
PROPOSAL 6 - SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMISSION – A GENEROUS AND COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITY REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

That the Synod:

1. noting the long-standing commitment of the Uniting Church to seek justice for refugees and people seeking asylum; most notably the *Shelter from the Storm* statement and associated resolutions adopted by the 14th Assembly in July 2015, and
2. recognising the ongoing dedicated efforts of Uniting Church congregations and members who continue to offer direct support and advocacy for people seeking asylum in our community,
 - (a) Write to the Federal Government expressing our support for a new Community Refugee Sponsorship model, and
 - (b) Encourage congregations to express their interest in supporting a new Community Refugee Sponsorship model, and
 - (c) Provide resources and information to those congregations expressing interest in supporting a new Community Refugee Sponsorship model.

Mover: Mark Brisbane

Seconder: Bob French

Rationale

The Uniting Church in Australia Assembly and the Synod of Western Australia have long expressed their concern at policies that do not protect the human rights of people seeking asylum.¹

As Christians, the bible makes it clear that we are called to love our neighbour, welcome the stranger, challenge unjust systems and offer refuge and care to those who are marginalised and in exile. We, therefore, have a particular responsibility in our society when it comes to responding to issues related to people seeking asylum and refugees. As a church we have said that all people should be treated with respect and accorded the dignity they deserve as human beings and that:

- People do not flee their home, their family, friends and community and undertake perilous journeys without very good reason.
- Refugees should be able to find hope, shelter and restoration from the despair and persecution from which they have fled.
- People seeking asylum and refugees should not be used for political point scoring or as a distraction from other policy issues. Punishing a vulnerable group of people (people seeking asylum) in order to deter others ('people smugglers' and other people seeking asylum) is immoral.²

“The Good Samaritan is a story Jesus tells in response to the question; ‘who is my neighbour?’, and the answer really is; ‘whoever comes to you in need is your neighbour’. So, community sponsorship is a way

¹ <http://www.unitingjustice.org.au/refugees-and-asylum-seekers>;

² <http://www.unitingjustice.org.au/refugees-and-asylum-seekers/uca-statements/item/1105-shelter-from-the-storm>

where we can live out that story of the Good Samaritan by welcoming the stranger.” – Rev. James Douglas, St Luke’s Uniting Church³

Community Refugee Sponsorship Background

Community Refugee Sponsorship offers an opportunity for members of the Australian community to directly sponsor refugees to resettle in Australia. Refugees who are resettled in Australia through the current process of the Refugee and Humanitarian program engage Australia’s protection when they are either outside Australia (offshore), or have already arrived in Australia by plane or by boat (onshore). Community Sponsorship is an alternate pathway for *offshore* refugee resettlement; providing an opportunity for communities to directly sponsor and help to resettle refugees.⁴

A whole-of-community approach to settlement provides better outcomes for individuals, community and government. *“When receiving communities are engaged - more robust, well-resourced and successful integration can occur. People will make a positive contribution to a community when they feel welcome and have a genuine sense of belonging. And it is incumbent on the receiving community to do everything that it can to welcome newcomers and to plan as effectively as possible for that.”*⁵

Members of the Western Australian community, including the Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Western Australia have repeatedly called for an increase to the humanitarian intake; giving the community the opportunity to help resettle more refugees in Australia in order to do their bit in responding to the global refugee crisis⁶.

Australia has a long history of successful refugee resettlement, including a credible record in engaging communities to sponsor refugees, and assist in resettlement to their new homes. Previous refugee sponsorship models, such as the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme started in 1979, have used a combination of government and private funding and involved community groups (including faith communities) volunteering their time and resources to help new refugees settle.⁷

The current model of private sponsorship for refugees, the Community Support Program (CSP), is expensive for individuals and communities to engage in, and is not designed to encourage widespread community participation in the welcoming and supporting of refugees.

A new community sponsorship model would harness the goodwill and compassion of Australians to increase the number of resettlement places offered by Australia and contribute to the successful settlement of refugees in active and cohesive Australian communities.⁸

A collaborative approach between key agencies has drawn on best-practice models from around the world, including Canada and the UK, to design a model of community refugee sponsorship. The collaboration between Amnesty Australia, Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce, Refugee Council of Australia, Rural Australians for Refugees, Save the Children and Welcoming Australia looks to build a model based on the existing energy, resources, partnerships and relationships of the refugee sector and wider community in order to welcome more refugees to our communities each year.

With many Uniting Church congregations already engaged in supporting refugees and new migrants in their local communities, we are well-placed to collaborate with settlement providers, other faith groups, community organisations and individuals to provide support to new and emerging communities through

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W60a7HiHx20>

⁴ <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/what-we-do/refugee-and-humanitarian-program/about-the-program>

⁵ Welcoming Australia submission to inquiry into migrant settlement outcomes https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportjnt/024098/toc_pdf/NooneteachesyoutobecomeanAustralian.pdf;fileType=application/pdf

⁶ 2014 Synod Meeting Proposal 14 Asylum Seekers and Refugees <https://unitingchurchwa-startdigital.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/2014-Synod-Presbytery-Minutes.pdf>

⁷ Community Refugee Settlement Scheme

https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/HPR08004586/upload_binary/HPR08004586.pdf;fileType=application/pdf

⁸ Community Refugee Sponsorship Initiative Position Paper <http://www.ausrefugeesponsorship.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/CRSIPositionPaper.pdf>

this proposed new model of community sponsorship. The Uniting Church in Australia Assembly and Synod of Western Australia, through its existing relationship with members of the Community Refugee Sponsorship collaborative are well-placed to provide support to individual congregations and communities seeking to support the Community Refugee Sponsorship Initiative.

COMPARING COMMUNITY REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP MODELS	
CURRENT	PROPOSED
<p>EXPENSIVE</p> <p>High government visa fees and other intermediary fees of the current model mean that only half of the money paid by sponsors actually contributes to providing material support to the family involved.</p> <p>Currently, sponsoring a family of five could cost over \$100,000</p>	<p>MORE ACCESSIBLE</p> <p>The proposed model eliminates exorbitant visa and intermediary fees and reduces the cost of sponsorship to reflect the actual cost of supporting the sponsored refugees in their first year in Australia</p> <p>Reduces costs for sponsoring a family of five to between \$20,000 and \$50,000</p>
<p>NO ADDITIONALITY</p> <p>Places within Community Support Program (CSP) are not in addition to the government-funded Refugee and Humanitarian Program,</p> <p>Visa places made available under the CSP reduce the number of places for government-funded resettlement</p>	<p>ADDITIONALITY</p> <p>The new model proposes that the community refugee sponsorship program leads to additional places being available above the current Refugee and Humanitarian Program quota</p> <p>The number of refugees who can rebuild their lives in Australia is expanded</p>
<p>LOW COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT</p> <p>The current CSP is not designed to encourage widespread community participation.</p> <p>Risks placing serious financial pressure on newly arrived refugee families, with limited community support</p>	<p>INCREASED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT</p> <p>The new model is designed to encourage widespread community participation in the welcoming and supporting of refugees.</p> <p>Increases settlement outcomes, engages the wider community and fosters social cohesion</p>
<p>LIMITED ELIGIBILITY</p> <p>CSP currently gives priority to applicants who: are considered 'job ready'; are from certain priority countries; have 'adequate English'; and are willing to settle in regional areas of Australia.</p> <p>Engages criteria that risks excluding those refugees who are in most urgent and desperate need of resettlement</p>	<p>PRIORITY ELIGIBILITY</p> <p>The new model proposes sponsored refugees are merely required to meet the eligibility criteria for an existing visa subclass in the Refugee and Humanitarian Program.</p> <p>Provides resettlement opportunities for those in urgent need of resettlement, those seeking family reunion in Australia and those who Australian employers may wish to sponsor</p>