



**Foundation  
House**

The Victorian Foundation  
for Survivors of Torture Inc.



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# ABOUT US

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc. (also known as Foundation House) provides services to advance the health, wellbeing and human rights of people of refugee backgrounds in Victoria who have experienced torture or other traumatic events in their country of origin or while fleeing those countries.

The organisation was established in Melbourne in 1987 and is non-denominational, politically neutral and non-aligned. It is constituted as a not-for-profit organisation managed by an elected Board of Management. Our work is funded by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments, charitable organisations and donations from private individuals.



### The main areas of our work are:

- › Providing services to clients in the form of counselling, advocacy, family support, group work, psycho-education, information and complementary therapies
- › Working with client communities to improve their capacity to access the services they need and to enable them to support recovery
- › Offering professional and organisational development, consultancy and resources to assist health, education, employment and other community service providers, to enhance the responsiveness of their services to the needs of people of refugee backgrounds
- › Working with the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments to ensure that policies and programs have proper regard to the needs of people of refugee backgrounds
- › Conducting and contributing to research regarding the needs of people of refugee backgrounds and the best possible ways of meeting those needs

Working throughout Victoria, Foundation House is a state-wide agency offering services in metropolitan, regional and rural areas. We have approximately 200 staff across our three offices in Brunswick, Sunshine and Dandenong, with an outpost in Ringwood. We also provide services in partnership with other agencies in Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Mildura, Shepparton, Swan Hill and the Latrobe Valley.

Foundation House is a member of the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma. FASSTT is a network of Australia's eight specialist rehabilitation agencies that work to reduce the impact of torture and trauma on individuals, families and communities.

“We started in 1987 with one small house and a pile of dreams. There was an incredible and sometimes naïve belief in what we were going to accomplish. We made a decision about our service model that kept the clients at the core. The rest followed and we have never shifted from that path”

Paris Aristotle AM, Foundation House CEO

# DELIVERING SERVICES TO SURVIVORS OF TORTURE AND OTHER TRAUMATIC EVENTS

Foundation House provides direct services to clients in the form of counselling, client advocacy, family support, group work, psycho-education, information and complementary therapies.



## OUR CLIENTS

Among our first clients, in 1987, was a woman from Latin America whose home had been raided by the military. They were looking for her son who was involved in the trade union movement. They shot her husband and knocked her unconscious. When she regained consciousness she reached for her daughter who was slumped against the fridge. The girl slid into her arms and the mother realised she had also been killed.

Since then we have worked with thousands of men, women and children who have survived similarly harrowing events in their countries of origin. People who have been detained and imprisoned, often without charge or trial, and subjected to horrific physical and mental abuse - severe beatings, electric shock, suffocation, rape and other forms of sexual abuse, prolonged solitary confinement and sleep or sensory deprivation. Their flight in search of safety is often hazardous. They commonly flee during periods of violent conflict, are exposed to bombing and shelling, have witnessed the death or injury of family members and friends; and travel on foot or by whatever other means are available without adequate supplies of food, water and shelter. Having been forcibly displaced and enduring dangerous journeys, many of our clients spend lengthy periods in camps or urban areas without legal rights to reside or work, and without adequate access to the means to ensure they can meet their basic needs.

Each year Foundation House delivers services to approximately 4,000 survivors of torture and other traumatic experiences who come from more than 60 countries of origin.

The impact of torture and other traumatic events can manifest in many ways including severe emotional distress, sleep disorders; recurring and intrusive memories; difficulty concentrating; sadness; fear; anger; guilt; and breakdown in family and personal relationships.



Settlement in Australia can be a stressful process, because of the persistence of difficulties associated with experiences in countries of origin, dangerous flight and precarious transit. People of refugee backgrounds may also;

- › have limited proficiency in English
- › have occupational skills which may not match work available in Australia
- › have qualifications which are not recognised
- › have limited and/or disrupted formal education.

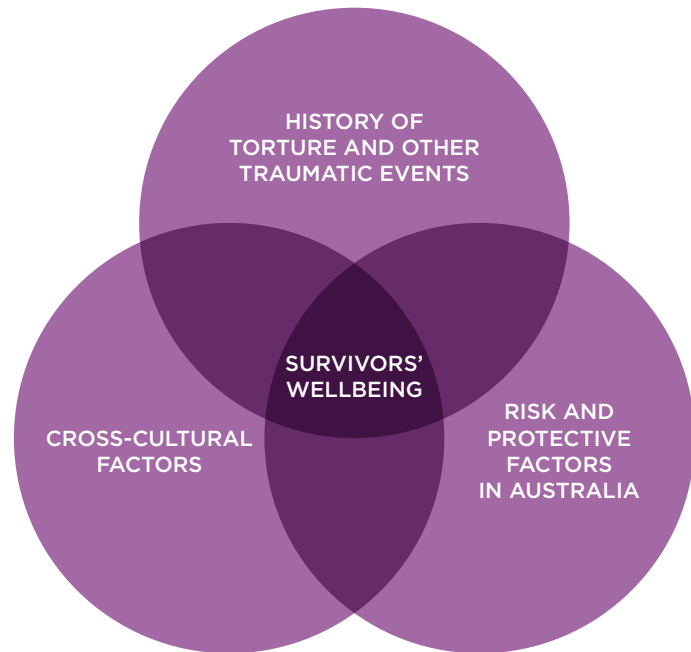
The wellbeing of children and adolescents can be significantly affected both by their experiences of traumatic events and because their parents' capacity to support and nurture them may be negatively affected. Many children are orphaned or were separated from their parents or carers for long periods of time.

“I had come from a country with a different language, people and culture. Terrible things happened to me there because I supported human rights. It is hard to talk about what they did to me. When I came to Australia I was so frightened...of everyone.”

Foundation House client

## OUR SERVICE MODEL

Working with our clients towards recovery requires a framework of understanding which brings together awareness of historical, political and social influences, both past and present, which affect lives on a daily basis. Our conceptual framework for trauma recovery is based on an understanding that survivors' well-being is affected by a complex interplay of their history of torture and other traumatic events, the risk and protective factors they encounter in Australia and cross-cultural factors at play in a new settlement environment. It is underpinned by four recovery goals which result from an analysis of the impact of torture and other traumatic events.



## RECOVERY GOALS

Safety and control  
Connections and belonging  
Meaning, identity and justice  
Dignity and value



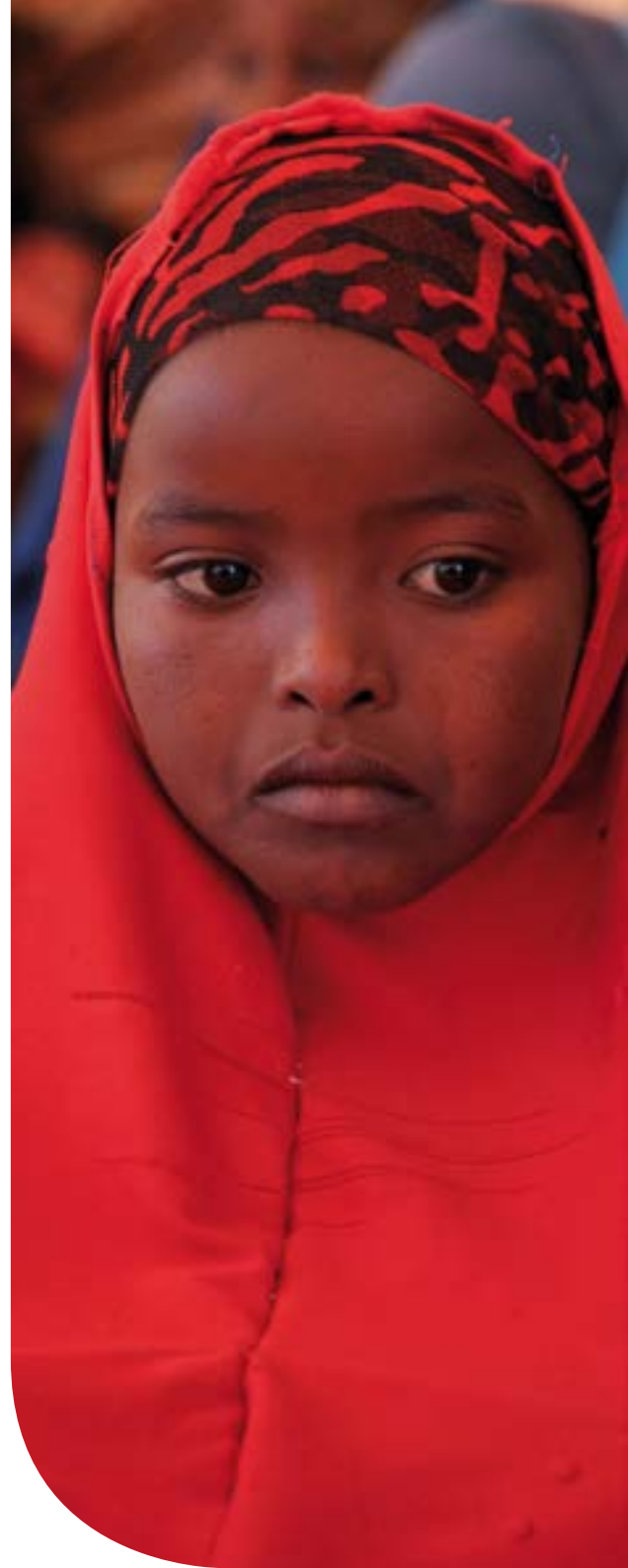
## GOALS FOR RECOVERY

- › To restore safety, enhance control and reduce the disabling effects of fear and anxiety
- › To restore attachment and connections to other human beings, and a sense of belonging
- › To restore meaning, identity and justice
- › To restore dignity and value, and reduce shame and guilt.

This framework guides the role we play in working with clients and ensures our multi-disciplinary staff offer appropriate interventions. Foundation House client services are directed at achieving and promoting recovery through a range of interventions including:

- › Individual and family counselling
- › Client advocacy
- › Complementary therapies
- › Specialist Mental Health Clinic
- › Group programs
- › Psycho-education
- › Comprehensive assessments of psychological and social functioning and history of experiences of traumatic events
- › Referral and facilitated access to mainstream and refugee specific services
- › Co-joint assessment and interventions with community liaison workers who comprise the Capacity Building Team.

Interventions focus on individuals, families, groups and communities.



## CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND FAMILIES

Foundation House has a family-centred approach to working with children. Counsellors whose area of expertise is working with children, adolescents and families impacted by refugee trauma, are located within direct service teams. With an early intervention approach, services are provided within school settings in order to maximise access and inclusion. Foundation House teams work with students, their families, teachers and school systems in a whole of school approach which brings together specialised counselling and advocacy support, with systemic work, in partnership with schools and educators. Commencing in 2014 the program currently operates in four primary and two secondary schools across Melbourne. Targeted funding for our work in this area has been made possible through the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services.

## COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES

The complementary therapies program provides Foundation House clients with access to a range of natural therapies such as:

- Naturopathy
- Herbal medicine
- Nutritional therapy
- Massage therapy and bodywork  
- remedial, therapeutic
- Yoga
- Physiotherapy and shiatsu therapy.

Complementary therapies practitioners work in collaboration with counsellors and the Mental Health Clinic.





# IMPROVING THE CAPACITY OF SERVICE SYSTEMS AND COMMUNITIES



## SECTOR DEVELOPMENT & PARTNERSHIPS

Refugee-background communities and service sectors, such as health, education and social services, play a crucial role in influencing whether the multiple and complex needs of people of refugee backgrounds receive appropriate responses. The Foundation House approach to improving the capability of service systems is multi-faceted and includes:

- › Establishing dialogue between refugee-background communities and service providers
- › Building networks and partnerships with other services to support service and broader sector development
- › Conducting professional and organisational development
- › Developing and piloting innovative programs and building on strategic investments
- › Research and policy advocacy

## BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY

The Foundation House approach to building community capacity recognises the trauma of refugee-background communities and promotes protective factors in health, education, employment and family life. Our approach recognises that individuals can begin to recover from pre-arrival trauma when the communities they are part of, and the service systems they interact with, are inclusive, safe, responsive and provide meaningful connections. In this context, the term community capacity building is used when Foundation House:

- › Establishes structures and processes which identify a community's strengths and concerns
- › Provides information from a trauma-informed perspective which addresses community concerns
- › Empowers a community to set and advance their own goals
- › Encourages communities to take control over their health, education, employment and family life

Our strategies for building community capacity include:

- › community advisory groups
- › psycho-education groups
- › testimonials
- › community engagement and networking
- › community advice and consultation
- › partnerships
- › therapeutic group work



## EARLY YEARS

The importance of early years programs to a child's positive development has been recognised globally and in Australia. Access to maternal and child health services, kindergartens and other programs such as playgroups all play a role in a good start to a child's life, and also enhance family participation in their community.

In 2011, Foundation House undertook work with early years services in the City of Brimbank and the Chin community which highlighted the significant barriers that newly-arrived families face in accessing such services. The goal of the subsequent Foundation House Early Years program is to explore the barriers and facilitators to inclusion, and to develop strategies to promote full inclusion of families.

### **The Early Years program of work includes:**

- › provision of resources, professional learning opportunities and consultancy
- › place-based collaborative projects to establish meaningful dialogue between community members and Early Years sector representatives
- › collaborative projects with local and state-wide Early Years providers.

## SCHOOL SUPPORT PROGRAM

The School Support program works with primary and secondary schools in metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria to better support refugee-background children, families and communities. There are two program components - the Refugee Education Support Program (RESP) and broader school development work. RESP is a partnership, between the Department of Education and Training, the Centre for Multicultural Youth and Foundation House, and is delivered in collaboration with the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and Independent Schools Victoria. It is funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Training.

RESP is a program working with clusters of schools in areas of significant refugee settlement to improve responsiveness to refugee-background students and their families using a whole of school approach. This includes participation in professional learning, completion of an audit of school activity and development of an action plan, based on our key resource 'Schools in for Refugees'. Since it was first developed in 2007, nearly 200 schools have participated in this program. RESP is jointly delivered with the Centre for Multicultural Youth, who focus on out-of-school-hours learning support.

Foundation House also offers professional learning and consultancy in other designated areas of significant settlement informed by the RESP model. Each year over 50 sessions of professional learning are provided to schools, with up to 2,500 participants. There is also a program of work focussing on RESP alumni schools, who are able to further develop and share their expertise regionally and across the State. This has included a focus on parent engagement, including the production of *'Schools and families in partnership: A desktop guide to engaging families from refugee backgrounds in their children's learning'*.





Aiming to facilitate and support social inclusion, Ucan2 is an education and settlement program for young people aged 16-25 with a refugee background. Ucan2 was initially developed by Foundation House in partnership with the Centre for Multicultural Youth and AMES Australia.

The program is multi-faceted, offering work skills, psycho-social support and social connections to enable young people from refugee backgrounds to settle successfully.

Components include:

- › a 10-16 week program encompassing psycho-social support, work skills and social connections
- › a work experience placement (Foundation House & business partners)
- › a business mentoring placement over an 8 -12 month period.

The 16 week group program is delivered in partnership with the Centre for Multicultural Youth and delivery sites such as AMES

Education, AMES Employment, TAFE and English Language schools and secondary school groups; and community organisations.

The Ucan2 mentoring program is provided by Foundation House in partnership with businesses and industry leaders including Australia Post, Coles, K-mart, Telstra and Woolworths. On completion of the Ucan2 program, young people may be selected to be mentored by a business representative.

With support from Foundation House, a mentor develops an advisory relationship with a young person by supporting them with their settlement in Australia. This involves assistance with goal setting, education, looking for work, social activities and showing them what it is like to live in Australia.

## PROFESSIONAL AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT


The Foundation House Professional and Organisational Development program provides a range of opportunities for people to develop their skills and knowledge in working with survivors of torture and trauma. Each year over 250 sessions with over 4,000 participants are delivered.

The program includes:

- › facilitated workshops
- › reflective practice
- › organisation-specific professional development
- › partnership work
- › online learning

Our calendar of workshops includes specialist programs for people working in educational and health settings, as well as sessions open to anyone working with refugees and asylum seekers. All sessions are interactive, and may combine formal presentations with large and small group discussions, drawing on participants' experience.





Along with our public professional development calendar, Foundation House also provides tailored professional development for agencies working with people from refugee backgrounds. Our facilitators are social workers, psychologists, teachers and community development practitioners, who have experience working with people of refugee backgrounds and their communities. Facilitators are able to draw on current issues, themes, and experiences from their own practice, to enrich the workshops.

Foundation House uses its specialist expertise to produce a wide range of resources. These assist health, education and other providers to enhance the responsiveness of their services to the needs of people of refugee backgrounds. Many of these resources are available for download from the Foundation House website.



## victorian refugee health network

### **VICTORIAN REFUGEE HEALTH NETWORK**

[www.refugeehealthnetwork.org.au](http://www.refugeehealthnetwork.org.au)

Under the auspice of Foundation House, the Victorian Refugee Health Network (the Network) provides a unique forum to bring together primary and specialist health services, government departments, settlement, and asylum seeker support agencies, to identify and respond to the needs of people from refugee backgrounds, including asylum seekers.

#### **The Network is a vehicle for:**

- › sharing emerging issues and practice, (through working groups, web-based Policy and Practice Updates and thematic forums)
- › collaborative development of good practice resources for the sector
- › communication with Commonwealth and state government departments about trends in refugee and asylum seeker health, and
- › dissemination of information to the sector through the Victorian Refugee Health Network website and monthly e-bulletin, with over 1500 subscribers.

The Network has worked in policy and service development in areas including access to primary and specialist health services, maternity care, sexual and reproductive health, oral health, asylum seeker access to healthcare, and immunisation. The work of the Network is guided by a Reference Group that includes members from primary and specialist health services; settlement and asylum seeker health services; peak bodies and relevant government departments.



A photograph of a man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a patterned shirt and a dark tie, speaking into a microphone at a podium. The background is a colorful, abstract pattern of green and orange circles.

# ADVOCATING FOR IMPROVED POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

Foundation House conducts research and undertakes advocacy to promote the development of policies and services that respect and advance the health, wellbeing and human rights of people of refugee backgrounds.

Major award recipient of the Foundation House Quentin Buckle Study Grant in 2015, Ahmed Askari, speaking of the great value that refugees bring to their new countries.  
*Photo: Glenn Hester Photography*

## RESEARCH

Foundation House has conducted a range of studies, independently and in partnership with other organisations. Research findings and recommendations are disseminated to government, policy makers and service providers through publication, presentations and on our website.

Recent and current research includes:

- › the experiences of mental health services for young people of refugee backgrounds
- › the development of a computer assisted tool for assessing the wellbeing of children of refugee backgrounds
- › the experience of Afghan families having a baby in Australia, and the experiences of health professionals providing maternity and postnatal care to families of refugee backgrounds - in partnership with Murdoch Childrens Research Institute
- › the development, implementation and investigation of the impact of quality improvement interventions in maternity and early childhood primary health care sectors, on health outcomes for refugee families. The program is led by Murdoch Childrens Institute and the partnership includes maternity services, and maternal and child health services.

## ADVOCACY

Based on its knowledge and work with refugee-background clients and communities, Foundation House communicates with and advocates to government, policy makers and service providers about issues of concern and proposed improvements. Advocacy occurs at national, Victorian and local levels. Advocacy modes include direct representations and collaboration with other agencies, for example:

- › Foundation House Chief Executive Officer Paris Aristotle chairs the Minister's Council on Asylum Seekers and Detention (advising the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) and the Settlement Services Advisory Council (advising the Minister for Social Services).
- › Foundation House participates in the Network of Asylum Seeker Agencies Victoria convened by the Refugee Council of Australia.
- › Foundation House makes regular submissions. These have included the Commonwealth Parliamentary Committees about proposed legislation affecting people seeking asylum, the Australian Human Rights Commission Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention, the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority to highlight the importance of recognising the costs of interpreters in the health system; and the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence.
- › Foundation House provided input to the Victorian Government consultations for the development of the state Refugee and Asylum Seeker Health Action Plan and programs for early years and schools.

## SUPPORT & COMMUNITY

“Everyone at Foundation House – staff, supporters, the Board – has common aims and goals. It’s a community of people gathered together, paid or voluntarily, with their hearts and minds set on achieving those goals. It’s a culture of support. That’s what I see every single time I visit.”

*Foundation House supporter*

Since its inception, Foundation House has had a committed network of individuals and families who support us in a range of ways including talking to people in their communities about our work, attending our events such as the Max Charlesworth Oration and end of year celebration, and contributing financially.

## BEQUESTS

Leaving a bequest to Foundation House in your will is a meaningful way to provide a lasting legacy. Bequests are a clear record of your commitment to the work we do with refugees and asylum seekers and funds bequeathed are used directly to assist our clients.

Should you have any questions or would like to have a confidential discussion about making a bequest, please contact our Finance Department on **(03) 9388 0022** or email: **[finance@foundationhouse.org.au](mailto:finance@foundationhouse.org.au)**

### Patron in Chief

Her Excellency the Honourable Linda Dessau AM,  
Governor of Victoria

### Patrons

- Professor Hilary Charlesworth AM
- Ms Dur-é Dara OAM
- Professor David de Kretser AC
- Mrs Jan de Kretser
- Mr Andrew Demetriou
- Mr Petro Georgiou AO
- The Honorable Michael Kirby AC CMG

**Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc.**  
ABN 52 783 974 656

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# Foundation House

The Victorian Foundation  
for Survivors of Torture Inc.

Foundation House offers services throughout Victoria with offices in:

**BRUNSWICK, DANDENONG, SUNSHINE, RINGWOOD  
and RURAL & REGIONAL LOCATIONS**

4 Gardiner Street, Brunswick,  
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**W:** [www.foundationhouse.org.au](http://www.foundationhouse.org.au)

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture's primary offices at Brunswick, Dandenong and Sunshine, and our out-post location in Ringwood, are on the traditional lands of the Kulin nation. In keeping with Foundation House's aspirations to heal individuals and communities we recognise the loss of land, children, language, lore and spiritual and physical well-being of the Kulin nation people and other Indigenous Victorians due to the impact of colonisation. We believe that acknowledging the past and its impact on the present is vital in building strong Victorian communities.