



Supporting Communities,  
Strengthening Voices

# East Web

## PROJECT FACTS

### Sewing from Home

Arrival in a new country – whilst exciting – is frequently challenging. Among the many hurdles to resettlement are loss of role; financial burdens; and loss of community. A group in Melbourne's Western suburbs have developed a unique way to address all these barriers, through their 'Sewing from Home' group. This sewing-skills development group has grown from the simple idea of one of its members, to a group that involves many women from many Arabic-speaking countries including Lebanon, Jordan and Morocco. The group meets weekly to learn and share skills in mending, altering, designing and sewing clothes – for themselves, for their families and for sale.

The Refugee Council of Australia suggests that a desire to contribute financially and socially - to their households and to the wider community - is prevalent amongst refugees. However, prior skills are often not recognised or valued. When opportunities are available for people from refugee backgrounds to develop new skills, they also have the ability to negotiate new roles for themselves - in their families and in the wider community. The title 'Sewing from Home' reflects the desire of the group members to be able to contribute materially to their households, through tangible skills. Developing skills in sewing enables the group participants to mend and alter clothes, and to make new clothes for their families. This has the potential to reduce some of the financial burden in households. Some of the group participants are also interested in developing small enterprises and sewing from home, for profit. Skills in sewing are valuable workforce skills. The Refugee Council of Australia notes that a lack of domestic experience is frequently the greatest barrier for people in becoming employed. Whether paid or voluntary, for a friend or as a part of a small enterprise, sewing skills constitute domestic experience. This experience will result in increased access to future employment opportunities, reduced economic disadvantage and an improved experience of resettlement in Australia.

By meeting together as a group to develop these skills, women from refugee backgrounds are also forming a new community for themselves. Whilst the burdens of household expenses, unemployment or sporadic employment are significant for refugees, many also report the burden of experiencing social isolation. The opportunity to gather together in the process of acquiring new skills enables group members to build social connectedness. Recent research by the World Health Organisation suggests that social connectedness improves peoples' mental health, reduces the likelihood of physical health problems, and results in stronger families and communities.

For more information about refugees and employment, visit The Refugee Council of Australia website <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au>

For information about social connectedness, visit The World Health Organization website <http://www.who.int> or for more local information, visit VicHealth <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au>

**The EastWeb Fund**

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