



connect

WINTER 2016

A NEWSLETTER FOR SUPPORTERS OF CATHOLICCARE



Welcoming Syrian refugees to Australia

Message from Fr Joe Caddy



Here at CatholicCare, there has been a long tradition of working with recently arrived humanitarian entrants to Australia to build their sense of belonging. Our Refugee and Settlement Programs respond with support services that reach people from African, Afghan, Karen and Chin (Burmese), Iraqi and Iranian communities as they

integrate into our vibrant, multi-cultural community.

There has never been a more pressing need to advocate for community harmony and compassion, and to strengthen new refugee communities. As the Syrian war enters its sixth year, we have a responsibility to respond to the biggest refugee population the world has seen in a quarter of a century. Eight million residents are currently displaced within Syria, and 4.8 million refugees have fled the country.

In this issue of *Connect*, our feature story is on what life is like for Syrian refugee families; their experience of war, genocide, displacement and loss; and how the world has rallied to show their support.

With Australia agreeing to take in 12,000 Syrian refugees, in addition to the existing Humanitarian Programme intake of 13,750, CatholicCare has entered into a partnership with St Vincent's Health Australia to deliver an innovative housing and support solution that will help to resettle some of the most vulnerable people in the world. You can read about this project in our feature article. We have also included articles on some of our other work with refugee communities.

On behalf of CatholicCare, I am very grateful to our supporters who step up to provide the spiritual, human, financial and material resources required to address social disadvantage for refugees. Our donors, partners, volunteers and staff should be proud of the role they play in supporting and delivering our social support groups, community education, cross-cultural forums, case work and capacity-building programs.

Together we can continue to welcome refugees.

With every blessing

Fr Joe Caddy

A lasting legacy

Did you know that the word 'bequest' comes from the old English word, 'becwethan', which means to 'to declare or express in words'?

How fitting then, that on 10 March 2016, CatholicCare hosted a special afternoon tea for the members of the Parker Moffitt Bequest Society, to 'declare' our thanks to those donors who have 'declared' their intention to leave a gift to CatholicCare in their will.

Our guests were treated to an exclusive guided tour of St Patrick's Cathedral - and who better to show off its hidden secrets than the Cathedral historian himself, Mr Max Potter? After a detailed tour filled

with engaging stories and insights, our guests were ushered to the Cathedral Room at the Cardinal Knox Centre for refreshments.

We can't thank donors enough for the work their legacies contribute to - they support families and strengthen communities for generations to come.

If you would like more information about the Parker Moffitt Bequest Society, or about how to leave a bequest to CatholicCare, please call Bernadette Garcia on 9287 5529 or email Bernadette.Garcia@ccam.org.au

Tax time

CatholicCare's June Appeal is fundraising for our Refugee and Settlement programs. If you would like to support our work to help newly-arrived refugees to settle well (and take advantage of a tax-deductible donation), please visit our website www.ccam.org.au/donate or call Nevin on 9287 5517.

Run Melbourne 2016

Team CatholicCare are dusting off their running shoes as they prepare for this year's Run Melbourne and we invite all supporters to join us as we fundraise for our Refugee and Settlement programs. You can run (or walk). Fundraise. Donate. Visit www.ccam.org.au/runmelbourne2016

Welcoming Syrian refugees

Feature story

Over the next eighteen months, 12,000 Syrian refugees will arrive in Australia with around 4,000 likely to settle in Victoria. For many, having a roof over their head will be an important first step to calling Australia 'home'.

Every day it seems we are faced with news of the conflict in Syria. The situation is so dangerous that 4.8 million people – close to the entire population of Sydney - have been forced from their homes to seek refuge in neighbouring Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.

Within Syria, 8 million people, 50% of them children, have been forced to leave their homes. Eighteen million people are stuck in a country where 40% of children can't go to school because school buildings have been bombed. It is a country where the people's own government has opened fire on peaceful demonstrations; where basic food and necessities run out, because it is so dangerous to deliver aid.

Germany has said they can take up to 500,000 refugees a year, the UK has said they will accept up to 20,000 refugees by 2020, and France has pledged to take in 24,000 people. But only 104,410 resettlement places have actually been offered globally since the start of the conflict in March 2011. Meanwhile, the war has entered its sixth year.

In an act that showed the entire world that we should accept refugees, Pope Francis recently returned home to Italy with 12 refugees after witnessing adults and children break down and beg for help at a camp in Greece. They will be cared for by Sant'Egidio, a Christian community based in Rome.

Around 4,000 refugees settle in Victoria each year, and with the additional intake from Syria we will more than double that number. Newly arrived refugees are welcomed and supported through the Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) for up to six months; they are eligible for appropriate income support and will have work rights. Beyond this initial period, providing safe, secure accommodation - along with support to learn a new language and to access education and employment - will be critical to successful settlement.

It is into this space that CatholicCare – with the support of our partners – will step in to meet their needs.

The Eltham Syrian Refugee Project

In response to the Syrian crisis, CatholicCare has partnered with St Vincent's Health Australia (SVHA) to develop an innovative new housing and support solution.

SVHA have refurbished 60 bedsit units in Eltham which

will be offered for short and medium term rental to Syrian and other refugees. Building on our successful and highly regarded Refugee and Settlement Program, CatholicCare will provide support, orientation and community linkages for this newly arrived, vulnerable group. We will also provide specialised tenancy support to focus on achieving stable, well-managed housing – and greatly improve the opportunity for tenants to demonstrate the rental and utilities history necessary to secure private rental accommodation. And with SVHA and a range of local community partners, we will also provide support to access education and employment pathways.

The Eltham Syrian Refugee Project would not be possible without the support of St Vincent's Health Australia and a number of generous donors who have answered our call for assistance to fund this very important work.

“In the face of the tragedy of tens of thousands of refugees fleeing death in war or hunger, and who are on the road to hope of life, the Gospel calls us, asks us to be near, the littlest and the abandoned.”

~ Pope Francis

Parishes in the picture

Currently there are a number of parishes and religious congregations providing housing for refugee and asylum seeker families in Box Hill, Balwyn/Deepdene (2 houses), Hawthorn and Dandenong, with CatholicCare providing Pastoral Care Coordination to resource the parishes and volunteers.

As word spreads about parish involvement, we find that adjoining parishes and even those further afield are enquiring about how to contribute their support.

Pope Francis asked that every parish and religious community in Europe host a refugee family. CatholicCare is proud that our community in the Archdiocese of Melbourne is playing a part in supporting refugees. Together we can ensure that the experience of coming to our shores is welcoming and empowering; filled with hope for a safe and brighter future.

Editor's note: at the time of writing this article, the Australian Government was in the process of conducting health and security checks for the Syrian refugees. As we await their arrival we will commence leasing the Eltham bedsits to other refugee groups in need of accommodation.

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Want to help? If you would like to find out more about partnering with us on the Eltham Syrian Refugee Project, please contact Bernadette Garcia, Senior Manager Communications, Fundraising and Marketing on 9287 5529.

I am a Syrian refugee

John (not his real name) was born in 1994 in Damascus, Syria. This is the story of John's experience of leaving his homeland to settle here in Melbourne.

Growing up in Syria was beautiful. We had a choice of coastlines, mountains and deserts. It was home to people of many cultures and religions and everyone lived in peace. It offered people free education and an active social life, and once had such a low crime and unemployment rate that it was voted the third safest country in the world.

In the summer, everyone went back to the village where they were born, or to a coastal town for a resort style holiday.

And there was no fear.

The hardest part about war is being estranged from family and friends who live in an area not far away, but you can't visit them because roads have been blocked by an ISIS controlled area. No electricity and no phone can mean no contact with others. Otherwise, life continues as normal. Luxury things become obsolete, but otherwise people get up and go to work and university – just with less free medicine and less money for warm clothes because most money is spent on food.

When I was 20 years old, someone tried to kidnap me. They stabbed me in my right shoulder and phoned my parents to say that they would be back to kidnap me again, if they didn't pay a ransom. People move in tight social circles in Syria, so it was easy for them to get my parents' phone number. In second year medicine, my university came under a missile attack one day. I lost a friend who died in the attack.

I felt threatened when my family was threatened and as a Christian, I didn't want to be affiliated with extremist religious groups or change my religion.

When I lost my sense of safety – and control over whether I lived or died – I knew I had to leave. Nothing else

seemed to matter except self-preservation, and I left my house, family, friends, money and a great job to build a new life.

I travelled to Lebanon, but life was hard there too. They use the US dollar, so life was expensive. I was able to work, but my wages were a quarter of what they are here. I lived in local church halls with shared bathrooms and kitchens, and when they were full I would sleep outside them in line with others.

Through UNHCR I was granted a Subclass 200 Visa to come to Australia because I was able to connect with a distant friend from University who was living in Melbourne.

I have had to restart studying medicine here in Australia. Applying through VCAT was difficult, and it's hard speaking to friends back home, who are nearly finished medicine, because I'm two years behind! There have been other achievements; with the help of family, I have bought my first home, and I have joined a church and made friends, who I play music and eat pizza with.

When I first arrived I lived quite far from other Syrian people and I felt quite isolated, but I'm now only ten minutes away from friends.

Life is much easier and I no longer need an interpreter. Lots of Government departments say that they offer Arabic interpreters, but they are not always available when you need them.

With work references, my employment opportunities have improved and I love Australia. Australians are so friendly and down to earth. They don't judge, and if you show respect, they show respect back. I have been amazed by the rights and opportunities available to me in Australia. I was shopping once, thinking 'Why is everyone smiling at me?', when I realised that I was walking around smiling!

This article was written with information provided by The Australian Syrian Charity (ASC).



A Prayer for Victims of Migration

"We entrust to you all those who have made this journey, enduring fear, uncertainty and humiliation, in order to reach a place of safety and hope.

Just as you never abandoned your Son as he was brought to a safe place by Mary and Joseph, so now be close to these, your sons and daughters, through our tenderness and protection."

Extract from the Press Office of the Holy See,
Daily Bulletin, 16 April 2016

Photo: giulio napolitano/Shutterstock.com

Vibrant Vital Volunteers!

It goes without saying that the contribution volunteers make is invaluable, and helps to extend CatholicCare's reach into the community. With over 100 active volunteers across the organisation, assisting in a variety of programs, our Refugee and Settlement Program benefits greatly, enabling our staff to offer Community Groups to those settling in a new country.

Let's take a typical Friday. On this day, up to 15 volunteers can be found facilitating and supporting a variety of CatholicCare community groups, sharing their skills and knowledge to participants from diverse refugee backgrounds.

At our Dandenong office, the English Conversation Group is in full flight by 9.30am, with volunteers assisting participants to develop their English conversation skills, and helping to improve their overall well-being through social connectedness.

Travel west to Wyndham Vale and you will find our Computer Support Class, where volunteers provide a supportive and social environment, and introduce



participants to basic computer functions and operations; important skills to assist with their settlement process.

Meanwhile, back in the east, the community group room doesn't have long to settle before eight enthusiastic women bound in to begin the Sewing Class. This group is supported by three - equally enthusiastic - volunteers, who provide participants with instruction, support and basic knowledge in the 'art of sewing'. It also helps them to develop confidence and language skills.

As these budding 'stitchers' start to pack-up for the day, up to 80 participants start arriving in Werribee for the Homework Support and Parent Cooking Support Groups. Volunteers assist students from Prep to Year 9, by providing a supportive and encouraging environment, helping them to remain engaged in school and pursue academic aspirations. In the adjoining kitchen, a number of parents work with a volunteer to learn how to prepare simple, nutritious dishes for their family, while practicing their English conversation skills.

Every Friday, 15 volunteers provide over 30 hours of support and guidance to up to 100 refugees.

Our Refugee and Settlement programs are enhanced by the contribution of our volunteers who contribute their time, skills and a commitment to helping others. Volunteering gives them the opportunity to give back; by sharing their experiences, they open doors and change worlds.

Photo courtesy of Melbourne Catholic magazine



Staff profile - Lulu Johnny

Lulu Johnny started working with CatholicCare in October 2007. As a Settlement Support Worker in Footscray and Wyndham Vale, he works in our Refugee and Community Programs. He is the father of five children; three older girls and two younger boys, and another is on the way. Lulu's hobbies include gardening, fishing, hunting and exploring with his family.

Tell us about your work ...

I am honoured to work with CatholicCare; I look after refugees who have suffered a terrifying past. My programs are linked with government and non-government organisations and community services. I provide a Homework Club for new students of all ages, particularly those that did not get the opportunity to study or work back home. For parents, I provide computer lessons that also assist with English language skills. With CatholicCare, refugees have the opportunity to take driving lessons and become Australian citizens. Both are great for their resumes and job prospects.

What attracted you to work at CatholicCare?

I came to Australia as a humanitarian refugee from Kayin State, near the border of Burma. Life in Burma wasn't safe, especially for children. Education was poor and life was uncertain; I felt like I had no choices. I was given the opportunity to work with CatholicCare when I first arrived in Australia. I've continued because I enjoy everything I do at CatholicCare. I get to help many people who are in need.



Lulu Johnny (left) with a participant from the Community Group
Photo courtesy of Melbourne Catholic magazine

What does 'Life to the Full' mean to you?

For me personally 'Life to the Full' means living happily, and always putting 100% effort into everything I do. It means that I'm meant to be where I am.

What are you reading or listening to at the moment?

I read the bible, plus novels and magazines. I listen to gospel songs, Pwo Karen songs and songs on the radio, when it's on.

What was the first record/CD you owned – and what did you think of it?

The first CD I owned was a slideshow of family photos taken in Sydney and Canberra. I loved it; it included many happy memories.

Refugee women in the driver's seat

The freedom and opportunities driving a car provide will soon be available to a group of refugee women, thanks to the generous support of RACV's Good Citizen Program.

Gula Bezhan and David Hannan, CatholicCare staff at our Dandenong Refugee and Settlement program, have long been aware of the women's interest in learning to drive, but how to go about doing this, funding it, and finding culturally appropriate driving schools were some of the challenges.

Refugee Women in the Driver's Seat addresses all these barriers. RACV is funding lessons that will be provided

by women drivers from the women's countries of origin, which are likely to be Afghani, Iranian and South Sudanese.

In addition, RACV personnel, along with VicRoads, Victoria Police and the City of Greater Dandenong Council, will provide information sessions that introduce the women to road rules, the responsibilities of driving a car, and the learning to drive process.

A selection of participants will commence in the next month. We wish them every success with this new settlement milestone.



CatholicCare is the social service agency of the Archdiocese of Melbourne and the Diocese of Sale. While we are a Catholic agency, our programs are offered to the whole community, regardless of religious belief or background.

Strengthening families and communities

www.ccam.org.au