



NEWSLETTER August 2022

Dear Grandmothers and Friends

It has been 100 days since the election of the Albanese Government. This is generally regarded as sufficient time for a new administration to settle in. So, it offers us an opportunity to assess Labor's progress towards meeting commitments related to refugees laid out in the Party platform.

New members of Parliament have made their maiden speeches and we are happy to note some independents have used the occasion to acknowledge the Grandmothers for Refugees and our localised campaign for change.

In some electorates, MPs are meeting with local Grandmother groups and exchanging views on what can be done better for refugees. This is in sync with our revised objectives and our strategy to strengthen engagement with MPs across the political spectrum.

A working group of the Co-ordinating Committee has produced a discussion paper on the cost benefits of giving permanent protection and work rights to refugees. Just in time for the Jobs Summit. We include a summary of the Paper in this edition of the newsletter and some useful Fast Facts to help in your letter writing.

Welcome to your August newsletter.



Our Intent

We work for a reset of Australia's refugee policy that is consistent with **(a)** our international obligations, **(b)** our national tradition of welcome for those seeking asylum, and **(c)** basic rights to enduring protection for refugees, with safe settlement support.

We call for urgent, decisive action in the near term (first year) to:

1. Provide an adequate and dignified level of economic, social, health and educational supports for all refugees and people seeking asylum, including work rights
2. Prioritise transfer of refugees with temporary, safe haven or bridging visas on to permanent visas
3. Release people seeking asylum from onshore locked and community detention
4. Prioritise family reunion applications by refugees granted permanent protection

In support of these objectives GFR will

- **Write to and seek to meet** relevant Ministers, other government members and MPs.
- **Take action to inform local communities** of the current plight of 'unauthorised maritime arrivals'.

NEWS from the grass roots

CONTACT WITH MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT:

Wills, Higgins, and Jaga Jaga groups are all in the process of arranging to meet their MPs. **Dunkley** will have a representative from *Peta Murphy's* office to address their September meeting. Annette Berryman, Pam Dudgeon and Janet Joss from Cooper had a very productive meeting with Ged Kearney. Ged agreed to raise the issue of refugees awaiting renewal of their bridging visas who were ineligible for medicare with Minister Giles. Ged has committed to maintaining ongoing contact with Cooper.



On 26 August, **Goldstein members** met with **Zoe Daniel MP**. She listened to our presentation and had good ideas in response. Zoe plans to bring up the question of a cost benefit analysis of recent policy on refugees in parliament and was very interested in the information we had extracted from the Draft prepared by Jenni.

Next week on Friday 2 September she has invited a few more of us to join some Hazara people for morning tea in her electorate office.

Zoe is also active in setting up support groups for some Afghan families in Goldstein, part of the additional 1500 people from Afghanistan who are about to start arriving. She asked us to help her in this campaign and was interested in our contacts in the community. It was a productive meeting.

Hani Vodstrcil

VIGILS:

Vigils were held in **Casey, Bendigo, Wills and Kooyong**. All elicited a positive public response. **The vigil at Monique Ryan's office, brought together members from Kooyong, Jaga Jaga, Cooper, and Casey**. It was a wonderful photo opportunity and made a great impact on Twitter, where Monique mentioned her great respect for Grandmothers.



REFUGEE AWARENESS and SUPPORT:

Macnamara meeting had a speaker who had provided services to refugees in PNG. It was a valuable insight into the dire situation of refugees in PNG. **Bendigo** planned a consultation with local Karen refugees. On behalf of **Higgins** group, Jean Ker Walsh was guest speaker at Glenferrie Rotary and there was a very positive response with some guests wanting to connect or reconnect with Higgins group.

MEETINGS PLUS:

Greater Perth held their **inaugural meeting** and proposed a **Curtin group be established**. **Dunkley** secured a library venue for their meetings; **Casey** is looking for a venue in the Yarra Valley to hold a monthly meeting to support local members residing there and Higgins is also looking for a meeting venue. **Wills** follows their vigils with coffee whereas **Cooper** have decided to socialise with coffee 30 minutes before their meeting. **Bendigo** has weekly coffee mornings.

IDEAS BREWING:

- Use personal refugee stories and guest speakers to enhance awareness of refugees.
- Continue campaigns with other groups about the funding of detention offshore.
- Support private sponsorship to Canada.

PLANNED ACTIVITIES:

Dunkley - Develop an education role in the local community

Deakin - Suggest members acquaint with ALP platform. Research local asylum seeker/refugee support initiatives. Contact Andrew Giles, Tony Burke & Jim Chalmers re attendance by refugee groups at Jobs & Skills Summit. Discussion with other Liberal held seats such as Casey re parliamentary contact.

Casey - Preparation of a power point display to accompany community engagement.

Higgins - Discuss showing of Beyond Fear

Cooper - Development of survey to ascertain availability, interests, ideas, and ways in which the group can further engage its members. Continue to develop the group's action plan. Use of a What'sApp chat within the group.

Jaga Jaga - Distribute flyers at train stations, especially if there are still flyers available that explain the conditions of those on bridging visas.

Bendigo - Stall at September Bendigo Book Fair. Some members to attend conversation sessions conducted by Bendigo Friends and Mentors for refugees, learning English.

Greater Perth - Activist Betty McGeever to speak at their next meeting when they will also explore potential for establishing a Freemantle group. Focus on education of members re various types of visas and their effects on the plight of refugees.

LETTER WRITING:

Most Grandmothers for Refugees groups are stepping up their letter writing activity which is in line with our strategic approach to engagement with the new Parliament.

This month letters have been particularly directed to Labor parliamentarians showing support for Andrew Wilkie's Bill to end mandatory detention. **Cooper** has sent letters of thanks to *Andrew Wilkie* and *Monique Ryan* for the support given by them to refugees and to Grandmothers in Parliament. **Bendigo** engaged in a four-week letter writing activity, aiming to motivate silent members. **Kooyong** group proposed a joint letter writing initiative with the **Chisholm** and **Deakin** groups.

For ideas and tips on writing to your local MPs and Senators, you will always find them here at [Letter Writing | Australian Refugee Action Network ARAN](#).

The theme for this month is *Abolish the 'Fast Track' Assessment Process*.

Put your ideas into your own words, and always ask for your request for information or action to be passed on to the relevant Minister. MP and Senator Addresses are available in the ARAN writing kit.

MAKING A (BOOK)MARK FOR REFUGEES

NEW RESOURCE FOR YOU TO USE WHEN ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY



Front side (above)

Reverse side (below)

Refugees bring skills and ideas. They just need a fair go.

Grandmothers for Refugees is a grassroots movement that advocates for compassionate welcome and safe settlement of people seeking asylum.

For information check out our website and consider joining us. www.grandmothersforrefugees.org
Contact us via email
info@grandmothersforrefugees.org

Initiated as an idea by the Bendigo group, we have created this bookmark (above) with a key positive message about refugees who **bring skills and ideas**, backed up by a call to action – **They just need a fair go.**

20,000 bookmarks will be available across electorates to use in your community engagement activities.

Bendigo has plans to hand them out to visitors at the city's September Book Fair and place them as a free takeaway at their public library.

Bookmarks can be given out at U3A sessions and at school and Service Club speaker events. Hand them out at regular vigils. Offer them to your local library. Place a pile at your local MP's office when you visit. Even your local bookstore might be willing to have a small bundle at hand.

Positive feedback about our election cards encouraged us to think of other positive ways to engage with people and give them a short pithy message about what refugees offer our communities.

Bookmarks have a long life, so we think this is a useful way to spread our key message. We hope you think so too.

Donations received but not spent for the election campaign are being used for the production of our bookmarks. Your gifts keep on giving. Thank you!

To order bookmarks for your electorate, send us an email at info@grandmothersforrefugees.org and put **BOOKMARKS** in the subject line. Tell us how many you would like us to send (maximum 500 for this first run) and the delivery address.

First refugee families welcomed to Australia under community sponsorship program

This is an edited version of a report by **Ben Doherty** of *The Guardian* 28 August 2022 Read it in full here: [First refugee families welcomed to Australia under new community sponsorship program | Australian immigration and asylum | The Guardian](#)



Ten-year-old George Al Daoud arrives in Australia with a declaration. “My English is ... medium,” he announces, smiling broadly.

George and his family are among the fortunate first to be resettled in Australia under the new Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot, which allows community groups across the country to sponsor new refugees....

Photograph: Jessica Hromas/The Guardian

Australia’s [Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot](#) (CRISP) – which will resettle 1,500 refugees over the next three years – is based on Canada’s long-running Private Sponsorship of Refugees program. PSR has run uninterrupted for more than 40 years and resettled more than 325,000 refugees, in addition to refugees resettled by the Canadian government.

Refugees resettled under Australia’s pilot program will be counted as part of the federal government’s existing humanitarian program, but the immigration minister, Andrew Giles, on Friday committed to making future community sponsorship additional to the government’s intake.

“We will see up to 5,000 places through these programs, and these places, critically, will be in addition to those places for resettlement supported by the government,” Giles said.

“The community sponsorship program is something that can change our country as well as changing the lives of people in need of resettlement.”

Comment - Jean Ker Walsh

Any humanitarian response to the global refugee situation is welcomed. This 2022 scheme is in part a return to an era when Australia actually welcomed refugees. ([See here Ben Doherty’s story Sept 2018](#))

The Albanese Government is at risk of having an each-way bet on refugees. Bringing in some families (generating “beautifully told stories”, as Minister Giles tweeted) while forcibly sending out others (with as little fanfare as possible) starts to look like a smoke-screen to reduce visibility of a continuation of the cruel policies of the former Coalition governments.

Labor policy is clear. It will continue to deny settlement to thousands of refugees already in Australia (purely because they came by sea after 19 July 2013). The “solution” is to force them into resettlement in NZ, US or Canada.

But there is a cruel irony in modelling a future refugee sponsorship plan for Australia on Canada’s successful program of generous welcome, while at the same time forcing refugees already here (including children born here) to leave for places like Canada if they ever want to live freely in a welcoming community. That fails the common-sense test, let alone any test of decency.

Refugees already here should be eligible for the Community-sponsored resettlement program. After being used as political pawns for nine years or more, surely they have earned that. We, the communities that have been supporting them all these years, deserve also the right to make them officially welcome with the encouragement of our government. #

THE COSTS OF CURRENT REFUGEE POLICY

A working group of the Grandmothers for Refugees Coordinating Committee has tackled the difficult task of analysing the costs of current refugee policy as a basis for finding savings and benefits to be had from changes based on compassion rather than cruelty.

Led by **Kooyong member, Jenni King**, the group has completed their work in time for the Jobs Summit where the economic contribution to be had from migration will be a major consideration.

This paper examines the economic costs to Australia of the current incarcerations and restrictions on those refugees and asylum seekers on Temporary Protections Visas (TPVs), Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEVs) and Bridging Visas (BVEs) and Transitory Persons.

It further outlines the way these visa holders can, relatively seamlessly, be transferred to Permanent Visas with particular short-term emphasis on the granting of universal work rights for them and the provision of humanitarian support to facilitate their study and training where needed.

The granting of universal work rights to the legacy caseload and transitory persons at a time of labour shortages in Australia will, in addition to saving costs, go some way to providing ready workers. Most of these people are of working age and many have experience in some key labour shortage categories.

Taking action on the requests of this Grandmothers for Refugees paper would help align Australia's refugee policy and practices with our international obligations and traditions.

For a copy of the paper, download it from the Resources Page on our website www.grandmothersforrefugees.org

We encourage you to use this paper as an information source for writing to your local MP. Here are two examples of how the case can be made either in general terms or by citing key statistics drawn from the document.>>>



Workers are already here

It was never the right thing to heap cruelty on top of their trauma when people came by sea seeking asylum. There are 30,000 people in Australia who have been pleading for nine years for the right to work and rebuild their lives, contributing to the social and economic life of the country.

Refugees have skills and ideas to contribute. They are already here. No expensive, overseas marketing campaign is needed. They know us and want to stay. Let's admit we need them and make them part of the worker solution considered at the Jobs Summit. Give them permanency and they will work.

Jean Ker Walsh, Woodend

To The Editor,

As espoused by some in the union movement, while internal training will not fill all workforce shortages there is scope to maximise the benefits to Australia by using local labour, some needing retraining. A ready source of internal workers are those trapped in Australia's heartless and expensive treatment of those refugees and asylum seekers on temporary, humanitarian and bridging visas who arrived by boat in excess of 7 years ago and caught here in limbo.

Some have work rights others not. In excess of 80% of these people are under 45 years of age, have functional English skills, and many have years of sought-after work experience as chefs, personal carers, construction workers, carpenters, builders and plumbers (Supporting economic growth in uncertain times, John van Kooy). These are the very skills amongst those called for by industry leaders. The urgency of filling labour shortages is hindered in part by the Federal Government's policy obstinacy in not granting universal work rights to this group. Work rights do not counter their current unfortunate residency policy for these approximately 31000 people.

Jenni King, Kooyong

Finally...

WHAT AUSTRALIA CAN LEARN FROM NEW ZEALAND'S COMPASSIONATE RESETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES

Join us at this important FORUM on Saturday 10 September: 2-3.15pm AEST

Attend ONLINE, or IN PERSON at St Paul's Cathedral, corner Swanston & Flinders Street, Melbourne. **All attendees are asked to register by Friday 9 September.** After registering, you will receive confirmation email containing the link to join the online forum.

Book your ticket here: <https://www.trybooking.com/CBUVP>



Our special guests in this forum will compare and contrast the way Australia and New Zealand have responded to people who have sought protection by exercising their right to seek asylum under the United Nations Convention on Refugees.

Instead of punishing refugees for seeking safety as we currently do, Australia should be offering safe resettlement and treating all people who seek our protection with dignity, fairness and compassion.

Help us to promote - share the FB event on your social media: <https://www.facebook.com/events/454176886582012>



That's it for this month. Best wishes,

Jean, Margaret, Janet, Virginia, and Therese