

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **When having a job can change a life: Green Connect celebrates Refugee Week**

Social enterprise Green Connect is tackling disadvantage in local refugee communities by providing employment opportunities at its urban farm in Warrawong and four other businesses.

Celebrating National Refugee Week this week, Green Connect General Manager Kylie Flament said: “Wollongong has the largest refugee community in NSW outside of Sydney and it’s important to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions that refugees make in our community.

“Every former refugee I have met came to Australia for a better life, has faced enormous challenges, and wants to work to support their family, be financially independent and to give back to Australia.

“Despite being incredibly hardworking and motivated to work, only 23 percent of refugees have a job two and a half years after resettlement in Australia.”

Green Connect creates jobs and employment pathways for young people and former refugees (who have the highest unemployment rates in the region) in work that helps the planet and the community. It runs a farm and an op shop, provides zero waste services at events, staffing solutions to businesses and councils, and gardening and landscaping services. Former refugees are employed across all areas.

Green Connect employee 31-year-old Eh Moo has been working at the Green Connect farm for almost five years and says his job has changed his life.

“Before I started at Green Connect I was very shy and scared to talk to people because my English was not very good, but now I have so much self-confidence and I believe in myself,” he said.

Eh Moo was born in a refugee camp on the Thai-Myanmar border, his family had been displaced by violence in their home village in Karenni State in Myanmar (Burma). He spent 17 years moving from camp to camp as his family fled ongoing persecution and violence.

“I have many hard memories of that time because life in a refugee camp is hard and soldiers kept attacking the camps we were in,” he said.

“I remember walking long distances from camp to camp to escape the soldiers and we would be walking by foot in the rain and there wasn’t always shelter, so we would build it out of bamboo trees and leaves. It was really hard.

“Because I was born in a camp I was not considered a Burmese citizen or a Thai citizen and I was not recognised, so I was stateless. I felt like I had no home and Australia really was the first country I had to call home.”

In 2007 Eh Moo and his family were recognised as refugees and granted permanent residency in Australia. They settled in Wollongong and Eh Moo started High School in Warrawong. He went on to study at TAFE then did work placement at the Green Connect farm.

The Lake Heights father-of-two is now a senior farm hand and Ms Flament says Eh Moo is an essential part of the farm’s day-to-day operations.

“We’re privileged to be able to work with and learn from refugees like Eh Moo. I have learned more about hardship, resilience, the value of family, hard work, laughter, hospitality and the strength of community connections from our former refugee staff than I can ever express.”

Eh Moo says he’s also gained invaluable skills at the farm including time management and planning.

“I was so excited when I found out we were going to come to Australia but I was also very nervous because I didn’t know what to expect. It was hard to start with because I couldn’t understand the language so buying bus tickets and trying to talk to people was confusing and the culture was different.

“Australia is my home now and this is my community – I love the people, the culture and especially the weather.”

*Refugee Week is from Sunday 20 June to Saturday 26 June 2021. The theme for 2021 is Unity – the way forward. The week is an opportunity to raise awareness and establish dialogue in our communities about the refugee experience.*

#### **FOR MEDIA ENQUIRIES CONTACT**

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