



How art therapy can help migrants settle in Australia

Irene Renzenbrink has seen first hand the benefit of art therapy to help migrants overcome their grief at moving to a new country.

As a child and through her parents' eyes, she knows what it is like to migrate to Australia.

She arrived from The Netherlands in Australia as a three year old with her mother and five year old sister in 1952. Her father had arrived by boat six months before to pave the way.

Irene is a social worker with experience in grief counseling. As an art therapist she uses art to help migrants come to terms with their new reality.

"Art goes beyond words and can give people the chance to be creative when they feel overwhelmed by the many losses and changes in their new life," Ms Renzenbrink said.

"Music and movement, too, can be fun when people feel heavy and burdened by stress," she added.

Irene, who is currently completing a doctorate in Expressive Arts Therapy at the European Graduate School in Switzerland, said she has seen how her clients have moved beyond loneliness and grief, as well as learned how to manage their expectations about being happy and settled in the new country.

"Most people focus on the practical adjustments when they arrive in Australia, such as housing and income, but disenfranchised grief is a huge issue. By this I mean that the grief is not acknowledged or supported", Irene added.

"Migration and bereavement have a lot in common. The French even have a saying: *to leave is to die a little.*"

Irene Renzenbrink is one of nine speakers at **GriefLine's Migrant Forum: Migration – Then & Now**. It provides an opportunity for first, second and third generation Australians to explore common migrant themes and issues which are often unacknowledged. They help empower and support migrants connect to our broader multicultural Australian society.

Event details

GriefLine's Migrant Forum: Migration – Then & Now

Date: Saturday 17 October

Time: 10am – 2:30pm

Venue: Level 1, 479 Warrigal Road, Moorabbin

Cost: \$40 for general public, \$20 for volunteers & students

Other: Refreshments and lunch provided

Registration: 9935 7444 or www.facebook.com/grieflineservices

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