

Updated August 2018

WHAT CAN PARISHES DO TO ASSIST ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES?

There are many ways that we can help asylum seekers and refugees settle in our communities. Asylum seekers' and refugees' basic needs are the same as for all of us: we need shelter, gainful employment and friendship. Your parish may be able to assist someone with their needs, as described below.

Intercede

- 1) Pray for Asylum Seekers that they will receive a welcome, and enjoy peace and happiness in Australia and around the world. *The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.* (James 5:16)

Provide direct support

- 2) Welcome new asylum seekers into your community. If you know of asylum seekers or refugees who have recently moved into your community, contact them or the people who are supporting them to see if you can help. It is very likely that they will need various forms of assistance - clothing, bedding, furniture, assistance with location of facilities (shops, schools, government offices, etc). You might place a notice in your parish bulletin to alert parishioners to this initiative.
- 3) One of the greatest needs asylum seekers have is for accommodation. Your parish may be able to raise funds to rent a house (or contribute together with other parishes or donors to a family's rent), either in your local area or elsewhere. You could donate to the Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project (BASP) that provides accommodation, food and language support for many families. You may wish to provide support for expenses associated with maintaining accommodation – rates, utility usage fees, insurance cover etc.
- 4) Befriend an asylum seeker family. Take them on excursions, shopping, accessing community facilities. *Always respect the person's/family's privacy and independence.* Show them friendship, make them feel welcome in your community, but be careful not to intrude into their private space. Ask them if you can help in any way, they may have simple needs that you are not aware of, but could easily help with.

Provide indirect support

- 5) Collect items that may be useful for families, including furniture, bedding, crockery and donate to support agencies such as ASRC or the Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project, or get a team together within your parish to deliver to families in need.
- 6) Support those who are already helping asylum seekers. This can include fundraising, donating money or donating food, providing hospitality, English language conversation or teaching

English as a second language. You may be able to join in the daily community meals at the ASRC in Footscray. You may be able to visit the Broadmeadows Detention Centre (Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation).

- 7) Need a caterer? Need a cleaner? The ASRC has catering and cleaning companies providing work for asylum seekers and raising funds to support asylum seekers. Visit their website at www.asrc.org.au/
- 8) Attend one of our Parish Forums which explore the important role parishes play in supporting people seeking asylum and refugees, and which bring parishioners together to discuss these issues, see [link](#).

Provide educational support

- 1) Set up an asylum seeker support group within your Parish to find out more about the situation facing asylum seekers. Read relevant articles, organise and attend seminars. Become advocates for asylum seekers in your Parish; keep your Parish informed on what is happening to asylum seekers who have sought Australia's and our protection.
- 2) Education campaigns are very important to promote understanding of the issues facing asylum seekers. Why not hold a community dinner or a trivia night to discuss and promote this issue and raise funds to support asylum seekers?
- 3) Find out what the Bible and the Church have to say about supporting asylum seekers – you will find many references and documents.
- 4) Find out the facts about asylum seekers There are many misconceptions about asylum seekers in Australia, which is a large part of the reason the main political parties have such harsh policies. See the Refugee Council of Australia's 'Myths about refugees and asylum seekers' web page at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au> or the ASRC at <http://www.asrc.org.au>.
- 5) Invite speakers to visit your parish or group, to tell you about how they support asylum seekers, what are the current issues affecting asylum seekers, and how your parish can help.
- 6) Visit the websites of agencies that support asylum seekers and refugees, to see how you can help. Many organisations need volunteers to provide much-needed support. Here are some agencies and their websites to visit -

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| AMES | www.ames.net.au |
| Asylum Seeker Resource Centre | www.asrc.org.au |
| Australian Catholic Migration and Refugee Office | www.acmro.catholic.org.au |
| Australian Red Cross | www.redcross.org.au |
| BaptCare Sanctuary | http://www.baptcare.org.au/ |
| Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project | www.basp.org.au |

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| CatholicCare | www.ccam.org.au |
| Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA) | www.capsa.org.au |
| Catholic Social Services Victoria | www.cssv.org.au |
| Jesuit Refugee Service | www.jrs.org.au |
| Jesuit Social Services Victoria | www.jss.org.au |
| Mackillop Family Services | www.mackillop.org.au |
| Refugee Council of Australia | www.refugeecouncil.org.au |
| Vinnies | www.vinnies.org.au/ |

Advocate

- 7) Make your voice heard—Write to, or better, visit your local MP, tell them what you think about the way refugees are treated, ask them what they think and are doing about this issue. Write letters to newspapers and local publications – try to highlight or raise specific issues that show the injustice that asylum seekers may be facing.
- 8) Consider a banner for your local church, school or grounds, showing your Parish’s support for asylum seekers.

Further Action

- 9) 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.