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Community Idol Presentation

Address to the Communities in Control Conference
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Horn of Africa Community Network

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Since 1984 there has been a significant number of Horn of Africa settlers coming to Australia.

An estimated 70% of refugees coming to Australia have experienced some form of torture, including rape and physical assault, or extensive periods of living in fear, this trauma experience frequently resulting in significant mental health issues.

Most settlers from the Horn of Africa do not come directly from their country of origin. People fled their war-torn countries in fear of their lives, crossing the border to neighbouring countries and seeking asylum everywhere the United Nations had a Commissioner for Refugees to provide them with shelter and relief assistance.

There are more than 20,000 Horn of Africa settlers living in Victoria. Melbourne has a higher proportion of these settlers than any other area of Victoria, and therefore bears a major responsibility for responding to the settlement needs of the community of refugees.

The issues facing these communities are substantial, and include employment, education, health, problem gambling and domestic violence.

In 1998 Horn of Africa activists, professionals, community leaders, and elders got together in Melbourne and established the Horn of Africa Community Network (HOACN) for local people to deal with local issues so that the gulf between Horn of Africa settlers and service providers could be minimised.

The Committee of Management of the Horn of Africa Community Network is comprised of people from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, and North and Southern Sudan, and represents people of different ages and different religions (Islam, Christianity, and other beliefs) and different genders, ethnicity, and differences in language and background.

Horn of Africa Community Network has the support of an advisory group, which can provide additional support, especially about Australian structures and systems.

The Advisory Committee is made up of representatives from the Magistrate's Court, the Children's Court, Victoria University, the

Department of Human Services, the Victorian Police, Centrecare Catholic services, and more.

The overall goal of the Horn of Africa Community Network is to identify the issues that pose a threat to Horn of Africa communities, to bring them to the attention of various levels of government, as well as the public and the community centre.

In addition, it will seek ways to enhance awareness of available services among Horn of Africa settlers and will address the difficulties they encounter in the settlement process.

To be heard, you have to have a voice. To address this issue, Horn of Africa has become involved with community issues, including information discrimination.

Horn of Africa, in partnership with Adult Cultural Education Services, produced the first Horn of Africa newspaper in Australia, in seven languages, named "The Ambassador".

Horn of Africa Community Network promotes voluntarism, sought funding from alternative sources such as philanthropic foundations and trusts, negotiations with the government, and service providers for program and project support.

Horn of Africa Community Network also engages with the media, and local media in particular, to put forward the views of the community and to present a positive image of the community to a wider audience. Lack of language skills and training, and of previous work experience has contributed to the high unemployment rate in the newly arrived communities.

Horn of Africa has played a strong and direct role in reducing the unemployment problem through establishing a regional employment and training program through Victoria University, Murray Mallee Training Company, Swan Hill council, and the Horn of Africa community sector.

We also have another employment program in partnership with the Warnambool Council and Adult Multicultural Education services.

Horn of Africa is also proud of another of its successful efforts to develop an effective youth support program and to secure a grant from the Australian Youth Foundation which would enable us to

create an opportunity for Horn of Africa youth to develop their confidence, independence, leadership skills, and pride in their African and Australian identity.

The other great successes of the Horn of Africa Community Network have been in implementing, since 2001, an education support program that aims to promote partnership amongst schools, Horn of Africa parents, and young people.

To serve our community in addressing settlement issues, Horn of Africa Community Network received funding from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs.

Horn of Africa Community Network has worked tirelessly to preserve African values, cultures and beliefs while they migrants to integrate into Australia, their new country.

In line with this, Horn of Africa Community Network secured a grant from VicHealth to carry out a unique cultural festival, a live night which could foster and preserve the artistic and cultural heritage of the Horn of Africa.

What makes Horn of Africa Community Network stand out? Its position as the only vibrant, fundamental, and functional Horn of Africa organisation that brings together communities with traditional and recent histories of enmity to work together for the better settlement of them all within their homeland – Australia.

This is a brave and commendable stance.

Yes, indeed Horn of Africa Community Network has initiated many important community developments and care services. It is also now more involved more with mainstream services, and is working in conjunction with them to maintain the wellbeing of families and young people from different walks of life.

Of course, the above-mentioned achievements are only a few illustrations of the projects and programs that reflect the specific efforts of Horn of Africa Community Network to address the top priorities of Horn of Africa refugees.

The management committee of Horn of Africa Community Network would like to thank all the special people who have contributed

their valuable time, effort, support and advice and, most important and most deeply valued, their longlasting friendship.

With their ongoing support we are confident that we can make a difference and assist the Horn of Africa humanitarian and refugee communities to achieve the lifestyle they have aspired to when they started the long journey to Australia.

We are not only receiving – we are also giving back to the Australian community to which we belong. Our diversity is our strength. We are inclusive and innovative. We are very proud of being Australian citizens.

Thank you.