

***Case Study* EMERGE FESTIVAL (formerly the refugee and Asylum Seekers festival)**

INTRODUCTION

Australia is a major resettlement country for refugees. In 2008-2009 Australia will accept 13,500 onshore and offshore refugees. For the 2007-2008 financial year the Australian government granted 3,014 humanitarian visas. (*Refugee Council of Australia*)

Newly arrived migrants face many difficult experiences during settlement such as the break down of social support networks, lack of knowledge and capacity to access essential services including the arts and cultural services, as well as language, cultural and religious barriers. These issues are compounded by refugee experiences of grief, trauma and loss.

In recent years, many new arrivals to Australia through the refugee program have been from African countries. Many refugees from the Horn of Africa have come to Australia escaping civil war and speaking Amharic, Dinka, Kirundi, Sudanese Arabic, Swahili and Tigrinya. It is not uncommon for African refugees to have spent 10 to 15 years in refugee camps before arriving in Australia. Many refugees have also been forced to leave their extended families, friends and communities behind.

Victoria is the second largest settlement location in Australia, receiving approximately 29 per cent of national settlement services target group arrivals over the last five years (2002–03 to 2006–07). Around 59.5 per cent entered under the family stream with approximately 40 per cent arriving under the Humanitarian Programme (Department of Immigration and Citizenship- Settlement Trends and Needs of New arrivals)

Significant settlement issues include: high unemployment, housing issues, English language barriers effects of torture and trauma, general health issues- lack of self esteem, isolation and lack of confidence.

BACKGROUND TO EMERGE FESTIVAL

MAV believes that ignorance is at the heart of racism and the arts are a pivotal way of combating this which will ultimately lead to a more harmonious community and are important ingredient in the resettlement process.

MAV in 2004 decided to address the settlement issues faced by many refugees and ignorance by the wider community through the establishment of the Emerge Program which importantly included the Emerge Festival which was a festival to celebrate the culture of refugees in Victoria, to create sense of

belonging and to allow a meeting place for the wider community to interact with the refugee artists and community

EMERGE FESTIVAL OVERVIEW

Produced annually by Multicultural Arts Victoria, Emerge is a dynamic arts festival which celebrates Victoria's many diverse refugee and emerging cultures in a series of quality events around Melbourne starting in Refugee Week in June through to July. From Africa to the Far East, from the emerging to the established, from the traditional to the contemporary, music, dance, theatre, visual arts, cultural foods, crafts and ceremonies, Emerge festival is part of the Emerge Cultural Network which also facilitates the Visible mentoring program and Connect youth program focused on refugee, indigenous and emerging artists.

Emerge Festival commemorates the United Nations World Refugee Day

OVERALL FESTIVAL STATISTICS

The Emerge Festival engages over 200 artists annually in each festival and has included artists and communities from different cultures including Horn of Africa, Barundi, Congolese, Oromo, Rawandan, Afghan, Iranian, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Sudanese, Gambian, Ghanaian, Senegalese, Guinean, Burmese, Cambodian, Maltese, Haitian, Komoros Islander, Oromo, Burundian, Chinese, Kurdish, Australian, Sri Lankan, Turkish, Vietnamese, Tibetan, Laasian, Italian, Croation, South African, Bosnian, Spanish, Greek, Indian, Mutti Mutti, Gurnaikurnai, Wonnarua, Tjapukai and Torres Strait Islander, Koori. The festival program attracts culturally diverse audiences exceeding 9000 people from all over Melbourne.

EVENT BENEFITS

The Emerge festival provides a platform for newly arrived artists and their communities to share their culture and arts with the wider community. For many it is the first time to showcase their work outside of their own community and to connect with wider Australian audiences. For many it is a regular yearly event that they now look forward to and work towards. The festival has assisted not only artists but also small businesses selling cultural foods and crafts to promote themselves to the wider community. The festival is also a chance for the wider Australian community to experience the sights, sounds and flavours of Melbourne's newly arrived refugee communities all the way from Africa to the Far East.

ARTISTS AND AUDIENCE COMMENTS

' If MAV could hold festivals like Emerge and Visible more often that would be great. It helps our people settle and gives a chance to the Australian people to know us. We need more of this.' **Intesar Homid, Community Worker Jesuit Social Services.**

' Me and the boys look forward to the Emerge Festival every year. MAV has really helped us grow – actually I don't think we would still be here if we didn't have things like the festival to work towards – it gives us motivation..' **Simon Landid, South Sudan Musica Emerge Festival.**

' This has been just what I needed - it's hard to find opportunities to work in this field let alone with a group of like minded people who understand what I'm about...I want more of this' **Sharief Serfonteyne, actor Voodoo Vaudeville.**

' I feel it...everything in this play is real...all African kids in Australia should see this play and know that they're not alone.' **Nassir Asfir, Ethiopian community member who attended Voodoo Vaudeville.**

' I guess one of the things I enjoyed the most was that everyone had an equal role. Some of you are better known than others but no one stood head or shoulders over the rest. This is a sign of a REAL community where everyone has an equal part to play and no one tries to steal the show....I also thought that Sarah's piece was so brave and moving and reflected the thoughts that some of us oldies have had over the years trying to negotiate race minefields and political correctness. Your story is one that needs to be shared with the bigger community..' **Kate Welsman aka Systs BB, PBS Radio, Voodoo Vaudeville audience.**

' Before I volunteered at the Emerge Festival I had never had the chance to even speak to an African person or refugee ...I was curious but never had a way in...now I have African friends and even play in a band with some Congolese guys – all they've ever shown me is love!' **Alex Savage, musician/ Emerge Festival volunteer.**

' Days like this are special because its about the music and helping people from indigenous cultures around the world come to an understanding that they are in the same boat...it's also about making people think and overcoming ignorance that has bred racism and persecution against indigenous peoples' **Kutch Edwards, Mutti Mutti song man, artist.**