information Centre of SA, Congolese Community AGM, African Women's Federation Launch of new office in Salisbury as well as the Maternal Healthcare Project, Ashanda Festival Celebration by the Tigray Community Association South Australia, Walk Together 2021 by Welcoming Australia for Unity Festival, Harmony Day Expo at the Northern Sound System, Ladies Bazar by the Islamic Society of SA. Plus networking events held during Refugee week, Women's Day, Reconciliation and NAIDOC Week.

#### National Mental Health month: Multicultural Wellbeing Hub at the Festival of Now

STTARS was proud to participate in the Festival of Now - an event organised by the Mental Health Coalition of South Australia which aims to celebrate mental health, creativity and inclusiveness and challenge stigma. STTARS worked with the Relationships Australia PEACE service to coordinate the multicultural wellbeing hub.

#### Youth Art Workshop

STTARS worked with the Carclew Youth Arts Centre to provide a workshop for young people accessing STTARS services. Working with a talented Kenyan singer, Elsy, and visual artist, Ruby Chew, participants had an opportunity to explore creative skills, including



badge design and developing their own rap song. One participant is now pursuing a grant through the Arts Centre to further their passion.

#### YRC Photography Project

"Photography asks us to frame the world - decide what to include, what to leave out, what to emphasise and what to overlook. As such, photography helps us to form a sense of ourselves and our place. It requires we take an active stance and in this sense promotes initiative and purpose" (**Dr. Tiffany Fairey**)

Photography workshops for young people were facilitated by Farhad Noori. The aim was to develop skills in photography, expression through arts and practical skills including public speaking. Participants considered their strengths, what is important to them and what helps them get through hard times. The work was exhibited at STTARS Angas Street office.





# **Complementary Therapies**

Ongoing ramifications from experiences of torture, trauma, exile, homelessness, grief and separation from loved ones may include physical pain, insomnia, anxiety and a range of other health issues. These are common symptoms for many refugees who present at STTARS.

Our Complementary Therapies program works in conjunction with, and alongside, other counselling and healthcare professionals to reduce pain and support recovery.

During periods where COVID restrictions precluded face-to-face client appointments, direct body work through massage largely ceased, and the coaching and teaching of self-care strategies became the focus instead. We supported clients over the phone to focus on their bodies and self-care strategies, using the self-care cards as prompts. We were surprised at how helpful and empowering this could be. Relevant selfcare cards were posted, along with products such as massage cream, magnesium flakes and healing roll-on sticks containing essential oils.

On returning from lockdown, this continued. Clients were seen, usually with their counsellor, with the aim of self-care strategies being included as part of their ongoing counselling, homework and healing process. Hand massages or head massages were given as restrictions eased, with an aim to teach and practice at home.

Presentations were given to many groups which included body awareness, posture, simple exercises and self-care strategies to continue at home as well as making up products. Groups included: Afghani, Syrian, Bhutanese Pain Groups, gardening group, sewing group, Bhutanese deaf group, Uyghur women's group. Complementary Therapies attracted attention at the STTARS stall at the Muslim Ladies Bazaar.

It has been rewarding to notice the changes that occur for people as they realise the difference that simple things can make to their sense of wellbeing, to pay



attention to their body: to breathe, to move, to relax, to massage, their face softens, they smile their eyes shine.

Self-care and working with the body is part of the road to healing and wellbeing of clients.

Further development of resources for staff to incorporate in their work with clients.

- > The range of Self Care cards has been expanded with some new art work by Robin Mellors
- > Eight further translations of self-care cards have been added
- > Display boards have been set up for presentations and community groups
- > A training program has been developed to help staff introduce and activate the messages of self-care to enhance clients' or groups' knowledge, wellbeing and empowerment.
- > Videos are in the process of editing with the view of being available for staff and clients to further facilitate these concepts towards healing and wellbeing.

Again, the Peggy Charitable Fund has enabled this program to continue its support for our clients. In particular to make up the much appreciated products to continue their healing journey.

At the end of June, Lyn Butler retired as Complementary Therapies Coordinator.



# Our Strategic Directions

#### **Providing High Quality Services**

To provide trauma-informed, holistic, culturally responsive services that recognise the expertise, values, needs and aspirations of survivors of torture and trauma and their families and communities

### Collaborating with Communities and other Organisations

To work with communities and other organisations to foster opportunities for enhancing the wellbeing and resilience of survivors of torture and trauma

## Increasing Understanding and Capacity

To raise the awareness, understanding and capacity of others who work with survivors of torture and trauma

# Strengthening Sustainability through Quality and Culture

To build and maintain a credible, vibrant, robust, inclusive and sustainable organisation

#### **Promoting Human Rights**

To work towards a world where human rights are respected and violations are never tolerated

# Our Values

#### **Diversity**

We recognise and celebrate our unique stories, culture and strengths. From this foundation we grow and learn from each other

#### Hope

We believe in the innate human capacity to strive, against the odds, for a better life for oneself and one another

#### **Social Justice**

Our hearts are challenged by experiences of oppression and together we work to improve human lives

#### **Ethical Practice**

We strive to act with integrity, care and compassion. We reflect on the ways that our actions affect the lives of people with whom we work

#### Humanity

We keep the people that we work with at the centre of everything we do







# Financial Summary

Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service Statement of Profit and Loss and other Comprehensive Income For the year ended 30 June 2021

#### Income

TO	TAL INCOME	\$4,718,766
•	Other Income	\$59,407
•	Interest	\$12,397
0	SRSS Services	\$11,374
0	Grant Income	\$4,635,588

#### Expenditure

• Salaries, Wages & Employee Expenses \$3,852,276			
•	Audit & Accounting Fees	\$8,988	
•	Client Expenses	\$376,684	
0	Depreciation	\$39,661	
•	Insurance	\$6,133	
•	Occupancy Expenses	\$40,709	
•	Rent	\$161,412	
0	Other Operating Expenses	\$347,245	
то	TAL EXPENDITURE	\$4,833,108	
OP	ERATING SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	-\$114,342	

**INCOME EXPENDITURE** 

For a full audited report provided by Nexia Edwards Marshall visit www.sttars.org.au



Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service Statement of Financial Position As at 30 June 2021

#### **Current Assets**

TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	\$2,439,753
Prepayments	\$43,426
Trade & Other Receivables	\$33,710
Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$2,362,617

#### Non Current Assets

Property Plant & Equipment	\$2,566
TOTAL NON CURRENT ASSETS	\$2,566

#### **Current Liabilities**

Trade & Other Payables	\$207,919
Contract Liabilities	-
Grants Received in Advance	-
Employee Provisions	\$497,643
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	\$705,562

#### Non Current Liabilities

Employee Provisions	\$96,620
TOTAL NON CURRENT LIABILITIES	\$96,620
TOTAL LIABILITIES	\$802,182
NET ASSETS	\$1,640,137
TOTAL EQUITY	\$1,640,137



# STTARS gratefully acknowledges funding from the following agencies in 2020-2021



We also acknowledge client sponsorship from the following organisations:

Flinders Foundation Inc (Karen Fitzgerald Fund) Suzanne Elliot Charitable Trust Country SA PHN (for the African Women's Sexual Health Project)





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