



MEDIA STATEMENT

6 September 2020

Hundreds more refugees being abandoned to homelessness

The @HomeSafeWithUs coalition today calls on the Federal Government to cease the destitution policy for refugees being released from community detention.

Pamela Curr, spokesperson for the @HomeSafeWithUs initiative, said there was no forewarning of the Government's intentions. "Last week the department informed refugees living in community detention that they had three weeks to get out of their house and only two weeks until all assistance ended including basic income support," Ms Curr said.

"While people are living in community detention they have housing and a small stipend to live on since they have no right to work or study, and must abide by department curfew restrictions.

There are 840 refugees currently in community detention who are at risk of homelessness and destitution from the decision to release them with no income support, Ms Curr said. "There are already thousands of refugees on bridging visas who are being denied government support at a time when one million in the community are unemployed.

"Many of these on bridging visas rely on community groups for housing and food to save them from total destitution. Home hosts responding to the @HomeSafeWithUs initiative have offered to provide homes and beds to refugees currently locked up in unsafe detention centres and motels.

"This latest group of refugees transferred from community detention to short term bridging visas, have little prospect of gaining employment in the COVID recession. Both single people as well as families and children will be destitute," Ms Curr said.

A recent report by Refugee Council of Australia documents the scale and cost of denying basic income support for this group of people in our community.

According to the RCOA Report, most of these 840 people now at risk are recognised refugees who were detained offshore for up to 6 years and are still living in limbo as the government has not decided their future.

Those currently being released from community detention will join thousands of others whose refugee claims are unresolved because the Minister withheld their process for more than three years.

These thousands have been living here in Australia in limbo because of administrative delays outside of their control. Refused income support, they are relying on casual and insecure work or on charities which are at breaking point as they seek to assist these people.

Sister Brigid Arthur, Coordinator of Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project - a member of the @HomeSafeWithUs initiative, said the whole approach to managing appeals for asylum is a total mess.

"I can tell you, after 20 years of working with asylum seekers and refugees, the situation is critical.

“People come to us every day seeking help. I meet people who arrived here in 2013 and after 7 years have not even had an interview to start the process. This is yet another example of the punitive policies and shambolic administration of refugee claims by the Morrison Government,” Sister Brigid said.

“There is an enormous reservoir of goodwill in the community, with many offers of rooms for refugees but there is no way that home hosts and material aid agencies can carry the load alone,” Ms Curr said.

“The government must provide basic income assistance for those unable to find employment to support themselves and their families. This is the Australian way - a fair go for all,” Pamela Curr added.

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The **@HomeSafeWithUs** Coalition of more than 20 refugee support groups includes the Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project, Grandmothers for Refugees, Rural Australians for Refugees and Refugee Advocacy Network.