

# Socio-Political History of the People of Raaso

Have you been wondering why we refer to the people of Raaso as being Somali, even though Raaso is situated in Ethiopia? Read on...

In 1884, the European powers divided Somalia into five parts with arbitrary borders, paying no consideration to tribal regions. The regions were divided and governed as follows

- Region 1 - Italy (south)
- Region 2 - Britain (north)
- Region 3 - France (Djibouti)
- Region 4 - Under Ethiopian Rule
- Region 5 - Somali Region of Ethiopia

In 1960, regions 1 and 2 as labelled above joined and gained independence from Italy and Britain. This became the Somali Republic. In 1976, Djibouti received its independence from France, but remained separate to the Somali Republic. The people of Raaso live in what is labelled above as region 5 and is known as the Somali Region of Ethiopia.

That is to say, they are Somali people living under the Ethiopian flag.

Beginning in the 1960s and continuing today, tribal conflict affects the people living in the Somali region of Ethiopia. Kidnappings and violence are rife and deeply traumatise those not even directly involved in the conflict. In a country with 77 million people with a poor economic situation, the Ethiopian Government granted permission for the innocent victims of the conflicts to move away from the war-torn areas, but were unable to provide any assistance with the move.

Having been given permission by the Ethiopian Government to move, in 1998, 80,000 people moved en masse to a different part of the Somali region of Ethiopia, in search of a peaceful life - an 800 kilometre journey taking months to complete. This is Raaso.

Today there are approximately 300,000 that have made the journey to Raaso in search of peace. More arrive each week.

## How you can help...

### Raise Funds

Do you have a flair for organising people? We would be pleased to talk to anyone who would be interested in holding their own fundraiser, be it for 5 people or 500 people. So get your friends, work colleagues, family or sporting club together and raise some much needed funds! The Raaso Project can provide advice and information for your event. Please contact the project office on 9450 2612.

### Donate Money

Giving a monetary donation is the easiest and most direct way to help The Raaso Project. We are proud that 100% of your donation goes directly towards building the hospital, as all administrative costs are covered by Banyule Community Health. Donations can be made by cash, cheque or credit card. Donations over \$2.00 are tax deductible and a receipt will be issued to you. If you would like to donate, please complete the donation slip below and return it to us.

On behalf of the people of Raaso, **Mahadsanid!** (Thankyou!).

Left:  
Children of Raaso with Banner  
'Raaso Hospital - thanks for Australia'



### Donate Goods in Kind

Many of the goods needed to build the hospital will be purchased in Australia and sent in shipping containers (please see our wish list). We will also happily accept high quality, desirable goods that can be auctioned at our fundraising events. For more information, please contact the project office on 9450 2612.

### Volunteer

We understand that time is precious and are always grateful to people who can donate their time to help 'behind the scenes'. If you would like to contribute in this way please contact the project office on 9450 2612.

## The Raaso Project DONATION SLIP



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Suburb \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to make a tax deductible donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to the Banyule Community Health Raaso Project.

Please find enclosed:

Cash in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (Cash donations can be dropped into Banyule Community Health reception - please do not post)

Cheque made payable to **Banyule Community Health Raaso Fund**

Please debit my  Visa  Mastercard

Cardholder Name \_\_\_\_\_

Cardholder Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry Date \_\_\_\_\_

Card Number

Please return donations to the Executive Assistant  
Banyule Community Health  
21 Alamein Road  
West Heidelberg 3081  
Victoria Australia



**BANYULE**  
Community Health

# Community Health Matters

SPECIAL FEATURE - THE RAASO PROJECT



THE RAASO PROJECT  
'STARTING FROM SCRATCH'

## Art brings about positive health benefits for Somali Women in West Heidelberg

On Thursday 18th October, Banyule Community Health, in partnership with Olympic Adult Education, celebrated the successful completion of the Somali Women's Artwork, launched by Ms Jenny Mikakos MP Parliamentary Secretary for Planning and Member for the Northern Metropolitan Region.

Banyule Community Health Clinical Services Manager, Ms Meni Stefanovski, said that this Vic Health sponsored community art's project "primarily aimed at promoting social connectedness and health and wellbeing through a process of local social engagement, the development of meaningful connections and provision of social support".

She stated that "research literature reveals that participation in community-based arts projects can generate significant developmental outcomes and positive benefits for health and wellbeing".

This project's key outcomes and social/cultural benefits for Somali women included:

- stimulating social interaction
- learning basket weaving skills, expressing ideas, seeking inspiration
- contributing to social health and wellbeing
- developing a sense of self worth
- nurturing traditional Somali culture
- creating a sense of place and distinctiveness by reinforcing community identity and fostering pride and confidence
- contributing to community cohesion
- recognition of Art as part of strengthening the local community



Key note speaker Ms Jenny Mikakos MP advocated that "governments, at all levels, need to help make the difficult transition for many immigrant and refugee women, isolated by culture and language, much easier".

"The experiences of dispossession, war and persecution have a huge adverse impact on an individual's mental and physical health and well-being. Artwork can be a great healing mechanism as well as great fun," Ms Mikakos said.

The Artwork is featured in the foyer of Banyule Community Health - West Heidelberg Centre.

### New website

Look at our new website at [www.bchs.org.au](http://www.bchs.org.au) for news, events, service details and publications. Also note the online suggestion box. We welcome your comments and ideas.



## Health for Life Tip



### Why Walk?

Research indicates that individuals need at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day to maintain a healthy lifestyle (or 3 x 10min sessions).

### People who are moderately active:

- Live longer
- Reduce the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, some cancers and pain from arthritis
- Improve their muscle and bone strength
- Decrease their risk of falls
- Suffer from less stress, anxiety and depression

### Walking is:

- Cheap and easy
- Low impact on joints
- Fun to do in groups or alone
- Can be done indoors or outdoors - many people walk in shopping centres because they are heated and airconditioned
- Can be easily adapted into everyday activities such as collecting the mail, shopping

### Carol Phillips

Health for Life Service Coordinator





Above: Jim Pasinis, CEO, Abdalla Ahmed, BOM and Tony Shaw, former Collingwood FC Captain at the recent Raaso fundraiser

## From the CEO

Welcome to our Summer Edition of Community Health Matters. It's hard to believe we have been in our new facility in West Heidelberg for over a year now. It is with real pride that I look back on the last 12 months of achievements for Banyule Community Health. Our services continue to grow and create new opportunities for the community to address their health. In this edition we are highlighting our role in the Raaso Project. I'm sure you will be fascinated and inspired by the work being done to improve the health of people in both Ethiopia and Banyule.

The growth of the new Dental Service in West Heidelberg is a great example of our growth and it has had a remarkable impact on wait lists.

Our staff continues to impress me with their dedication and commitment to both you, the community, and their respective discipline. Many community members commented in the recent PHCCOS feedback surveys on their satisfaction with staff. This gives me great pleasure in knowing that staff are connecting well with the community.

In closing, I wish all of the community a happy holiday season and urge them to drive carefully and keep good health.

Jim Pasinis

*With the approach of the Festive Season, it is a pleasure for the Board of Management and Staff of Banyule Community Health, to extend Season's Greetings and wish all our Members a New Year abounding with Health, Happiness and Prosperity*

Peace on Earth

## History of The Raaso Project

Abdalla Ahmed, a Somali Community Leader in West Heidelberg, was deeply affected by the poverty and sickness he witnessed on a visit to Raaso (Ethiopia) in 2005. After a second visit in 2006, Abdalla promised the people of Raaso that he would help them. True to his word, in December 2006, Abdalla presented his idea of building a hospital in Raaso (Ethiopia), to the Board of Management at Banyule Community Health. Abdalla explained the hardships being faced by the West Heidelberg Somali Community, of trying to build new lives for themselves here in Australia, while also trying to give emotional and financial support to the family members that they have left behind in Raaso. The Board of Management felt compelled to act by lending its support to this project.



Abdalla Ahmed with his sons visiting Raaso

To this end, Banyule Community Health now provides assistance to this project in the form of strategic and managerial advice, administrative support and office space. However, perhaps most importantly, Banyule Community Health covers all administrative costs for the project. This means that 100% of all money donated goes directly towards building the hospital.

While the size and importance of the project can be daunting at times, we look forward to the great sense of achievement that the West Heidelberg and wider Melbourne community can feel once the hospital is built and fully operational. We sincerely hope you will lend your support to this project. The Somali Community of West Heidelberg and Raaso are depending on it.

## Where is Raaso?

Raaso is situated in the Somali Region of Ethiopia, East Africa.



## What is life like in Raaso?

### Drastic Food Shortages

There is no infrastructure in Raaso. The Ethiopian Government is only able to provide sporadic assistance in the form of rice and wheat – usually every 6 to 8 months. A 50 kilo bag of rice or wheat is expected to feed 10 people until the next delivery. *This equates to just 27 grams of rice per day.* In between the aid deliveries from the government, people starve to death and die from diseases which a simple, cheap vaccination would prevent. The acute malnutrition rate of children under 5 is 30%. Here at The Raaso Project we are determined to make a difference to these frightening statistics. The people of Raaso live in shanties, constructed from a wood frame with tarpaulin draped over it.

## The Hospital

Despite The Raaso Project being less than a year old, we have already achieved so much. The hospital has been designed free of charge by architects at MMM International, who, in addition, also built the steel frames, making the value of their in-kind contribution somewhere in the region of \$60,000. Australian National Lines (ANL) have agreed to ship 3 containers carrying goods for the hospital to Africa free of charge. The first container, carrying the steel framework has already left. The Mercy, Warrigal & Royal Talbot Hospitals have donated 100 hospital beds and thanks to the hard work of the local Somali Community, the beds have been packed into the second shipping container (each bed takes 3 people to lift!), along with important hospital equipment.

The International Volunteer Health Network is providing valuable skills and expertise 'on the ground' both here and in Raaso, providing the professional tradespeople who are experienced in building hospitals in developing nations. Director of IVHN, Allan Herman, says of the project "we are pleased to offer our expertise and tradespeople to this worthwhile project, as well as being able to teach the people of Raaso valuable skills, such as brick making".

The foundation has been laid and we are awaiting the steel framework to arrive. Of course, there is much more to be done and we invite you to look at our wishlist.



## The Water Crisis

Currently, citizens of Raaso use donkeys to transport water. The water is not fit for human consumption and we urgently need to bore a well. If we can provide clean drinking water, then the hospital has already started.

## Raaso –

### Not a world away for the Somali Community of West Heidelberg

The Somali community in Melbourne is primarily located in public housing in West Heidelberg, Flemington, Carlton, East Reservoir and Broadmeadows, with the majority settling in West Heidelberg. Our local Somali Community are resilient, peaceful and work hard to create a good life in Australia. Like all refugee communities, their needs are complex, intense and diverse. Many have spent 10 – 15 years living in refugee camps in Kenya and Ethiopia before settling in Australia. As a consequence of these experiences, the Somali Community of West Heidelberg have many of their own health issues including poor emotional, dental and eye health, nutritional deficiencies, and chronic health conditions.

On top of this, many of them still have relatives living in Raaso. As such, members of our own community are placed under a lot of stress with their constant concern for the wellbeing of those they left behind. Because of this, their own health is being adversely affected. Below are some of the concerns of our West Heidelberg Somali community members

*"All of my brothers and sisters live in Raaso – I am here alone. I have stopped looking at the photos of my relatives in Raaso – it is too hard. I cannot eat, I can only think about my family"*

*"I have left all my family behind in Raaso and they continue to live in a terrible situation with no food, no education, no hospitals, no water and no sanitation. I am always sad here when I think of what is happening to my relatives."*

*"I feel so bad – I have three meals a day and my family in Raaso cannot get even one meal a day. I do not want to eat."*

*"I am a single mother, caring for two of my own children and four other children, my brother's children. He and his wife died in Somalia. My sisters and brothers live in Raaso with their families. I am not working. My children are teenagers. They do not understand that the extra money I have must go to Raaso – I cannot buy them clothes or spend money on things here when my family in Raaso does not have any food."*

**This is why the Raaso Project is different to many other charities helping in Africa. By helping the people of Raaso, we are also directly contributing to the better wellbeing of people right here in West Heidelberg.**

## Wishlist

Materials to build water drilling machine	\$10,000
Labour to build water drilling machine	\$2,000
Roof – Iron sheeting and related items	\$15,500
Toilets and related plumbing	\$5,000
Tools and materials	\$20,000
Electrical Costs	\$15,000
Shipping Containers (for transport and storage)	\$6,000
Road Costs	\$23,000
Travel to Raaso for professional tradespeople	\$15,000
Floor preparation for tiles	\$10,000
Tiled floors	\$15,000
Paint	\$8,500
Plaster	\$10,000
Doors	\$5,000
Door locks and hinges	\$1,000
Door frames	\$1,500
Louvre windows	\$5,000
Fly wire	\$1,000
Tools to complete hospital fit-out	\$10,000

...and more

