

Image from left: John Barker, Rahaf and Monther, and their children Aseel and Mohammad, at their home in London. The family from Syria have been supported by a sponsorship group from Hampstead Parish Church, including John. June 2019 © AI/ Richard Burton



MY NEW NEIGHBOUR STORIES

EVENT GUIDE

This guide contains all the resources and information you need to be part of Amnesty's My New Neighbour Stories events happening around Australia. By helping to share the stories of home, and of the welcoming communities around Australia, you will be part of Amnesty's global movement to create supportive pathways for refugees to reach safety.

In this guide you will find:

- Note from the campaigner
- Overview of event tactic
- Steps for organising your own event, including links to resources
- How to help capture content to influence decision makers
- Examples of resulting stories

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Image from left: Deena Yako, Veronica Lopez, Erfan Daliri, Shankar Kasynathan, Prudence Melom, Arash Bordbar

A NOTE FROM THE CAMPAIGNER SHANKAR KASYNATHAN

As the My New Neighbour campaign lead, I am working to create a world where refugees are supported to come to Australia— and by a safe and welcoming community. When my family came to Australia from Sri Lanka, we were supported by our neighbours, local churches, organisations and members of our own Tamil community. Memories of this goodness have instilled in me the value of community led solutions to helping people come to Australia safely, as well as resettle successfully.

This year, in partnership with our friends in other organisations across the country, we are working in local communities to show this powerful welcome that exists across Australia to not only advocate for fairer and safer pathways to refugee resettlement, but also to illustrate how we have succeeded so far and that we have it in us to succeed in the future.

By sharing stories of people who have come to Australia seeking peace and safety, in parallel with those who have helped welcome them, we have the opportunity to showcase what community sponsorship looks like in practice— and celebrate what people are willing to do for their new neighbours through personal connection and storytelling. This series of events are “My New Neighbour Stories”.

We are calling on all supporters of a more welcoming Australia to hold a ‘My New Neighbour Stories’ event in their town. These events are designed to help audiences have a new perspective on the welcome exists in our communities for refugees.

In Wagga Wagga, where Amnesty’s ‘My New Neighbour’ campaign launched in March 2018, Felix Machiridza, a political refugee from Zimbabwe, reflected on fond memories of the community support and love he received from his neighbours upon arrival.

“Community organisations worked with me, not for me, to make it possible for me to reunite with my children. I was creating my own destiny”.

Sponsoring his own children to reunite with him cost many thousands of dollars:

“I couldn’t do it without them, but I must stress that the journey was mine to walk—but they walked it with me.”

For several of us, it’s the first time we are harnessing the strength of our personal stories to advocate for ourselves and others like us. It’s happening with us, not for us or to us.

With ‘My New Neighbour Stories’, we are at the start of building a significant national movement by bringing attention to the power of simultaneous grassroots events. Movement building requires a lot of work, and as refugees we can’t do it alone. As people with lived experience, we need allies everywhere to help us: companies, institutions, governments and friends in the community. People who respect the need for us to lead this work but will walk alongside us. People like Brad Chilcot from South Australia whose organisation ‘Welcoming Australia’ founded the Adelaide based ‘Welcome Centre’ providing food, social services and emergency relief to people newly arrived in Australia:

“It’s a privilege to offer welcome and a safe place to call home to people who’ve experienced things I couldn’t imagine. My life and community have been incredibly enriched by people seeking asylum and refugees— and I want to be a part of enriching the lives of those who’ll become my new neighbours in the future.”

In 2019 we are working to make change happen. We are calling on our leaders to take action to prove that our voices are being heard— ‘we’ being those of us who have the most to gain from social change, and our friends who stand with us. At the heart of ‘My New Neighbour Stories’, and this campaign, are both stories are woven together: just the way our neighbourhoods can be.

In hope, Shankar Kasynathan



Image from left: James Ondari, Margherita Mezzasoma, Anita Nair

OVERVIEW OF MY NEW NEIGHBOUR STORIES

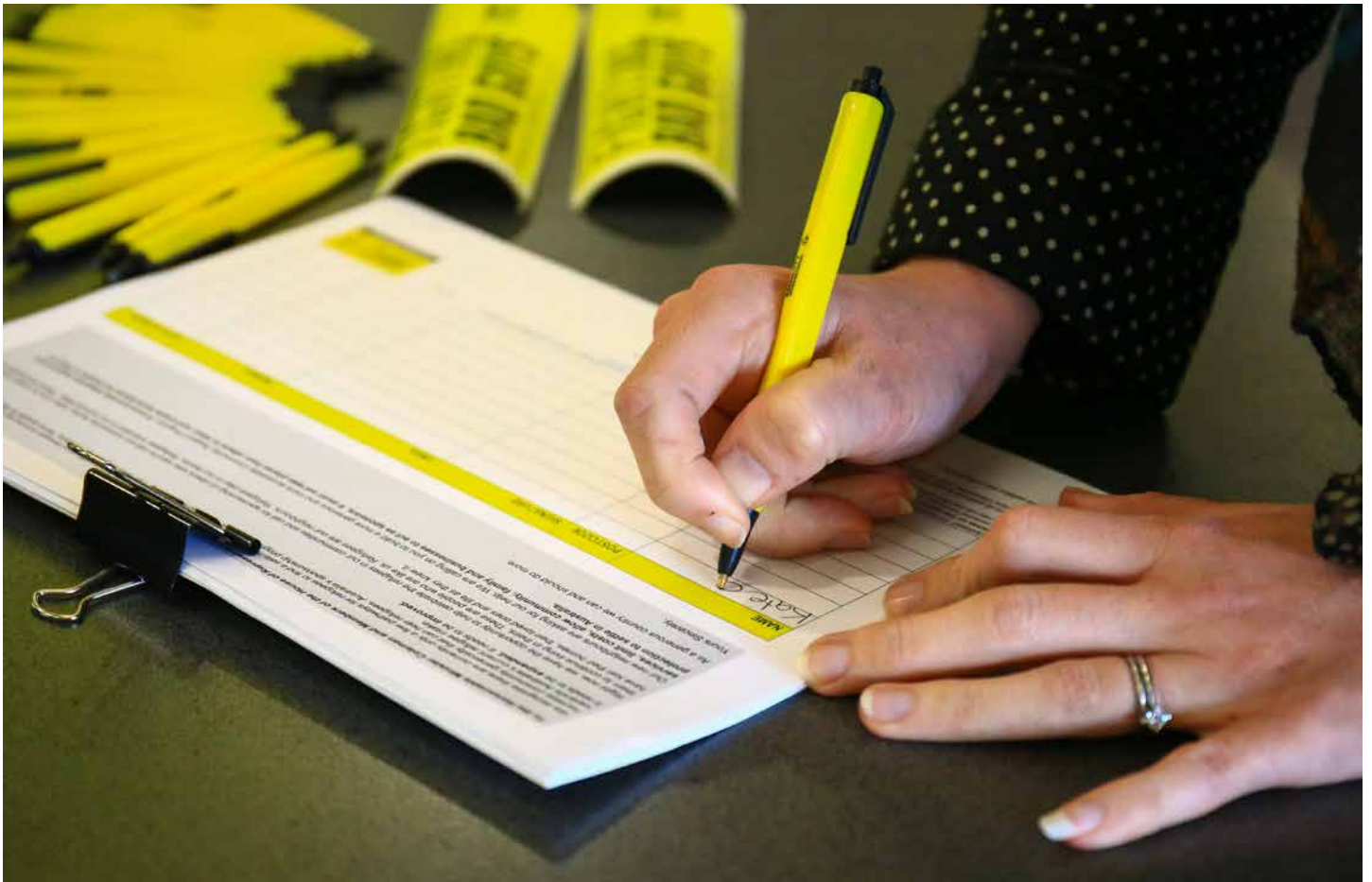
To expand our audience of those calling for an improved community sponsorship program for refugees, we are launching a new tactic to reframe the narrative of refugees from a story of suffering and helplessness to a story of solutions and people.

These “My New Neighbour Stories” will be storytelling sessions hosted by libraries across Australia (what better place to host a story!), featuring true stories experienced in parallel between someone with refugee experience and someone who helped to welcome them in their community. These parallel stories are key to demonstrating to audiences that our lives are all connected, that our voices are equal. These stories will help audiences have a new

perspective on the welcome that can and should exist in our communities for refugees, what community sponsorship looks like in practice, as well as reveal a national demand to our policy makers as we promote these events taking place all around the country.

We are calling on all supporters of a more welcoming Australia to support holding a My New Neighbour Stories event in their local library. You are invited to help facilitate one of these events to share the powerful stories that exist in the connection and rebuilding of lives within our communities.

The recipe of a My New Neighbour Stories event is simple: you’ll need a local library space, an event facilitator to organise, a moderator to introduce and guide the storytelling session, a storyteller with lived refugee experience, a storyteller they nominate as someone who helped them resettle, and an audience.



STEPS TO HOSTING A MY NEW NEIGHBOUR STORIES EVENT

BEFORE THE EVENT:

1. Let us know you're planning to hold a community conversation by submitting an [event proposal via this link](#)
2. Find someone in your region who has lived experience of coming to Australia as a refugee, and ask them to nominate someone who supported them to settle here. Let them know that we need them to be willing to share their stories and portrait publicly as part of the campaign to improve community sponsorship. Please see our [guide to working ethically with people from refugee backgrounds](#) to help here. You could contact your local migrant and refugee resource centre, or other community groups to ask if there is anyone they know who might be interested in participating.
3. Arrange a time with each of the storytellers to conduct a pre-event interview story collection using our [Story Collection Guide](#). Let them know that these will be the same questions that will be asked of them at the event, so they will feel prepared in advance.
4. Find a moderator to guide the storytellers during the event, and ensure both feel comfortable and confident sharing their stories. See our [Moderator's Guide](#) for more information, and pass this along with the completed Story Collection Guide (from step 3) to ensure they are prepared to help prompt the storytellers with any details of their story they may need help recalling so everything is clear for the audience.
5. Decide on possible dates and times for your event with your storytellers and moderator, and see if there are any volunteers who can help you at the event to arrange the space and help facilitate.
6. Book a library (or library-like) venue with the storytellers and moderator's availability in mind. A library-like setting is ideal to reinforce the similarities between events happening around Australia, this will give policy makers a sense of momentum and consensus. Contact your local council to ask what venues might be suitable if finding a library is tricky (and invite them to come along!)
7. You can request materials like Amnesty t-shirts, banners, stickers and posters to be sent out to you by emailing activism@amnesty.org.au at least 4 weeks before the event date (or you can collect in person from your region's action centre)
8. See if you can find a photographer who would be able to assist with taking photos at the event (on phone or tablet is fine too!) See our [Photographers Brief](#) for more information on what we need to support this tactic to gain momentum at a national level, and please share with the photographer in advance. Have story participants sign the [image release forms](#) to allow us to use the photos from the event online.

9. Promote your event and invite local council makers! Some ideas include: create posters and fliers to hand out at the library, council offices and around town. Put up the event details on your local group's social media. Have some design skills? We suggest canva for a simple and free online design tool (tip: ask your community organiser or activism support coordinator for access to Amnesty templates in canva). We also have this [handy resource page for setting up stalls and events](#). Write or email other community organisations and businesses to invite them to attend. The most effective way to promote an event is often word of mouth—so don't forget to invite your friends!
10. Use our [Social Media Guide](#) to help promote your event and also ensure the tactic is supported nationally through our social channels. We want to make sure as many people see these events being hosted in local communities as possible, reinforcing the desire to welcome more refugees AND the call for an improved Community Sponsorship Program.
11. Send out an event notification to your local media using this [Media Guide](#). If you need assistance with drafting a media release, you can contact Amnesty's media team at media@amnesty.org.au
12. To help organise, feel free to make a copy of our [run sheet template](#) to use to help guide your event and share with key attendees so everyone is on the same page.
13. Print out the [Moderator's Script](#) for them to have on hand during the storytelling session. All events are supplied with the same script for cohesion. Please also print out [Image Release Forms](#) to bring with you for the storytellers to sign if they haven't already.

AT THE EVENT:

1. Collect attendees details on [Amnesty's Community Sponsorship petitions](#) so that new supporters can add their voice to our campaign to improve community sponsorship
2. Check in with speakers to confirm that they are still comfortable with sharing their stories.
3. Do an acknowledgement of the traditional owners at the start of the event
4. Include time at the end to get a photo of everyone together. Before you snap, let everyone know that it will be used on Amnesty's social media and website, and ask anyone uncomfortable with being photographed to bow out – that's totally fine! Tweet it out with #MyNewNeighbour and @AmnestyOz (if your group has a twitter presence) and then send the original file after your event to jen.wells-scherrer@amnesty.org.au
5. Pack up - ensure space is left as found

AFTER THE EVENT

1. Send any invoices or reimbursements needed to activism@amnesty.org.au
2. Post back the signed petitions to the Amnesty Victoria Action Center, Locked Bag 7, Collingwood VIC 3066
3. Please make sure that the key photos listed in the [photographer's brief](#), scans of all signed release forms and a scan or copy of the pre-event interview story collection documents are all supplied to the AIA Story & Content Team by sending them through the free file sharing service WeTransfer to jen.wells-scherrer@amnesty.org.au, including a note about the event date and location to ensure we know which files go with which event.



“

I've learnt a lot from this process. When you want to help someone, you've got to get in contact with what that person needs, not what you want to give.

”

Susana Gutiérrez Barón got involved with a community sponsorship scheme in Argentina, sponsoring Eddy to come over from Syria. June 2019 © AI

INSPIRATION FROM RECENT MY NEW NEIGHBOUR STORY EVENTS



“I was nine years old, and I wish I had known I was leaving my home country because I would have brought along some things to remind me of my home. I realised things were not right when my parents took myself and my younger brother—who was six at the time and I was nine—to a stranded village in the middle of northern Iraq, in the middle of the night, to tell us that we were leaving our home country and travelling to Iran... It was then that I realized how sad my parents were, and I will never forget my grandma’s face when she kissed us goodbye. She had known about something that we as young children did not.”

Deena Yako, Sydney



“I remember when I first met Phong Gam and his Burmese family. What was meant to be a brief initial meeting, lasted an entire evening. I knew that I had made a special connection with a special group of new neighbours. Over the coming years we would stay in touch and my family would become familiar with Phong Gam’s family and the challenges that they had to overcome. Our friendship would even include visits to my grandfather’s farm. I think our friendship even influenced and shaped the larger community around us. I knew well that the journey for Phong Gam and his family was not straightforward, but the determination of Phong Gam to succeed inspired me, and motivated me to continue with the work I was doing. I become a refugee resettlement worker, and have helped resettle numerous families in my community in Wagga Wagga.” **Eliza Tout, Wagga Wagga**



“I remember feeling overwhelmed when I arrived in Wagga Wagga as a young teenager from Burma. Schools were different, I had no friends and there was an expectation that I would need to learn a lot and very quickly. It was at the very beginning that I had the opportunity to meet a community volunteer: Eliza Tout. Eliza met me on my first day in my new neighbourhood and helped my family find our feet by providing us with the information we needed to get around town, and become familiar with our new surroundings. Looking back over my life in my home of Wagga Wagga, that connection with Eliza made such a difference and helped open up my world to what was possible for me in my new neighbourhood.” **Phong Gam Tiwangce, Wagga Wagga**

Campaigning for human rights has a cost. Since 1961 we’ve made the choice to never accept funds from governments or organisation. This independence means we rely on people like you to help us fight injustice and abuses. If you are able, please make a regular donation to power the movement for human rights.

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