

# Bright Ideas



Refugee Council  
of Australia

**Local strategies to support  
refugees and asylum seekers**

## THE SOCIAL STUDIO



*(Photo  
courtesy of The  
Social Studio)*

### What?

The Social Studio fosters pathways in fashion and textile design for young people from refugee, asylum seeker and migrant backgrounds. The program offers a practical and creative way for young people to reengage with education and employment.

The Social Studio has been fostering pathways in fashion and textile design for young people from refugee, asylum seeker and migrant backgrounds since 2009. Out of its studio in Collingwood, Melbourne, this not-for-profit social enterprise creates pathways into creative, long-term, rewarding education and employment. Within the program, 85 to 100 annual participants have the opportunity to acquire skills and qualifications through industry-based training in clothing, textile production and design, and pre-accredited training in fashion.

### Who?

Over 600 people have participated so far, most of whom are young people between the ages of 16 and 25.

**Why?**

The Social Studio focuses on young people as it recognises this demographic benefits greatly from creative expression, and are particularly interested in pursuing skills, careers, and creativity in fashion. The program offers an engaging alternative to traditional education and employment pathways, helping to overcome barriers that young people might face.

**How?**

As enrolments are open all year round, young people can quickly pick up Saturday social sewing classes, training in fashion, and work experience in the Social Studio's digital print studio or clothing label. Applications for the Certificate III in Clothing Production open biannually (January and June). Previous opportunities have included Certificate IV in Textile Design, pre-accredited training in hospitality and café work experience. New opportunities are always being created through partnerships with RMIT University, the Department of Education and Training Victoria, as well as various other refugee and youth support services. The Social Studio strives to not only educate participants, but also connect them with the creative arts industry.

Participants are always supported by teachers within the training programs and staff supervisors within work-experience programs. An English-language teacher and other social support services, including a Youth Coordinator, provide additional support to those requiring it. These services contribute to the program's success, with 90% of participants completing the program, and 65% of participants moving on to further education and employment.

The program is half funded by grants and philanthropy, with the rest being self-generated. The Social Studio self-generates revenue through its ethical fashion label — approved by Ethical Clothing Australia, in that all garments are made from reclaimed or up-cycled materials — and retail business, manufacturing business and digital printing studio.

**Advice for others**

If you are planning to set up a similar initiative, the Social Studio recommends being flexible, providing wrap-around support services and being able to respond quickly to challenges. The biggest challenge so far has been establishing the right balance between running social impact programs and a successful business; it is important that the organisation is able to transform quickly if demand or financing shifts. That said, the most rewarding aspect of the Social Studio hasn't been its business success; it has been witnessing young people from refugee, asylum seeker and migrant backgrounds with a stable base — the Social Studio's Collingwood hub — feeling empowered by a sense of community, social connectedness and creativity.

**More info**

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**Bright Ideas**

*Bright Ideas* highlights innovative programs, initiatives and projects developed to support refugees and asylum seekers. It provides a way to share ideas, success stories and good practice to improve service provision and assist organisations and communities in addressing key issues and challenges.

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