



NEWSLETTER January 2021

## LOOK AT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN REFUGEES ARE FREE

Grandmothers for Refugees

Tweets

Tweets & replies

Media

Likes



**Jean Ker Walsh** @JeanKerWalsh · 3d

This is what happens when refugees are free. We make them welcome. We make our community. We build our future.

[#freeallrefugees](#)



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Visit our website today [www.grandmothersforrefugees.org](http://www.grandmothersforrefugees.org)

*Dear Grandmothers and Frogs,*  
Best wishes for your good health throughout this new year. What a start to 2021!

It begins with the welcome news of the release of most of the men previously held in the hotel prisons at Preston and then Carlton. Releases from hotel prisons in Brisbane and Darwin are yet to come, we hope.

In this edition, we offer insights into what freedom looks like when it is given begrudgingly without acknowledgement of the damage done by 7+ years of detention. See Pamela Curr's report on how the men have responded to their sudden freedom in Melbourne.

There is media coverage on the money-saving motivations behind the releases from hotel prison, and editorial opinion indicating that your letters and untiring efforts are having a positive impact.

2021 is widely expected to be a federal election year. That means we need to plan. G4R will participate in planning sessions with other grassroots organisations, and begin our own plans for the year ahead at the first meeting of the Co-ordinating Committee.

The apparent gains of recent weeks are not a reason to take the foot off the pedal. Quite the opposite! Let's be energised by these welcome events and double down on our efforts to see justice for all refugees and an end to our shame.



**21 January 2021**

**In case you missed the 'thank you' in this tweet from Moz Azimitabar leaving the Park hotel prison in Carlton.**

This is the most beautiful moment of my life and one that I would like to share with you all. After 2,737 days locked up in detention – I am free.

Thank you to all of the amazing people who helped me to stay strong.

[#GameOver](#)



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There are 14 men still detained in the Park Hotel prison. Some may be awaiting departure for US. Others are devastated to be left behind.

**The 5pm weekday and 3pm weekend protests are continuing in support of the remaining detainees who fear being forgotten.**

Community actions in support of the 15 detained in Darwin are being organised. Regular protests outside the Kangaroo Point hotel prison in Brisbane are continuing.

[#freeALLrefugees](#)  
[#gameover](#)

**Congratulations,  
Craig Foster AM**



**Craig Foster** @Craig\_Foster · 8h  
Congrats to Grace Tame [#ausoftheyear](#)

The AM I receive today is dedicated to [@AzimiMoz](#) [@FarhadBandesh](#) [@hakeem07746464](#) & all refugees seeking safety around the

## And now we are told their release was all about the \$\$\$

www.theguardian.com › australia-news › jan › peter-du... ▼

### Peter Dutton says refugees released from Melbourne hotel ...

4 days ago — **Peter Dutton** says **refugees** released from Melbourne hotel detention to **save money** ... the decision to release dozens of **refugees** who were held in Melbourne hotel rooms for more than a year was a cost-saving measure.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jan/21/peter-dutton-says-refugees-released-from-melbourne-hotel-detention-to-save-money>

#### A few letters to the paper on this cost-saving /cost-shifting issue would not go amiss.

1. There is an enormous cost borne already by the Australian taxpayer for a cruel and unnecessary policy. That cost might well be measured in units of shame.
2. Then there is the ongoing expenditure \$\$millions on unnecessary security contracts and facilities, of which Christmas Island is probably the most egregious example.  
<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/home-affairs-awards-20-million-maintenance-contract-for-near-empty-christmas-island?cid=newsapp:socialshare:copylink> .
3. This govt is now, in effect, cost-shifting onto the Australian community, particularly charitable organisations like the Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project [www.basp.org.au](http://www.basp.org.au) .

#### Freedom at Last – by Pamela Curr AM, Refugee Advocate

It was a joyful week. At last, we saw our friends suddenly released from detention after more than seven years. For nearly two of these years, they have been locked up in motel rooms with no access to visitors, fresh air or exercise. At the same time, returning travellers were grumbling about two weeks of quarantine.

People are overjoyed to be free at last; however, there was no preparation for what was to come.

“I was in the gym when I got a message - Immigration want to see you.”

“My friend came back to the room and said -I am getting visa- I did not believe it”.

So it was that the word was passed around the Park Motel and the MITA detention centre creating relief and raising hopes for those left behind.

As always with these decisions, they are arbitrary and no reasons are given. Some men were called to be told specifically that the Minister would not sign them out- no reasons given. They are brokenhearted.

Later, Minister Dutton in a radio interview said that the men were released to save money.

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Within hours the refugees were lined up into buses and taken to the MITA in Broadmeadows to be signed out and given their property. They divided into two groups and were taken to allocated accommodation by contractors, AMES and LIFE WITHOUT BARRIERS who were similarly caught unprepared. One group to a motel on the edge of a highway on the outskirts of Melbourne and the other to a de-commissioned aged care building.

The men were given \$150 cash and told that they had two weeks of accommodation and that was it. The men have

the right to work but no right to income support from Centrelink or SRSS (State Resolution Support Services). They are expected to find their own housing, to be self-sufficient and employed in two weeks. Clearly an impossible task for people who have been in detention and now have to find their way in an unknown place, negotiate banks, public transport and medical care in a foreign country after not being allowed to choose even what they ate or where they slept for the past 7 years.

By the weekend they realized that a takeaway meal would cost \$20 plus dollars. Concern set in by Saturday as there were no cooking facilities in their motel cabins. Calls went out for Rice Cookers as a solution.

The guys reminded us that they had faced deprivation before during the siege on Manus when immigration cut off water, electricity and food supplies to force them out.

We went out (to Ardeer) on Saturday morning to find that the people had no food and were far from any shops or supermarket. They are in a place surrounded by industrial sites and grasslands. They were given MYKI cards but were unsure as to whether these would provide a return trip if they found a bus.

With food as a priority, we organized representatives of six different national groups and set off to a supermarket having made a list. The Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project covered the cost of the biggest grocery bill I have ever seen. Sister Brigid has a lot of experience of immigration post release care! The contracted caseworker had been sent from another part of Melbourne to talk to people about public transport. As he said, I did not know that they had no food.

The decommissioned aged care home at least has a kitchen. Their contractors have now locked it down and no visitors are allowed but the people are free to come and go if they only knew where to go. Community volunteers have provided food supplies there. It is hard to comprehend the malicious cruelty of a government Minister and his bureaucrats in the choice of accommodation and in a secret contract which is designed to give minimal support to the refugees.

We have seen it before when other groups were suddenly released from detention. In July 2013, in a particularly cold winter, families were put out into houses which were filthy, empty and cold. I visited places where pregnant women were sleeping on newspapers on bare floors. Heaters were not functioning and so ancient that we were too scared to turn them on without a safety check. It was ordinary Australians in the community who stepped up then too. Carpets and bedding were found until the contractors provided basic furniture.

These men will join thousands of others in the community who are denied access to the safety net which we take for granted in Australia.



There are already 3000 people living in the community with no permission to work and no right to Medicare or Centrelink. They are totally dependent on the kindness of strangers while the immigration department fiddles with their visa decisions. Some are waiting 10 years for a decision. There are also hundreds of families with children facing destitution. This is a harsh government in action. Few Australians realise what is happening in their own country. #

### Grandmothers make the connection personal at last!



On behalf of all the Grandmothers who kept vigil at the Mantra after our first Christmas Carol singing in 2019, kept lobbying in 2020, and then rallied at the Park prison hotel in 2021, I went to personally meet our friends Ramsi (L) and Subeshan, both from Sri Lanka. I was able to assure them of the Grandmothers continuing care and concern for their futures.

They told me they could always see the purple Grandmothers from the hotel prison windows, and they “love you lots”!



The budget accommodation arranged for the former detainees by the Government is minimalist, if not mean.

Fortunately, by arrangement through other friends, these two men have a house in Kew to share and will move there soon. As for their futures, they want to go to any country where they can be free to reunite with their families. In the meantime, we will stay connected. *Jean*



Waiting outside MITA for the men to leave after being issued with their “IMMI card” and \$150.

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SATURDAY  
THE AGE

## Release the rest of the detained refugees

Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton gave a remarkably trite response this week when asked about Canberra's sudden decision to release scores of refugees from long-term detention in Melbourne hotels. "It's cheaper for people to be in the community than it is to be at a hotel, or for us to be paying for them to be in detention," he said. "And if they're demonstrated not to be a threat, or that is the assessment that has been made by the experts, then it is cheaper for people to go out into the community until they can depart."

Mr Dutton's reasoning is incontestably true. It is cheaper to have 65 refugees living in the community on six-month visas than it is to have them locked down for over a year in hotels. But his explanation is also grotesquely misleading. Cheaper still would be to let them become industrious, taxpaying members of our community, to have them lead healthy lives in a nation that protects the rights of its own citizens. And cheaper again would be to release and repatriate all other detainees who have been deemed to be refugees and entitled to our protection.

Even more could be saved by extending compassion to the family of four Tamil asylum seekers, two of whom were born in Australia, who lived for a while in Biloela, Queensland, but have spent almost three years in immigration detention and are now held on Christmas Island.

This government and previous Coalition and Labor governments have grappled with how to deal with asylum seekers who came here by boat. Thousands of men, women and children were branded "illegal maritime arrivals" because they sailed into our nearby seas seeking help without a



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## Letter Writers Rock!

To all those of you who have written to The Age newspaper over the years, here is proof that your persistence pays off.

Letters to the Editors have become a staple of G4R lobbying over the years. It was often the names of Grandmothers we recognised in the one or two letters published. Now we are seeing letters from many more who are not obviously connected with us. And there are more men writing compassionately about refugees.

**There is a feeling that the tide is turning towards justice!**

Coordinating Committee member, **Marysia Green**, has recently agreed to be the G4R rep on a national Letter Writing Group to promote alignment around themes and issues affecting refugees. We will post her feedback and advice on our website. Visit

[www.grandmothersforrefugees.org/resources](http://www.grandmothersforrefugees.org/resources)

For the full editorial, click on this link: [Release the rest of the detained refugees \(theage.com.au\)](http://theage.com.au)

## Upcoming events

**Hurry!**

**Thursday 28 January at 3 pm**

Rally outside the new electoral office of Josh Frydenberg at [141 Camberwell Rd Hawthorn East](http://141CamberwellRdHawthornEast). Grandmothers for Refugees will meet at 2.30 on the carpark side of Camberwell market to canvas our message as we walk to the rally point.

Speakers will include **Julian Burnside** and **Marie Hapke**.

All Grandmothers and Frogs are welcome. Flyers, posters, badges and banner available. BYO mask, badge, purple colours and hats umbrella.

Kooyong Grandmothers for Refugees

**Monday 15th February 1-2pm.  
Grandmothers for Refugees NSW: Live Online with Dawn Barrington**

Dawn is a singer, songwriter, performer and activist passionate about human rights and a fair and just world for all. Dawn has spent the past 3 years standing in the street in Denmark W.A. protesting against the injustice handed out to refugees. Dawn has now moved to Fremantle W.A. and currently joins a weekly refugee protest group in Fremantle.

Dawn will talk to us about her insights into Australia's appalling treatment of refugees, her knowledge of what's happening now, and what we as a protest group can do to turn this situation around.

You will need to register for this event, click here: <http://bit.ly/3oejobw>

## Electorate Coordinators

Members are encouraged to learn about upcoming local events and to connect with others in your electorate. If you get in touch with the Executive at [info@grandmothersforrefugees.org](mailto:info@grandmothersforrefugees.org) we will give you the contact details for your Federal Electorate G4R Coordinator.

Our website is the best way to stay updated on breaking news, events, and calls to action. Go to: [www.grandmothersforrefugees.org](http://www.grandmothersforrefugees.org)

Remember that we are also on social media, so look for us on...

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/GrandmothersforRefugees/>

Twitter: [https://twitter.com/gmothers\\_adrc/](https://twitter.com/gmothers_adrc/)

Instagram: [Grandmothers4Refugees \(@grandmothers4refugees\)](https://www.instagram.com/grandmothers4refugees) • Instagram photos and videos

## Supporting G4R activities



**G4R** does not run fundraising activities. However, **donations are always welcome**

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

**Name: Grandmothers for Refugees**  
**BSB: 083170**  
**Account No: 83 813 3480**

With best wishes until next time,

From your Executive Members



*Jean Ker Walsh*  
*Co-chair*



*Margaret Browne*  
*Co-chair*



*Jane Touzeau*



*Linda Sparrow*



*Gillian Meek*

Contact us at [info@grandmothersforrefugees.org](mailto:info@grandmothersforrefugees.org)

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