

### Whittlesea Community Connections Burundian Community Project



It is rare to hear about Burundi in the media or streets of Australia and it is likely that many Australians would not know where to find Burundi on the world map. Despite that fact, Australia has a small community from that part of the world. In the years 2005-2006, more than 100 Burundi refugees settled in Victoria (DIMA Settlement Planning Unit, Victoria, August 2006). The community remains small but is growing. The Republic of Burundi is a small country in the Great Lakes region of Africa. It is bordered by Rwanda on the north, Tanzania on the south and east, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the west. Geographically isolated, facing population pressures and having sparse resources, Burundi has the lowest GDP per capita in the world.

EastWeb is supporting one of the first community projects working directly with the Burundi community in Victoria.

The Burundi community in the City of Whittlesea and surrounding areas, in conjunction with Whittlesea Community Connections, is establishing a small community enterprise, using both traditional and non-traditional skills such as basket weaving, sewing and wood carving. The same wood traditionally used in Burundi will be sourced for the group's woodcarving, to maintain tradition, cultural connectedness, and authenticity of the finished product.

The project idea has grown from the Burundi community's strong desire to both maintain traditional skills and develop new and transferable skills. In particular, they have emphasised the importance of ensuring that traditional skills are maintained at the same time as addressing other competing settlement priorities. Training and programs to enhance and develop relevant skills in the short term will ensure the sustainability of this long-term project.

The Burundian community also hopes to share their culture and the works they produce with the wider community through community festivals and other public forums. Sharing and learning from emerging and diverse cultures will contribute to Australia's multicultural society and establish dialogue between refugee and mainstream communities. In addition, the 'enterprise' nature of the project ensures that incoming funds will assist in making this project sustainable, as the Burundi community in the North grows.

**The EastWeb Fund**

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