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FOREWORD

From church groups to diaspora communities to local councils, communities across the country are speaking with a united voice. Australia needs a community-oriented and affordable refugee sponsorship model that encourages widespread community participation in welcoming and supporting the world's most vulnerable people.

The federal government's review into its Community Support Program for refugees in 2020 has inspired dozens of groups Amnesty International has worked with to take their voices directly to the government. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this timely review and hope it will lead to a favourable outcome that would benefit both refugees and the Australian communities.

As demonstrated by individuals and groups featured in this report, Australians have shown genuine eagerness to welcome more refugees to their neighbourhoods and volunteer their time and skills to support them. A fair and just community sponsorship program for refugees is critical to harnessing this goodwill among Australians.

Since early 2018, Amnesty's My New Neighbour has mobilised the public, local governments and community groups to call for a better government program for enabling individuals, groups and businesses to support refugees. Put simply, the current Community Support Program can and must be substantially improved. Presently, the program's cost is highly prohibitive for many Australians who wish to be part of it. Worse still, for every refugee that comes to Australia through this program, the government deducts a place from the annual humanitarian intake quota.

We are urging the government to redesign the program to encourage, not hinder, more families, groups, and businesses to participate. Equally importantly, an improved program will allow Australia to welcome more refugees every year. It will also save lives and prevent refugees from making perilous sea journeys and avoid costly and punitive deterrence measures.

Globally for the last few years, Amnesty International has worked with governments, civil society and stakeholders in eight countries to establish new programs for community sponsorship or make existing ones more sustainable and effective. Our vision is to ensure that a fair community sponsorship program becomes a reality in Australia and worldwide as it breathes new life into communities, refugees and host countries alike for generations to come.

The public call for a fairer and most accessible community sponsorship program for refugees has never been more apparent. We need the government to listen and to act.



Samantha Klintworth
National Director
Amnesty International Australia

OVERVIEW

In just three years Amnesty International’s refugee campaign, ‘My New Neighbour’, has gone to every Australian state and territory, revealing the willingness of local communities to get behind their new neighbours, some of whom are refugees.

The My New Neighbour campaign is a neighbourhood-led solution to help refugees – people who are seeking to rebuild their lives somewhere safe. It’s all about giving communities the opportunity to lead the change from within.

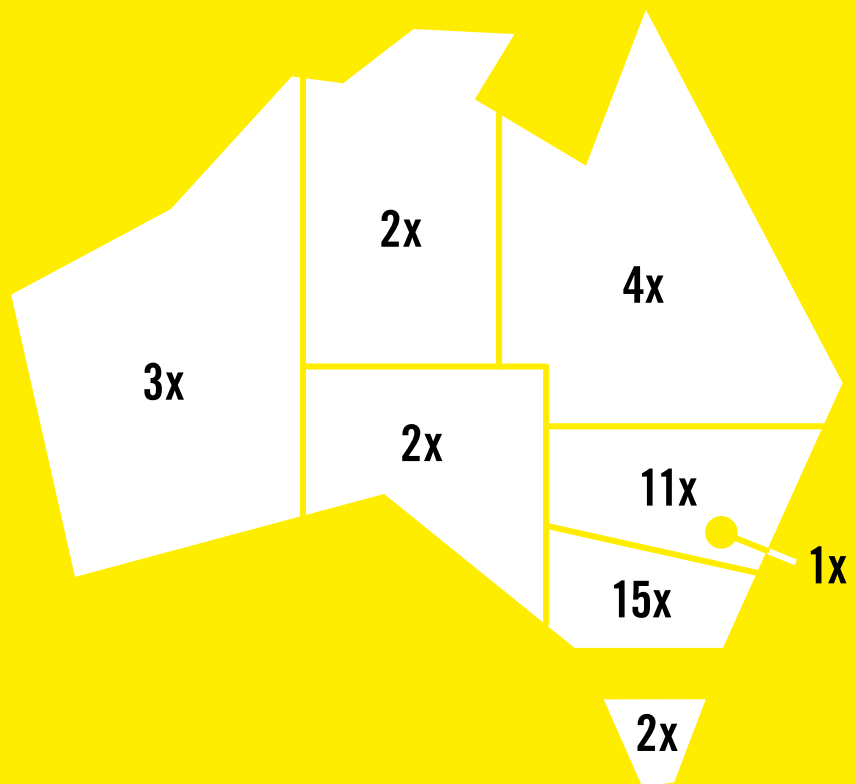
The journey started in March of 2018, in Wagga Wagga, and made its way around to just over 50 communities across the country. In each state and territory, we have seen local groups building public support for a: **fair and just model of refugee community sponsorship in Australia.**

With almost 40,000 Australians signing a petition calling on the Australian Government to expand and improve community sponsorship for refugees so that more families can rebuild their lives in safety, we are confident that this issue is a significant one and for so many.

Here’s what we’ve achieved so far.

1. Tireless efforts from communities working for a fair model of refugee sponsorship has meant to date that 40 Mayors and/or local governments have stood with refugees in sending letters to the Minister responsible for refugee sponsorship, or passing motions in support of improvements to community sponsorship and often unanimously.
2. We have seen refugee diaspora communities and leaders standing up for improvements to the program. Maribyrnong City Council **unanimously supported a motion calling for improvements to refugee sponsorship** led by Mayor Cuc Lam, a former refugee who fled to Australia from Vietnam. Mayor Lam called on the Federal Government to step up and ensure that the intake of refugees under community sponsorship is above and beyond any existing humanitarian quota. The Asia Pacific Network of Refugees, to ethnic community peak bodies such as the Federation of Ethnic Community Councils of Australia (FECCA), and thereafter regional bodies such as the ECCV, ECCQ and several others.
3. In a fantastic show of support from regional local governments starting in 2018: Albury, Wodonga, Wagga Wagga and Griffith – simultaneously passing motions, to the City of Toowoomba, Logan and Darwin more recently in October 2020. Australians want better solutions and councils like these are leading the way.

COUNCILS SUPPORTING MY NEW NEIGHBOUR



The opportunity of the Government review in 2020, into Australia's model of community sponsorship, inspired submissions from dozens of the communities the campaign has worked with. These submissions were made available to both the Review as well as the Federal Parliamentarians for each locality/region.

We have enjoyed the support of a multitude of organisations from church groups and Rotary Clubs, to AFL teams with the Western Bulldogs adding their support and voice to the campaign by calling for more community-led programs like community sponsorship.

We must harness the strength and compassion of all the communities that have engaged with this conversation, represented by the 40 local governments who have written to the Commonwealth Government to date. These Local Government Areas provide homes to refugees with incredible stories of sacrifice, courage and contributions to the communities they live in.

Our work across all these communities has revealed that there is a goodness that lives in our families, communities and neighbourhoods – to reach it we just need to walk beyond our fears. If we can go and build our homes there, raise our children there, look out for each other there, we will all live fortunate lives.

You and I, and our new neighbours.

Shankar Kasynathan
National Campaign Manager
– My New Neighbour

* List at the time of the report's publication

RECOMMENDATIONS: NEW MODEL FOR THE COMMUNITY SUPPORT PROGRAM FOR REFUGEES

OUR CONCERNS WITH THE CURRENT MODEL

The Government's Community Support Program is a small private sponsorship scheme that began in 2016. It allows individuals, organisations and businesses to sponsor a refugee or their family to start a new life in Australia. There are currently only 1,000 refugee placements through the community sponsorship program.

While it is welcome that Australia has recognised the potential of community sponsorship, the current model has significant flaws.

Firstly, the cost of sponsorship is exorbitant, including an approximately \$20,000 visa application fee, additional fees for family, a bond of \$20,000 plus airfares, medical expenses and settlement costs.

Secondly, the program privileges those who have 'adequate English', are between the age of 18-50 and are willing to work in regional Australia, rather than those in urgent need of resettlement.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the community sponsorship program does not serve to increase Australia's refugee intake. Because it sits within the Refugee and Humanitarian Program, for every refugee who comes to Australia under the community sponsorship, the Government deducts a place from the annual fixed quota for refugee resettlement.

A BETTER PLAN

Amnesty International is calling on the Government to expand and improve its current model.

By working with like-minded civil society organisations, we have developed an alternative model for the community sponsorship program for refugees similar to Canada's model which has been successful for many years.

An appropriate program would:

Not take places from others in need

For Australia to do its fair share in meeting the global need for people seeking asylum, the community sponsorship program must be above and beyond any existing humanitarian or visa quotas. Ensuring community sponsorship places are additional to Australia's existing humanitarian intake will mean that the Government is not merely passing the buck by shifting their responsibility onto the community. We have also heard from businesses and community groups that additionality is needed to give them confidence that their contributions to the community sponsorship program are delivering real humanitarian outcomes.

Based on our wealth, population and current support for community sponsorship, Amnesty recommends that the Australian community could support the sponsorship of around 10,000 refugees per annum through the community sponsorship program.

Provide adequate support and services

To assist people seeking asylum to integrate successfully into our communities, the Government must provide adequate settlement and support services. The pilot program allows access to Medicare and the Australian Migrant English Program, but more clarity around services and entitlements is needed. It is also necessary to put in place measures to protect refugees from exploitation or harm in the event of their sponsor seeking to make a profit from their arrival or if the sponsorship arrangement breaks down.

Limit costs

An improved program must ensure it is not too costly for refugees or their sponsors. Currently, the high cost of the application and visas is approximately \$80,000 for a family of five – three times the amount of the Canadian program.

Allow community, family and businesses to act as sponsors

Amnesty recommends that there be three main categories of potential sponsors:

1. Family sponsors bringing refugee family members residing overseas who require international protection
2. Independent sponsors such as faith-based groups, universities and community associations who may sponsor those most in need, as identified by UNHCR, who do not have family links and who are not yet job-ready
3. Business/employer sponsors who want to employ job-ready refugees to meet dual commercial and corporate social responsibility objectives.

DALLAS TOUT

Wagga Wagga - NSW



Deputy Mayor of Wagga Wagga Dallas Tout is deeply passionate about his community and celebrating its diverse, multicultural residents.

The strength of the tapestry or social fabric is dependent on the threads that make it up. In Wagga, I feel that the threads are very strong and very thick because of our history of welcoming refugees and the passion people have for supporting others. This submission to the review of the community sponsorship program is just another example of what we do here in Wagga.

I personally have been involved in the refugee space, along with my family and particularly my daughter, for a long time. I felt that we needed to make a submission to the review because community sponsorship should be much more achievable and affordable. We have organisations here in Wagga who will raise money, but if the costs can come down and we can get five people for the current cost of one person then organisations will be able to get much more involved. Right now it's just impossible.

In reality, the refugee space in the City of Wagga is not a new thing. A history of welcoming refugees goes back to around 1974. Back then, there was a group of people who got involved in bringing out Vietnamese refugees. This group provided the new arrivals with housing and a supportive community environment. So, when people ask how everyone in our community perceives Wagga's involvement in refugee resettlement, I remind them that in fact Wagga has been welcoming refugees for the last 45 years and it is only in the last 4 – 5 years that we have increased intakes with particular groups such as Afghans, Burmese and Yazidis. As a result of this long history, when I was putting a submission together for the review of the Community Sponsorship Program, the 8 or 9 people I reached out to had no issues in quickly putting together something because it's what they do and it's what they are passionate about.

Community sponsorship is crucial as it provides another avenue for communities to bring family members or other individuals in need here to Australia. Around the time we were putting in our submission to the review, the refugee numbers were reduced substantially. As a result, community sponsorship, especially in the form of an additional pathway, has become even more critical.

Whenever a person who, for whatever reason, whichever country they are in, is unable to proceed with their normal life, it is crucial that communities come together to care for them. Sharing what we have here with people who have been shut out of what they used to have, supporting them in a safe environment, is what is important to me. It is critical that we help and assist.

For me personally, what gives me hope is the depth of passion in the community here, and the fact that it is not waning, but growing. The size and diversity we have in our communities from refugee backgrounds here in Wagga is also amazing. Their growth has enabled them to also be increasingly involved in the lobbying and sponsorship processes over time. Every year, to celebrate that diversity, we hold the Fusion Festival in the City of Wagga. I invite anyone who loves good food and entertainment to come visit the city of Wagga, meet our residents and attend the Fusion Festival.

ALI AL BATTAAT

Shepparton - VIC



Currently studying Social Work, Ali Al Battatt spends his free time working to ensure his community, and particularly its youth, is supported in being the best they can be.

I arrived with my mother and four siblings in the early 2000s, about a year after my father. My family and I took one of the most dangerous routes to come to Australia. We left Iraq for Iran then from Iran to Indonesia and from there we crossed the ocean for Australia and were taken to Christmas Island. I don't remember much because I was one year old, but through the stories of my siblings and my mother, I learned that the journey was very difficult. As a result of this experience, creating avenues for safe and fair means for asylum seekers to obtain protection in Australia is very important to me. The current community sponsorship program isn't fair or just, and that is something we need to change.

In terms of our community here in Shepparton, and some people might disagree, but I think we are probably the best regional town in Australia. I say this because Shepparton's highly diverse and multicultural community is doing its best to help all its members, build each other's skills, and stand out as a colourful, multicultural, regional town.

Anyone who values human rights should be supportive of the community sponsorship program, as we are giving other people an opportunity to live a better and safer life, and creating a brighter future for the youth. We are creating a more diverse country and we are adding to our community because refugees have and continue to contribute to Australia and its society. Here in Shepparton, most of our doctors are from multicultural backgrounds or former refugees. Through the actions of those in our community, it is clear to see that refugees are giving a lot to Australian society and contributing to the best of their abilities.

Community plays a very big role in supporting people who come through the sponsorship program because it helps them feel a sense of belonging. With people who are hesitant about community sponsorship of refugees in general, my advice to them is, speak to refugees, listen to their stories, read about them, before judging them or before making an assumption. It's important. I know a lot of people that I have met in my life and my journey, changed their perceptions on Muslims after they met me or changed their perceptions about refugees after seeing what I do. It's just a matter of listening to their stories and understanding their struggles.

We refugees didn't leave our home country because we wanted to go on a holiday on a boat to Australia. We left our home because, in my case, my father lost five of his brothers, his father and his uncle which led him to fleeing his country across the border to Iran. We are not coming here for holidays. We are coming here for a safer place to call home where there is peace and safety. When families or individuals from refugee backgrounds arrive in welcoming towns in Australia, they see that peace, safety and even love within the community. We see that here a lot in Shepparton and we are proof of how welcoming a community can and should be to refugees.

What gives me hope are the young multicultural leaders that I am seeing stand up during these difficult and unprecedented times. They are trying to create change in our communities, in our country and in every way possible they are working hard to create a better future for the youth that are coming after us. I have hope in our youth, because I feel like they will create a lot of change.

CHRISTIAN FONYE

Canberra - ACT



An Amnesty International activist since 2019, Christian Fonye previously worked as a protection officer at the National Human Rights Commission of Cameroon before having to leave as a refugee in 2017. Currently living in the ACT, Christian is a big advocate for why his city is an ideal place to welcome refugees through community sponsorship. Christian is also a current UN Fellow for People of African Descent.

Although I have worked on a variety of Amnesty campaigns since 2019, the My New Neighbour campaign was something that I felt was very close to my heart as it relates much more to my experience. I left Cameroon as a refugee in the wake of what started as non-violent protests that descended into a violent conflict in 2017. Since being in Australia, I have worked for a number of organisations including the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services (MARSS) in the ACT as a caseworker. Working with MARSS gave me the opportunity to engage with people from all different displacement contexts such as Iraq, Iran, Syria and Myanmar. Having that opportunity to interact with so many of them, made me see how much, and how relevant, building support around community is. Coming into contact with individuals and hearing about their experiences one on one, in addition to reflecting on my own experiences, made me see the value of community sponsorship and wrap around support in a much clearer way.

There are many things that make Canberra an excellent place to welcome refugees through the community sponsorship program, the first of which is Canberra's cosmopolitan spirit. When you walk around Canberra, you feel the celebration of our diversity and all our different cultures. As a result of this, the community tends to empathise with and be much more accepting towards new arrivals. I would also say that the Australians living around me are very friendly people. Meeting Australians here reminds me a little bit of the

experiences I had back in my country before the War. For us Cameroonians, we find it very easy to get along with people and start conversations with someone new. Here in Canberra, I live in a very calm neighbourhood where I have had the opportunity to have people walk up to me, want to know my story and how they could support me. One of my best friends, Norman, happens to be an older man who gave me very natural integration support. The friendship we built provided me with that sense of belonging and the feeling that there was always someone I could talk to or go to with any issues.

When I just came to Australia, I was very eager to find avenues to pursue the things I am passionate about like human rights. Things that I had been doing and working on back in Cameroon. It didn't take me very long to spot campaigns and organisations that were working with and for refugees, and who were running advocacy campaigns in opposition to issues such as offshore detention. In other words, it was not a very laborious search. Instead, these organisations were visible in the community and that was one aspect that made me feel very much at home here. Worthy of mention is the exposure and continuous personal and professional development opportunities that I benefit from as an activist with Amnesty International Australia. I also had access to networking opportunities as an applicant for the rotary fellowship which brought me into contact with the Rotary district in Canberra which offered me the unique opportunity of spotlighting the humanitarian challenges faced by civilians in the ongoing conflict in Southern Cameroon.

In a nutshell I would say that because Canberra is diverse and because Australians are friendly people who want to help out their neighbours, Canberra is the right community to welcome individuals through the community sponsorship program.

CINDY CARPENTER

Inner West Sydney - NSW



Cindy Carpenter from the inner west of Sydney is a management consultant by trade and the Chairperson of the Bread & Butter Project, a social enterprise that trains refugees and asylum seekers to become qualified bakers.

My involvement in the community sponsorship programme predates my involvement with the Bread & Butter Project. I was wanting to host a refugee family and the Homestay Network had been proposed by the Greens at the time. It was knocked back, so I was wondering how else I could help. That's when someone suggested I join the board of the Bread & Butter Project.

I think Australians are more generous than we might appear - a lot of us want to make sure we are doing our fair share when it comes to helping refugees and the more vulnerable in our community. There was a lot of rhetoric around boat arrivals which demonised the topic, but ultimately I think most of us want to welcome more people here.

Last year I got involved in a pilot project run by the Community Refugee Sponsorship Initiative where a neighbourhood group comes together and supports a recently arrived refugee. We got together five couples and we stepped in to provide support for two refugees in around October last year.

It's been a lot of hard work, but so rewarding and beneficial - you really learn and understand what a refugee needs and the challenges they face through that lived experience, so it's hugely beneficial and rewarding not only to the person helping, but also the mentees are thrilled and the community is thrilled.

One of the mentees celebrated their 22nd birthday the other day and her friend's family put on a Persian extravaganza. We all went and it was wonderful, the food was incredible, there was dancing, everyone from the Persian community was so welcoming and friendly.

One of our friends who is helping as a mentor said it was a really spiritual experience.

I'm a great believer in changing the rhetoric around how we can and should be helping refugees and in doing so also help our communities to grow and thrive even more. Research has shown clearly that refugees are more inclined to start their own businesses, those businesses tend to survive which then benefits taxpayers. And of course there are all the other benefits of multicultural diversity communities - the food, the festivals, the arts. We are such a lucky country, so much of our growth is because we are so diverse.

I think you change the way people think about these things at a grassroots level. By showing, through this pilot scheme for example, how much we all benefit from supporting refugees in our communities we build support for an improved Community Sponsorship Programme.

I think you also have to give a certain amount of autonomy to those communities wanting to support refugees. There is too much bureaucracy now, the community is very good at helping and if they feel there is a bit of self-determining they can do as well as the necessary guidance, more are likely to want to get involved. It's a really good way of activating a volunteer workforce that really wants to help but doesn't know how.

Our group of five couples includes a CEO of a tech start up, a lawyer, a guitarist, people who work in television. We've all worked together and provided things like driving lessons, work experience, someone needed dental work so we helped sort that out. It's hard work and pretty time consuming, but it's so worth it. Everyone gets something out of it and the community thrives as a result.

JOSH FERGEUS



Monash - VIC

Josh Fergeus was elected in 2016 and is the first Greens Councillor to serve the City of Monash. Josh serves the City through the many causes he focuses on both through his work on the local council, and outside work hours. His goal is to make Monash as fair and inclusive as it can be, welcoming people from all different backgrounds to enrich the fabric of the community.

Monash is an extremely multicultural community. We are one of the most multicultural municipalities in Australia and I think it's really important that we have a really considered, empathetic, rational response to new migrants including asylum seekers and refugees.

Being a part of local government, I am here to represent the community and my community in particular, is very multicultural. Being at the vantage point of council, I see how we can all benefit from when the response to refugees and asylum seekers is the right one. Particularly when people first arrive. If they are welcomed and if they are allowed to settle, be engaged and connect with one another in ways that they want and in ways that benefit them, I think all members of the community benefit as a result.

Local government really should be taking the lead. We are absolutely best placed to work with our community in the promotion and facilitation of sponsorship. We are the level of government that is closest to the people, we know our communities the best and I think that gives us the highest chance of success. Unfortunately, being a part of local government means that I am well aware that any avenue that sees us take on more responsibility needs to come with further resourcing. It can't just be a practice of cost shifting for the state and federal governments.

Monash is perfectly placed to welcome refugees and people seeking asylum. Out of all municipalities in Victoria excluding the City of Melbourne, we have the highest number of people move in and out of Monash every day for work, study and recreation.

We are really a hub for Melbourne and Victoria. We are an employment hub, an education hub, we are the perfect slice of middle suburbia and we are already extremely multicultural. I think we are a success story for multiculturalism, and we are a part of Australia which I think the rest of the country can relate to.

Community sponsorship allows individual communities to say 'look we are willing to do more, we would like to do more'. It's them saying 'we would like to welcome people and enhance the social fabric of the community'. Community sponsorship is demonstrative of the compassion that is present and it simply allows further additional voluntary involvement in solving some of these great humanitarian problems. If we facilitated a system which allowed communities to demonstrate what they would like their contribution to be, I think we would be really surprised with the results and I don't think we would be seeing the toxic debates around migration and seeking asylum that are currently prevalent. I believe the vast majority of communities out there in Australia really are prepared to welcome people with open arms when you get down to it and actually put these decisions in their hands.

What gives me hope is usually the conversations I have day to day with residents of Monash. For example, you will be working away, you might be feeling a bit sad about the various ridiculous things that are happening in the world. Then all of a sudden you will get a call from someone and they will be asking about how they might be able to assist the international student who is living across the street and has really been struggling during COVID, or they will ask about how they can help their elderly neighbour who has lost their husband but who doesn't speak very good English and what services are available for her. The kindness and compassion of everyday people, when confronted with adversity, when it is literally in their street or neighbourhood, gives me a lot of hope. I think if we can tap into that on a broader scale, there is certainly a lot of hope for the future.



Photo by Derick McKinney on Unsplash

ELSA ADSHEAD

Darwin - NT



Currently doing her practical legal training, Elsa Adshead feels strongly about social justice and equality of rights and opportunity whether it be indigenous issues, individuals at risk or refugee rights.

I'm based in Darwin and I have been involved with Amnesty since I was in my 20s. As well as doing my law degree, I also tutored English and have worked as part of the Adult Migrant English Program. I mainly worked with migrant and refugee women and it's been very humbling to hear what they have been through and their struggles in coming to Australia to seek a better life for themselves and their families. Many of these women became close friends with time.

A Karen lady I taught in Perth who I became close to has a story that sticks with me. Her and her family were on the Thai border for 10 years as refugees. She was a pre-school teacher back in Myanmar, and while displaced, she taught in a small school which

was started by the families there because they were there for so long. When she came to Perth, I was teaching her English so she could get her childhood education certificate. The moments that I remember so vividly were doing the night driving she was required to complete for her licence. We used to go pick up her kids and take them to get their library cards. Sometimes during the day when we did some driving, we would find time to grab a coffee together among the errands and appointments. I was so proud of her when she ordered her coffee by herself in a cafe. I think that also gave her a lot of confidence. During this time, I was particularly struck by the quiet and unheralded generosity and kindness of lots of people in the community. One Mens Shed in particular which upgraded old computers for very low prices for refugees and migrants demonstrated this generosity when the question as to an estimate of the cost of a repair was met with "well, we're partial to a tea cake for morning tea".

“Community sponsorship is really important for me, especially when I think about how more than half of the world’s refugees are children.”

“These continuous demonstrations of kindness, generosity and humanity need to be highlighted to counter and change the dominant narrative of nastiness we see on a daily basis.”

Darwin is a good place to welcome refugees because it has a history of cultural diversity and has a very relaxed culture. There is really a sense of community here. I can feel it when I go to the shops and bump into one of my students from English tutoring and we chat in the aisles at Coles or Woolies. On the other hand, Darwin is also losing a lot of people. Not many young families stay here, so there is a lot to be said about the importance of bringing people to the region. Community sponsorship helps with regional development, and refugees have been shown to assist with the loss of population which is a big issue. One thing that the Lord Mayor of Palmerston said that stuck with me was that families are the glue, they buy houses, open businesses, encourage people to engage and develop their broader communities.

In making the submission to the community sponsorship review, I reached out to a variety of different organisations to provide support letters and or quotes. While doing this I realised there were lots of organisations and individuals than I wasn't aware of, who were very willing to support refugees and who already work in this space. For example, some women from the Uniting Church hold regular market stalls for Darwin Asylum Seeker Support and Advocacy Network (DASSAN) to raise money for those refugees who are unable to work. These women use the money raised to buy supermarket vouchers for the families. The Uniting Church at Nightcliff also has a community garden and runs activities for refugees and new arrivals.

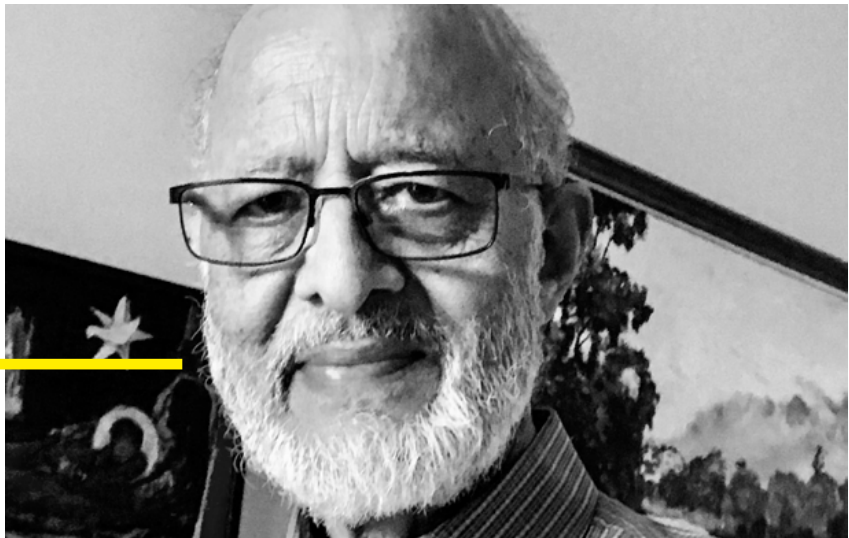
Community sponsorship is really important for me, especially when I think about how more than half of the world's refugees are children. These children are not able to play as children in Australia are able to. They can't go to the beach or a park and their education is in a state of permanent disruption. This is one of the things that upset me as it is such a waste, a waste of childhood and of potential. I hope

that through an improved community sponsorship program, we could provide families with a safe space and foster that potential.

I also think that a well structured and funded community sponsorship program would, apart from the economic and regional development benefits, really tap into the generosity and kindness of the community that is there. This would develop further inter-cultural understanding and change the narrative about refugees from a securitised perspective to one of humanity and kindness. This change in narrative will make for stronger, more cohesive communities. It needs also to be remembered that, more often than not it is the refugees and migrants who receive such kindnesses and a warm welcome, who give back to the community.

What gives me hope and has reinforced my belief in humanity has been the myriad of smaller community efforts, generousities and kindnesses. Examples of this are the Uniting Church stall ladies, the Men's Shed, the patience and kindness of the coffee shop waitress in encouraging my students as well as support from the many larger well known community organisations and councils. These continuous demonstrations of kindness, generosity and humanity need to be highlighted to counter and change the dominant narrative of nastiness we see on a daily basis. With networks established through community sponsorship, we will be able to change the national narrative around refugees.

FATHER ARNOLD HEREDIA



Knox - VIC

Originally from Pakistan, Father Arnold Heredia has worked for human rights since the early 1970s. Now retired, he dedicates all his time to the rights of persecuted communities and getting them to safety through his engagement with international organisations and the creation of his organisation, Links and Consolidation Network.

I have been doing human rights work since 1972 in Pakistan. In collaboration with other churches and human rights groups. Our organisation, Idara-e-Amn-o-Insaf (Commission for Justice & Peace) ran four different projects to support worker communities. The first of these was preventing settlements from being demolished to allow for developments. These settlements were not small. Generally, had more than 200,000 people living in them, in small houses very close together. We also addressed women's concerns and provided legal support to non-unionised workers, as the vast majority of them could not afford lawyers. As an organisation, we always tried to give people the tools and the knowledge to tackle their problems themselves. We also ran a publication in Urdu and English, called 'The Toiler' - a reference to the one who sweats to make a living.

In 1986, I was asked by Asma Jehangir, a prominent advocate and women's human rights activist, if I would join the to-be-established Human Rights Commission for Pakistan. The executive, among others, consisted of representatives from every minority religious group. Amazingly, these were consistently re-elected by the members of whom 98% were Muslim. This organisation worked for the rights of all downtrodden Pakistanis.

When I arrived in Australia in 2001, I was working in the church. I didn't have much time for my human rights work. During that time, I was only able to assist people on an individual basis. Now that I am retired, I am able to dedicate myself completely to human

rights on a much broader scale and that is what led to the creation of Links and Consolidation Network in 2017. The name is inspired by what we actually do. We establish links with refugees and asylum seekers as well as organisations who can assist them in the countries they have fled to. Subsequently we endeavour to build a network with the people and organisations who can assist these refugees to be resettled in a safe country. At present we are working with three church agencies in Canada. So far we have been able to assist around 10 individuals who have been sponsored by them. The process takes around 3 years and we are with the refugees at each step of the process.

The Canadian sponsorship program, especially the one run by churches in Canada, provides wrap around support to families that arrive in the country. For example, when a church sponsors a family, there is always one family in the community that volunteers to be a 'foster-family' to those arriving. When the family arrives, they are not simply introduced to the church and then expected to fend for themselves. That foster-family is always with them. They take them to the government agencies, help with processing documentation, get them coupons and are there for general support. This is because, for many newly arrived families, English is not their first language and they need some extra support. The \$35,000 that the church raises for each family is given to them on a quarterly basis to cover their daily expenses. The state department advances the family a loan to cover their medical check up and airfare, repayable when they start to earn a decent salary. The success of this model is reflected through the data. Within a year, 55% of those people who were sponsored by the community are self-supporting. Whereas 90% of government sponsored families continue to be reliant on government assistance. Community support is very important and makes an enormous difference. It has proven to be successful, cheap and practical.

“The success of this model is reflected through the data. Within a year, 55% of those people who we are sponsored by the community, are self-supporting. Whereas 90% of government sponsored families continue to be reliant on government assistance.”

The Australian government, in attempting a review of its Community Sponsorship Program, could use the Canadian model and specifically the church model as their template. If we can get churches and organisations, and specifically those in country churches, as well as donors, to sponsor families and individuals, we would be able to bring refugees to areas that have need of people and who will welcome them. This is really important as many regional areas need young families to live and work in their areas.

What keeps me going is the exemplar in the 'Parable of The Good Samaritan'. A traveller sees a beaten up stranger lying by the wayside. He alights from his donkey and attends to him. Binds his wounds and places him on his donkey. He takes him to an inn and tells the innkeeper to care for him, also paying him an advance. He promised to pay any balance on his return. The parable ends with the words: "Go and do the same." This parable inspires me every day. Refugees and asylum seekers have nowhere to go. They are innocent - 'beaten up' persons. They haven't committed any crime. It is our responsibility to help them.

KATE LEAHY



Adelaide - SA

Based in Adelaide, Kate works for Welcoming Australia on their organisation's campaign communications.

In making the South Australian submission to the community sponsorship review, we at Welcoming Australia consulted first with our clients. These individuals come from forced migration backgrounds and possess visas ranging from bridging-E visas to permanent residency or citizenship. They are our first stakeholders and were our first point of call in making the submission. As an organisation that works with and for refugees, we consult on everything that we do and we were looking to see what community sponsorship would mean to our clients, and what would make it accessible to them. We then worked with churches in the areas from different denominations as they all provide really strong practical support to individuals from refugee backgrounds. We were consulting with them on how they would be able to get involved in community sponsorship on a more structured basis.

A huge part of what we do as Welcoming Australia is looking at how people can be in situations where they are able to belong, contribute and thrive. Community sponsorship is pivotal to that as the environment in which people resettle and build a home is very important. This is especially the case for individuals or families who have had to resettle without all their family members. These people can feel as if there is something missing and this is just one of the areas in which community through a sponsorship framework is important. Approaching resettlement as a whole of community approach to ensure that the broader community takes ownership of the process and is leading it, whether that be churches, schools, sporting clubs or mosques. Community sponsorship gives people the chance to actually belong where they may not already have a family connection.

South Australia would be a good place to welcome people from refugee backgrounds through the community sponsorship model as it is a very community-oriented place. I think this is helped by the fact that South Australia is smaller than other eastern states. There are also established welcome zones, and welcome cities here in South Australia, so there are connections that are existing already that can be activated in response to someone coming to the country and being able to provide that support in terms of employment and housing. We do have a long history of regional resettlement in regional South Australia and people being able to find that sense of belonging as well.

What gives me hope for the future is when you see more and more people, every day Australians taking action. Whether that is wanting their local council to sign up to be a refugee welcome zone or Welcoming City, whether it is people volunteering their time to help individuals or families who are new to Australia. It's not the big corporations, or the grandma who is retired and who spends her days in front of the local MP's office demanding that they offer safety to people seeking asylum. It's the volunteers who go out of their way to factor in their volunteering hours or their activism hours, making that a priority where they are doing something bigger than themselves.

MELISSA SULLIVAN



Mornington Peninsula - VIC

My New Neighbour Ambassador Melissa Sullivan works to make her broader community more receptive to refugees and new migrants. Having worked with the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre on the Right Track Awareness Campaign, in addition to the Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre's Youth Programs, Melissa has recently completed a Bachelor of Arts in International Relations and a Graduate Certificate in International and Community Development.

I learnt about the My New Neighbour campaign after writing a research assignment about this initiative at uni. I needed to find a campaign for my policy unit that was based on principles of community development and the community refugee sponsorship initiative was a great example. I was curious about the progress of the campaign, so I reached out to the campaign manager - Shankar Kasynathan to find out. Soon after that, I was given the opportunity to apply and become a My New Neighbour ambassador for my local government area.

The Mornington Peninsula is a Refugee Welcome Zone but not many people from recent refugee backgrounds have settled here. This is partially because the Peninsula does not have refugee settlement services like other parts of Victoria.

When I started reaching out to organisations to be a part of my submission my local government area was under stage four Covid-19 restrictions, which made it quite difficult to connect and everything had to be conducted over Zoom. After some desk research, I found several social justice organisations in my area that I was not aware of. Many of these organisations had been advocating for refugee justice and lobbying our local government for a long time. I reached out to the Mornington Peninsula Human Rights group, then the Southern Women's Action Network and my local Amnesty group. It branched out from there and we had a small network of social justice groups and not for

profits talking about My New Neighbour and how they could help a potential new neighbour if sponsorship was improved in Australia.

I think community sponsorship is important because it provides wrap around support during resettlement. Instead of arriving in a new country and being paired up with one case worker, sponsorship could provide an individual or a family support as well as friendship from a group of people. It is really about the social cohesion sponsorship creates in the broader community and I think it's a much better way to welcome people.

Most of the quotes used in the Mornington Peninsula's submission were from social justice groups and not for profits but one came from my new friend Sunita who I met in the process. She fled Bosnia in 1995 with her family when she was a child. Sunita is grateful for her families' safety and opportunities in Australia, and to pay it forward, she is willing to provide accommodation to a refugee family. I thought that was really touching and a strong example of the goodwill that exists in my community.

What also struck me was that during stage 4 lockdown, people were willing to make the time to connect and work together on this issue. This really gave me hope for refugee justice and our future as a nation.

After working on this submission, I am feeling proud that I come from a community where many people support refugees and are ready to put their hand up and help someone new to their neighbourhood. I am glad that there is a conversation about community sponsorship happening in places like the Mornington Peninsula and other Local Government areas who made submissions to the community sponsorship review.

LIBBY WILLIAMS



Fremantle - WA

Having previously worked as a primary school teacher for the past 20 years, Elizabeth Williams now spends most of her time volunteering with a range of groups and organisations in the asylum seeker and refugee sector.

In addition to volunteering with Amnesty, convening the Fremantle Action Group which runs the Fremantle Pantry Project for the Centre for Asylum Seekers Refugees and Detainees (CARAD), I volunteer with Welcoming Careers at the Asylum Seeker Hub as a careers counsellor. I'm also a member of the West Australian Refugees and People Seeking Asylum Network (WARPSAN) and the Social Justice Commission for the Uniting Church.

I have been a member of Amnesty for around 30 years and have been passionate about refugees and the obstacles faced by them for as long as I can remember. I became involved with Amnesty when I was 21 during my first teaching post in a small mining town. A woman I had got to know in town was keen to start an Amnesty group. I am not sure how she knew it would be something I would be interested in, but she asked me if I wanted to be a part of it. That was my first experience of an Amnesty Action Group and it was a very positive one!

“Fremantle is a very inclusive community and there is a great deal of tolerance and acceptance for people of all walks of life.”

My involvement with Amnesty has changed over the years. When I was busy raising three kids and teaching, I was lucky to get to a meeting once a month. But I did always manage to keep in touch somehow, joining Amnesty groups when I could, writing letters from home and making donations.

Fremantle is a very inclusive community and there is a great deal of tolerance and acceptance for people of all walks of life. That's one of the reasons I think it would be a perfect place to welcome refugees through the community sponsorship program. This was highlighted to me through the submission process. The problem I had was keeping the submission short enough!

I reached out to our local state and federal members to start with, as I had developed a relationship with them through the Fremantle Pantry Project for CARAD. Both Simone McGurk MLA and Josh Wilson MP let us use their offices as drop off points for donations and regularly encourage their networks to donate. I also reached out to many community groups including the local football club, community learning centre, Refugee Rights Action Network, community members etc. I was so impressed with the willingness to participate that I was met with throughout our community.

Community sponsorship is important, first and foremost, because I think belonging to a supportive community is essential to wellbeing. By putting sponsorship in the hands of the community, giving them ownership of the process, will make for a much better experience for those who are seeking asylum. That word community is the most important word in the whole process, joining a sympathetic community is the best way of making people feel welcome and that they have a place in which they belong. If new arrivals are actively involved in the community it will help to dispel racist myths and increase general community acceptance as well.

Another reason I think the community sponsorship program is important is that it would be difficult to trust any government to run it effectively. If the responsibility can rest with communities, there is a far greater chance that it will be a successful program.

For many refugees, Fremantle would be very similar to communities they have either experienced back at home, with friendly neighbours and support networks around them. This must be remembered because community is everything for people seeking asylum or trying to find refuge.

What keeps me going is a quote often used by Amnesty (I think a lot of the people I volunteer with might be a bit sick of hearing it!)

If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito. – The Dalai Lama.

What's important is the knowledge that making a difference to one person's life matters. I try not to get too focussed on the big picture or get overwhelmed by how much needs to be done. I think that if I can make one bit of difference to one person's life today, then that is a good day. Small wins keep me going. I had a meeting just yesterday about a fundraising project to get six Afghan women living in Indonesia to Canada through their community sponsorship program. Thinking about people like those six women, and how a little bit of effort on our part will completely change their lives, is what I find motivating.

“I think that if I can make one bit of difference to one person's life today, then that is a good day. Small wins keep me going.”

LISA SINHA

Gippsland - VIC



Currently retired, Lisa Sinha, has spent the last 30 years working in settlement and multicultural services in the Gippsland Region. Growing up in Melbourne in the 60s, Lisa is passionate not only about welcoming and supporting new arrivals, but indigenous rights and making Australia a more equitable and empathetic place.

Having seen resettlement in Gippsland across the years, I am able to say that community sponsorship provides invaluable support that government led programs cannot achieve. After World War II there were waves of refugees from Poland, Ukraine and other parts of Europe who came to Gippsland. These communities are now our elders, many of whom are in their 80s or 90s.

Subsequently, in the 1990s, there were the Bosnians sponsored by their relatives and the Sudanese in the early 2000s. Many of the Sudanese families settled in La Trobe Valley because of the affordable housing, while the young people were attracted by the work in abattoirs in Wonthaggi and Poowong. These pull factors were not sustainable and required us in the resettlement space to think about what components and factors would encourage people to stay in the area in the future.

We looked at what worked, and what wasn't working and took examples from other communities around regional Victoria such as Warrnambool to see how we could be more successful. Through this we found that the general community needed to be supportive of those arriving and take ownership of that process. Secondly, it helped significantly if there was already an established community from the person's own background if possible. We took these learnings and used them when we welcomed the Karen community to Gippsland in around 2007/2008 through an iteration of the community sponsorship program.

The community in Gippsland sponsored Karen families who had been stuck on the Thai border in UN camps for many years. As the community was the driver for this sponsorship, there was no one asking this time around 'who sent them here' or ringing me up to tell me that they had seen two people from the resettled community walking down the street at night. People were well aware of who the Karens were, what their situation was and they knew how they could be involved before the Karen families even arrived because we had held many workshops and information sessions. Individuals, churches and businesses put up their hands to sponsor families, many of whom were mothers and their children. At the same time, I knew that for the initiative to be successful and for people to stay in the community, we also needed to ensure that we sponsored community leaders who would take care of the new families. I personally sponsored two monks, whose role was to look after the other families who came, supporting and guiding them as well as acting as an intermediary.

For the Karen families we sponsored, they are still there in Gippsland 14 years later. Since then, they have also been able to sponsor family members to come over, and very few individuals have drifted to other communities or areas. For me, the best way to see if community sponsorship has worked is looking at whether it has been sustainable, and for us in Gippsland, it has.

As one would expect, there were sometimes teething issues when welcoming sponsored individuals and families. For example, the community in Gippsland initially had a hard time understanding the role of monks in the Karen community and how to interact with them. Many of the welcoming community wanted to hug or shake hands with the monks and they didn't understand that out of respect, you shouldn't touch them. This was

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something we had to work through with workshops on expectations, and cultural dos and don'ts. What we learnt is that cross cultural engagement is a process of constant negotiation. On the flipside, for some of the communities that were resettled to Gippsland, there was also a bit of an adjustment period as one would assume for anyone adapting to a new context. One area where it stood out was in terms of shopping, before literacy levels had been fully developed. Sometimes resettled individuals would have to poke small holes into the bottom of the flour, sugar, salt bags to taste what it was if they couldn't find someone to ask.

I think why the resettlement of the Karen community was so successful is because they were able to build such strong connections and these strong friendships are still there. For me, I feel an overwhelming sense of pride that those that I sponsored or helped get sponsored, have their own sense of belonging, and agency and that's all about them. To me, community sponsorship is all about that – you are there with them for the journey, giving them the tools, and through this people are able to create their own sense of community.

I think I am passionate about the rights of others because of the context in which I grew up and who I was surrounded by. My father came from India in the 50s as a skilled migrant when it was still very much a White Australia. Growing up in the 60s, people would always say to my sister and I 'oh look at you girls, you are so exotic with brown skin, how nice'. We were still very much "othered" despite our mum being from New Zealand. We were growing up in a white Anglo world, which was painfully evident when you opened a book, looked on TV or even looked around you. In the 70s, it was what I call 'food, flags, and costumes', where multiculturalism was belittled into the palatable tip of

the iceberg. This was where, 'we will eat the souvlaki, we will enjoy all the food and costumes, but can you leave your values, different political ideas at the door'.

Another thing that I think inspired me to work in this space was the fact that my dad's family was active in the civil rights movement in India, fighting for the rights of the untouchables and other populations. My grandma was very involved in the independence and civil rights movement and she went to jail multiple times. Even in my immediate family, my mum was passionate about Australian history and indigenous land rights. As a result of this, I think where I grew up and my family's passions helped point me in the direction I went.

What keeps me going is the younger ones coming through, like my own daughter (whose father was from a Cambodian refugee background), who is so articulate on matters of diversity and equality, and people like Shankar at Amnesty. To me there is a younger generation that needs to take over, and we have had enough of the pale, stale and male.

Sometimes I think "Oh, there is no one in this country to look up to and I might as well move to New Zealand." But then I remember there are so many up and coming young people and we just need to step aside and listen. There are people like Harriet Shing, Lidia Thorpe, Sarah Hanson-Young. There are young people to look up to and I am pinning my hope on the next generation being more empathetic.

NINA ASHFIELD- COOKE

Sunshine Coast - QLD



Having studied and worked in microbiology, Nina then turned to activism. An Amnesty activist for the last six years, Nina also works with the Sunshine Coast Refugee Action Network to make their region more receptive to those experiencing forced migration.

I became involved with the My New Neighbour Campaign through my activism with Amnesty International Australia on the Sunshine Coast. I have been an Amnesty activist for almost six years now, starting while I was in university. Being an Amnesty activist empowered me to stand up for justice, taught me about different social change methods and helped me to discover my burning passion for community building and organising.

The opportunity to create the Sunshine Coast's submission to the community sponsorship review was very welcome because of all the pre-existing connections Amnesty Sunshine Coast have built in the community. We had been working on the My New Neighbour campaign locally to bring community organisations, university academics, sporting groups, churches and businesses together to act for refugee rights. The submission to the review was a great opportunity to further build on those networks and demonstrate all of the support that was there in the community for refugees and people seeking safety.

When we started working on the My New Neighbour campaign, our aim was to get the local council on board to pass a motion of support. Due to the political landscape on the Sunshine Coast, we knew that we needed to have a lot of backing from the community before we could present our proposal to the local councillors. Therefore we did a number of different events to collect petition signatures from people in the local area and raise awareness of the community sponsorship program. We reached out to other community groups who were doing refugee advocacy and support work. Through this we all came together and formed a network which allowed our reach to extend that bit further, as all these organisations that were newly collaborating could share the community sponsorship petition and message that bit further. Now a lot of those groups are preparing to become sponsors themselves.

I believe that community sponsorship is a mutually beneficial program, both for the people who are newly arriving and for the local community as a whole. A newly arriving person, who comes into a sponsorship group, instantly has access to these networks of welcoming people and a variety of support. It works in the other direction as well. For the already established local people, they get to experience new friendships, perspectives and connections, and the benefits of a more diverse community flow through to the whole region.

On the Sunshine Coast we have so many community members who are willing and interested in supporting refugees. There is the Buddies Refugee Support Group, who regularly host Learn English Holidays to facilitate newly resettled folks from the city to visit the Sunshine Coast for a week of activities. Welcome to Maleny hosts Welcome Days for refugees to provide opportunities for community connection and experiences. When the Sunshine Coast was a resettlement area in the past, many locals provided assistance to newly arrived refugees. For example, folk would provide transportation, English lessons, and community support. For those people, when the Sunshine Coast stopped being a resettlement area, it took away their purpose in the refugee justice movement. I think, because of this, there is a lot of appetite in the community to be able to provide that type of support again.

What gives me hope is, all of the beautiful connections that are made through grassroots activism. Part of the reason why the My New Neighbour Campaign was really appealing to us, was because we feel like it really gets down to that grassroots level and helps to build that diversity and inclusion across the community. We are simultaneously fighting for policy change and helping to create a community where refugees and people seeking safety can feel safe and included. Meeting other people and groups who share the same values, and who are doing similar work and being able to come together and make an even bigger impact, is what has been really enjoyable about this campaign. Seeing how the campaign has spread through the local community, gives me hope.

“We are simultaneously fighting for policy change and helping to create a community where refugees and people seeking safety can feel safe and included.”

SHAMREEZA RIAZ



Logan - QLD

Shamreeza Riaz is a PhD candidate and research assistant at Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Brisbane, Australia. She mainly works on human rights law, cybercrime, and freedom of speech. Shamreeza has been involved with refugee rights since her time at university in Pakistan.

Before I moved to Australia, back in 2008 when I was studying at university in Islamabad, there was an Afghan refugee camp in the neighbourhood of my university. In 2009, two suicide attacks happened at my university and as a result, the government ordered the refugees to vacate the camp despite them having nothing to do with the explosions. The residents of the camp were worried and as students passed through the area of the camp to access the university, women, children, and elderly people would often stop individual students and request for them to convey their concerns to the government and university. I discussed the situation with one of my professors and we started a campaign to share the

camp's distress with the government authorities and to get the camp's residents appropriate support. Later I wrote my very first article titled Expulsion of Afghan Refugees from Pakistan: A violation of the principle of non-refoulement. For me this was a very important experience and has led to me being involved with the advocacy and refugee focused space wherever I go.

In 2015, my husband and I got PhD scholarships from Queensland University of Technology and we moved to Australia from Pakistan. At the time, our twins were just one and half years old. Luckily for us, next to our home was a community hub where there were plenty of activities for kids such as little league, swimming and story time. Both my husband and I spent the last few years dividing our time up between the community hub where we met many refugee families and the university for our research work. In the community hub, I made my friends who were from refugee backgrounds and had settled in Logan, Queensland. They sometimes

“I believe Logan and Brisbane are great places to welcome refugees. Many people I have met from the refugee community have said they feel safe here and there are many organisations who support refugees who already work in the area.”

experienced language barriers and sometimes were unable to convey their concerns to people or to the organiser of the community hub. I served them as an interpreter for almost 3 and half years until my kids joined school last year. Even though I don't frequent the community hub as much now, many of the families I met there remain good friends.

One of the ways that I thought I could contribute and support the refugee community I had been connected with, was by working on the My New Neighbour Campaign. I believe Logan and Brisbane are great places to welcome refugees. Many people I have met from the refugee community have said they feel safe here and there are many organisations who support refugees who already work in the area. I also think that the local government in Logan is very responsive to the needs of refugees and throughout this campaign and in putting together the submission to the review of community sponsorship, I have only been met with positivity.

I think community sponsorship is particularly important as it provides new arrivals with a more supportive environment for them to establish themselves. I remember one woman I met in the community hub in Logan had come with her 6-month-old boy but had been separated from her husband. She didn't speak a word of English, but we managed to communicate using her broken Urdu. I felt that if she had been brought to Australia through community sponsorship, it would have been different, and much easier for her. Instead she faced a lot of obstacles, many of which she had to deal with alone. Community sponsorship is important for refugees as it allows them to be involved in their local area and be supported in this new environment.

Every time we had meetings with key stakeholders during the My New neighbour campaign and putting together our submission, we were met with positive attitudes. This gave me hope because, if the government approves this program, community sponsorship will be a much better way through which refugees can find safety. A new community sponsorship model could harness the goodwill and compassion present and would contribute to the successful settlement of refugees in active and cohesive Australian communities.

SALLY BAKER



Newcastle - NSW

Sally Baker is a senior lecturer at the University of New South Wales where she works on issues of equity in higher education and educational experiences of students from refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Currently based in Newcastle, Sally is also the Chair of the Refugee Education Special Interest Group, which is supported by the Refugee Council of Australia.

I think community sponsorship is important because it is hopeful. Not only for the families but the communities that support them.

I have a lot of empathy for new arrivals in particular, and I have also seen first-hand how difficult it is to move between different contexts and educational sectors. I used to be an Adult Migrant English Program teacher at TAFE in Newcastle and that work really reminds you what it's like to be in a new country. I myself am a migrant to this country, and although obviously not a forced migrant, I still remember how difficult it was to interface with Centrelink for the first time. Working in the Adult Migrant English Program gave me a strong sense of what it's like to not be able to communicate as you want to or not to be able to transmit your meaning.

I recently came back to Newcastle after living in Sydney and I wanted to feel like I was doing a bit more for the community. Making a submission to the review of the community sponsorship program was my way of doing that as I think it was something that Newcastle needs.

Ultimately, there is a good chunk of society who want to help, and community sponsorship gives people a really tangible way to do that. It's not just clicktivism, and it's not just about throwing money at an issue and not seeing where it goes. It's about being able to really invest a part of yourself. If you are someone like me, with an absolutely overwhelming sense of their own privilege and can see how the world is unfair, you want

something redressive where you can rebalance in some ways. It's really thinking about how I want to leave the world? I think community sponsorship helps to bridge that individual imperative to do something, with the benefits of the collective.

If the ideology of some of our political leaders tells us anything, it is that if we don't do anything about the humanitarian situation, then we will just be letting this rampant selfishness that we see take hold. Community sponsorship is important. It offers us something quite different, something exciting to live and hope by. It may be difficult initially, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try.

Currently, I am working with others in this field on the possibility of a higher education complementary pathway. If this was implemented, it would look like the World University Service Canada model and ideally, the places it would create would be in addition to Australia's current humanitarian intake. How this works in Canada is, every student pays amenities fees, and a portion of these are allocated to the student refugee program. There are networks of universities, and further education colleges, that then take refugees in from an academic pathway. These students are sourced from displacement contexts, identified by international organisations like UNHCR. The students will essentially get a package for the year which is part funded by the university and part funded by the students who fundraise through their amenities fees equivalent. Universities often waive the first-year fees and accommodation so the first year is covered. The idea is that the student communities assist with the navigational support and all that good stuff that we know happens through community support programs. From the second year, that student is by all means a Canadian permanent resident, they have permanence, they can move into the community and are counted as any other refugee.

Higher education participation is incredibly important for individuals from forced migration backgrounds. We know that in the case of forced migration that people are not moving for economic or personal reasons, but because they are facing persecution or violence. So for many, it is their intention to go back to their home countries when it is safe. Higher education is absolutely fundamental to nation building or rebuilding and for filling the kinds of skill shortages and knowledge gaps that will have been created by mass migration and the kind of long term impacts of trauma and torture of situations where there has been civil and violent unrest. Higher education is also really important for settlement contexts like Australia because it's a pathway to some sense of rebuilding on an individual, familial or community level. A lot of refugees have qualifications and professional experience that is difficult to recognise in a country like Australia which some would say has fundamentally racist qualification recognition processes. That makes it difficult for people to regain some of the currency that they held before they were displaced.

“I think community sponsorship is important because it is hopeful. Not only for the families but the communities that support them.”

PHILIP ARMIT

Toowoomba - NSW



Philip Armit, a member of Amnesty's Toowoomba group is passionate about helping all members of the community not only through refugee rights and sponsorship but also through climate action.

What motivated me to work on the My New Neighbour Campaign and making a submission to the review of the community sponsorship program was a couple of things. Firstly, it was my experience with the current sponsorship system. I was friends with an Afghan guy who has been trying for years to get his family over to Australia, but he really didn't have enough English for me to explain that it was unlikely that it was going to happen. He was spending a lot of money on immigration agents and that sort of thing. When I heard about the changes to community sponsorship proposed by the My New Neighbour campaign, I realised that this was exactly the sort of program he, and others in the same situation, needed.

The other motivation was that Toowoomba had a fairly big intake of Yazidis, around 800 or 900 families, a few years ago and that constituted a huge influx into our community. As their settlement agency support was tapering off you could see that there were lots of people still with high or specific support needs. So I thought the changes to community sponsorship proposed by the My New Neighbour campaign would be a great way of providing an alternative model and supporting the settlement agencies. Community sponsorship would facilitate that wrap around support that people need as they would be brought into and engaged in the community.

In making this submission and being involved in this space, I have noticed the eagerness of people in Toowoomba to help out. I saw this with a local TAFE teacher who was working with young students and wanted to provide them with the opportunity to play soccer. They approached a local coach who was really keen. Through this, I realised that the more people you contact and reach out to, the more you can see how extensive the distribution of those willing to support new arrivals to the community really is. This can be surprising, especially as we are a pretty conservative community. But one thing that I think also really helps is the attitudes of the mayor, who is totally committed and has a strong social justice streak that shines through his work.

With community sponsorship, it's a community-based solution. People are welcomed into the community and they arrive with a foundational network around them that is there to help. I think that the community can be more effective than contracted settlement agencies sometimes as they have a lot more flexibility in how they support people, where they focus, and in achieving support goals.

What gives me hope is that, when given the chance and with the right approach, people always step up. Ultimately I am pinning my hope on that.

COUNCILS SUPPORTING MY NEW NEIGHBOUR*

VIC	Yarra City
	Moreland City
	Hobsons Bay City
	Whittlesea City
	Maribyrnong City
	Brimbank City
	City of Darebin
	Banyule City
	Hume City
	Kingston City
	City of Monash
	Wodonga
	Greater Shepparton City
	City of Ballarat
	Surf Coast Shire
NSW	City of Sydney
	Inner West
	Randwick City
	Canterbury-Bankstown
	Waverley
	Bayside
	Albury City
	Griffith City
	City of Wagga Wagga
	Wollongong City
City of Newcastle	
QLD	Quilpie Shire
	Bulloo Shire
	Logan City
	Toowoomba Regional
WA	City of Fremantle
	City of Subiaco
	Town of Victoria Park
SA	City of Adelaide
	City of Port Adelaide Enfield
TAS	City of Hobart
	Huon Valley
NT	City of Palmerston
	City of Darwin
ACT	Legislative Assembly for the ACT

* List at the time of the report's publication

Publication date: March 2021

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