



To: Sts Peter and Paul Pastoral Council

From: The Step Up Parish Project Team on behalf of the Social Justice Committee

Date: 31 August 2020

Summary – In this Note

- An update on the status of the Step Up Parish Project (SUPP)
- Information about the changing environment for refugee resettlement due to COVID-19
- A proposal to invite parishioners to advocate on behalf of the refugees in locked hotel detention in Kangaroo Point
- Attached: a draft communication to the parish

Recommendation: The Parish Pastoral Council is requested to provide feedback on this proposal and, if supported, to approve its implementation.

SUPP Current Status

Since the Step Up Parish Project (SUPP) launched in March, Sts Peter and Paul parishioners have raised over \$30,000 towards resettling in Canada refugees detained indefinitely by the Australian Government. This is enough to complete the funds required for the two stateless Kurdish men currently being held in hotel detention in Victoria to lodge their application for resettlement in Canada. Approximately \$10,000 is then available to contribute to a third refugee.

Recently, the Canadian Government released the next tranche of application slots to Ads-Up Canada's resettlement partner Mosaic. Mosaic has since confirmed that the resettlement applications for the two Kurdish men have been submitted to Canadian Immigration. We expect a period of between 6 and 12 months for a decision to be reached.

Ads-Up Canada are yet to identify the third refugee. The reason for the delay, as we understand it, is that COVID-19 has impacted both the release of resettlement slots by the Canadian Government and the criteria and priority used to assess applications. Ads-Up Canada are continuing to identify a suitable candidate for the parish to support.

A Need to Reconsider Our Strategy and Plans

The original strategy for SUPP was to share our progress with other parishes to demonstrate what can be achieved and encourage others to follow. COVID-19 has changed things somewhat, given its impact on international migration generally, and the situation in Canada in particular. Given uncertainty over both the number of refugees that can be resettled to Canada and the timing over which decisions will be taken, we need to rethink our strategy for SUPP for the remainder of 2020.



Advocacy for Refugees Being Detained Onshore in Australia

Following a recent presentation by Rebecca Lim, a member of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker On-Arrival Support Group (RASOASG) to the Sts Peter and Paul's Social Justice Committee, we have learned that over 200 men medevaced from Nauru and PNG to Australia for medical treatment between December 2018 and January 2020, are now being detained onshore Australia, including in hotels in Victoria and Queensland.

Given the unwavering bipartisan support at the Federal Government level not to resettle these refugees in Australia, the strategy being adopted by RASOASG is to **lobby political stakeholders to act to address the very real risks to the mental health of the detainees**, arising as a result of their indefinite detention and delays in providing identified medical treatment.

Until we are able to continue to promote the opportunity provided by Ads Up Canada, we recommend that the SUPP project refocus its effort in the next phase to support this advocacy effort.

Proposed Advocacy Plan for SUPP

Following the presentation by Rebecca Lim, SUPP with the endorsement of the Parish Social Justice Committee proposes to invite parishioners to write to Federal and State politicians to advocate for two actions.

1. Release Refugees from Locked Hotel Detention to Community Care Until Resettlement is Decided

Many of the refugees are being detained in facilities located in Queensland. We understand some 80 men are being held in a hotel in Kangaroo Point. While this is a Federal Government responsibility, the Queensland Government should be influenced to advocate for the humane treatment of people detained within the State. We argue that the Queensland Government has a duty of care to protect the health and wellbeing of everyone within the State. Indeed, under the Australian system of government, States have responsibility for health, which includes mental health.

Transitioning the refugees from locked hotel detention to community detention is a viable alternative. Many of the refugees have family connections, offers of accommodation and community support. While it is clear the Federal Government will not support settling the refugees in Australia, we can advocate for an alternative that can reduce the harm of long term, indefinite detention.

By advocating for temporary release into community care until long term resettlement is resolved, we are pushing for an outcome that does not require the government to back down on its unmovable position that the refugees who have come to Australia by boat will not be settled in Australia.

2. Advocate for Withdrawal of the Migration Amendment Bill 2020

The Migration Amendment Bill 2020, currently before Parliament, is legislation sponsored by Peter Dutton which seeks to further persecute the detained refugees by confiscating their mobile phones and denying their internet access.

We know that the ability to connect and communicate with others is an important support to mental health. For example, we know that the two Kurdish men being sponsored for resettlement in Canada

Supporting Refugees



by Ads-Up are in email contact with both Ads-Up Canada and their sponsoring community in Swift Current, SK, Canada. This communication must be a source of tremendous support and hope for them.

Depriving the detainees of these communication facilities is unnecessary, cruel and inhumane.

Alignment with the Australian Catholic Social Justice Statement

This proposed advocacy plan is fully aligned with the Australian Catholic Social Justice Statement “*To Live Life to The Full: Mental Health in Australia Today*” for 2020-21, which was launched earlier this month. The statement makes specific reference to the **mental health of refugees**, and so it is timely to launch this next phase of SUPP given that we have just observed Social Justice Sunday on 30th August.

Proposed Action Plan

Attached to this memo is a draft communication to parishioners, which includes a standard message (*which individual parishioners can personalise if they wish*) together with details on how to contact the relevant political stakeholders.

The stakeholders identified are as follows:

Federal Government

- Hon Scott Morrison MP, Prime Minister of Australia
- Hon Terri Buter MP, Member for Griffith (which covers both Bulimba and Kangaroo Point)

QLD State Government

- Hon Anastacia Palaszczuk MP, Premier of Queensland
- Hon Dr Steven Miles MP, Deputy Premier of Queensland and Minister of Health
- Hon Di Farmer MP, Member for Bulimba

Candidates for the QLD State Government Elections on 30 October 2020

- Anthony Bishop, LNP Candidate for Bulimba
- Rolf Kuelsen, Queensland Greens Candidate for Bulimba

SUPP further proposes that after allowing for two weeks for parishioners to write to the local QLD State election candidates, that the Social Justice Committee would write to the candidates to invite them to attend meetings at the parish to discuss their responses to the advocacy requests. We would then undertake to inform all parishioners of each candidate’s response ahead of the election.

Given the timing of the election, our timeline would need to be:

- Sunday 6th September: Newsletter insert to Parishioners (attached)
- 18th September: Write to Bulimba candidates inviting them to meet to discuss responses
- Early October: meet with Bulimba candidates
- Sunday 18th October: inform parishioners of candidate responses to the refugee issue



Attachment

Draft Communication to Parishioners to be issued on 6th September

Supporting Refugees



S.U.P.P. – A Call to the Parish to Step Up and Advocate for Refugee Mental Health

Last Sunday was Social Justice Sunday and we marked the launch of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Statement: *“To Live Life to The Full: Mental Health in Australia Today”*. Today, as part of our ongoing SUPP initiative for 2020 to help the refugees detained by the Australian Government, we draw the parish’s attention to the mental health of refugees. **We invite parishioners to Step Up and advocate on their behalf.**

As a parish, we have made great progress raising over \$30,000 towards resettling in Canada three of the hundreds of refugees being detained by Australia both offshore in PNG and onshore in Australia. While this process progresses, there is more we can do NOW.

Today, around 80 refugees are being held in **locked hotel detention in Kangaroo Point**, just a short distance from our parish. Many of these refugees have been detained by the Australian Government for many years; some are entering their 8th year of detention. It is reported that **many are suffering from mental illnesses**, surely an inevitable consequence of everything they have been through including the actions of our government.

While the major parties of the Federal Government will not consider resettling these refugees in Australia, we believe that **Australia has a duty of care for their health**, including their **mental health**, until they can be resettled permanently. In Australia, health is the responsibility of State Governments, so we in Queensland are now directly responsible for the health of these men.

There is no need for these men to be kept in locked hotel detention. Some have family connections in Australia willing to support them. Others have offers of support from the community. We believe that until their long-term resettlement is decided, they should all be placed into the care of the community. By doing this we can avoid the terrible health consequences that can arise from long term indefinite detention, isolation from community and uncertainty.

We are asking each parishioner to **add your voice** to those of others calling on the government to do two things:

1. To release to the care of the community the refugees held in hotel detention in Kangaroo Point.
2. To STOP the Migration Amendment Bill 2020 currently before the Parliament, which is seeking to allow Border Force to remove mobile phones and internet access from the detainees. We note that human connection can be important in combating mental illness, so this legislation is particularly inhumane.

On the back of this page are a list of contacts and instructions on how you can go about sending a message to our political leaders. We have provided some simple, standard messages. You can also add any personal message you wish.

Please continue to Step Up and help these refugees. Act TODAY to implement the Social Justice Statement.

From,

The SUPP Project Team on behalf of The Social Justice Committee



SUPP Refugee Advocacy Action Plan

Message to All Political Leaders

To: *[Insert Name and Title]*

I write to call on you to take immediate action to prevent further adverse health impacts, including mental health, arising from the indefinite detention by the Australian Government of the refugees currently being held in locked hotel detention in Kangaroo Point, Brisbane.

Specially, I request that you ask the Federal Government and Minister(s) responsible to:

1. Place these refugees in the care of the community, including with family contacts and others who have offered support, until such time as their long-term resettlement is decided. Australia should not choose to keep them in locked detention when there are better and cheaper options. This is especially true now as confinement exacerbates the risk of spreading COVID-19 as the men report the infection control measures are inadequate. The men are displaying signs of resignation syndrome as they have no hope of a resolution, so the current situation is risking their mental and physical health.
2. Withdraw the Migration Amendment Bill 2020, which seeks (among other things) to deprive refugees in detention of their mobile phones and internet access. I am requesting this on the grounds that depriving people of human contact is cruel, unnecessary and can undermine mental health.

Yours sincerely,

[Enter your name]

List of Political Leaders and How to Contact them

Name & Title	How to contact	Further information
Hon Scott Morrison MP, Prime Minister of Australia	Fill out web page contact form at: pm.gov.au/contact-your-pm	Leader of the Government, with control of the Federal legislative agenda.
Hon Terri Butler MP, Member for Griffith	Email: Terri.Butler.MP@aph.gov.au	Our Federal MP. Griffith includes Kangaroo Point
Hon Anastacia Palaszczuk MP, Premier of Queensland	Fill out web page contact form at: thepremier.qld.gov.au/tools/contact.aspx	The health of everyone in Queensland is a State Government responsibility.
Hon Dr Steven Miles MP, Deputy Premier of Queensland and Minister of Health	Email: health@ministerial.qld.gov.au	Minister responsible for the health of everyone in QLD.
Hon Di Farmer MP, Member for Bulimba	Email: bulimba@parliament.qld.gov.au	Our local State MP. The health of everyone in Queensland is a State Government responsibility.
Anthony Bishop, LNP Candidate for Bulimba	Email: bulimba@lnpq.org.au	Elections for the QLD State Parliament are on 30 October 2020.
Rolf Kuelsen, Queensland Greens Candidate for Bulimba	Email: rolf.kuelsen@qld.greens.org.au	Elections for the QLD State Parliament are on 30 October 2020