

PHILANTHROPY BENEFITS REFUGEE SERVICES



Celebrating a birthday at Foundation House
Photo: Ian McKenzie & Associates

For the past three years, the ANZ Trustees' Strategic Impact Program has funded Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture to develop significant infrastructure and undertake innovations otherwise out of reach.

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (Foundation House) was established in 1987 to meet the needs of people in Victoria who were tortured or traumatised in their countries of origin, or while fleeing those countries.

Paris Aristotle, Director of the Foundation, says the scale and nature of the trauma experienced by refugees sits well outside the realm of most Australian's experience. The opportunity for them to receive expert and specialised support on arrival in Australia is crucial to their ability to recover and build new lives for themselves and their families

Since inception, the Foundation has built its programs, profile and credibility. While its core funding is now provided by government, Foundation House still relies on other funding from various councils, donors and philanthropic trusts.

"One of the major challenges the not-for-profit sector faces is developing a sustained funding base that enables growth, long term planning, service delivery and innovation," says Paris.

He believes that government plays an important role in funding not for profit services and building systemic responses across mainstream services. The philanthropic sector is crucial as a catalyst for innovation in service provision allowing providers like Foundation House to research and develop programs that can be used as a basis for constructive changes to government policy and programs.

ANZ Trustees, through its Strategic Impact Program, has made a considerable investment in the Foundation's infrastructure for three consecutive years.

"This support enabled us to create the capacity for service innovation by strengthening our infrastructure and resourcing our project implementation. It has been pivotal in enabling us to develop and pilot new initiatives and in providing the leverage for us to attract other funding into the agency and the field as a whole."

"The confidence this provided in our ability to plan has resulted in several new initiatives in school based work, community development with newly arrived African refugees and the formulation of strategic health policy advice. The net effect of this has been the generation of significant changes in service provision and policy and in the level of government support for refugee services" said Paris.

The strategic grants from ANZ Trustees allowed the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture to partner the Victorian State Government in developing a Refugee Health Strategy. The Strategy is currently helping to meet the welfare and health needs of refugees by delivering improved health services and building private health care systems through community health centres. Now - whether they go to Foundation House, the local community health centre, the local dentist or the school nurse – refugees can be more confident they will receive the help that they need.

Paris is adamant that the philanthropic support from ANZ Trustees has played a significant role in helping the Foundation bring about systemic and social change.

"We have been able to yield substantially more than what they gave us as a result of the fact that they gave it to us to use in such a strategic way," he concluded.

If you doubt the difference that Foundation House is making, you just have to talk to the people who have entered the country through the humanitarian program and benefited from the programs and activities taking place.

An Afghani refugee comments: "I always remember my father's hope and vision... I recall him saying 'do not lose hope'... my real breakthrough came when I met the people at Foundation House. I felt welcomed, cared for, believed and acknowledged. These attitudes were fundamental in reigniting my hope."

Other Foundation House programs and activities resulting from ANZ Trustees' Strategic Impact grant:

1. School Based Project: Helping schools develop their capacity to support refugee children. The aim is to ensure that there are support mechanisms which are integrated into the schools' policies and practices.
2. Refugee Mental Health Project: In partnership with the Victorian Transcultural Psychiatry Unit, Foundation House established a Refugee Mental Health Clinic at its Brunswick and Dandenong sites, and a network of private mental health practitioners. This project helps address barriers to mental health care experienced by refugees, including long waiting periods and lack of access to physicians with cross-cultural experience. After just one year, the clinic had helped 69 people. The success of the project has resulted in recurrent funding from the Victorian government.
3. Community Development Project: This is a pilot project with South Sudanese refugees, working on developing community strategies to address issues including education, trauma and parenting. The Foundation aims to help the community implement strategies they themselves have designed.
4. The establishment of a Training Unit: to provide accredited training to key stakeholders in the refugee service sector.

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