



MEDIA RELEASE

Catering For Refugees In The Garden: Garden Lunch Program Launch

For Release Wednesday 4th March

Sunraysia Community Health Service has identified need within the refugee community in Mildura to help build capacity and assist with people from a refugee background to settle into life in Australia. The Refugee Health Team at SCHS is currently focusing on looking at the strategies to specifically support young adult male refugees in the Mildura community.

Sam DeLuca, SCHS Torture and Trauma Counsellor has established a weekly community gardening group at the Mildura Eco Village. "Anyone that is a refugee or asylum seeker is welcome to attend the garden. The purpose of the garden is to provide refugee's and asylum seekers a place to be able to come together and talk about their experiences both before and since arriving in Australia," says Mr DeLuca.

Many refugees in Mildura are currently on bridging visas which limit their access to English language classes, and prevent them from working. "The community garden is a place where we hope that people will find many purposes: learning new skills in growing and cooking fresh vegetables; having an opportunity to speak English; being able to connect with others who are new to this community; and sharing some of their own cultures particularly with recipes and foods from their country of origin." says Mr DeLuca.

"For some it is not so much the passion for cooking and gardening but more of a necessity to learn how to grow, prepare and cook healthy food. These may be newly required or desired skills due to various life changes", says Occupational Therapist at SCHS Laura Wallis. "The community garden and Garden Lunch program is enabling refugees to engage in meaningful activities." The level of interest and need for the community kitchen garden was measured at an established refugee exercise program that is run every Monday by SCHS Physiotherapist and Allied Health Assistant at Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council. "While undertaking exercise we were able to ask some of the refugees what they thought of gardening and cooking and if it would be something they would be interested in," said Ms Wallis.

The recent installation of a retrofitted eco house at the Eco Village has been timed to perfection for the pairing of the cooking program and the community garden. The cooking program uses seasonal produce grown in the garden plus low cost everyday pantry items to create healthy, nutritious snacks and meals. Every week an SCHS facilitator will assist the refugees to prepare a different meal. The recipes are designed to coincide with the produce projected to be available that month.

"Using seasonal produce in cooking is an important skill to be learnt. This can help with shopping on a low budget, providing a nutritious meal for the individual or family, and maintain environmental



sustainability," said Danika Carty, a Dietitian at SCHS. "There are no other programs in Mildura that offer the same learning opportunity and experience."

Language barriers have presented challenges in the past when working with the refugee community. Interpreters are generally only available via the telephone, which makes gardening and cooking activities somewhat restrictive. Refugees in Mildura speak many languages including Farsi, Dhari and Tamil, so rather than focusing on an interpreter for each language group, SCHS have been able to partner with Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council (SMECC) and employ a Bilingual Community Guide. "Having a bilingual community guide from SMECC working with us has been really insightful," says Dietitian student Fiona Wilkie. "Abdul has been a great source of cultural knowledge and someone to bounce ideas off while I was selecting recipes to use in the kitchen lunch program." All recipes are vegetarian and halal in order to suit as many participants as possible. "Having a bilingual guide really helps to break through the communication barriers like language and culture. The program couldn't be as effective without our guide."

A selection of the recipes will be offered at the official program launch on Wednesday 11th of March. Representatives from local community health agencies will be invited to attend the event which will give a behind the scenes experience of the community garden lunch program.

The community garden is situated at the Mildura Eco Village and is open to the public. The refugee community garden group meet weekly every Wednesday 1pm-4pm to look after the garden and participate in a cooking activity.

END

Media enquiries to:

Photo Opportunities Are Available On The Day (Wednesday 11.3.15 Between 12.30 And 2pm) Or Prior To The Event Upon Request.

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