



sttars

supporting survivors of
torture & trauma

Annual
Report
2021-2022



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.



‘A Sky Full of Stars’ by Mali Isabel (Arabana and Kokatha)

‘A sky full of stars’ tells the story of survivors through various stages of their recovery and reconnection after traumatic experiences. The rivers that edge the outer corners of the canvas symbolise the struggles and obstacles overcome, creating a safe space within the centre, which is filled with meeting places that signify the varied stages, places, and situations people are at in their healing journey. The people symbols are scattered around the canvas like stars in the sky, yet intrinsically connected through their life experiences, telling the importance of genuine connection and community to ones’ healing and reassuring that, no matter what you are experiencing in life, you are never alone.

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Chairperson's Report

World events continue to have an impact on STTARS. The war in Ukraine has generated a new wave of refugees that adds to those coming from Syria, Afghanistan and so many other parts of the world. As always, the staff at STTARS have been responsive to these new arrivals.

Our work is still being affected by the pandemic. Our staff continue to adapt to the changing conditions. It is a great credit to staff that they have been able to maintain the quality of services in such a challenging environment.

Funding and resources remain a significant challenge. Once again, the Board's response to this has been to draw on some of our financial reserves to supplement the budget in order to maintain the number of service delivery staff.

At the Board level the only change has been the resignation of Perla Soberon-Brittle at the last AGM after many years of service to STTARS in several different capacities including as the Treasurer. We thank her for her loyal and valuable contributions to the organisation.

John Khateeb has joined the Board in her place and we welcome him to STTARS. As in the previous year, Haidari Smart was co-opted to the Board as its tenth member.

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 the 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. 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



Director's Report

This year has not been without its challenges. While we started the year with the backdrop of the uncertainty of Covid-19 and a reduction in funding due to lower numbers of Humanitarian Entrant arriving in South Australia, STTARS has continued to put people first, just as we have done for the last 30 years.

There has been a high demand for services this year as many people in our community have been

affected directly or indirectly by an increase in global instability, particularly in Afghanistan, Ukraine, Tigray and Myanmar but also in many other countries that have not reached the attention of mainstream media in Australia.

With the impact of reduced funding, we have needed to closely monitor the financial resources entrusted into our care to ensure that we continue to achieve the outcomes possible for the people who need our service. We are grateful to our Board of allowing us to access some of our financial reserves to maintain as many staff as possible so that we could continue to provide much needed care.

While this year has had its challenges, and our team has been smaller, a significant amount of work has been done by the caring and dedicated members of our team, and there is much to celebrate.

Some highlights have included:

- » A revitalised STTARS Community Advisory Group.

- » A whole team response to the crisis in Afghanistan, with particular focus on engagement, early intervention and support of others.
- » Projects focused on raising the voices of the people we support and drawing out their strengths and creativity (e.g. Youth Art Competition, Stories of Strength exhibition + book, "I AM" project, Letters to Parliament).
- » Continued growth and development of support for young people in schools.
- » Recognition of the outstanding achievement of the ARANAP program in responding to the health needs of new arrivals.
- » New members joining our Refugee Mental Health Clinic enabling people to access culturally relevant trauma informed support that would not otherwise be possible.
- » Increased reach and impact in the Multicultural Wellbeing (Living well with chronic pain) project.

- » An increased focus on community engagement with a record number of activities across the year.

I would like to thank our Board, leaders, staff, interpreters and volunteers as well as our stakeholders and government partners for making these achievements possible. I am proud of the professionalism, care, compassion and humanity that I see my colleagues demonstrate every day as they go about their work. I am proud to have worked alongside a team of people who really are doing extraordinary work every day. I am grateful for their commitment, professionalism and their service.

Finally, I would like to thank the survivors who access our service. I continue to be humbled and grateful for the trust they place in us.

Robyn Smythe
Director

2021-2022 Board Members



John Oliphant
Chair



Bernadette McGrath
Secretary & Public



Gay Gardner
Vice Chair



Muhammad Akram
Treasurer



Kaz Eaton



Haidari Smart



Sandra Gault



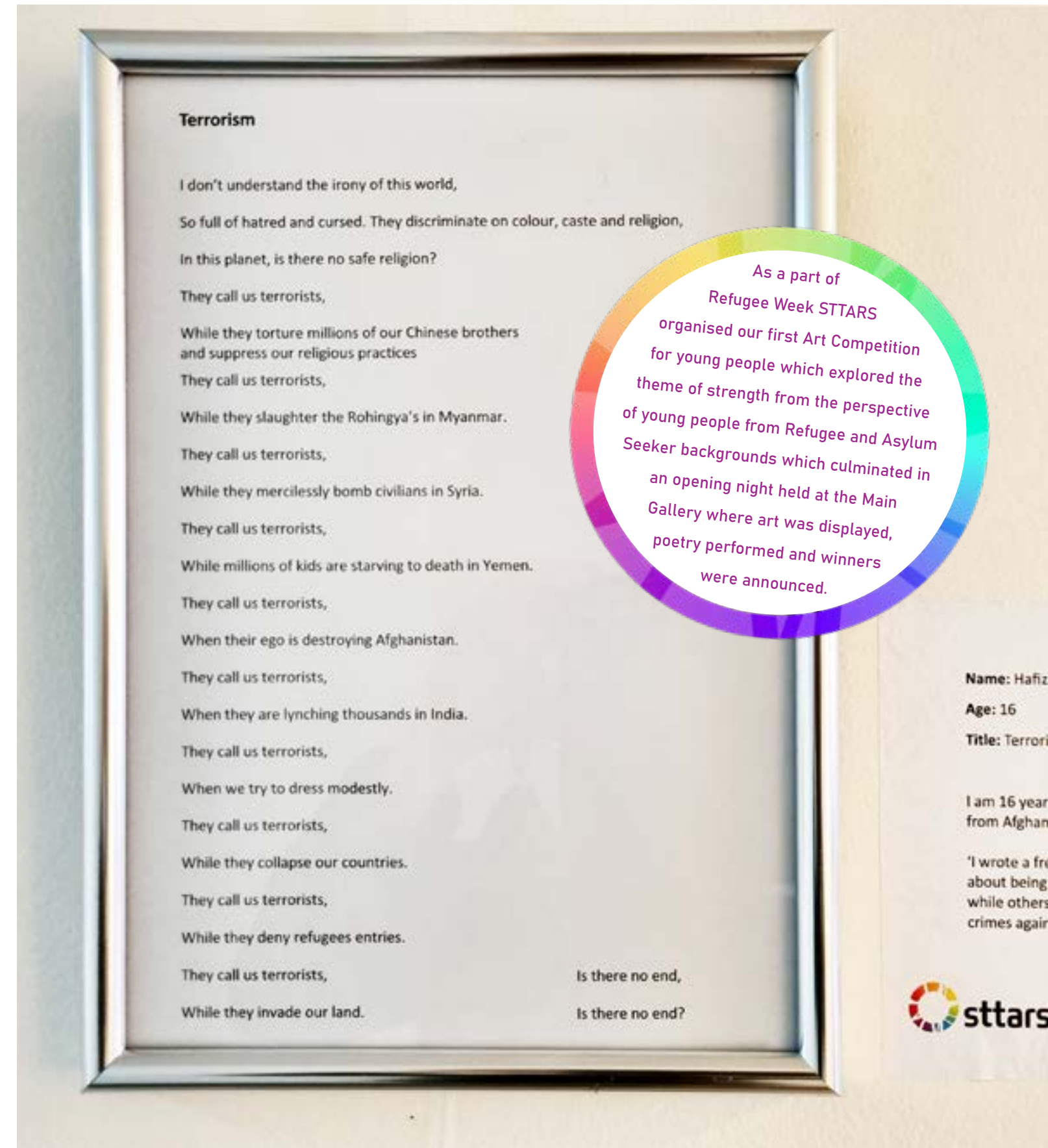
David Wild



Carol Irizarry



John Kateeb



2021-2022 Our Staff



Director
Robyn Smythe

Clinical Services Manager
Ana Maria Allimant Holas

Counselling Team Leaders
Kerri Berardi
Mtho Ngcanga (to Aug 21)
Riziki Saidi

Intake & Clinic Coordinator
Alica Varesanovic

South East Regional Coordinator
Sophie Coote

Senior Counsellors
Maria Morales-Boyce
Sarah Purcell

Counsellor/Advocates
Akar Pardedar
Dart Russell
Donatien Ntikahavuye
Gabriela Gonzalez Falcon (from Jun 22)
Galawej Ibrahim
Ghani Nasery
Gulshan Hussain
Jacqueline Taylor
Lisa Jenkins
Mehak Khandeparkar
Melanie McGuigan
Nellie Anderson
Rhett McDonald (South East Region)
Sonia Kiriyanthan
Wah Wah Naw (from Jun 22)

Counsellor/Nurse Lead
Matthew Seabrook

Refugee Health Programs Project Officer
Hayley Radford

Refugee Health Nurses
Bridgit McAteer
Joanne Riddle
Muslima Huka

Chronic Pain Counsellor/Therapist
Amritha Aparnadas

Special Projects
Fatima Shah (Bicultural Worker -Persistent Pain Project)

Refugee Mental Health Clinic Visiting Clinicians:
Dr Anoop Sankaranarayanan - Psychiatrist (to Dec 21)
Dr Jayakrishnan Nair - Psychiatrist (from Nov 21)
Dr Tushar Singh - Psychiatrist (to Dec 21)
Dr Vani Kaler - Psychiatrist
Amanda Gierasch - Psychologist (from Nov 21)
Jessica Evans - Psychologist
Dr Miriam Posselt - Psychologist (to Aug 21)
Wendy Anderson - Psychologist
Sharlene Pope - Mental Health Social Worker (from May 22)
Simon Humphries - Mental Health Social Worker (from May 22)

Caseworkers
Rima Abu-Assi
Slavica Dedijer (Senior Caseworker)

Community Development Officer
Everine Munyonge

ICT and Operations Manager
Daryl Eckermann

Finance Officer
Rachel Inness

Administration Assistants
Carol Cantlon
Komang Sukraeni-Francis
Kubra Ozsou Clarke (to Mar 22)
Leah Newman (from Jun 22)
Maria Siro
Marina Lever (Senior Administration Assistant) (to Dec 21)
Neelima Kafley (from Nov 21)

Students
Adriana Bernardo (to Dec 21)

Volunteers
Greg Kelly (to May 22)
Jill Wilson (Garden Project)
Richard Wilson (Garden Project)
Lyn Butler (Complementary Therapies)
Kubra Ozsou Clarke (to Mar 22)
Community Development

About STTARS

Since 1991, **STTARS**, the Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service, has provided flexible and culturally sensitive services to people from refugee backgrounds who have suffered from torture and refugee-related trauma.

STTARS offer a range of services to address the physical, psychological and social needs of survivors of torture and trauma to help them rebuild their lives in Australia.

STTARS specialist services include: counselling, groups, programs for children and young people, physical health programs, complementary therapies, service provider training and community development activities.

STTARS team consists of experienced, multicultural professionals who specialise in trauma recovery.

STTARS offers outreach counselling at various locations including homes, schools and community centres.

STTARS is committed to providing a safe, inclusive and culturally responsive environment while working to promote the health and wellbeing of clients.

STTARS 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.

STTARS welcome survivors of torture and trauma regardless of their age, ability, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, language, religious beliefs, visa type or length of time in Australia.

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

STTARS consultations include free professional interpreting services for non-English speakers.

STTARS works with other organisations, services, clinicians, community groups, schools and individuals, offering training and support, to enable them to work more effectively with people from refugee backgrounds.

STTARS is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation with no political or religious affiliations.

In 2021 – 2022 STTARS provided support for **1174** individuals and families, and also worked with refugee communities to enhance their capacity to develop support structures & access external resources.

Since 1991 STTARS has assisted **70,975** people from **169** countries heal the scars of torture and refugee trauma.



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

Strategic Direction

Providing High Quality Services

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

Working with Communities

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

Increasing Understanding and Expertise

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

Strengthening Sustainability through Quality and Culture

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

Promoting Human Rights

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



Values

Humanity

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

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

WHERE
OUR CLIENTS
ORIGINATE
FROM...



TOTAL
1174

REFERRALS AND INTAKE

STTARS provides support for people living in South Australia who:

- » Have a refugee or refugee-like background.
- » Have a history of torture and/or other traumatic events prior to their arrival in Australia.
- » Are experiencing psychological or psycho-social difficulties believed to be associated with their experience of torture and traumatic events
- » STTARS recognises the effects of intergenerational trauma and provides services to children and young people whose primary caregivers have experienced torture and/or trauma before arriving in Australia.

Anyone can make a referral to STTARS, including service providers, medical professionals, a family member or friend of the person or the person themselves.

STTARS' Intake Coordinator, Alica Varesanovic, is the first point of contact for referrals. Potential clients are contacted for an intake interview within 48 hours of receiving their referral. Interviews are conducted face-to-face or by telephone, with free professional interpreting services if required.

Due to a high demand for our services, STTARS operates a managed waiting list. Priority on the waiting list is determined by the severity of the person's symptoms and specific vulnerability factors including the availability and adequacy of other supports in their life.

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.

HIGHLIGHTS

- » STTARS responded to 669 new referrals in the last year.
- » The main sources of referral were general health services 38%, settlement services 17%, self-referral 14% and education providers 11%.
- » Global instability particularly in Afghanistan, Ukraine, Tigray, and Myanmar had a significant impact on referrals with an increase in distress reported by people directly affected by the conflicts, those with family in those regions and people who had had similar experiences in the past.
- » This year STTARS introduced new ways of approaching referrals to be able to respond more quickly as needed including a new rapid response for newly arrived evacuees from Afghanistan (with 77 people responded to within 4 weeks), and the trial of new connection groups for people on the waiting list.



"Their door is open, and you can go there if you have problems"
STTARS Client

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. This year has been particularly difficult for asylum seekers with an increase in conflicts around the world. Many have been living in uncertain circumstances for so long that it is difficult to continue to hold on to hope particularly as family members face increasing danger and opportunities for reunification seem remote. Because asylum seekers are not yet in a position of safety,

Therefore, counselling support at STTARS focuses primarily on helping asylum seekers to 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.

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 72 asylum seekers this year.

If you would like to make a referral or speak to someone before making a referral please contact us on 8206 8900



AFGHANISTAN RESPONSE

REFLECTIONS from...

When Kabul fell to the Taliban in August 2021 reverberations were felt around the world. There was naturally a significant increase in distress amongst the Australian Afghan community, particularly for those who had family and friends in direct danger. The situation triggered responses from many other people from refugee backgrounds who had had similar experiences or whose countries were also experiencing unrest. In addition to this, there was a need to respond to people who had been airlifted to Australia in an evacuation supported by the Australian Government.

STTARS responses included attending community meetings, facilitating information sessions, support groups, increased frequency and number of counselling sessions for affected clients, community-based activities and consultancy/support for other service providers. Acknowledging the need to respond quickly to new arrivals, STTARS implemented an early intervention program where new arrivals referrer to our service were fast tracked for short term counselling and support.

STTARS Counsellor/Advocate:

One woman said she feels like she can't talk in depth about her pain with her family or friends because they all have the same pain. She said she doesn't want to burden them and they all find it so hard to talk about what is happening. But with the counsellor she can share freely and openly, knowing she is not burdening and that the counsellor can return to her life outside of her world. Another said she feels hopeful and inspired that someone truly cares about her and feels her story is important to tell. I have been reflecting recently about the power of simply listening and witnessing someone's story, their pain and their worries. Knowing that simply being there with that person is such a gift and we can't underestimate the power of witnessing in seemingly hopeless situations.

STTARS Counsellor/Advocate:

Working with Afghan evacuees required a different approach from us as counsellors. The assessments were done very soon after their arrival to Adelaide while families were still very much in shock from having to flee their home country. While there was a huge sense of relief and gratitude for having found safety, the grief of leaving everything behind was overwhelming for many clients. One of the major challenges of this work was trying to be with people while they processed the understanding that there would be no easy way to bring their family members here. Many clients had children, spouses or parents left behind and were faced with the grueling task of trying to resettle while constantly worrying about their loved ones with little or no contact. The challenge for counsellors is to make a safe space for this grief, while also looking for opportunities for moments of peace.



COUNSELLING

Every individual is unique and traumatic experiences can affect people in many different ways. Trauma can affect people of all ages, cultures, genders and life experiences; affecting relationships and children intergenerationally with trauma being passed down; causing people to feel frightened, helpless, isolated and without power and control. Therefore, we begin all of our support with a trauma recovery focus of helping people to feel safe, respected and empowered.

Counselling provides a safe and nurturing environment for people to talk through their problems with qualified counsellors. We recognise that, although people from refugee backgrounds have survived horrific experiences, they also possess many strengths, skills and immense resilience. Through talking therapies STTARS' Counsellor/Advocates work together with each person to build on these strengths and develop way to better manage reactions to new situations, address and resolve problems, and work through thoughts and feelings. Counselling helps survivors to cope more effectively and regain control over their lives so that they can live their best life and the impacts of torture and trauma are not a barrier to wellbeing meaningful



"The problem I had I didn't think anyone else had. I escaped from 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"

"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 said to me and that helps"

"The counselling helped me to stand on my feet. I began to be assertive in my heart when negative thoughts or bad nightmares kept appearing. Now I try to live in the moment and to live positively"

HIGHLIGHTS

- » Counselling support provided over 5456 counselling sessions.
- » STTARS provides counselling in a range of venues where clients feel most comfortable. In the past 12 months 2109 counselling sessions were provided on an outreach basis at various locations including homes, schools and community centres.
- » STTARS specialises in working effectively with people from many cultures. In the last 12 months we provided counselling support to people who came from more than 60 different countries of origin.
- » STTARS counselling team consists of qualified and experienced Counsellor/Advocates, many of whom also have lived experience, come from countries similar to those of the people we work with and speak a range of languages.

"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"

RURAL AND REGIONAL

A growing number of people from refugee backgrounds are settling in regional and rural areas around Australia. In addition to primary resettlement, substantial numbers of asylum seekers and people from refugee backgrounds are moving to regional areas to obtain work. Areas with growing populations from refugee backgrounds include Mt Gambier, Naracoorte, and Bordertown.

STTARS maintains a strong presence in Mt Gambier and the South East region with an office in Mt Gambier and regular weekly outreach services in Naracoorte and Bordertown. Services available in the South East include:

- » Individual or family counselling
- » Group programs
- » Education and training
- » Secondary consultations & telephone support for other services

STTARS South East team work closely and in collaboration with the local communities, supporting numerous events and gatherings in the region that have newly arrived communities plus provided opportunities for connection, interaction and sharing between cultures.

STTARS continues to work tirelessly alongside survivors of torture and trauma communities within the Limestone Coast. Creating strong foundations for safe, trusting spaces where individuals, families and communities can come to share their traumatic experiences, worries, concerns, hopes and dreams.

We have witnessed a lot of healing and displays of traumatic growth over the past year, especially when finding voice to create change that better supports the needs of survivors of torture and trauma. STTARS SE counsellors would like to thank the communities they support for allowing them to stand in solidarity with them while they explore and voice their experiences and strive for greater prosperity and healing.



HIGHLIGHTS

» This year STTARS South East team have provided counselling for 55 individual/families, 9 community development activities, 4 health and well-being activities and multiple community engagement and consultation activities.

» **Stories of Strength:** STTARS partnered with the Tatiara Council in Bordertown to produce 'Stories of Strength Project' which utilised photography and storytelling to combat negative perceptions and stereotypes that can be associated with migrants and refugees. The project focussed on building social cohesion, awareness and understanding within the local community. STTARS worked with each participant to construct their story of strength that was produced in a public booklet and an exhibition that has been showcased at three events in the Limestone coast to date.

» STTARS partnered with the Naracoorte Lucindale Council on the "I AM PROJECT", which profiled 4 new migrants to the town, having their portraits drawn by an accomplished artist and displayed as part of refugee week. STTARS worked therapeutically with the participants to develop the written element which accompanied their portrait telling part of the story of their journey and how they had become a 'local of Naracoorte'.

» **Mental Health and Safe Relationships:** In response to client concerns following a recent suicide in a CALD community and requests for more information about safe relationships in Australia, STTARS facilitated a workshop for CALD women in the SE. A number of agencies including SAPOL, Centrecare's Limestone Coast Domestic Violence Service, Standby Response and Country Health SA participated in panel discussion sharing experiences, services and local support regarding mental health and safe relationships.



CHILDREN & YOUTH

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 also recognises the effects of intergenerational trauma and provides services to children and young people whose primary caregivers have experienced torture and/or trauma before arriving in Australia.

The support STTARS provides to children and young people is crucial in assisting children and young people from refugee backgrounds to deal with challenges brought on by trauma and feel more settled and content at school, and at home with their families. STTARS provides support through a variety of activities including:

- » Individual and family-based counselling for survivors of torture and trauma.
- » Therapeutic groups
- » Support for young people and their families to connect with other services
- » Opportunities for young people and their families to engage in activities that promote family connections such as Family Fun Days and School Holiday Programs

STTARS also works closely with schools, providing outreach to students and supporting staff to build their capacity to respond to the needs of students and families from refugee backgrounds.



HIGHLIGHTS

- » Provided support to 203 Children and young people to the age of 20
- » School residencies at Para Hills High School, St Columba School, Playford International School, Ingle Farm Primary School and Adelaide Secondary School of English
- » Regular outreach service provided across an additional 30 schools
- » Four therapeutic drumming programs
- » Youth Art Competition highlighting the creativity and strengths of young refugee and asylum seekers in South Australia in both visual and written art forms. Culminated in an art exhibition opening at The Main Gallery, Adelaide.
- » A range of youth activities including Tree Climb



INTENSIVE FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Torture and other traumatic events that occur as a part of the refugee journey, in addition to stressors in the resettlement context, impact family systems in a range of ways including attachment relationships, cohesion among family members, and relationships between the family and broader community. The restoration of connections is a key component of STTARS recovery model. This is particularly important when working with families as the quality of family functioning influences the recovery of each family member.

While other programs within STTARS focus on supporting individuals or groups, STTARS Intensive Family Support Program has a particular focus on working with families. Focussed to improve family functioning and wellbeing, addressing child and family safety concerns at an early stage, to prevent escalating involvement with statutory services, such as child protection or youth justice. The counsellor may at times work with a family as a whole unit and at other times with individuals or selected family members.

HIGHLIGHTS

- » Support provided to 63 participants, the majority of who were from single parent households.
- » Families reported finding it difficult to trust and engage with services prior to involvement with this program, by completion they were connected with a range of services and were confident that they had someone they could turn to if they were experiencing distress or challenges in the future.
- » Families reported better communication within their family and with external parties such as schools.



REFUGEE MENTAL HEALTH CLINIC (RMHC)

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

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 who provide a dedicated service to 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.

HIGHLIGHTS

- » This year STTARS has consolidated the work of the Refugee Mental Health Clinic (RMHC) by establishing a new position to support the amazing work that Alica does as a clinic coordinator, Maria Siros has been appointed as Intake and Clinic Assistance and is working closely with Alica.

- » Jessica Evans has completed her accreditation as a clinical psychologist and Amanda Gierasch who was a visiting psychologist, doing her placement at the RMHC has completed her clinical placement. STTARS acknowledges her work with survivors of torture and trauma and wishes her well with her future roles.
- » The RMHC continues to receive referrals of survivors of torture and trauma with complex presentations. Caseworkers, Rima and Slavica play a vital role in supporting the work that visiting clinicians do. Visiting clinicians have commented on the significant changes that survivors of torture and trauma have experienced as fully participants of the integrated, trauma specialist and culturally safe approach exercised at STTARS RMHC.

"I see the clinic as an invaluable, cost effective and accessible service and for me as a clinical psychologist, being able to offer a service where I can bulkbill clients, use interpreters, refer to psychiatry where needed, call on the assistance of casework and have much of the practical aspects of delivering the service arranged for me is an excellent model of care."

Dr Miriam Posselt
Psychologist



"I have observed that most patients coming to STTARS have experienced spirit shattering human tragedies, extreme violence and fear for safety of their children. They have been through the most primal fears. They have escaped from their home countries for survival. They had to leave their countries in circumstances, that never gave them a chance to prepare themselves mentally or practically for the systemic challenges, procedural requirements and cultural acceptance of their new world. Trauma issues combined with the burden/uncertainty of new settlement puts them in unique predicament, which is quite different to what local mental health services are trained to deal with."

Visiting Psychiatrist

CASEWORK

In addition to psychological distress resulting from past torture and trauma experiences, survivors often have multiple practical needs that impact on their recovery. STTARS' recovery model recognises that psychotherapeutic interventions alone are often not sufficient to adequately resolve distress for people from refugee backgrounds. An individual or family experiencing housing, financial or legal crisis, will not respond most effectively to psychological support while primary needs remain unmet.

STTARS Caseworkers support recovery working alongside visiting mental health clinicians with a focus on facilitating positive changes to the survivor's external circumstances through advocacy, assisting survivors to build life skills and navigate systems to address immediate practical needs.

STTARS team of specially trained and dedicated Caseworkers use a high degree of professional judgement, working with survivors to identify and resolve the problems that they have been unable to resolve on their own and are likely to have the most impact on their recovery process.

People from refugee backgrounds often have low health literacy and difficulty navigating the Australian health system. Many suffer from health issues specific to their refugee experience and migration journey, finding themselves in a position where health concepts and the health system is foreign and potentially overwhelming.

STTARS is funded by the Adelaide Primary Health Network (PHN) to advocate, support, and provide health education for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers living in Adelaide.

ARANAP Refugee Nurse/Advocates conduct health assessments to identify unmet primary healthcare needs and then link clients to the appropriate services. Where necessary the nurse will accompany the client to initial appointments. They work holistically to build confidence and empower their clients to advocate for their own health needs independently.

ARANAP also facilitates training and development for health professionals by offering support, collaboration and resources to assist in their provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate care. Primary healthcare services are supported to understand overcome common barriers people from refugee backgrounds encounter in accessing health care due to their limited knowledge of health systems in Australia and how they work, low basic health literacy, language barriers, cultural differences, socioeconomic disadvantage and other settlement challenges.

ARANAP work closely with Australian Refugee Association (ARA) Bicultural Support Workers who play a vital role in bridging cultural understanding between health-related systems in Australia and those the client may have encountered in their country of origin.



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”

“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

HIGHLIGHTS

During 2021 to 2022 Covid 19 has had a particularly detrimental impact on the health system and this has meant that ARANAP clients who continue to have complex physical and mental health needs have further struggled accessing appropriate care in the community. The ARANAP Team have had to adapt to this new challenge with medical services as well as providing clients with more tele-health support and assessments and where possible some face-to-face appointments in both home and medical settings. This year the ARANAP team provided 423 Face to face appointments, 655 telephone/video consultations, 270 episodes of non-direct care or advocacy with health care providers.

ARANAP nurses continue to have a focus on capacity building with GP practices to enable better health outcomes for clients. Feedback from practices has included ‘trust has been established with the Nurses and their support and prompt assistance has been invaluable to our vulnerable group of patients’.

In recognition of their exceptional work in this area the ARANAP team were awarded runner up in Outstanding Achievement in Population Health/ COVID-19 Response at the Adelaide PHN’s annual awards.

GROUP WORK

Experiences that people from refugee backgrounds have endured often leave them fearful or suspicious. Healing and connection are interlocked.

When survivors of torture and trauma come together in safe groups, they are able to learn to trust again.

In a group setting participants can make friends, support one another, learn together, share their grief and experience a sense of belonging and purpose.

Many newly arrived refugee communities are unfamiliar with western notions of individual counselling. Attending groups can be a more accessible and comfortable way for members of these communities to seek help and heal.



HIGHLIGHTS

Collective grief and wellbeing groups for Afghani Men and Women

The fall of Afghanistan had a powerful impact on many members of the Afghan community already in Australia, particularly those who had family and friends who were directly affected. STTARS support groups allowed for small numbers of people from Afghanistan to come together and share their grief, sadness and sense of helplessness in a safe and supported way that acknowledged and validated feelings and was combined with information and self-care activities. Separate groups were facilitated for men and women.

Rhythms to Recovery/Drumming group

The drumming program uses rhythmic attuned movements, music, psychology and neurobiology to improve social skills and provide a safe space for young people to express themselves. Rhythms to Recovery Groups were facilitated in a range of schools including Mt Carmel College, Para Hills High School and Roma Mitchell Secondary College. Initial groups were facilitated for students from refugee backgrounds only with later groups including a mix of non-refugee and refugee background students who built stronger relationships and learnt from each others experiences.

“Honestly it has all helped... because it has happened to all of us - initially we didn't want to come, or to leave the house but we left the house and got here. We now leave here in a better mood and better state of mind in being able to work through the issues better.”

Knitting Hope – Wellbeing groups for Bhutanese and Arabic Women

These groups provided regular opportunities for women to get out of the house and meet with others, engage in enjoyable activities and build meaningful connections. Participants shared their craft and life skills and experiences with each other. Activities such as knitting and crochet included repetitive movements and attention to detail that served as mindfulness activities, providing increased relaxation and interrupting repetitive thoughts about past trauma and current stressors, in addition to opportunities for social connection.

“It has been good to share with other people. This has helped me a lot to control my emotions. It has given me that pause to control.”

Connecting with Self

This year STTARS commenced a new therapeutic group program ‘Connecting with Self’. The primary aim of the group was to build safety and trust in a small group environment, provide information for participants about the causes, symptoms and impacts of traumatic experiences in their lives. The groups offer interventions to build the capacity of participants in healing and recovery from those symptoms and facilitated sharing and support between group members.

Some of the topics covered over the 6 weeks were:

- » Managing stressful thoughts and rumination
- » Managing anxiety
- » Sleep & ways to improve it
- » Reconnection, belonging and bonding.

Trauma-Informed Yoga and Wellbeing Groups

STTARS' yoga groups provide an opportunity for participants to engage in gentle exercise in a small group setting. Being ‘Trauma-Informed’ means that there is significant focus on creating emotional and physical safety within the group and exercises. Groups include gentle yoga exercises, mindfulness practices, psychoeducation, and where appropriate folk music and dance. These groups focus both on physical wellbeing, with participants often reporting a reduction in pain, and emotional wellbeing, with mindfulness.



MULTICULTURAL WELLBEING

LIVING WELL WITH CHRONIC PAIN

The way that pain is conceptualized and expressed differs between cultures. Each cultural group has differences in the way that pain is understood and types of exercise/movement that are considered to be more appropriate. This program is designed specifically for people from refugee backgrounds, focusing on providing culturally relevant information and activities to help participants to better understand and manage their pain.

Many of the people supported by STTARS live with persistent pain and this has a profound impact on the quality of their daily life. There is much higher prevalence of chronic pain in people from refugee backgrounds 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 medical conditions which contribute to chronic pain not receiving adequate timely treatment

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. Cultural awareness and an integration of cultural knowledge is vital to the success of this highly effective program.



“My pain has reduced significantly its only 3/4 and it was 9 before. Pain started for me years ago. Before the program, I was not able to stand for long, due to unbearable pain. I stopped going to study or work and stayed home all day. The exercises helped a lot. I learned to breathe deeply. I learned a big lesson, it’s not good to just stay home, it’s better to move, the more you try, the better you feel. I realised I should not wait in one place and instead stay active. I am working now and I feel much better”

HIGHLIGHTS

- » Groups were established specifically to response to reports of increased distress and pain by Afghani women following the fall of the Afghanistan Government in Groups. Participants expressed the need of meaningful activity to keep them positively distracted and thus included the ‘Hope’ gardening project was developed as a part of the group program. In addition to the usual group activities, the group supported each member to develop a home garden and an enduring social support group.
- » Group programs were developed for new cultural groups including people from Africa and East Turkestan
- » 73 people participated in tailored group programs this year.
- » A Reconnect Hydrotherapy Program brought together former participants from different cultures (Bhutanese, African, Syrian, Uyghur, Afghani) which allowed for past learnings to be reinforced
- » and facilitated more shared learning, connections and friendships with other cultural groups.



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

A sense of safety is fundamental for healing. Without connection, people do not feel safe. Community Development work at STTARS builds on the connections, strengths and resilience of people from refugee backgrounds within their communities to overcome their trauma, empower themselves and create a better life in Australia.

Trauma impacts on communities as much as it impacts on individuals. When groups of people are exposed to organised violence and terror, the bonds of trust that hold a community together are damaged. Added to this, the considerable challenges for a community settling into a new country may threaten pre-existing connections. Therefore, whilst it is important to work on an individual's symptoms of trauma, a vital element of the recovery process is to develop community capacity. Through fostering new connections and a sense of belonging in their new home, people from refugee backgrounds are able to find meaning and purpose in their new lives.

STTARS actively seeks opportunities to work in partnership with community groups and associations to undertake projects, events and initiatives to promote better support of survivors of torture and trauma within their community.

- ## HIGHLIGHTS
- » STTARS Community Development Program included a range of art, sewing, yoga and wellbeing programs with different communities.
 - » In 2022 STTARS engaged in 67 community development activities and 38 Psychological health and well-being promotion activities, and 62 community engagement, networking and consultation activities.
 - » STTARS Community Advisory Group was reinvigorated with active members from Afghan, Bhutanese, Iranian, Syrian, Congolese, South Sudanese communities.
 - » Community Development activities included a focus on engagement with Afghan, Ukrainian and Tigrinya communities in response to crises in those countries.
 - » STTARS Community Garden program continued at Hawker St with the support of Slavica Dedijer and volunteers, Jill and Richard Wilson.
 - » As a part of Refugee Week STTARS organised our first Art Competition for young people which explored the theme of strength from the perspective of young people from Refugee and Asylum Seeker backgrounds which culminated in an opening night held at the Main Gallery where art was displayed, poetry performed and winners were announced.
 - » Health promotion events included stalls at school wellbeing days, a partnership with STTARS with ARA, RASA, Welcoming Australia, Carers SA and the City of Salisbury Council to organise the Sharing Our Healing Culture event for Refugee Week and coordination of the Multicultural Hub at the Festival of Now Mental Health Week event.



TRAINING & COLLABORATION

An important aspect of our work at STTARS is supporting community members and 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.

STTARS offers high quality, full-day, professional development workshops which are scheduled throughout the year, and are open to bookings from allied professional services, including health and welfare services, employment services, non-government organisations, support groups and educational institutions at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, through to the general public.

Full day training packages offered this year were:

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

STTARS also offered a range of tailored training programs for specific services. Altogether, in 2022 STTARS workshops were attended by more than 550 participants.



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 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.

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. We acknowledge that this year has been a difficult year for a number of interpreters due to the impacts of conflicts in their countries of origin.

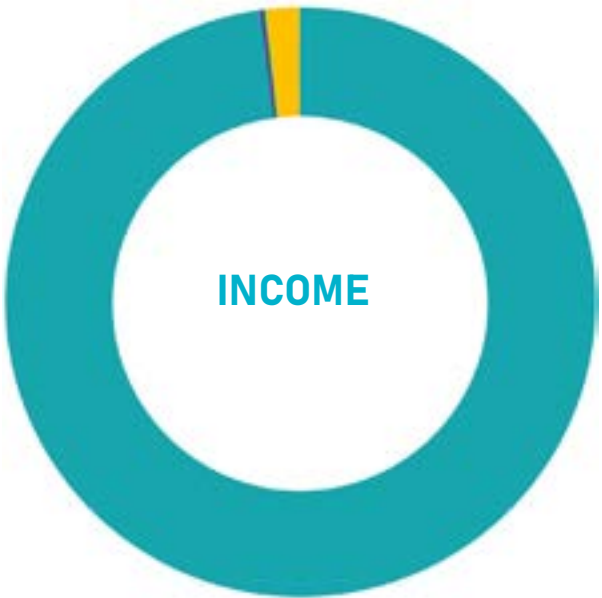
We thank our interpreters for their ongoing commitment, dedication and professionalism.

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 2022

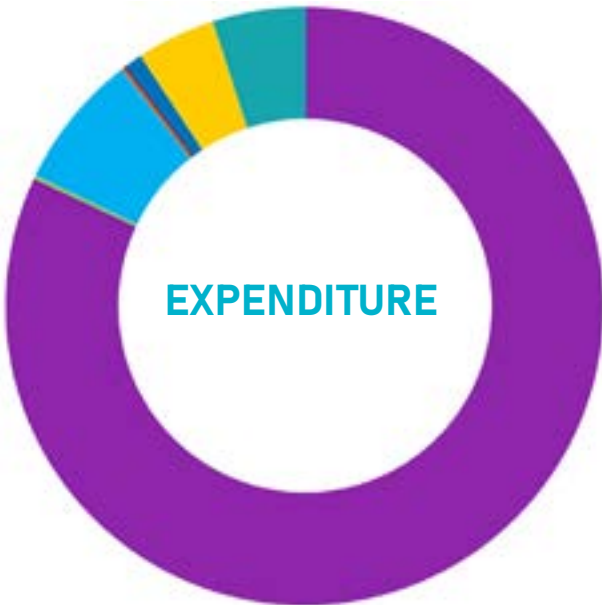
Income

Grant Income	\$3,834,227
SRSS Services	\$5,818
Interest	\$5,307
Other income (for example, gains)	\$70,352
TOTAL INCOME	\$3,915,704



Expenditure

Salaries, Wages & Employee Expenses	\$3,285,184
Audit & Accounting Fees	\$7,900
Client Expenses	\$294,808
Depreciation	\$2,566
Insurance	\$4,650
Occupancy Expenses	\$40,583
Rent	\$171,791
Other Operating Expenses	\$200,570
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	\$4,008,052



OPERATING SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) -\$92,348

Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service
Statement of Financial Position
As at 30 June 2022

Current Assets

Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$2,459,489
Trade and Other Receivables	\$19,077
Prepayments	\$33,375
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	\$2,511,941

Non Current Assets

Property, Plant and Equipment	-
TOTAL NON CURRENT ASSETS	-

TOTAL ASSETS \$2,511,941

Current Liabilities

Trade and Other Payables	\$195,103
Contract Liabilities	-
Grant Received in Advance	-
Employee Provisions	\$586,774
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	\$781,877

Non Current Liabilities

Employee Provisions	\$182,275
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES	\$182,275

TOTAL LIABILITIES \$964,152

NET ASSETS \$1,547,789

TOTAL EQUITY \$1,547,789

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

STTARS gratefully acknowledges funding
from the following agencies in 2021-2022



STTARS also acknowledges client sponsorship
from the following organisations:

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



Survivors of Torture and Trauma
Assistance and Rehabilitation Service

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