



Report to Synod on the Syrian Iraqi Refugee Response

In response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis, the Federal Government committed to resettling 12,000 Syrians and Iraqis displaced from the Syrian conflict over 2016/2017. This intake is in addition to the annual humanitarian intake of 13,750 migrants, some of whom will also be from that region and conflict.

The Federal Government's response is being managed by Settlement Services International (SSI) in Sydney and Navitas in Wollongong. These government-contracted services provide resettlement support for refugees for their first 6 months in Australia.

The Sydney Anglican Diocese, led by Anglicare, has raised funds towards responding to the crisis. The Diocesan response is in addition to the government activities, seeking to compliment, extend and provide a strong Christian care response to those refugees coming into our community.

Response funding

Anglicare's appeal has received in total \$746,000. Of this \$178,000 was donated from major donors specifically for Early Learning Through Play (ELTP) classes.

Current Refugee Intake

13,750 places annually (11,000 places offshore and 2,750 places onshore)

With an additional 12,000 places for Syrians and Iraqis over two years

Refugee Intake Update

It was initially expected that Syrian and Iraqi refugees would commence arrival in early 2016. However, due to processing delays the cohort arrivals only significantly commenced mid-2016. There is no delineation between 'normal UNHCR' intake and the extra 12,000 Syrian crisis refugees.

SSI and Navitas have informed us that refugees are coming with significant health concerns and psycho-social challenges related to the torture & trauma many have experienced.

Initial information from the Department of Social Services last year was that the majority of refugees would be granted visa subclass 200 (refugee visa) or visa subclass 204 (women at risk visa). What has been identified since then is that a significant number of arrivals have been granted a visa subclass 202 (global special Humanitarian visa). A 202 visa requires an Australian-based proposer who has the following responsibilities –

- meet them at the airport;
- provide their accommodation on arrival;
- help them to find permanent accommodation; and
- familiarise them with services and service providers.

This information highlights the need for establishing strong community connections between Syrian and Iraqi community leaders and the local Anglican Church. The community leaders will likely have more information on where the refugees have settled and their ongoing needs.

As at the end of August 2016, it is understood that in addition to those 1,700 refugees who have already arrived in Australia that an additional 8,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees from the 12,000 cohort have had their health and security checks completed and have been approved for a visa, but are still awaiting the issue of these visas by Australian diplomatic missions in the Middle East. Of these, an estimated 5,000 are said to be Assyrian Christians.

Response focus areas

The primary elements of the response are to provide practical Christian care through Anglican agency services and parish caring ministry.

Anglicare has recruited a dedicated project manager who is responsible to identify opportunity and connect relevant services, to promote a co-ordinated Diocesan response drawing on the strengths and resources of each Diocesan agency, and to liaise with SSI and Navitas to connect service offerings where appropriate.

The key focus areas of the response are –

1. To Support and extend upon the Government response through formal service delivery –
 - Humanitarian Family and Relationship Counselling.
 - Early Learning Through Play.
2. To connect parishes to their local Syrian and Iraqi communities and the refugees arriving in their area –
 - Support to understand the culture and environment from which the refugees have come, through Refugee Training and ongoing specialised training for parish needs.
 - Resourcing and equipping parishes for outreach activities (through Micro-grants).
 - Operating and resourcing support services and activities in the local parish facilities (ESL classes, ELTP classes, Mobile Community Food Pantry, Clothing Pop-Up Shop).
 - Identifying and connecting relevant local key parishioners with local community members and groups through: Mentoring and Employment/Training support; Specialist Professional Volunteers; and Key staff with connections to relevant community groups.
3. To connect Anglican parishes, agencies and individuals across the Diocese for partnering in this work –
 - Facilitating partnerships between parishes (both clergy and laity) across the Diocese so that Anglicans in non-settlement areas can support the local work of the Anglican community amongst refugees.
 - Identifying and connecting relevant key parish people with refugees for: Mentoring and Employment/Training support; Specialist Professional Volunteers; and Affordable accommodation.

Service Delivery Priority Areas

The gap areas identified where our response is focussing are –

- ongoing language training;
- early intervention for young children;
- building community connections;
- mentoring for young people;
- skills training and employment outcomes;
- family and relationships counselling; and
- enough appropriate, affordable accommodation.

Early Learning Through Play (ELTP)

ELTP is a program developed by Anglicare to assist migrant and refugee families with young children by providing a play-based educational program. The program utilises the Early Years Learning Framework.

By working alongside families to help their children learn and develop through play, the program also prepares children from refugee backgrounds to get a good start at school and make transition smoother.

ELTP has originally been a specific school or community site-based program and for the response a new parish based model has been developed. This provides an opportunity for volunteers to run the program within churches and to engage with the families of the children who attend.

There is also the opportunity to link 'sponsoring parishes' outside of Georges River Region to host parishes for prayer and volunteer support.

ELTP parish has the focus of transitioning to school and builds connections to local schools where children will be commencing Kindergarten.

ESL

Anglicare works in partnership with around 90 churches in the Sydney Diocese to assist with making ESL an effective ministry.

ESL is a practical way to assist migrant and refugees learn English and adjust to a new culture.

Through this ministry, church members can demonstrate Christian care, acceptance and friendship.

ESL in the Georges River Region will be the key area of growth required over the next two years.

Hope Counselling

Hope Counselling provides vital support to refugee families from the Middle East (and elsewhere) and effectively addresses a wide range of needs experienced by refugees.

The trauma of conflict and the difficulties that can be experienced adjusting to a new culture and a new language can place added relationship strain on newly arrived families.

Hope Counselling works toward strengthening family relationships for refugees through counselling, group work and community development activities.

Housing

Sydney Anglicans encouraged to make available self-contained premises that may be privately leased to tenants. The premises could be a granny flat or self-contained residence, an investment property or a holiday residence. Landlords would be encouraged to set an affordable rent below market rent for a period of at least six months.

A model for the housing response is in development. We expect that there will be a high demand once the cohort requires long term housing arrangements.

Training

To prepare parish members for working and supporting refugees it is important that they are trained and equipped in cultural awareness training and working with vulnerable people who have suffered torture and trauma.

The training has been split into two modules and will be run as required over the next two years.

1. Module 1

Outcomes – Cultural Awareness Focus

- Understand something of the experiences people coming as refugees may have had; the trauma they may have experienced and their needs.
- Understand the background to why people become refugees and the situation in Syria and Iraq.
- Assisting these new arrivals and think about how you can be involved with them.

2. Module 2

Outcomes - Practical focus

- Communication (including how to speak with people from a Muslim background).
- Trauma (greater depth than module 1).
- Culture (looking at ourselves and our preconceptions etc. and how this affects working with others from refugee backgrounds).
- Working with interpreters.
- More on how to be involved and looking at it from a Christian perspective.

Outcomes to date

- ELTP parish model has been developed & initial site agreed for term 4.
- 600kg of clothing has been sent to the Middle East from Anglicare Villawood.
- Hope Counselling has 25 active clients from the cohort.
- 236 volunteers from churches have been trained in Module 1 to prepare and equip them to work with vulnerable people.
- ESL in Georges River Region has 16 churches offering ESL and we have engaged with four churches interested in launching classes.
- Anglicare is part of the Joint Partnership Working Group of the Premier and Cabinet led by Peter Shergold. This working group consists of a range of government and community organisations that are working on meeting the needs of the refugees. This Working Group is a key forum for Anglicare to receive updated information about the cohort and provide input into the design of various responses.
- Anglicare's Migrant & Refugee Program has established connections with local community groups such as the Australian Assyrian Association as a point of referral to Anglicare programs for new refugees.

Client engagement stories

Anglicare has also been making links with Christian workers and missionaries in the Middle East, specifically with ones who are working with Syrian and Iraqi refugees in urban and camp settings. They are informing Anglicare when a family or individual has been granted a visa to Australia, so that we can prepare well for their arrival. A five-member family who arrived recently in our Diocese – included a mother, father and three teenage children. The family were Christians and keen to meet their local Christian community.

Anglicare assisted in connecting the family with a local Christian couple who have cross cultural ministry experience. They enjoyed some meals together, the couple was able to assist with local knowledge and orientation, schools information, and provide practical support like computer and internet access to help find rental accommodation.

Challenges

There have been significant delays with the resettlement program. It was initially expected that Syrian and Iraqi refugees would commence arrival in early 2016 however due to processing delays the cohort arrivals only commenced mid-2016.

Due to the confidentiality of the settlement program Anglicare does not receive specific information on where and who the refugees are. Anglicare relies on SSI, Navitas and Government Departments to provide general information. It is through building strong community connections that individuals can be reached.

The needs of the refugees are case by case and we need to be prepared locally to have a flexible approach to engage with the community and find ways to support needs where possible. It is vital that strong community connections are established and maintained in order to understand the ongoing needs of these communities.

The resettlement program has taken much longer than expected, however Anglicare remains committed to the Diocesan vision for a well-resourced, well-planned and well-run program to meet the needs of refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria and Iraq.

GRANT MILLARD

Chief Executive, Anglican Community Services

1st September 2016