

# THE SOCIAL STUDIO



**ANNUAL REPORT 2010**

## **MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR**

In March 2009, The Social Studio was little more than an idea among a small group of people who believed in that idea. At times, the challenges to making it a reality seemed insurmountable. But it was an idea driven by the urgent need of the young refugee population for access to education, employment and social recognition commensurate with their skills and capabilities. Alongside this was a need to develop more environmentally sustainable practices within the fashion industry and a growing awareness within the local community of the ethical imperative to support Fair Trade within the hospitality industry.

The Social Studio meets all of these needs. It is now a fully fledged training establishment, a retail space, a café and a drop-in centre where people, who—due to their prior experiences—often feel uncomfortable in more formal settings, come to learn and to demonstrate their talents and skills. It is also a place where members of the broader community come to purchase one-off garments, garments that they will treasure. Some come simply to enjoy the ambience, the food and the excellent coffee. Those who come admire what they see.

It has been through the efforts and support of many people and organisations that this project has come to fruition: board members, staff, volunteers, financial supporters, sponsors, partners, and of course, the students themselves. After a long search for a suitable location, board members and others rolled up their sleeves to do the fitout—brilliantly designed by our volunteer architects. The Studio first became operational in 31 August 2009. Just three months later, it launched its first collection—tribute indeed to our wonderful teachers and the commitment of the students.

Since then, The Studio has gone from strength to strength—expanding the courses and employment offered, building up the café and diversifying its sales strategy to include selling at mobile and temporary locations and on consignment. It will continue to grow, along with the confidence of the people it supports. Sadly, it is unlikely that it will ever fully meet the needs it set out to address—they are so great—but hopefully, in proving the viability of its model, it will blaze a trail that will encourage the birth and development of similar organisations.

Congratulations to all involved in setting up and supporting this wonderful organisation.

*Gillian Essex*

## **MESSAGE FROM THE CEO**

The Social Studio is an incredible place, thanks to the hard work of many people who saw merit in the idea at an early stage and helped give it life. Our Board of Management have been active, involved, dedicated and skillful in creating and implementing our development and growth. We have had a wonderful group of volunteers who have helped us with everything from accounting and marketing to building and picking up important supplies. We have been faced with a myriad of challenges in our start-up and yet it feels like we have been at our home in Smith Street for a decade. It amazes me to be able to come to work each day to such a dynamic place which has heart, integrity, humour and such a strong community fabric. Thanks to everyone for sharing in the journey.

*Grace McQuilten*

## OUR PEOPLE

*Founding Directors:* Gillian Essex, Raphael Kilpatrick, Tobias Muench, Tamara Veltre, Farah Farouque, Ben Edwards, Nyanbol Kuol, Grace McQuilten and Enza Adem

*Teaching Staff:* Erin Santamaria, Anna Loughnane, Sarah Martinus, Karen De'Amyand

*Project Staff:* Raphael Kilpatrick, Zubeyda Ahmed, Grace McQuilten, Sara Maher

*Café Staff:* Enza Adem, Francis Anjong, Jehnet Kaya, Ramesh Fernandez

*Trainees:* Ayat Jama, Festus Zarwue, Asiah Lado, Salamawit Meckonen, Joyce Heath, Jeneviva Sechele, Meselech Kelelew, Nicole Kuol, Nyanbol Kuol, Fatimata Kamara, Mayong Manouk, Mario Kawac, Awen Kuol, Abuk Bol

*Volunteers:* Christine Coughlan, Jessica Wraight, Kate Forbes, Claudia Mereine, Alex Tempany, Carly Phillips, Hitomi Pratt, Michael Camilleri, Jeanie Mulligan, Paul Castro, Helen Peake, Dee Yek, Ro Bailey, Cora Diviny, Lia Kennedy, Hayley Davis, Beth Bicknell, Hannah Colman, Jessica Moran, Anya Trybala, Amelia Batrouney, Jessica Oldfield, Lucy Thomas, Alice Goulter, Edwina Hanneysee, Clare Marshall, Anwar Alishek, Andy Simpson, Ladyfingers DJs, Sarah Ougila, Angela Mezzatesta



## **MISSION**

The Social Studio is a non-profit social enterprise and our sole purpose is to create meaningful and long term social change for young people who face barriers to employment and education.

The Social Studio is a dynamic space where clothing is created from recycled and excess manufacturing materials. The Social Studio empowers young people from the refugee community in Melbourne to achieve their dreams through work experience and training in clothing design, production, retail and hospitality. The main social barriers that we address are unemployment, isolation and difficulties accessing education and training.

The Social Studio addresses these problems in four ways:

1. creating jobs;
2. providing training;
3. encouraging community engagement and
4. social inclusion.

The Social Studio is a safe place of belonging that strives to create awareness and change public perceptions for people who have experienced being a refugee. We provide social support including legal advice, counselling, tutoring, driving and referrals for housing and medical assistance. The Studio also enables community engagement through its program of workshops and public events. We are an environmentally sustainable and ethical enterprise.



## **THE ENTERPRISE**

There are three core aspects to the “business” of the Social Studio:

- The design and making of clothing
- Sales of fashion merchandise made on premise
- Preparation and sale of coffee and cafe food.

### **Products**

The Studio sells clothing under two labels: Remixed Design & The Social Studio

#### *Remixed Design*

This label is created through the re-working of reclaimed garments from the fashion industry which are sold at a lower price point and are therefore more accessible.

#### *The Social Studio*

The Social Studio is a designer label that features a range of designs produced collaboratively by Studio students along with mentors from the fashion industry. It is produced to extremely high quality controls, is produced in a range of sizes and sells at a higher price point.

### **Sale of goods**

Garments produced at The Social Studio are sold in a number of retail outlets, including partner enterprises Hunter Gatherer and the Red Cross. The Studio is a shop-front which provides a showcase of our product. Mobile pop up shops designed by RMIT roam the CBD and provide opportunities for employment in retail, as well as increasing our income through sale of goods. All goods are sold on consignment with designers receiving commissions on the sale of goods. Any profits are invested in developing more employment and training opportunities for refugee youth.

### **Café**

Our café serves Fair Trade coffee and our menu features vegetarian food with an East African/Middle Eastern theme. It is open 7 days a week and provides training and employment for 6-8 staff.

### **Environment and Social Sustainability**

The Social Studio is a pioneer in creating an enterprise that is both environmentally sustainable and ethical in its operation:

- All goods are created from reclaimed materials.
- All goods are produced on-site at our Studio, sustaining the local manufacturing industry.
- All goods are produced within ethical working conditions. Our production methods and employment model has Ethical Clothing Australia accreditation.



## TRAINING

- Certificate II and III in Clothing Production, RMIT School of Fashion
- Certificate II in Hospitality, AMES
- Certificate II in Retail, AMES
- ESL and numeracy coaching
- Business admin and event management work experience

## Pathways

### 1. Training

- Cert IV in Clothing Production / Cert IV in Applied Fashion
- Pathways into Diploma and Bachelor courses at RMIT
- Certificate IV in Frontline Management / Certificate III in Business

### 2. Employment

- Small business development and mentoring
- Mariana Hardwick
- Social Roasting Company

## Social Supports

- Weekly driving tuition program
- Financial literacy and financial counselling
- Tutoring and ESL support
- Referral for housing, legal and medical advice



## PARTNERSHIPS

### **Major Financial Supporters**

- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations  
Round 1 Jobs Fund – Seed funding to June 2011
- RE Ross Trust  
2 years of seed funding to June 2011
- Westpac Foundation  
2 years of seed funding to December 2011
- Vodafone Foundation  
World of Difference program, employing CEO Grace McQuilten until April 2011
- Sidney Myer Fund  
Education grant for 2010
- City of Yarra  
Arts grant for Remixed Design mentoring 2010
- Neighborhood Justice Centre  
Café development and training
- Melbourne Community Foundation  
Support for training and education, 2010
- Victorian Multicultural Commission  
Support for Remixed Design project 2010 - 2011

### **Community Supporters**

- Midnightsky  
Christmas card appeal and feature in window display
- Bowerbird  
Clothing exchange fundraiser and promotion
- Rotary – Collingwood and Albert Park clubs  
Sponsorship for stall fees, excursions
- Good Fashion For Good Fundraising Project – Jackie Ruddock

## **Industry Partners**

- RMIT School of Architecture and Design  
Design and manufacture of pilot mobile “pop-up” shops
- RMIT School of Fashion and Textiles  
Training in Certificate II/ III in Clothing Production. They also provide advice on training and employment pathways.
- Adult Multicultural Education Service who train our Certificate II in Retail Operations trainees and Certificate II in Hospitality trainees.
- Sportsgirl / Sussan  
Donations of clothing, marketing and promotion
- Witchery & MimCo  
Work experience pathways
- Social Roasting Company  
Work experience pathways and employment opportunities for cafe staff
- Craft Victoria  
Access to networks of designers and craftspeople to provide workshops and training for participants.
- Mariana Hardwick Fashion  
Start-up donation of fabrics and equipment and support / work experience and employment opportunities
- Stitches Fabric  
Donations of fabric
- The Clothing Exchange  
Donations of clothing
- Ruby Patootie and Lulamae clothing  
Mentoring in retail, sales and design and advise on employment pathways and skills needs for our trainees
- The Textile Clothing Footwear and Leather Industry Training Body  
Information training opportunities through Skills Victoria and promotion.
- The Textile Clothing and Footwear Union (Victorian Branch) who have provided information on the Fair Work Act and assisted the Social Studio to become accredited to Ethical Clothing Australia.
- Ethical Clothing Australia  
Accreditation of our brands and promotion
- Foundation House  
Training, advice and support in working with people from a refugee background. Mentoring and supervision for management staff.
- RISE (Refugee Survivors and Ex-Detainees)  
Referral of youth “at risk” / cross referrals to external social support services / creative partnerships
- Neighbourhood Justice Centre  
Access to services including financial counselling, problem solving, access to legal advice and drug and alcohol counselling
- YarraReporters / Infoxchange  
Collaboration on publication of Bespoken newspaper, training in journalism

## **GOVERNANCE**

- Incorporated Association
- Public Benevolent Institution, DGR status
- Governed by the Model Rules for Association along with its constitution
- Presided over by a committee of management that is elected by the membership, including representatives from newly arrived community groups.
- Monthly board meetings
- Weekly staff meetings

### **Organisation Structure**

Patrons: Mariana Hardwick, Fashion Designer and Lee-Lin Chin, SBS Newsreader

#### *Board of Management*

Gillian Essex (Chair)

With a background as Manager of Literacy in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Gillian has extensive experience in educational curriculum.

Tobias Muench (Director)

Tobias Muench is an innovative architect and designer, who specialises in environmentally sustainable architecture and design.

Nyanbol (Rose) Kuol (Director)

Rose Kuol is a young community leader for Sudanese-Australia. She has an interest in politics, international development and community welfare.

Farah Farouque (Director)

Senior writer for The Age newspaper, Farah Farouque is our media and policy advisor. Her interests range across social policy, politics, law and the arts.

Tamara Veltre (Director)

Director of Ruby Patootie & Lulamae Clothing, two fashion retailers in Melbourne. She lends expertise in business, retail operations and fashion design.

Raphael Kilpatrick (Director)

Raphael is a designer with an interest in architecture, interior design, graphic and web design. He teaches at RMIT School of Design.

Grace McQuilten (Public Officer)

Dr Grace McQuilten has worked for several years in community development overseeing projects to support the capacity and development of emerging communities in Melbourne.

## THE FIRST YEAR: OUR JOURNEY

*"People are our biggest asset. We invest in our people. Everything is structured around supporting the people who come here and we would never compromise this for commercial return."* Grace McQuilten, CEO

### Strengths:

- Importance of networks of skilled and practical people being involved – from designers, architects, literacy specialists, journalists and, importantly, community representatives from the new and emerging communities.
- Willingness to take on risk – in management and at the Board level.
- Learning as the social enterprise develops, being constantly flexible and testing and trialling what works.
- Tapping in to the big changes that are currently happening in the market where people are looking to spend more ethically.

### Challenges:

- Finding and taking on a commercial lease of a shop-front. The issues were resolved by taking over the lease from another shop who wanted to get out of the building.
- Very difficult to get infrastructure money. Need to constantly be thinking 6 months to a year ahead about where to leverage funding.
- Balancing social and economic goals –because the social goals cannot be compromised, the economic viability takes longer to develop.



## EVALUATION HIGHLIGHTS

Sixteen Studio members were interviewed in May 2010. All identified a positive change in themselves in one or both of the following:

- A new way of thinking about the future
- A positive change in feeling about themselves

All spoke of working in the future as designers, running their own clothing business, or using the skills they have learnt to help others. All valued and recognised the Studio as an opportunity unlike any other. Some discussed their experience of racism, stereotyping, injustice and difficulties in finding work or training and education. The Studio has clearly addressed employment and education needs for this group of participants. The model of engagement it uses to do this means that issues of social isolation and community engagement are also addressed.

Those interviewed described:

- an increase in confidence
- a sense of achievement
- feelings of safety
- camaraderie & belonging
- support and acceptance

One described themselves as no longer depressed. A majority felt excited about attending the Studio and felt a sense of pride in their work. Others described feelings of being valued and admired by the public who came into the Studio to buy or observe.



## FACTS & STATS

- The Social Studio had 50 participants register for its programs between September 2009 and June 2010.
- 20 enrolments in formal study.
- 9 students have graduated from Certificate II in Clothing Production.
- 6 students have gained employment as a direct result of involvement at the Studio.

### Cultural background

Country of birth	Total
Somalia	6%
Sudan	56%
Ethiopia	10%
Afghani	6%
Liberia	4%
Eritrea	6%
Uganda	2%
Namibia	2%
Sri Lanka	2%
Other	6%
Grand Total	100%

### Gender

70% **female**, 30% **male**

### Age group:

40% are between **15-19**  
25% are between **20-24**  
15% are between **24-29**  
20% are between **30-39**

### Studying Profile

60% **general participants**  
40% **students**

### “Risk” profile

Combination of employability, previous education, housing and alcohol/drug/mental health issues  
30% **High risk**  
56% **Moderate risk**  
14% **low risk**

According to the United Nations,

there are **11,400,000** refugees worldwide.

Australia takes **0.1%** of the world's refugee population per year.

Australia receives only **1%** of the world's asylum seekers.

Last year, Australia's refugee intake was only **7%** of our annual permanent migration.

Statistics compiled from data published by the Department of Immigration and United Nations Refugee Agency.

## ACHIEVEMENTS + RECOGNITION

### Awards

Finalist in the Melbourne Awards  
Finalist in the Victorian Training Awards  
Commended in the City of Yarra Sustainability Awards

### Media

ABC TV  
The Age Newspaper  
A2, The Age Newspaper  
Map Magazine  
Vogue Living  
Red Magazine  
Melbourne Times  
That's Life Magazine  
MX Melbourne  
Melbourne Voice  
The Big Issue  
ABC Radio National  
3RRR Radio  
3CR Radio

### Online

InDesign  
The Design Files  
Three Thousand  
The Vine  
MichiGirl  
Mel: Hot or Not  
Green Fables  
PSFK – New York  
Sportsgirl Style Files  
yarraReporter  
Social Traders  
Fitzroyalty  
We make stuff good  
Audio Design Museum

