

February 2015

Providing Hospitality Support for Asylum Seekers

Introduction

This note suggests ways in which parishes and parishioners can provide hospitality support to asylum seekers and refugees. It includes case studies of Catholic agencies and parishes, to show some activities that are already being provided, and what is possible.

Each Parish will decide how it is best able to assist asylum seekers and refugees, having regard to the people and skills, and the financial resources available to the Parish.

We all need to meet, communicate and laugh with others, and to feel that we are valued and accepted, especially when we are in a new environment. Asylum seekers and refugees are no exception.

Providing hospitality need not be expensive, but requires us to give our time and friendship to welcome the 'strangers' in our midst so that they may feel valued as our friends and neighbours.

For further information, please contact: Adrian Foley, mobile 0497 780 233 or email 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.

Forms of Hospitality Support

There are many ways that we can provide support, limited only by our imagination. Some of the more common forms of support are

- Helping asylum seekers navigate their way around our community services and resources, including Centrelink, hospitals, transport, schools, asylum seeker support services such as the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, Vinnies and other support agencies, and so on
- Helping families move into new premises – helping them to obtain basic items of furniture, fridge, microwave oven, beds, bedclothing etc, and helping them to move their belongings into a new residence
- Visiting asylum seeker and refugee families in their homes for a cup of tea and a short talk. These visits can help put asylum seekers at their ease, to help them get to know you better, to discuss problems they may be experiencing, for example with food or furnishing needs, children's education, how to get help with expenses, how to take care of the garden
- Hosting a periodic get-together in your neighbourhood of asylum seekers and refugees, together with your friends or acquaintances, to share each others' company and food.
- Taking asylum seekers out on an excursion, with your family and an asylum seeker family, or in a larger group.
- Visiting people at the Broadmeadows detention centre (Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation), supporting them after they are released from detention

Things you will need to consider

Before offering hospitality support, you will need to consider the implications of providing support. We have set out a range of things for you to consider before proceeding with your project, see our note '*Assisting Asylum Seekers and Refugees - Parish Self Assessment*'.

If you need further advice or assistance, please contact Adrian Foley, program leader, on Adrian.foley@css.org.au

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Case Study - St Thomas the Apostle Parish, Blackburn

The Social Justice Group, which works together with the local St Vincent de Paul (SVdP) conference, is very active in supporting asylum seekers, with the following activities undertaken consistently –

- Letter writing to MPs and others
- Frequent visits to the Broadmeadows Detention Centre. All visits are co-ordinated by a member of the Group
- Every February the school and parish come together to make up a very large food gathering and Living Collections week. Sr. Brigid Arthur visits the parish and talks to the schoolchildren beforehand. The goods collected are given to the ASRC and the Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project. During this week, parishioners are invited to donate to a special Social Justice Group bank account if they want to, or have difficulty bringing goods to church or school during the week. Funds raised are used to assist asylum seekers and refugee families
- Visiting some asylum seeker families at home to show hospitality through referrals from Red Cross, Villa Maria, etc.
- Documenting government policies and the Parish's response to those policies
- Contribute frequently to the parish newsletter

Case Study – Edmund Rice Asylum Seeker Project, Melbourne

The Edmund Rice Asylum Seeker Project commenced in 2007 as a meeting place on Sundays. Their mission is to help bring dignity through building friendships and supporting people seeking protection in this nation. There is a drop-in centre at St Ignatius Church in Richmond, where asylum seekers in the community and a number from the Broadmeadows Detention Centre gather each Sunday – along with the organiser and a number of Australian residents, to share each other's company and food.

Case Study – 'The Bridging Visa Social Club' (BVSC), Hobart

The project commenced in 2012 to support Asylum Seekers on Bridging Visas. There is a large rotating group of volunteers who meet every Saturday afternoon at a fixed place in the centre of town with some of the 50 or so Asylum seekers on bridging visas in Hobart. There are also several asylum seeker families. Each-Saturday there is a social activity, sometimes at the location, at other times the group walks or travels to another location for a walk, a game, an event, a festival, a birthday or whatever might be happening. The group operates almost entirely as an email group but keep turning up on Saturdays - 2pm to 4pm. And the asylum seekers in Hobart know that the group will be there. It is a convenient reference point for asylum seekers who are new to Hobart. In

addition, BVSC joins with others to host regular monthly “Potluck” dinners on the third Saturday evening with lots of music, for a wider group of asylum seekers and refugee new arrivals, including a group of ‘unaccompanied minors,’ older teenagers who are placed in community detention in Hobart.