



**sttars**

supporting survivors of  
torture & trauma

Annual  
Report

**2023-2024**



**STTARS** acknowledges the traditional custodians whose ancestral lands we meet and work on and pays respect to their (leaders) Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge their cultural beliefs and deep and abiding connection to country.



**'A Sky Full of Stars' by Mali Isabel (Arabana and Kokatha)**

'A sky full of stars' tells the story of survivors through various stages of their recovery and reconnection after traumatic experiences. The rivers that edge the outer corners of the canvas symbolise the struggles and obstacles overcome, creating a safe space within the centre, which is filled with meeting places that signify the varied stages, places, and situations people are at in their healing journey. The people symbols are scattered around the canvas like stars in the sky, yet intrinsically connected through their life experiences, telling the importance of genuine connection and community to ones' healing and reassuring that, no matter what you are experiencing in life, you are never alone.

## CONTENTS

### STTARS Annual Report 2023-2024

- P 3 Chairperson's Report & Director's Report
- P 5 Board of Directors
- P 7 Our Staff
- P 9 About STTARS
- P 11 Strategic Direction
- P 12 Values
- P 13 STTARS Clients

### OUR WORK

- P 15 Referrals and Intake
- P 16 Asylum Seekers
- P 17 Counselling
- P 19 Rural and Regional
- P 21 Children and Youth
- P 22 Strong Families Strong Communities
- P 23 Refugee Mental Health Clinic
- P 24 Casework
- P 25 ARANAP
- P 26 Thrive and Connect  
CALD Mental Health Program
- P 27 Community Development
- P 29 Group Work
- P 30 Multicultural Wellbeing  
Living with Chronic Pain
- P 31 Embrace
- P 32 Interpreters
- P 32 Training and Collaboration
- P 33 Operations Team
- P 34 Financial Summary





## Chairperson's Report

It has continued to be a great honour to serve as Chairperson of an organisation that holds such a special place in my heart as STTARS for the 2023-2024 period. Having started my career as a Child and Youth Counsellor at STTARS, it brings me great joy to see it continue to thrive and provide such crucial services to its incredible clients. At the end of last year, the STTARS Board farewelled Treasurer, Muhammad Akram, and the

post was taken over by Aref Ahmadi. I would like to thank both Muhammad for his service and contribution over the years, and Aref for his expertise and for committing to this integral position. Their collaboration to ensure a smooth transition is greatly appreciated by the Board. We have also welcomed new Board colleagues this year, and I would like to thank John Haren and Emily Slaytor for joining us. Their fresh perspectives and areas of expertise are valued and appreciated and we look forward to their continued contribution into the next year.

It has been a challenging year in respect to ongoing conflict around the world, and as a result we have seen an increased number of refugees and internally displaced people. In particular, the conflict in Palestine and surrounding Middle East, Venezuela, Congo and Sudan have significantly impacted the people we work with and STTARS staff continue to support and advocate tirelessly for these people and communities through community consultation, group supports, and both practical and therapeutic work.

Housing and increased cost of living pressures continue to cause strain and distress on clients and STTARS has seen these pressures reflected in people's presentations. Advocacy in this space continues to be significant for STTARS staff.

At last year's AGM, we shared that we had been successful in receiving funding to deliver a specialist mental health service for people from CALD backgrounds. An integral milestone in achieving this was the opening of the STTARS northern office, located in Salisbury. Over the last 12 months, this office has been opened and it is now operating to support clients not only of the Thrive and Connect specialist mental health program, but also the Refugee Mental Health Clinic which ran its first group from there and had a visiting clinician running a clinic on Wednesday, and our PASTT clients who are now able to access their torture and trauma counselling from a location that is more convenient to those living in the northern suburbs. The Salisbury office has a wonderful group space and there have been several popular groups bringing connection and purpose to clients there, some of whom travel some distance to attend

because of the positive impact they have experienced there.

Lastly, to the members of the Board, to STTARS' Director, Robyn Smythe and her dedicated and passionate staff and volunteers, I would like to thank you all for your contributions over the last financial year. Your support is, as always, greatly appreciated.

This will be my last AGM as the STTARS Chair, because of my move interstate I have decided to step down from the role to enable another Board Member to take up the responsibility, leading the team into its next chapter. It has been an honour, joy and learning experience to chair the STTARS Board – one that has taught me a lot. However, above all, this role has inspired me as I have learnt the stories of our clients and staff's hardship and survival, which the work of STTARS addresses in a manner that co-creates our community to be a better place for all.

*David Will*  
Chair



## Director's Report

UNHCR Global Trends show that the proportion of people who are forcibly displaced has almost doubled in the last decade, now exceeding 120 million people. Our hearts have broken with the awareness of the unfolding trauma around the world, in particular in Afghanistan, Congo, Ethiopia, Gaza, Israel, Lebanon, Myanmar, Sudan, Ukraine and many other places that are not reaching our nightly news. The impact on the individuals, families and communities that we support continues to be immense, with support needed now more than ever.

I am immensely proud of the STTARS team, who show up every day with professionalism, care and compassion, bringing their whole selves to the tasks of bearing witness, holding onto hope and helping people to overcome trauma and rebuild their lives here in South Australia. Each member of our team brings unique skills and knowledge and makes a very real difference every day.

**"It means a great deal to those who are oppressed to know that they are not alone. Never let anyone tell you that what you are doing is insignificant."**

Desmond Tutu, South African civil rights activist

**Highlights of this year have included:**

- » Providing counselling for over 620 individuals and families.
- » On the 10th anniversary of STTARS providing services in the South East, our regional staff members were jointly awarded the prestigious Governors Multicultural Award in recognition of their knowledge, skills and the impactful way they have worked with a range of local stakeholders to care for and support new arrivals and refugees across the Limestone Coast.

- » Additional funding through the Federal Government Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (PASTT) enabled us to establish a Community Development, Allied Health and Therapeutic Groups team which has substantially increased our reach in co-designing supports for communities, significantly increasing our groupwork programs and ability to provide early intervention activities with clients engaged with AMES and TAFE.
- » Our Thrive and Connect program which commenced in July 2023 with funding from the Adelaide Primary Health Network has added to our capacity to provide early intervention through support by bi-cultural peer workers responding to lower intensity needs that support mental health and wellbeing and practitioners who can support care co-ordination where more support is needed.
- » Our Salisbury office, opened in October 2023, has become a busy hub of activity for individuals, families & groups. Located close to a public transport hub and shopping centre the new office has made it easier for clients living in the north to access STTARS services.

- » A project with Embrace Multicultural Mental Health allowed us to have a greater focus on the needs of members of communities from Afghanistan this year.
- » As part of our ongoing commitment to quality, STTARS underwent re-accreditation processes this year for both the Australian Service Excellence Standards and National Mental Health Standards passing both with commendation.

I want to express my gratitude to our Board, leaders, employees, volunteers, and interpreters, as well as to our government partners and stakeholders, for making these accomplishments possible. I am proud of the passion and commitment that each person brings to this work. When I hear of the difference their support has made in the lives of the people they support it brings hope and light.

Finally, I want to thank the people and communities who entrust us to support them. They inspire all of us with their courage, desire to recover, rebuild their lives and contribute to our community.

*Robyn Smythe*  
Director

# 2023-2024 Board Members



**David Wild**  
*Chair*



**Gay Gardner**  
*Vice Chair*



**Bernadette McGrath**  
*Secretary*



**Aref Ahmadi**  
*Treasurer*



**John Haren**



**Carol Irizarry**



**John Oliphant**



**Emily Slaytor**



**Haidari Smart**



# Our Staff 2023-2024



## Director

Robyn Smythe

## Clinical Services Manager

Ana Maria Allimant Holas

## Practice Facilitator

Frieda Bou Diab (to May 2024)

## Referrals and Intake

Alica Varesanovic

Everine Munyonge

## Counsellor/Advocates

Dart Russell (Acting Team Leader)

Kerri Berardi (Team Leader)

Riziki Saidi (Team Leader)

Akar Pardedar

Amanda Doll

Donatien Ntikahavuye

Gabriela Gonzalez Falcon

Galawej Ebrahimi (on leave)

Ghani Nasery

Glauce Raymundo (to May 2024)

Gulshan Hussain (to November 2023)

Ibrahim Ali

Lisa Jenkins

Mastura Alim

Matthew Seabrook (Counsellor/Nurse Lead) (on leave)

Melanie McGuigan

Rachel Masih

Ramata Leigh (to December 2023)

Rhett McDonald (South East Region)

Sarah Purcell

Sophie Coote (South East Regional Coordinator)

Wah Wah Htoo Naw

## Adelaide Refugee and New Arrival Program (ARANAP)

Bridgit McAteer (Nurse Lead)

Joanne Riddle

Kate Spencer

Muslima Huka

## Refugee Mental Health Clinic

Dr Jayakrishnan Nair - Psychiatrist

Dr Mastura Alim - Psychologist

Dr Michael Lee - General Practitioner (to March 2024)

Dr Tushar Singh - Psychiatrist

Dr Vani Kaler - Psychiatrist

Apoorva Madan - Clinical Psychologist

Juan Pablo Escobar Betancur - Mental Health Social Worker (to April 2024)

Sharlene Pope - Mental Health Social Worker

Wendy Anderson - Psychologist (to March 2024)

## ICT and Operations Manager

Daryl Eckermann

## Finance Officer

Rachel Inness

## Caseworkers

Rima Abu-Assi

Slavica Dedijer (Senior Caseworker)

## Community Development and Allied Health and Therapeutic Groups

Amritha Aparnadas (Team Leader)

Abdul Ghafar Stanikzai (EMBRACE Project Lead, to June 2024)

Ahilya Horsfall

Arefa Hassani

Belinda Cardozo

Elliane Nigem

Estela Fuentes

Fatima Shah

Maryam Safi (to June 2024)

Melissa Bridge (to May 2024)

Moti Esalat

## FICT Group Facilitators

Abdul Wahab

Bassam Ashqar

Beheshteh Samimi

Denis Msema

Gauri Giri

Marcelina Mendoza Nunez

Olena Petrivska

Olga Gryshko

Ranjana Sunar

Seraphin Mulegwa

Shamina Stanikzai

## Thrive and Connect (CALD Mental Health Program)

Mehak Khandeparkar (Team Leader)

Bahar Salehi

Caroline Baker (to April 2024)

Carolina Medina

Juan Pablo Escobar Betancur (to April 2024)

Laxman Gurung

Lucas Lopes Rodrigues

Masooma Joya

Noha Elnahas

## Safety, People and Culture Coordinator

Natasha Arora

## Project Officer

Helen McGeoch (to May 2024)

## Administration

Stevie Bridgman (Team Leader)

Alexandra Fowler

Carol Cantlon

Eldana Abbas

Harriet Hemmings

Komang Sukraeni

Maria Siros

Natalia Rojas Parra (to June 2024)

Neelima Kafley

## Volunteers

Debra King

Jill Wilson

Richard Wilson

Wedian Abudaqqa

# About STTARS

Since 1991, **STTARS**, the Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service, has provided flexible and culturally sensitive services to people from refugee backgrounds who have suffered from torture and refugee-related trauma.

**STTARS** offer a range of services to address the physical, psychological and social needs of survivors of torture and trauma to help them rebuild their lives in Australia.

**STTARS** specialist services include: counselling, groups, programs for children and young people, physical health programs, complementary therapies, social support networking, service provider training and community development activities.

**STTARS** team consists of experienced, multicultural professionals who specialise in trauma recovery.

**STTARS** offers outreach counselling at various locations including homes, schools and community centres.

**STTARS** is committed to providing a safe, inclusive and culturally responsive environment while working to promote the health and wellbeing of clients.

**STTARS** value the experiences, culture and aspirations of each survivor. We recognise that every person has a different story, and our services are therefore carefully tailored to address the needs of each unique individual.

**STTARS** welcome survivors of torture and trauma regardless of their age, ability, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, language, religious beliefs, visa type or length of time in Australia.

**STTARS** services are free and available to individuals, families and groups.

**STTARS** consultations include free professional interpreting services for non-English speakers.

**STTARS** works with other organisations, services, clinicians, community groups, schools and individuals, offering training and support, to enable them to work more effectively with people from refugee backgrounds.

**STTARS** is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation with no political or religious affiliations.

In 2023-2024 STTARS provided support for **1336** individuals and families, and also worked with refugee communities to enhance their capacity to develop support structures & access external resources.

Since 1991 STTARS has assisted **13,511** people from **93** countries heal the scars of torture and refugee trauma.



## Our Mission

To help survivors of torture and trauma to find their voices and rebuild their lives

## Our Vision

STTARS seeks a world where human rights are respected and violations are challenged

# Strategic Direction

# Values

## Providing High Quality Services

To provide trauma-informed, culturally responsive services that recognise the values, needs and aspirations of survivors of torture and trauma and their families

## Working with Communities

To work with communities to foster opportunities for enhancing the wellbeing and resilience of survivors of torture and trauma

## Increasing Understanding and Expertise

To raise the awareness, understanding and expertise of others who work with survivors of torture and trauma

## Strengthening Sustainability through Quality and Culture

To build and maintain a vibrant, robust, inclusive and sustainable organisation

## Promoting Human Rights

To work towards a world where human rights are respected and violations are never tolerated

## Humanity

We keep the people that we work with at the centre of everything we do

## Diversity

We recognise and celebrate our unique stories, culture and strengths. From this foundation we grow and learn from each other

## Hope

We believe in the innate human capacity to strive, against the odds, for a better life for oneself and one another

## Social Justice

Our hearts are challenged by experiences of oppression and together we work to improve human lives

## Ethical Practice

We strive to act with integrity, care and compassion. We reflect on the ways that our actions affect the lives of people with whom we work



# WHERE OUR CLIENTS ORIGINATE FROM...



TOTAL  
**1336**



# REFERRALS AND INTAKE

## STTARS provides support for people living in South Australia who:

- » Have a refugee or refugee-like background.
- » Have a history of torture and/or other traumatic events prior to their arrival in Australia.
- » Are experiencing psychological or psycho-social difficulties believed to be associated with their experience of torture and traumatic events.
- » STTARS recognises the effects of intergenerational trauma and provides services to children and young people whose primary caregivers have experienced torture and/or trauma before arriving in Australia.

Anyone can make a referral to STTARS, including service providers, medical professionals, a family member or friend of the person or the person themselves.

STTARS' Intake Officer, is the first point of contact for referrals. Potential clients are contacted for an intake interview within 48 hours of receiving their referral. Interviews are conducted face-to-face or by telephone, with free professional interpreting services if required.

Due to a high demand for our services, STTARS operates a managed waiting list. Priority on the waiting list is determined by the severity of the person's symptoms and specific vulnerability factors including the availability and adequacy of other supports in their life.

We maintain regular contact with vulnerable clients on our waiting list which allows us to respond promptly to any significant change in their condition or circumstances. Those on the waiting list may be provided with self-care advice or referred to our casework service for help to resolve practical issues. They may also be linked in to mainstream services while they await allocation to a STTARS counsellor.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- » STTARS responded to 1336 new referrals in the last year.
- The main sources of referral were:**
- » General health providers (around 21%), education providers (around 21%), self-referral (around 20%), employment services (around 7%), allied health (6.5%) and settlement services (6.3%).



"The people there are very non-judgmental and are understanding of my circumstances."  
– STTARS Client.

# ASYLUM SEEKERS

Asylum seekers in Australia can be particularly vulnerable as distress arising from previous torture or traumatic experiences is often compounded by prolonged periods of uncertainty, concerns for family members still living in danger, and the threat of being returned to their home country.

Therefore, counselling support at STTARS focuses primarily on helping asylum seekers to cope with and contain trauma-related symptoms, building strengths and resilience to manage their current situation, and preparing for the future once their protection claim has been declared.

**If you would like to make a referral or speak to someone before making a referral please contact us on 8206 8900**

STTARS has remained strongly committed to providing support to all survivors of torture and trauma who need it, regardless of their visa type. This commitment was demonstrated through the provision by STTARS of pro bono support to 58 asylum seekers this year.

STTARS welcomes the Commonwealth's Government decision to make Temporary Protection visa and Safe Haven Enterprise visa holders eligible to apply for a permanent visa and their ongoing commitment to reforming the visa assessment process. STTARS has observed that whilst this has been life changing for the people who have been able to have their visa status resolved, the small number who have not are experiencing greater distress, anxiety and uncertainty.

# COUNSELLING

Every individual is unique and traumatic experiences can affect people in many different ways. Trauma can affect people of all ages, cultures, genders and life experiences; affecting relationships and children intergenerationally with trauma being passed down; causing people to feel frightened, helpless, isolated and without power and control. Therefore, we begin all of our support with a trauma recovery focus of helping people to feel safe, respected and empowered.

Counselling provides a safe and nurturing environment for people to talk through their problems with qualified counsellors. We recognise that, although people from refugee backgrounds have survived horrific experiences, they also possess many strengths, skills and immense resilience. Through talking therapies STTARS' Counsellor/ Advocates work together with each person to build on these strengths and develop way to better manage reactions to new situations, address and resolve problems, and work through thoughts and feelings. Counselling helps survivors to cope more effectively and regain control over their lives so that they can live their best life and the impacts of torture and trauma are not a barrier to wellbeing meaningful participation in family & community life.



"His tone of voice, words, & body language showed that he was listening to me".

"My counsellor was very welcoming, I looked forward to seeing her and had a lot of empathy for me".

"My counsellor built my feelings of hope again, reminded me of my resilience and strong faith. My children have come to Australia and I am so happy that I worked on my mental health before they came".

"I only had one session but I felt so much lighter after speaking to the counsellor, I felt listened to and heard. She didn't rush me and was patient with me. I was taught mindful breathing that I still use when I feel overwhelmed and was told to disconnect by avoiding the news, that was very helpful".

"My counsellor and the children's counsellor are very kind and compassionate, you can tell that they care and this is not a job for them".



## HIGHLIGHTS

- » Counselling support provided over 3661 counselling sessions.
- » STTARS provided counselling in a range of venues where clients feel most comfortable. Over the last year, 1374 counselling sessions were provided on an outreach basis at various locations including homes, schools and community centres.
- » In 2023-24, STTARS provided counselling support to people who came from more than 57 countries of origin.
- » STTARS counselling team consists of qualified and experienced Counsellor/Advocates, many of whom also have lived experienced, come from countries similar to those of the people we work with and speak a range of languages.

# RURAL AND REGIONAL

A growing number of people from refugee backgrounds are settling in regional and rural areas around Australia. In addition to primary resettlement, substantial numbers of asylum seekers and people from refugee backgrounds are moving to regional areas, such as Naracoorte, Mt Gambier and Bordertown, to obtain work.

STTARS maintains a strong presence in Mt Gambier and the South East region with an office in Mt Gambier and regular weekly outreach services in Naracoorte and Bordertown.

**Services available in the South East include:**

- » Individual or family counselling
- » Secondary consultations & telephone support for other services
- » Education and training
- » Group programs

STTARS South East team work closely and in collaboration with the local communities, supporting numerous events and gatherings in the region that have newly arrived communities plus provided opportunities for connection, interaction and sharing between cultures.

STTARS continues to work tirelessly alongside survivors of torture and trauma communities in the south east region. Creating strong foundations for safe, trusting spaces where individuals, families and communities can come to share their traumatic experiences, worries, concerns, hopes and dreams.

STTARS works closely and in collaboration with key services within the region, including Tatiara Council, the Local Health Network, Country Health SA, Mount Gambier Hospital, South Australia Police, and non-government service providers.



This year marks  
**10 years**  
since STTARS began  
operating in the  
South East region!



## HIGHLIGHTS

- » In 2023-2024, the STTARS South East team provided counselling for 55 individual/families and delivered 21 community development activities within the region.
- » One of the biggest highlights (honours) from this year was receiving the prestigious 2023 Governors Multicultural Award, Community Sector, in February. STTARS was unaware of the nomination by SAPOL and AFP, which recognised the ongoing support for people with refugee and asylum seeker experiences and the continual engagement in community development across the South East.
- » Community collaboration between the AFP, SAPOL, CFS, SA Ambulance, SES and Noorla Yo-Long Adventure Park to run a Multicultural Family Fun Day for people with refugee experience. This collaboration came about due to STTARS being approached by a frightened community member and resulted in participants not only having fun on the day but also feeling more confident to call emergency services when needed.

*"No matter how strong or wise I can be in trying times I am still in danger so your service was vital, it was so much needed. Your service is more important than a highly specialised doctor with resources. People need kindness, caring and comfort and that is what you gave me and it made me stronger."*

# CHILDREN & YOUTH

Children and young people are not spared the human rights abuses that cause people to become refugees. They may experience these traumatic events as part of a family or on their own, and be forced to flee their homes with little understanding of the reasons why. STTARS also recognises the effects of intergenerational trauma and provides services to children and young people whose primary caregivers have experienced torture and/or trauma before arriving in Australia.

The support STTARS provides to children and young people is crucial in assisting children and young people from refugee backgrounds to deal with challenges brought on by trauma and feel more settled and content at school, and at home with their families. STTARS provides support through a variety of activities including:

- » Individual and family-based counselling for survivors of torture and trauma
- » Therapeutic groups
- » Support for young people and their families to connect with other services
- » Opportunities for young people and their families to engage in activities that promote family connections such as Family Fun Days and School Holiday Programs

STTARS also works closely with schools, providing outreach to students and supporting staff to build their capacity to respond to the needs of students and families from refugee backgrounds.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- » Provided support to 246 children and young people to the age of 24, which comprised of 105 females and 141 males.
- » STTARS has continued to establish and maintain connections with schools, both private and public, and Counsellor/Advocates has a regular presence in 28 schools across metropolitan Adelaide.
- » School residencies at Adelaide Secondary School of English, Para Hills High School, Ingle Farm Primary School.
- » STTARS continued to deliver therapeutic groups in schools, including Rhythm to Recovery Drumming Groups, a Drumming with Mums & Bubs group, Wellbeing and Self-Expression groups, and Team of Life Narrative Therapy groups.



"My counsellor and the children's counsellor are very kind and compassionate, you can tell that they care and this is not a job for them."



# STRONG FAMILIES STRONG COMMUNITIES (SFSC)

## HIGHLIGHTS

- » Supporting clients who are new arrivals in Australia to navigate the housing market during the housing crisis.
- » Child protection concerns being mitigated and de-escalation of issues through intervention.
- » Family reunification after a brief separation.
- » Identification and addressing of family concerns, that would otherwise have been missed.

STTARS was successful in 2023 with obtaining funding through the Department for Human Services for the Strong Families Strong Communities Program and has been successful in securing a funding extension until June 2026.

The Strong Families, Strong Communities program's focus is to provide both family counselling and therapeutic case management to individuals and families to address tiered low risk child protection concerns specific to CALD communities based in the Northern Suburbs. It has a specific focus on supporting families from a refugee and asylum seeker background. It is a prevention/early intervention service delivery approach with support over a 6-month period.

At present, it has two part time staff members who are acting as Family Counsellors.

We are pleased that with our service practice in the Strong Families, Strong Communities program, we have been able to achieve some significant outcomes for families who have come from extreme trauma backgrounds further compounded by complicated resettlement in Australia.

Collaboration with external service providers has opened up new referral pathways and networking opportunities. Such collaborations have strengthened organisational relationships with service providers and established outcomes that would otherwise remain a challenge to achieve.



# REFUGEE MENTAL HEALTH CLINIC (RMHC)

Many people from refugee backgrounds find it difficult to access mainstream Medicare funded services that understand the refugee experience and use interpreters. The STTARS RMHC addresses this by hosting a number of registered visiting mental health clinicians with specialist expertise who provide a dedicated service to people from refugee backgrounds under Medicare funding, including the Department of Health and Aged Care's 'Better Access Initiative'.

STTARS provides administrative, interpreting and casework support to help those accessing our RMHC to overcome practical and settlement difficulties. In particular, STTARS caseworkers are vital in supporting the visiting clinicians provide an integrated and culturally safe mental health service.

STTARS RMHC also connects clients to other services, supports, and group work opportunities within STTARS. This year, RMHC facilitated 2 of its own therapeutic groups, supporting clients with information relating to practical needs and therapeutic stress management.

## HIGHLIGHTS

» In 2023-24, 234 clients were supported by the RMHC. STTARS is grateful for the expertise and compassion of all our visiting clinicians who help make the clinic a success and would like to thank Dr Vani Kaler, Dr Jayakrishnan Nair, Dr Michael Lee, Dr Tushar Singh, Apoorva Madan, Juan Pablo Escobar Betancur, Mastura Alim, Sharlene Pope and Wendy Anderson.

- » The RMHC continues to receive referrals of survivors of torture and trauma with complex presentations. Caseworkers, Rima and Slavica play a vital role in supporting the work the visiting clinicians do.
- » Visiting clinicians have commented on the significant changes that survivors of torture and trauma have experienced as full participants of the integrated, trauma specialist and culturally safe approach exercised at the RMHC.
- » STTARS holds dinners that enables clinicians in the Refugee Mental Health Clinic and STTARS staff to explore ways to further improve integration of supports across STTARS programs and the clinic.

**"The ability for RMHC clients to attend culturally appropriate groups (run by STTARS and others) whilst attending Medicare funded psychological services is, in my opinion, a really excellent clinical model."**  
**-Visiting Clinician.**

# CASEWORK



In addition to psychological distress resulting from past torture and trauma experiences, survivors often have multiple practical needs that impact on their recovery. STTARS' recovery model recognises that psychotherapeutic interventions alone are often not sufficient to adequately resolve distress for people from refugee backgrounds. An individual or family experiencing housing, financial or legal crisis, will not respond most effectively to psychological support while primary needs remain unmet.

STTARS Caseworkers support recovery working alongside visiting mental health clinicians with a focus on facilitating positive changes to the survivor's external circumstances through advocacy, assisting survivors to build life skills and navigate systems to address immediate practical needs. In 2023-24, STTARS casework team supported 141 clients of the RMHC.

STTARS team of specially trained and dedicated Caseworkers use a high degree of professional judgement, working with survivors to identify and resolve the problems that they have been unable to resolve on their own and are likely to have the most impact on their recovery process.

## HIGHLIGHTS

STTARS caseworkers have provided therapeutic groups to clients accessing the RMHCP, including Client Information and Support groups for clients from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iran, which have had many positive outcomes including providing psychoeducation, reducing social isolation, and linking clients to vital health services.

# ARANAP ADELAIDE REFUGEE & NEW ARRIVAL PROGRAM

People from refugee backgrounds often have low health literacy and difficulty navigating the Australian health system. Many suffer from health issues specific to their refugee experience and migration journey, finding themselves in a position where health concepts and the health system is foreign and potentially overwhelming.

STTARS is funded by the Adelaide Primary Health Network (PHN) to advocate, support, and provide health education for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers living in Adelaide.

ARANAP Refugee Nurse/Advocates conduct health assessments to identify unmet primary healthcare needs and then link clients to the appropriate services. Where necessary the nurse will accompany the client to initial appointments. They work holistically to build confidence and empower their clients to advocate for their own health needs independently.

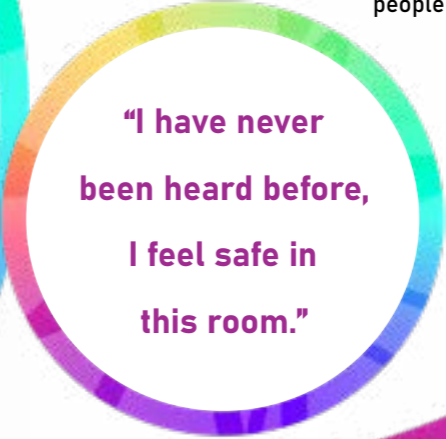
ARANAP also facilitates training and development for health professionals by offering support, collaboration and resources to assist in their provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate care. Primary healthcare services are supported to understand and overcome common barriers people from refugee backgrounds encounter in accessing health care due to their limited knowledge of health systems in Australia and how they work, low basic health, literacy, language barriers, cultural differences, socio-economic disadvantage and other settlement challenges.



ARANAP work closely with Australian Refugee Association (ARA) Bicultural Support Workers who play a vital role in bridging cultural understanding between health-related systems in Australia and those the client may have encountered in their country of origin.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- » ARANAP presented at the FASSTT conference on 'Improving access to healthcare for refugees', which was well-received by the national bodies attending who are invested in supporting refugees.
- » Participated in ARA's Winter Health Expo, meeting with community members and building relationships with representatives of services and businesses in and around the Salisbury area.
- » Conducted regular meetings with GP clinics after-hours to improve refugee access and encourage building a body of data to inform future primary health services.



# THRIVE AND CONNECT CALD MENTAL HEALTH

The STTARS' Thrive and Connect program that started in July 2023 was finally able to move into the newly established STTARS Salisbury office in October 2023.

The program continues to support clients from culturally diverse backgrounds to achieve better mental health and well-being through low intensity support and clinical care coordination, so that they can go from surviving to thriving.

Our bi-cultural peer support workers are important to this program because they have had similar experiences to the people who access our services. They help to build hope in recovery by drawing on their own cultural expertise and personal experiences. In order to upskill and contextualise their lived experience to better support their clients and prioritise their own self-care, the program engaged the Lived Experience Workforce Program (LEWP) to provide the team with tailored training.

The Thrive and Connect program has successfully achieved outcomes in a number of areas including stakeholder engagement, client outcomes, community consultations and training and development to external agencies.



## HIGHLIGHTS

- » In 2023-24, the Thrive and Connect supported 264 clients to achieve better mental outcomes through face-to-face or outreach appointments with individual clients.
- » Partnered with Council on the Ageing (COTA) to establish tailored, needs-based Strength for Life groups with the Bhutanese and Uyghur communities. Content delivered through these groups came directly from community consultation.
- » Delivered specialist mental health literacy training and development to external agencies providing support to people from CALD backgrounds.

# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

A sense of safety is fundamental for healing. Without connection, people do not feel safe. Community Development work at STTARS builds on the connections, strengths and resilience of people from refugee backgrounds within their communities to overcome their trauma, empower themselves and create a better life in Australia.

Trauma impacts on communities as much as it impacts on individuals. When groups of people are exposed to organised violence and terror, the bonds of trust that hold a community together are damaged. Added to this, the considerable challenges for a community settling into a new country may threaten pre-existing connections. Therefore, whilst it is important to work on an individual's symptoms of trauma, a vital element of the recovery process is to develop community capacity. Through fostering new connections and a sense of belonging in their new home, people from refugee backgrounds are able to find meaning and purpose in their new lives.

STTARS actively seeks opportunities to work in partnership with community groups and associations to undertake projects, events and initiatives to promote better support of survivors of torture and trauma within their community.

This year marked the formation of the Communities, Allied Health, and Therapeutic Groups team in response to the growing need for collective trauma recovery and healing within our communities.

**"I feel more connected with my body. I now understand what foods help my pain and which ones worsen it."**



## HIGHLIGHTS

- » In 2023-24, STTARS engaged in 72 community development and capacity building activities, consisting of 21 consultations with community leaders. 19 community consultations and hosted 39 community capacity building activities.
- » In April 2024 STTARS held a Family Fun Day at the John McVeity Centre in Smithfield Plains. This event was a joyful celebration featuring music, crafts, food, and more. The Family Fun Day also provided an opportunity for community members to connect with local services, with speeches by the Mayor of Playford and Hon. Mira El Dannawi MLC. The event was a vibrant reflection of community spirit.
- » Following a consultation with AMES Australia, the Regency Green School Holiday Program was established to address the loneliness and boredom often experienced by children and young people during school breaks. The program focuses on creating a safe space and social connection and encouraging emotional self-expression.
- » Seven clients received individualized naturopathic consultations addressing digestive issues, anxiety, and sleep disturbances.



# GROUP WORK

## Team of Life

During term 3, the CYP Team ran 3 "Team of Life" groups at Adelaide Secondary School of English with newly arrived Dari-speaking students. Team of Life is a collective narrative approach that uses sporting metaphors to enable young people to identify key supports in their lives. It also supports them to recognise the collective skills, strengths and resilience of their 'life teams', to celebrate goals and to make plans for the future. The students enjoyed the mix of physical and reflective activities as well as opportunities to build deeper connections and a greater feeling of safety with their peers. Students discovered the richness of the supports available to them in their life teams. A highlight for many were the opportunities to celebrate each others' stories, strengthening their connected identity.

## Purruna Program

The Purruna Program focused on holistic health, integrating dietary, lifestyle, and self-care education to empower participants in managing stress and improving overall well-being. With 17 women from Afghani backgrounds participating over 12 weeks, the program created a safe space for learning and healing.

## Multicultural Women's Group – Together We Can

In collaboration with Kilburn Community Centre, STARS launched a social group for refugee women to combat isolation and support empowerment. Participants developed skills in catering, physical activities like yoga, and English tutoring, while the group evolved into a supportive community. The initiative culminated in catering at the Annual Refugee Week Welcoming Dinner, laying the groundwork for a sustainable, self-sufficient enterprise.

## Latin American Women's Group

Women from diverse Latin American countries united through this group to support one another in their new lives. Completing training in Child Safe Environments and Food Safety Handling, they showcased their culinary skills during Refugee Week, expressing pride in their heritage.

## Karen Women Gardening Group

This group provided Karen women with the opportunity to learn Australian gardening techniques, reduce isolation, and share cultural knowledge. The communal spirit fostered a sense of belonging and empowerment.

## Afghani Women's Wellbeing Group – Together We Heal

This eight-session program focused on self-care and well-being for Afghani women who had experienced trauma and chronic pain. Through yoga and educational activities, participants reported feeling more engaged and empowered. The sessions created a supportive environment where women could heal together.

## TAFE SA Wellbeing Program

In response to consultations with refugee students at TAFE SA who experienced trauma and torture, the Wellbeing Program was created as part of our Therapeutic Group initiatives. The program aimed to strengthen self-care skills, improve sleep quality, enhance memory retention, and build relationships post-relocation. By addressing learning-related stress and exploring mental health concepts, the program created a safe space for students to relax, share emotions, and improve their academic outcomes.



"I haven't played a game like this before, & it helps me remember things better."

"This program helped me take control of my health. I feel less pain, more energy, and more capable."

"I look forward to Saturdays to come to the group"

"We need to do these exercises in class every day to learn English better."



## Thrive and Connect Sewing Groups

The Thrive and Connect Sewing group is attended by women from CALD backgrounds who present with mental health challenges related to social isolation, disconnection, lack of identity in a new country, low self-esteem and low confidence. It provides a safe space for women to learn and practice a new meaningful skill as guided and make new social connections. Due to the growing popularity of the Sewing Group, a second one has been established and has commenced.

"Being part of this group brings back the feeling of being in my village – connected and valued."

"When we are together, we can show all that we are capable of. We want to feel valued in this new country."

## Self-Help Stress Management Program

This program was hosted by a Visiting Clinician aiming to educate and support Afghani women through an Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) treatment model. This group can be linked to trauma recovery goals relating to psychoeducation, information regarding stress and empowering clients, building a sense of safety & resilience.

"Sharing plants and knowledge after the sessions reminds me of home and brings me joy."



"Yoga helped ease my pain, and now I feel more relaxed and at peace."



# MULTICULTURAL WELLBEING

## LIVING WELL WITH CHRONIC PAIN

The way that pain is conceptualized and expressed differs between cultures. Each cultural group has differences in the way that pain is understood and types of exercise/movement that are considered to be more appropriate. This program is designed specifically for people from refugee backgrounds, focusing on providing culturally relevant information and activities to help participants to better understand and manage their pain.

Many of the people supported by STTARS live with persistent pain and this has a profound impact on the quality of their daily life. There is much higher prevalence of chronic pain in people from refugee backgrounds than in the general population. Reasons for this include:

- » Physical injuries sustained as a result of torture, war-related experiences or refugee flight
- » The complex interplay between pain and traumatic memories connected to the refugee experience
- » Living in situations of extreme hardship for prolonged periods, resulting in medical conditions which contribute to chronic pain not receiving adequate timely treatment

The Chronic Pain Management Program significantly improved the quality of life for Karen, Ukrainian, and Afghan participants, with group sizes ranging from 8-15. The program provided essential education on pain mechanisms, the brain-body connection and practical strategies such as pacing and exercise grading, nutrition (anti-inflammatory diets) and sleep education. Three hydrotherapy sessions allowed participants to experience the benefits of low-impact exercise for chronic pain in a supportive environment. As a result, participants reported reduced pain, better sleep and improved function in daily activities.

The Reconnect Program offered past pain management participants continued support through hydrotherapy, benefiting Karen, Bhutanese, Uyghur and Afghan participants. Reduced joint pain and increased confidence with water-based exercises was reported. Karen women also took part in 10 tailored exercise sessions focusing on balance, strength, mobility and flexibility, which fostered a supportive community and allowed for continued activity at home.

“Since learning deep breathing, I’ve cut back on sleeping tablets & feel less stressed.”

“Hydro helps with my joint pain and has improved my sleep. I hope this program continues.”

“I learned breathing exercises that help me relax and fall asleep quickly, even reducing my need for sleeping tablets.”

“Hydrotherapy has reduced my knee and back pain, and I feel better.”



## EMBRACE

The Embrace Project was a community-centred initiative aimed at improving mental health awareness and reducing stigma among Afghan refugees in South Australia. The project collaborated with community leaders, religious scholars and organisations to deliver workshops addressing chronic pain management, well-being and reducing social isolation among the elderly. Culturally appropriate mental health resources, such as educational videos in Dari and Pashto and brochures, were also developed, helping build trust within the community and promoting mental health literacy.

“Meeting other Afghans takes me back to my village and gives me a sense of connection.”  
– Elderly Men Outing Program

# INTERPRETERS

Interpreters are vital to the work that is done at STTARS. When talking about a sensitive or emotive topic it can be difficult to find the right words to express yourself, and this is even harder when speaking a second language. For clients who do not yet have sufficient grasp of English to engage effectively in counselling, access to professional interpreters is considered a matter of basic rights.

The role of interpreters at STTARS is valuable and complex. Interpreters not only translate the words of clients but also the nuances that accompany them. When asked, interpreters can also provide valuable insight into cultural, social and historical contexts that are essential to understanding what clients are saying. The resulting collaboration contributes significantly to our counsellors' knowledge base and capacity to respond to client needs in a culturally sensitive way.

STTARS works with a collection of highly professional interpreters who understand the impacts of trauma and provide a high level of care for our client group.

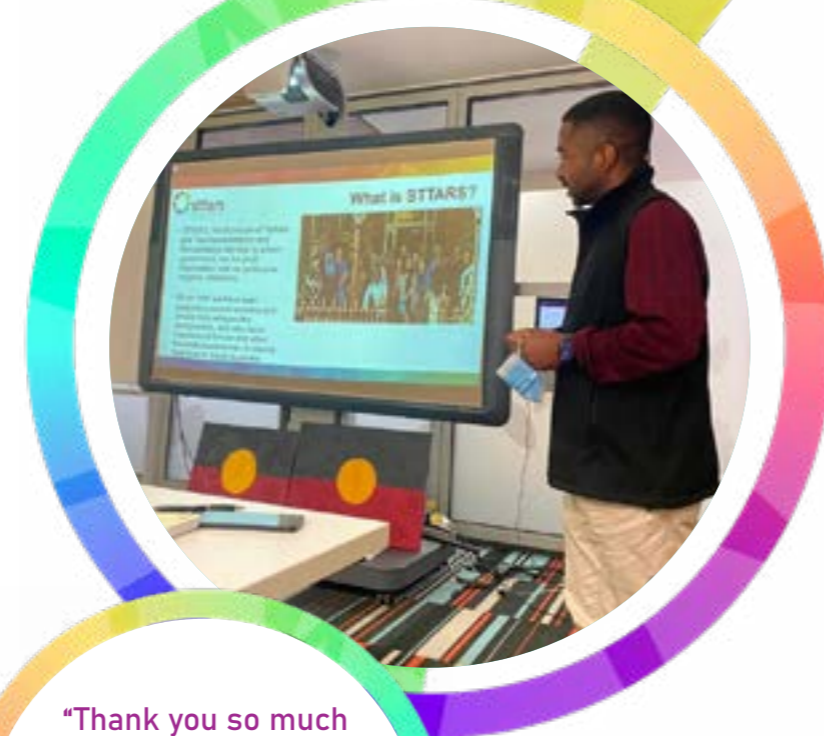
Many interpreters come from the same communities as the people they assist at STTARS, and we appreciate the careful ways that they uphold the privacy and confidentiality that is essential for clients to feel safe. STTARS is aware that interpreters can be moved and distressed by the stories of injustice and suffering that they hear in the course of their work.

To acknowledge and celebrate the integral work of our pool interpreters, STTARS hosts quarterly interpreter evenings in order to thank them for their contributions and to build stronger relationships between interpreters and staff. This gathering is also an opportunity for interpreters to share their knowledge and experience which results in improved services in supporting our clients.

# TRAINING & COLLABORATION

An important aspect of our work at STTARS is supporting community members and service providers to better understand the context of refugee experiences of torture and trauma and how these impact on the process of settling into a new society.

STTARS offers a range of high quality trainings scheduled throughout the year. In 2023-24, STTARS provided 4 full day Core Concepts and Accidental Counsellor training sessions. In addition, STTARS has also offered 18 tailored training sessions to a range of service providers and organisations including Adelaide University and other government and non-government services, totalling 588 participants.



"Thank you so much for yesterday's training. It was brilliant and exactly what we hoped for. The staff got so much out of it."

"The staff are very nice and the interpreter was always waiting for me and greeting me. It was very important that I had an interpreter and STTARS always organised that for me".

# OPERATIONS TEAM

STTARS' client-facing service delivery work is supported by a highly skilled, committed and compassionate operations team. Back-office functions including ICT, Finance, People and Culture, Executive Support and Administration are prioritised and managed by this team as well as first contact Reception functions across two sites. Behind the scenes, this team works to ensure that ICT requirements and the internal database are supported, staff and bills are paid, the workforce is looked after and programs are complemented with welcoming facilities and person-centred service. They also schedule interpreter bookings (which 45% of STTARS' sessions included this financial year), handle incoming enquiries, ensure accurate data entry of referrals and maintain an effective chain of communication throughout the organisation.

"The ladies in admin always are smiling, friendly, and polite".  
STTARS Client



# Financial Summary

Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service  
Statement of Profit and Loss and other Comprehensive Income  
For the year ended 30 June 2024

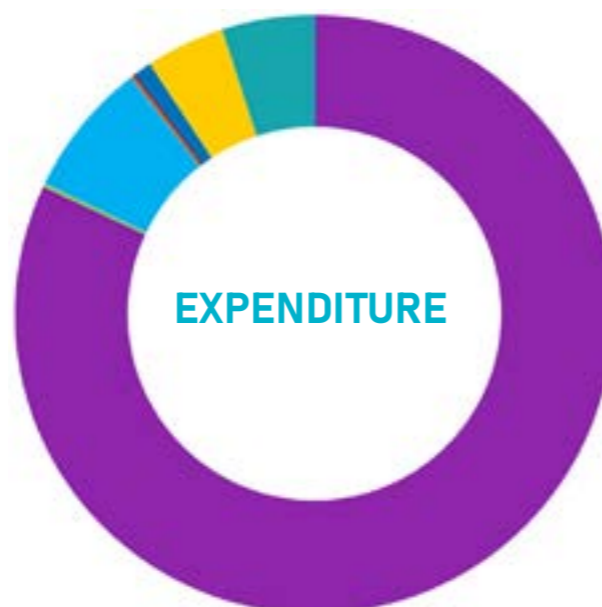
## Income

Grant Income	\$5,912,107
SRSS Services	-
Interest	\$139,784
Other income (for example, gains)	\$34,037
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$6,085,928</b>



## Expenditure

Salaries, Wages & Employee Expenses	\$4,605,126
Audit & Accounting Fees	\$9,550
Client Expenses	\$365,315
Depreciation	\$2,684
Insurance	\$5,200
Occupancy Expenses	\$66,992
Rent	\$275,644
Other Operating Expenses	\$456,589
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>\$5,787,098</b>



**OPERATING SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) \$298,830**

Unspent grant funding carried over to 2024-25

Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service  
Statement of Financial Position  
As at 30 June 2024

## Current Assets

Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$3,326,462
Debtors and Other Receivables	\$76,050
Prepayments	\$52,369
<b>TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS</b>	<b>\$3,454,881</b>

## Non Current Assets

Property, Plant and Equipment	\$43,401
<b>TOTAL NON CURRENT ASSETS</b>	<b>\$43,401</b>

**TOTAL ASSETS \$3,498,282**

## Current Liabilities

Trade and Other Payables	\$304,672
Contract Liabilities	\$438,025
Grant Received in Advance	-
Employee Provisions	\$859,491
<b>TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>	<b>\$1,602,187</b>

## Non Current Liabilities

Employee Provisions	\$47,165
<b>TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>	<b>\$47,165</b>

**TOTAL LIABILITIES \$1,649,352**

**NET ASSETS \$1,848,930**

**TOTAL EQUITY \$1,848,930**

STTARS gratefully acknowledges funding  
from the following agencies in 2023-2024



STTARS also acknowledges client sponsorship  
from the following organisations:

The Peggy Charitable Foundation



Survivors of Torture and Trauma  
Assistance and Rehabilitation Service

T +61 8 8206 8900  
F +61 8 8206 8945