

SHEPPARTON NEWS

Lifestyle

Enabling new lives

by RHIANNON TUFFIELD

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Colombian migrant Luz Restrepo is using her knowledge to empower some of Australia's newest migrants.

Arriving in Australia seven years ago, Colombian political asylum seeker Luz Restrepo felt lonely, vulnerable and invisible in a new world.

With the danger of her country behind her, Ms Restrepo had also left behind her life and job as a doctor, and felt incredibly lost in a new land that initially had no use for her.

After meeting a group of foreign women with similar stories, Ms Restrepo discovered she was not alone and soon formed a business plan that would propel the group into a project that made use of the women's knowledge.

As part of her work with SisterWorks, a group of migrant women who began to teach themselves craft, she is now bringing the skills she learned to Shepparton.

The organisation comprises 68 asylum seeker, refugee and migrant women, 44 volunteer supporters and three part-time staff.

Now living in Dromana, Ms Restrepo said SisterWorks encouraged vulnerable women to tap into their underlying business and entrepreneurial abilities to find self-sufficiency.

“Sometimes it’s not easy to engage in a new society, to learn the language quickly and understand the culture,” Ms Restrepo said.

“For many women who have come from Africa or the Middle East or Russia, it’s completely different and many of them feel out of their comfort zone.

“It’s not easy to become independent, but when you have people like yourself to form a community and tap into your skills, it makes it easier.”

In an initiative of Multicultural Arts Victoria, Ms Restrepo will present a workshop that aims to encourage emotional resilience and collaborating with courage and compassion for women. The workshop will introduce tools for developing self-awareness, managing difficult situations, compassionately communicating across differences and taking care of emotional wellbeing.

Ms Restrepo said she looked forward to meeting with women in Shepparton, particularly migrants who she believed would be experiencing a tough time.

“People come here and they are living here but they need the opportunity to start, and it’s about allowing new people to start their lives,” Ms Restrepo said.

“It’s more easy to move together than to move alone, and that’s what I’m going to be talking about.”

Luz Restrepo’s free workshop will be held at St Paul’s African House, 54 Poplar Ave, Shepparton on Saturday, May 20 from 11am until 2pm.

To book a spot, RSVP to anita.larkin@multiculturalarts.com.au