

29 June 2020

Ms Felicity Wilson
Member for North Shore
Parliament of New South Wales

Re: Your support for asylum seekers in the community and the need for ongoing support.

We are contacting you on behalf of the Nangami Peace and Justice Group at the parish of Our Lady of the Way, at North Sydney, to request an on-line meeting with you for a discussion on this topic.

Our church community has, for a long time, been concerned about the plight of asylum seekers, and formed a Peace and Justice group, Nangami, in 2018, which welcomes and includes people of other faiths.

<https://www.nangami.org/>

We were delighted to welcome you to a Table Talk event Nangami organised in collaboration with Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) in late 2018, to have a community conversation on the topic, attended by over 100 people.

The COVID-19 pandemic has now put asylum seekers in the community, and the organisations that help them, in a crisis situation.

We strongly welcome the NSW government's decision earlier this month to provide financial assistance for asylum seekers in the community.

The NSW government has demonstrated admirable leadership in committing to provide \$1.5 million dollars in emergency relief funding for people seeking asylum.

Despite this excellent initiative from the NSW government, the emergency is such that much more support is needed, as this will amount to a very small sum per head. There are over 40,000 people in NSW currently seeking asylum so this emergency relief amounts to a one-off allocation of \$37.5 per person.

These 40,000 asylum seekers have been contributing to the economy, working, volunteering, studying, and raising families while awaiting resolution of their status. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic they are now unable to earn income to support themselves or to access government services.

The JRS community centre in Westmead has had to be closed to community activities and face-to-face appointments, and instead is operating in crisis response mode providing casework, employment support, and emergency relief over the phone, and home delivery food bank support.

A comparison shows the impact of COVID-19 on people supported by JRS:

- Over all of 2019 JRS supplied Food Bank parcels to just under 2000 people
- For 2020, JRS supplied Food Bank parcels to 3,756 people in the first three months.

Statistics for June 2020 illustrate the current situation:

- JRS is doing over 250 deliveries each week, which reach more than 750 people.

- As of June 19, 174 families and individuals are on JRS Australia's waiting list for support with food, rent, medications, and psycho-social support

The current situation is going to result in increased homelessness and ill health.

Studies have proven that the downstream costs of addressing problems arising from lack of health care, housing and social services outweigh by large factors the costs of providing those services in the first place.

- For example, the AHURI study (Reference 1), carried out in Western Australia in 2016 found direct calculable government costs savings in preventing homelessness. The peer reviewed detailed study concluded this saving is between \$4800 to \$13,000 per person in health care costs to government.
- The study “The Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia” (Reference 2) estimates the cost per person to be \$9000 in health and justice services.

In light of these findings, we hope the NSW Government can consider providing further on going support in this area.

Members of the Nangami group would be very grateful for an opportunity to meet with you on line via Zoom at a time that your office can arrange to discuss this urgent issue.

with our best regards,

Reference 1: What are the health, social and economic benefits of providing public housing and support to formerly homeless people?

https://www.ahuri.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0021/8526/AHURI_Final_Report_No265_What-are-the-health,-social-and-economic-benefits-of-providing-public-housing-and-support-to-formerly-homeless-people.pdf

Reference 2: The cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia

<https://www.csi.edu.au/research/project/cost-youth-homelessness-australia-final-report/>