

BUSINESS SOUTH-EAST

Working hard for dream

By CASEY NEILL

AMIR Mohammadi was 12 months old when his parents fled war-torn Afghanistan to seek safety in Iran.

Today he's living in Dandenong, following his dream career and eating Four'N Twenty pies for morning tea.

The Mohammadi family lived in Iran as refugees for 16 years, with no identity papers or access to proper schooling.

Amir started working to support his family at age 14 - first as a labourer, then selling clothes and finally milling and pressing metal in a steel factory.

In 2010, when he was just 16, his parents gathered their savings and sent Amir to Australia by boat for the chance of a future.

He sought asylum, spent time in detention on Christmas Island and in Perth, and was granted a refugee visa in June 2012.

After a year studying English, he heard about a new English as a Second Language (ESL) supported Certificate II in Engineering for students with migrant and refugee backgrounds.

South East Local Learning and Employment Network (SELLEN) developed the Department of Employment-funded course in response to a shortage of young people seeking engineering apprenticeships.

The full-time 18-week course was a partnership between Apprenticeships Group Australia (AGA) and Chisholm Institute.

Amir jumped at the chance to return to the manufacturing industry and working with metal, and was among the top two students in his class.

After graduating he was recruited through Australian Industry Group Training to join Rowville company Sondex as an engineering mechanical apprentice (fitter and turner).

"The environment is pretty different. Here is very safe," he said.

Weekdays, Amir works 8am to 4pm at Sondex then 5.30pm to as late as midnight delivering pizzas - all so he can send money home to support his family.

He encouraged fellow refugees to



Left: Amir Mohammadi hard at work.

Below: Amir Mohammadi, front, with Australian Industry Group Training Services employment and training consultant Kevin Troy, Employment Department south east Melbourne employment co-ordinator Ian Barker, SELLEN senior partnership broker Katrina Peach and Sondex's Kim Miller and Casey Gray.

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pursue "anything they like". "If they want to get their dream they have to work hard for a while - not forever - and then your dream comes true," he said.

Sondex service and parts manager Casey Gray said Amir was one of the best guys the company had.

"His English skills are well above what we expected when we took him on," he said.

"And he's coming out of his shell."

Kim Miller, responsible for Sondex's quality assurance and human resources, said the company would happily take on another apprentice through the program.

SELLEN senior partnership broker Katrina Peach said the group networked with secondary colleges and language schools to put the program together.

It aims to provide students with engineering vocabulary and life skills, and an opportunity to prove their motivation and ability.

She said three groups had completed the course so far, the retention rate had steadily improved and employers had been "extremely happy" with the graduates.

Contact SELLEN on 9794 6921 or visit sellen.org.au for more information about the program.

