

Updated August 2018

ASSISTING ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES PARISH SELF ASSESSMENT

These notes have been prepared to assist parishes consider how they might provide support to asylum seekers and refugees.

Preliminary assessment

Every parish is called to reach out to its local community in response to local needs. Pope Francis constantly exhorts us as Christians and parishes to reach out to those in need in our communities.

Every parish has limited human and physical resources and competing needs, and has to consider which needs it will respond to. Some of these will have greater urgency than others.

Asylum seekers and refugees are among the most disadvantaged people in our community, and deserve our help. The following considerations may help to determine your parish's approach to providing support:

- Are there asylum seekers living within your parish or within easy travelling distance?
- Are there people within the parish who could assist with teaching, providing hospitality, or in other ways?
- Could your parish assist asylum seekers financially, or partner with another parish to assist asylum seekers?
- Do you have housing available within the parish that could be made available for asylum seekers?
- What financial resources does the parish have that might be available to support people seeking asylum? Will you need to raise funds? Does fundraising need to commence before a final decision can be made?
- Is there a committed, reliable group of people in the parish who could carry this project forward and sustain it over time? If not, can such a group be built up?

If this is going to be a parish project, you should discuss your proposal with your Parish Priest and perhaps the Parish Council at an early stage.

Next Steps

Once you identify potential areas of support, you may wish to obtain more information before proceeding:

- If your project involves providing accommodation, you could invite one of the agencies or parishes already providing accommodation to give you their advice on issues to consider, and how to go about it, for example Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project.
- Similarly, there are parishes and agencies providing hospitality, teaching English, providing material aid, that would be very happy to discuss your proposals with you

- Try to be clear on what responsibilities you intend to undertake, and where the boundaries of parish involvement will be - ie what you will help with, and what you will not help with (eg, teaching English, schooling). This may help avoid the project expanding into other areas of support.
- If your parish has a Child Safety Committee, seek their guidance on your parish's child safety requirements and ensure that you will comply with these.

Don't rush this process: it is important that your parish has time to take into account all the main issues, and reach agreement on how to proceed. When you have firmed up your proposals, ensure that key parish people are fully briefed and are on board - the Parish Priest, the Parish finance committee - and are regularly updated.

Consider the potential for your support to raise awareness among parishioners and local schools

Parishioners are likely to find the experience a very positive one in the life of the parish. How will you engage the parish in the project and keep parishioners regularly informed?

Select the parish team

- Consider the skills required on the parish team, given the responsibilities the team will undertake.
- Who will lead the project? Ideally the project leader should have cross-cultural experience, be an effective team leader, be aware of issues that may arise and how they will be managed, and have the support of the parish priest.
- How will you select parishioners who will have contact with asylum seekers and refugees? How many parishioners will be directly involved? Parish volunteers will need to be sensitive always to the needs and privacy of the asylum seekers.
- Consider the gender balance of the parish team. Some cultures and religions have firm protocols regarding interaction of the sexes. Generally when meeting with people from other cultures, it is better for males to interact with males, and females with females. When visiting asylum seekers in their homes or privately, at least two visitors should be present

Consider necessary insurance

You may need to amend parish insurance for any extra risks that may be incurred, eg parish volunteers interacting with the asylum seeker family. If you are renting a house for an asylum seeker family, you may wish to insure against mishap.

If you will be relating directly to asylum seekers and refugees

Some training for the parish team will be desirable. Training may be available from one of the agencies who deal with asylum seekers, including CatholicCare, Jesuit Social Services, MacKillop Family Services, St Vincent de Paul Society, Asylum Seeker Resource Centre.

The Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne and all parishes have Child Safety Policies and Codes of Conduct to ensure the care, safety and wellbeing of all children and young people in our

care. Everyone employed or volunteering in parishes has a responsibility to understand the important and significant role he/she plays to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all children is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make. Please refer to your Parish's Child Safety Policy and Code of Conduct for more information.

Police and WWC checks are necessary for any members of your team who will have contact with children. WWC checks for volunteers are free (see <http://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au/>). Police checks cost about \$24 each for voluntary work (August 2018).

How will you make contact with asylum seekers whom you will support? How will you help?

- If you already know someone you would like to help, try to ascertain what assistance they already have, and their unmet needs
 - if they have a case manager such as the Red Cross or ASRC, speak with the family, or with the family's permission, contact their case manager to ascertain where you may be able to assist
 - if they do not have a case manager, try to establish what support they currently have (income support, income and employment, permission to work, access to Medicare, arrangements for children's education, support from other people or groups) and what are their unmet needs where you may be able to assist
- If you do not already know someone who may need assistance, contact an agency which regularly supports asylum seekers such as the Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project or the Asylum Seeker Support Centre. They may be able to suggest someone in need of the kind of assistance your parish may be able to offer.

Within the parish team, agree on the areas where the parish will provide support, and on the arrangements for relating to the individual/family

- Ensure that the boundaries for parish responsibility are clear to the parish team and to the asylum seeker individual/family
- Which members of the parish team will have most contact with the family? The number of people who will normally have contact with the family should normally be limited to two or three, depending upon the social setting. If the meeting place will be at home, perhaps two visitors should be the limit at any time; if in a public meeting place, more people can participate. Ask the family what they would prefer.
- Who will keep an eye on the family's welfare, while ensuring that their privacy is maintained?

How would the parish respond to an emergency or an unforeseen situation within the asylum seeker family?

Procedures to follow in emergency and unforeseen situations, including circumstances requiring referral to the parish team leader and hospital, police and emergency services should be documented and communicated to the parish team and the parish office. These procedures should be in place before responsibility is assumed for the individual/family.

If you need further advice or assistance, please contact Adrian.foley@css.org.au We can also put you in touch with other parishes and agencies who can give you expert and practical advice.