



1996 - 2026

A BRIEF HISTORY

This report celebrates our community, our experiences, and our impact



Acknowledgement of Country

In the spirit of reconciliation, Accessible Diversity Services Initiative (ADSI) acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters, and community.

We acknowledge the Darug Nation and People as the Traditional Owners of the land on which our office is located in Auburn.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

About us

Accessible Diversity Services Initiative (ADSI) is a community-based, non-profit organisation committed to promoting multiculturalism, access, equity, and social justice.

Since 1996, we have worked alongside diverse communities, responding to changing needs and supporting people from all backgrounds, particularly migrants, refugees, and individuals with additional or complex needs.

Established as a grassroots migrant resource centre in Auburn, ADSI has grown into a multi-service organisation supporting communities across Greater Sydney, with a service footprint extending from the Inner West to the Blue Mountains.

We work in partnership with individuals, families, and communities from diverse cultural, linguistic, and ability backgrounds, supporting people to participate fully in community life with dignity and confidence.

Our approach is grounded in respect, cultural understanding, and genuine community engagement. With a diverse and multilingual workforce, we are committed to delivering accessible, culturally responsive services that empower individuals and strengthen communities.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the people whose commitment, compassion and vision helped shape ADSI and the community it serves.



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CEO Message



For thirty years, Accessible Diversity Services Initiative (ADSI) has stood alongside individuals, families and communities as they began new chapters in their lives.

What began as a small, community-driven response to the needs of newly arrived migrants in Auburn has grown into a multifaceted organisation supporting people across all stages of life. From settlement services to aged care, disability support, youth programs and community development, our work has always been guided by a simple but powerful belief: that everyone deserves the opportunity to belong, to participate and to thrive.

This milestone is not only an opportunity to reflect on how far we have come, it is a moment to recognise the people who made this journey possible.

We honour the community leaders who laid the foundations of this organisation through vision and determination. We recognise staff and volunteers whose compassion and commitment have shaped every service we provide. And we acknowledge the individuals and families who trusted us during some of the most important and challenging moments of their lives.

Over the years, we have witnessed extraordinary resilience. We have seen people rebuild after displacement, navigate unfamiliar systems, learn new languages, and create opportunities for future generations. These stories are at the heart of ADSI.

As we look to the future, our commitment remains clear. We will continue to evolve in response to the changing needs of our communities. We will strengthen partnerships, embrace innovation and advocate for a more inclusive society, one where diversity is not only accepted, but celebrated.

This book is a tribute to the journey we have taken together. And it is also a reminder that our story is still being written.

Joanna Matthew



Chair Message



Reaching thirty years is a significant milestone for any organisation, but for Accessible Diversity Services Initiative, it carries particular meaning.

ADSI was founded on the principle that communities are strongest when people are supported, connected and empowered. From its beginnings as a Migrant Resource Centre in Auburn, the organisation has grown in both scope and impact while remaining deeply grounded in the community it serves.

As Chair, I have had the privilege of witnessing the dedication of our Board, leadership team and staff, as well as the strength and resilience of the communities we work with. ADSI's success is built on collaboration between community members, government, partner organisations and volunteers all working towards a shared vision of inclusion and opportunity.

Over the past three decades, the organisation has adapted to changing policy environments, emerging community needs and an increasingly diverse population. Through this change, one constant has remained: a commitment to ensuring that every individual is treated with dignity and respect. Good governance is about more than oversight; it is about stewardship. It is about ensuring that the organisation remains true to its purpose while continuing to grow responsibly and sustainably.

As we celebrate this milestone, we also look ahead.

The challenges facing our communities continue to evolve, and so too must we. ADSI is well positioned to meet these challenges, guided by its values, informed by lived experience and strengthened by its partnerships.

On behalf of the Board, I extend our gratitude to everyone who has contributed to ADSI's journey over the past thirty years.

We are proud of what has been achieved, and confident in what lies ahead.

Steven Gal



ADSI's Vision & Strategy

Our Vision

Diverse communities have equality and achieve their aspirations.

Our Strategic Objectives



Communities That Thrive

Community led, culturally responsive services at the centre of ADSI's work.



Giving Community Voice

Lived experience shaping systems, policy and decision making.



Capability With Purpose

Building the people, systems and foundations that enable impact.



30 Years of Community Impact



82,617

Individuals Supported



188,617

Acts of Support

Settlement & Community Programs

44

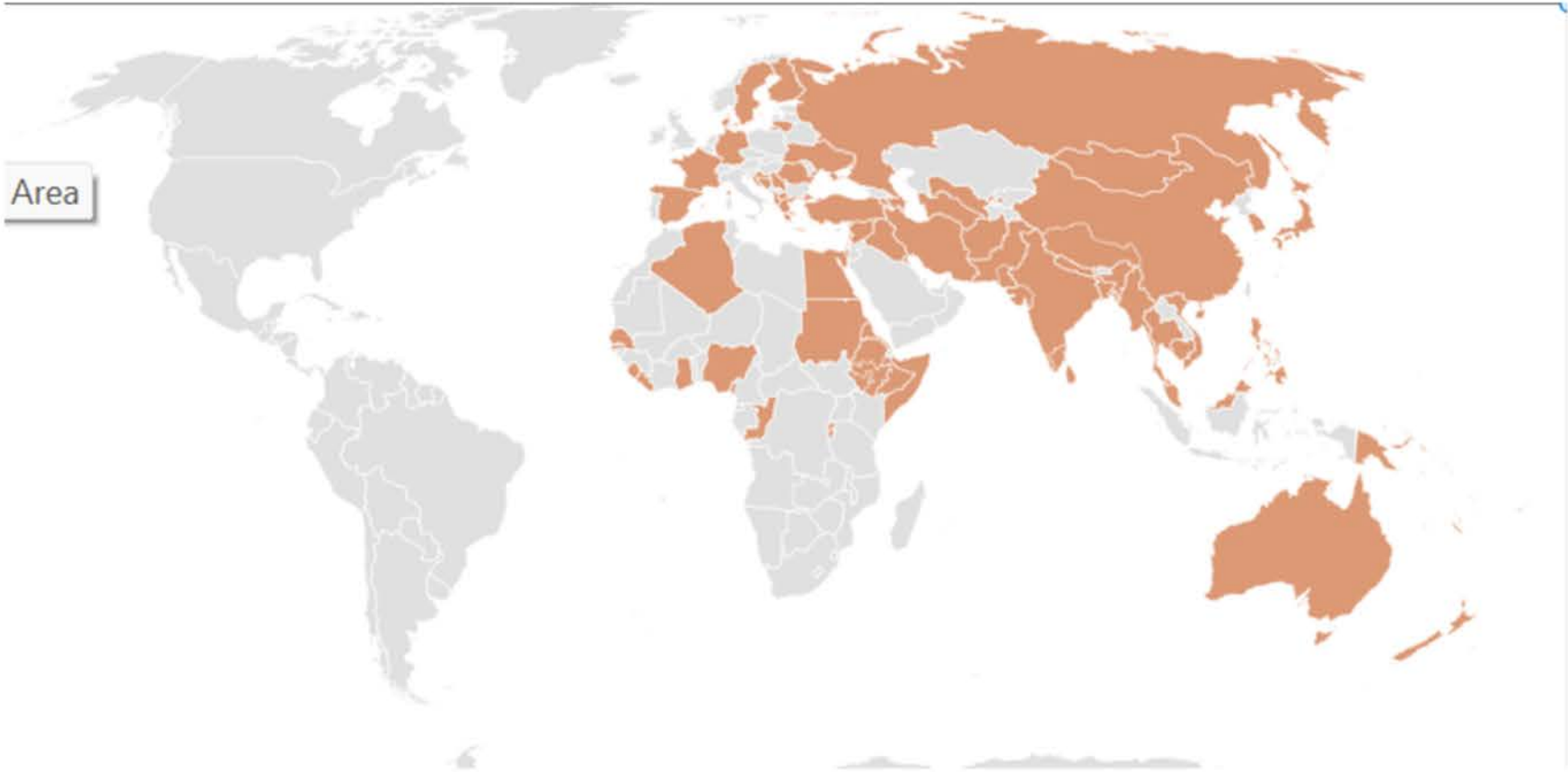
Suburbs
reached

100

Languages
spoken

87

Countries
represented



Decade Snapshot



Since 2019 we have delivered
2,861 Community visits
to lonely and vulnerable individuals



Since beginning Aged Care in 2018
we have delivered
78,274 hours
of service



Since beginning NDIS in 2017 we have
delivered
66,847 hours
of service



In the last decade we have helped
1,614 people
secure long term accommodation



In the last decade we have provided
2,500 Playgroup sessions
and over 1600 parenting support sessions



Since our ER program launched in 2019
we have completed
6,344 Casework sessions

In the last decade our SETS team
have completed
23,282 Casework sessions
and delivered

6750 Education sessions

Our Names



9th August 1996

Officially opened by The Hon. Phillip Ruddock,
Former Minister for Immigration and
Multicultural Affairs

The Auburn, Migrant Resource Centre
was founded as an incorporated
association.



2009

The Auburn Migrant Resource
Centre was renamed **Auburn
Diversity Services Inc. (ADSI)**



2020

Auburn Diversity Services Inc. (ADSI)
transitioned to a company limited by
guarantee (CLG), registered with
ASIC under the Corporations Act
2001 (Cth), and adopted the
company name **Accessible
Diversity Services Initiative (ADSI)**.



Our Journey



“We chose to live in Auburn because we wanted to be part of a familiar community, where our children could enjoy Turkish culture and feel a strong sense of belonging while starting a new life in Australia.”
— Djemal, ADSI aged care client

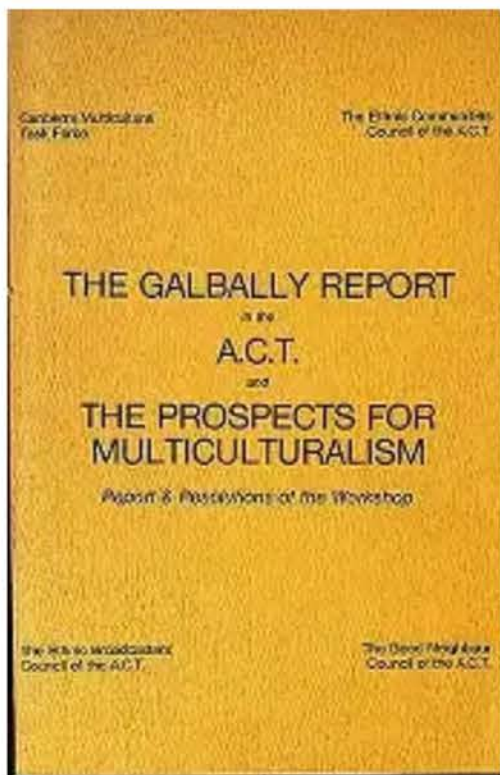
From Settlement to Belonging

The story of Accessible Diversity Services Initiative is, at its heart, a story of people - their journeys, their determination and their shared commitment to building a more inclusive society. It is also a story shaped by a broader national vision - one that transformed how Australia supports people building new lives.

Before the late 1970s, settlement support for migrants was often fragmented and informal. Newly arrived families relied on ethnic clubs, religious institutions and personal networks for guidance. While these connections were vital, they could not always meet the complex needs of an increasingly diverse population.

Djemal (pictured above) has spent his life working as a sheet metal worker. Here, he is pictured with treasured photographs of his late parents, a lasting reminder of the family he carries with him.

After migrating from Cyprus to Australia in 1969, he built a life in Auburn with his wife, where they have remained ever since. Together they raised a family, and today their children live nearby and continue to play a strong role in their lives.



A defining moment came with the release of the Galbally Report in 1978. Its recommendations marked a turning point in Australian policy.

Settlement services, it argued, should be local, coordinated and shaped by the communities they served. Migrants should not simply receive services, they should help design and deliver them.

In response, Migrant Resource Centres were established across the country.

Top right image: Jamal and wife sitting outside their family home of nearly 60 years, a longstanding daily ritual of observing the comings and goings of the Auburn community.

Bottom right image: Jamal proudly points to decades of family photographs spanning multiple generations, displayed throughout the walls of the family home.



From Vision to Reality

In New South Wales, this vision took shape in communities like Auburn. By the 1980s and 1990s, Auburn had become one of Sydney’s most vibrant multicultural centres. Migrants from Turkey, Lebanon, Southern Europe and later from Africa, the Middle East and Asia brought both cultural richness and new challenges.

Local leaders responded. Community representatives, faith organisations, social workers and advocates came together to identify needs and push for locally based services. Steering committees were formed, funding was pursued and a shared vision began to emerge.

From this effort, the **Auburn, Migrant Resource Centre (MRC)** was established. Governed by a community-based board, it ensured that decision-making remained in the hands of those who understood the community best.

A Place of Support and Connection

The centre quickly became more than a service provider - it became a place of trust. Individuals and families came seeking help with housing, employment, education and healthcare. Bilingual staff played a crucial role, helping people navigate systems that were often complex and unfamiliar.

Just as importantly, the centre fostered community. Cultural associations, youth programs and women’s groups were supported, creating spaces where identity and belonging could flourish.

Responding to a Changing World

From the 1990s onwards, new waves of humanitarian arrivals reshaped the community. Refugees from Iraq, Afghanistan, the Balkans and African nations brought resilience and hope, alongside the challenges of rebuilding their lives. ADSI services expanded.



“I remember walking into what felt like a family home. From the moment I arrived, (the late) Zeljka at reception, herself a refugee from Serbia, was incredibly welcoming. I was over the moon to be in the right place.”



Sarjoh Bah, refugee from Sierra Leone, (pictured, left), initially an Auburn MRC client, later a volunteer and staff member, former ADSI Chair, current Board Director, and ongoing community leader and policy maker.

“I never saw myself as a public speaker... and never did I think I would be standing in front of, other youth workers, at Youth Action, Youth Conference, talking... I was able to do that because of the support from ADSI.”



Adama Kamara (pictured left), resettled in Australia with her family through a Humanitarian program. She was a youth leader for the Sierra Leonean Youth Group in the early 2000s and participated in Auburn MRC’s newly developed Leadership and Youth Participation program. She went on to serve as ADSI’s youngest Board Director, an officer at Cumberland City Council, and is currently Co-CEO of the Refugee Council of Australia.



Meaningful Beginings



Anne Bicer, TAFE NSW (pictured right), was one of the original members of the community management committee. Together with Sherbanu, ADSI Family Worker, Anne has worked with ADSI for over 30 years, supporting community programs and employability skills initiatives.

“I’ve known ADSI since the very beginning, 1996, and I was part of, well, one of the workers (to set up programs for people, particularly people who were new arrivals) that would come in from TAFE, sometimes teaching program, sometimes meeting with the workers here at the centre to set up programs and other teachers would come to teach.

There were a lot of people coming in from places like Bosnia, people from Middle Eastern countries. A lot of people who just had no idea about services and how to access anything in their community. A lot of people were living in Auburn... So they really wanted to know how they could use the services that were available. What they were eligible for and who they might need to contact in order to get things started, such as the local schools.

I remember we used to have the police come to talk to groups because they just, you know, weren’t sure about the role of police in Australia. So we needed to help them to build good relationships there as well. And then to help them develop language skills and to look for work.”



Cheryl Webster (pictured, left) has worked with Anglicare for 40 years and with ADSI for more than 30 years. She began as a settlement worker funded by the Department of Immigration and now works as a Community Engagement Worker in a community living support program for refugees and asylum seekers, focusing on mental health support.

“A lot of it (my work) was in relation to advocacy, working with different workers here (at Auburn, MRC), like Semra. And we would be involved with various advisory committees, with Centrelink, with housing, with FACS or docs, whatever it was at the time...we worked together, and being advocates for the communities that we worked with.

Often we would have events, activities that we’d be doing together, or I might be referring people here for casework, doing some work with the workers here, supporting them, the workers themselves, supporting leaders from the different communities.

And also, because a lot of people from different African communities were coming in the early 2000s. We had a program for the South Sudanese community over a number of years... And at one point, we had a worker, Monica, who was based here for one or two days a week, and she would be doing casework doing some work with communities as well.

Some of the things that I particularly remember, was the Hey Dad program, which was for South Japanese dads, helping them to learn to be a South Sudanese dad in Australia and what the differences were and how they could be doing that.

Also, we had some programs with a number of the South Sudanese and some of the people from other African communities where we have barbecues and with just the men, and we would have information sessions around those.

But it’s been an ongoing thing, working with different workers here, supporting them in their work, as well as working with leaders of the different communities that were involved with the MRC.”

Responding to the Changing World

The Formation of SSI

In 2000, Settlement Services International (SSI) - then known as the NSW Migrant Resource Centre Association was established by a coalition of 11 migrant resource centres across New South Wales, including Auburn MRC.

This marked a turning point for organisations like Auburn MRC. Rather than operating in isolation, migrant resource centres became part of a collaborative, statewide framework designed to:

- secure and manage large federal settlement contracts
- standardise service delivery and case management
- strengthen advocacy and sector coordination

SSI did not replace organisations such as Auburn MRC; instead, it functioned as an umbrella body, amplifying their reach while retaining their local knowledge and community trust. As a member organisation, Auburn MRC contributed to and benefited from this model, which brought grassroots expertise into a more structured and professionalised settlement system.

The awarding of major programs such as the Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) contract reinforced this shift. SSI's model relied heavily on its member organisations' local connections, recognising that effective settlement outcomes depended on community-based delivery.

For Auburn MRC, and other migrant resource centres this meant increased access to:

- federally funded programs
- coordinated service networks
- shared infrastructure and expertise
- while continuing to serve as a frontline provider in communities such as Auburn, one of Australia's key migrant settlement hubs.



“Auburn MRC was a place-based community hub for refugee communities. It was an incredibly busy place, with a strong sense of community ownership... Its legacy lies in the leadership of community members it helped build, including the establishment of settlement positions. We supported waves of African migration, as well as Bosnian and Kosovar refugees. We were also part of providing a safe haven during those times.”



- Amrit Versha (pictured, left) led Auburn, MRC from 1999, for five years, carrying forward the vision of staunch advocate, the late Claudette Elaro (1965 - 2008), Auburn MRC's first manager, with care and dedication.

In doing so, Amrit helped nurture the organisation's growth, expanding its reach and establishing new initiatives, including refugee youth and women's housing positions.



“Looking back, the start of SSI was a big change for settlement services in NSW. For organisations like Auburn Migrant Resource Centre, it meant moving away from working on their own and becoming part of a wider statewide network. At the same time, local centres still mattered a lot because they had strong ties to their communities and understood what newly arrived people needed day to day.”

- Amadu Bah, ADSI Team Leader, Settlement Services

Strengthening Settlement Outcomes

Building on this collaborative foundation, the next phase in settlement service delivery saw the emergence of formal consortium models under the federal Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program.

In 2015, the NSW Settlement Partnership (NSP) led by SSI, brought together multiple organisations, including Accessible Diversity Services Initiative (ADSI), to deliver integrated settlement services across the state.

This model emphasised shared governance and accountability, coordinated service planning and innovation through partnership.

For ADSI, participation in NSP enabled involvement in cross-sector initiatives, such as targeted projects for emerging communities in Auburn, including collaborative work supporting the rapidly growing Nepalese community.

Western Sydney Settlement Alliance

As the settlement sector continued to evolve, regionalised delivery models emerged to better reflect changing migration and settlement patterns, particularly the significant concentration of new arrivals in Western Sydney. This shift recognised that effective support is strengthened when services are designed and delivered close to where communities are actually forming, rather than through fragmented or purely organisational boundaries.

In response to this need, the Western Sydney Region Settlement Consortium (WSRSC) was established as a partnership of key organisations delivering SETS-funded services across Greater Western Sydney. The consortium reflects a more mature and integrated phase of the settlement sector, characterised by place-based service delivery aligned to settlement locations, shared responsibility across organisations with complementary



Photo courtesy of SydWest Multicultural Services
(L-R) Melissa Monteiro, CMRC, Joanna Matthew, Advanced Diversity Services, Elfa Moraitakis, SydWest Multicultural Services and Maeve Brown, Western Sydney MRC

“We are able to expand specialised services, ensuring clients are not restricted by geography in accessing the support they need. This means people can receive the right services regardless of where they live, allowing us to respond more flexibly and equitably to diverse and evolving community needs.”

- Joanna Matthew, CEO ADSI

strengths, and coordinated, collaborative responses to complex and diverse community needs.

The consortium includes the following members:

- Accessible Diversity Services Initiative (ADSI)
- SydWest Multicultural Services (lead member)
- Community Migrant Resource Centre (CMRC)
- Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre (WSMRC)

The Western Sydney consortium covers major settlement areas such as Cumberland (including Auburn), Blacktown, Liverpool and Penrith, regions where a significant proportion of new arrivals to NSW establish their lives.



Growing Beyond Settlement

Over time, ADSI evolved, with its scope of work expanding well beyond settlement services to include aged care, disability support, and a range of broader community programs. This expansion reflected both the changing and increasingly complex needs of the communities it served, as well as a growing recognition that inclusion must be supported across the entire life course, from newly arrived migrants through to older people and individuals requiring ongoing care and support.

“With this continued evolution came a new identity: Accessible Diversity Services Initiative. The name captures a broader and more integrated mission, one that recognises diversity not as a barrier or challenge to be managed, but as a foundational strength that enriches communities and underpins equitable, inclusive service delivery.”

- Saroj Bah, ADSI Board member

Today, ADSI stands as part of a wider legacy shaped by decades of community effort. From grassroots beginnings to a leading multicultural organisation, its journey reflects the power of community-led action.

Yet its core purpose remains unchanged: to empower people, strengthen communities and create opportunities for belonging.



A Lasting Legacy



“ADSI aged care for me is like a big family. I have more friends now. I meet new people, I go different places, and I enjoy my days. The staff are very nice and kind, and they come from my own community. ADSI is very good to me. They really care for me.”

- Gulsun, an ADSI client (pictured left), holds a photograph of her younger self in front of a display of family photos spanning multiple generations.



“I came to Australia back in 2001 and I have been here since. I now call Australia my home. I have been in contact with ADSI for a very long time, over 16 years, and I am very glad I was referred to them. They helped my children grow with confidence and supported me in raising them in a new culture that was very new to me. They supported me through programs like the 4Ps parenting program and playgroups, where my children could learn, play, and make friends, and I could also feel supported as a parent. Both of my children are now grown up and happy, and I feel very thankful and grateful to ADSI for all their help and care.”

- Vinita, a long-term ADSI client (pictured, left), was referred to ADSI by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Auburn to support her daughter’s socialisation through playgroups and school readiness programs. She continued to participate in women’s programs and activities for many years, fostering connection, belonging, and community engagement.

“Having a home gives me independence. It is freedom. I can live my own life, make my own choices, and feel safe. I feel strong and can move forward now.”

- Sepil (pictured right) is an ADSI client who, after a family breakdown and finding herself without a place to stay, was helped to access safe and affordable housing through a housing provider. With this support, she was able to secure a stable home and start again with confidence. She now lives in peace, knowing she has a safe place to call home, close to a familiar community, and the stability to rebuild her life and look to the future with hope.



“As you know, getting a small amount of help...even one dollar is a big help. Emotional help means a lot too. ADSI showed me the way, under God’s help. It was very good help for me and my family.”

- Kebra (pictured, left) was previously an ADSI client and is now giving back to the community by supporting ADSI clients in obtaining their driver’s licences.

Meaningful Community Impact



“I have been to ADSI a couple of times ready. About my personal things. When I have a problem, I cannot think straight... And this is my place.”

“I had never rented before. And when I was asked to leave, Jok, she helped me a lot... Whatever I asked, she sits there and help me. I’m grateful to her. That was a difficult time for me.”

- Mimi, (pictured, right) with Jok, ADSI Specialist Homelessness Services Caseworker, from South Sudan. Mimi is from Hong Kong and came to Australia to join her daughter.



“The high court asked her file from Accessible Diversity Service what she's doing, what kind of programme she's attending, all that kind of things. Because of that, it's linking Triple P, driving knowledge, and also English class, all these things is to improve her skill to look after her children.

And that is the reason she received back her daughter. And was so celebrating, so exciting everyone as a community, as accessible diversity service, and also as a family members. That's a good achievement I never forget. Never forget.”



Aynalem Tessema (pictured, left) Settlement Worker, Community Capacity Building has been working at ADSI for 21 years.

“I was very fascinated to hear the word migrant. So I was so excited to come and see what Auburn, MRC was... it's such a beautiful place here - and I just came in and joined the playgroup. I also started to study my Certificate III in Children's Services from TAFE. The lady was so proud of me that it's been just a short while, not even three months here in Australia and I had already started to study.

And after that, the lady who was there at the playgroup had went on leave and the team leader just came up to me and said, Would you like to volunteer over here?... And that's how I just stepped in... eventually, I think I was destined to be here and work here at this beautiful place.”



Sherbanu Oomatia Family Worker has been working at ADSI for 18 years.

“In 2015, we were seeking a community partner who could act as a bridge between community voices and the system. We connected with ADSI and the Family team, and found a partner willing to work alongside us to achieve shared outcomes and objectives.”

“ADSI keeps the community at the centre as equal partners - not speaking down to them but working alongside them. From the Western Sydney Local Health District perspective, we have greatly valued the strategic insights they have provided, particularly in relation to improving community access; deepening our understanding of communities, and responding respectfully to their needs.”



Dipti Zachariah, Associate Director of patient and care experience, Western Sydney Local Health District.

Contact Us

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ADSI
Accessible Diversity
Services Initiative

30
Years
Supporting
Community



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scan the QR code