

6.6. ADVOCACY FOR THE EXPANSION OF THE COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Submitting Councillors: Cr Josh Fergeus & Cr Rebecca Paterson

MOTION

That Council:

- 1) *Notes Amnesty International's campaign 'My New Neighbour' to advocate for an expansion and improvement to the Commonwealth Government's Community Sponsorship Program.*
- 2) *Offers their support to Amnesty's advocacy efforts by writing to the Commonwealth Government, to request the future expansion and improvement of the Community Sponsorship Program, to assist refugees and people seeking asylum with their settlement in the City of Monash.*
- 3) *Writes to Amnesty International expressing its support for the My New Neighbour campaign;*
- 4) *Writes to Victorian Councils notifying them of their support for the My New Neighbour campaign*

INTRODUCTION

In 2013 the Australian Government introduced a Community Proposal Pilot that enabled communities and businesses, as well as families and individuals, to propose applicants for humanitarian visas. In 2016, the Prime Minister announced the establishment of a Community Sponsorship Program (CSP) to follow on from this pilot program.

Amnesty International is advocating to the Government to expand the Community Sponsorship Program to allow for more community organisations such as schools, churches and non-government organisations to contribute to the re-settlement of refugees.

Amnesty International is calling upon Council to support their advocacy efforts so that more people and organisations in Monash can be a part of the CSP and sponsor refugees.

DISCUSSION

In 2016 the Turnbull Government announced the establishment of the Community Sponsorship Program (CSP), giving communities and businesses, as well as families and individuals, an opportunity to sponsor applicants for humanitarian visas. A Community Sponsorship Program enables members of the community to sponsor visas for refugees from around the world who wish to begin the process of resettling in Australia.

Amnesty's *My New Neighbour* campaign is calling that the CSP to be expanded and improved in the following ways:

Must not take places from others in need

In order for Australia to do its fair share in meeting global need for people seeking asylum, the CSP quotas must be above and beyond any existing humanitarian or visa quotas. Ensuring that CSP places are additional to Australian's existing humanitarian intake will mean that the Government is able to

better address the growing number of refugees and asylum seekers who require support to resettle and establish safe, prosperous and meaningful lives in Australia.

Additionality provides potential sponsors with the confidence that their contributions to the CSP are delivering true humanitarian outcomes; one of the strongest motivators for sponsors.

Allow community, family and businesses to act as sponsors

Amnesty recommends that there be three main categories of potential sponsors:

- Family sponsors, bringing refugee family members residing overseas who are in need of international protection
- Independent sponsors, such as faith-based groups, universities and community associations who may sponsor those most in need (as identified by UNHCR) who do not have family links in Australia and who are not yet job ready.
- Business/employer sponsors, who want to employ job-ready refugees to meet dual commercial and corporate social responsibility objectives.

Provide adequate support and services

In order to assist people seeking asylum to integrate successfully into our communities, it is essential that adequate settlement and support services be provided. The pilot program provides for access to Medicare and the Australian Migrant English Program, but more clarity around service services and entitlements is required.

People seeking to re-settle are vulnerable and it is necessary to put in place measures to protect refugees from exploitation or harm, particularly in the event that their sponsor seeks to make a profit from their arrival or if the sponsorship arrangement breaks down.

Limit costs

An improved CSP would ensure that it is not too costly for refugees or their sponsors. At the moment the costs for sponsoring under the CSP are out of reach to most, including an approximately \$20,000 visa application fee, additional fees for family, a bond of \$20,000 plus airfare, medical screening and settlement costs.

Create more places for people seeking asylum to settle in Australia

Currently the CSP allows for only 1,000 refugee placements to be processed per year. Amnesty recommends that the Australia community could support the sponsorship of around 10,000 refugees per annum through the CSP. This is based upon Australia's wealth, population and recent levels of interest in community sponsorship.

Under the current program, applications are only received for those aged between 18 and 50, who have an offer of employment, personal attributes to enable financial self-sufficiency within 12 months of arrival, and who are willing to live and work in regional Australia.

Australian neighbourhoods have proven to be generous, welcoming communities when given the opportunity to do so. An expansion and improvement of the Community Sponsorship Program will allow businesses, community organisations and local families to help too. A strengthened CSP will provide a clear and compassionate system for Australians, through their businesses, community organisations and family connections, to welcome refugees and people seeking asylum into their local communities.

Almost 150 Australian local government areas are self-declared Refugee Welcome Zones. The City of Monash signed the Refugee Welcome Zone Declaration in 2002. A Refugee Welcome Zone is a local government area that has made a commitment to welcoming refugees into the community, upholding their human rights, demonstrating compassion and enhancing cultural and religious diversity in the community.

Monash Council has a strong commitment to its community, supports cultural diversity and values and respects the expression of difference. Monash Council has demonstrated significant leadership in the areas of multicultural policy development, service provision and support for culturally and linguistically diverse residents.

CONCLUSION

Advocating for the improvement of the Community Sponsorship Program is in line with Monash Council's position on providing humanitarian support for refugee and asylum seekers wishing to resettle in Australia.

By supporting Amnesty International's advocacy campaign, Council is making a symbolic, non-binding expression of support. It also demonstrates Monash Council's commitment and leadership in making practical contributions to helping refugees settle into their new neighbourhoods and lives in Australia.