

Opening Doors

Celebrating
the work of the
Ecumenical
Migration Centre
1956–2016

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Brotherhood
of St Laurence

The Ecumenical Migration Centre – which formalised long-held ties with the Brotherhood of St Laurence in 1999 – has been at the forefront of providing practical responses to the challenges of settlement in Australia. This publication captures some highlights over the past 60 years, and in its modest way, offers a mirror to the progress of our diverse nation with its rich waves of migration and refugee settlement that have greatly enhanced our society.

The diverse Australians the centre has worked with include European migrants in the 1950s and 1960s, Turkish and Indochinese arrivals in the 1970s and 1980s and, more recently, we have been working with Australians of Middle-Eastern and African descent.

I'm proud that my predecessors at the Brotherhood supported the efforts of the precursor European Australian Christian Fellowship in 1956, and then later the union with the Ecumenical Migration Centre. Today, under the banner of the Multicultural Communities Team, we build on this legacy, harnessing community goodwill and volunteer efforts to build cohesion and resilience.

TONY NICHOLSON
Executive Director,
Brotherhood of St Laurence

Acknowledgements

This publication has been produced to capture, commemorate and celebrate the history of the Ecumenical Migration Centre (now the Multicultural Communities Team). While space did not allow us to comprehensively document the achievements, services and programs of the past 60 years, we have showcased a selection which epitomise the organisation's dynamism and successes. We trust that you will enjoy reminiscing about, and celebrating, this important milestone with us.

This book would not have been possible without the sharing of memories by all those who agreed to be interviewed in their capacity as previous or current staff members, committee of management members or clients. We were also grateful that we could lean on the history captured in the 30th anniversary publication, *Espresso Bar to EMC* (1996) by Michele Langfield.

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HUTCH HUSSEIN
Senior Manager
Multicultural Communities Team
November 2016



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Acronyms

AMES Adult Migrant English Service

EACF European Australian Christian Fellowship

EACoCoV East and Central African Communities Council of Victoria

EMC Ecumenical Migration Centre

JAS Justice for Asylum Seekers

MCT Multicultural Communities Team (formerly EMC)

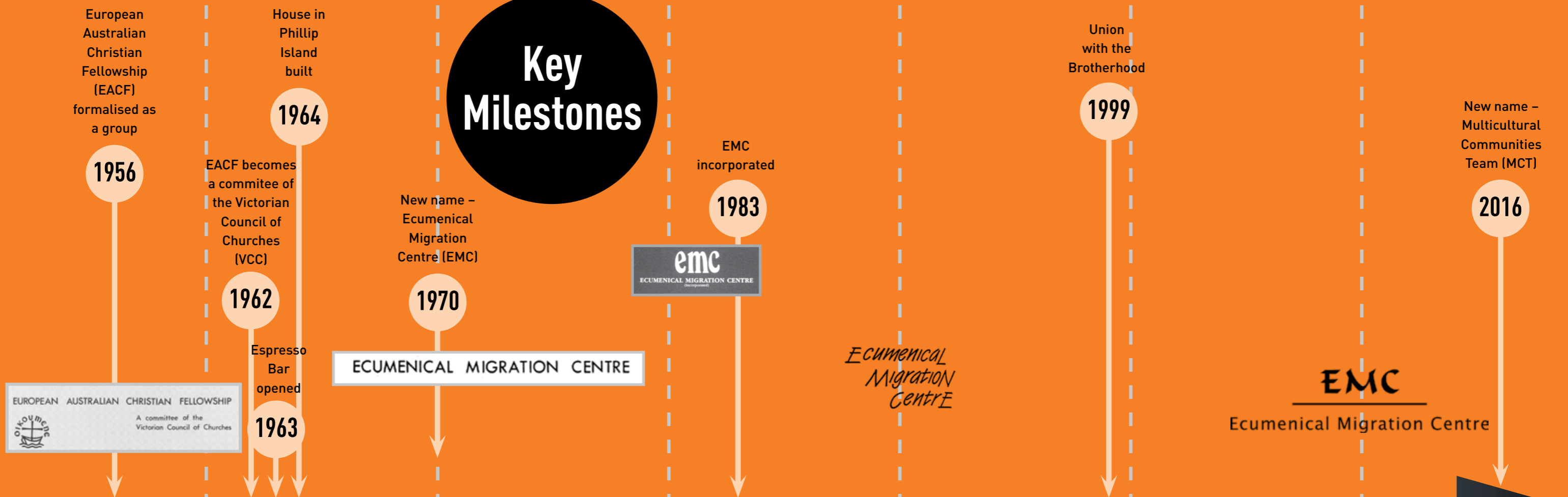
MRC Migrant Resource Centre

TPVs Temporary Protection Visas

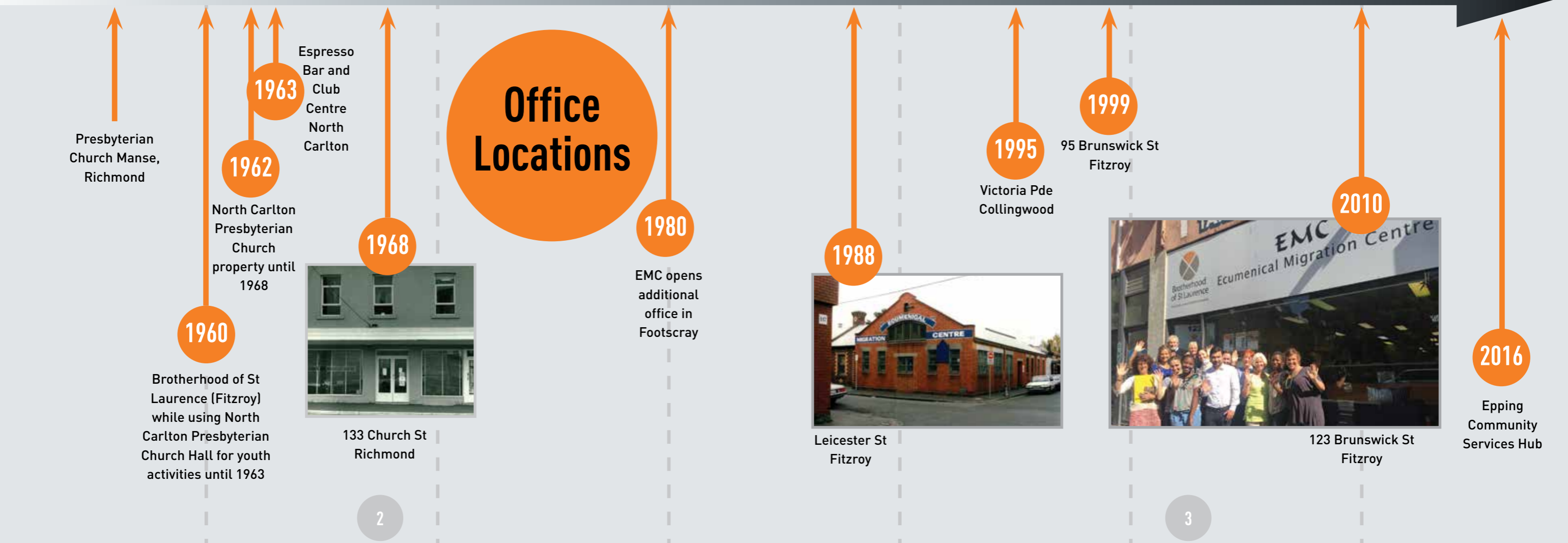
VCYC Victorian Christian Youth Council

WCC World Council of Churches

Key Milestones



Office Locations



Highlights from the past sixty years

An overview of the history of the Ecumenical Migration Centre, from its beginnings as the European Australian Christian Fellowship (EACF) to its recent incarnation as the Brotherhood's Multicultural Communities Team (MCT).



Top: A Greek family representing three generations at Phillip Island, circa 1965–66 Above: Group of young men on porch at EMC's Phillip Island house (Johnny Kalisperis on far left).

From little things, big things grow 1956–65

The European Australian Christian Fellowship (EACF) was founded in 1956 after Eric Richards of the World Council of Churches' (WCC) Resettlement Department spoke to the Presbyterian Fellowship of Australia at St Aidan's Presbyterian Church in North Balwyn. EACF's inaugural volunteer, David Cox, was in the audience and was inspired to get involved in supporting newly-arrived refugees. The earliest refugees were Hungarian, former Yugoslavs from various parts of the former Yugoslavia, Bulgarian, Russian and Greek. The generosity of St Aidan's members in sponsoring refugees and providing accommodation, drawing up architectural plans for subsequent premises, donating equipment and serving as volunteers meant that St Aidan's was a vital starting point for the EACF.

Highlights

1956 EACF is established as the first generalist migrant support service in Australia, with its formalisation in 1962 as a committee under the auspice of the Victorian Council of Churches.

1956–63 Run by volunteers, EACF operates on donations from individuals, congregations and the committee, with various chairpersons, including Eric Richards and Bishop Geoffrey Sambell, providing support.



I would meet ships carrying WCC-sponsored refugees, and assist them with pre-arranged accommodation and a job, and funds to bide them over until the first pay. Children were taken to the local school for enrolment and parents helped to understand how the system worked. Church members acted as host families for adolescents, while young men were placed in boarding houses. The overarching focus could perhaps be described as "reaching out in fellowship". David Cox.



Left and below: Stole (centre) at the Fitzroy rooming house. Right: Stole (kneeling) in a refugee camp in Greece, 1960. Bottom: More recent photo of Stole.



Stole Steriovich's story

Stole Steriovich was one of EACF's first clients, arriving in Australia when he was 15. He is now 73.

Stole remembers: 'I went to Greece from Yugoslavia because of the political situation. I stayed in a tent in a refugee camp until the new year's eve of 1959. David Cox used to go and visit the refugee camps in Europe and he met my mother in Yugoslavia and she told him my name. Upon his return to Australia he looked me up and the rest is a long story. It's because of him that I was able to come to Australia on September 5th, 1960 as a refugee.

Getting help from the churches made things easier. The young men would go to the Bonegilla Camp, but they put me in the care of a church woman as I was under age. I was sent to work which I wasn't very pleased about. I still went to school back in Yugoslavia as I was 15, and wanted to continue. They had promised me that in Australia I would go to school, but they broke that promise. Instead, I worked at the ACI glass factory in Spotswood. Eventually, I left ACI and found my own job.



I found out about the World Council of Churches and EACF, which helped in setting us new migrants up, from David Cox. David and I used to go to churches and raise money. I was young and an example of how refugees need help.

David helped me a lot, particularly with finding jobs. I went to night school to become a motor mechanic. During this time, I met Heather, a young woman from Tasmania. We decided to get married. Because I was under age, David had to represent me. He was also our best man. Heather and I ended up moving to Tasmania, near her very accepting and welcoming family. We've raised our children here. We still exchange Christmas cards with

David. We had good holidays in Rye, we stayed there all together. He used to come down to the university here and come and see us. He represented me for many years. He helped us a lot. He helped a lot of migrants. He was very popular. A good man. They were very good people, committed to the church. We are still very good friends.' ●



Left: Johnny Kalisperis, Family Counsellor. Right: Families on holiday at EMC's Phillip Island house, which was used extensively for weekend community gatherings.

1956–59 EACF focusses on doing home visits, helping with English and schooling and orienting new arrivals. Home visits are complemented by group activities, providing opportunities for new arrivals to meet other Australians.

1956–68 Premises are provided pro-bono by various arms of the churches, as well as the Brotherhood, and are used as an office base, a migrant youth hostel and accommodation for both full-time staff and volunteers. A house at Phillip Island is built by volunteers over a 16-day work camp on land purchased by donations, and in 1963, a building in Nicholson street, North Carlton becomes the EACF headquarters and the shop-front youth centre, known as the Espresso Bar. Through the Espresso Bar, EACF undertakes important outreach work: see page 12 for more detail.

1963 onwards Johnny Kalisperis, Savas Augoustakis and Alan Matheson join David Cox as the first paid staff members (as well as the two full-time volunteers). The team pioneers the model of pairing an English-speaking and an ethnic worker to offer their respective strengths, which is critical at a time when there are no trained bilingual social workers.

From EACF to EMC 1966–75

By the mid-1960s, EACF was working with a diverse population. Over the years the numbers of Greeks, Italians and Maltese grew considerably, as did the number of young men from the Balkans. Most had either migrated alone or did not have relatives in Australia. As the work developed, however, the number of families, children

and young people increased greatly, especially among those from Southern Europe and later from Turkey and South East Asia. In 1968, the team moved from Carlton to Richmond and began to expand to support these new arrivals. In the early 1970s the name was changed from EACF to Ecumenical Migration Centre in recognition of the diversity of these migrant communities.

Highlights

1966 Production of *The Navigator* bulletin, which catalogues the issues confronting migrants on their arrival, commences. It has 800 supporters at one stage. *The Navigator* is succeeded in 1974 by *Migration Action* (see page 17).

1973 Collaboration with the Victorian Council of Social Services leads to the establishment of the Emergency Telephone Interpreting Service.

1973 The Clearing House on Migration Issues (CHOMI) is established by Lidio Bertelli as a unique library, bookshop and documentation service (profiled on page 16). Prior to CHOMI, EMC's documentation of migrant needs was important in the framing of multiculturalism in Australia (see page 20 for more details).

1974–75 onwards Elisabeth Gawith (later Howie), Loula Rodopoulos, Di Batzias and Priscilla Jamieson are among the first women to join the welfare staff, enabling closer work with children and families. Prior to this, Kay Sarll and Diane Clark are among the many female volunteers, with Kay beginning EACF's work with women, alongside Jill McArthur.

Q&A DAVID COX

Inaugural EACF volunteer and coordinator (1956–74)

What was it about Eric Richards' 1956 speech to your North Balwyn Presbyterian youth group that prompted your interest in working with newly-arrived young refugees?

Eric's speech motivated me because the need he presented was so obvious and so great and the response so straightforward – that we as Australian-born young people could and should reach out to these newly arrived youth who had arrived after some harrowing experiences. Moreover, the contrast between our privileged positions and that of newly-arrived refugee youth could not have been greater. In my opinion we had an obligation to share with them in every way we could.

What surprised you most about the young men you met during your outreach youth work?

I guess I was most struck by their vulnerability. These young men had no English, no vocational training, usually no relatives in Australia to fall back on and were confronted with an environment completely different from what they had known. How did one make a start in life in such a difficult situation? At the same time, I was impressed with how keen most of them were, how they supported each other and how they spotted and referred to us other young arrivals whom they could see were struggling.

If EACF hadn't existed, where do you think they would have got assistance from?

This was the period when assimilation policies prevailed, so the situation was bleak. Education, health (especially mental health) and welfare facilities generally were not geared to the needs of new immigrants, and there was no government assistance available until 1968. The ready availability of rather dead-end and often monotonous manufacturing jobs was a blessing, but these young men needed more than a poorly paid job. We were at least able to assist with learning English, with spare time activities that involved Australian-born as well as fellow immigrants, and with avenues of support. I have no doubt that the toll of failed resettlement, such as mental health problems, would have been far greater without us, as there were very few alternative avenues of support in Melbourne's inner suburbs.

How did you balance the workload, when you were the sole full-time staffer?

EACF's early years were a period of enormous pressure and I must confess that I look back and wonder how I both



L to R: Johnny Kalisperis, Loula Rodopoulos, Loraine Bates, David Cox, Savas Augoustakis and Alan Matheson, circa early 1970s.

managed and survived. Two things kept me sane. Firstly, the tremendous volunteers that were the strength of EACF, both in the work they did and the support many of them offered. Secondly, Bishop Sambell made his home in North Melbourne an open house for church-related inner suburban workers every Sunday evening. Many of us went quite regularly to spend time sharing in a range of ways and relaxing in the very supportive atmosphere. It was an important contribution to my development and perhaps indeed my sanity!

What changed as the team expanded beyond the original team of four?

The situation of the early years, up to around 1970 or 1972, with equal pay, team retreats and very strong team relationships, gradually, but probably inevitably, gave way to a staff situation with a director, salary variation and so on. Expansion, however, made possible a greater diversity of expertise and background and a wider range of activities.

What are you most proud of?

First, that we could mobilise literally hundreds of volunteers keen to reach out and assist newly-arrived migrants and refugees and provide a comprehensive service with absolutely minimal funding; and, second, that something that started as a small team has grown over many decades to make a significant contribution to Australia's migration scene and to many individuals and families for over 60 years. ●



Top: Turkish resources available at EMC's Footscray office.
Above: Some of the EMC Team outside the Footscray office.
Below: Vietnamese group outing, 1985.

1974-75 EMC receives a grant to establish a welfare rights program in association with the Australian Turkish Cultural Association. They subsequently collaborate to establish, among other things, three Turkish speaking childcare centres to facilitate workforce participation.

Community activism for migrants' rights 1976-85

EMC was at the forefront of community activism and a growing movement for social action, with its focus on the rights of migrant workers, delivery of services to migrants and establishing women's groups. Community education to migrants about their rights, and to mainstream services to help them better support multicultural communities, was seen by staff, especially Alan Matheson, as increasingly important. Staff also gave regular talks to ethnic radio and provided information to ethnic papers to ensure that communities understood their rights.

Highlights

1976 EMC begins its support work with Timorese, Vietnamese and Laotian communities in North Richmond.

1979-84 Cultural awareness training for mainstream services staff is a major focus, with proposals to government and resources developed.

1980 EMC opens an office in Footscray to work with newly-arrived Vietnamese refugees, and is now working with Horn of African, Indochinese, Latin American, Romanian, Afghan and Pacific Islander communities.



1980s The innovative Women's Interpreting Service is developed in response to the lack of female interpreters in health services.

Influencing the debate 1986-95

This was a time of increased interaction with federal and state government departments, and influence at the local and national level. EMC's aims were to advance multiculturalism and to develop a knowledge base in relation to the migrant experience that would stimulate public debate and influence public policy. EMC also auspiced and developed partnerships with groups that would grow to become organisations in their own right including the Vietnamese Women's Association, the Refugee Women's Network, the then Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria and the then Afghan Support Group.

Highlights

1990-91 EMC conducted a major research project into the experiences and needs of Horn of African communities: *Selected African communities in Melbourne: their characteristics and settlement needs* (see page 18).

1991 In partnership with the Adult Migrant English Service (AMES), EMC established women's English classes in Flemington and Springvale, tailored to those with low literacy levels (see page 21).

Through the 1990s, EMC collaborated with African communities to develop a community education program on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) (see page 21).

Building the capacity of refugees and asylum seekers 1996-2005

In 1999, the EMC became part of the Brotherhood of St Laurence; a union that brought refugee and migrant issues into the broader agendas of eradicating poverty and exclusion.

That same year, the Howard government introduced Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) for refugees who arrived by boat. TPVs did not confer work rights, and holders were denied access to government settlement services, the family reunion program and permanent residency. EMC used its independence from the federal government to establish a central coordination system for housing, information and referral into state government-funded services and support.



EMC Chair Basil Varghese and the Brotherhood's Executive Director Bishop Challen sign the Memorandum of Understanding, marking the union of the organisations, in 1999.

EMC continued its role as a pioneer in service development and design through its **Given the Chance** employment program, as well as working to enhance the capacity of mainstream services to respond to multicultural communities.

Highlights

1999-2000 EMC becomes part of the Brotherhood, and moves to a Brotherhood office in Fitzroy.

2000 The Justice for Asylum Seekers (JAS) network is established to act as a statewide voice on asylum seeker issues, disseminating information to the media and public and advocating for the abolition of TPVs. JAS develops the 'community detention' model that is subsequently adopted by the federal government as an alternative to immigration detention (see page 22).

2000 Johnny Kalisperis, EMC's longest-serving staff member, retires after 40 years of service to multicultural communities.

2002 EMC develops the **Given the Chance** employment program for newly-arrived communities (see page 12).

2005 onwards EMC becomes a provider for the state government's **Refugee Brokerage Program** (now RAP), which supported emerging community leaders to address community priorities and develop infrastructure. Eleven years on, MCT still delivers RAP which pioneered a best practice approach to community engagement. ➔

“The EMC thought that its future lay in not being on the sidelines but being at the centre of the solutions around poverty, exclusion and disadvantage. The Brotherhood respected the uniqueness of the centre and there was mutual expertise shared . . . It has delivered, because it was a very good synergy and much desired by both groups. Sarina Greco, former EMC CEO



Q&A **SARINA GRECO**
EMC CEO (1997–2005)

Sarina giving a speech at a rally, circa 1999–2000

What do you think has made the agency's role in the multicultural sector unique?

The EMC was a centre for communities and knowledge, not a settlement service. We wanted to cover the gaps; to trial approaches to help redress or prevent disadvantage and exclusion. The uniqueness of EMC in the sector was its non-ethno-specific approaches and its statewide reach, bringing national influence through its research and publications, based on its relationships with communities.

What did you see as your main role?

Upon my appointment my main job was to look at what EMC's strategic role would be in the future and how we would secure that, financially and for the next phase of its work. Or was it time to say 'EMC has been at the forefront of pioneering settlement services and migrant services; it's done its job and the government is now funding MRCs and communities have built their own infrastructure'? Was it time to say 'that was a job well done, time to close up and say that's our legacy'? It wasn't!

What do you regard as your key achievements during your term as the CEO?

Securing EMC's future for that time and integrating it into the Brotherhood, so that its work would be enriched by a more comprehensive understanding of poverty and exclusion, were significant achievements. This was not my work alone; there were many people involved. Nobody can claim to have a legacy around the EMC without

recognising it was a co-legacy with many partners. For me, the work to link refugee issues with the business community and employers was an important part of how we wanted to work. To broaden our reach – not just into the welfare community but into the business community as well. That pioneering work, built upon the tradition of previous pioneering work, has been sustainable. The sector is riddled with short-term programs but **Given the Chance**, the employment pathways program for refugees, is still growing.

How did the role change you?

I learnt a huge amount about myself and it changed me as a person. Being able to take the initiative around our support and advocacy for asylum seekers felt like being part of something big that was a timely response that really affected people's lives. That changed my understanding of the power of ordinary people's voices, and my experience in influencing and persuading others to act. It changed my view of advocacy to one of being able to talk with, influence and show, teach, and learn from those who don't yet see what you have seen. Being part of those statewide and national campaigns taught me a lot about the nature of Australia which has always had an undercurrent of racism: how that surfaces periodically, and just how damaging it is to this fantastic country that we have joined as migrant families. Thinking about the history of EMC, all the people and the work it managed to be part of makes me less pessimistic about the future. ●

It was a privilege to undertake a role steeped in a proud history and lead a team to innovate fresh ways of working to ensure refugee communities themselves could advocate and seek change.
Jo Knight, EMC Manager 2009–11.

2006–16 The move from EMC to MCT

In this last decade, EMC's focus has remained on new and emerging communities as those least able to access existing services. These communities are often small in number, widely dispersed and with little infrastructure. In most cases leadership is still developing.

The role of auspicing and hosting small ethnic community groups continues with the successful transition to independence of groups such as the Sudanese Lost Boys Association.

The legacy of the early family support work continues through our parenting support programs, **Integrated Family Services** and **Refugee Child Outreach**, the latter one of the few settlement programs focusing on newly-arrived children. The tradition of utilising volunteers remains crucial, with over 110 mentors in programs like **Brainbank**, **Stepping Stones** and **ReSource**.

In the lead up its 60th anniversary in 2016, it was timely for EMC to consider how it could remain relevant within the broader multicultural services sector, both in terms of location as well as in name. To better serve our clients, who are increasingly settling in the more affordable growth areas, EMC moved into its new home, the Epping Community Services Hub, in June 2016. The formal name change to 'Multicultural Communities Team' (MCT) occurred in July 2016, reflecting the fact that it is no longer a stand-alone centre.

Highlights

2009 **Stepping Stones**, a micro-enterprise program for women from multicultural communities, is piloted. **Stepping Stones** is the culmination of various programs fostering financial independence for women and proves to be a successful model (see page 14).

2012 In response to the gaining of work rights by a new group of asylum seekers, EMC pilots its **Employment Program for Young Asylum Seekers (EPYAS)** in Yarra to fill the gap in support. **EPYAS** is subsequently run in Darebin, Brimbank, Moreland and Whittlesea. In 2013, the Brotherhood's Centre for Work and Learning establishes an employment program specifically for adults seeking asylum. Outcomes from these programs are provided to government decision-makers and we are pleased that the 2014 iteration of TPVs provides people with work rights.



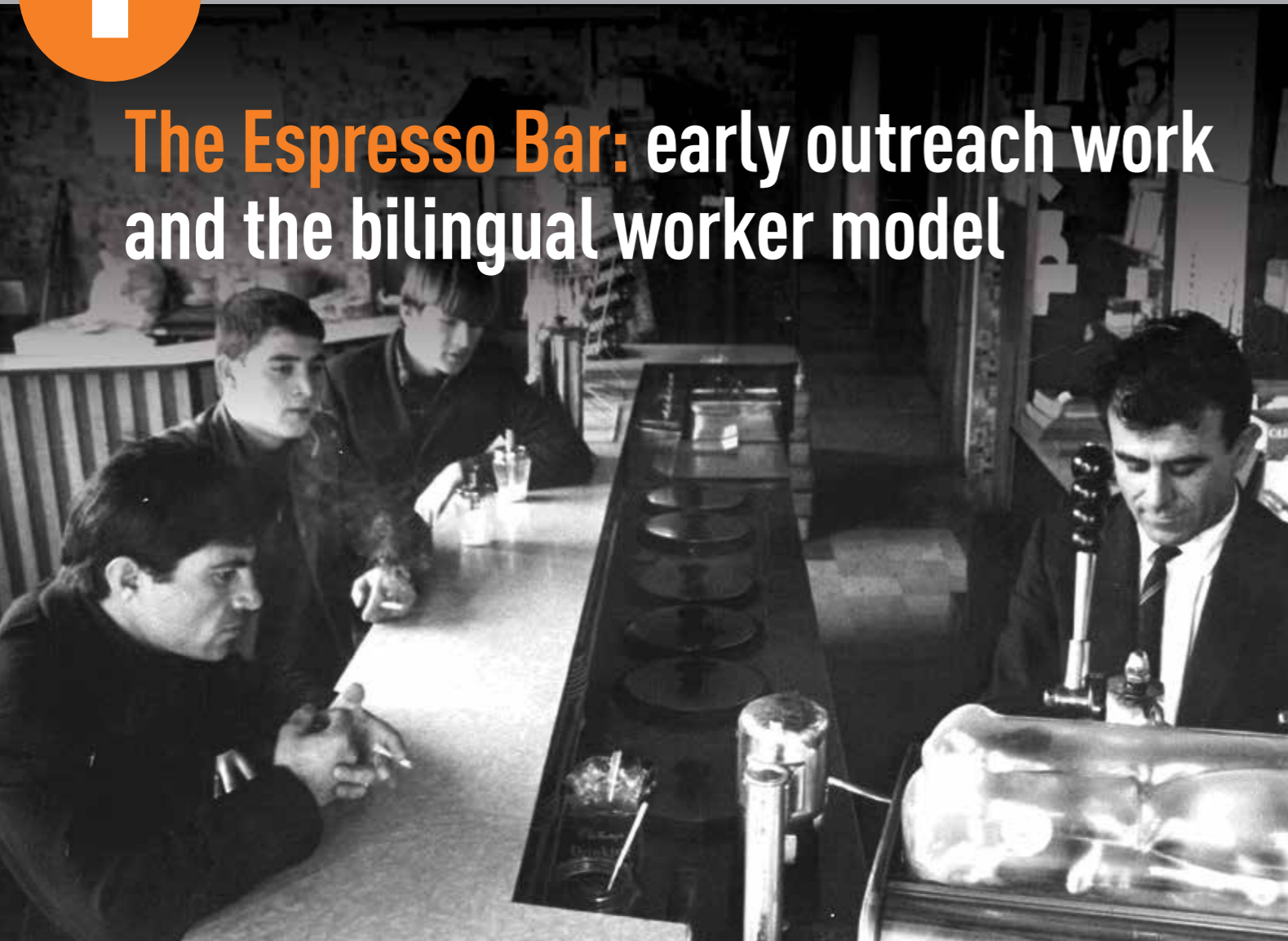
Top: Brainbank volunteer mentor, David Sier, with mentee, Justina Kurpri. Above: Melisa receiving barista training through the Youth Transitions program.

2014 Harking back to its community education roots, EMC begins offering cross-cultural responsiveness training both within the Brotherhood and to other agencies.

2016 The Brotherhood is selected to pilot a new refugee-specific **Youth Transitions** program in Hume on the basis of the organisation's experience in supporting young people into employment.

2016 EMC becomes the Multicultural Communities Team and moves from Fitzroy to Epping (see page 19). ●

The Espresso Bar: early outreach work and the bilingual worker model



Johnny Kalisperis serving clients, Espresso Bar opening night, 1963. Photograph: Hamilton Aiken

Given the Chance in employment

For most refugees and asylum seekers, finding employment in Australia is a challenge. Many have left their countries suddenly and in traumatic circumstances, and long periods in refugee camps can interrupt schooling and further education. Many are highly qualified and skilled but, like **Abraham Maluk**, have trouble getting a foot in the door due to lack of experience in Australian workplaces.

Since 2007, the **Given the Chance** at ANZ program has provided jobs to more than 130 refugees and asylum seekers. As a partnership between the Brotherhood and ANZ, the program operates as a labour hire model. The Brotherhood recruits, trains and supports employees during their placements at ANZ, as well as providing training for ANZ's staff.

Developed by EMC in 2002, the program emerged because the one-size-fits-all employment services system wasn't catering for newly-arrived communities, particularly young people who needed mentoring to help them navigate Australian workplaces and careers. A successful pilot program attracted industry support, and since then, the partnership has delivered remarkable results: more than 90% of participants complete the program, with 86% gaining ongoing work with ANZ. Of these, 94% are still employed there six months later.

Former project worker Kerry Gartland recalls the program's impact: 'Due to their displacement, there was no place that felt like home for new arrivals, but EMC offered warmth through a hot drink or a conversation. Gaining security of income through employment was going to help them settle. As people developed confidence and got jobs, I could see more of a light in their eyes. The program's impact on clients was felt tangibly by staff. We could give them hope.'

The Brotherhood recognised that the client-centred approach that worked for refugees could also work for

In 1962–63, the European Australian Christian Fellowship (EACF) opened the Espresso Bar and Club Centre; a part of its new North Carlton headquarters. An activities program, run from an adjoining hall, was frequented regularly by around 300 young, mostly Greek and Russian, migrants and irregularly by 300–400 others. The Espresso Bar provided coffee, companionship, acceptance and recreation.

The idea for the Espresso Bar came from the street work that the team was undertaking in places where disengaged young men ate and socialised. Savas Augoustakis recalls, 'We spent countless hours and nights scouring through the espresso bars of Carlton, Fitzroy and Brunswick getting to know, and establishing some rapport with, many young men.' David Cox reflects, 'Many of these young men were desperately lonely, homesick and frustrated with their life

We acted as liaison people as we were one of them; we spoke the language and were able to empathise with what those people were going through. Savas Augoustakis

chances, and while many longed to study, it was hard to see how this might be possible. Language classes were offered in the evenings when many immigrants were working overtime, working shifts, or were simply exhausted.'

Conducting outreach work in such a casual environment was a pioneering initiative in Australia. Through the Espresso Bar, EACF provided English classes at suitable times, offered family work and counselling, provided some employment on weekends, and showed films. The centre became a community where young people could meet and seek advice and support in the evenings. It served migrants who, for status, class or confidentiality reasons, were unable or unwilling to use ethnic agencies or general community services but required access to an ethnic worker.

The late John Kalisperis OAM managed the Espresso Bar.

David believes that John and Savas were the first community-based ethnic workers in Melbourne. Through his work, 'Johnny', as he was affectionately known, gave 40 years of service to migrants and refugees until he left in 2000, while Savas worked at EMC for twelve years. Each man drew from his own experience of being an immigrant to guide his work.

Savas recalls, 'There were a lot of young people needing help to meet their social and personal needs, and to integrate into their new community. We acted as liaison people as we were one of them; we spoke the language and were able to empathise with what those people were going through. It helped to build up trust between people. It wasn't a clinical approach; not a typical social worker relationship. It was an environment where people relaxed. I provided a package of friendship and assistance in fitting in

to the environment. Together we helped families make the transition to their new home.'

The centre embodied community-based work in action, long before trained bilingual workers emerged in the field of migrant welfare. The partnership between an English-speaking and an ethnic worker constituted an original working model which was critical at that time. Whether it was on the street or at the Espresso Bar, the strengths of both were brought together.

In January 1984, Johnny Kalisperis received the Order of Australia for longstanding service to the community. The legacy of the Espresso Bar lives on today, with the Chancèz café at the Multicultural Communities Team's new Epping location providing a gathering place for clients, volunteers, staff and the general public. ●

other disadvantaged job seekers, and at the beginning of 2010, the program became a central part of the Brotherhood's Centre for Work and Learning, with a focus on addressing unemployment amongst public housing residents. Today, with other companies coming on board, **Given the Chance** has assisted more than 1000 people.

Sarina Greco reflects: '**Given the Chance** is an example of how EMC has historically worked in the space between specialist services that target a population group (refugees) and the mainstream service system (employment services). As this wasn't just a tailoring that worked for refugees, but also other highly disadvantaged groups, being within the Brotherhood allowed EMC to enrich the offering of a mainstream organisation – just as multicultural communities have done within Australian society. As a signature EMC program that delivered significant benefits for refugees on the one hand, and contributed to innovation in the Brotherhood on the other, **Given the Chance** represents multiculturalism at work.' ●

Abraham Maluk is one of the Lost Boys of Sudan, forced to flee his village as a teenager when his family was killed in a massacre. He lived in refugee camps for 17 years, teaching himself English, completing a Diploma of Theology in Nairobi and becoming an Anglican minister.

When Abraham arrived in Australia with his wife and children, he found it extremely difficult to find work despite completing a Bachelor of Social Work and then a Masters degree. Despite his many skills, 'everyone said that they had more experienced candidates, so I didn't even get interviews,' says Abraham.

Having completed the Given the Chance program, Abraham now has a permanent position at the ANZ's Traralgon branch near his home in Victoria's Latrobe Valley.





Stepping stones to success

Supporting women to become more financially independent has been a specific focus for EMC over the past decade. Programs such as **Women on the Move**, **Bead by Bead** and **A New Life**, which operated between 2008–10, aimed to increase women's social interaction, economic participation and awareness of rights. Some women were already running informal businesses or selling things as a hobby, and it became clear that these women were keen for more opportunities to improve their finance and business knowledge, and expand their businesses. Many of these women did not have formal recognition of their skills and qualifications, and language barriers and caring commitments prevented them from participating in formal courses.

From this, **Stepping Stones to small business**, a micro-enterprise program for women from refugee, migrant and asylum seeker backgrounds, was born. At its heart **Stepping Stones** is a plain-English, small business training course, which runs one day a week, allowing women to juggle any caring commitments. Its focus is to demystify the process of establishing a business in Australia, with each participant having their own mentor working closely with them.

Inaugural co-ordinator, Juliana Lobo de Queiroz, recalls, '**Stepping Stones**, similar to other EMC projects, began

as a response to the community's aspirations. After seed funding in 2009 from the City of Yarra, it grew with the women and their ideas, as we got to know these women's needs and their desire for income generation. **Stepping Stones** was vital as there were a lot of gaps in knowledge.'

She goes on, 'The program's uniqueness was that it recognised that a one-size-fits-all version didn't work. We unpacked all the jargon to enable these migrant and refugee women to engage and learn. It was great to watch the Brotherhood use its leverage over the next eighteen months to then get funding from the AMP Foundation to match the need from the community. In 2011, we began the first three year pilot.'

Since then, 128 women have graduated from the program, 485 people

have attended small business workshops and 122 mentors have been involved. In the program's pilot phase, 44% of participants started their own small business. **Stepping Stones** is now part way through its second three-year program, operating in Brimbank, Hume and Whittlesea. Many other local government areas are also interested.

According to Juliana, for the women in the program, '**Stepping Stones** is the place where they met other women with the same needs and dreams and hopes; where they came to learn together.' According to a recent participant, 'We have discovered that as a group of women we can do anything – we can conquer anything!' ●

We have discovered that as a group of women we can do anything – we can conquer anything! 2016 **Stepping Stones** participant.

Far left: Yaya Zarwue, Weedor Karmah and Yassah Zarwue. Above left: Yoko Nakazaw, owner of Merri Creek Organics miso paste. Above: Elham Shahhoseini with her mentor Cynthia Edgell. Right: Guiomar Arias, owner of Choc Artiste.

Somali street food, anyone?

Through EMC's **Stepping Stones** program, Sharifa Abiikar realised she could do business in Australia. Five people are now employed at her Somali Street Food Cafe, in the northern Melbourne suburb of Glenroy.

Sharifa migrated to Australia in 2008, working as a cleaner and in child care, but business was in her blood. In Somalia, she grew up working in her family's wholesale grocery shop and small ice-making factory.

'I thought it was very difficult to start a business in this country because the rules and regulations were totally different. I didn't know how to register a business name, and that sort of thing,' she said.

When she did the six-week **Stepping Stones** program in 2015, Sharifa was motivated by hearing the stories of other multicultural businesswomen, whose stories were so similar to hers.

'That encouraged me that I could do something as well – that it doesn't need a lot of money and the rules are not that hard', she said. Not long after the course finished, she saw a local cafe business for sale and decided to take on the new venture.

Sharifa is proud that the cafe is already doing well, providing financial security for her and husband Abdul, and most importantly, their three young sons. ●

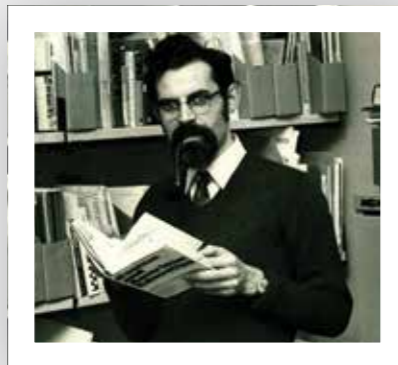
Clearing House on Migration Issues (CHOMI)

The Clearing House on Migration Issues (CHOMI) was one of EMC's most significant contributions to the field. As a public access resource centre on refugee and migrant issues, CHOMI built on EMC's modest but comprehensive collection of immigration-related documents to become the go-to place for information about migrant groups and experiences in Australia. Founder Lidio Bertelli recalls, 'After seeing the Rome and New York centres for migration studies, I came to Australia and established a third centre in Australia in 1973. I felt that you can't change the community's attitude unless you provide relevant information.' Lidio believed that such centres should exchange rather than duplicate or collect material. The name reflected this philosophy.

Supported by fundraising campaigns and funding from the Whitlam government, CHOMI combined a sophisticated database for monitoring and accessing information with a vigorous publication program. Former CHOMI coordinator Michael Liffman recalls, 'In this pre-Google era, we were the best informed organisation in Australia. If you wanted information we were the place to come to.'

According to Michael, CHOMI 'really attempted to distil information coming in to make it useable. You could subscribe to a publication that summarised in one paragraph every publication that we came across.' He recalls the process of roneo-ing information for subscribers, and stacking things in wine casks: it was 'a process that would now be regarded as time-consuming and ineffective...but at the time it was very sophisticated.'

In addition to its comprehensive database, CHOMI also produced a series of reprints, monographs and kits.



Lidio Bertelli, CHOMI founder.

CHOMI's first monograph, *Towards an understanding of the Greek migrant* by David Cox, was published in 1974. CHOMI's publishing arm flourished between 1979–81, and in the 1980s the focus shifted from supporting EMC and other community agencies to providing information to students who had become its largest user group. CHOMI also operated a bookshop and provided key resources for governments, researchers and workers in the education and family services sectors, and developed and conducted training programs on refugee and migrant issues. Its income helped EMC during difficult times.

Through CHOMI, EMC devised what we now call 'cross cultural responsiveness training' - programs for nurses, church groups, teachers, managers and others who needed the skills and knowledge to better serve their multicultural clients. EMC subsequently took up a community education role in recognition of the fact that, as Michael puts it, 'We were no longer a monocultural Anglo-Saxon

English-speaking society. The times had changed. The recognition of the importance of diversity was light years away from what it is now. We helped shape it and were shaped by it.'

In 1983 Michael Liffman was invited to attend a meeting of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees in Geneva, in recognition of CHOMI's role in documenting and sharing Australia's experience in refugee settlement.

CHOMI's contribution to research and policy advice was overtaken somewhat by the establishment of the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs in 1980. A declining subscriber base led to CHOMI ceasing operation in 2000. ●



The recognition of the importance of diversity was light years away from what it is now. We helped shape it and were shaped by it. Michael Liffman

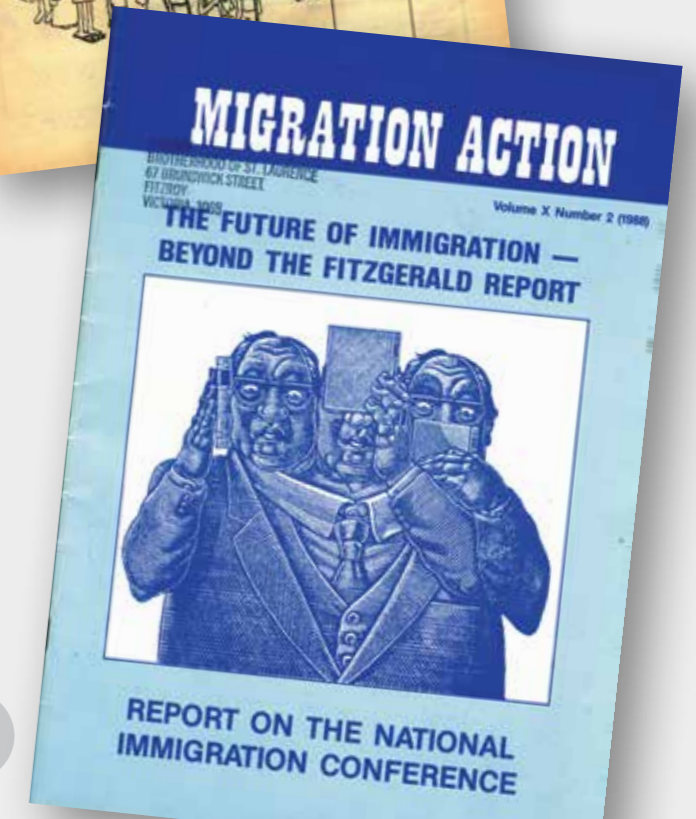
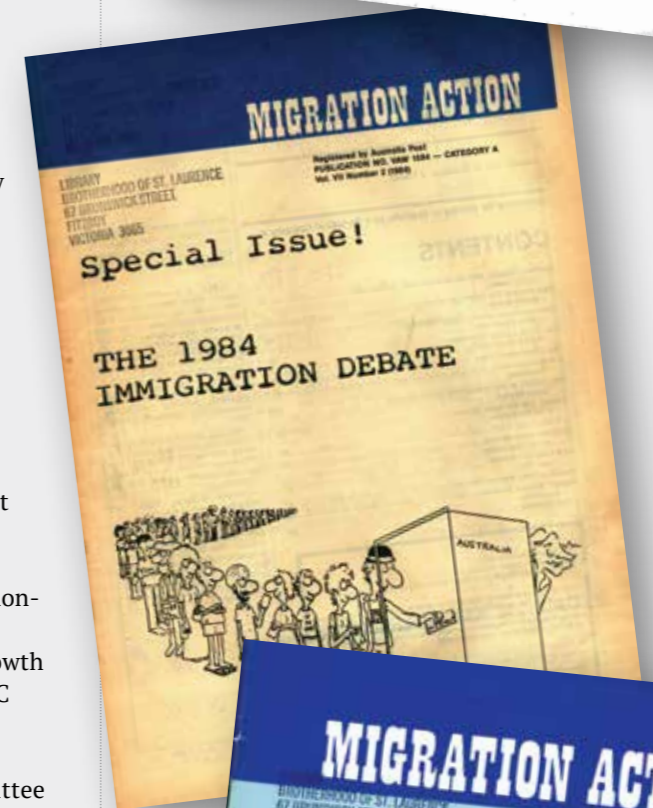
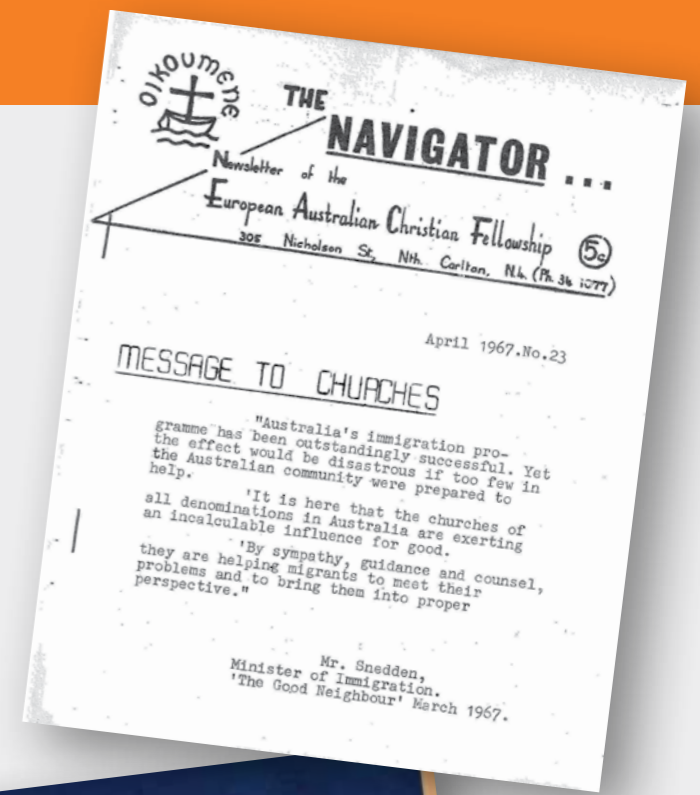
Advocacy through publications: *The Navigator* and *Migration Action*

As well as collecting the latest practice-based research and information about migrant communities in Australia, CHOMI produced two publications that were crucial to EMC's advocacy efforts: *The Navigator* (1966–74) and its successor, *Migration Action* (1974–2009). *The Navigator* developed from the regular newsletters put out by David Cox in the early 1960s, and was produced bi-monthly. It addressed the issues confronting migrants on their arrival in Australia, as well as those faced by Anglo-Australians when they came into contact with migrants. There were nearly 800 subscribers to *The Navigator* by the time it was replaced by the more comprehensive *Migration Action* journal in 1974.

Migration Action was the first Australian journal devoted to refugees, immigration and multiculturalism. It provided in-depth critical analysis and alternative views, informed by case work and close relationships with specific migrant communities. The journal aimed to promote discussion among governments and the general public, and was written to cater for people from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

Migration Action was intended to foster the growth of Australia as a pluralistic society. Many key EMC figures such as Lidio Bertelli, David Cox, Michael Liffman and Alan Matheson played a role in the journal's influence. Tony Pensabene, EMC Committee Chairperson, produced the journal from 1991–93, and recalls that '*Migration Action*, which was nation-wide, was one of the key ways for EMC to influence change and shape thinking.'

The journal enabled EMC to contribute a strong and informed voice to the national debates over immigration in the 1980s. In 1984, a special edition of *Migration Action* was produced in response to the debate provoked by Geoffrey Blainey's comments about the rate and pace of migration from Asia. Also in 1984, CHOMI produced *The Immigration debate in the press*, edited by Renata Singer. In recognition of EMC's contribution to the debate, the authors of *Surrender Australia? Essays in the study and uses of history: Geoffrey Blainey and Asian Immigration* (1985) donated their royalties to EMC. ●



Working with African communities

In the late 1980s, the wave of migration shifted away from Europe and Asia to include refugees and migrants from the Horn of Africa. This population faced some additional challenges to those experienced by all newly-arrived communities, and in 1990–91 EMC conducted a major research project. Funded by the Bureau of Immigration Research, *Selected African communities in Melbourne: their characteristics and settlement needs* was published in November 1991: the first time EMC's research had been funded by government.

Dr Trevor Batrouney was engaged as the primary researcher, and was assisted by ten research assistants from the Horn of African communities. Trevor recalls, '[This was] part of the innovative work of EMC. It worked with the Africans and other ethnic groups, doing things before the more formal government bodies took them up.'

The ten African members of the research team conducted surveys with their communities and participated in group discussions. These gave EMC insight into some of the main issues faced by people including the lack of affordable housing, racism, social isolation, a lack of social and financial support, low literacy and language difficulties and a lack of relevant work experience.

Article from
*Migration
Action*, 1991.



EMC has a lot of knowledge and care for people.

Dr Apollo Nsubuga Kyobe

According to Trevor, 'In retrospect it was a successful project because we involved the African community... [EMC] approached people from a position of equality.'

The report was much more detailed than similar reports of the time, and was well-received by the federal government. 'I don't think I have ever done a project which has received such a supportive response,' says Dr Batrouney.

The EMC formed another strong partnership with the East and Central African Communities Council of Victoria (EACoCoV) in the 1980s. Its CEO, Dr Apollo Nsubuga Kyobe (known as Dr Apollo), received funding to conduct research on African migrant groups and their needs, and he chose EMC as the partner organisation for his

many reports and articles on the issues faced by African communities in Australia, as well as their strengths. For Dr Apollo, 'other organisations weren't as articulated as EMC. EMC has a lot of knowledge and care for people.'

Both Dr Apollo and EMC considered it important that people from the migrant group being researched were involved in the project, and in the process of gathering and collating information. According to Dr Apollo, it was important 'that the research not be purely academic in its purpose, but also a means of empowering the community to have a voice. That the research process itself helped to enable the community to articulate its own needs and future goals.'

Dr Apollo was later involved in the development of the African Australian Community Centre in Footscray, which was a part of the Brotherhood until 2015.

These two projects, with their emphasis on the involvement of the relevant communities, were examples of best practice in researching the aspirations and challenges of multicultural communities. The many publications and programs that arose through EMC's partnership with the EACoCoV are testament to the strength of EMC's focus on collaboration, which continues today. As Dr Apollo says, 'Work can be achieved with good collaboration. To change society you really need an understanding of each other. ●'



Refugee Action Program (RAP) Leadership Course graduating group, 2014.

The changing face of migration: the move to Whittlesea

In the lead up to its 60th anniversary in 2016, it was timely for EMC to consider how it could remain relevant within the broader multicultural services sector, both in terms of its location as well as its name. While its inner city location meant it was centrally accessible for established and newly-arrived communities around Melbourne, two key social factors were beginning to affect EMC's growth and sustainability: the gentrification of the City of Yarra, and the low turnover in the existing inner city public housing stock, due to the lack of affordable alternatives for residents. Consequently, there were declining numbers of newly-arrived refugees and migrants in inner Melbourne.

The Brotherhood's scoping of opportunities within the growth corridors led to a review of EMC's future directions and location. The outer urban LGAs had a more substantial population of multicultural communities, and were also experiencing a much greater increase in the numbers of newly-arrived refugees and migrants than the City of Yarra. The Brotherhood was also concerned that the substantial population growth and early indications of poverty and disadvantage in those areas could become more entrenched due to the lack of social capital, services, infrastructure, employment opportunities and accessible transport.

EMC had long-standing relationships with agencies and ethnic community leaders in the north west of Melbourne, and for this reason settled on the City of Whittlesea as its new home. The EMC team undertook a community engagement process with local residents, following the

Harwood Institute's 'Aspiration' technique. Current senior manager Hutch Hussein recalls, 'We wanted to give voice to, and work in partnership with, local communities to assist them to achieve their aspirations, utilise their community strengths, meet their challenges and facilitate changes required to achieve their aspirations.'

The community identified itself as a harmonious and multicultural community, with affordable housing and some good amenities. Support from extended family, friends and community was identified as a strength and local volunteering and leadership opportunities were emphasised. However residents identified a lack of employment pathways and opportunities, a low standard of secondary education (often due to interrupted schooling), social isolation and language barriers as challenges, amongst others. Infrastructure, community spaces and funding for activities were also lacking.

Reducing isolation, providing opportunities to socialise across social groups, increasing employment and educational opportunities and increasing access to services and community spaces were identified as important new conditions for meeting the community's aspirations. Ultimately the Whittlesea community aspired to be happy, healthy and safe; to have regular activities to promote harmony and belonging across cultures; to have access to good and equitable educational and employment opportunities; and have better transport, services and community spaces.

Hutch reflects, 'As custodians of the EMC tradition, we were keen to both document and have our future directions be guided by the aspirations and challenges of the communities we work with.'

The team moved into its new home, the Epping Community Services Hub, in June 2016, where it works alongside 16 other agencies supporting local communities. Due to the fact that it was no longer a stand-alone centre, staff decided that 'Multicultural Communities Team' was more reflective of their current work, and the name was formally changed in July 2016. ●

Getting multiculturalism onto the agenda in the 1960s and 1970s

Over its sixty year history, EMC has played a significant role in getting multiculturalism onto the agenda of successive governments – and keeping it there. This is reflected in the general acceptance today of the need for culturally-tailored services for migrant communities.

When EACF was established, however, migrants were expected to assimilate. Only in the late 1960s did the policy shift to one of ‘integration’, with the government developing settlement services, interpreter schemes, special education arrangements and a range of assistance for migrants and refugees: all developments that EACF and others had argued for.

The establishment of CHOMI in 1973 was an important part of the framing of multiculturalism in Australia: see page 16 for more detail. The documentation by practitioners became crucial for the planning and delivery of welfare services throughout Australia, helping identify gaps or inadequacies in services and leading to a greater appreciation of migrant issues by government.

The knowledge of community resources and processes contributed by key team member, Alan Matheson, in these areas was crucial. Material he collected overseas on international programs had an important influence on the future direction of EMC. This juxtaposition of CHOMI with the direct welfare work of the centre was one of EMC’s strengths, and contributed to the compilation of a knowledge base for welfare and community workers around Australia and internationally. This helped change the language as well as the attitudes and stereotypes towards people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, and made a major contribution to the shift from assimilation to integration and multiculturalism.



Prime Minister Gough Whitlam speaking at VCOSS/ACOSS gathering. To his right is Walter Lippmann who chaired the ACOSS Migration Committee of which EMC was a member.

The Whitlam government’s election in 1972 saw the abolition of the White Australia policy and the official adoption of multiculturalism. Migrant voices were increasingly being heard through an emerging ethnic press, ethnic community groups and new welfare agencies. From 1974 onwards, Ethnic Communities’ Councils were formed nationwide and Migrant Task Forces were established by Al Grassby, then Minister for Immigration. Prominent on the Victorian Task Force was Walter Lippmann, who was to have a long association with EMC in the fight for justice for migrants.

Further momentum led to the then Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser, commissioning Frank Galbally QC to undertake the *Review of Post-Arrival Programs and Services to Migrants* in 1977. The report confirmed the commitment to multiculturalism – and the importance of principles such as equal opportunity and access for migrants, cultural maintenance and the provision of specialist services – that has largely underpinned government policy ever since.

Importantly, much of the momentum during the 1970s was generated by the ethnic communities themselves. Michael Liffman, former EMC community development worker who was appointed to the board of the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs in 1983, recalls, ‘The ethnic communities themselves became organised lobbies during the 1970s and part of our role was to support them and work with them. People like [Alan] Matheson and [David] Cox were Anglos, but they were saying “just because these guys are Greeks and Italians, doesn’t mean they are being self-interested. We as a wider community should recognise the need for multicultural services.”’ ●

When we were based in Richmond we did a lot of work in the housing commission flats. A young Vietnamese woman who was pregnant came in one day and said, ‘I love it here, Australia is great. I’m going to name my child an Australian name’. We found out later she called her daughter ‘Athena’ – a lovely story illustrating multicultural Australia. Michael Liffman



Language and settlement support program, Flemington neighbourhood house, circa 1991.



The power must be with the women involved for it to have success.

Nikki Marshall

Opening the door: working with women

Through its direct engagement work with communities, EMC recognised that women from newly-arrived refugee and migrant communities required particular responses. By taking the time to connect with people and develop positive relationships, EMC staff were able to identify the needs, challenges, strengths and aspirations of particular groups of women, and develop innovative programs in response.

In the late 1980s, women from the Horn of Africa were one such group. They were from a rural background, experiencing big cities for the first time. Along with the challenges of parenting in a new country, they had to make sense of a new and complex culture and language.

The women were keen to engage with the broader community, so improving their English was crucial. However, many had little or no formal education, meaning that existing English language programs, which were based on the written word, were not appropriate. In 1991, EMC partnered with the Adult Migrant English Service (AMES) and established a key language education program in Flemington and Springvale. Funded by the state government, the classes ran in neighbourhood houses, with teachers who were trained in delivering programs to people with low literacy levels. Nikki Marshall, the community development worker who led this initiative, recalls: ‘Previously, the women couldn’t understand what was happening in the classes. This tailored approach enabled the women to engage in

learning English effectively. This type of approach was adopted at a policy level and is now part of mainstream service delivery.’

Nikki continues: ‘Another key part was the social element – from sharing lunches together, they influenced the neighbourhood houses to conduct other classes, and singing and sewing groups emerged. I know that the group in Flemington still meets 25 years on, sharing stories, and regular women’s camps give them a break. Reducing social isolation was vitally important.’

EMC’s groundbreaking work with newly-arrived women was exemplified in its work on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). EMC employed women from the relevant communities to help educate and gather the sensitive personal information required. These women recommended that key male community leaders be involved to debunk the myth that FGM was a requirement of Islam. Male imams and doctors educated and informed community members and the wider health sector. EMC supported the women at every stage but essentially let the women lead it. ‘We were of the view that communities must instigate and own their own change,’ says Nikki Marshall. ‘That the power must be with the women involved for it to have success. The community education campaign was with the women, by the women and for the women.’ One of the participants described the project as ‘like a door opening’. ‘Before the project some of us felt this was not a good habit, but to talk about something, you need a door to open for you. So this project I consider as a door opening and seeing what’s inside. Before we were thinking, but outside. Education, information and talking about it is the door.’

This kind of close collaboration with communities as well as other service providers continues to be the basis of the Multicultural Communities Team’s approach today. ●

Advocacy for people seeking asylum: Temporary Protection Visas and Justice for Asylum Seekers

Throughout its history, EMC has held a unique position in the multicultural sector. Unlike Migrant Resource Centres, EMC has never received its core funding from the federal government. As a result, it is able to act autonomously and according to its core values, and is flexible enough to fill gaps quickly as they arise.

This enabled a quick response in 1999 when the Australian Government introduced Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) for people recognised as refugees but not given the same rights. By then, EMC had become part of the Brotherhood, which enhanced its profile and access to partner agencies. Along with other advocates, EMC had lobbied for people seeking asylum to be released from detention into the wider community, but the conditions placed on TPVs were limiting. Someone issued with a TPV had no work rights, and no access to the family reunion program or permanent residency. The federal government also denied people access to government-funded settlement services. Many welfare agencies regarded the approach taken by the then Howard Government as harsh, and some agencies utilised volunteers rather than paid staff to provide after-hours services for people holding TPVs.

Meanwhile, busloads of people were arriving in major cities three times a week, with nothing more than a bank account and access to one night's accommodation. EMC considered the situation a crisis and, as EACF had decades earlier, stepped in to meet the need. As former EMC project manager Kerry Gartland recalls, 'There were many organisations that supported [TPV holders] but what made EMC unique is that it provided the first response. It was like an emergency responder.' Former EMC CEO Sarina Greco notes, 'Once again, EMC was responding to the newcomer, or welcoming the stranger amongst us, in its original ecumenical sense. It exemplified why we played such a crucial and unique role in the development of multicultural Australia.'

Justice for Asylum Seekers

In 2000, with the politicisation of boat arrivals, a loose coalition of around 30 agencies and refugee groups came together as Justice for Asylum Seekers (JAS) to become a state-wide voice for asylum seeker issues. JAS' aims were to disseminate accurate information to the media and public, showing the human face of boat people and TPV holders, and to build political and public support for an alternative to mandatory detention.

EMC coordinated the logistics of housing, food, income and counselling services and enlisted financial support from the churches and support from the state government for education and training. It created a comprehensively-documented settlement system, working to ensure that the organisation would not become crisis-ridden, as happened to some smaller agencies that responded in a more ad-hoc way. Sarina Greco recalls, 'You needed a non-ethno-specific agency, not aligned to government and/or beholden to it, that was multi-faith or no faith and had the expertise to develop systems.' The church agency representatives, such as the Uniting Church's Hotham Mission, provided both extensive volunteer support and financial aid. Hotham's Grant Mitchell also brought practical experience from his years working in a community placement program in Sweden. Sitting side by side were welfare agencies with significant service development experience and strong relationships with government. The collective expertise was the right mix.

A credible alternative

While JAS fearlessly critiqued government policy around TPVs, it had a solution as well. This was rare in the welfare and refugee sectors. It developed a detailed case management model as an alternative to immigration detention, with the Red Cross as the lead agency



A young girl shows support for people seeking asylum.

facilitating community release of people seeking asylum. Fully costed by Tony Ward, an independent economist, *The Better Way: Refugees, Detention and Australians* took three years to develop. It was released in 2003, and provided a credible alternative to mandatory detention. This documentation gave genuine credibility to JAS and its goals.

JAS also felt the need to resource the media and community to win hearts and minds. Asylum seekers were now being described as 'illegal boat arrivals' and 'queue jumpers'. JAS had a journalism volunteer who played a role in humanising the issue in the wider community with real stories and images of people who arrived by boat.

Bringing the issues onto the main stage

JAS engaged in some innovative advocacy. Its members enlisted refugee expert, Paris Aristotle, to assist in brokering an arrangement with the government's independent advisory group. JAS was then able to sit at the table for a day or two, working through its proposal and seeing what was possible from the department's point of view. A meeting with the then Immigration Minister, Phillip Ruddock, who responded positively to the presentation but not the campaign, propelled JAS to change tactics.

Sarina Greco recalls, 'JAS enlisted and resourced the heads of welfare agencies to be the face of refugee advocacy. That changed the dynamics of the campaign: it made a punitive policy for an excluded population part of the mainstream conversation about poverty, exclusion and disadvantage. It was not on the side stage anymore. JAS worked to change the dynamics around asylum seeker policy and practice.'

Advocacy for people seeking asylum after JAS

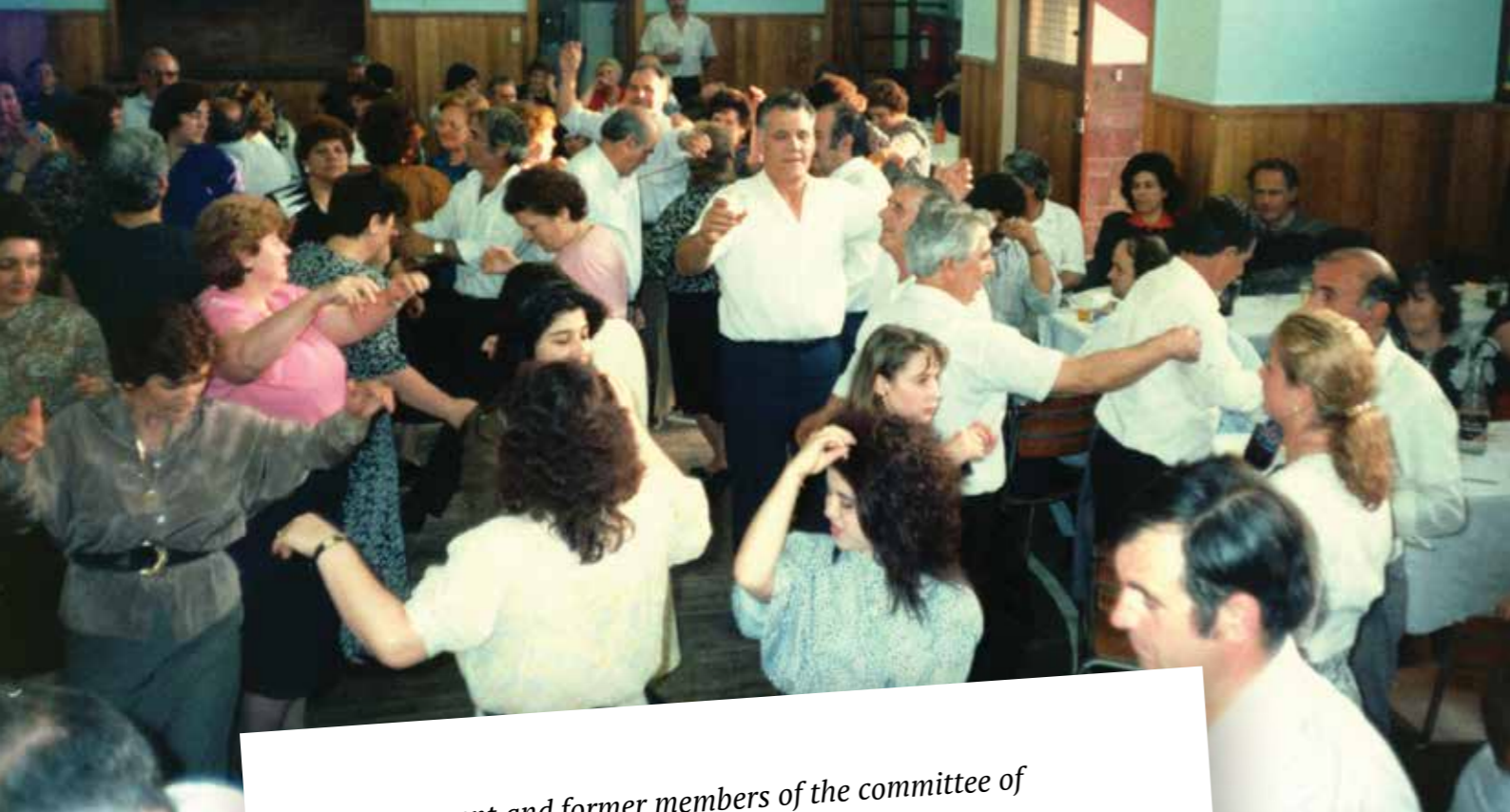
JAS had petitioned effectively and the new Rudd government responded in 2008 by restoring community-based arrangements for asylum seekers while their claims were being assessed, and restoring permanent protection to those found to be refugees.

When the Abbott Government reintroduced TPVs in 2014, EMC was involved in lobbying to ensure that work rights would be included. The Brotherhood had already, with philanthropic support, established a version of its **Given the Chance** program to cater for people seeking asylum (see page 12) and was now able to help more people who held the right to work.

According to Sarina Greco, the real strength in JAS lay in the approach that EMC had been taking for many years: being respectful, working alongside those affected by the issues, pulling in the experts, working as part of a group and getting the issues into the main arena. 'JAS had the know-how and was very effective,' she says. 'It was collective action at its best.' ●

Once again, EMC was responding to the newcomer, or welcoming the stranger amongst us, in its original ecumenical sense.

Sarina Greco



60TH BIRTHDAY MESSAGES

From your early days giving young people in the inner suburbs of Melbourne a sense of belonging, to strengthening rights, social integration and economic participation, to assisting our current newly arrived migrants in settlement – your role has been critical. I welcome this occasion to acknowledge the Multicultural Communities Team’s true dedication and leadership, which has strengthened our multicultural communities, fostered acceptance of our rich cultural diversity and helped to realise multiculturalism as we know it in Victoria today. Congratulations on an inspiring 60 years!

HELEN KAPALOS
Chairperson, Victorian Multicultural Commission

Dear current and former members of the committee of management, staff and volunteers,
This booklet is dedicated to you all for the contribution you have made, not just to EACF, EMC or MCT, and the people it has served over the last 60 years, but also to multiculturalism and to a more inclusive society. Many of you have gone onto bigger and better things, but we are comforted that many of you recall your EMC days with great fondness and continue to maintain friendships with former colleagues. We count you as part of the family, appreciate the difference you have made and feel honoured to follow in your footsteps.

Here’s to the next 60 years!
From the Brotherhood of St Laurence’s Multicultural Communities Team

PS: We are conscious that the booklet doesn’t reference all leadership staff and chairpersons. Our records indicate that the following people played operational leadership roles: Rev Prof David Cox, Johnny Kalisperis, Savas Augoustakis, Rev Alan Matheson, Rev Wayne Sanderson, Marion Webster, Robert Mister, Mike Hill, Virender Bajwa (Acting), Sarina Greco, Kate Bean, Sevi Vassos, Kerry Gartland (Acting), Joanne Knight and current manager Hutch Hussein.

We also acknowledge the following chairpersons from 1962–99: Eric Richards, Bishop Geoffrey Sambell, Rev Stan Weeks, Archbishop Peter Hollingworth, Peter Renkin, Flora Pearce, Lorna Lippmann, Rev John Jamieson, Tony Pensabene and Basil Varghese.

Greek dancing at the North Carlton Presbyterian Church hall, circa 1963.

Over years of involvement with the EMC and prior to that the European Australian Christian Fellowship, my knowledge and understanding have been greatly enriched. Firstly, on the benefits of migration, as well as the initial challenges of resettlement. Secondly, about the distinctive cultural backgrounds of the many ethnically based organisations and the particular needs of their constituents. Thirdly, the importance of formulating sound policies to uphold the family and cultural needs and traditions of the various migrant groups, and then to encourage their social integration and engagement in mainstream society. In these and other ways, EMC has thus given me a better and a more sensitive understanding of the many opportunities and challenges involved in forging Australian life in the 21st Century.

DR PETER HOLLINGWORTH AC OBE
Former Chair, EMC Committee of Management (1975–78)

Through your 60 year presence in Yarra, you’ve championed the City of Yarra’s mission to make people from all backgrounds feel safe, welcome and supported. Yarra City Council applauds the Multicultural Communities Team for continuing to make Yarra, and wider Melbourne, the diverse and vibrant place it is celebrated for.

VIJAYA VAIDYANATH
CEO, City of Yarra

My involvement at EMC as both a student and later as a board member provided the grounding to my career in the multicultural sector. I was fortunate to be part of an organisation that was at the forefront of advocacy for migrant communities. It was a formative experience through which I gained invaluable skills and knowledge.

CARMEL GUERRA
CEO, Centre for Multicultural Youth

EMC has played a pioneering role in welcoming and supporting new migrants to inner Melbourne. Arriving in a new and often very different country is challenging, but the support of EMC has made a significant difference for so many people. You are an important reason for the success of multiculturalism in our city. Thank you to all those who have worked, volunteered or supported EMC over the 60 years. I wish you all the best as you continue to support people and communities and strengthen our multicultural society.

ADAM BANDT MP
Federal Member for Melbourne

The EMC from the beginning, offered hospitality, practical assistance and belonging to folk newly arrived on our island! How beautiful has been the intention and outcomes over 60 years. Our community is stronger and more friendly as a result. EMC has helped contribute to Australia’s quality of multicultural well-being! Thanks be!

BISHOP PHILIP HUGGINS
Former Chair, Brotherhood of St Laurence

European Australian Christian Fellowship

Ecumenical Migration Centre

Multicultural Communities Team



The Mayen family was reunited in 2016 via the Community Proposal Pilot Program run through EMC. Photo: Craig Sillitoe

Opening doors

Ecumenical Migration Centre

**Brotherhood of St Laurence
Multicultural Communities Team**

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Multicultural Communities Team