

Community Fund grant helps migrants transition into Melbourne's South West community

Refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, ineligible for government subsidised training, who have migrated to South-West Melbourne will soon have access to formal English language classes, helping to ease their transition into the community.

The Williamstown Community and Education Centre received a \$10,000 Slater and Gordon Community Fund Grant which will fund the 'Welcome to Australia' program, providing free stand alone classes and free entry to existing classes for migrants at both Joan Kirner House in Williamstown and Spotswood Community House.

CEO Dr Mark Brophy said the program, starting in July, will provide qualified and experienced teachers in a supportive and engaging environment.

"The Williamstown Community and Education Centre currently facilitates English language program for local residents however many refugees, asylum seekers and migrants are not eligible for the program and cannot afford to pay full fees," Dr Brophy said.

"With the Slater and Gordon Community Fund grant we will be able to facilitate the *Welcome to Australia* program, offering free and professional English lessons within a supportive classroom environment. We expect to start with over 20 participants, and within the 12 months help dozens more.

"Not only will students develop their language skills, they will also have the opportunity to network and engage with likeminded members of the community to help ease their transition into South-West Melbourne.

"We are hopeful that by delivering quality adult education programs we can provide continual support to these people and their families while also reflecting the interests and needs of all sectors of the community.

"Our experience with similar programs has demonstrated that taking these people out of an isolated environment into an informal Community Centre environment can have immediate and profound results. Passing Citizenship tests, getting their Drivers Licence, finding part time work, joining community groups, as well as developing friendships, finding out about resources, Australian culture and generally integrating and contributing to our community."

Migrants, or anyone who knows someone who would benefit from the program can contact the Centre directly on 9397 6168 or admin@wcec.com.au

Melbourne based Principal Lawyer Andrew Baker congratulated the Williamstown Community and Education Centre on their efforts to reduce isolation within South-West Melbourne.

"The Slater and Gordon Community Fund program was created to support community projects, particularly those that promote social inclusion," Mr Baker said.

"The program will give families the skills they need to seek employment or further study and to integrate into their new community.

"We are committed to limiting the barriers for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and I congratulate Williamstown Community and Education Centre for developing such a beneficial initiative."

To enquire about the application process and eligibility criteria for the next grants funding round, phone Suzy Mallett on (03) 9602 6832 or email smallett@slatergordon.com.au.