

PROJECT FACTS

Whittlesea Community Connections Shared Learning Project.

In 2003, more than half a million Australians identified as being from Arabic background. With the recent arrivals of new communities from the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, it seems likely that the proportion of Australians identifying as Arabic will have grown exponentially.

Women now make up over 50% of all migrants both in Australia, and worldwide. It is commonly the case that refugee communities are made up of a high proportion of single heads of house families who have fled without their partners, and there are also women who have arrived alone. Many refugee women are seeking opportunities to connect with other women in their communities, for social reasons as well as to seek support through the resettlement process.

The Arabic Women's Group (AWG) is a group convened by Whittlesea Community Connections, which provides support and services to migrant and refugee Arabic women living in Whittlesea. The AWG provides an opportunity for women to socialise, develop English language skills through a volunteer English program and to learn about local services. Consultations indicated that the AWG provides the only meaningful opportunity for group participants to meet and socialise with other women and children, particularly as access barriers such as transport and child-care are addressed.

The AWG recognises that community connectedness, language skills and computer literacy are critical to a successful settlement process for recently arrived Arabic women. With this in mind, it has developed an exciting new project called the Shared Learning Project to support the acquisition of these skills. With EastWeb's support the program will provide meaningful skill development sessions over 10 weeks which will facilitate shared learning of various skills, whilst also ensuring the maintenance and strengthening of traditional skills. The program will include computer and Internet skills as well as sewing and craft skills. Through skill enhancement and development, participants will be supported to engage and participate in mainstream economic and social opportunities.

EastWeb's funding will be utilised to provide sessional tutors to work with the women to develop and strengthen their skills in the identified areas of interest (sewing, IT and crafts etc). Some of the funds will be utilised to provide child-care, interpreting and venue costs (the lack of which is a significant barrier to the participation of this growing group).

For more information on this project, visit the Whittlesea Community Connections website at <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~ciwwhit/page7.html>