

## NEWS

Chief executive of The Social Studio, Grace McQuilten said the studio was started as a direct response to a range of settlement issues faced by refugees, including unemployment, isolation and difficulties accessing education and training.

The studio has had success in retaining 90 per cent of its students with a range of strategies such as providing them with access to education and assistance with employment opportunities in retail, hospitality and clothing production. This creates a sense of social inclusion and community engagement through their interaction with customers and other members of the public.

Dr McQuilten said the studio's fashion focus helps. "The most obvious is our focus on creativity through fashion and design, and our flexible training delivery where students access TAFE level training, all of which occurs in a supportive setting at The Social Studio," she said.

"A number of programs are attached to the enterprise to ensure students can access support for issues that impact on their ability to participate, including driving tuition, financial counselling, legal advice, referrals for housing, medical needs and counselling."

Dr McQuilten cited a Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission study which supported Ms Nyuon's views on the need for greater educational support for newly arrived refugees.

The study of African Australians found the settlement experience is made difficult by a lack of flexibility at education and training facilities to meet the needs of refugee students. It also highlighted the negative attitudes by some teachers and trainers to the abilities of their refugee students, and their difficulties with the curriculum due to a lack of formal education.

The study found younger refugees can lack confidence in English, which creates significant anxiety and feelings of embarrassment on the part of students and can result in increased absences or dropping out.

"We advocate for increased support systems for refugee students in primary and secondary schools, along with alternative educational programs and vocational training for students who

discontinue schooling," Dr McQuilten said.

"Supportive workplace based training and work experience programs greatly enhance the employability of newly arrived migrants from refugee backgrounds. We have found that with increased confidence, self-esteem and English language skills young people form the building blocks for subsequent employment."

Ms Nyuon told MPs at the hearing that when it comes to community awareness of multiculturalism, she thinks more has to be done from within communities such as her own Sudanese community.

"We need to do more to reach out to the mainstream Australian community," she said. "Also, more needs to be done by government officials in making sure that the idea of multiculturalism does not look like something that the ethnic community or people who look ethnic do and the rest sort of watch. Maybe we as a community are not demonstrating very well how multiculturalism benefits our society."

"If we put more emphasis on that, maybe people could see that it is part of an Australian identity, not something that belongs to certain people."

Ms Nyuon highlighted the media's role in how certain communities are being perceived in Australia.

"Particularly the Sudanese communities we deal with have had very bad media coverage — the notions of Sudanese gangs, which is really disproportionate to what is happening in the community."

"It does not assist in the process of settlement, it does not assist in making better communities; it just makes communities scared. We become scared of each other because we are made to feel like our neighbour is a bad person who may attack us."

"That is another thing that needs to be combated. More action needs to be taken. More and more young people feel that if they try to reach out for an Australian identity, it is almost as though they are being told 'You're not Australian enough in some ways'." •

## LINKS

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**THE DOCTOR IS OUT:** *Concerns over mobile medics*

## FLY-IN MEDICINE SECOND BEST

Rural health advocates have urged federal MPs to ensure the work of local health professionals is not undermined with the use of fly-in fly-out medical staff.

Concerns about the provision of rural health services have been highlighted by the National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA) to the House of Representatives Regional Australia Committee's inquiry into fly-in fly-out (FIFO) and drive-in drive-out (DIDO) workers.

NRHA told the committee policies and programs are needed to effectively balance the use of temporary staff and permanent workers in providing the best care possible to patients.

Executive director Gordon Gregory said feedback received from rural communities is that the use of FIFO health services is a "necessary second best".

"For the people of rural Australia, FIFO and DIDO services are part of a necessary compromise between the tyranny of distance and the justified expectation of [people's] access to services," he said.

The NRHA emphasised in its submission to the inquiry that despite the potential for some problems, FIFO workers make a significant contribution

to rural and remote health in areas of shortage and in some communities there is no other choice.

But it said the design and operation of FIFO health services must provide support to healthcare workers already on the ground rather than contribute to the closure of existing health and aged care services.

“The dismantling or deterioration of existing health infrastructure and shrinkage of the local resident health workforce makes it even harder for the community to retain its existing health professionals or to attract a new workforce — even a visiting one,” the submission said.

While advocating for its own members, NRHA has also raised concerns about the health of the growing number of FIFO workers it sometimes ends up treating, such as mining staff. It has recommended that there should be research into the impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing of FIFO workers and their families.

The Australian Medical Association’s Western Australia branch agrees. AMA WA president David Mountain told the inquiry there is a “noticeable dearth” of research and evidence into the full impact of FIFO practices on health, communities and small business.

“Recent reports have shown significant health concerns around FIFO workers, ranging from diabetes, to obesity, mental health and heart issues, and it is important that any review involves this key area,” Dr Mountain said.

In its submission to the inquiry the Royal Flying Doctor Service emphasised the importance of using FIFO staff to supplement local services. It also raised concerns about the impacts on its budget and ability to deliver services of increasing numbers of FIFO workers.

“If the FIFO workforce continues to grow the strain on RFDS health services is likely to increase,” it said. ●

## LINKS

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# Ghost town warning

## Soaring insurance costs hit unit owners.



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**HIGH RISE:** *Complaints about insurance hikes for units*

**T**he north Queensland town of Airlie Beach, renowned as a base from which to explore the Whitsundays, could become a ghost town because of massive increases in insurance costs.

At a community forum on residential strata title insurance, the House of Representatives Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee heard that an increasing number of unit owners are finding themselves in arrears and in some instances forced to sell, as they face massive increases in levies brought on by insurance premium hikes.

These unit owners — often retirees — do not have the option of increasing the rents they charge to help cover their costs because there are already so many vacant units in the small town.

Airlie Beach unit owner Saro Kelly told the committee about the stress she is experiencing after her body corporate insurance increased more than 400 per cent in one year.

“I am the chair of the body corporate for a group of eight units. I have owned my unit there for almost

nine years. We have had no insurance claims over that period at all. As of just over 12 months ago, we were with Zurich Insurance and we were paying — this is for body corporate insurance — \$3,500 per annum. We went to renew that policy and they came back to us with a renewal amount of \$18,283.42,” she said.

“We then started, after having a bit of a moment, to look around at other insurers. There were two things upsetting at that point. One was that there were only a handful of insurers that were offering body corporate insurance. The second was that the best offer we could find ended up being through one of our local brokers, Oceanic Insurance — the policy was from AMP — and was for \$7,877.”

She said her unit has become unaffordable and she is going backwards financially.

“I cannot put the rent up. I have had to give my tenant a rent reduction because there are so many vacant units in our area. I am lucky to actually have a tenant and I am grateful for that.