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Ballarat reaffirms refugee commitment as part of Harmony Day

- Siobhan Calafiore



SHOWING SUPPORT: Mayor Samantha McIntosh signed the Welcome Scroll on behalf of the Ballarat City Council and the community during Harmony Day celebrations on Wednesday at Alfred Deakin Place. Picture: Kate Healy

The City of Ballarat has reinforced its commitment to welcoming refugees during a Harmony Day event at Alfred Deakin Place.

Mayor Samantha McIntosh signed the Welcome Scroll on behalf of the Ballarat City Council at the celebration on Wednesday.

The Welcome Scroll is an initiative of the Refugee Council of Australia involving councils which are Refugee Welcome Zones.

Ballarat has been a welcome zone since 2013.

Cr McIntosh said community participation in Harmony Day, in conjunction with Harmony Week, had grown over the years in what was a celebration of cultural diversity and a chance to reaffirm commitment to inclusion and respect for all cultures.



Harmony Day celebration

Pictures: Kate Healy

“Harmony Day presents a valuable opportunity to recognise the plight of refugees around the world,” Cr McIntosh said.

“(In signing the scroll), we reaffirm Ballarat’s commitment to welcoming refugees from all corners of the globe to our city.”

The Refugee Council’s Jan Govett said the initiative started simply as a good news story.

“We hear so many tragic stories and so much hardship about refugees and people seeking asylum,” she said.

“When I looked around I thought the idea councils have taken on board the refugee issues and declared themselves Refugee Welcome Zones was an incredible statement.

“Given the pressure politically and the pressure from some sectors of the public, it’s not an easy thing to do to stand up and say, ‘We stand with refugees, we welcome them into our community’.”

<http://www.thecourier.com.au/story/5297692/ballarat-reaffirms-refugee-commitment-as-part-of-harmony-day-pictures/#slide=1>