



**sttars**

supporting survivors of  
torture & trauma

Annual  
Report

**2022-2023**





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

It was an honour to step into the position of Chairperson of the STTARS Board in November 2022. STTARS is such a special organisation to me because it is where I started my career as a Child and Youth Counsellor. I learned so much from the resilient people and communities STTARS supports. I would like to thank John Oliphant, former Chairperson, for his time and dedication over the years.

John has calmly and capably supported STTARS to continue to provide sustainable and quality services to survivors of torture and trauma despite the challenges of COVID-19 and reduced funding over the years. The Board also sadly farewellled Kaz Eaton, Sandra Gault, and John Khateeb during the past year. Their expertise and contributions significantly helped develop STTARS into the organisation it is today, for which on behalf of the Board I thank them all for their contributions.

Regrettably, the war in Ukraine has continued, resulting in an increased number of refugees and internally displaced people. Over the last year, STTARS made a concentrated effort to reach out to the Ukrainian community in Adelaide and stand beside them. STTARS supported the Ukrainian community through providing tailored wellbeing group sessions for community members.

Some local challenges have included the housing shortage in South Australia and the increased cost of living, which inevitably led to increased distress for the people we support.

STTARS staff responded by providing advocacy and practical support for clients and their communities.

Overall, the last year saw things return to normal following the end of COVID-19 restrictions. It has been wonderful to see STTARS reconnecting with communities. Effective consultation with communities is key to ensuring STTARS continues to provide relevant and effective supports to our diverse clients.

The STTARS Board also made an important decision to expand its services through a successful proposal for funding to deliver a specialist mental health service for culturally and linguistically diverse people. People from refugee backgrounds face the same range of mental health challenges as other community members, but often face more barriers to accessing mainstream services. This new service will complement our existing programs by prioritising people who may not need need torture and trauma counselling, but who need support accessing mainstream Services or achieving positive outcomes.

STTARS has built expertise in providing supports that foster increased social cohesion, improved confidence and self-agency of groups and individuals, and the opportunity to expand this expertise and work more closely with communities and mainstream service providers can only be beneficial to the clients we support. To facilitate this new program and STTARS' existing programs, work commenced over the last year to establish a new STTARS office in the northern suburbs of Adelaide.

Lastly, I would like to thank all the members of the Board for their contributions over the last financial year, and of course STTARS' Director, Robyn Smythe and all of her dedicated and passionate staff and volunteers who worked compassionately and tirelessly throughout the year.

*David Wild*

Chair



## Director's Report

In recent years we have seen an increase around the world in new conflicts and abuses of human rights. In times like these services like STTARS are needed more than ever. I am proud of the team at STTARS who work steadfastly alongside survivors to support them to recover and rebuild their lives.

This year marked the completion of an in-depth evaluation of the Program to Assist Survivors of Torture and Trauma which found that the program demonstrated high levels of appropriateness in meeting client needs.

Based on the evidence in this evaluation the PASTT program has opportunities to increase our efforts in therapeutic group work and connecting with communities.

The evaluation noted the importance of work to reduce stigma and contribute to early intervention and we have been fortunate to receive new funding from the APHN to enable us to respond to individuals with lower intensity needs that support mental health and wellbeing who do not need the more specialised PASTT services.

Alongside focusing on how we work together and the norms and practices we have chosen to foster, staff have continued to achieve so much for the people we support.

### Some of these achievements include:

Over 4800 counselling sessions were provided to support people who came from more than 84 countries of origin.

- » Establishment of some new and exciting groups, including the Wellbeing and Self-Expression Group and the Adult Therapeutic Choir Group.
- » Supporting community cohesion in the South East region of South Australia through working with South Australia Police and the Australian Federal Police to hold a multicultural family fun day.
- » Welcoming new clinicians to our Refugee Mental Health Clinic, which improves access to trauma-informed psychiatric and psychological supports.
- » Our Adelaide Refugee and New Arrival Program (ARANAP) winning an Adelaide Public Health Network Health Equity Award.
- » The University of South Australia using our Multi-cultural Wellbeing Program as inspiration to further research in relation to better pain care for refugees.
- » Our laughter filled Family Fun Day which brought together communities in the northern suburbs enabling connections to be made between community members and service providers.

- » Successful community consultations that led to the delivery of tailored supports that met the needs of specific communities.
- » Establishment of a second STTARS office in Salisbury, which brings us closer to where the majority of our clients live.

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 and passion. 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



## 2022-2023 Board Members



**David Wild**  
*Chair (from Nov 2022)*



**John Oliphant**  
*Chair (until Nov 2022)*



**Gay Gardner**  
*Vice Chair*



**Aref Ahmadi**  
*Treasurer*



**Muhammad Akram**  
*Treasurer*



**Bernadette McGrath**  
*Secretary and Public Officer*



**Haidari Smart**



**Carol Irizarry**



As a part of Refugee Week STTARS organised our second Art Competition for young people which explored the theme of 'Finding Freedom'. ARTIST: Zainab



2022-2023

## Our Staff



### Director

Robyn Smythe

### Clinical Services Manager

Ana Maria Allimant Holas

### Referrals and Intake

Alica Varesanovic

Amanda Doll

### Counsellor/Advocates

Kerri Berardi (Team Leader)

Riziki Saidi (Team Leader)

Akar Pardedar

Dart Russell

Donatien Ntikahavuye

Gabriela Gonzalez Falcon

Galawej Ebrahimi

Ghani Nasery

Gulshan Hussain

Ibrahim Ali

Jacqueline Taylor

Lisa Jenkins

Maria Morales-Boyce (to March 2023)

Matthew Seabrook (Counsellor/Nurse Lead)

Mehak Khandeparkar

Melanie McGuigan

Ramata Leigh

Rhett McDonald (South East Region)

Sarah Purcell

Sonia Kiriyanthan

Sophie Coote (South East Regional Coordinator)

Wah Wah Htoo Naw

### Adelaide Refugee and New Arrival Program (ARANAP)

Bridgit McAteer (Nurse Lead)

Hayley Radford (Project Officer) (to August 2022)

Joanne Riddle (Project Officer)

Muslima Huka (Nurse)

### Refugee Mental Health Clinic

Dr Vani Kaler – Psychiatrist

Dr Jayakrishnan Nair – Psychiatrist

Dr Michael Lee – General Practitioner

Apoorva Madan – Psychologist

Giovanina Demaria – Psychologist (to July 2023)

Jessica Evans – Clinical Psychologist (to August 2023)

Mastura Alim – Psychologist

Sharlene Pope – Mental Health Social Worker

Wendy Anderson – Psychologist

### Caseworkers

Rima Abu-Assi

Slavica Dedijer (Senior Caseworker)

### Special Projects

Natalia Rojas Para (Exit interviews)

Sonia Kiriyanthan (Exit Interviews)

### Community Development and Allied Health and Therapeutic Groups

Amritha Aparnadas (Team Leader)

Abdul Ghafar Stanikzai (EMBRACE Project Lead)

Estela Fuentes

Everine Munyonge

Fatima Shah

Lyn Butler

Melissa Bridge

Moti Esalat

### Thrive and Connect (CALD Mental Health Program)

Mehak Khandeparkar (Team Leader)

Bahar Salehi

Caroline Baker

Carolina Medina

Juan Pablo Escobar Betancur

Laxman Gurung

Masooma Joya

Samir Yassin (to August 2023)

### ICT and Operations Manager

Daryl Eckermann

### Finance and HR Officer

Rachel Inness

### Project Officer

Helen McGeoch

### Administration

Stevie Bridgman (Team Leader)

Carol Cantlon

Eldana Abbas

Kate Spencer

Komang Sukraeni

Maria Siros

Neelima Kafley

Rachel Howlett

### Volunteers

Jill Wilson (Garden Project)

Richard Wilson (Garden Project)

Lucy Pfeifer (Choir lead and accompanist)

Lyn Butler (Complementary Therapies)



# 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 2022-2023 STTARS provided support for **1349** 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 **12,610** people from **117** 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  
**1349**





# 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, 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 1230 new referrals in the last year.

**The main sources of referral were:**

- » General health services 30%
- » Self-referral 17%
- » Education providers 21%
- » Settlement services 7.5%



**"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.

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 declared.

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

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 36 asylum seekers this year.

STTARS welcomes the Commonwealth's Government decision to make Temporary Protection visa and Safe Haven Enterprise visa holders eligible to apply for a permanent visa and their ongoing commitment to reforming the visa assessment process.



# 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 participation in family & community life.



"We had anxiety and depression. We were scared at night – we screamed. But once we saw the counsellor things got better."

"I am feeling so good. I feel free of a heavy weight in my shoulders. I have learnt about myself."

"I would like to say thank you for the service I received from STTARS counsellor. I worked with her very well. I was very hopeless but she worked with me through my recovery journey. I also appreciate how STTARS continues to support different people who are struggling with their past traumatic experiences to regain life."

"I got so much out of every session. Now I feel I can sleep better, I am not so tired all the time. I feel less pain in my body, I feel I am happier and I deserve to be happy."

"I was unable to talk to people or listen to anyone. Everything was a dark colour and negative but I am much better now."

## HIGHLIGHTS

- » Counselling support provided over 4800 counselling sessions.
- » STTARS provided counselling in a range of venues where clients feel most comfortable. Over the last year, 1848 counselling sessions were provided on an outreach basis at various locations including homes, schools and community centres.
- » In 2022-23, STTARS provided counselling support to people who came from more than 84 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.



# 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, such as Naracoorte, Mt Gambier and Bordertown, to obtain work.

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
- » Secondary consultations & telephone support for other services
- » Education and training
- » Group programs

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 in the south east region. Creating strong foundations for safe, trusting spaces where individuals, families and communities can come to share their traumatic experiences, worries, concerns, hopes and dreams.

STTARS works closely and in collaboration with key services within the region, including Tatiara Council, the Local Health Network, Country Health SA, Mount Gambier Hospital, South Australia Police, and non-government service providers.



“People need kindness, caring, and comfort and that’s what you gave me and made me stronger. It helped me to hang on, calm down and not think bad thoughts like self-harm or suicide. I tell others about STTARS, I now don’t think it’s fair I use your time and service when others are desperate and in more need for it, like I used to be. I’m happy I don’t need it. I used to need it once, but there are no problems now.”

## HIGHLIGHTS

- » In 2022-23, the STTARS South East team provided counselling for 61 individual/families and delivered 13 community development activities within the region.
- » Multicultural Family Fun Day: STTARS together with the South Australia Police and the Australian Federal Police held a Multicultural Family Fun Day at Noorla Yo-Long. The day provided an opportunity for people with refugee backgrounds to reframe their experiences of people in uniform by providing them with an opportunity to interact with police officers and staff from the Country Fire Service and the State Emergency Service in a fun and safe environment.

- » Around 60 people attended the day and enjoyed trust-building activities such as navigating a maze blindfolded and high rope challenges. Stories were shared, connections were made, and there were lots of handshakes, smiles and laughter. The day was made possible through the support of the local community. Mt Gambier bus lines volunteered to transfer people to and from the venue and the South Australian Muslim Sheik and his family graciously provided a delicious lunch.

- » Chairing the Naracoorte Network Services Group which advocates and assists services to offer culturally appropriate supports to migrant communities.



# 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.

“Your enthusiasm and relationship building with the kids really shined through, and the drumming success speaks volumes about your creativity and dedication. The kids’ feedback was that they really enjoyed the sessions, especially the mini games/warms ups – their smiles and engagement were clear indicators of how much they enjoyed themselves.”

## HIGHLIGHTS

- » Provided support to 265 Children and young people to the age of 20
- » School residencies at Adelaide Secondary School of English, Para Hills High School, and Ingle Farm Primary School
- » Following the COVID-19 pandemic, STTARS has focused on re-establishing connections with schools and Counsellor/Advocates had a regular presence in 37 schools across metropolitan Adelaide
- » STTARS continued to deliver its commended Rhythm to Recovery Drumming Group and established connections with new schools through expanding this group along with the new Wellbeing and Self-Expression group

# 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.

In 2022-23 STTARS continued to deliver its Intensive Family Support Program in the eastern suburbs of Adelaide which focused on working with families and improving family functioning and wellbeing. Over the past year, the Intensive Family Support Program provided support to 27 participants and there was an increase in clients from Latin America. A key theme that emerged from the work done over the last year was one of resilience. Families were supported to reach out for support when needed, make difficult decisions together, and develop a sense of trust and safety with each other.



The Intensive Family Support Program transitioned to the South Australian Department of Human Services’ Strong Families, Strong Communities Program on 30 June 2023. The new program will focus on providing low intensity early intervention support to prevent families from entering or escalating through the child protection system. Support is for up to six months for families with children aged pre-birth to 17 years of age living in the northern suburbs of Adelaide.





# REFUGEE MENTAL HEALTH CLINIC (RMHC)

Many people from refugee backgrounds find it difficult to access mainstream Medicare funded services that understand the refugee experience and use interpreters. The STTARS RMHC addresses this by hosting a number of registered visiting mental health clinicians with specialist expertise who provide a dedicated service to people from refugee backgrounds under Medicare funding, including the Department of Health and Aged Care's 'Better Access Initiative'.

STTARS provides administrative, interpreting and casework support to help those accessing our RMHC to overcome practical and settlement difficulties. In particular, STTARS caseworkers are vital in supporting the visiting clinicians provide an integrated and culturally safe mental health service.

STTARS RMHC also connects clients to other services, supports, and group work opportunities within STTARS.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- » In 2022-23, 234 clients were supported by the RMHC. STTARS is grateful for the expertise and compassion of all our visiting clinicians who help make the clinic a success and would like to thank Dr Vani Kaler, Dr Jayakrishnan Nair, Dr Michael Lee, Apoorva Madan, Giovanina Demaria, Jessica Evans, Mastura Alim, Sharlene Pope and Wendy Anderson.

- » 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 the visiting clinicians do.
- » Visiting clinicians have commented on the significant changes that survivors of torture and trauma have experienced as full participants of the integrated, trauma specialist and culturally safe approach exercised at the RMHC.
- » STTARS holds dinners that enables clinicians in the Refugee Mental Health Clinic and STTARS staff to explore ways to further improve integration of supports across STTARS programs and the clinic.



"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. In 2022-23, STTARS casework team supported 141 clients of the RMHC.

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.



# ARANAP ADELAIDE REFUGEE & NEW ARRIVAL PROGRAM

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.

Certain things that you see with your client:

The smile that they give you when you go into the doctor's appointment with them and you walk out and they feel like you've answered all those questions that they have never been able to ask. That feeling, that hug, that touch is what motivates us.

Muslima Huka  
– Refugee Health Nurse.



## HIGHLIGHTS

In 2022-23, ARANAP supported 173 clients. The Adelaide Refugee and New Arrival Program was an award recipient for the Adelaide PHN's 2023 Health Equity Awards. The program was recognised for successfully providing support to refugees to advocate for their health needs in the Australian public health system. The program empowers clients to be part of the decision-making process by assisting them to voice concerns with their GPs.



# THRIVE & CONNECT CALD MENTAL HEALTH

STTARS new CALD mental health program  
– Thrive and Connect – started supporting clients from July 2023.

STTARS' Thrive and Connect program supports people from culturally diverse backgrounds, especially those from refugee-like backgrounds, to achieve better mental health and wellbeing, so they can go from surviving to thriving. Engaging with target communities is key to reducing stigma around mental health and building trust and linkages with community services.

Our bi-cultural peer support workers are important to this program because they have had similar experiences to the people who access our services. They help to build hope in recovery by drawing on their own cultural expertise and personal experiences. In addition to providing practical help with issues that will reduce stress levels,

bi-cultural peer support workers can assist people to:

- » Better understand social, emotional and mental health needs
- » Build on strengths and develop new coping strategies
- » Access the community/meet new people
- » Set and achieve goals to move forward on their healing journey

Where needed the team can also provide care coordination to support people to better navigate the Australian healthcare system and access to mainstream services as needed.





# 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.

At STTARS, groups are organised on a regular basis to enable the people we work with to socialise and participate in activities or benefit from psychoeducation sessions. Groups enable people to learn new skills, talk over problems and discuss coping strategies.



## HIGHLIGHTS

### Rhythms to Recovery (Drumming)

The Rhythms to Recovery group uses rhythmic attuned movements, music, psychology and neurobiology to improve social skills and provide a safe space for young people to express themselves. This group was facilitated in a range of schools including Adelaide Secondary School of English and Charles Campbell School. 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 other's experiences.

### Community Garden

STTARS' community garden group provides participants from a range of cultural backgrounds with an ongoing opportunity to reduce social isolation as well as connecting with other services as needed. The group received ongoing generous support from volunteers Jill and Richard Wilson as well as long term staff member, Slavica Dedijer. Participants learn new gardening skills while sharing their knowledge with others. Sessions include information about health, nutrition, horticultural techniques, and culminate in the preparation and sharing of a meal based on freshly picked ingredients with newly made friends.

"Everything about this program is good, my mind is getting fresher. No time to think negatively. I have learned to look after myself learning about a healthy lifestyle. I was hopeless in the past and thought there is nothing to help me with my pain. There's so much to appreciate in this program. It's always really good meeting my friends, laughing and having fun while we exercise."

"This is helping me a lot. Instead of staying home, feeling sad, and in pain, coming here and moving helps us a lot. I used to have a lot of pain, but I now know doing exercise and staying active will help me reduce my pain. If we don't have a program like this, we will be always thinking of our stress."

### Healing Now, Connecting with Self

Language specific groups were offered for women who spoke English, Spanish, Dari, and Hazaraghi. These therapeutic groups enabled women to come together and share their experiences and coping strategies, covering topics such as understanding trauma, becoming aware of one's body, managing stressful thoughts, dealing with worries and anxiety, sleep difficulties and ways to improve sleep, connection and belonging.

### Wellbeing and Self-expression

A new Wellbeing and Self-Expression Group was formed as a space for youth who have a refugee and trauma background to engage in stimulating creative activities that foster body based sensory experiences and connection, self-expression, self-awareness, emotional regulation and social connection. Young people engaged in activities such as drumming, body movement, dance, music and art. In 2022-23 the program was delivered in Elizabeth Vale Primary School, Blair Athol North School and Ingle Farm Primary School. Young people who participated in the program developed confidence, sensory modulation, self-awareness, and emotional regulations skills and learnt ways to express their unique identities. They also built relationships through encouraging and supporting each other.

### Therapeutic Choir

The STTARS choir provides a space for participants to enjoy music, singing and poetry and share and learn with others who are from different cultures and backgrounds. It provides a safe space that enables participants to acknowledge their own and others' wellbeing, while learning and engaging in mindfulness and wellness activities. The choir is facilitated by STTARS' counsellors and a choir leader/accompanist in collaboration with Creative Therapy Adelaide, who provides in kind music therapy consultations.





# 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.

It helped me in my mental and emotional health. Breathing and relaxation exercises helped me to manage my stress – especially when I am feeling a bit down. I like socialising in the group, I feel comfortable in the group. I felt it as a place for me to come and talk about my problems. I hope we have exercise sessions weekly/fortnight that we can attend to motivate ourselves. I have more tools to manage my pain compared to when I started the program.

"It was good for me physically and mentally. It was exercising and socialising at the same time. It was such a good distraction from my day-to-day routine. It helped me mentally as I see people like me, learn from each other and that makes me feel happy. It helped me in managing my pain. I felt my pain has reduced since I started practicing the exercises I learned, and it is also helping me to reduce the stiffness in my neck and legs. You made the environment so loving, warm and friendly, there were smiles, music and kindness in the air, I felt good coming there."

"The emotional and mental part of this program was very helpful. I was able to get out of the house, make friendships and connect with others. During the last session I laughed so much I don't remember laughing like that in the last 12 years. I felt safe here and you and interpreter were lovely and made us all feel so comfortable."

## HIGHLIGHTS

- » In 2022-23, the Multicultural Wellbeing program addressed health equity by tailoring supports for participants from various countries, including Afghanistan, Bhutan, Syria, Nepal, Iran, Iraq, East Turkistan and Malaysia.
- » A total of 71 people participated in tailored group programs in 2022-23.
- » The Multicultural Wellbeing caught the attention of respected Professor Lorimer Moseley AO, CEO of Pain Revolution and a pain scientist and Professor of Clinical Neurosciences at the University of South Australia. Inspired by the positive outcomes participants achieved through the Multicultural Wellbeing program, Dr Lorimer is now supervising doctorate research related to better pain care for

refugees in consultation with the Multicultural Wellbeing program. It is anticipated the guidelines resulting from this research will help provide appropriate pain management care for refugees all around the globe.





# 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** » In 2022-23, STTARS engaged in 47 community consultations and development activities, 54 psychological health and wellbeing promotion activities, and 31 community engagement and networking activities. Through these activities, STTARS has successfully maintained and/or strengthened relationships with the Afghan, Bhutanese, Karen, Congolese, South Sudanese, Tigray, Pashtun, Syrian, Iran, Yazidi and Ukrainian communities.
- » STTARS Youth Art Competitions continue to be successful, with some amazing art being created. The competition opening night was attended by the young artists and their families and friends, members of the public, and STTARS staff.
- » In January 2023, STTARS held a Family Fun Day at the John McVeity Centre in Smithfield Plains. The day was a success and included face painting, soccer, a photo booth, arts and craft, and lots of delicious food. The Hon Tung Ngo MLC and the Hon Jing Lee MLC also attended the day.
- » Following successful consultation with Karen Women, STTARS coordinated the Karen Women Social Group to meet the needs of this emerging community in South Australia. The group has been growing in numbers since its inception.
- » The Uyghur Yoga Wellbeing Group resulted in a member of that community being accepted into a Trauma Informed Yoga Scholarship and completing that training so that they could continue to facilitate future yoga sessions for their community.





# 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 another difficult year for a number of interpreters due to the impacts of conflicts in their countries of origin.

# 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.

In 2022-23, STTARS delivered four full day scheduled education and training programs which included the Core Concepts and Accidental Counsellor training.

STTARS also delivered nine tailored education and training programs to organisations that included universities and other non-government organisations that provide refugee and/or mental health services.

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





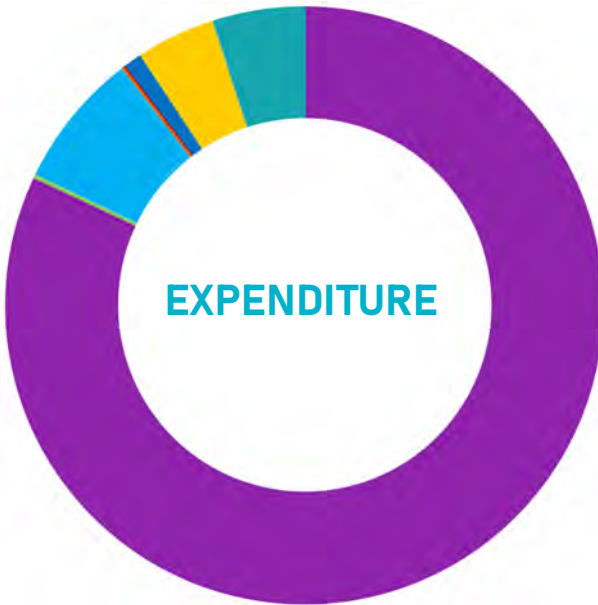
# Financial Summary

Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service  
Statement of Profit and Loss and other Comprehensive Income  
For the year ended 30 June 2023

Income	
Grant Income	\$4,002,047
SRSS Services	\$1,375
Interest	\$60,930
Other income (for example, gains)	\$22,543
<hr/>	
TOTAL INCOME	\$4,086,895



Expenditure	
Salaries, Wages & Employee Expenses	\$3,326,980
Audit & Accounting Fees	\$8,460
Client Expenses	\$278,240
Depreciation	\$0
Insurance	\$5,130
Occupancy Expenses	\$44,371
Rent	\$190,472
Other Operating Expenses	\$230,931
<hr/>	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	\$4,084,584



OPERATING SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)      **-\$2,311**

Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service  
Statement of Financial Position  
As at 30 June 2023

Current Assets	
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$2,603,638
Trade and Other Receivables	\$29,277
Prepayments	\$43,221
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TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	\$2,676,136

Non Current Assets	
Property, Plant and Equipment	-
<hr/>	
TOTAL NON CURRENT ASSETS	-

TOTAL ASSETS      **\$2,676,136**

Current Liabilities	
Trade and Other Payables	\$224,024
Contract Liabilities	144,099
Grant Received in Advance	-
Employee Provisions	\$643,681
<hr/>	
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	\$1,011,804

Non Current Liabilities	
Employee Provisions	\$114,232
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TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES	\$114,232

TOTAL LIABILITIES      **\$1,126,036**

NET ASSETS      **\$1,550,100**

TOTAL EQUITY      **\$1,550,100**



STTARS gratefully acknowledges funding  
from the following agencies in 2022-2023



STTARS also acknowledges client sponsorship  
from the following organisations:

The Peggy Charitable Fund

Dialog Information Technology



Survivors of Torture and Trauma  
Assistance and Rehabilitation Service

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