

Step Up Parish Project Update



Earlier this year, following a proposal from the **Parish Social Justice Committee**, the Parish of Sts Peter and Paul, Bulimba initiated the **Step-Up Parish Project (SUPP)** to support refugees as our social justice focus for 2020. SUPP aims to raise funds to support the resettlement in Canada of the refugees Australia has kept in offshore detention on Manus Island in PNG and Nauru. Many have been detained indefinitely since 2013.

A lot has happened since the project was initiated in March. But because we have been locked down and unable to meet as a community, this bulletin provides an update of our progress and plans.

Our Goal: To Help Resettle in Canada the Refugees Detained By Australia

Since 2013, the Australian Government has refused to accept any refugees arriving by boat. Refugees fleeing war, genocide, religious persecution and domestic violence from a range of countries have been detained indefinitely in Papua New Guinea and Nauru. For seven years the Government has failed to meet its human rights obligations and now accepts no ongoing role in this continuing humanitarian crisis. However, there is another way.

Canada and The Australian Diaspora Steps Up (Ads-Up)

A group of Aussies living in Canada recognised there is another way to solve this problem. They are called **Ads-Up**, which stands for **Australian Diaspora Steps Up**. We learned about their work via an interview on ABC Radio last year.

In Canada private groups can sponsor refugees to settle in their community. Sponsors commit to help the new arrivals integrate into the community. Each application must be supported by c. \$18,000 to support their living costs.



Photo: Ads-Up Welcomes refugees to Canada in late 2019

Ads-Up raises funds and facilitates the formation of sponsorship groups across Canada. Working with the UNHCR, it has identified around 200 refugees for whom resettlement in Canada is the only hope of freedom. So far, Ads-Up has helped around 30 refugees to apply via this route. Our parish has decided to join this effort.

The First Two Refugees

The first refugees our parish sought to help are two stateless Iranian Kurdish men aged 25 and 33. They are both from Shi'a Muslim Kurdish families expelled from Iraq under Saddam Hussein. Brought up stateless in Iran, they were discriminated against severely. Both escaped (separately) and came to Manus Island by boat in 2013. Detained on Manus for 6 years they were eventually medivaced to Australia last year, where they are now in indefinite community detention in Victoria, Australia.

The Sponsors: Introducing Swift Current, Saskatchewan, Canada

The refugee men are being sponsored by the community of Swift Current, in Saskatchewan, Canada. The sponsors include a social worker, an employment coach, two women who have previously been very involved in sponsoring Syrian refugees to their community, and others. Needing to raise some \$36,000, the Swift Current team made good progress reaching around \$16,000. But then COVID-19 hit and many of the fund-raising activities they had planned could not proceed. Ads-Up identified that this was an opportunity for our parish to make a difference.



Photo: The Swift Current Sponsorship Team

Our Progress So Far

The parishioners of Sts Peter and Paul raised the remaining \$20,341 necessary to allow the resettlement application for the two Iranian Kurdish men to proceed. This has been a tremendous achievement. It will save many months from the time these men must wait for their application to be submitted to the Canadian Government.

Anika Henderson of the Swift Current sponsor group said: *"It is incredible to think that your parish [has been] able to pull in the remainder of the required funds so quickly. We have shared this progress with the two men we are sponsoring, and they continue to be amazed that people around the world care so much about them and their situation."*

What Happens Next?

The team in Swift Current and Ads-Up Canada have prepared all the necessary documentation for the application and are working with an immigration agency that will manage the application to Canadian Immigration. They are awaiting confirmation from the Canadian Government that the applications can be submitted after which it will take about one year for the applications to be processed. The SUPP team will keep the parish updated on progress.

Where To From Here?

As of 10 June 2020, the Parish has raised a total of **\$30,080**. That means we have already raised **\$9,739** towards the resettlement application **of a third refugee**. That's over half-way! Ads-Up will nominate the next refugee and the SUPP Team will update the parish via the weekly newsletter when it was been decided.

We would also like to share what we are doing with other parishes so that others can consider the opportunity to help even more refugees in this way.

A Word of Thanks

Parishioners of Sts Peter and Paul have been very generous in responding to the great injustice and humanitarian crisis of the refugees detained for so long by Australia. On behalf of **Ads-Up Canada**, the **Swift Current community**, the **Parish Social Justice Committee**, and the **SUPP Project team** we thank you for your generosity.

We ask for your continuing prayers for justice and freedom for our refugee brothers and sisters. Please pray that our Lord will touch the hearts of others in a position to help those who tried to come to Australia as a place of refuge. May they also be inspired by the call to be good Samaritans.

From the **Sts Peter and Pauls Step Up Parish Project Team**

10 June 2020

