



Mental Health First Aid benefits refugee community

ABOVE: Mohammed Abbas Omar, of the Rotary Club of Flemington Kensington, left, Hadia Komba from Moonee Valley Council, President-elect of the Rotary Club of Flemington Kensington Lesley McCarthy, and Dr Francis Aquah of the Rotary Club of Greensborough, at the MHFA certificate presentation.

The Rotary Club of Flemington Kensington, Vic, recently presented a successful Mental Health First Aid program to address mental health concerns in its local community.

MEMBERS of the Rotary Club of Flemington Kensington, Vic, were well aware of the challenges facing residents of the social housing estate in the area, having worked with and supported them for many years.

Most residents are refugees from the Horn of Africa diaspora and experienced trauma due to drought, famine and war,

often spending many years in refugee camps. To address community distress, the club held a mental health forum in 2022.

The forum highlighted a desperate need for support for families dealing with the mental health of their children and teenagers, so members began exploring ways to address this need.

With the support of a

district grant, the club set about organising a Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) program. Moonee Valley Council offered their facility at the Djerring Hub, with a large and airy classroom containing audio visual facilities.

Understanding the background of participants was crucial to the success of the program, so a culturally sensitive and linguistically capable presenter was a priority. Dr Francis Aquah OAM, of the Rotary Club of Greensborough, Vic, was selected and agreed to moderate the program.

As most of the participants were mothers, the program was altered to run over four days during school hours rather than the usual two full days. Childcare was also offered.