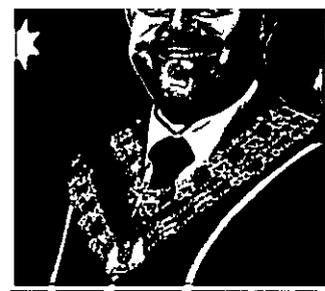


12 September 2014

Cr Gaetano Greco
Mayor
Darebin City Council
274 Gower St
PRESTON VIC 3072



Dear Cr Greco

Re: Forum regarding local impacts of Asylum Seekers living in the community

I am writing to thank you for your participation in the recent Mayoral Forum hosted by the City of Greater Dandenong. It is important that we take the time to share our experiences and approaches to common issues and I enjoyed hearing about initiatives such as the Community Passport you developed in conjunction with the Darebin Ethnic Communities Council.

As you know, a key focus of the Forum was to progress a joint statement of advocacy. This statement will call on the Federal Government for increased resources that will enable us to adequately respond to the needs of our respective asylum seeker communities and the agencies supporting them. I have attached the joint statement, which has been amended to reflect the Forum discussion. I now ask for your confirmation that this is an appropriate reflection of the Forum and your consideration to endorse or support this statement. If there are any comments or minor amendments you wish to have considered please provide them to Kathryn Bates by **3 October 2014**.

It is envisaged this process will be completed towards the end of 2014 at which time the presentation of the statement to the Federal Government can be considered.

If you have any queries regarding the joint statement, its content and process for finalisation please contact Kathryn Bates, on 8571 5159 or at kathryn.bates@cgd.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Memeti".

Cr Jim Memeti
Mayor

Joint Statement in support of Asylum Seekers living in the Community

Preamble

Local Government is an essential tier of government working in partnership with the State and Commonwealth Governments to improve the overall quality of life and achieve the best outcomes for people in local communities. Local government's strength is in activities and services that are place based and responsive to the community.

Local Governments support a wide range of services that help both asylum seekers and refugees, through direct service provision and through collaborative partnerships with community groups. From the recognition of various local government areas as Refugee Welcome Zones, the establishment of Interfaith Networks, asylum seeker specific volunteer opportunities and free access to maternal and child health services local government seeks to create a community that is welcoming and inclusive.

It is becoming evident however, that without reinforcement of resources for programs delivered at the municipal level, local governments and their partner groups will no longer have the capacity to provide the considered and integrated responses required to meet asylum seekers' complex needs.

This Statement represents the agreed views of those local government bodies across Victoria that carry the greatest burden of real, every-day support for asylum seekers.

Joint Statement

We the undersigned representatives of local governments in Victoria note that providing adequate resources for support of asylum seekers based in the community is a duty of the Australian nation and primarily a responsibility of the Commonwealth Government of Australia.

The burden of providing support programs and services for asylum seekers falls increasingly on local government and their partner community groups in the municipalities where asylum seekers are living while they await a determination on their status. Should the demand for resources continue to grow there is a genuine risk that asylum seeker programs will increasingly fail to integrate new arrivals as healthy and productive community members. Therefore, we seek assurance from the Australian Government that it will support local government with adequate resources to meet the needs of people seeking asylum who live in the community.

We believe more effective collaboration and coordination is essential between Commonwealth, State and Local Governments and we seek the following commitments from the Australian Government:

Victorian Local Governments Joint Statement to the Australian Government

1. Aid

The Australian Government must recognise that local government and the community work together as key partners when addressing the complex needs of people seeking asylum in Australia. A wide range of community service and voluntary organisations offer essential assistance to asylum seekers living in the community and many rely on philanthropic, voluntary or charitable contributions to enable them to deliver these services.

Commitment One: We call on the Australian Government to provide more effective resourcing to reinforce the capacity of community service and voluntary organisations to assist asylum seekers to live safely in local communities and receive emergency relief and material aid until such time as their refugee status is determined.

2. Information and Statistics

Local Government takes account of the needs of all groups in the community when allocating its limited resources. Informed local area planning is essential for Local Government to provide adequate and timely support for asylum seekers and support groups in the community, while ensuring that support is well-targeted and equitably distributed.

Commitment Two: We call on the Australian Government to provide Local Government with timely, specific and accurate information about asylum seeker arrivals and locations to assist local area planning and ensure the delivery of adequate levels of support when and where it is needed.

3. Social Inclusion and Engagement

Many asylum seekers arrive in Australia having experienced a transitory and different way of life to that of Australia. Establishing links in their community as well as finding and accessing meaningful ways to participate and engage can prove challenging especially in cases where access to paid employment is denied. It often falls to local government to facilitate community-based activities and services that assist new arrivals to learn about their new communities, understand social norms, develop conversational language abilities and learn new skills to address the challenges and the risks that life in Australian communities can present. Social engagement would be enhanced by the timely processing of asylum seekers. This will assist in determining work rights and eligibility to access services that, in turn, assist asylum seekers to maintain their dignity, provide for themselves and their families and improve overall health and wellbeing.

Commitment Three: We call on the Australian Government to provide adequate resourcing at the local level for appropriate information to be provided and the broad education of asylum seekers about living within an Australian community.

Commitment Four: We call on the Australian Government to provide resources at the local level to enable a program of services to promote meaningful social engagement for asylum seekers living in the community.

Victorian Local Governments Joint Statement to the Australian Government

Commitment Five: We call on the Australian Government to process asylum seekers in a timely fashion. The timely processing of asylum seekers will improve health and wellbeing outcomes for individuals and communities and, in cases where work rights are granted, will have flow-on productivity benefits for local economies as well as enabling people seeking asylum to actively contribute to their local community.

4. Local Level Coordination

Community organisations are often among the first responders in providing support to vulnerable community members and provide a service that is distinct to that of funded service providers. Operating in isolation and with limited funds, these organisations do not currently have the resources available to enable a coordinated response which at times results in the unnecessary duplication of effort and a less efficient use of already scant resources.

Commitment Six: We call on the Australian Government to provide adequate resourcing to enable a centralised coordination point within local areas for the appropriate coordination of limited resources.

5. Housing

Asylum seekers and recently arrived refugees are experiencing significant difficulty in gaining access to affordable and appropriate housing. This is exacerbated by limited income, lack of rental history and reluctance of landlords to rent properties. Overcrowding and sub-standard conditions are commonplace once asylum seekers are able to find housing.

Commitment Seven: We call on the Australian Government to provide adequate resources to assist asylum seekers find suitable and affordable accommodation within local communities.

6. Education

Asylum seekers living in the community have limited access to formal education options. Access to the government funded primary and secondary school system ceases upon a young person reaching the age of 18 years. Following the cessation of formal education entitlement it often falls to community service organisations and volunteers to provide informal education options.

Commitment Eight: We call on the Australian Government to provide adequate resources to enable community service organisations to provide engaging and meaningful education programs.

Commitment Nine: We call on the Australian Government to extend access to formal education until the end of the school year in which a young person turns 18 years.

7. Accountability

Additional resourcing will bring with it an obligation to ensure that Local Government allocates resources appropriately and resource areas of identified need.

We commit to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.

We commit to evaluate the application of resources in asylum seeker support programs by measuring service delivery against agreed objectives and targets. The evaluation process will include annual program reports and Inter-Governmental consultations to review program effectiveness and refine objectives and activities.

Victorian Local Governments Joint Statement to the Australian Government

This statement is respectfully endorsed by the following Councils:

As an organisation that supports the work of Local Government this statement is respectfully supported by the following peak bodies:

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