



NEWSLETTER August 2020

Dear Grandmothers and Frogs,

This newsletter brings **breaking news** of an untimely death in MITA.

But there is some good news, too, from the Courts with a finding in favour of release of at least one person in immigration detention.

We have news of a practical alternative to ongoing detention of refugees and people seeking asylum. Please see if you can join the **@homesafelywithus** initiative announced yesterday (9/8/20).

Another **CALL TO ACTION** relates to Government power to confiscate phones from people in immigration detention. We need you to contact Senators urging them to vote "NO".

At the same time, many of us are living under tough Covid19 lockdown. It is a time to look after ourselves and each other. We want to come through this feeling stronger and as committed as ever to securing justice for refugees. Keep on going! Don't give up! Stay safe!



BREAKING NEWS!!



A man in MITA (Broadmeadows) has died following fearful news that people in immigration detention are again being sent to Christmas Island. **More inside....**



Christmas Island has been prepared for a fresh intake of those in immigration detention and awaiting deportation. This could happen as soon as **this Wednesday**.

Visit our website today www.grandmothersforrefugees.org

Tragic news from inside MITA >>>Monday 10 August
From reliable sources

This morning the detainee of MITA Melbourne detention centre awakes to shocking news of a sudden death by one of the Detainees. The Detainees feel that it has a strong connection to the Christmas Island move that is planned very soon involving all detention centres and Prisoners getting released from prisons.

Early this morning an ambulance was seen, then it left after being there most of the morning, shortly after a van from the Corona's office, Police detectives and uniformed police had arrived on the scene. Australian border Force, Serco Security were first on the scene since this morning.

There is a sense of anxiety throughout prisons and detention centres around Australia. Not only



because of the coronavirus pandemic but because of the big question who is going to be moved to Christmas Island.

Ever since Peter Dutton and Scott Morrison announced this shock move. All detainees - we're on edge because of the history Christmas Island has. The numerous amounts of suicides, including a detainee that set himself on fire and

eventually died from his injuries. The numerous amount of Detainees that have committed self-harm in all forms.

The form of punishment that Serco officers have administered on the island, the deprivation, the torture, the daily mental health issues caused by been isolated so far away from the mainland of Australia. The mental and physical long-term scars Christmas Island has on these Detainees.

This is the answer that Peter Dutton and Scott Morrison has for this coronavirus pandemic. Their answer is instead of releasing refugees and detainees to self-isolate in their homes with their families, they would rather utilise a condemned Christmas Island detention centre all because they have been pressured by the government on why they are wasting 30 million dollars a year of taxpayer money to house one family in a detention centre on Christmas Island.

Peter Dutton and Scott Morrison knows that there is overcrowding in detention centres around Australia. They know that there is no social distancing and there is no strategic plan if there is an outbreak in detention centres. and if Serco brings the virus into the compounds then the detainees have nowhere to go and they will surely be infected. (ends)

A shameful history:

8/01/2020 . Eight People Died in Immigration Detention in 2019, 193 Since 2004, according to the Cato Institute.
19/06/2018 · Twelve refugees and asylum seekers have died while in Australian immigration detention on Manus Island and Nauru.

20/6/2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/ng-interactive/2018/jun/20/deaths-in-offshore-detention-the-faces-of-the-people-who-have-died-in-australias-care>



@homesafelywithus

Can you help?

Grandmothers for Refugees wants to hear urgently from any members who may be able to offer accommodation to a released refugee or asylum seeker.

We are looking for expressions of interest at this stage. It may be a house, room, granny flat, holiday home... any safe and supportive place.

Contact the executive at info@grandmothersforrefugees.org. We will call you back to discuss options if you like.

Release refugees to stay @homesafelywithus

9 August 2020

The **@homesafelywithus** initiative is being offered to the Commonwealth Government as a concerned community response to reduce overcrowding and the risk of Covid-19 cluster outbreaks in immigration detention facilities.

The move follows an Australian Border Force (ABF) announcement last week that it needs to relieve capacity pressure across the immigration detention network in Australia and will transfer people under a 501 classification to the reopened Christmas Island detention centre.

“For months medical experts have warned there is a high risk of coronavirus cluster outbreaks in overcrowded immigration centres and the hotels being used as alternative places of detention,” said Pamela Curr, spokesperson for the **@homesafelywithus** coalition of support groups.

“Releasing asylum seekers will reduce the public health risk which is paramount at the moment,” Ms Curr said.

“It will also save taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars being wasted on all this unnecessary security around administrative detention because Government refuses to give refugees and people seeking asylum the protection they deserve.

“This is all so costly and unnecessary - spending millions on keeping people who pose no risk in immigration detention,” said Ms Curr. “It is totally unnecessary to be moving people around like pawns on a chessboard during a pandemic when there are homes for them to go to.

“The safe, sensible and cost-effective thing to do is to release people who came here seeking asylum into the safe keeping of their families, friends and supporters. There are more than enough family and friends ready to welcome refugees into their homes and communities.”

@homesafelywithus coalition of support groups: (as at 9 August 2020)
Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project
Grandmothers for Refugees
Rural Australians for Refugees
Tassie Nannas
Tasmanian Refugee Rights Action Group
Refugee Action Collective Queensland
Refugee Action Campaign, Canberra
Refugee Action Coalition Sydney

RECENT MEDIA

The following story was issued by [Grandmothers for Refugees](#) as a media statement and generated coverage in [Ch10 News \(25/7/20\)](#) and in [online media](#).

Council to investigate possible permit breach at Mantra 'prison'

Darebin Council is investigating the use of the Bell City Mantra Hotel to detain refugees as a possible breach of planning permission. It is also questioning the hotel's use as Covid-19 'isolation cells' and its compliance with quarantine requirements.

"This place has metamorphosed from a hotel into a prison," said Cr Gaetano Greco following the passage this week of a council resolution calling for a commercial boycott of the Mantra hotel group.

Cr Greco confirmed that council officers were now "drilling down" into the permit conditions which allowed the former Preston and Northcote Community Hospital (PANCH) site to be redeveloped as hotel accommodation.

"It will be 12 months come August-September that refugees have been held there in prison-like conditions and the hotel management need to show cause as to why the current use still fits with their accommodation permit conditions.

"There would be totally different requirements if it were operating as a prison," Cr Greco said. Border Force and the Commonwealth Department of Immigration designate the Mantra facility as an APOD – a place of alternative detention. Government authorities have control of the third floor of the Mantra facility where 65 men are held under guard. Hotel guests are prevented from accessing the floor.

In a recent development, detainees showing Covid-19 symptoms were moved from the third-floor shared rooms and bathrooms to the first floor where they could be isolated in single rooms. It is understood that the men were belatedly tested for Covid-19 although results of the tests are not known.

Council on Monday (20/7/20) resolved to write to Victoria's Chief Health Officer, Brett Sutton, requesting 'an investigation into whether Mantra Bell Hotel is compliant with Vic Health protocols regarding the establishment of Isolation Cells.'

Darebin Council has previously used the Mantra Hotel for occasional official events and Councillors often attended business events there before the Covid-19 pandemic.

"It is on our doorstep, 200 metres from Town Hall," Cr Greco said. "Darebin Council has been concerned about refugees for many years when they were on Manus and Nauru. But now they are right here in our municipality, and there is an extra onus on us. We have to stand up for them," he added.

Council also resolved to write to Brisbane City Council, Adelaide City Council and any other councils with a Mantra facility in or near their council area asking them to take a similar approach to Council in the interests of human rights and basic decency.

Grandmothers for Refugees has welcomed the move by Darebin Council to investigate the 'grossly inappropriate' use of the hotel and the conditions in which the men are held.

"We support the commercial boycott of all properties under the Mantra brand," said Jean Ker Walsh, Chair of Grandmothers for Refugees. "Decent businesses don't use their assets to make money out of the misery of desperate people."

CALL TO ACTION: Use this link to send a message to the Mantra Group about your disgust with their business making money out of innocent refugees and asylum seekers.

<https://www.mantragroup.com.au/Contact-Us.aspx>

Court makes duty of care ruling for MITA man at risk of Covid-19 infection

Earlier today (Monday 10 Aug), the Federal Court of Australia ordered the Minister for Home Affairs to cease detaining a 68-year old man with multiple health conditions at the Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation (MITA) as protection against the serious risk to him of COVID-19 infection.

This is the first significant Court decision addressing the Commonwealth's duty of care to people in Australia's immigration detention network at high risk of COVID-19.

Justice Murphy heard an urgent interlocutory application on behalf of the 68-year-old man last Friday.

The Court received expert evidence from leading infectious disease experts in Victoria that group detention settings were unsafe for those at high risk of COVID-19, in spite of precautions that might be taken.

Justice Murphy ordered the Minister to advise the man's lawyers 24 hours before any further steps were taken.

Prior to his abrupt detention in late 2019, the man had lived peacefully in the Australian community for nearly a decade with his Australian citizen son and grandchildren.

His family eagerly await his return to their home so that he is able to practice 'social distancing' measures like every other resident of the State.

The sole reason for the man's detention (he is not a refugee) was an adverse 'security assessment,' made on the basis of allegations relating to his former overseas business and dating back nearly 15 years.

An independent review of the assessment recommended that it be reconsidered by ASIO at the earliest opportunity.

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ABC reports Covid-19 risk to refugees in MITA

Posted to ABC online 2/8/20

Asylum seekers in a Melbourne detention centre fear a lack of social distancing and a ban on alcohol-based hand sanitiser have left them vulnerable to coronavirus.

Photographs taken inside the Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation centre in Broadmeadows in Melbourne's north-west appear to show a lack of social distancing — one of the most effective measures in the fight against coronavirus.



Image provided to ABC online

The images have alarmed asylum seeker advocates who fear it is only a matter of time before a virus outbreak like those that hit the aged care sector and the city's public housing towers.

Detainee Amira, who did not want her real name used, shares a unit including shower facilities with two other people and said she was worried about her health. "We're really scared about this issue," she said. "There is no social distancing."

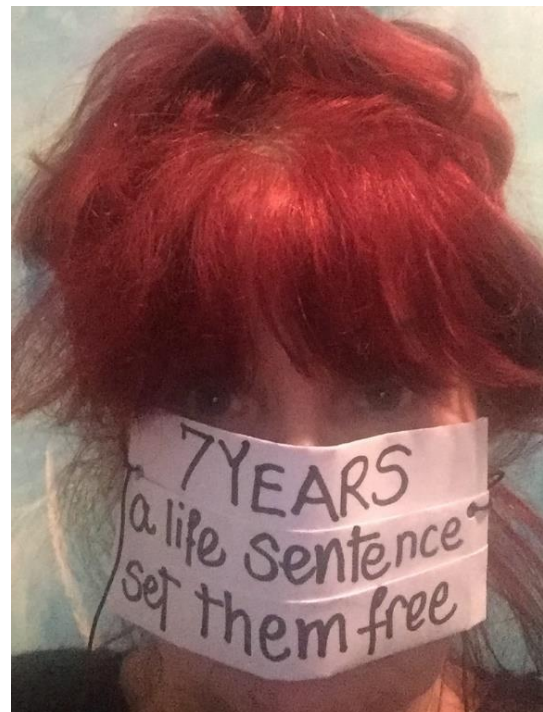
Refugee Voices

This new organisation launched last week.

<https://www.refugeevoices.org.au/>.

An important development – please check it out.

Your vigils – The UNHAPPY ANNIVERSARY 19 July 2020 (See more on the Gallery page of our website www.grandmothersforrefugees.org)



Thank you to all who sent their pics. We have put them in the Gallery on our website. www.grandmothersforrefugees.org/gallery



4000 flyers distributed

The investment in a new 6-page colour flyer* has been widely well-received with demand exceeding supply. It has given a boost to regional electorates from Indi to Corangamite. Metro electorate grandmothers from Flinders to Cooper have been letterboxing during their Covid-19 permitted walking exercise. Some went on request as far away as Nth Queensland (hello Bonney!).

On this size print run, the cost is 38cents per flyer. It was funded in part by donations. When our reserves are replenished, and if you want to order more, we will be able to do a reprint.

*Hello Committee,
I want to CONGRATULATE you all on the fantastic new flyer. I believe it is the best one we have ever had. From the front-page photo and heading to all the other information, so well put in simple to understand and relate to language. It is informative and factual. Well Done!!
Best wishes
Goldstein Grandmother
Brenda Todd.*

*Special thanks to Julie Cattlin for her design work.

Donations are always welcome.

Donations may be made by direct funds transfer to our bank account:

Name: Grandmothers for Refugees

BSB: 083170

Account No: 83 813 3480

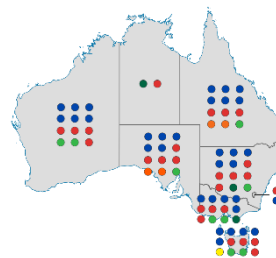
Thank you



Don't take their phones

Mobile phones are lifelines for refugees in immigration detention. Border Force wants to take that lifeline away.

A recent Committee Report recommends that the Senate pass legislation to allow confiscation of phones as 'prohibited items'. Read the full report here: [https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportsen/024483/toc_pdf/MigrationAmendment\(ProhibitingItemsinImmigrationDetentionFacilities\)Bill2020.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportsen/024483/toc_pdf/MigrationAmendment(ProhibitingItemsinImmigrationDetentionFacilities)Bill2020.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf)



CALL TO ACTION: Contact Senators in your state, and especially the crossbenchers Senators Jacqui Lambie (Tas), Stirling Griff (SA), and Rex Patrick (SA).

Go to the Resources Page at www.grandmothersforrefugees.org for the link to Senator's addresses.

Labor and Greens members of the Parliamentary Committee issued dissenting reports.

Network News



Refugee moved to high security after speaking out on Covid-19 – four now on hunger strike

Four refugees in immigration detention in Brisbane, Farhad Ramahti, Mehdi, Mehrzad and Adnan are on hunger strike in protest at the apparent punishment of Adnan for his complaints over staff failure to use personal, protective equipment (PPE) and maintain social distancing.

Farhad Rahmati, a refugee currently held in Brisbane's Immigration Transit Accommodation facility (BITA), after spending 6 years detained on Manus Island, is on day 4 of his hunger strike in protest against the removal of 22-year-old Adnan from BITA's residential compound to the high-security compound, a place usually reserved for those who have committed serious crimes.

Rahmati says that Adnan complained to a Serco manager at lunchtime on Friday July 31 that kitchen staff were not wearing PPE, and that International Health and Medical Services (IHMS) staff were not wearing masks or practising social distancing. Between 3 and 4pm that afternoon Adnan was moved to the high security wing of BITA. Rahmati believes that Adnan was moved to the high-security wing because of his complaints.

Adnan was only 15 when Australia forcibly transferred him to the Nauru Regional Processing Centre on the 20/07/2013. He is now 22. He attempted suicide on 20/07/2020, the first day of his eighth year in immigration detention. He should not be held in high security isolation.

Farhad says his own 'next meal will be with Adnan when he is returned to BITA's residential area.'

If this item and related concerns raises issues for you and your wellbeing, please reach out to one of the following agencies:

Beyond Blue

1300 22 4636 or visit

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/who-does-it-affect/older-people>

LifeLine

13 11 14 or visit

<https://www.lifeline.org.au/about/our-services>

UPCOMING EVENTS

Monday Conversations on Zoom hosted by Grandmothers NSW

Monday 17th August 2pm-3pm.

Grandmother's guest speaker meeting with Angela Fredericks. Angela Fredericks is a Biloela resident and social worker from Biloela. Since March last year, she has been working alongside other Bilo community members to bring 'Home to Bilo' a young Tamil family who are still detained on Christmas Island.

Monday 31st August 2pm-3pm. Join us for a zoom discussion and Q and A with Craig Foster.

Craig is a tireless human rights advocate involved in Indigenous rights, refugee rights and homelessness through his official roles, along with community and sports programs. He is Ambassador for Amnesty, Australia Committee Human Rights Watch, and the UNSW Australian Human Rights Institute.

Please note: these are invitation only events. To register: email:

grandmothersrefsyd@gmail.com. Put "G4R Invited" in the subject line to help confirm your invited member status.

THOSE SMALL DIVERSIONS

Here are the answers to the small diversions included in the July Newsletter.

WORDPLAY

Christmas Island has become infamous as the Federal Government's preferred place for cruel isolation of the Biloela family.


How many words of 4 letters or more can you make from the following letters? (No plurals, please).

CHRISTMAS ISLAND

chairman	dahlia	dramatic
claimant	strand	stir
charisma	dismissal	alarmist
cardinal	antiracism	radical
shard	landmass	sarcasm
drastic	martini	rascal
sadist	canal	indict
maniac	sadism	saint
salami	slant	snatch
snitch	tarmac	trial
train	chart	starch
march	hand	stand
star	sand	mind
last	arid	claim
clam	hard	liar
sail	rich	smash
rash	char	airmail

Go to <https://wordsolver.net/> for the hundreds more words that eluded me... JKW

QUIZ

1. What are the names of the two children detained on Christmas Is for more than two years? **Kopika and Tharunicaa**
2. Which federal MPs have been Immigration Minister since 19 July 2013? **Tony Bourke, Scott Morrison, Peter Dutton, David Coleman, Alan Tudge (Acting)**
3. What is the formal name of the legislative amendment that would make mobile phones prohibited in detention centres? **Migration Amendment (Prohibiting Items in Immigration Detention Facilities) Bill 2020**
4. Who (pictured) is one of the three Founders of Grandmothers Against Detention of Refugee Children? **Clare Forbes**

5. What was the name of the Norwegian ship denied permission to land asylum seekers rescued at sea? **MV Tampa**
6. Which ABC journalist won a Walkley Award for an interview about Children Overboard? **Virginia Trioli**
7. Who wrote the book *Dark Victory*? **David Marr and Marian Wilkinson**
8. What is the name of the seat held by the Acting Immigration Minister and what is his office address? (Now you have it, why not drop him a note? See Call to Action1.) **Aston. Suite 4, Level 1, 420 Burwood Highway, Wantirna South, VIC, 3152**
9. What is Scotty from Marketing's middle name? **John**
10. What is the second of the Four Demands Grandmothers make of the 46th Parliament? **End refugee family separation**

There is a lot in this edition, and we encourage you to follow events closely over coming weeks. We will do our best to keep you updated via our website: www.grandmothersforrefugees.org .

A final reminder to contact us if you can help with the [@homesafelywithus](https://www.instagram.com/homesafelywithus) initiative.

With best wishes to all for your continued safety and good health,

Jean, Margaret, Jane and Di

info@grandmothersforrefugees.org

[join@grandmothersforrefugees.org](https://www.instagram.com/grandmothersforrefugees)

Visit our website today www.grandmothersforrefugees.org