



Refugees from Rwanda, Afghanistan, China, India, Chile, Colombia and Iran show off handmade letters. Picture: Jake Nowakowski

Helping hand from community programs boosts sister act

Paddy Naughtin, Herald Sun

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GRASSROOTS community programs help thousands upon thousands of people from all walks of life every year.

Often manned by volunteers for countless hours, these charitable groups do untold amounts of good for our local communities.

That's why the *Herald Sun* is once again teaming up with the Bank of Melbourne to offer 10 Victorian community groups the chance to share in \$100,000 in The Local Project campaign.

There are five categories to nominate in: Education, Community, Culture, Environment and Recreation.

After nominations close, a judging panel will select 10 entries from each category that all Victorians will be asked to vote on to decide which project deserves the funding.

SisterWorks Design Labs, a group that empowers refugee and migrant women, was one of the 2013 winners of the \$10,000 grant.

Luz Restreto, a Colombian refugee, helped found SisterWorks early last year after realising there was a need for refugee women to have a social outlet where they could become more independent.

“I came here knowing who I was in Colombia, but having no idea of who I was or will be in Australia,” she said.

“My lack of English made me lose a lot of confidence, and it was through meeting other women like me at English-speaking lessons that I realised I wasn’t alone.”

With an emphasis on the making and selling of handmade craft items, SisterWorks is slowly but surely churning out independent businesswomen.

“We all support each other, but the Bank of Melbourne and The Local Project really gave us our first boost and we’re now located in both Collingwood and Elwood,” Restreto said.

Bank of Melbourne chief executive Scott Tanner said he was glad the Bank of Melbourne was able to give something back to groups like SisterWorks that do so much good work in the community.

“The Local Project is all about supporting Victorians who are improving those communities, every day,” he said.

“We are delighted to launch the Local Project for a third consecutive year in partnership with the Herald Sun and look forward to uncovering grassroots initiatives that enhance the social, economic and environmental prosperity of local communities across Melbourne and regional Victoria.”

News Corp Australia’s Victorian managing director, editorial, Peter Blunden said: “It’s great to be on board again with the Bank of Melbourne for The Local Project. It is a fantastic initiative helping worthy community projects, telling their stories and providing a substantial injection of much-needed funds.”

If you know of a worthy project that could use a helpful cash injection then head to heraldsun.com.au/thelocalproject to fill out the nomination form.

Nominations for The Local Project close on September 1.