



## Gathering of Women Story of Refugee Women Settling in Toowoomba

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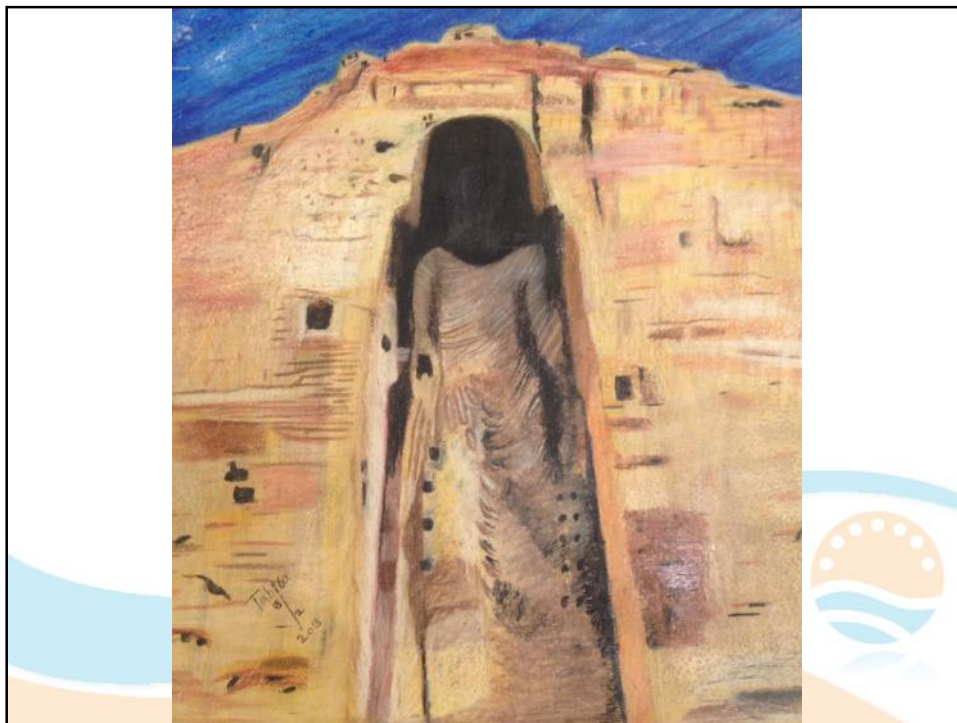
Sebastian Ross-Hagebaum

**Jobs Australia National  
Conference 2014**



*I have only one request,  
I do not ask for money  
Although I have need of it,  
I do not ask for meat ...  
I have only one request,  
And all I ask is  
That you remove  
The road block  
From my path.*

From the Acholi poem, Song of  
Lawino by Okot p'Bitek (Cited in  
Women Across Cultures, Burn 2005)



Settlement intends to provide refugees access to *“civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights similar to those enjoyed by nationals”* (UNHCR, 2011)

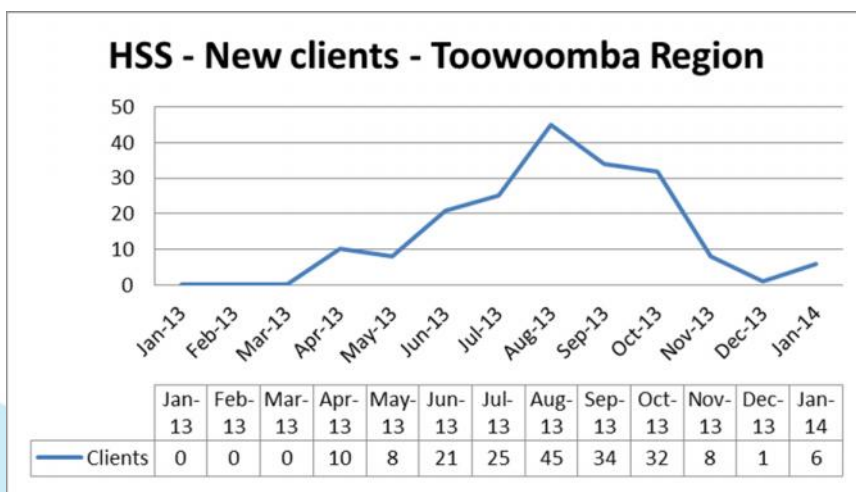
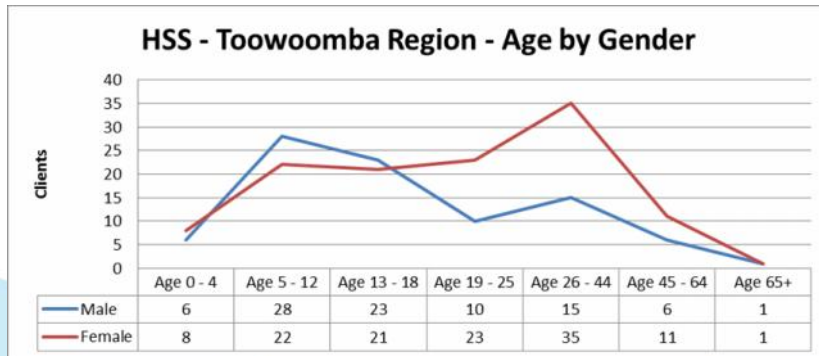


## Ager & Strang (2008) Integration Framework

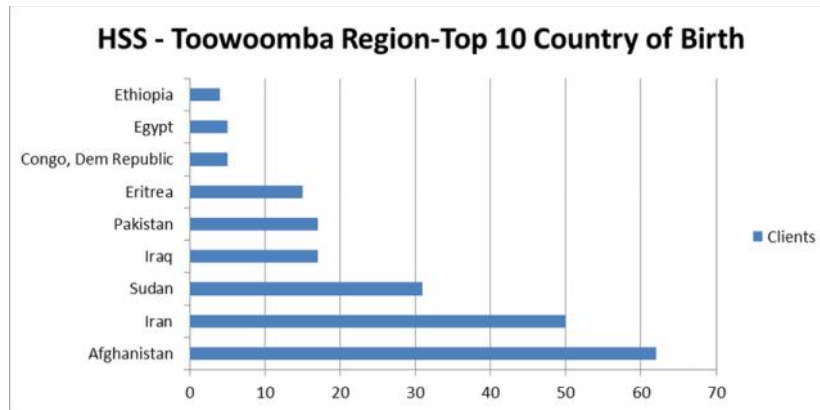


- Labour Market and Economic Integration is an important indicator of short and long term refugee integration.
- Despite the rhetoric, labour market integration is often measured poorly or neglected completely when the settlement outcome is discussed.
- Generally resettled Refugees Nationally and Internationally are included within broader immigrant categories.
- In general the research and statistics on economic participation do not separate the women at risk from other categories.

- Individual Clients: 210                      Cases: 57
- Families 42                                      Singles 15
- Male 89    Female 121



## HSS - Toowoomba Region – Country of Birth



Date 12/02/2014


## Principles of the Strategy:


- Individuals, families, groups and communities bring with them skills and experiences to respond to complex life situations
- Gender issues are complex, and need careful and deliberate work
- Supporting refugee women's access to economic advancement, requires gender specific responses

## Aspiration

- Women are healthy and well
- Women feel settled and safe
- Women are empowered and active
- Women have meaningful employment and economic opportunities
- Women are able to strengthen their families
- Women feel connected
- Women are contributors to their communities
- Women are contributors to Australian society



- To engage Women at Risk with employment related opportunities as quickly as possible after their initial arrival.
  - To reduce the length of time it takes for Women from Refugee backgrounds to enter income Generating activities from in some cases 3 years or longer down to around 6-12 months.
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- To build confidence, relevant language skills, and industrial awareness.
  - To build on existing strengths and skill sets while helping to translate these into an Australian context
  - To capture unique skills and trades such as weaving, embroidery, shoemaking, decorative brazing, exotic beauty therapies.
  - To inspire innovative entrepreneurs to take up new challenges
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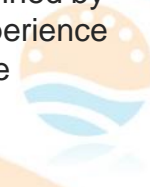
## Light within

- Social inclusion initiatives supporting women fulfilling their aspirations
- Employment support that recognises cultural and traditional values and provides opportunities to become competitive in Australian job market
- Links with services and confidence in accessing them independently



## Some tools

- Understanding the cultural concepts
- Assessing response to unfamiliar concepts and applying those when performing unfamiliar tasks
- Creating a safe space in trying out new things
- Building confidence to admit when the topics discussed are unfamiliar
- Building a training plan that incorporates the above, which focuses on **empowerment** and is underpinned by **respect** for individuals, their culture, their life experience and their learning style and skills they bring to the context.

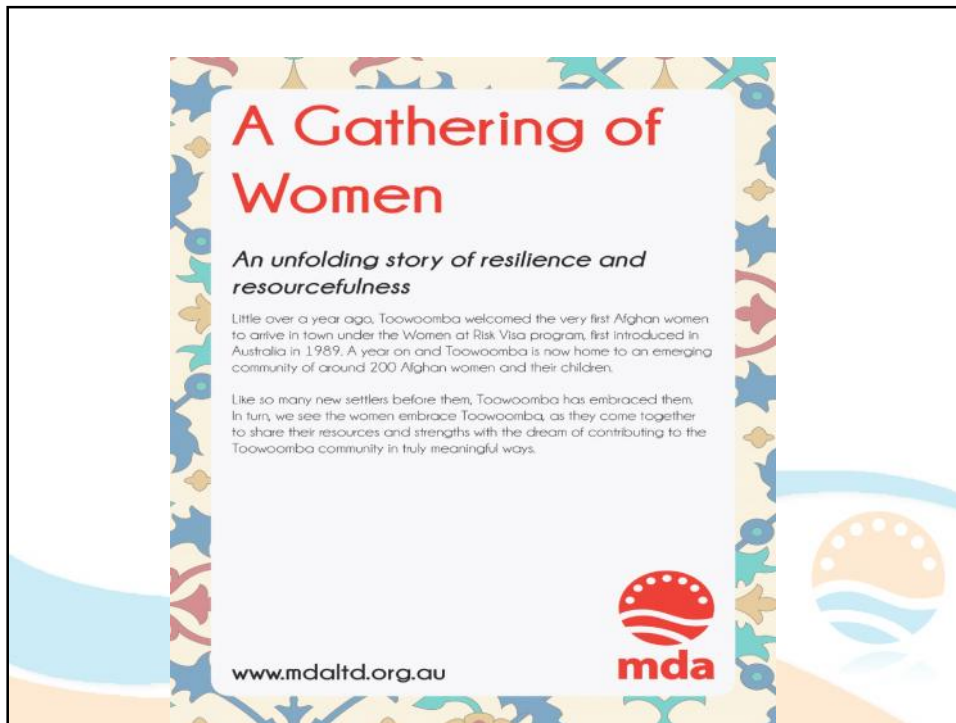




## What has worked

- Toowoomba “Refugee Welcome zone”
- Positive settlement experience
- Positive media response
- Provision of fully subsidised Settlement Competency Training
- Focus on employment and skills development pathway






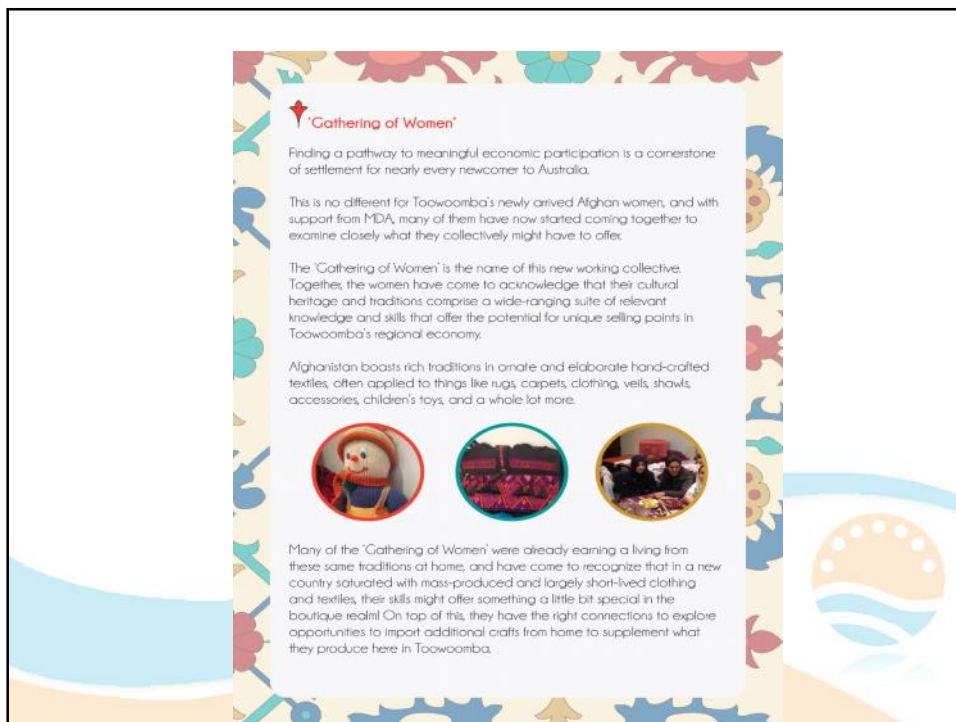
# A Gathering of Women

*An unfolding story of resilience and resourcefulness*

Little over a year ago, Toowoomba welcomed the very first Afghan women to arrive in town under the Women at Risk Visa program, first introduced in Australia in 1989. A year on and Toowoomba is now home to an emerging community of around 200 Afghan women and their children.

Like so many new settlers before them, Toowoomba has embraced them. In turn, we see the women embrace Toowoomba, as they come together to share their resources and strengths with the dream of contributing to the Toowoomba community in truly meaningful ways.

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




## Gathering of Women

Finding a pathway to meaningful economic participation is a cornerstone of settlement for nearly every newcomer to Australia.

This is no different for Toowoomba's newly arrived Afghan women, and with support from MDA, many of them have now started coming together to examine closely what they collectively might have to offer.

The 'Gathering of Women' is the name of this new working collective. Together, the women have come to acknowledge that their cultural heritage and traditions comprise a wide-ranging suite of relevant knowledge and skills that offer the potential for unique selling points in Toowoomba's regional economy.

Afghanistan boasts rich traditions in ornate and elaborate hand-crafted textiles, often applied to things like rugs, carpets, clothing, veils, shawls, accessories, children's toys, and a whole lot more.

Many of the 'Gathering of Women' were already earning a living from these same traditions at home, and have come to recognize that in a new country saturated with mass-produced and largely short-lived clothing and textiles, their skills might offer something a little bit special in the boutique realm! On top of this, they have the right connections to explore opportunities to import additional crafts from home to supplement what they produce here in Toowoomba.





- Show case of women's success

