



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Engineering students empower Western Sydney communities to solve local challenges**

A new partnership between SydWest Multicultural Services and RMIT University will see humanitarian engineering students working with our culturally diverse community to solve local issues, using local resources.

The *SydWest-RMIT Engagement Challenge* will focus specifically on ways young people and seniors can work together to address issues across health, energy, infrastructure and the environment.

RMIT's Dr Spyros Schismenos – an academic specialising in empowering communities to solve humanitarian and development issues – says his students are keen to learn more about the benefits of co-designing solutions *with* community, as opposed to designing solutions *for* community.

“Real impact is created through genuine partnership and by empowering the communities we work with,” Dr Schismenos said.

Projects could include how to address climate change and heat stress and designing housing appropriate for larger families or seniors from culturally diverse backgrounds.

SydWest Aged Care Services Manager Mereline Murimwa-Rarami said members of the Blacktown community are experts in their own lives and are best placed to provide valuable insights and possible solutions to challenges that they face.

‘At the same time members of the community can gain a sense of worthiness and take ownership of solutions,’ she said.

SydWest Multicultural Youth Case Manager Bronwyn O’Brien said our community members can bring a different perspective to the conversation and often have ideas others had not already thought of.

‘Western Sydney is an extremely diverse and vibrant area and with diversity comes different forms of creativity, and that can enhance our problem solving,’ she said.

Dr Schismenos is passionate about teaching and researching the most effective interventions for these communities and has a number of students enrolled in his course from Western Sydney.



“We have students from Western Sydney enrolled in this course, so for some of them it is a personal motivation to get involved,” Dr Schismenos said.

The humanitarian engineering program, through Dr Schismenos, also works with UNESCO on projects as diverse as women in science in developing countries, and environmental initiatives.

SydWest is proud to be partnering with RMIT and looks forward to seeing what can be achieved.

### **What is humanitarian engineering?**

As Dr Schismenos explains, humanitarian engineering sits across all engineering disciplines with a focus on social impact and improving quality of life in society.

Humanitarian engineers specifically work with vulnerable and marginalised communities and combine specialist social and technical thinking with core engineering practice.

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