

For immediate release
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Bhutanese battlers find home away from home in Adelaide's north

Numbering just 250 families, one of South Australia's smallest migrant groups will celebrate an enormous milestone in Adelaide's northern suburbs on Saturday, 21 June.

Members of Adelaide's Bhutanese community, many who spent up to 20 years homeless in refugee camps, will come together to mark 100 families that have made it into home ownership through South Australian lender HomeStart.

Coinciding with National Refugee Week, the milestone event will see the Bhutanese community gather for an afternoon of Bhutanese dancing, song and food.

President of the Bhutanese Association Kamal Dahal said while it might not sound like a large number, given the small size of the community and the hardships they've faced in the last two decades, it was a huge achievement.

"Home ownership remains an important goal because many of Adelaide's Bhutanese community were homeless and stateless for two decades," he said.

"Home ownership is a commitment to our community and a part of being good Australian citizens. Most home owners from the Bhutanese community are moderate income earners and home ownership can help break the cycle of poverty by helping families to accumulate wealth.

"HomeStart has helped many members of the Bhutanese community on limited incomes to buy a house of their own by offering its range of unique home loans. In most cases, it would have been more difficult for them to obtain a home loan from mainstream banks."

Mr Dahal said the majority of 100 Bhutanese home owners had purchased properties in Adelaide's northern suburbs.

The majority of Bhutanese migrants arrived in South Australia from 2008 onwards under a United Nations Third Country Resettlement Agreement, after living for up to 20 years in refugee camps following persecution by the ruling government, forcing many to flee Bhutan.

The Australian Government, under its Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) program, committed to resettle 5000 refugees from Bhutan beginning in 2008 with many settling in Adelaide.

HomeStart's Chief Executive Officer John Oliver said a seminar with five members of the Bhutanese community a few years ago led to a steady stream of home loan applications that has continued to grow over time.

HomeStart makes home ownership a reality for more South Australians in more ways. We are a statutory authority that reports to the Minister for Housing and Urban Development. We were created in 1989 and since then have helped over 64,500 households into home ownership.

“Having a roof over our heads is something that many Australians take for granted,” he said.

“Many of our Bhutanese customers never dreamed they could achieve the goal of home ownership, but they are proof of what can be achieved when government, local councils and other groups work together to cater to all migrant groups.

“The innovative home loans that HomeStart offers all South Australians, such as low deposit options and those that boost borrowing capacity, have provided a step-up for the Bhutanese community into home ownership.

“HomeStart is extremely proud of the role we’ve played in supporting the Bhutanese community in South Australia, helping more than 100 families purchase their own home.”

Minister for Communities and Social Inclusion, the Hon. Zoe Bettison, said South Australia’s migrant intake had increased significantly in the last decade.

“We’ve seen a steady rise in the number of migrants settling in South Australia over the last 10 years driven by the educational opportunities and the lower cost of living compared to other Australian state capitals,” she said.

“Whether it’s through refugee resettlement or migration, housing plays a vital role in helping new Australians integrate into their community and find financial security.

“Many newly arrived migrant families don’t meet the necessary requirements for a home loan as they are still establishing a credit history and that’s where the state government, through HomeStart Finance, is able to assist.

“The success of home lending to the Bhutanese community is a testament to our strategic objectives to make South Australia an affordable place to live in safe, happy and healthy neighbourhoods.”

HomeStart’s current loan portfolio is made up of customers from more than 102 countries, including the United Kingdom, India, Afghanistan, Bhutan, the Philippines, New Zealand, Vietnam, Sri Lanka and Sudan.

The 100 Bhutanese Loans milestone celebration will be held at the Khmer Buddhist Hall on Salisbury Highway on Saturday, 21 June between 12-2pm.

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