



NEWSLETTER November/December 2022

Dear Grandmothers and Friends

Welcome to this, our last newsletter for the year. As such, it invites a reflection on what has been achieved or, indeed, what has *not* yet been achieved with and for refugees during 2022.

We certainly sense that members are feeling more positive than they were at this time 12 months ago. In this past year we have been more active in more electorates with more determination than ever before. Mutual support at electorate levels (we will always value the G4R Campaign Flying Squad!) has seen real friendships grow within the process of planning and being in campaign action together. We hope all groups will take advantage of the end of year as a prompt for personal reflections on what you have achieved together locally.

To make a point to the Parliament in its final sitting week for 2022, Grandmothers for Refugees endorsed the Convergence on Canberra.



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TODAY AT 11 AM - 1:30 PM

Canberra Convergence - Permanent Visas For All Refugees

Parliament House, Canberra

We report on this significant action in solidarity with refugees through the experience shared by members from the Casey (Vic) electorate who made the 27-hour round trip by bus, adding their voices to the refugee-led campaign for permanent visas for ALL refugees.

Grandmothers for Refugees is growing and working increasingly as a national movement capable of speaking with a united voice to the national parliament. We report in this edition on two private meetings our Co-chairs had with senior Ministers of the Albanese Government. Both recognised the importance of our work.

At the time of writing, there is still no definitive word confirming delivery by the Albanese Government on its pre-election promise to transfer refugees on temporary visas to permanent protection. We – and the Government - understand that refugees and their supporters are impatient for action.

In one final push for 2022, let's continue to press hard for priority implementation of Labor's pre-election commitments. Then we can put permanent protection for *all* refugees on the Christmas and Holiday Season Wishlist for 2023.



Convergence on Canberra 29 November 2022

Grandmothers for Refugees proudly joined a coalition of refugee communities and advocacy groups to endorse the Canberra Convergence.



Casey Grandmothers for Refugees go to The Canberra Convergence

We left Melbourne at 9pm on Monday night and travelled overnight by bus to meet other supporters and refugees at Parliament House.

We were a mixture of Hazara men from Afghanistan and Iranian men and women with a sprinkling of Aussies and a PHD student from Ireland. There were 36 of us. The other bus from Melbourne brought mainly families from Sri Lanka.

We all met for breakfast, after travelling all night, at the Uniting Church in Curtin before being taken in several cars to Parliament house.

About 80% of the participants were refugees and there were about 300 - 400 of us, with many banners and signs.



(cont)

(cont...) *There were several impassioned speeches from the different ethnic groups and Priya Nadesalingham from Biloela closed the initial part of the event, although sadly it was not translated for those of us not Tamil speakers.*

I recall the first time I went to Canberra was in 2016 with the first group of the Grandmothers Against the Detention of Refugee Children. Eventually the children and their families were brought from Nauru to Australia in 2018. There are still many in community detention.

The second time I went the group camped overnight on the lawn outside Parliament House. That time it was to try to prevent the repeal of the medivac legislation. We were unsuccessful, it was repealed. There were very few refugees, (possibly not any) at either of these two previous events. It was a significant difference this time.

This time we are lobbying the new Labor government to immediately amend the migration legislation so that the status of thousands of refugees and people seeking asylum can be changed, enabling them to stay securely in Australia.

Several of the independent MPs sent messages of support and Senator David Pocock visited. He later addressed a question about the issue of bridging visas to the government in the Senate.

I will tell the story of one man, a Hazara refugee who has been in locked detention for over nine years. He has spent time in many states - on Christmas Island, in Villawood detention centre in Sydney, MITA in Melbourne and most recently in Yongah Hill in WA. Finally, after all those years, he was released on a SHEV (safe haven enterprise visa) and came from WA to Melbourne three months ago. His case had been before the courts on multiple occasions, and he had been ordered to be released, but each time the previous Coalition Government appealed the decision, leaving him in detention. He has a wife and five children between the ages of 15 and 22 in Tajikistan. He has not seen them for 10 years. He is a man of great dignity and optimism. He just wants to live here safely, reunited with his family.

Prue Licht

The Canberra Convergence 2022 calls for:

- An immediate announcement on permanent visas for those on TPVs and SHEVs
- Pathways to permanency for all people seeking asylum who are on Bridging Visas
- Review of all refugee determinations rejected under the Fast Track system, and the thousands of others in the community on bridging or lapsed visas
- Safe resettlement options, including Australia, for those still held on Nauru and in PNG
- Commitment to the resettlement of refugees stuck in Indonesia
- Refugee quota of at least 30,000 and an immediate intake of 20,000 Afghan refugees
- Pathways and special quotas (similar to that offered to Ukrainians) for refugees escaping crisis situations – including Iranians fleeing state repression, or Myanmar refugees escaping the military dictatorship.

CALL TO ACTION>>> Write a letter/email TODAY to your local MP to urge their support for PERMANENT VISAS FOR ALL REFUGEES – No one left behind. [Find your local MP here.](#)

Making connections inside The House



Federal Treasurer Jim Chalmers holds a G4R bookmark with the message that “*Refugees bring skills and ideas. They just need a fair go*”. There was no disagreement from the Treasurer on that!

Co-chairs Margaret Browne and Jean Ker Walsh had private meetings with **Federal Treasurer Jim Chalmers** (above) and Attorney-General **Mark Dreyfus** (below) at their Parliament House offices in the last Parliamentary sitting week for 2022.



Both meetings were warm and appreciative of the presence and grassroots work of Grandmothers for Refugees in local electorates around the country.

Separate discussions with Mr Chalmers’ adviser on migration matters centred around the ongoing costs and lost benefits to the economy while more than 31,000 refugees remain on temporary visas with limited or no work rights.

Noting the need to spend substantial time and money on reducing the backlog of 1,000,000 unprocessed visas in the Department of Home

Affairs, Mr Chalmers said his Cabinet colleague and DoHA Minister Clare O’Neil was working very hard to progress Labor’s commitments to remove uncertainties for refugees.

The Government remains hopeful of an announcement “soon” on pathways to permanent protection for 19,500 refugees on temporary and safe haven enterprise visas, Mr Dreyfus said.



Making the cost/benefit case for settlement solution for all UMAs

November 2022

Call to action>>> Write to your MP and Senators about this issue

1. **The current treatment of unauthorised maritime arrivals (UMAs) has cost \$billions each year for a decade.** It continues to cost current Budget \$billions through combined and compounding costs of:
 - Offshore processing (2022-23: \$632.5m...for 105 people on Nauru)
 - Security contracts, offshore and onshore
 - UMA case management contracts
 - Health care contracts and Medicare services
 - Trauma service contracts and hospitalisations
 - Domestic violence program for TPV holders – (pilot of \$6m+/year)
 - Recurring administration 'roundabout' of short-term visa re-applications

Benefits of settlement solution for refugees

2. There are real \$\$ *and* electoral benefits to be had through a solution that gets all UMAs settled and contributing to our economic and social wellbeing.
 - Curtin University researchers find TPV and SHEV holders are likely to generate \$6.5bn over 5 years.
 - Community attitudes against treating refugees justly have diminished: May/June 2022 survey found 80% Labor, 72% Coalition voters want a pathway to permanent settlement for refugees on TPVs. Compassionate treatment of refugees is now a vote-winner.

Risk factors of no solution

3. There is a compounding risk factor of \$billions in future claims for life-long trauma impacts on adults but especially on the children damaged for a decade or more by ongoing refugee policy, discriminatory and cruel treatment.
 - Traumatized refugees claim their condition is directly attributable to their offshore detention and is exacerbated by the knowledge that people arriving on the same boat were allowed to enter Australia and given protection (TPV and SHEV) without clear criteria as to the basis for selection.
 - This has potential to cost this or future governments \$billions in compensation (arguably akin to the amounts claimed by victims of childhood sexual abuse.) These will be claims made directly against the government as victims are under Ministerial control and duty of care.
4. Failure to recognise changed community attitudes to refugee settlement risks sustained campaigns against the Government throughout this term and at the next election.

Language matters. The Prime Minister committed to govern with kindness and respect. That promise demands urgent permanent protection for TPV/SHEV holders and commitment to a compassionate solution that ends the discriminatory and unnecessarily cruel treatment of all traumatised UMA adults and children.

Find your local MP and Senator >>> Use the search here:
https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Members

Building Capacity: the language of intent



Workshopping “Words that Work”

Some takeaways from the stimulating ASRC workshop 'Words that Work' that Cooper hosted on Friday October 28. Even though it was an online delivery from Justin Whelan in Sydney, the face-to-face social opportunity and shared cross-branch experience on the day has already prompted discussion for how members might pursue ideas raised.

Some research findings seem counterintuitive as to how we may be framing effective communication - however, the challenge to engage in genuine relationship building as well as inviting people to recognise our compassionate selves seems fundamental in "persuading the persuadables". A debriefing, following the workshop, with Victorian organiser Saajeda Samaa from ASRC, has helped explore ideas further, including the possibility of hosting the follow-up 'Breakthrough Communication' workshop.

Neighbourhood outreach

On Wednesday 23rd November a group of Grandmothers for Refugees, invited by Wills, Jaga Jaga and Cooper Branches, met for the first time at Reservoir Library. Our primary aim for this initiative is to build on the generous working relationship that is a hallmark of these branches, and work in an area that does not as yet have a G4R presence.

Our agenda was to engage with the public, share ideas as to how to get change for refugees and people seeking asylum, contact politicians, and perhaps between us develop another model for ensuring advancement in government policy.



The library manager for the day, Jenny, posted this photo (shown here) of Chris, Meg, Annette, Meg, Helen and Pam, on the library's community WhatsApp. By early afternoon it had attracted many supportive comments/emojis. We also posted a review, commending the spirit of the library staff in accommodating us. Stay tuned for how this endeavour might develop in 2023 and how you might get delight in exercising your agency to help refugees.

Thanks Annette Berryman (Cooper, Vic) for both of these reports on innovative local actions.
www.grandmothersforrefugees.org



CONTACT WITH MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT:

Casey is planning for Senator White to attend their meeting, next year. **Fremantle** plans to meet with Josh Wilson, next year. **McNamara** is meeting Josh Burns this month and a subcommittee of members have drafted questions, based on issues in GFR newsletter, ARAN kit and their own input. **Wills** had a positive meeting with Peter Khalil and **Kooyong** spoke to the state ALP and Teal candidates.

LETTER WRITING:

Groups are making widespread use of the ARAN kit and regularly writing to MPs. **Cooper & McNamara** had a letter writing activity, with **McNamara** writing to the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture, Inhuman or Degrading Punishment. **Curtin** wrote to all WA Senators and MHR's. McNamara and Kooyong circulated via email to their members, widespread coverage of refugee issues raised in the media.

VIGILS & RALLIES:

Weekly vigils were held in **Wills** and **Curtin**, and in **Casey** at Chirnside Park and **Belgrave**. **Melbourne, Casey, McNamara & Cooper** groups all had members attend the "No One Left Behind" rally, with Melbourne being accompanied by a member-supported Iranian refugee family.

ENGAGEMENT WITH OTHER REFUGEE SUPPORT GROUPS:

Members from various groups viewed the RAC Indonesia Insight presentation. **Cooper** organised an ASRC Words That Work Workshop, in which other GFR groups participated.

MEETINGS:

Most groups reported they had met. **Fremantle had 105 attendees and 87 apologies!** Discussion in **Deakin** was about media articles, the ASRC campaign for permanent visas and obtaining professional health and advice in one's own language. **Cooper** addressed the results of the survey of its members. **Melbourne** proposed ideas for letter writing and made a list of points to raise with MPs. **McNamara** reviewed matters arising from the ERC meeting and plans for GFR decorations for a community Christmas tree, where groups provide a message about their issue. **Greater Perth** held a small meeting aimed at raising greater awareness in the Perth electorate, members took flyers to distribute, and enquiry made of ASRC for a Words that Work workshop.

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EFFECTIVENESS OF ACTIVITIES:

Many groups reported bookmarks were well received. **Casey** reported good responses to their vigils both from motorists and community interaction. **Dunkley** had good attendance at their meetings but that their connecting with silent members is a challenge. **Cooper's** regular meeting with their MPs staff member is beneficial, many members have registered to meet with Andrew Giles, letter writing has been well attended and members are appreciative of being kept informed. **McNamara** continues to provide ongoing help for former detainees. Growing awareness in **Perth** electorate hoped especially via planned public meeting, future emphasis to be on group action. The **Wills** FaceBook post reached 20,749 and was shared 260 times! **Wills** also posted "Eyes on Offshore," referencing the recent The Drum program. **Curtin** obtained good coverage in their local paper. **Kooyong** expressed need to recruit new members and their article in Eastsider News received an enthusiastic response from Monique Ryan, who also visited BASP.

PLANNED ACTIVITIES:

DUNKLEY: Attendance at street stall at Seaford Farmers Market, asking a letter to be signed requesting permanent visas and handing out merchandise. Use of cabinet at Frankston library displaying GFR information. An end of year celebration.

CASEY: Activities with Deakin. Attendance at a lunch at Lilydale Community House to attract new members. Some members to attend Convergence on Canberra rally. End of year celebration.

COOPER: At invitation of Ged Kearney, information briefing with Andrew Giles and Jaja Jaga and Wills groups. Use of flexible groups to activate Cooper action plan. Letter writing at Reservoir library, followed by street walk and coffee shop stop. Discussion of how to reengage silent members.

MELBOURNE: Meeting including members from Wills & Casey to arrange coordinated activity by GFR to Senators, based on member Bruna Evans paper. Canberra Convergence, possible other less onerous travel arrangements. Letter writing especially to Albanese, Giles, O'Neil with copies to Adam Bandt.

DEAKIN: Alternate 2023 meetings between Croydon and Blackburn. Plan activities with Casey and investigate attendance at community events.

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GRASSROOTS

FREMANTLE: Meet with Fremantle Council to discuss commitment to a Refugee Welcome Zone and ask for support for by use of libraries for GFR information. Plan stalls for Human Rights Day.

GREATER PERTH: Group meeting open to the public with guest speaker Indonesia refugee activist Professor Nina Burrige.

CURTIN: Attend a garden fundraiser for refugees

and attend a public talk by Professor Copeland about the legal reasons behind indefinite detention.

KOOYONG: A meeting in December to celebrate the year.

IDEAS BREWING:

Contact with ASRC to provide workshops. Information sessions with community groups utilising the new PowerPoint presentation. Joint activities with other GFR groups. Ensuring maximum member participation by engaging silent members, recruiting new members, and diversifying meeting times and places within electorates.

WELCOME and congratulations to the small but keen group of Hotham (Vic) Grandmothers for Refugees members who had their first meeting in November.

A feature of the meeting was a presentation supported by a powerpoint audio-visual pack developed by executive member Janet Joss. (The presentation comes with a user's guide and has been sent to all electorate co-ordinators for local adaptation and use.) Hotham is held by Home Affairs Minister Clare O'Neil. One of the first personal actions by new member and co-ordinator Naree Osmer was to write a constituent's letter to her local MP advising that the Grandmothers for Refugees were now present and active in the Hotham electorate. Well done, Naree, and thanks to nearby electorates of Higgins and Goldstein for their support by attending the inaugural meeting. Thanks also to Executive member, Virginia Schneiders, who has mentored the fledgling Hotham group through the "birthing" process.

FINALLY...Thank you all for every caring thought, effort and action you have all taken on behalf of refugees and people seeking asylum during 2022. We wish you a peaceful Christmas and New Year holiday season and look forward to continuing the work of Grandmothers for Refugees in 2023.



Season's greetings and best wishes to all

Jean, Margaret, Marita, Janet, and Virginia