

Welcome smile from Australia

text
Jason McIntosh

photograph
Sarah Hanks

For Russian immigrant **olga postans**, the first shock delivered in her new home came at Australia's border with smiling Customs officers proving a revelation compared with their stony-faced counterparts back home.

Grasping her luggage and her teenage daughter Yulia, Olga and her husband George were soon on their way from Perth to their new home in the remote mining town of Gove, in the north east corner of the Territory.

That was in October 2007 and after adjusting to the flies, heat, isolation and cultural upheaval, the family is now embedded happily in the Gove community.

Although it wasn't an easy transition for Olga, with cultural alienation and her then brittle English, initial work cleaning motel rooms along with a specialised migrant English course at Charles Darwin University's Nhulunbuy campus were huge confidence-boosters.

She is especially proud of her daughter's new linguistic talents that saw her quickly develop near-perfect English "with an Aussie accent I can't understand", and move in many social circles.

But Olga isn't far behind now. Her new language skills have just helped her to land a service assistant position at Gove Hospital and, judging by her background – she was a lecturer in Russian tax law, this job will be the start of a rich career.

CDU Lecturer Ann Bartholomeusz works closely with Olga and said the hospital job was a major confidence boost for her. "She saw the job in the paper and applied herself, which shows her tenacity and effort and it's given her a wonderful opportunity to talk and engage with more people," she said.

Olga's home town of Novokuznetsk, in the remote Kemerovo region of Siberia, isn't a sea of salt mines as Western stereotypes might suggest. Siberia's freezing winters open up to warm, sub-30 degree summer days where white beaches and lush forests are a Mecca for swimming, fishing, hiking and gardening, pastimes Olga continues to enjoy in the NT.

But there are differences including no mushrooms to pick in the NT's tropics and a distinctly different approach to fishing. "The fish we would catch in Russia are the ones my husband uses for bait (in the NT)," she laughs.

o

left
Olga Postans

antennae

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) is sponsored by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to provide English classes for migrants and refugees. The AMEP delivers to about 300 students across CDU's campuses and centres, with Thailand, Indonesia and China representing the top three countries of origin.

