

22 June 2018

Celebrating refugees in south western Sydney

The unique contribution refugees make to Australian society has been celebrated at South Western Sydney Local Health District's Refugee Week event.

Representatives from refugee health services, community organisations and South Western Sydney Local Health District heard from speakers, including former refugees, at the Liverpool Hospital event on 19 June.

The District settles more refugees than any other LHD – in 2016, 71 per cent of refugees who came to NSW settled within the District's boundaries – and the majority of these people move to the Fairfield and Liverpool Local Government Areas.

In 2016, 89 per cent of these new residents were humanitarian refugees from Iraq or Syria.

NSW Refugee Health Service Director Dr Mitchell Smith said the event highlighted the unique health needs of refugees as well as the positives they bring to Australian society.

"Some of our refugees have managed to overcome the persecution they may have suffered in their country of origin and the hardships they faced while fleeing, but others have found the journey far more difficult," he said.

"Some have lost family members in war or civil unrest, faced harassment and torture and suffered from poor medical care before arriving in Australia.

"The District has a very important role in caring for refugees through a variety of mainstream and specialised services including hospital services, community and allied health, dental and interpreting services. It also hosts the NSW Refugee Health Service."

Resident Medical Officer and former refugee Sarah Afram spoke at the NSW Refugee Week event about her own experiences.

Ms Afram arrived in Australia in May 2016 after fleeing religious persecution in Iraq at the hands of ISIS.

Since arriving in Australia the young doctor has retaken some of her medical exams so she can continue her career in her new country.

"I'm really excited to start my new job – when I left Iraq four years ago I had been offered a job, but I had to leave," she said.

"Now I'm getting down to doing what I should have been doing four years ago."

Ms Afram said she, like many refugees, was focused on securing a job, regaining a normal life and giving back to Australia in return for the support she had received.

“Sometimes it takes a little while for people to engage with their new culture and community, but we all have the potential to be good members of our community and we all want to pay back the Australian community for what they have given us,” she said.

“It is hard starting in a new country; sometimes we need support in the beginning so we can reach our whole potential.”

In the 2018/19 budget the NSW Government announced it would invest \$7 million in specialised refugee health services.