

CAMPUS BULLETIN: MY NEW NEIGHBOUR CAMPAIGN

Campaign for the Australian Government to create a fairer community sponsorship program for refugees.



BRINGING REFUGEES SAFELY TO AUSTRALIA

Amnesty International is campaigning for the Australian Government to create a fairer community sponsorship program for refugees and help more refugees rebuild their lives in Australia.

What is community sponsorship for refugees?

Community sponsorship is where everyday people in the community choose to contribute towards the costs of resettling a refugee and support this person to settle into their new community.

Community sponsorship (sometimes called private sponsorship) relies on individuals, community groups or businesses to 'sponsor' a refugee. They will also provide the refugee with employment prospects and support them in their settlement journey – such as helping them make new friends, find accommodation and become self-sufficient.

A fair community sponsorship program would mean our communities are enriched with new skills and cultures. It promotes better community integration and fosters positive attitudes towards refugees.

When community sponsorship is fair and accessible, we know it works. In the last 40 years Canadians have welcomed over 280,000 refugees into their neighbourhoods through community-led sponsorship. These people arrived in Canada in addition to their government's annual humanitarian intake, and it was thanks to community groups, families and individuals.

Seeking a safe place to live

According to the UNHCR:

- There are 22.5 million refugees, and over half of them are under 18
- 28,300 people per day are forced to flee their homes due to persecution and conflict
- The five countries who host the most refugees are Turkey (2.9m), Pakistan (1.4m) and Lebanon (1m), Iran (979,400) and Uganda (940,800)

Source: [UNHCR, 19 June 2017](#)

Manus and Nauru

For over three years, the Australian Government has held over 1,200 men, women and children on Nauru and over 800 men on Manus Island. Rather than assessing all people asking for protection in a fair, efficient and orderly way, the Australian Government has created a deliberate system of abuse.

[Researcher Kate Schuetze went to Manus Island in 2017](#). She found a lack of access to food, power, water, medical and transport services for refugees, as well as deteriorating mental health for refugees. Refugees told Kate they were very concerned for their safety, and that all they want is freedom and safety.

We're a decent country, and our communities are well-equipped to offer solutions like community sponsorship too.

What's wrong with Australia's current community sponsorship program?

The current community sponsorship program is limited and expensive. It costs a minimum of \$19,000 just for the application alone, making it very difficult for average Australians to take part. And for each privately sponsored refugee, the government wants to take one place away from their own refugee quota – depriving a person of the help they desperately need.

How to create a fair community sponsorship program

The Australian Government must:

- Ensure all privately sponsored refugees are in addition to our government's current humanitarian intake quota (that's the number of refugees our government has already agreed to help resettle). The government is currently proposing that for every sponsored refugee, they'll take a place away from their humanitarian quota. This means our government wants everyday people pay what they've committed to doing – and that's not fair.
- Limit the costs of community sponsorship. At the moment, the Australian program is three times as expensive as the Canadian program. This means that the program is out of the reach for many of the everyday Australians who want to help.
- Allow community, family and businesses to all act as sponsors. We need to have sponsorship offers from as diverse a range of our communities and institutions as possible.

Can we win this?

Yes! Since launching our campaign, the ACT Government has now called on the Federal Government to broaden the refugee community sponsorship program. This is a great first step and now we need to pressure the other states and territories to do the same.

On top of this, we have already campaigned to achieve 150 self-declared refugee 'welcome zones' across the country, home to refugees with incredible stories of sacrifice, courage and contribution. Getting a fairer

community sponsorship program in Australia is just the next step in making refugees welcome in our neighbourhoods.

How we'll make change happen

1. **Collecting petition signatures.** We need to show support for alternative pathways for refugees – from individuals, schools, community organisations and sporting groups.
2. **Talking to our local councils.** If local councils across Australia start to voice their support, the Federal Government will be pressured to do the same.

Winning in the ACT

In March, the ACT Government passed a motion in support of fairer community sponsorship. Amnesty activists Johanna Larkin and Jill Moran share five tips that helped them campaign for this successfully, and in less than a month!

1. **Talk to the people who can make change.** We gathered a list of our local 'members of the legislative assembly' (MLAs), and divided them among our team of local activists, then called their offices to ensure they knew our thoughts on community sponsorship! A key lesson for us was to be open to receiving support from all MLAs and all ends of the political spectrum.
2. **Talk about the positives.** We made sure to focus on the positives of community sponsorship, rather than focus on the negatives of the government's current refugee policies. Community sponsorship can be reformed to not only support refugees but also benefit Australian communities.
3. **Find allies.** The people in power heard from us and also from people with refugee backgrounds from the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services.
4. **Be persistent.** We called MP offices again to ensure our message was clear. They heard from us and our allies many times!
5. **Celebrate every win!** When the motion passed in ACT Parliament we clapped, hugged, and went outside with our banners, placards and shirts. We took a quick photo outside parliament and thanked everyone involved – from the activists, members, other community organisations and volunteers, to the political staffers and the support team at Amnesty. We know that this motion is just one small step, but it is an important one.

LET'S GET TO WORK

Campaign for your university's Vice Chancellor to write a letter to the local council in support of a fairer community sponsorship program.

Step 1: Map Your University

Your Community Organiser will be running some workshops looking at how to map your community - make sure you head along to one of these sessions. Do your homework ahead of this workshop and start to think about who is connected in your community. Think sporting clubs, faculty reps, student unions etc. Something like this will probably need to go through the University Council or governing body. Start to get a sense of who is on your the university council, how that group works, and how they make decisions. The better picture you build of your community in the beginning, the better you can plan how to collect signatures and build support for this campaign.

Step 2: Build Support in Your Community

Work out an overall target for how many signatures you think you need to present to the university. Go big - pick a goal that's ambitious, but also achievable – we need to make them take note! Start reaching out to the key players you identified in your community mapping workshop - this is usually holding events and activities that capture their interest, and making sure they come along. Regular lunchtime “My New Neighbour” stall, partner with the sports association for ‘Human Rights Round’. At the same time - start asking for meetings with key players. If you've got a really great student representative or union president - start there. Check in with your Community Organiser about what local action groups in your area are up to, make sure you invite them to events that you're running on campus.

Step 3: Demonstrate Community Support to Your University

Time to meet with your Vice Chancellor! Work with the student's association or guild to make a plan for how this can happen. It might take a few goes to get something locked so don't give up if it takes a little while. This meeting is a chance to talk about the role your university can play in shaping communities, alternative pathways for refugees and why we need a fairer community sponsorship program. This is your chance to show how much campus support you've gathered for fairer community sponsorship, and letting your Vice Chancellor know about the positive conversations you've had with your community about it.

Next comes the ask. Be clear and confident; you've already done the hard work Give them a clear directive eg. “We'd like to ask you to write to the local council. We'd like you to say our university supports a better plan for refugees, and ask them to pass a motion asking the Commonwealth Government to expand and improve its community sponsorship program.” Agree to a timeline for progressing your request.

Step 4: Let us know how you went

...at youth@amnesty.org.au. Hearing about your meetings not only shows us all your great work, it helps inform Amnesty's meetings with local councils and Federal MPs.

Next steps:

You've done your mapping, built support, and asked your community to use its influence to call for fairer community sponsorship. Build on this momentum and start making a plan to have your university declared a [Refugee Welcome Zone](#).

Front page image: The My New Neighbour campaign comes to Wodonga, Victoria, April 2018. © AI

MY NEW NEIGHBOUR:

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is community sponsorship?

Community, or private sponsorship is an alternative method of refugee resettlement that operates alongside government sponsorship programs. It typically relies on individuals, community groups or businesses to select a refugee, often based on family or other community connections, and pay the resettlement costs that would normally be paid by government.

What are the benefits of community sponsorship?

The benefits of private sponsorship include improved community integration, strong bonds between refugees and sponsors, engaged communities and the fostering of positive attitudes towards refugees.

Importantly, it should also provide additional numbers to a countries annual refugee intake hence increasing the overall resettlement pool worldwide.

Doesn't Australia already have private sponsorship?

Yes but it is fundamentally flawed. Currently Australia has the [Community Support Programme \(CSP\)](#), which commenced on 1 July 2017, after a four year community proposer pilot (CPP). It permits individuals, community groups and businesses to sponsor eligible refugees to resettle in Australia. There is a [limit of 1,000 sponsorship places](#) per year.

The program sits within Australia's broader [humanitarian program](#), which permits a total of 16,250 refugees to be resettled per year.

What are some of the key problems with Australia's current CSP?

The three serious issues with Australia's approach to private sponsorship are:

1. it comes out of the humanitarian program, so it does not provide any additional places;
2. it is very expensive, particularly compared to similar models, such as the Canadian model
3. while in theory it is open to all to sponsor, if the CPP experience is anything to go on, it is likely to be very restrictive in who can actually sponsor, so unlike Canada, for example, community groups, church groups, university groups and ordinary citizens will find it extremely difficult. (Under the previous CPP close family were prioritized, while under the CSP it is likely to be businesses).

What are the costs?

Under the current CSP there are two Visa Application Charges, an initial fee of \$2,680 (per person), and a second fee of \$16,444. There is then an assurance of support of \$20,000 for adult applicants and \$10,000 for each family member of working age (the assurance of support covers any expenses in the first 12 months). The applications much go through a Proposer Organization (APO) which will also charge a fee, around \$11,000.

Added to this are the cost for airfares and medical screenings.

It is estimated that for a family of 5 the upfront cost will be \$92,844 (if all the bond is repaid after 12 months this will be a final cost of \$52,844)

How does this compare to other countries?

Australia's CSP costs are three times the cost of sponsoring someone under the Canadian program.

For [Canada the cost is estimated to be approximately C\\$13,500](#) for one individual, or approximately C\$30,900 for a family of five. Sponsors are not required to pay government fees or visa costs. The government covers healthcare, education and other integration programs. Refugees are eligible for social security benefits in their second year.

How else does the Canadian program differ?

The major difference between the Australian and Canadian approaches is that the places offered under the Canadian model are additional to other government programs. [Canada is expecting to offer 16,000 private sponsorship places in 2017](#), in addition to 9,000 government-assisted and blended sponsorship places.

How can Australia justify the high costs?

For Australia private sponsorship has been seen as a cost saving measure, rather than a life saving measure.

The cost-saving element of the program has been criticised by Amnesty and others, with the government [expecting to save \\$26.9 million over 4 years](#) by shifting resettlement costs to the community without reinvesting those savings into increasing resettlement opportunities.

What is an APO?

The Approved Proposing Organisations (APOs) are individuals, community groups, or businesses that have been authorised by the government to propose applicants who are in humanitarian situations overseas. APOs are also responsible for lodging visa applications and ensuring the provision and management of settlement services to these people following arrival in Australia.

All private sponsorship applications must go through an APO, who charge a fee for their service.

Under the previous CPP there were 5 APOs, however they were asked to re-apply under the new CSP and other organisations were also asked to apply. Despite the CSP starting in July 2017 and the announcement of the APOs scheduled to be announced in October 2017, to date there are no APOs. As such it has not been possible to sponsor anyone under the CSP.

What if someone, sporting group, business or church organisation wants to sponsor a refugee or their family now, what steps do they need to take next?

Unfortunately until the government appoints the APOs it is currently not possible for anyone to be sponsored under the CSP.

Who can be sponsored?

The proposed individuals must meet the definition of a refugee or a humanitarian entrant (defined as a person living outside their home country and who is subject to substantial discrimination amounting to a gross violation of human rights).

Under the new CSP however, the primary applicant must meet the job applicant requirement. This will include requirements that the primary applicant is:

- aged 18-45
- can speak English 'well' (defined as level 2: can speak English well enough to deal with basic social and work situations) and
- has a recent work history, tertiary qualifications or can otherwise demonstrate capacity to find employment.

This is likely to exclude those who are particularly vulnerable and in particular need of resettlement.

The job-ready, language and age requirements are not a feature of the Canadian system.

To the Honourable Minister Dutton and Members of the House of Representatives,

We recognise there are currently only a few pathways for refugees to find a safe home in Australia. One of them is community-led resettlement through community sponsorship. To fully harness community generosity that can help refugees, Australia's sponsorship program needs to be designed in a way that encourages, not hinders, more people to take part, and that expands Australia's current refugee intake.

It needs to be **expanded**. It needs to be **improved**.

Right now, we have the opportunity to help celebrate the refugees in our communities and call for sponsorship of others who want to call our community home, when it is no longer safe for them to continue living in theirs. These are people who are like us. Refugees are our neighbours. Refugees play in our teams. Refugees volunteer in our communities. These are people who have lost their homes, their loved ones and life as they knew it.

Our new neighbours are asking for our help. We are calling on you to build a more generous and more accessible Community Support Program. **It must provide adequate support and services, limit costs, allow community, family and businesses to act as sponsors, it must not take places from others in need, and create more places for people in need of protection to settle in Australia.**

As a generous country we can and should do more.

Yours Sincerely,

NAME	POSTCODE	SIGNATURE	EMAIL	MOBILE	DATE OF BIRTH

Updated: 13 April 2018

Names on this petition may also be presented to relevant Local Council staff, University Faculty and other targets. For more information contact activism@amnesty.org.au.

All personal information you provide will be collected, stored and used in accordance with our privacy policy: www.amnesty.org.au/privacy.

We may use the information you provide to let you know about our campaigns and activities.

REF-902

Return all petitions to your local Amnesty Action Centre or post to Refugee Campaign, Locked Bag 23, Broadway, NSW 2007.

For more information visit amnesty.org.au or call 1300 300 920

Tell us who collected this petition _____

