



Vinnies
good works



**REFUGEES AND PEOPLE
SEEKING ASYLUM:
VINNIES NSW
SOCIAL JUSTICE STATEMENT**



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of this land, with deep respect. May Elders, past and present, be blessed and honoured. May we join together and build a future based on compassion, justice, hope, faith, and reconciliation.

**To join Vinnies NSW in building a more
just and compassionate society visit
socialjustice.vinnies.org.au
or call 0448 832 400.**

OUR VISION

Australia is home to people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW is proud of the role we have played helping to make our communities places where people seeking protection have been able to rebuild their lives, care for their children, prosper and thrive.

We believe government policies for people seeking protection should respect human dignity. Our processes should be fair and efficient, and uphold the human rights of people fleeing persecution, torture and violence.

When people arrive in our country, strive to integrate into our communities and contribute to our vibrant society, we should all ensure they receive the assistance they need. If together we provide the right support, our communities will continue to benefit from the strength and resilience of people who have sacrificed much in order to live in safety and peace.

THE CHALLENGE

Many people cannot live safely in their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution. People seeking asylum feel they have no choice but to leave and seek safety elsewhere because their own government cannot or will not protect them from these dangers.

Under international treaties, Australia has committed to uphold and respect the human rights of people seeking asylum and refugees. Yet some of our governments' policies are inconsistent with our international human rights treaty obligations, and with our moral obligations as a humane and compassionate country.

People who seek asylum in Australia do not always receive a fair opportunity to have their claims heard. Instead, they face the prospect of prolonged immigration detention, with detrimental effects on their physical, social and emotional health.

People living in our community while their claims for asylum are processed are not properly supported. The Federal Government's cuts to financial assistance have left many individuals and families without the means to meet basic needs such as shelter, food and clothing. Meanwhile, the Government's approach to assessing claims is often slow and inefficient. It leaves people living in limbo for far too long. Some people seeking asylum may be asked to repeatedly justify their need for protection, while others are denied important rights, such as the right to family reunion.

Many people from refugee backgrounds have risked everything for the hope of a better life. Despite the odds, many have gone on to make enormous social and economic contributions to our communities. Rather than adding to the challenges they face, we should treat people seeking protection with compassion and dignity so they can rebuild their lives, and further enrich our communities.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

To support people seeking asylum and refugees, the NSW Government should:

- 1. Remove permanent residency and citizenship requirements to access social housing and all other housing and homelessness services and supports, and increase funding for those services accordingly.**
- 2. Improve education and employment pathways for refugees and people seeking asylum. This includes removing cost barriers to education, expanding employment support services, and developing employment-related initiatives.**

To uphold its international obligations and the human rights of those who seek asylum, the Federal Government should:

1. Create a fair and efficient asylum process:

- End offshore detention, indefinite detention, and the detention of children. Detention should only take place on the Australian mainland and be limited to the time required to assess people's health and security status.
- Assess people's claims for refugee status fairly and efficiently, and ensure appropriate access to support, advice and legal assistance services.

2. Enable people seeking protection to live well in our communities:

- Properly support people seeking asylum in the community including repealing restrictive changes to eligibility for the basic income allowance (SRSS).
- Reinstate permanent protection to enable people to rebuild their lives.
- Restore access to family reunion visa pathways for people seeking asylum who came by boat.

3. Expand Australia's contribution to providing people seeking protection with a safe place to live:

- Increase our humanitarian intake over the next ten years, including adding a separate quota of up to 10,000 places for the Community Sponsorship Program.
- Reform the Community Sponsorship Program and reduce the financial, country of origin and employability barriers that prevent sponsorship.

OUR PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW has long helped newly arrived refugees, people seeking asylum, and migrants settle into life in Australia. We have met immediate needs such as food and accommodation, provided advice and legal support, and created opportunities to connect with others in the community. The arrival of people from Vietnam and Timor in the 1970s, in particular, saw Vinnies members across the country galvanized into action – gathering donations, establishing specialist conferences, and assisting thousands of families to resettle.

Today, our members continue to support refugees and people seeking asylum, visiting families in their homes and providing direct assistance in the form of food, electricity vouchers, clothing, and furniture.

We walk with people seeking asylum as they navigate complex, lengthy and often unpredictable legal hurdles, and help ensure access to appropriate advocacy and assistance.

Our programs continue to support newly arrived refugees settle into the community, navigate new systems, and develop a shared purpose and sense of belonging. We help families build the skills, knowledge and community connections they need in order to become self-reliant, fostering more vibrant, diverse, and cohesive communities.

MARY'S* STORY

I came to Australia, initially to study, gain qualifications and experience. I planned to return home, but was diagnosed with a serious health condition, resulting in permanent disability. While sick, I noticed growing political instability in my country of origin and worried whether my family and I would be safe if we returned. I also worried that my disability would make me more vulnerable. And I worried whether I could keep my young child safe. I felt depressed and traumatised and realised my only choice was to seek asylum in Australia, for my own safety and the safety of my family.

Since becoming sick, life in Australia has been hard. There is an ongoing uncertainty about our future and safety. I grieve for my old life and feel re-traumatised every time the government asks me to repeat my story. I find it increasingly difficult to respond to the emotional and financial needs of my child. The process for seeking asylum has been long and stressful, affecting my family relationships and the emotional stability of my child.

Lack of qualifications, limited work experience in Australia and my health condition has made it difficult to secure a stable job. I face discrimination because of my disability. And as someone seeking asylum, I am unable to access rehabilitation services. This makes my physical and psychological recovery difficult, and significantly impacts my employability.

It is not uncommon for people seeking asylum to face great hardship while waiting for a decision on their claim for protection. Lack of support for people seeking asylum and a prolonged application process forces people seeking asylum into stress, homelessness and poverty. Without the support of organisations like St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, I wouldn't be where I am today.

*Name has been changed for confidentiality reasons

ALEX'S AND ELIAS'* STORIES

Alex's and Elias' families came to Australia after fleeing war. Like many who have fled war and conflict, they lost everything they owned and found themselves in danger. Both Alex and Elias had good jobs and were well respected in their home towns, but were forced to leave because their safety was at risk.

Settling into life in Australia as refugees was difficult. Both Alex and Elias had a basic understanding of English, but they faced many challenges including navigating public transport, understanding government systems and not having many friends. Little money, no work experience and English language difficulties caused significant financial stress and social isolation.

Alex and Elias did not know each other in their countries of origin, but the St Vincent de Paul Society helped them to connect. Both men were referred by refugee support services to the Maitland/Newcastle Refugee Conference, who welcomed them, and provided them with kitchen utensils and furniture. Because of Vinnies' support, they are both slowly rebuilding their lives in Australia and for this, they are very grateful.

Alex and Elias felt it was important that they give back to the communities who welcomed and supported them. Alex has been volunteering with the Refugee Conference for the past six months. They are excited to become St Vincent de Paul members so they can give back to the community like those who supported them in their time of need.

*Names have been changed for confidentiality reasons





To join Vinnies NSW in building a more
just and compassionate society visit
socialjustice.vinnies.org.au
or call 0448 832 400.