

2015 NATIONAL PLAY YOUR PART AWARDS FOR INSPIRING PREVENTION INITIATIVES – INDIVIDUAL

To: Amrit Versha

For: Being an inspiring advocate for children's safety and wellbeing in the migrant and refugee community.

Amrit Versha knew no one when she arrived in Australia 27 years ago. She has since committed herself to ensuring migrant women, children and families don't feel alone but are supported, empowered and connected to their community.

The human rights advocate has worked with refugees for 25 years including managing several community organisations such as the former Auburn Migrant Resource Centre. Previously she was a community program officer for the Department of Community Services, where she initiated the African Learning Circle.

Mrs Versha said that the Learning Circle is a strategy used to create dialogue, which in itself is a co-operative activity involving respect. It is a grassroots approach, which places families from migrant and refugee backgrounds at the centre, to strengthen their capacity and resilience.

"It works well because people's feelings are validated and they are part of the solution, rather than being spoken at."

She has recently established the Sikh Women and Girls Group where she adopted the Learning Circle model. The group is using action learning strategies to harness leadership amongst women and girls to create prevention programs around issues such as domestic violence, which is considered as shameful by their community.

As an educator at TAFE, she delivers education programs that validate the life experiences and learning that adults bring with them. An example is her partnership with an Afghan mosque to provide training for qualifications to newly arrived women from refugee camps with no formal education.

Mrs Versha believes that through supporting women and their families we provide strength throughout our community. Her work in empowering migrant and refugee families directly impacts the safety and wellbeing of children by educating, resourcing and supporting parents and extended family members.

The community worker is pursuing a doctorate about the interface of family violence with settlement in migrant and refugee communities, from Madurai University in India. This is following a similar community based study with refugees in partnership with the Community Migrant Resource Centre and the Centre of Refugee Research UNSW. This research has led to the development of several prevention programs for newly-arrived refugee communities.

Amrit Versha is an inspiring advocate who is committed to promoting the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and their families.