



# SOUTH EAST COMMUNITY LINKS

ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

*Every Person Counts  
Every System Fair*

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Hampton Park Secondary College  
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Hampton Park Youth Centre  
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Link Employment Dandenong  
LJ Hooker Noble Park  
Lions Club of Dandenong  
Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation  
Macpherson & Kelley  
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Max Employment  
Melbourne City Soccer Club  
Melbourne University  
Melbourne Playback Theatre Company  
Metro Drive School  
MFB  
Monash Aquatic and Recreation Centre  
Monash Oakleigh Community  
Monash Oakleigh Legal Service  
Mountain Dreaming Apartments  
Cornerstone  
Monash Christian Church  
Monash Health  
Monash Youth and Family Services  
Monash University  
Moses Booshi  
Mt Hotham Ski Company  
Multicultural Centre for Women's Health  
Multicultural Youth Action Group  
Narre Warren P-12 South Secondary College  
New Hope Foundation  
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Noble Park Aquatic Centre  
Noble Park English Language School  
Noble Park Secondary Collage  
Noble Park Uniting Church  
Oakleigh Police Station  
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Red Cross  
RILC - Refugee Immigration Legal Centre  
Rivergum Performing Arts Centre  
RMIT  
Rotary Club of Bentleigh Moorabbin Central Inc.  
Salesian College  
Salvation Army Dandenong  
Samoan Advisory Council Victoria  
Sang Pool Scholarship Fund  
Scanlon Foundation  
Self Help Addiction Resource Centre (SHARC)  
SELLEN South East Local Learning Employment Network  
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Skills Plus  
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South Oakleigh Secondary College  
Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre  
Sports Without Borders  
Springvale Learning and Activities Centre  
Springvale Monash Legal Service  
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Wesley Mission  
Wellington Secondary College  
Wheelers Hill Lions Club  
Youth Foundations–Narre Warren South and Hampton Park  
YMCA Victoria  
Youth Law  
Young Worker Center  
YSAS

We wish to acknowledge and thank the members of the outgoing boards at the time of the merge

DCAB  
Angela Kyriakopolous *Chairperson*  
Sri Samy *Deputy Chairperson*  
Naresh Raja *Treasurer*  
Julie Klok *Secretary*  
Kathy Bridle  
Susan Herbert  
Kathy Lambadaridis  
James Wong

SCAAB  
Ross Hepburn *Chairperson*  
Deborah Remfry *Deputy Chairperson*  
Christopher James *Treasurer*  
Christine Keys *Secretary*  
Anna Hall *Executive Director*  
Hang Vo  
Jan Cormack  
Kristen Wallwork  
Robert Davies  
Marija Dragic  
Garrett Teters

SEAAC  
Cameron Wiseman *Chairperson*  
Rob Owers *Deputy Chairperson*  
Reg Shelley  
Andrew Stamper  
Heidi Zwick  
Phill Start  
Ilias Tsinanis

## FROM THE CHAIRPERSON



With a brand new name and significant new partners it is a privilege to present the first annual report of South East Community Links. South East Community Links was formed on 1st October 2015 via the merge of Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau (SCAAB) and Dandenong Community Advisory Bureau (DCAB), with Southern Ethnic Advisory and Advocacy Council (SEAAC) joining in December 2015. These three organizations have a proud history of serving the community for over 118 years collectively.

I congratulate and thank the former boards of SCAAB, DCAB and SEAAC for their far-sighted decisions to merge in order that their organisations could become more sustainable and enable their various community services to be delivered to a growing client base in broader geographical area. I thank the individual board members across the organisations who selflessly supported the merger, promoted the benefits of amalgamation to their members, staff and volunteers and selflessly voted to relinquish their individual board positions. I particularly thank Angela Kyriakopoulos the former DCAB Chair and Cam Wiseman the former SEEAC Chair for their leadership and wise counsel during the amalgamation process and since. I also thank Anna Hall the retiring CEO of SCAAB for her more than eleven years service to SCAAB and this community and for her vision to ensure the organisations long-term sustainability. Similar thanks for their enthusiasm, support and far sightedness also goes to the directors of the three merging entities: Jinny McGrath at DCAB, Michelle Rowland at SEAAC and Denise Goldfinch at SCAAB. Together they supported the merger and ably led their staff, volunteers and clients during the challenging amalgamation process. It is highly significant and a testament to their outstanding leadership that Jinny, Michelle and Denise have all continued as senior managers in the new organisation. I also thank Sonia Vignjevic for standing in as CEO at SCAAB during the initial merger phase and for commencing a significant leadership change process.

Following the mergers and an exhaustive selection process the board of South East Community Links was delighted to appoint Dr Rhonda Cumberland as our new CEO. During this formative year Rhonda has worked tirelessly with the board, managers, staff and volunteers to bring together the best of the merging organisations and to cement an assuredly sustainable future. Rhonda has held strategic workshops with the board, met individually with every staff member, revamped the organisation structure and refocused the strategy for the organisation around the theme "Every Person Counts, Every System Fair". We thank Rhonda for agreeing to lead our organisation into the future and are delighted with the significant team progress to date.

The board has been delighted to watch the progress and positive change in this first year. There has been unanimous support and uptake from staff, volunteers and stakeholders alike. This view has been confirmed by the recent quality reaccreditation process, which was undertaken by QIP. I wish to congratulate all staff and volunteers on their great work in this exciting but often unsettling year of change for future prosperity.

During the year management has also been able to ensure that all existing services have been maintained and often expanded geographically. In difficult funding situations forward revenues have been locked in. Costs are being reviewed to ensure we have the resources we need in all the critical areas of our operation. Staff security is being enhanced as we work to multi skill staff so they are equipped to work across a range of areas within the organisation.

As our new organisation settles in and targets new ways to support and assist our clients and the growing demand for our services we are truly grateful for the on-going, excellent support from our various stakeholders, operational partners and funding bodies. In particular I wish to thank the City of Greater Dandenong and AMES for their excellent cooperation, advice and support in our formative year.

Last but by no means least I wish to thank my board colleagues for their dedication to the new organisation and for giving so freely of their time especially on numerous board committees as we worked to formalize the strategies, governance, policies, procedures and structures for the new organisation. I especially thank Cam Wiseman and Sri Samy for their board involvement and for agreeing to step down from the board as we downsize again in accordance with our new constitution. I also thank Merle Mitchell our Patron for her support and fearless wise counsel in what was a very difficult year for her family. We note with sadness and affection the passing of Eric Mitchell who as a founding committee member of SCAAB, Rotarian, former Springvale School Principal, former Mayor and Councillor of Springvale, always supported and advocated for the less well off in our community.

Members and friends of South East Community Links can be assured that the organisation is continuing in the best traditions of its founding bodies and is poised to better service our needy clients in the growing communities of Springvale, Greater Dandenong and beyond in the years ahead.

**Ross Hepburn**

*Chairperson*

# CEO REPORT



*Three organisations took the decision to amalgamate based on their shared goal to put people in our community first.*

## *2015/16 Performance*

The year 2016 is unique in the history of Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau, Dandenong Community Advisory Bureau and the Southern Ethnic Advisory and Advocacy Council.

South East Community Links (SECL) was formed after the amalgamation of these three highly regarded community organisations. The amalgamation story is one of change-making, the theme highlighted in this year's report. There can be no greater change in the history of an organisation than taking the decision to amalgamate. This reflects the sincere desire of each organisation named above to put clients first.

In order to make this change some one off costs were incurred, returning a small budget loss for 2016. This expense in turn has provided greater financial stability. We have developed a new operating structure and framed a new SECL strategic map and business plan. Despite reduced program funding we have met or exceeded all of the service standards required by local, state and federal governments.

## *Challenge all that is unfair*

As inequality continues to grow between the richest and poorest Australians, South East Community Links works with others to challenge all that is unfair. Minimum incomes, biased hiring practices, red tape and small print in contracts, the gambling crisis, the pay gap, and declining housing affordability are examples of the policies, regulations and systems that cement inequality in our communities. As we call on others to make systems fairer, we will play our part to ensure our services are effective and accessible. We will evaluate our programs, develop multi disciplinary approaches and change systems and practices where required. We will imagine for each client a good job, life long learning and wellbeing. Our organisation has taken the first hard steps and now looks forward to promoting our story and working with others who share our determination.

## *An innovative Business Development approach*

We recognise the capability within our organisation to identify new funding opportunities and to promote our services to like minded investors. Our Business Development Task force was established in April. In 2016 we applied for \$1.2m in new grants and we were successful in approximately 50% of our applications. As such, our budget in 2017 will include new funding and we look forward to improved outcomes for clients.

## *We highly value all our partners*

Federal, state and local governments are valued partners at South East Community Links. We acknowledge in particular the City of Greater Dandenong. The Community Partnerships Funding program demonstrates our long-standing relationship with council and our shared goal to strengthen local communities. We welcome opportunities to develop our relationships with community partners and seek new ventures to meet ever increasing and diverse needs.

## *Thank you*

In this my first year at South East Community Links, I wish to thank all those responsible for allowing me to join this wonderful team as the inaugural CEO. In particular I thank the chair Ross Hepburn and the board for its inspired leadership. I thank the executive, staff, managers, students and volunteers at South East Community Links for your acceptance of change, your dedication and your collective empathy.

## *Our deeper story*

South East Community Links is a new organisation emerging from a beloved past. Its origins lie in fierce leadership, guiding our society through various periods of social and economic change. It has survived funding and policy twist and turns. It prioritises community service above all other demands. When resources are hard-won an important trust develops between an organisation and its clients. The value may not be reflected on the balance sheet. But we are richer for it.

This is the deeper story at South East Community Links.

## **Dr Rhonda Cumberland**

CEO





## OUR PATRON

### MERLE MITCHELL

We are honored to have widely renowned change maker Merle Mitchell as our Patron at South East Community Links. As a lifelong advocate for fairness, community engagement and diversity, Merle has become a well known advocate in our community and beyond.

Merle was born in Dandenong in 1934 and has lived in the municipality for most of her life. She trained as a kindergarten teacher and settled in the developing Sandown Park area with her husband Eric in 1961.

The limited services for the community prompted Merle to become an active lobbyist. She helped to plan kindergarten facilities across the City of Springvale and to establish the Sandown Park Primary School.

Merle was a steering committee member for the establishment of the Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau (SCAAB). Later she became the first Director, leading the organisation as it developed innovative and responsive services for the growing community. She remained committed to SCAAB for more than 45 years and continues to support SECL following the merge.

Merle also played a vital role in establishing Springvale Neighbourhood House, the Family Mediation Centre and Springvale Monash Legal Service. Never one to shy away from advocating to politicians and policy makers, Merle has shaped state and federal social welfare policies through roles with the Victorian and Australian Social Service Councils. Merle continues her advocacy work in her role on the City of Greater Dandenong Positive Ageing Committee.

In recent years Merle has convened the Spirit of Enterprise Project. With the assistance of hundreds of community people, the History of the Enterprise Migrant Hostel and the role it and the 30,000 migrants and refugees who lived there from 1970 to 1992, and those who came later, had in shaping the city has been documented. The impact of this project led the Department of Immigration to name it a Project of National Significance. It has brought significant recognition to the contributions and strength of migrant and refugee communities who have settled in this area and Australia.

With a determination that grows stronger with years, Merle is a Member of the Order of Australia, City of Greater Dandenong Living Treasure and the proud Patron of SECL.



## IN MEMORIAM

### ERIC MITCHELL

In June this year, the SECL family mourned the loss of Eric Mitchell. Born in Dandenong in 1928, Eric was one of the early change makers in the south east. Eric's life was a remarkably active one. Everywhere he went he seemed to find things that needed to be done and people who needed to be helped.

Eric and Merle moved to Springvale in 1962 when it was still country. But it was a community that was growing fast. As the houses were rapidly built, the diversity of the community also grew. Eric knew all of his neighbours. He was the Chair of the local Good Neighbourhood Committee, set up by the Federal Government to assist newly arrived migrants and refugees to settle into their new communities. The Council understandably was focused on building roads and sewerage systems but the community wanted welfare services and Eric led the push for the appointment of a social worker. Eric was always in constant contact with local councillors to discuss what was happening and what support was needed in the community. He finally became a Springvale councillor and was the City of Springvale's last Mayor, carefully guiding the City through the amalgamation process that led to the creation of the City of Greater Dandenong in 1994.

In his paid work as a teacher, Eric became Principal of Westall Primary in 1980. At the time, 90% of the students were either born overseas or had parents who were born overseas. With 45 different languages spoken, Eric immediately began to change the way the school engaged with its community. Parent/teacher interviews were conducted in first languages, the school was opened up on weekends for community language classes, he established a playgroup for isolated mothers with small children, ran a youth club on Friday nights so young people had somewhere to go, set up cross age tutoring programs with the local secondary school and approached Monash University to research the language development of students to ensure they were teaching non English speaking students in the most effective ways. At the time these were groundbreaking initiatives, well beyond the normal role of a school principal. He was a beloved educator, renowned for his uncanny ability to remember students many years after he taught them and for encouraging people to follow their own paths to do the things they loved to do. Even after his retirement, Eric continued to tutor English and was a longstanding School Councillor and President of Noble Park English Language School.

Eric believed passionately in the capacity of individual people to contribute to planning and development through consultation and ongoing involvement. The spectacular Braeside Park is testament to that belief and living proof of Eric's effective advocacy with Parks Victoria that led to extensive community consultation and the formation of the Friends of Braeside Park group.

It is not possible to name all of Eric's contributions to our community here, but instead to highlight the unique qualities that made Eric a change maker for the ages. He was a thoughtful man who got things done. He was reserved but passionate, advocating skillfully where he was usually shy socially. He had an ability to talk to anyone and genuinely engage with them. He knew what needed to be done to create each and every change, then he worked tirelessly until the change was realised.

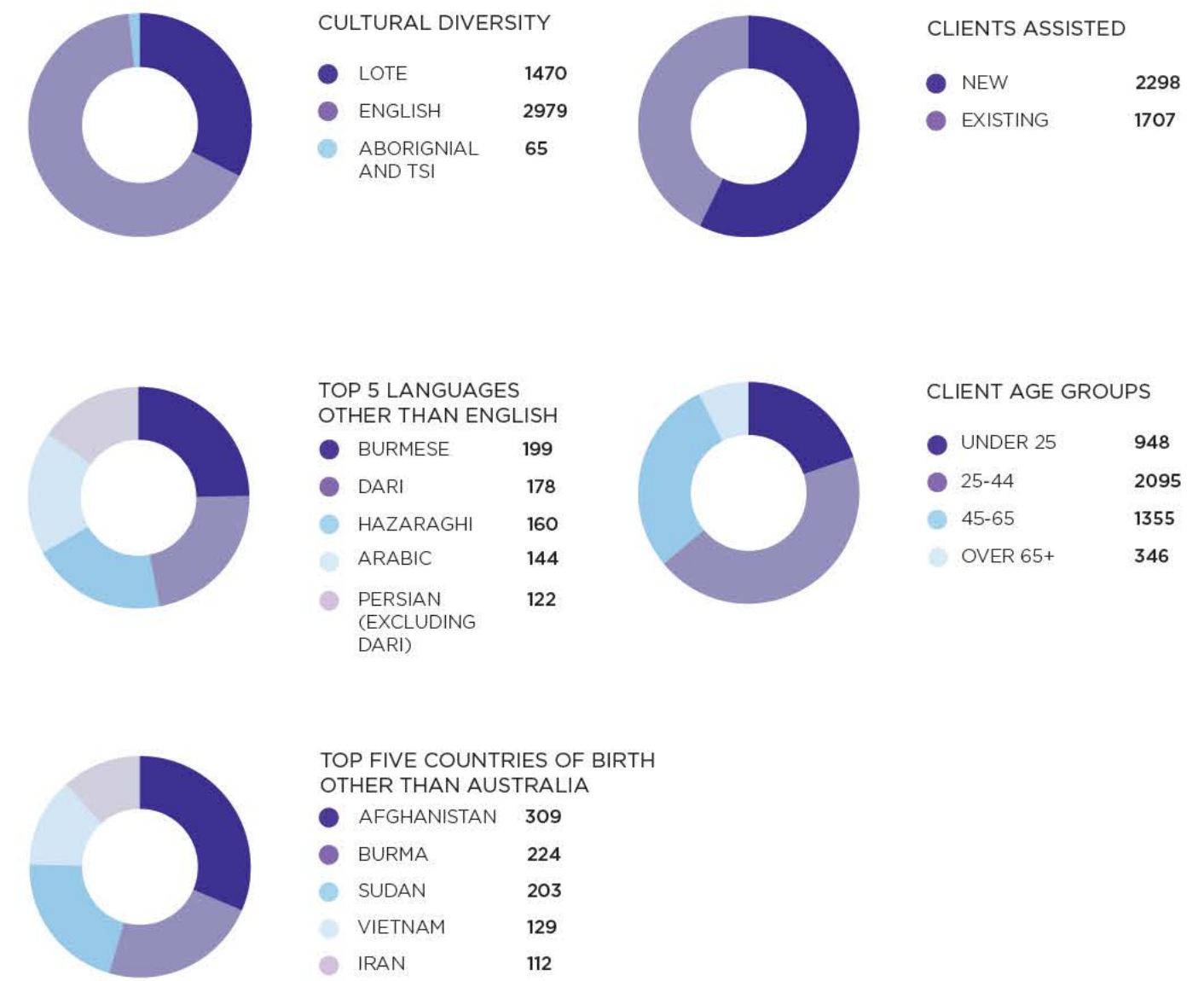
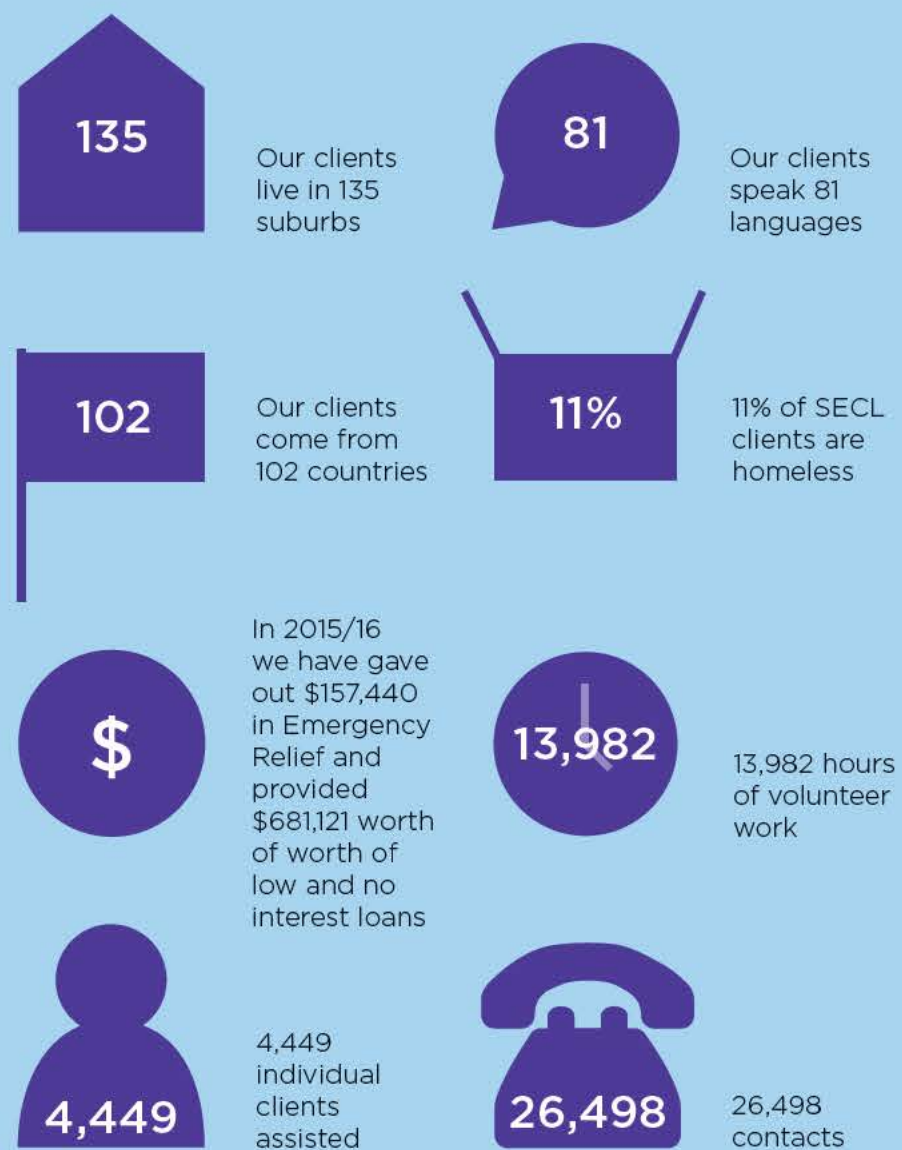
Vale Eric. We thank you for all you did to grow this community and make it a place of opportunity, equality and compassion.





## SERVICE DATA

SECL delivers a wide range of services to meet the needs of people in our community including emergency relief, casework, housing support, youth and family support services, financial counselling, resettlement services for refugees and asylum seekers, financial capability assistance, no interest loans/micro finance and volunteer programs. Below is our key service data for the 2015/16 financial year.







*“One of the most stressful aspects for a woman who escapes domestic violence is the lack of financial resources to start up their life again”*

# LENA

## STEP UP TO A BETTER FUTURE

*South East Community Links provides a wide range of services to our community. We are proud of our skilled, responsive and diverse team of staff, volunteers and students who deliver these services and vital personal support to our clients. We measure our success by the impact of our services for individuals, families and communities. These are some of our change making stories from the 2015/16 financial year.*

Lena came to Australia 5 years ago to marry her Australian boyfriend. She left the marriage due to family violence and was living in emergency accommodation when she applied for a StepUP loan for a car. As she stated: “One of the most stressful aspects for a woman who escapes domestic violence is the lack of financial resources to start up their life again. Therefore, as shocking as this may be, I saw many women returning to their abusive husbands. For me this was not a solution.”

Lena had held a professional position in her home country and was applying for all types of jobs to start her new life after leaving her husband. She realised she would increase her chances if she had a car. She was very organised for her StepUP interview and had an understanding of her financial situation. She was particularly interested in learning about insurance for a car, which the worker explained to her. Her loan was approved. We approached her to share her story at the annual StepUP conference in Melbourne, which she took up. Her presentation was so impressive that Good Shepherd Microfinance flew her to the NILS conference to speak. Through networking at these conferences, someone was able to assist her with a volunteer position close to where she lived using her professional qualifications. She is hoping this will assist her in getting paid employment in the future.



## ALI

### EDUCATING TOMORROW'S LEADERS



Ali, an asylum seeker from Afghanistan, is reaching the end of his first year of study at Monash University after receiving an Asylum Seeker Bursary Scholarship.

Although he was doing extremely well and was a college captain at his secondary school, Ali describes his Year 12 studies as the 'hardest time', because of the uncertainty about his future. When he heard about the Monash scholarships, he says 'It was a kind of miracle for me. I never thought someone would want to help students like us. Thank God I didn't give up like lots of other students who have thought there was no future'. With the support of his school and SECL, Ali applied for the Monash scholarship, which was offered for the first time in 2015. Despite the continuing uncertainty about his legal status, Ali says that when he heard the news about his success 'It was the happiest day of my life because I was going to start a new life'.

Ali is continuing to enjoy and soak up every day of university life: 'All of this is still like a dream to me. A guy who has been in a Detention Centre sitting here with other students who were raised here, were more privileged than me. It's the most amazing thing I've experienced. I never had this in my life, so I am very thirsty for it'.

After achieving promising grades, he is hoping to transfer into a double Law/Arts degree so he can pursue his dream of working in human rights. Ali will find out in December whether he has been accepted into the Law/Arts degree.

## SAYEMA

### FIGHTING FOR FAIRNESS



Sayema and her family came to Australia from Afghanistan as refugees. When her husband's physical abuse escalated she was hospitalised after he stabbed her 10 times. Sayema found herself recovering from her injuries and worrying about money. The hospital social worker had supported Sayema to make a trauma claim against her Mortgage Insurance but her claim was rejected, so she was referred to our Financial Counselling program. Sayema had very limited English language capacity when the insurance was sold to her at the bank, but she felt assured that the cover would protect her and her five children if she were unable to make the repayments. No interpreter was provided. The Product Disclosure Statement was mailed to Sayema in English.

When the bank rejected her claim, Sayema was left with no means of paying her mortgage and was at risk of losing her home. Her husband was in gaol for attacking her and she found herself on limited Centrelink income with no support. With the assistance of her Financial Counsellor, Rachna, and through the use of interpreters, Sayema was able to tell her story. Her determination, and Rachna's advocacy, led to a complaint with the Financial Ombudsman Service. After many months of negotiations all of the premiums Sayema had paid were refunded and the bank made an additional payment as compensation for the lengthy process to recover her funds. This made it possible for Sayema to manage her repayments until she was ready to sell the family home on her own terms.

Sayema has become a confident and passionate consumer advocate within the Financial Counselling sector, presenting at the FCRC Conference in 2016.





*“A leader in her community through her commitment to linking women with opportunities outside their homes”*

## KHA RE MAR

### BREAKING BARRIERS THROUGH FOOD

Kha Re Mar came to Australia from Burma as a refugee. After settling in Springvale, she quickly became a leader in her community through her commitment to linking women with opportunities outside their homes. She became involved in the Refugee Action Program and developed a strong capacity for developing projects to meet the needs of isolated women and build relationships across migrant communities.

In 2015 the City of Greater Dandenong made Social Cohesion grants available, one of which was a program called ‘Engaging Women through Food and Conversation’. Kha Re Mar was successful in obtaining this funding which made her dream project a reality.

The women got together for the first time early 2016. There were women from Vietnam, Ethiopia, Cambodia and Burma. Although some were unable to communicate due to language barriers it was through their common interest of cooking that they were able to learn different cooking methods, share recipes and have a laugh.

This program provided a unique opportunity for women from different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds to get to know one another and break down any barriers. It also created a space for isolated women to meet new people and develop friendships. It gave them purpose where they were responsible for leading and teaching the group how to make their traditional dish and explain what it meant to them. It was such a success that the women have asked for this program to run again in the future.

The program would not have been possible without the initiative and determination of Kha Re Mar who continues to support women in the community.



## KYLIE

### A CHANGE IS AS GOOD AS A HOLIDAY



When Kylie, a case worker at SECL, attended the Money Minded Training as part of her professional development she was focused on finding new ways to work with her clients to make the most of their money. What she hadn't expected was the impact the training would have on her own family.

After attending the training, Kylie went home and pitched an idea to her husband and two children (aged 8 and 11) – a year long effort to block their spending leaks with a goal of using their savings to have a family holiday at the end of the 12 months. They would make small changes for a big gain. They each identified areas where they thought they could reduce money wastage. Each week, Kylie would write their savings down in a book so they could see how they were doing.

12 months down the track, they had saved \$2,500! Kylie and her family recently returned from their first holiday in 7 years. While they were away, Kylie continued to educate her children by showing them how their savings were being spent.

Kylie and her family are looking forward to another year of sensible spending and their next holiday.

## THET

### THE ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE



Thet's family migrated from Thailand and had only been living in Australia for a year when a mutual friend introduced them to South East Community Links (SECL). Thet was studying VCE whilst her younger sisters were still studying at the English Language School. As newly arrived migrants, Thet and her sisters needed support to assist them with a smooth transition into their new homeland. Thet joined SECL's Multicultural Homework Support program in 2015 to get help with Maths, English, Accounting and Legal Studies. She was shy, quiet and yet determined to study hard. Thet's confidence grew as she became further involved in SECL's other youth engagement programs.

Thet was extremely keen to get her licence to help her parents and siblings. Thet joined the L2P program in October 2015. The program provides 120 hours of supervised driving practice thanks to a team of fully licensed volunteer mentors. Thet was matched with two of our wonderful mentors, Noel and David. She formed a strong connection with her mentors and together they have driven to Mornington Peninsula, Phillip Island, the Dandenong Ranges, St. Kilda and all over inner and outer Melbourne. Thet successfully passed her test in June this year and got her probationary licence.

Thet is a confident very intelligent young woman with a bright future ahead. She is an excellent student and works extremely hard. Having a licence has helped Thet and her family as they adjust to life in Australia. Being able to drive the family around has eased some of the resettlement stress for the family and introduced a wide range of new options to their lives.



*“Ha Me’s family were further supported and empowered to build their knowledge of and capacity to navigate the health and disability systems”*

## HA ME

### DIGNITY FOR DISABILITY

Eleven year old Ha Me arrived with his family to Springvale after being born in a refugee camp. From birth, Ha Me has had severe cerebral palsy and epilepsy. Ha Me is unable to communicate, to move unaided and is completely reliant on his family for all care needs. In the refugee camp Ha Me never had access to disability aids, supports or therapeutic intervention and was carried around by his father when he needed to attend appointments.

On arrival there were a number of barriers to Ha Me and his family receiving the urgent health and disability support required, including; funding, long wait lists, lack of formal diagnosis, lack of supporting medical documentation, the family’s limited knowledge of the support available, transport to appointments, just to name a few. These barriers were greatly concerning due to the lack of equity and dignity the he and his family were facing without such essential support.

When he was referred to the Complex Case Support program, his case manager felt an immediate sense of determination to ensure that Ha Me accessed support as quickly as possible. Through much time, advocacy and creativity, the case manager and Ha Me’s equally determined sister, Ra Me Ya, supported him to access much needed disability aids, funding, sustainable transport, appropriate health care and long term disability care and support through one of Australia’s best specialist schools for cerebral palsy, within a very short period of time. Ha Me’s family were further supported and empowered to build their knowledge of and capacity to navigate the health and disability systems and are now managing appointments and accessing services independently.

Ha Me is now greatly enjoying school, particularly swimming, and is being supported to build his health, skills and capacity. With the right supports in place Ra Me Ya, Ha Me’s main carer, has been able to attend English language classes and to access further education which she hopes will lead to employment in the near future.



## VOICES WITHOUT WORDS CAMPAIGN



At the end of November 2015 the Federal Government ceased funded access to Translation Interpreter Service (TIS) for the Department of Social Services funded Financial Capability and Wellbeing Program with only a month's notice to affected community organisations. SECL is located in one of the most culturally diverse communities in Australia and is the largest user of TIS in Victoria, assisting 6 clients every day through interpreter use. So much is linked to an individual's right to self determination. Because we are talking about money, whether it is accessing crisis support in the form of emergency relief or food, or the sometimes serious consequences of not being able to pay bills or debts it's not easy to ask for support. Language barriers and being less familiar with Australian service systems add additional layers of complexity. Treating people with dignity and respect is at the core of our values and accurate provision of information is vital. Our experience is that many clients presenting for support are also impacted by significant social problems; family violence and mental health issues co presenting alongside language barriers and financial difficulties are commonplace. For these, and many other obvious reasons it is not appropriate for interpreting to be facilitated by a relative, friend or community member. Messages can easily be lost in translation, lead to loss of privacy, or trigger or exacerbate family conflict.

In partnership with Financial and Consumer Rights Council and Community Information and Support Victoria, the 'Voices Without Words' campaign included postcards for community members to send to the Minister, and the flagship event of the campaign, a community forum was held on Thursday 11 March 2016 to bring together all levels of Government, community organisations and affected communities to shine a light on the need for interpreter services. Just one strategy of the advocacy campaign, the event was well attended with around 50 present provided with insights into some of the communication issues experienced every day by people with little or no English. We continue to advocate for these services to be reinstated.

## BAQIR

### DETERMINED TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE



After SECL hosted last years Williamson Community Leadership Victoria participants, our case worker Garrett Teters and board member Hang Vo arranged a dinner for 20 community members interested in hearing from asylum seekers and refugees to more fully understand their journey.

At the dinner Nicole Batagloli, the partner of a Williamson participant, had the opportunity of meeting Baqir - an asylum seeker client from Youth Links. Baqir expressed his desire to establish a career in the medical profession. His dream since childhood has been to become a doctor in order to make a difference in the community.

Baqir had recently successfully completed VCE with top marks and an award for the Most Committed VCE Student. Unfortunately his asylum seeker status made further study financially impossible for Baqir who would have to pay the full \$27,000 course fees for his 18 month Enrolled Nursing course. Nicole was instantly struck by the unfairness of Baqir's situation.

What followed was months of Nicole's tireless work to raise funds to enable Baqir to study, culminating in the establishment of the Sang Pool Asylum Seeker Scholarship.

As the first Scholarship recipient, Baqir is currently studying at Holmesglen and firmly on the path to fulfilling his dream.

Donations can be made by contacting SECL on 03 9546 0255 or [www.secl.org.au](http://www.secl.org.au)



*“Mehtab has become a very valued member of the Youth Leadership Group”*

## MEHTAB

### REWRITING HER FUTURE

Mehtab was referred to Youth Links by the Student Wellbeing Team Leader at her school when she sought support to manage a range of issues in her life including domestic violence, mental health issues (depression, anger management, stress and anxiety, trauma), family relationships breakdown, financial struggles and social isolation. Her situation was made even more difficult because of her limited English language capacity and the high risk of homelessness if she escaped the family home. Mehtab was quickly referred to the Intensive Case Management program to support her with housing and accessing Centrelink payments, enabling her to seek safety away from her family.

Mehtab was able to move into Transitional Housing with the ongoing support of her case worker, Marlena. With stable housing and through their work together, Mehtab has been able to connect with our Homework Club to support her studies. As her mental health has improved, and with her confidence slowly returning, Mehtab has become a very valued member of the Youth Leadership Group. She was recently selected for a Ski Camp for young community leaders, opening the door to a wide range of opportunities to grow and develop her sense of belonging amongst her peers.

Mehtab is a writer. She won the 2015 Writing Competition at her secondary school. She continues to share her own story through poetry and verse.



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Moe Oo  
Mohamed Mohamed

Prema Kodikarage  
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Terry Vincent  
Viraj Vandabona  
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Gunyie Li  
Kah Leen Low  
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Margaret Traill  
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Sithy Marikar  
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Danielle Kastl  
Sri Samy  
Carol Drummond  
Glen Ravenscroft

Sarah Lannin  
Swathi  
Shanmukhasundaram  
Janine Johnson  
Fareeah Saifullah  
Abby Summers  
Jacques Tomson  
Nagu Kulkarni  
Anoja Dharmapala  
Zubair Murtaza  
John Simkin  
Jessica Miles  
Beverley (Bev)  
Deworsop  
Rosy Wolten  
Erica Moulang  
Victoria Prince  
Sarah Berchy  
Alexis Phang  
Franca Bywater  
Karen Au

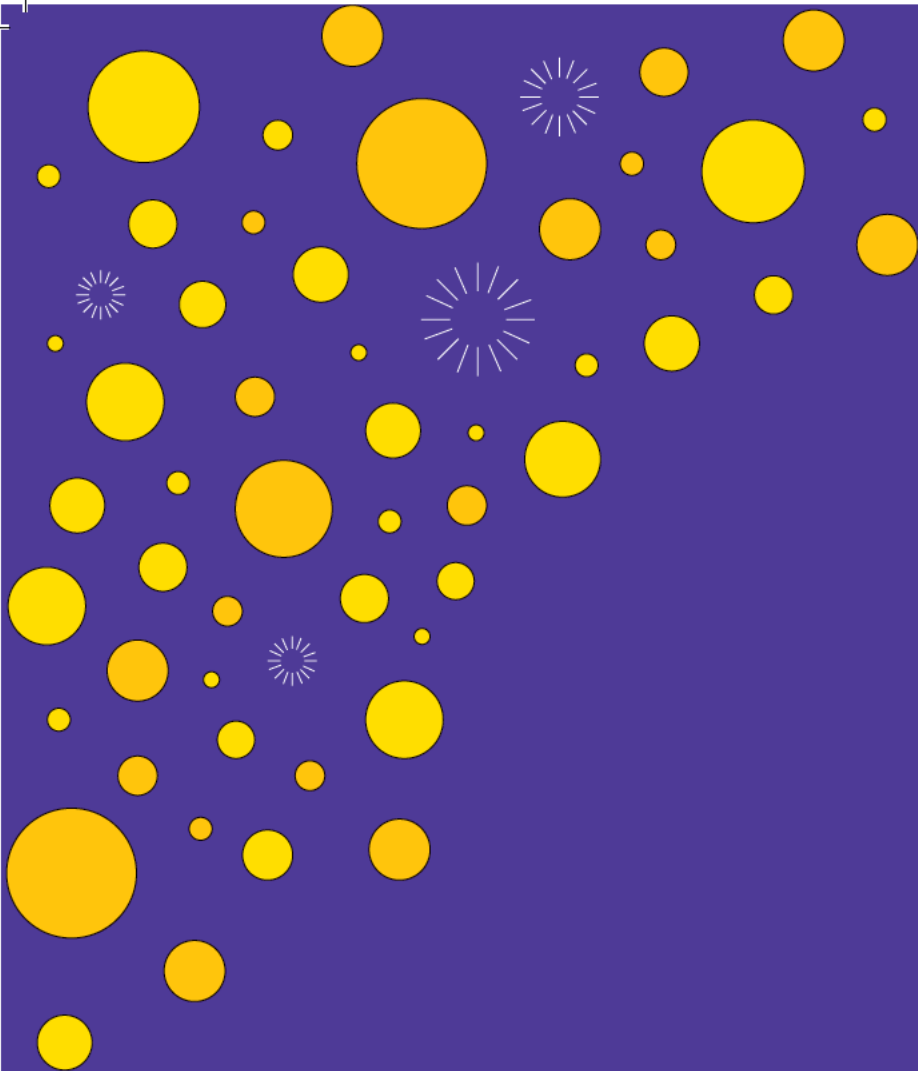
### STUDENTS

Raz Balian  
Ngoc Lan Ly  
Theresa Onuoh  
Lauren Hall  
Steve Hatton  
Shawnayle  
Abeydeera  
Sahar Khan  
Mobaraka  
Hussaini  
Sarah Ruch  
Rob Needham  
Atiq Abed  
Shannan White  
Mary Ispoglou  
Michelle Paterson  
Suhaina Suhaina  
Binte  
Dongfang Xu  
My Ngoc Tran  
Nasima Adiqi  
Sazae Shilpakar  
David Pereira  
Champa Ludwick  
Varun (Nick) Patel.  
Christel Ponce  
Quyen Ly  
Lina Maghsoudi  
Fiona Hallworth  
Talitha Daley  
Lauren Crawford

Sidonia Jaden  
Amelia-Jane  
Hassall  
Katelyn Eddy  
My Ngoc Tran  
Di John  
Donna Ryall  
Atiq Abed  
Robert Needham  
Jane Nga Huynh'  
Natalie Campbell  
Muinat Omotesho  
(MJay)  
Shawnayle  
Abeydeera  
Tania Louise Smith  
Daniel Hussaini  
Rachael Brown  
Moe Oo  
Martina Macek  
Diane Mary John  
Donna Ryall  
Theresa Onuoh  
Rebekah Zhang  
Airan (Tiara) Tang  
Amy Cullinan  
Sarah Berchy  
Hayatullah Rahimi  
Annabelle Beckert-Berger  
Despina Fillippaki  
Brittany Cunningham  
Rachel McNish  
Deborah Hart  
Redwan Rahman  
Patricia Omeregie







[WWW.SECL.ORG.AU](http://WWW.SECL.ORG.AU)

South East Community Links (SECL) was formed after the amalgamation of Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau, Dandenong Community Advisory Bureau, and the Southern Ethnic Advisory and Advocacy Council. The founding principles of each organisation live on, guiding the strategic direction and purpose of South East Community Links.

The merger, completed in December 2015, ensures strong governance and leadership, creating the necessary organisational environment to implement new ideas and to sustain our services into the future.

We appreciate the trust placed in us to achieve social and economic outcomes with our clients. We stand as an independent organisation ensuring inclusion is at the heart of our work.

We will report annually on our progress over the next three years, 2016-2019. We aim to work with our community, believing every person counts. When every system is fair our work will be done.

**5 Osborne Avenue  
Springvale**

03 9546 5255

**Youth Links**

49 Douglas St  
Noble Park

03 9547 0511

**186 Foster Street  
East Dandenong**

03 9791 8344