



MEDIA RELEASE

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Refugees achieving goals with help from Vinnies' VoRTCS program

Paw Hel Soe Hla is a true refugee success story.

With the help of Vinnies Queensland's volunteer refugee tutoring program VoRTCS, the 19-year-old has secured both a job in accounting and a place at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT).

Paw Hel Soe and her family who are of the Karen minority from Myanmar, arrived in Australia in 2007 from a refugee camp in Thailand.

The Stafford resident said the support of her VoRTCS tutors, who volunteer once a week to help the family, has been invaluable.

"Prior to starting VoRTCS I would have never thought of working in an accounting job, I was a girl from a refugee camp," she said.

"The tutors really helped, without them I'd still be in TAFE, learning English, I wouldn't have got to university so fast."

Paw Hel Soe said her family has grown in confidence and negotiates life in Brisbane much easier since they started weekly lessons with their volunteer tutors in 2012.

"It was very difficult at first, catching a bus or train, learning a new culture, making friends and learning a new language, at first I only knew my ABCs and very basic stuff like yes and no," she said.

"VoRTCS tutors helped us with our English and taught us about Australian culture, learning things like how to make an appointment with a GP, reading and understanding letters and other important documents.

"My parents have learned so much about general conversation and how to get around and my siblings have been helped with understanding the English in their homework so they can do well at school."

The young QUT student said a key factor in her securing part time work was undertaking volunteer work with Vinnies.

"It helped with working in an office environment because I'd never done that before, as well as using a computer and different software," she said.

Paw Hel Soe said the VoRTCS program is a great example of Vinnies motto of giving a 'hand up not a hand out'.

“Our tutors just didn’t give us a hand, they helped us look into what’s really available in Australia and gave us support to access that, they taught us how things work in Australia,” she said.

“I would recommend people volunteer with VoRTCS because it really helps people like myself and other refugee families with their confidence and in progressing in their life in Australia.”

“It’s great for refugee families to learn about Australian culture and for the tutors to learn about the culture of the family they are tutoring.”

“When I first arrived I definitely thought I wouldn’t have been able to get a job or go to university and VoRTCS was a big part of my success.”

More information on VoRTCS can be found at refugeetutoring.org

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