



annual report
2014 -15



metro assist



Our mission

To be a leader in the human services sector by delivering high quality, relevant and sustainable services to individuals, families and communities from diverse backgrounds that are underpinned by best practice and client participation through an organisation that is skilled, resourced and motivated to achieve social equality.

Chairperson's Report

It is my pleasure as Chair of Metro Assist to present the report for 2014-15. Metro Assist is in a very healthy state and continues to maintain its role as one of the most prominent community services in the region with a very positive reputation among our stakeholders and the wider community.

Over the reporting period we embarked on a process of renewal in terms of the organisation's governance structure to equip it for the future. This is the first annual report for 'Metro Assist' since undergoing a name change last year to reflect a more inclusive client base and broader service offering. Having grown significantly over recent years, we have worked on our governance structure and skills within the organisation in order for it to respond to future opportunities and challenges.

You will see from our financial report that Metro Assist is in a stable position, with sufficient reserves to pursue opportunities as they appear on the horizon. Our service offering has grown and I am pleased that we now play a formal role in employment and training support through the SkillME project. Our teams across the organisation continue to build on their skills and have actively engaged with other services to deliver a more client-focused response.

The year has also been marked by significant changes in key service areas. Our settlement services are delivered as part of a consortium of 22 organisations known as the NSW Settlement Partnership, led by Settlement Services International. Reforms in the child protection system have seen a refocusing of programmes like Brighter Futures to work with families where children are deemed to be at risk of significant harm.



Overall, our family caseworkers are working with clients who have very complex support needs.

We have productive collaborations such as Linking Hearts with the Muslim Women's Association, delivering the NSW Government's Going Home Staying

Home program, and with Rosemount Good Shepherd delivering financial counseling services. Through SkillME, we are working with a number of JobActive providers and training organisations and I am pleased to say that Metro Assist has become a placement of choice for students from TAFE colleges and universities.

Metro Assist has been at the forefront of community engagement across its service region through events and activities, whether it's operating a conversation club, or organising White Ribbon Day events, Refugee Week Awards, celebrating NAIDOC Week, or any of the many activities we engage in throughout the year. These events and structured activities are extremely important in giving a voice to vulnerable people in the community.

In closing, I wish to acknowledge the work of my fellow Board members in our governance role, and our managers, staff and volunteers who do remarkable work each day and are committed to make clients' lives better. I also wish to thank our funding bodies – government agencies, councils, clubs, sponsors and donors for providing us the resources to enable us to do what we do.

Elena Berrocal Capdevila
Chairperson

CEO's Report



2014-15 was another big year for Metro Assist in every aspect. Not least were the ongoing challenges for local communities in the face of increased cost of living and housing pressures, anxiety arising from the discourse around radicalisation; and the day-to-day challenges

for low-income families, new migrants and refugees. As CEO, I am proud of our team's unswerving commitment to our clients and seeking the best possible outcomes for them.

The year might be best described as one of collaboration. A major success was the coming together of the eleven Migrant Resource Centres and a number of regional and ethnic-specific services in NSW in a consortium led by Settlement Services International (SSI) to deliver the Department of Social Services' Settlement Services Programme (SSP) through til 2018. We are one of several partners in delivering the Going Home Staying Home programme headed by the Muslim Women's Association to assist individuals escaping domestic violence; and we now provide emergency relief in the Inner West through a partnership with Sydney Multicultural Community Services and Advance Diversity Services.

I am very pleased to report our inroad into supporting people into employment through the SkillME project. The project is funded by Multicultural NSW as a 3-year demonstration project designed to assist migrants and refugees in the process of having their skills and qualifications recognised. SkillME involves our settlement workers placed directly with JobActive providers to case manage clients, and working with TAFE, Skillmax, Navitas and other key agencies in identifying training opportunities as pathways into jobs. We also acknowledge the Australian Catholic University which will be monitoring and evaluating the project.

Reforms in the child protection system have seen a stronger collaboration between the Department of

Family and Community Services (FACS) and NGOs including Metro Assist. We have been involved in the co-design process in South West Sydney as part of the Department's Safe Home for Life programme which puts the child at the centre of response. A number of trials have been formed to providing better targeted responses and minimising duplication and re-reporting to the Helpline. Our Brighter Futures team is working almost exclusively with families where children are deemed to be at risk of significant harm and our family workers in the Sydney FACS District are also seeing a greater intensity in the cases they are handling.

Financially, Metro Assist is in a strong position and we will continue to look at ways of diversifying our income streams to strengthen our service offering and to support continual upgrading and development of our assets and skills within the organisation. We will also work closely with SSI and our sister migrant resource centres to explore further opportunities, and continue our collaborations with other services across our region.

In closing, I wish to thank our staff for their tireless effort and amazing work and the volunteers who support us. We have also enjoyed the support of students in placements from various educational institutions. Our Board has been inspirational, both in terms of their guidance, but also the time they have committed to the organisation. Of course, none of this would be possible without the financial support and confidence in our work from our funding bodies and donors. We thank you all and we look forward to the next twelve months and beyond.

Lou Bacchiella
CEO

Key statistics

Total number of clients served	34,186
Settlement assistance & main issues	12,399
Document help	
Education and training	
Employment	
Material/financial assistance	
Specialist housing/accommodation	
Centre facilities	
Citizenship	
Migration advice	
School or homework help	
Social participation	
Family and relationships	
Tenancy assistance	7,846
1,428 Information and referral	
6,091 advices (1,047 tenancy termination, 313 repair issues, 322 rental bond and 267 rental arrears)	
327 duty advocacy & tribunal	
Financial inclusion	3,411
1,890 EAPA (energy) vouchers issued, valued at \$94,500	
350 Telstra vouchers issued, valued at \$17,500	
237 NILS loans approved, valued at \$247,661	
595 clients received financial counselling	
Community engagement (through the Ashfield & Homebush Community Hubs)	9,350
9,350 people received information and referrals	
101 services connected with the Hubs	
8 events were organised with the Hubs	
48 collaborations/partnerships with the Hubs	
Family & children's services	1,180
Inner West Families Connect engaged 905 families	
Brighter Futures worked intensively with 27 families	
Child Youth and Family Support worked with 248 families	

Acknowledgements

Metro Assist acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we operate and we pay our respects to elders, past and present, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We also wish to acknowledge the Board, staff and volunteers.

The Board

Elena Berrocal Capdevila (Chair)

Maria Cosmidis (Chair from 1 July to 3 December 2014)

Mohamad Issa (Deputy Chair)

Anna Schinella (Treasurer)

Jon Soemarjono (Secretary)

Thuat Nguyen

Nemat Kharboutli

Turkan Aksoy (Non advisory member from 1 July to 3 December 2014)

Cheryl Webster (Non advisory committee member from 1 July to 31 December 2014)



Settlement services

Funded through the Commonwealth's Settlement Grants Programme (SGP), the team has enhanced its services through a rejuvenation of activities such as the Dare to be Sensible, Dress for Work and Housing Advocacy. We continued to deliver quality casework, community education, events and activities to help people become resilient and engage with the greater community. We are proud to present some of the year's highlights.

Community and sector development

- Refugee Week Awards 2015 for the second year recognised leadership in individuals who are themselves refugees, or work closely with refugees. 200 people attended the event.
- Bicycle Club (Cycle for Life) in partnership with the Canterbury City Council to encourage a healthy lifestyle and imparted basic skills and knowledge around bicycle safety and maintenance.
- Community Capacity Development with TAFE Sydney Institute and Canterbury City Council provided courses in painting and decoration, fork lift training and computer courses.
- Settlement Newsletter our quarterly newsletter translated into Arabic and distributed to 800 households as a way of promoting community engagement.
- Mentoring and Guidance for Imminent Citizens (MAGIC) support for the Citizenship test saw increased popularity of the course, coupled with excursions which promoted an understanding of civic life. Courses were run in collaboration with the Arabic Welfare Centre, Khmer Welfare Association, Chinese Australians Services Society, Australian Korean Welfare Association, Korean Society of Sydney and the Multicultural Network.

- Migration Advice is integral to the settlement of many migrant and refugee families with some outstanding outcomes in reuniting loved ones and pursuing other migration issues through the Migration and Refugee Review Tribunals such as domestic violence cases and appeals.
- ThinkAbility – The Power Within in partnership with Ageing, Disability and Home Care produced a DVD in Arabic addressing the stigma around disability and to raise awareness on the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme.
- Multicultural Social Support Group (Ashfield) to counter social isolation and raise awareness of mainstream services through information sessions and workshops about parenting, arts and crafts, employment, mental health and life skills.
- Triple P delivered workshops to CALD parents to better cope with supporting their children in their new Australian environment.
- English Conversation at Strathfield library supporting new migrants and refugees in a social and friendly environment engaging in conversational English.
- Floral Arrangement supporting women from Vietnamese, Chinese and Indian backgrounds

to explore their talents and interests and to set goals for employment or study.

- Vietnamese and Korean Family Support providing casework, information and referral, and workshops on mental health, life skills, culture, education, relationships and family violence.

Small and emerging communities

- Warrior to Wise Man in its third year is supporting men to build small businesses of their own. Metro Assist has purchased lawn mowers which will help the participants in kick starting domestic cleaning and small businesses.
- Support for the Aged in partnership with the NSW Multicultural Seniors Association organised support groups for the Fusion Cultural Group, Ghau Tibetan School, Burwood Seniors Group and Ultimo Chinese New Year group.
- Splash and Settle Swimming lessons for refugees to gain confidence around water based activities which make up the Australian way of life.
- Carer Support Lakemba empowering CALD parents who have children with special needs developing coping skills, individual support and advocacy, and formation of peer support group.

Mental health

- Mental Health Expo in partnership with Bankstown City Council, Transcultural Mental Health Centre (TMHC) and the Bankstown Community Resource Group and other stakeholders to raise awareness of mental health and service network.





Women

- Catering and Barista course for multicultural women's group as skills development through NSW TAFE Outreach to develop positive attitude and engagement with people from other cultures and language backgrounds.
- Probashi Bangladeshi Women's Association in Australia and Indian Squad in Lakemba a support group to help women exercise choice, access resources and achieve positive change in their situation. The group participated in Mental Health event "Mon Mala" and celebrated traditional festivals such as the Bangla New year and Indian squad organised parenting training Metro Assist.

Family Safety and Violence Prevention

- Domestic Violence Liaison Committees received funding from Bankstown City Council for workshops addressing early intervention issues within migrant and refugee communities as well as supporting victims and bystanders in domestic violence incidents.

Employment

- No Closed Doors integrating settlement and employment services and providing wraparound casework by outreaching to employment services sites in Bankstown, Lakemba, and Campsie.

- Dress for Work assisted over 1,650 men with free business attire to attend job interviews and ran 15 Job Readiness workshops. More than 600 clients secured employment and a number were accepted into apprenticeships. Major supporters included Virgin Australia, Fox Sports, National Australia Bank, Sydney Water, Bank of America Merrill Lynch, QANTAS, Channel 7 and Channel 9; and volunteers numbers have grown to 15.
- Drive Wise Work Wise in partnership with Petersham TAFE was provided preparation training for the Driver Knowledge Test in order to strengthen people's capacity to gain employment.
- SkillME is a demonstration project designed to guide migrants and refugees seeking recognition of their overseas qualifications and skills. Funded by Multicultural NSW, the project adopts a person-centred approach which also attends to people's social needs so that they can better engage with training and work placements. SkillME is delivered in collaboration with employment and training services in Metro Assist's catchment area.



Youth

- Multicultural Seven-a-side Football Tournament in partnership with the Sydney Friendship Group. In addition the Sudanese Soccer Team was assisted to become a member of The Australian National Sports Club in Lakemba.
- Dare to be Sensible was further strengthened with funding from the Attorney Generals Department and with increased access to schools in the Inner West and Canterbury. The 4-week early intervention workshop helps participants understand the law, rights and responsibilities. Participants included Strathfield South High School, Wiley Park Girls High School, Bankstown, Burwood and Campsie Police, Burwood Local Court, Marrickville Legal Centre and Parramatta Legal Aid.
- Youth Camp at Broken Bay Recreational Centre for 21 young refugees to develop integration skills and build social support networks. Camp activities incorporated sporting and leisure programs as well as discussions around family relations, self-esteem, motivation and aspirations.

- Special Tutorial Assistance Program provides school-based homework support students and parents from migrant and refugee backgrounds, in six schools. STAP is run in partnership with University of Western Sydney's Classrooms without Borders and the Australian Catholic University School of Teaching.
- Love Bites a school-based activities addressing domestic and family violence and sexual assault targeting young people aged 14-16 years, delivered with the support of Bankstown City Council.
- School Holidays Programme structured activities during school holidays.

Housing

- Housing Advocacy Project to assist migrants and refugees find private rental accommodation in a highly competitive market. In April 2015, the project partnered with the Inner West Multicultural Interagency and Burwood Council to deliver a Social Housing Conference which heard expert speakers from Housing NSW and Shelter NSW.

Losena Fuko

Manager Settlement Services Program

Family services

Our Family Services area saw some significant changes, both within the context of team realignment, and in broader policy and practice reforms within child protection and early intervention programmes across the sector.

In November 2014 we embarked on an extensive process with the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) and other services and providers in the South West Sydney district, under the Safe Home for Life reform process. This involved workshops throughout the year which focussed on the child's perspective and what became known as a 'Co-Design' process. Through this process, 'prototypes' emerged to address some of the more critical barriers and red-tape which slow down the number of children being seen to by agencies. This has particular relevance to our Brighter Futures team whose clients are now almost exclusively deemed as at 'risk of significant harm' (ROSH).

This direct process of engagement with co-designing the district service system has resulted in a deeper understanding of one another's roles, and ways in which we can work better together to see an increase in the number of children been allocated. In one

trial, Burnside and FACS have experimented with joint assessment arrangements in the Youth Hope programme. Our own Brighter Futures workers have undertaken training in Safe Assessment and Risk Assessment (SARA), with the view of potentially extending joint assessment arrangements within the Brighter Futures programme. This process of reform is expected to be extended to other FACS districts over time.

Part of the reform discussions has looked at programmatic barriers which complicate the way we assist families and children, particularly when so many early intervention programmes have almost identical target groups and objectives. We have taken this as a queue to combine our Inner West Family Connect and Child Youth and Family Support (CYFS) to eliminate duplication and concentrate more on casework, casework practice and client outcomes.

Brighter Futures

Our Brighter Futures program in Bankstown and Fairfield has refocussed its attention via an MOU with the Department to work with families experiencing more intensive needs where children are deemed to be at risk of significant harm (ROSH). To meet these new challenges, there is added emphasis on skills development among the caseworkers, and the team has attended training in undertaking Safety Assessment and Risk Assessment (SARA).

Advocacy around the specific needs and experiences of CALD families continues to be made at various forums and with the NSW Early Intervention Council which is convened by Community Services.

In 2014-15, the Brighter Futures team received 61 referrals from FACS and from the community. With participation being voluntary, 27 families agreed to sign up, with 23 deemed ROSH and 4 below ROSH. Eight children were placed in childcare through the programme during the year. The team also held two parenting sessions and one playgroup session, with parenting skills integrated into structured home visits. The team also contributed to local events and networks including child protection seminars, Child Protection Week and family budgeting workshops among other activities.



Early Intervention Programmes

Our other early intervention programmes in the Sydney FACS District include Child Youth and Family Support (CYFS) and Inner West Families Connect, funded through Families NSW. Both programmes are experiencing more complex cases as the Brighter Futures provider in that District focuses on ROSH referrals from the Department. In effect, other services are experiencing a cascading effect of families who would have previously been eligible for Brighter Futures, but sit below the ROSH threshold. While the emphasis on higher needs families has created challenges for all services, our plan is to review the team's capacity and skills, and to develop a recruitment and training plan to upgrade skills and to identify key areas where clinical skills might be required to offer a more comprehensive service to our clients.

We also wish to extend our gratitude to the many services that we work with. Clients have benefited from the many joint activities and collaborations and together we have provided a strong network of support to more comprehensively address families' needs.

Lou Bacchiella
Manager Family Services

Tenancy and financial inclusion

For the reporting period, the Tenancy and Financial Counselling Team has focussed on developing local connections for the projects within the team, and in particular on providing outreach to communities through neighbourhood agencies.

Southern Sydney Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service (SSTAAS)

SSTAAS is a specialist service of Metro Assist which forms part of a state-wide network of tenant advocacy services funded by NSW Fair Trading. The service covers southern Sydney including Bankstown, Canterbury, Hurstville, Rockdale, Kogarah and Sutherland LGAs. We now provide outreach across the region. We have consolidated our outreach at Sutherland, Rockdale and Chester Hill. We would like to thank Orana Community Services, Advance Diversity Services and Chester Hill Neighbourhood Centre for providing accommodation and links into local communities.

In 2014-15, Fair Trading introduced changes to tenancy assistance with a greater focus on vulnerable clients. The team provided duty advocacy at the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT) in Sutherland and Liverpool and we saw a 20 percent increase in clients needing this support. The focus on vulnerable clients means we are doing more face-to-face work with tenants. This year we assisted 327 clients in advocating with landlords, an increase of around 30 percent. With outreach at Sutherland and Rockdale we assisted over 50 clients with interviews, advocacy and representation at NCAT.

For the reporting period, we have provided:

- Information and advice to 1428 tenants (67% private rental / 19% social housing)
- 6,091 advices (1,047 termination of tenancy / 313 repair issues / 322 rental bond matters / and 267 rental arrears)

The largest increases related to termination of tenancies and rental arrears. With tenants in private rental we noted an increase in the number of tenants experiencing financial hardship. We also noted an increase in the number of tenants in social housing

being evicted for breaches of agreements relating to neighbour issues, drugs and other criminal activities. Many of these clients have mental health issues and this increased the time spent by our team in working with vulnerable clients. SSTAAS also responded to the review into Housing NSW and the submission is available on the FACS website.

Inner Western Sydney Financial Counselling Service

This is a specialist service funded by NSW Fair Trading and is managed in partnership with Good Shepherd Australia and New Zealand, covering six Inner West LGAs. During the year we expanded our outreach to include a fortnightly service at Canterbury City Community Centre in Lakemba, and weekly outreach to the Drummoyne Community Centre. The service also worked with Bridge Housing to pilot a project working directly with social housing tenants experiencing financial difficulties. Clients who agreed to undertake financial counselling are granted a credit towards their arrears in a similar manner to Work Development Orders where clients with fines can reduce their fines by working with financial counsellors.

During 2014-2015, the service received 595 new clients and opened 230 new cases. The majority of clients were tenants aged between 24 and 60 years. The main issues related to credit card and utility debts and the following outcomes were achieved:

- 54 clients saw debtor harassment cease
- 56 revised their budgets or expenditure
- 76 were successful in negotiating hardship variations
- 14 were assisted in obtaining emergency relief
- 67 were released from their debts

The service noted that it is becoming more difficult to obtain full waivers of debts from financial institutions. They are however, willing to negotiate reduced repayments on outstanding debts.

No Interest Loans Scheme (NILS)

Metro Assist is an accredited provider of interest-free and fee-free loans of up to \$1,200. Loans are available to low-income households for purchasing basic necessities and loan capital is provided by the National Australia Bank with the scheme's administration is supported by NSW Fair Trading and the Commonwealth Department of Family and Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Loans approved totalled \$247,661 for 237 clients, 87 percent of whom were born overseas. Loans were used for basic items such as whitegoods, car registration and repairs, computers, household furniture, medical and dental care.

Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) and Telstra

EAPA is funded through NSW Trade and Commerce to assist people experiencing a short term financial crisis or emergency to pay their electricity or gas bill. EAPA vouchers are issued by community welfare organisations and are available to any household experiencing financial hardship. In 2014-15, Metro Assist issued 1,890 EAPA vouchers to the value of \$94,500 and 350 Telstra vouchers to the value of \$17,500.

Metro Assist would like to extend our thanks to those neighbourhood and community agencies that have provided a space and administrative assistance to deliver regional projects to local communities.

Rita Wilkinson

Manager Tenancy and Financial Inclusion Team





Building communities

Through our many locations in Marrickville, our Community Hubs in Ashfield and Homebush, Condell Park and Campsie offices we have engaged with communities across or broad service area and provided information and referral, community education and activities. In the past year Metro Assist has collaborated with many other agencies to deliver activities, education and awareness programmes around a range of topics.

Among our highlights, we worked with government agencies, councils and other services to deliver a range of activities and events including a cricket programme, lifesaving information, seniors information, White Card training, Achieving School Success for the Korean and Chinese communities. We also collaborated in staging events throughout the year to mark NAIDOC Week, the Ashfield Carnival of Cultures, White Ribbon

Day, International Women's Day and Mental Health Week, to name some.

We wish to acknowledge the ongoing collaboration with the many educational institutions that provided student placements and also supported our work.

Capacity building

Metro Assist continues to work with other agencies, networks and advisory bodies to advocate on the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse people and communities. We also work with other agencies to improve the service system's response to migrants and refugees by undertaking cultural awareness training and supporting the establishment and development of small and emerging communities.

Financial summary

Metro Assist Inc

Metro Migrant Resource Centre Incorporated ("Seller") entered into a Sale Agreement with Metro Assist Incorporated ("Buyer") whereby the Buyer acquired the assets and assumed the liabilities of the seller as of 1st July 2014 for the total consideration transferred of \$1.

Financial Summary

The net surplus for the financial year 2014-2015 is \$1,162,804 compared to the surplus of \$3,043 for the previous year.

The current year's surplus includes the gain on acquisition of Metro MRC which was \$973,416. In addition, there was Capital Reserve acquired from Metro MRC of \$69,718 and Restructuring Fund acquired from Metro MRC of \$87,754.

Government grants and subsidies year on year were static and interest income was lower due to declining interest rates. The major increase in expenses was due to additional employee benefit expenses primarily due to CPI escalation and award rate increases.

The equity position remains strong with total assets of \$2,260,361 and net assets of \$1,176,605. The increase in total assets was due to Metro Assist Incorporated acquiring Metro Migrant Resource Centre Incorporated.

Directors recognise the need for assured funding and the organisation's ability to seek and receive funding from donors.

Acknowledgement to Funding Bodies

Metro Assist acknowledges the continued support of the following funding bodies:

Department of Social Services

NSW Department of Family and Community Services

NSW Office of Fair Trading

Multicultural NSW

Attorney General Department

Local councils and ClubGrants

Metro Assist Auditors

William Buck

Chartered Accountants


Level 29, 66 Goulburn Street,

Sydney NSW 2000

Metro Assist Incorporated

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUNE 2015

	2015	2014
	\$	\$
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	1,704,555	31,649
Trade and other receivables	314,697	476
Other	53,930	–
Total current assets	2,073,182	32,125
NON-CURRENT ASSETS		
Property, plant and equipment	187,179	–
Total non-current assets	187,179	–
Total Assets	2,260,361	32,125
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Trade and other payables	78,604	18,324
Borrowings	134,009	–
Employee benefits	387,993	–
Other	454,403	–
Total current liabilities	1,055,009	18,324
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Employee benefits	28,747	–
Total non-current liabilities	28,747	–
Total Liabilities	1,083,756	18,324
NET ASSETS	1,176,605	13,801
EQUITY		
Reserves	157,472	–
Retained surplus	1,019,133	13,801
Total equity	1,176,606	13,801



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Marrickville

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Ashfield Community Hub

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Homebush Community Hub

1B Bates Street

Homebush NSW 2140

TO 2 9746 8217

Condell Park

43 Simmat Ave

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