

ACC REFUGEE STRATEGY

Dear Church Leader,

We are currently witnessing the largest movement of refugees since World War II. Across the Middle East, Europe and Africa, there are record numbers of displaced people. Australia will be receiving 12,000 refugees in a one-off intake who have been displaced by the conflict in Syria and Iraq.

This additional quota is on top of the existing 13,750 places already set aside for this financial year. Displaced women, children and families will be prioritised from camps in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. Single men are considered best able to look after themselves.

There will be a focus on persecuted minorities.

It is hoped that the first group will arrive before Christmas however this is not confirmed. The majority will be arriving in the first six months of 2016.

We think local churches are some of the best placed organisations to help with this resettlement. There are so many things you already do that you may not realize would be enormously beneficial to your community. Please consider carefully how you could be a part of this.

Although there is still much information that we have not yet received, attached with this letter is some practical steps that will help you think and act. It also comes with a 'toolkit' of different things to assist your preparations.

Thank you for your heart to serve our community!

What is happening?

In response to the Commonwealth Government's announcement, each State and Territory has announced a response to this crisis. The indicative numbers for each State/Territory are:

- Queensland – 3,500
- NSW – 7,000
- Victoria – 4,000
- Tasmania – 500
- South Australia – 1,000
- Western Australia – 1,000
- Northern Territory – 1,000
- ACT – 250

When each of these people or families arrives, they receive up to 12 months of assistance. This may be provided by two different organisations. One for the first six months and another for the second.

The first six-months this is aimed at supporting their immediate settlement needs these include:

- meeting clients at the airport
- help with transport to their initial accommodation
- assistance with finding suitable accommodation
- property induction
- providing an initial food package and start-up pack of household goods
- assistance to register with Centrelink, Medicare, health services, banks, schools and an Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) provider
- orientation to life in Australia, including health, education, employment and Australian laws and culture.

For more information on the Australian Government's approach to this crisis see:

<https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs-programs-policy/syrian-iraqi-humanitarian-crisis>

For more information on Humanitarian Settlement Services see:

<https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs-programs-policy/settlement-services/humanitarian-settlement-services-hss>

For the service providers in your state or territory see:

<https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs-programs-policy/settlement-services/settlement-services-locator>

It is important to understand what is needed and importantly, what is not. They are assisted with accommodation but they do not receive public housing and must satisfy the same criteria as other Australians. They receive income support at the same level as other recipients of Commonwealth Support. For a full list of services, see:

<https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs-publications/fact-sheet-98-settlement-services-for-refugees>

What can we do?

Whilst there is a range of services that Governments, their contracted service providers and community-based agencies provide, there are service gaps. To find out where we as ACC fit, we are recommending a simple five-step strategy.

1. Engage

This is an opportunity to engage with our community beyond our church walls. There have been people working in these areas for many years. In most cases they know more about the issues than most of us will and they have been toiling hard for refugees over many years. Nothing can isolate us more than being instant experts.

Take time to talk to these people and ask them what the need is and how we can fit into the solution.

Initially they may even be suspicious!

There are Government, Church and Community groups already active in this area. There is much happening already but there will be gaps in services and that is where we can fit in.

Your first step should be to find out who they are, take them out to coffee and listen! They already know where the gaps are and what additional services are needed in your area.

For example, a local service provider in Wollongong has identified three key gaps:

- Developing capability and confidence in functional English
- Establishing meaningful social connections and networks
- Finding gainful employment

Another with many years of experience gives four key areas of need:

- Long Term Accommodation in an area where private rental is increasing
- Help with navigating day-to-day living in Australia
- Language skills
- Social inclusion

There will be similar needs in your area.

Many refugees only get six months accommodation and then they are on their own and at the mercy of the private rental market. They have difficulty navigating the day-to-day things that you and I take for granted.

They get lots of official correspondence but cannot understand it.

Many are socially isolated.

The important thing in this phase of the strategy is to meet and listen. You will need to build trust.

2. Prepare

Learn about what is happening in your area.

Who are the people arriving?

Where are they coming from?

How many will there be?

When are they arriving?

Are there existing communities for that group of people?

What do you know about the areas from which they come?

What are their needs?

Who is already involved in a paid or voluntary capacity in the community?

What are the opportunities to participate? Many State or Territory Governments have websites where volunteers can register.

These are:

NSW: <http://www.nsw.gov.au/icanhelp>

SA/NT: <http://govolunteer.com.au/Opportunity/Details/70624/>

Victoria: <http://www.volunteer.vic.gov.au/> (Type in Refugees)

Queensland: <https://linkki.volunteeringqld.org.au/dotnet/volunteer/>

Tasmania: <http://www.volunteeringtas.org.au/volunteers/find-role>

Western Australia: <https://volunteeringwa.org.au/>

In addition to this, there are a range of specialist organisations in each state and many regional centres.

3. Plan

The best place to start to help is starting with what is already in your hands. As churches we already have people, buildings and programs that can help. For example, one local refugee group has a catering business for refugees ready to go. There are customers and a business plan. All they needed was a commercial kitchen. At Lighthouse, we had one...all we needed to do was to link the people in need with what we already had.

The best place to start is to create an **Asset Map** of your church. Put simply, identify the current assets of your church? Those assets are the:

- **Programs** that you already run that could include refugees.
- **Buildings** that you have and how they could be utilised for your community
- **People** that you have. Their skills interests and passions.

What are you already doing that could integrate refugees? Play groups, youth groups, sporting teams, school holiday programs. Many need little adaptation to accommodate refugee families and young people.

What additional could you do? Community dinners and conversational English opportunities are two that can easily be done.

What skills, interests and passions do our people have? In Wollongong, a group of surfers decided to help groups of refugees learn to swim and surf. For some people, simply getting help with letters is a big assistance. You have more in your hands than what you realise.

What programs are you running?

What connections already exist?

Talk to Government organisations and register your church's interest and capacity in providing assistance.

Think about how we engage. Acting is not the only important thing, HOW we engage will be important. People are looking for partnership not paternalism. Empowerment and not dependence. See where you can add value.

If you can, make sure that the planning involves people from other cultures. Listen to what they have to say about what needs to be done and how. We will engage more effectively if the voices of the people we are helping are heard and respected.

It is also important to be sober in our judgement and know our limitations. Many refugees are survivors of abuse and torture. Many are suffering post-traumatic stress. Recognise where the boundaries are for support that we can provide and where professional and specialist services are required.

4. Act

Once you have gone through these processes, set out an action plan. Our recommendation is to offer people different levels of involvement according to their time, interests, skills and resources.

The framework for action should offer people opportunities at Low, Medium and High levels of involvement.

What does this look like?

Examples of a **low** level of involvement might be to give money or goods. Most of these people arrive with nothing. The Government and funded case management agencies do help but there are gaps. Find out what they are. For example, many have lost all of their photographs. Having pictures is something we all cherish.

If we are giving goods, food or clothes let's give the best. This is not an opportunity to clean out junk. Remember, we are giving it to Jesus!

We may open up our playgroups to young mothers who may otherwise be socially isolated.

Examples of a **medium** level of involvement may be to set up or participate in a contact point or hub a few days a week where we can help with practicalities. Remember they know nothing about how our systems work....government, transport, banks, schools and health systems will be unfamiliar in the way they operate. They will be receiving letters from government departments but they speak no English and come from a place where the Government represents something very different to what it does here.

Lastly, a **high** level of involvement may be adopting a family or giving someone a job or work experience. The history of migration in Australia tells us that these people will work hard. Many already are highly qualified. All they need is a start.

Don't forget the practicalities:

- Know what is running
- Have an accountability regime
- Make sure people have appropriate clearances (Working with Children or equivalent)

5. Tell us

Don't forget to share what you are doing. Why?

You might have the great idea that someone else needs!

As a movement, we can recognise what we achieve and celebrate what God has done.

#accommunityengagement and tell your story at <http://accommunityengagement.org.au/>

This is a great opportunity. In every tragedy, God's purposes can still be achieved. As Joseph went ahead of his family in awful circumstances, God used him when they arrived as refugees.

Many of these people are victims of brutal regimes. Our prayer is that we can say, that those regimes intended to harm you but God has turned this for good to accomplish what is now being done; the saving of many lives.