

# Helping **young refugees** settle in Australia

**H**OW CAN THE VISUAL ARTS be used to help young refugees settle in Australia? That's the aim of innovative research being carried out at La Trobe University.

Funded by an ARC Linkage Grant, the project is a partnership between the University's Refugee Health Research Centre (RHRC) and School of Social Sciences, Foundation House which houses the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, and VicHealth.

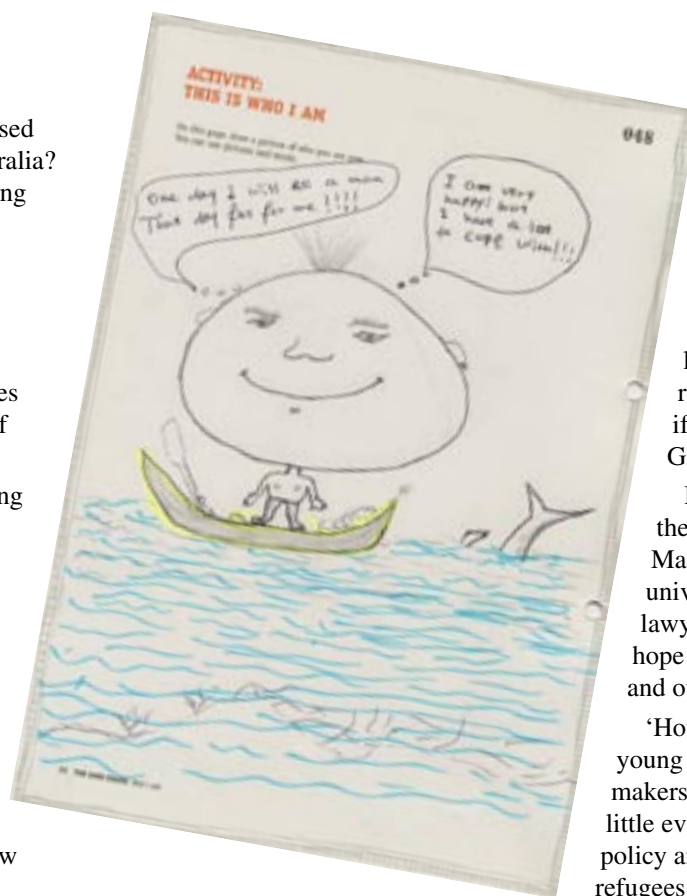
The grant of \$161,000 will enable young people from refugee backgrounds to document their resettlement experiences through film and visual art.

RHRC Director, Professor Sandy Gifford, Sociology and Anthropology lecturer, Dr Lorraine Mortimer, and Dr Ida Kaplan from Foundation House, will work with a film maker and community artist to teach young refugees creative skills needed to express their experiences of making a new life in Australia.

Professor Gifford says the project builds on the RHRC's existing 'Good Starts' study, funded by VicHealth, which follows 100 recently arrived young refugees over five years to identify factors which support their successful transition to adulthood.

'Good Starts Arts' over the next three years will involve 20 newly arrived young refugees. The project will also gather qualitative data about their experiences of settlement.

Dr Gifford says most refugees arriving in Australia are young



people from the Middle-East and the Horn of Africa.

'They face major challenges to successful settlement, having often been exposed to violence, lived for long periods in refugee camps, and had little if any schooling,' Professor Gifford says.

Research findings highlight their hopes and ambitions. Many want to complete university to become doctors, lawyers and engineers, and most hope to get married, have families and own a home.

'However lack of research with young refugees means policy makers and service providers have little evidence on which to base policy and practice to help young refugees achieve their ambitions.

'A lack of public understanding of the refugee experience also exposes these young people to discrimination and racism. This project will give them the opportunity both to learn technical, creative and interpersonal skills – and to share their stories with researchers and the public.

'It will also build the reputation of La Trobe, and Australia, as a centre for innovative research in Refugee Studies.' ●

## Refugee Centre seminars

**T**HE REFUGEE HEALTH RESEARCH CENTRE is conducting a series of seminars about the lives of refugees from childhood to old age. On the first Wednesday of each month, the seminars highlight the need for partnerships between academia and the community.

The February seminar dealt with issues that affect refugee families with children under five, while the topic in March was: 'Out of school learning for school-aged refugees'.

On Wednesday April 5, Associate Professor Santina Bertone, from Victoria University, will discuss 'Refugee access and participation in tertiary education'.

On 3 May La Trobe RHRC Research Fellow, Dr Ignacio Correa-Velez, will speak on: 'Refugee men: Negotiating the challenging of resettlement' and on 5 June Dr Correa-Velez and Ms Rebecca Atwell, a RHRC research assistant, will present 'A

profile of Victorian seniors from refugee backgrounds: Health and well-being needs and access to aged care services'.

The venue is the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, 6 Gardiner Street, Brunswick. Further details from [www.latrobe.edu.au/rhrc](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/rhrc) or tel: 03 9388 0022. ●



Professor Gifford