



MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Refugee Week 2008: A Time to Understand

Refugee Week Australia (15 – 21 June) this year celebrates UNHCR World Refugee Day on 20 June, which this year is globally promoting the theme of 'refugee protection', whether shelter, fair treatment, or the right to seek asylum. The UNHCR theme corresponds with our own national theme of 'A place to call home', which defends the right of all to safe, secure and stable living conditions.

We are faced with ever increasing "doom" messages from around the world, and many of us become overwhelmed with a sense of hopelessness and helplessness – who do we help? How do we help them?

We need to see that refugees are like us – just from another place and with a different set of fears, anxieties and hopes.

There has been much misinformation over the past few years about "refugees" and "asylum seekers".

The Geneva convention on the Status of Refugees (to which Australia is a signatory) says it simply: **Every year millions of people face persecution for traits they cannot control or exercising their religious or political beliefs. When governments fail to protect these rights, people have the right to move to a country that will protect them. This is the right to asylum. People who seek to exercise this right are called 'asylum seekers' or, in some cases, 'refugees'.**

One way to do this is to smile at our new neighbours, see them as people (not as a group), and welcome them to Australia in a real spirit of friendship.

Women's Health in the South East works with newly arrived communities, and has activities and information available as part of Refugee Week 2008, and on a regular basis. We welcome volunteers from all backgrounds, to work with us in helping our new families settle in well.

For further information, or to volunteer, please contact Tricia Mahon at WHISE on (03) 9794 8677, or by email ceo@whise.org.au

WHISE: Strength in Dignity, Choice, Diversity and Justice

Women's Health in the South East is a not for profit, community based women's health service, working with individual women, communities and services in the south-eastern metropolitan region of Melbourne. We encourage women to take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing, and work to overcome disadvantage, inequality and lack of access to services. Our services include: health promotion and information; assistance and referral; service provider education; self help support groups; secondary school programs; programs for newly arrived women and families; policy analysis and advocacy.

Our services are free and accessible to all women in our region via our phone: (03) 9794 8677.

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