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Subject: Review of Australia's Refugee Community Support Program – CSP

I am a proud resident of the City of Fremantle, a Refugee Welcome Zone which demonstrates compassion for refugees and enhances cultural and religious diversity in the community.

Before air travel, the port of Fremantle was the first sight many newcomers to Australia had when disembarking from a ship in their new country. Amongst these newcomers were my own parents who, benefiting from the Government immigration policy of the time, emigrated in 1959 and raised a family in Western Australia. I am writing to you now to advocate for an improvement to our current immigration policy that would pave the way for more people to successfully settle in Australia.

In keeping with this strong tradition of welcoming newcomers to Australia, the City of Fremantle declared itself a Refugee Welcome Zone over 10 years ago and continues to acknowledge the difficult journey men, women and children make to Australia to seek our protection. The City of Fremantle recognises the value that comes from cultural diversity and is committed to being a place where residents from refugee backgrounds are able to participate fully without fear of exclusion or discrimination.

Accordingly, many people in the community of Fremantle welcome the Government's decision to review the current Community Support Program (CSP) for refugees in 2020.

Currently, there are only a few pathways for refugees to find a safe home in Australia.

One of these pathways is community-led resettlement through community sponsorship. The Fremantle community welcomes the commitment of our Government to increase the number of places that are available. However, in order to encourage greater participation, some issues with the current program need to be addressed.

There is significant community goodwill and generosity toward refugees amongst the people of Fremantle. Australia's private sponsorship program needs to be designed in a way that encourages more people to take part and facilitates the goodwill that exists in many Australian communities, like my own.

Private sponsorship of refugees needs to be affordable, sustainable and improved.

Right now, we have the opportunity to 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. The Government, of course, retains control of the program, but the community is in charge of welcoming and integrating new refugees to their new home.

Our new neighbours are asking for our help. As a generous country, we can and should do more. As the Convenor of the Amnesty International Action Group in Fremantle, I regularly encounter individuals and organisations who are ready and willing to participate in an improved CSP.

On behalf of the individuals and community organisations I am engaged with, many of whom have contributed to this submission, I call on our Government to build a more generous and more accessible refugee CSP which:

1. Does not take places from others in need
2. Provides appropriate support and services
3. Is affordable and sustainable
4. Allows community, family and businesses to act as sponsors
5. Creates more places for people in need of protection to integrate and settle in Australia

I regularly witness many individuals and organisations in the Fremantle community working together to support refugees. One of my roles as the Convenor of the Fremantle Amnesty International Action Group is to manage the local Pantry Donation Project for the Centre for Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Detainees (CARAD). CARAD is an independent, community-based organisation providing essential welfare and advocacy support to asylum seekers, refugees and detainees in Western Australia.

In Fremantle, we collect thousands of dollars of groceries every month for the CARAD pantry. Our donation partners are many and varied, and include retirees from the Glyde-In Community Centre who, in addition to a generous amount of bought groceries, also donate homemade jams and chutneys; eager pupils from a pre-primary class at a local school; and many individuals who are happy to buy a few extra items when doing their weekly shop to donate to CARAD. We are well supported by our local politicians, Josh Wilson MP and Simone McGurk MLA, who kindly make their offices available as drop off points. The collective sum of these individual contributions makes a significant difference to many. The way in which the Pantry Donation Project is embraced by the Fremantle community is testament to how willing people would be to participate in an improved CSP.

“There is no question about the support around Australia for an expanded community-sponsored humanitarian migrant program - and that is certainly the case in Fremantle. I know from my engagement with outward-looking religious, multicultural, and humanitarian support organisations (like CARAD) that Australians are ready to welcome and sustain new migrants who are fleeing conflict and persecution. It’s an expression of our values, and it has been shown to be the basis of a caring and well-connected approach to integrating new Australians.”

Josh Wilson MP, Federal Labor Member for Fremantle

CARAD provides a range of services to their asylum seeker, refugee and detainee clients. All of their programs are designed to provide holistic support to clients,

they are tailored to meet their needs and include services such as emergency relief, food security and advocacy.

“CARAD has always assisted refugees and people seeking asylum in our community and we would ensure that this support is offered to those who resettle in Australia via an expanded Community Sponsorship Program.”

Esther Deng, Client Services Manager, CARAD

When seeking input for this submission from the many community groups I interact with in Fremantle, the first response I received was from Todd Shimmon, the CEO of the East Fremantle Football Club (EFFC). The EFFC recognises the unifying power of sport and the ability of community sports clubs to share Australian culture and values whilst promoting personal wellbeing and social connectedness. This is evident in their core values, one of which is *Inclusion*.

“The East Fremantle Football Club is a community-oriented sports club with a vision that includes being recognised for inclusion, innovation and excellence. One of our core values is Inclusion. We welcome people of all ages, abilities and cultures into our club, and if there was an expanded Community Sponsorship Program, we would welcome the opportunity to contribute to the resettlement of refugees by offering them ways to engage with our club and become a part of our community.”

Todd Shimmon, CEO East Fremantle Football Club

I am a member of the WA Refugee and People Seeking Asylum Network (WARPSAN), along with representatives from Curtin University’s Centre for Human Rights Education (the CHRE). The advocacy role of WARPSAN is in part informed by the CHRE’s leading ethical scholarship and advocacy for human rights. If given an opportunity, the CHRE would provide an invaluable contribution to the successful resettlement of refugees.

“Curtin University’s Centre for Human Rights Education would be very willing to volunteer to help resettle refugees living in Perth, and offer our social support and assistance to any who wish to study at our university. Improving the Community Sponsorship Programme will provide Australia with the means to welcome more humanitarian entrants and also ensure there is greater community support to assist them to settle well when they arrive.”

Associate Professor Caroline Fleay, Centre for Human Rights Education, Curtin University

The Fremantle community is also well served by many faith groups who have an integral role in the protection of human rights within Australian society. They demonstrate community leadership through programs that welcome new residents, and play a vital part in educating the community about the mutual benefits that result from living in a neighbourhood rich in diversity and acceptance.

As a member of the Uniting Church WA Social Justice Commission I am part of a team working toward reconciliation, justice and peace. The Social Justice Commission does this in practical ways by identifying issues, undertaking research, conducting advocacy, developing resources, organising events and promoting awareness, to ultimately seek change for the people who need it.

“The Uniting Church WA has formally called for a new Community Refugee Sponsorship model that is accessible and engages a whole-of-community approach. Practical support for people in need and concern for the welfare of refugees have long been a priority of the Uniting Church and we have congregations and networks willing to be involved in supporting refugees through a revised sponsorship program.”

Geoffrey Bice, Social Justice Consultant, Uniting Church Western Australia

I am one of many volunteers who works with community sector agencies at the Asylum Seeker Hub on a weekly basis. The Asylum Seeker Hub, organised by Riverview Community Services and held every Tuesday, provides an easy access point for people seeking refuge to receive information and services from a wide range of community sector agencies related to their legal, psychological, welfare and social needs.

“We could support the improved sponsorship pathway by providing a welcoming environment where newly arrived refugees can receive critical employment support services, emergency relief and referrals for migrant support services including pro bono legal services.”

Teresa Lee, Program Manager, Riverview Community Services

As a Welcoming Careers volunteer at the Asylum Seeker Hub I see, every week, the real impact these services have on newly arrived refugees. An improved CSP would enable volunteers like me to further assist people to successfully settle in Australia.

“Through a wider community approach to refugee resettlement, Welcoming Careers volunteers could assist our new neighbours to find meaningful work in their new community and build their individual capacity to lead successful lives amongst us.”

Kate Leaney, Campaigns and Communications Manager, Welcoming Australia

There are many groups in the Fremantle community who would be well placed to share information about an improved CSP at a local level, encouraging community led, neighbourhood driven outcomes. One of these groups is the Refugee Rights Action Network (RRAN). RRAN is a grassroots activist and advocacy group committed to many public activities including community outreach, media campaigns and exhibitions.

“Fremantle Refugee Rights Action Network advocates for the rights of asylum seekers and refugees. For a number of years we have held local and online events aimed at welcoming refugees, and increasing community awareness of refugee issues. We support and would actively engage with an expanded and improved community settlement program -- one which could be much more accessible financially, and over and above existing humanitarian visa quotas.”

Janet Parker and Leonie Lundy, Fremantle Refugee Rights Action Network

Members of the Fremantle Amnesty International Action Group are also ready to offer support in spreading the word through their friendship, family and professional networks about an improved CSP, as well as providing practical support for refugees finding their feet in our neighbourhood.

"If there was an expanded and improved community sponsorship programme, my family would be willing to consider raising resources, such as clothing and food, to support our new neighbours in our community. We would also welcome the opportunity to contribute to the resettlement of our new neighbours by engaging with them personally; introducing them to our friends; and helping them to build their capacity to lead successful lives amongst us."

Christa Kaltunbrunn-Long, Fremantle Amnesty International Action Group

"I am an individual proud to be living in Hamilton Hill, near the 'Refugee Welcome Zone' of Fremantle. I am a progressive, compassionate person and part of a growing movement leading the way in Australia playing its rightful role as a welcoming place for people who need refuge.

*An expanded and improved CSP is **hope** - it's new neighbours and friends for our towns and cities and more people rebuilding their lives somewhere welcoming.*

As part of an expanded and improved program, I would embrace the opportunity to contribute to the resettlement of our new neighbours by offering financial assistance, and support with basic necessities - such as food and hygiene products.

*As a librarian I would also be happy to introduce newly arrived refugees to all the libraries' **free** facilities and services. These include borrowing books and many other items, computer/internet access and sessions for learning English."*

Helen O'Brien, Fremantle Amnesty International Action Group

In addition to the support we receive at a local level from Amnesty International Australia, the Fremantle Amnesty International Action Group is part of a greater network of like-minded individuals. As members of this respected, global organisation our capacity to mobilise into action changes to the CSP is real and significant.

"An improved community sponsorship program would be supported by our local action groups and our wider community of supporters, who have continually advocated for a more accessible resettlement program for refugees in addition to our humanitarian intake. Promotion of the success of the newly improved program and initiatives would be shared through our community by local groups, and on our national platforms and encourage our supporters to engage with the program and support newly arrived refugees."

Leonie Alexander, WA President, Amnesty International

In Fremantle, there is a large network of people whose attitude is one of readiness and willingness, and who have great capacity to support an improved CSP. For the purposes of this submission, I have selected the quotes below to provide some insight into the ability of the people of Fremantle to support a better pathway for refugees.

"I migrated to Australia 12 years ago and Fremantle has been my home ever since. I was welcomed into this community with open arms from the moment I arrived and I know the heart of this place to be one that is built on that spirit of welcome. I know that Australia has that same spirit woven into it and we can and we must do more to open pathways for

refugees. We have to expand the current humanitarian intake and we have to expand and improve the current community sponsorship program as a key pathway. Fremantle has the room in its collective heart to welcome more people to join our beautiful community and I am personally able to offer accommodation in my home to support the success of an expanded and improved program.”

Sarah Gooderham, Fremantle WA

“As a citizen of Australia, an Australia built on immigration, I would welcome a better solution to the way we both view and treat refugees. Our society is richer for its diverse culture and the humane treatment of our fellow humans. Not only this but our economy would benefit greatly from an increased intake, instead of needlessly wasting money on these vulnerable peoples mistreatment they could be supported to become a valuable part of our community. I would be happy to support an expanded and improved community sponsorship program and would have no hesitation in supporting and housing these vulnerable individuals.”

Lloyd Groves, Fremantle WA

“It is great to hear that there is talk of an improved community sponsorship programme for refugees to Australia. I am a Fremantle local and have worked with asylum seekers and refugees for almost twenty years. I have seen first-hand the contribution that they make to Australia if given a chance. I have also seen their resilience and their desire to make a positive difference in their new country. I would be really happy to offer new arrivals both friendship and support and help them integrate into the community. I also know many people in the Freo community who would love to do something positive for refugees. When this new sponsorship programme comes to pass, I am sure they will be as happy to help as I am.”

Anne Pederson, Fremantle WA

These values are reflected in many instances by individuals who are eager to support positive integration outcomes by utilising their own skills and resources. This is evidenced by the following account from Betty McGeever, who lives in a neighbouring suburb.

“I support the Community Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, and if it should ever come to be, would be willing to help in any way I can, with funding or with friendship. Personally I would prefer to help those who came to Australia seeking protection, to support them to find a home in my country, with a pathway to permanency. I am very familiar with the success of the Canadian Resettlement Scheme, which for forty years has settled over 300,000 asylum seekers and refugees with initial support from good-hearted Canadians and the opportunity to become citizens after seven years. This is on top of the Government’s humanitarian intake.

My offer of support is a considered one, based largely on two experiences, both of which demonstrate that Australians are ready and willing for such a program. In 2013, when many asylum seekers arrived through Christmas Island, Red Cross was desperate for accommodation for them. I offered the other half of my home and a young man moved in. Now a SHEV holder he is still there, and I know I have made a difference to his life. The friendship of me and my neighbours got him through some very hard times,

there is huge mutual respect, good for both of us. For several years now, he has been working, paying tax and totally integrated in our community.

This year, with a small group of like-minded people, I set out to raise the money to sponsor a refugee from Manus or Nauru to Canada. We were talked into sponsoring a couple i.e. we needed to raise \$30,000.

We were absolutely staggered at the response and warm approval we got. Donors were so grateful to us for providing an avenue through which they could actually do something to help the boat people who sought protection from Australia but were forced to Nauru or Manus Island for wasted years. Australians may support border control, but most do not support the cruelty of long term mandatory detention. Again and again I was asked "But why aren't you settling them here ?" Indeed!

The fund-raising site closed with \$62,804, so we have rescued two couples to a new life of freedom and opportunity. I would have loved to have had the opportunity to sponsor them to Australia and would have helped in every practical way I could, with friendship and financial help. I know I would have heaps of community support.

I strongly recommend implementation of a Community Refugee Sponsorship Initiative in Australia, based on practical and compassionate grounds."

Betty McGeever, Cottesloe WA

In summary, the ability of the community to support the successful resettlement of refugees is clearly demonstrable. This support is evident in all aspects of community life, including local government and council; NGOs; religious groups; schools and universities; sporting organisations and individual citizens.

This submission should satisfy any doubt you may have regarding the capacity to embrace an improved and expanded CSP.

If you wish to hear more from members of the community, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

Libby Williams