



African drummers at last week's program launch.

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Drumming up help

Lee Arnold

RELATIONSHIP breakdown is an added stress for many refugee families settling in Melbourne's north, says the leader of a new support service.

Specialist counselling services are now available for families under the Stronger Families Program, a service run in Melbourne's north and west by the Brotherhood of St Laurence's Ecumenical Migration Centre and Adult Multicultural Education Service.

The program was launched at Melbourne Town Hall last week. Program leader Muktesh Chibber said most refugees would not be aware

professional help was available because it often had not existed in their country of origin.

"In Africa there would tend to be a traditional healer or they would go to their extended family for advice," Ms Chibber said.

Refugee families faced extra stress as they settled into a new country and culture and this could lead to relationship breakdowns.

Going through the legal system was also a traumatic prospect.

"This is a program that understands the refugee experience," Ms Chibber said.

New migrant families from Africa, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and the former

Yugoslavia are eligible for the program, which gets about \$180,000 a year from the Federal Government.

Serena Greco, from the Brotherhood of St Laurence, said refugee families also faced tension as children adopted Australian ways faster than their parents.

This could leave the parents feeling a lack of respect and loss of authority.

Under the program, community leaders and community services will identify families in need of assistance.

Ms Greco said the program workers would refer families to local services where possible.

For details call 9416 0044.