

Tuesday 11 June 2019

## Shared stories to break down barriers this Refugee Week

A young woman will tell Sydneysiders about her six-year journey from Syria to Australia as part of a Refugee Week program aimed at dismantling community misconceptions about refugees and people seeking asylum.

Assyrian-Syrian woman Atra Tchikha arrived in Australia in 2017 following a journey from Syria to escape the war, through the United Arab Emirates and Lebanon, seeking a safe place to call home.

"The war was so threatening, my mother received calls from unknown groups threatening to kidnap me and my sister," Ms Tchikha said. "All the roads and networks were cut off as we were isolated where we were. My journey to here was a struggle – six years of ongoing moving and travelling."

Ms Tchikha will share her story as part of the Refugee Council of Australia's Refugee Speakers' Bureau program at a lunchtime event hosted by the City of Sydney at Town Hall House on Friday 21 June.

The Refugee Council's program trains and mentors refugees in public speaking so speakers can share their stories with the community. The program aims to build social cohesion, address negative perceptions in the community and raise awareness about refugees and their journeys and contributions to Australia.

"I started studying construction management as soon as I set foot in Australia because I knew I had opportunities in my new home," said Ms Tchikha, who is studying for a degree at the University of Western Sydney.

"It's never too late to accept the opportunities you have. Take advantage of everything that surrounds you as a tool to build your future."

The City of Sydney is also partnering with the Asylum Seekers Centre to host a major speaking event – Stronger Together – at Lower Town Hall on Thursday 20 June.

Speakers include Secretary General of the world's largest human rights organisation, Amnesty International, Kumi Naidoo. Mr Naidoo will talk about the refugee crisis from an international viewpoint, detailing the latest worldwide developments involving refugees and people seeking asylum. Dr Graham Thom from Amnesty International Australia will cover the Australian and Pacific context.

Other speakers include Asylum Seekers Centre CEO, Frances Rush, and Lord Mayor Clover Moore.

"The City of Sydney has been a Refugee Welcome Zone since 2005 and we are committed to upholding human rights, demonstrating compassion and enhancing cultural and religious diversity in our community," Lord Mayor Clover Moore said.

"People go through incredibly difficult journeys to come and live in our city, forced from their homes by a fear

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of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, social group or political opinion.

“This year’s Refugee Week theme recognises that sharing stories of these journeys can help us build both understanding and stronger communities.”

A young woman supported by the Centre will share her experience of arriving in Australia and settling in a new community.

The event will also feature an uplifting performance by multicultural choir Phoenix Voices of Youth, in a joyous celebration of life, identity and hope.

Meanwhile, sports fanatics can come along and enjoy the Refugee Round of the Multicultural Futsal Series (the M-Series) at the City of Sydney’s King George V Recreation Centre in The Rocks on Sunday 16 June.

The M-Series futsal games aim to make newly arrived migrant communities, especially those from refugee backgrounds, feel welcome in Australia and assist in the settlement process. The Refugee Round is the biggest in the series of one-day tournaments that celebrate diversity, foster social cohesion and connect communities.

The M-Series is a collaborative project involving the City of Sydney, Fair Game Australia, STARTTS (NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors) and Football NSW.

Refugee Week runs from Sunday 16 June to Saturday 22 June with the theme ‘A world of stories’.

## **Refugee Week Speakers’ Bureau**

When: 1pm to 1.45pm, Friday 21 June

Where: Marconi Room, Town Hall House, 483 George Street, Sydney

What: At this lunchtime session, you’ll meet Atra, an Assyrian-Syrian woman who arrived in Australia in 2017 after a six-year journey seeking a safe place to call home. Please bring your lunch and find out why people leave, where they go and how they are treated. This event is a collaboration between the City of Sydney and the Refugee Council of Australia for Refugee Week 2019.

Cost: Free

## **Stronger Together**

When: 6.30pm to 8pm, Thursday 20 June

Where: Lower Town Hall, Sydney Town Hall, 483 George Street (entrance opposite QVB), Sydney

What: This is a major speaking event hosted by the Asylum Seekers Centre and the City of Sydney.

Speakers include Amnesty International Secretary General, Kumi Naidoo; Refugee Coordinator at Amnesty International Australia, Dr Graham Thom; Asylum Seekers Centre CEO, Frances Rush; and Lord Mayor Clover Moore. Multicultural choir Phoenix Voices of Youth will perform.

Cost: \$10, tickets at [eventbrite.com.au/e/stronger-together-tickets-62125419803](https://eventbrite.com.au/e/stronger-together-tickets-62125419803)

## **M-Series III, The Refugee Cup**

When: 10am to 3.30pm, Sunday 16 June

Where: King George V Recreation Centre, The Rocks

What: Held across three courts, this is the biggest round of the Multicultural Futsal Series. Teams comprising members of Sydney’s Afghan Hazara, Burmese Rohingya, Iraqi, Syrian, Iranian and Tibetan communities will

be contesting the senior men's and male youth tournaments. Football NSW and Western Sydney Wanderers FC will also be running community coaching courses for children aged between 5-16 years. Fair Game Australia will run fun health education activities and games for children. Bring the kids along to participate in the clinics and cheer the futsal teams on.

Cost: Free

For more information or to book visit [whatson.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/programs/refugee-week](http://whatson.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/programs/refugee-week)

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