



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### NURSES HIGHLIGHT AND CELEBRATE COURAGE OF REFUGEES

The devastating stories nurse Sandy Eagar and her team have heard over the years working with refugees is enough to bring most people to tears.

But one story that particularly touched her heart was of a little girl with Spina bifida, who had just landed in Australia after fleeing war-torn Syria.

“We had a family and in that family was a little girl in a wheelchair. The child’s mother said to me ‘madrasa’, which is the Arabic word for school,” Ms Eagar FACN, Nurse Manager for the NSW Refugee Health Service, said.

“The little girl shook her head and said ‘no school’. She was nine and had never been to school. I then said, ‘yes school, you will go to school’.

“The little girl then started to cry because she couldn’t believe she would have this opportunity here in Australia and actually be able to go to school. Her mother and her siblings all started to cry as well, and these were absolute tears of joy. It was such an absolutely lovely moment.”

Ms Eagar said school was new to many children with disabilities arriving in Australia because they had not been given the opportunity in their homeland for various reasons, sometimes because they were even hidden.

She said the NSW Refugee Health Service and South Western Sydney Local Health District had supported the family over many months since their arrival by providing advice and follow-up care to ensure referral services were accessed and the appropriate care had been received.

“The little girl and the family in general are doing well. The father is working as a truck driver and he very quickly completed his 510 hours of English language [tuition] not long after arriving in Australia,” she said.

Ms Eagar, who is also a fellow of the Australian College of Nursing (ACN), has shared her story to highlight Refugee Week this week, which runs until Saturday.

ACN Chief Executive Officer, Adjunct Professor Kylie Ward, said Refugee Week was a wonderful way to celebrate the courage of refugees and recognise the organisations and professionals including nurses that supported them.

“Nurses have arguably been at the forefront of caring and working with those who are most vulnerable and disempowered, and have often had to fill the gap where no other profession is willing or potentially able to work,” Adjunct Professor Ward said.

“All refugees and asylum seekers should receive quality holistic health care that addresses their physical and mental health needs and which includes health promotion and illness prevention regardless of their visa status.”

This year’s theme for Refugee Week is *With courage let us all combine*, acknowledging the courage of refugees and those who speak out against persecution and injustice.

-ENDS-

**For interviews, please contact David Giammetta, Senior Media Liaison Officer South Western Sydney Local Health District, on 02 8738 6943 or Narelle Barrie, Executive Assistant to ACN Chief Executive Officer Kylie Ward, on 02 6283 3459 or 0450 908 920**



**Above: NSW Refugee Health Service Nurse Manager Sandy Eagar FACN**

#### Notes to Editors:

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) is the national professional organisation for all nurse leaders and its aim is to ensure that the Australian community receives quality nursing care now and in the future. ACN is a membership organisation with members in all states and territories, health care settings and nursing specialties. ACN is also the Australian member of the International Council of Nurses headquartered in Geneva. An organisation not afraid to challenge industry issues affecting the nursing profession or Australia’s health care, ACN is a well-connected and educated national body that drives change with people of influence to enhance the delivery of health services to the Australian community. ACN’s membership includes nurses in roles of influence, including senior nurses, organisational leaders, academics and researchers.

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