

# MECATODAY

NEWSLETTER 2021 Issue 4



## TABLE OF CONTENT

- Pg.1- About MECA
- Pg.2- Manager's Memo
- Pg.3- Covid updates
- Pg.4- Service & Programs
- Pg.5- Citizenship class
- Pg.6- SwimSafe
- Pg.7- MECA Car
- Pg.9- Covid Survey Campaign
- Pg.10- Refugee Week
- pg.11- Kilos of Hope
- Pg.12 - KALLICO
- Pg.13- Local Heroes
- pg.14- Coming Soon

## A Warm Welcome

Welcome to the fourth issue of the MECA's quarterly newsletter. This newsletter outlines all you need to know about MECA services, events and the accomplishments achieved by MECA over the months in May, June, July and August, and what you can look forward to at MECA in the coming months.

## About MECA

MECA works with local people to identify the needs, and improve settlement services to, migrants, refugees and emerging communities in the suburbs of Mount Druitt and the wider Blacktown Local Government Area. MECA aims to build resilient communities by providing appropriate orientation, information, referrals and assistance. MECA also works with communities, individuals, government and service providers to promote community capacity building and social cohesion. MECA provides specialist youth services, which include community development, youth leadership and education and learning programs. The organisation is dedicated to improving social and economic outcomes for young people and promoting participation and inclusion in the broader community

# MANAGER'S MEMO

This quarter of the year started for MECA with the Refugee Week celebration! MECA organized successful Refugee Week 2021 events in partnership with several local service providers. The Refugee Week Launch was attended by Edmond Atalla MP, Blacktown City's Mayor, Tony Bleasdale (OAM), Aboriginal Elder Uncle Greg Simms, and several Community Storytellers. Also, on the day, MECA was delighted to have launched our podcast called "Roundtable" with the help of West Word.

Watching the Afghanistan situation on our screens was heartbreaking. In spite, the local Afghanistan-Australian community has been strong & resilient in working collaboratively with service providers and the Honorable Ed Husic MP to address some of the issues.

COVID lockdown has brought challenges and opportunities for MECA to serve our community better. MECA conducted a successful COVID-19 campaign by engaging more than 600 local community members in partnership with the Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA), WSLHD, and the House of Sakinah.

MECA has taken the initiative called "Kilos of Hope" to provide food and essential items to homebound community members within Blacktown LGA. I want to thank our excellent volunteers Samara Al-Fatlawi & Hannah Shamoka, for their commitment to deliver items to clients. MECA also appreciates WestPoint Blacktown and Multicultural NSW for supporting the Kilos of Hope initiative.

Kallio Catering, 100% Aboriginal enterprise, and MECA took a joint initiative called 'Yura Bada' (people Eat) to support the local First Nations People who are homebound due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are grateful for the support we received from producers of the film "In My Blood, It Runs", Blacktown City Council, Mount Druitt Police, and the local community members who have donated & volunteered. This initiative was made possible by Nene & Darryl Brown, owners of Kallico Catering. Their day starts at 4 am and, if they are lucky, it finishes at 8 pm once all deliveries are done. I want to say a big thank you to all involved in supporting this initiative!

MECA has successfully secured the 'Stronger Communities' grant to purchase a car. We are already using this car to deliver food and essential items to homebound community members.

Those initiatives and works are made possible because of the extraordinary commitment TEAM MECA shows every day.

MECA is here to serve the community, so please feel free to contact us.

We look forward to having you at our center once the lockdown has ended.

Sincerely yours,  
Daniel Gobena



# Update on COVID-19 Safety Practices at MECA

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, MECA has paused a few of their face-to-face services, and are now delivering some services online. We will continue to prioritise the safety and well-being of our community and employees during these difficult times. Please contact us for more information.

## Services on hold:

- Justice of peace
- Sewing Classes
- SwimSafe
- Foodbank
- Garden Program
- Seniors Health Programs
- Drivers Education

These services will resume face-to-face after lockdown.

Help stop the  
spread of  
COVID and  
Stay Safe





## OUR SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

### Our SERVICES



#### **CASEWORK | MON, TUE, THU, FRI | 9AM- 4PM Online**

Our casework services aim to provide settlement related information, advocacy, employment and education support and referrals to mainstream organizations.



#### **WDO | MON, TUE, THU | 9AM - 4PM Online**

If you are struggling to pay for your fines, volunteer at MECA and clear your fines.



#### **EAPA | MON, TUE, THU, FRI | 9AM - 4PM Online**

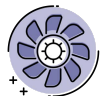
If you're unable or finding it hard to pay your energy bills due to short-term financial crisis or emergency like loss of job or reduced income as a result of the novel pandemic, MECA can help you apply for EAPA voucher.



#### **JP | On-hold**

MECA provides a Justice of the Peace for our clients and the broader community to access

### Our PROGRAMS



#### **DRIVERS EDUCATION | On-hold**

Learn road laws and rules. Participants can gain up to 3 free practical driving lessons. Must have a learner driver license



#### **SEWING CLASSES | On-hold**

Join us to learn or improve your sewing skills in a fun, social & supportive environment



#### **SCHOOL HOLIDAY PROG | On-hold**

Every school holiday period MECA runs recreational activities. MECA provides fun and educational programs for all young people



#### **AFROZCENTRIC | On-hold**

Designed to create a safe space for African-Australian Youths to be inspired, equipped and act.



#### **MEN'S HEALTH | MON | On-hold**

This is a monthly session designed to assist men to learn, connect and improve their wellbeing.



#### **ENGLISH FOR LIVING | TUE | 10AM- 11:30 AM Online**

A very interactive session to help you improve your English language & communication skills.



#### **MVP VOLUNTEER PROGRAM | ON-GOING**

It aims to give volunteering opportunities to those who would like to help their community and also develop their skills as a pathway to employment



#### **ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR HUMAN DIGNITY | ON-GOING**

The EHD program is designed to assist those who are interested in starting their own business by reactivating their entrepreneurial skills in the Australian context



#### **WE ARE FAMILY-PARENTING PROG | Upcoming**

This program aims to assist parents to improve their parenting skills and find support from other parents through networking



#### **INFO SESSIONS | THU | 12PM - 1PM Online**

Assists those who are new to Australia in their settlement journey. It covers a wide range of topics including, Australian law, accounting, health, housing, driving, Centrelink, education and more



#### **HOMEWORK SUPPORT | WED | 3:30PM - 5PM**

MECA provides assistance with homework, assignments, English, Mathematics, Science and Research.



#### **MENTORING PROGRAM | FRIDAY | 8:30AM - 9:50AM**

Focuses on fostering social confidence and emotional well-being for young people by providing basic education, mentoring, employment skills and experience



#### **WOMEN'S HEALTH | THUR | Online**

This is a monthly session designed to assist women to learn, connect and improve their wellbeing.



#### **SENIOR'S HEALTH | WED | On-hold**

This is a weekly session designed to assist seniors to learn, connect and improve their wellbeing.



#### **GARDEN PROGRAM | MON | On-hold**

Established to create a space where community members and groups can come together to participate in activities that encourage harmony, cooperation and a sense of belonging amongst those Involved.



#### **CITIZENSHIP CLASSES | MON | 2:30 PM-4:20 PM Online**

This program aims to assist participants to study and prepare for the Australian citizenship test.



#### **AUSTRALIANS SHARING A NEW STORY FORUM | On-hold**

This forum provides safe space for story sharing which is led by professional facilitators



#### **COMMUNITY & RELIGIOUS LEADERS SUPPORT PROG | On-hold**

This program is designed to support and build the capacity of community and religious leaders so they can in turn be effective in supporting their community.

MECA

# Citizenship program

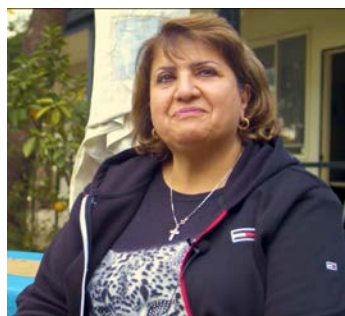
MECA has recommenced their citizenship classes via zoom. The citizenship program at MECA is a free service that is available to all public members as a way to help individuals prepare for their Australian Citizenship test. The citizenship classes are led by a wonderful team of volunteers – Layla, Hanna, Karen and assisted by a MECA staff. The service is available every Monday from 2:30–4:20 pm through zoom.

In August, we had a total of 14 participants join our online sessions, each of the participants we had was starting their own path to preparing for the test or were applying for the test. As a result, with the help of professionals, we help our participants practice and learn about Australian beliefs, values, and political states in order to increase their chances of passing. As such, our participants have found the service to be beneficial and educational.

Prior to the lockdown, we've celebrated the accomplishments of our few participants in receiving their Australian citizenship. We wish all of our current participants the best of luck in achieving their goals.

Thank you to our wonderful volunteers and MECA staff for their unwavering commitment to making the citizenship program a valuable resource to our community members.

Please contact MECA if you wish to register for this service





# SWIMSAFE

Our SwimSafe program is a 10-week swimming program for women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds that aims to both build water confidence and community connection. The sessions consist of swimming classes and group activities at the Sydney Gymnastic and Aquatic Centre (SGAC) and include language support and childcare. Participants will learn water familiarisation, safety, and swimming skills and develop social skills. Over two years, SwimSafe will run eight rounds – one per school term. Every school term, we can accommodate only ten women to take part in this program.

Our last cohort was composed of mothers, seniors and women over 30 years. The women were happy to have a dedicated time and place where they could learn swimming and socialise. Due to our provision of childminding service (in partnership with BACC), the mothers learned swimming without worrying about the children and received the much needed relaxation time. Initially, the women were quite afraid of the water, and now they can float and feel more confident in the water. Some of them can now swim with supporting materials. This program has started to bridge the critical gap that exists between CALD women and water activities. Additionally, it facilitates the development of social connections within the community.

In light of the COVID restrictions, SwimSafe is postponed. It will be up and running when it is safe to do so. Keep an eye on our Facebook page to register your interest for the program!



**DURING SCHOOL TERMS**



**10AM - 12PM**



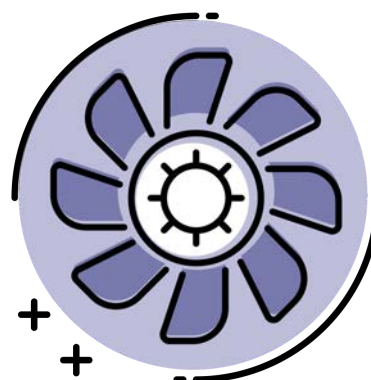
**SYDNEY GYMNASTICS & AQUATIC CENTRE (ROOTY HILL) / MECA**



# MECA CAR

## ALL WHEELS ON DECK!!

MECA was fortunate enough to be awarded a grant recently that allowed us the opportunity to purchase a brand new vehicle. The purchase of this vehicle means a lot to us and our community. It has allowed us to kick start our Kilos Of Hope program as we used it to make the deliveries. This vehicle will allow us to carry out various new and existing services with great ease and hopefully will be an ongoing positive impact on our aim to help those in need. One program we are excited to get going with the vehicle when the dust settles is to re-launch our driving course program with the aim of providing driving lessons and increasing road safety awareness for those in and around our community.





# COVID-19 Survey Campaign

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact it was having on our communities we decided to be a part of an initiative to bring about positive change. We launched our campaign to [Stay Home, Get Tested and Vaccinated](#). To launch the campaign our team members, friends and family recorded a multilingual video to reach the widely diverse communities we interact with. We partnered up with NSW Health and Settlement Services Australia to conduct a survey.

The aim of the survey was to assist in identifying the vaccination status of those we could reach in NSW. We also offered question and answer sessions hosted by medical experts and advisors that were translated into several language's to address the concerns and questions people had about Covid19 and the vaccination program. The campaign was rewarded with the allocation of a \$50 e-gift voucher that was won daily via a lucky draw and a second draw after question and answer sessions to reward those that joined us virtually for their participation.



[Click here](#) to view our 'Stay Home, Get Tested, Get Vaccinated' campaign video





# Refugee Week

In the month of July, MECA celebrated Refugee Week. Refugee Weeks at MECA commemorate the belonging and contribution of all refugees in Australia. This event raises awareness about refugee's experiences, and advocate for the ongoing issues that impact the refugee community. In celebration of Refugee Week, MECA held four events to honour the lived experiences of all refugees, and to share hope to individuals who are currently impacted by their journey and the issues they've experienced in Australia.



## Walk to Pirrama Park

We held 'Refugee week walk @ Pirrama Park' on the 20th of June 2021 to walk in solidarity with our refugee clients and for all refugees living in Australia. Volunteers and the public living across Sydney registered online to share a walk and to celebrate human connection.



## Story Sharing

We held 'Story sharing' on 23th of June 2021, an event with guest speakers with lived experience to share their stories. The stories they shared touched upon misconceptions that hurt the community, and powerful stories of starting a new life in Australia.



## Connect

We held 'Connect' on the 25th of June at Blacktown library for young children to connect with stories portraying the cultural appreciation of the culturally diverse communities.



## Podcast Launch

We held 'launch' on the 21st of June at the MECA office to celebrate the launch of our MECA podcast called "[Roundtable](#)". On this day, we invited the Blacktown LGA Consul representatives, police force, cultural organisations, and the public, to come together and unit over cultural appreciation of our ethnic and culturally diverse community.



[Click here](#) to visit our 'Roundtable' podcast

### MECA and Community.

Thank you to all our community members, and participants for making Refugee Week memorable.



# Kilos of Hope

In the month of August, to support the local community of Blacktown LGA, MECA launched the 'Kilos of Hope' program, in partnership with Multicultural NSW, Westpoint Blacktown and Foodbank to support the community members most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. By implementing this initiative, MECA aims to be actively involved in assisting the local community through these challenging circumstances.

## About Kilos of Hope

The 'Kilos of hope' is an emergency relief project that aims to deliver emergency relief supply in the form of hampers to the doorsteps of homebound community members in the Blacktown LGA affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We recognize the impact of Covid-19 on community members who might have some financial difficulties or maybe homebound due to disability, old age, illness, digital illiteracy, or any other reason. 'Kilos of Hope' is a response from MECA to support the vulnerable members of the community.

We were successful in launching this project as well as reaching a large number of people in the Blacktown LGA affected by the COVID restrictions.

### Hampers

Our hampers contain few essential food supplies and other essential items such as toiletries, nappies, and first-aid-kit, etc, We try to accommodate any additional needs at our best. Delivering hampers with essential items is a small attempt by MECA to support the community. Contact us for any assistance or further information about similar programs at MECA.



We want to thank our staff, volunteers and all external services who for their amazing contribution.



# MECA-Kallico Initiative - Yura Bada (people Eat)

To support the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities who are at greater risk due to COVID-19, MECA has partnered up with Kallico Catering service in their initiative to donate cooked meals to indigenous households.

Kallico Catering Service is an indigenous-led organization with meals prepared by Indigenous chefs. This initiative aims to deliver free-of-charge meals to First Nation people living in high-risk COVID conditions.

MECA is assisting with Kallico Catering Service in fundraising, client referrals, transportation assistance, and volunteer work. With this initiative, our main objective is to mitigate the effects of the food crisis and the impacts of isolation in the community. Please contact Kallico to register for this service.



*Donations urgently needed to support First Nations families affected by COVID-19 in Western Sydney*

Kallico is a First Nations catering company based in Blacktown NSW, who have selflessly been working to deliver meals to families across their community. \$2 can provide a meal, and at the moment they are delivering 1200 meals but are running out of funds.

**In My Blood It Runs will match donations up to \$2000.**  
Swipe to see how to support.

## Contact details



MECA: 02 9625 9300  
KALLICO: 02 9625 0046



info@meca.org.au  
info@kallicocatering.com

### FINANCIAL DONATIONS:

ACCOUNT NAME: MECA  
BSB: 062317  
ACCOUNT NUMBER: 10042270  
REFERENCE: KALLICO DONATION

# Westfield Local Heroes

Westfield Local Heroes is a recognition and awards program that celebrates people in Australia and New Zealand who make a positive impact on their local community or environment.

The Westfield Local Heroes program recognizes, celebrates, and rewards community role models whose work or activities create positive benefit for others in one or more of the following ways:

- Nurturing a sense of belonging and inclusion
- Helping in times of community crisis
- Helping build community resilience
- Promoting positive health and wellbeing
- Improving access to community services and groups
- Protecting the local environment

We at MECA, are pleased to announce that MECA team member, **Emma Smith** was a nominee for the Westfield Local Heroes Awards 2021.

Emma has smoothed the path for countless school-aged immigrants in her five years with the Mount Druitt Ethnic Communities Agency. The busy full-time university student finds time to volunteer with the non-profit's youth mentoring program for disadvantaged high school students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who are at risk of dropping out.

Mount Druitt Ethnic Communities will use the funds to support the mentoring program, including three educational excursions and job readiness workshops.

We appreciate the support of all those the took their time to vote for Emma.

Westfield  
*Local Heroes*  
**VOTE NOW**  
**EMMA SMITH**  
EMPATHIC - DEDICATED - PASSIONATE





# UP-COMING PROGRAMS!

# MECA

MT DRUITT  
ETHNIC  
COMMUNITIES  
AGENCY

**PROJECT HOPE 2770**  
partners

MECA CatholicCare growing potential Blacktown TONGAREVA LOCAL COUNCIL

**A LOCAL INITIATIVE TO SOLVE UNPAID FINES**

Toongabbie Legal Centre (TLC) has learned that there are approximately 132,470 penalties outstanding within the postcode 2770 - the highest number of unpaid fines in a single post code in New South Wales.

The debts are owed by more than 8,000 residents and exceed \$23 million in value.

To help those impacted by the unpaid fines, TLC has initiated a unique programme to bring awareness to affected people about the implications of not paying fines in a timely manner and options for relieving the debt in a manageable way.

To create awareness and try to resolve issues to the extent that it can, TLC has been successful in bringing other concerned organisations who are active in the local area, such as Mount Drutt Ethnic Communities Agency (MECA), Blacktown City Council, Growing Potential Ltd, CatholicCare, and local political leaders representing suburbs falling under postcode 2770. Mount Drutt Local Area Command of NSW Police, Westfield Shopping Centre and others have also expressed their willingness to assist with this initiative, called - PROJECT HOPE 2770.

We want to see educational awareness surrounding fines and penalties, and remedial options to alleviate the current situation.

Many of those with outstanding fines fall within disadvantaged community groups such as low-income earners, Indigenous Australians, and those with a disability.

"We are all very concerned about the situation," said Daniel Gohena, Manager of Mount Drutt Ethnic Communities Agency (MECA) which is a partner in the Project Hope 2770 Team.

"These penalty notices have devastating consequences on their lives and affect other law-abiding individuals in the area" Daniel Gohena said.

"I am pleased to support an initiative which helps our most vulnerable people to address their debts and to get a fresh start, however, it should be very clear that this is not a one stop shop for those who continue to commit offences" Edmund Attalla MP, State Member for Mount Drutt, said.

Blacktown City Mayor Tony Blandford OAM said: "During these times of lockdowns, restrictions and job losses due to COVID-19, Council understands that many people are finding it difficult. Blacktown City Council commends this initiative which aims to prevent people sliding into increasing debt due to fines and penalties."

The Project Hope 2770 Team is exploring options to help alleviate the situation, including, the establishment of an intensive educational awareness program about the Fines/Penalty notice system and its impact on people's lives. The programme will be launched early 2022.

Persons with unpaid penalty notices will be invited to attend seminars called "FINES CAMPS". For convenience sake, seminars will be held on Saturdays in ten different locations across the 2770 postcode area. Attendees will be provided with information about the various remedial options available under Government Regulations including: payment-by-installments, Centrelink deductions, fine reductions, as well as consideration of their suitability for Work and Development Orders (WDOs) a scheme where a person can work off the debt by participating in an agreed community activity or set of activities. Where none of the above debt liquidation options is feasible due to the debtholder's personal circumstances, the possibility of seeking the waiver of long-standing debt will also be discussed.

**Media Contact:**  
Daniel Gohena 0475 636 032 & Sahaba Attard 0421 656 188  
PO Box 232 Toongabbie NSW 2146 Tel: 1300 373 363 Email: admin@mea.au Web: www.meau.au

**MEDIA RELEASE**



## 1. PROJECT HOPE 2770

### About Project Hope 2770

Project Hope 2770 is an initiative in collaboration with the Toongabbie legal center to help and support the local community members in Blacktown LGA struggling with their overdue road fines.

## 2. CULTURE GRAZE

### About Culture Graze

An initiative to support local small business providers. A culturally inspired Middle-Eastern grazing box sourced from the local community members will be available for order soon at MECA.

# MECA

MT DRUITT  
ETHNIC  
COMMUNITIES  
AGENCY

6 Ayres Grove, Mount Druitt, NSW 2770  
[mecamtdruitt@meca.org.au](mailto:mecamtdruitt@meca.org.au) | [www.meca.org.au](http://www.meca.org.au)  
02 9625 9300

