

Resettlement and Sponsorship

Report by Vice President Margaret Rasa

POLICY and ADVOCACY

The 2018 AGM agreed to include both **resettlement** in regional and rural Australia and **community sponsorship** in RAR's national advocacy priorities.

Our challenge was to be able to work in a constructive and pragmatic way that recognised the long tradition of refugee settlement and community involvement and to position RAR as a leading player in the discussion.

Our initial focus was on developing our policy ask and establishing RAR credentials in the Humanitarian Program policy space both with Government(s), in relevant research players and amongst our own refugee sector organisations. RAR Vice President Margaret Rasa and Secretary Penny Vine succeeded in making firm connections with both the federal and key State bureaucracies and with leading peak organisations such as FECCA, ACFID, UNHCR, RAI and CPD.

Emmanuel Musoni's agreement to come on board as a RAR National Patron has signalled the importance of resettlement and community support for refugees in how RAR is seen.

Both Margaret and Penny attended and contributed to the Refugee Council, The African Forum Think Tank and the Kaldor Centre Workshop on Community Sponsorship and Margaret the Labor Party Conferences, the Regional Australia Institute launch of its regional resettlement model and Penny a Canadian High Commission Forum on Community Sponsorship to name a few..

RAR also now contributes to the settlement services sector through its membership of the Settlement Council of Australia, the Harmony Alliance and, importantly, we now have good access to key LNP and Opposition MPS.

Resettlement

2108 was a year where it became evident that both major political parties are keen to boost the level of refugee settlement in rural and regional Australia. RAR took a firm position on this prospect, arguing that we would like to see an increase in the Humanitarian settlement Programs and a recalibration of the service system to support any increase in

resettlement in rural and regional Australia. We called for better engagement of both receiving and refugee communities in the decisions about location, improved accountabilities for contracted service providers and better partnerships with Councils and business.

RAR made a submission on the annual Humanitarian Program and another to the Shergold Review on Humanitarian Settlement in Regional Australia where we were one of a few sector organisations invited to present in person. RAR has also presented to the Commonwealth Senior Officers Group on how a greater resettlement footprint in regional Australia might be implemented. Apart from the question of numbers we have stressed the need for better data, planning and engagement of business and local government and the need for improved processing times in citizenship, family reunion and reform of the job placement system.

RAR also started looking ahead to how we can build self-sustaining enterprise capability for refugees (especially disabled refugees) in regional and rural centres. Ongoing work in this area is being led by Committee Member Gerry Gillespie.

Community Sponsorship

RAR National has been an integral member of a collaboration between key organisations in the refugee sector to enhance community sponsorship policy - as a platform for increasing the numbers of refugees accepted for settlement in Australia and reducing present costs, and as a way to support more positive engagement by communities in the refugee story. The project, called Community Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (CRSI) also involves Refugee Council of Australia, Amnesty Australia, Save the Children, Australian Churches Refugee Task Force and Welcome to Australia.

An outline of the project activities and the CRSI position Paper is on the RAR National website.

RAR has been a strong partner within CRSI approach which has now established recognition and support with major parties, local governments and within several local communities. This has culminated in the project receiving significant funding which will allow it to employ staff and to work alongside policy makers and communities in demonstrating how the approach CRSI approach can work.

CRSI is now developing an implementation strategy and forward plan to commence in a couple of months.

Some RAR groups are already involved and the CRSI team - through a RAR-Amnesty collaboration - will be working with others over the coming year.

Emerging policy issues for RAR into 2019/20

The advocacy work on resettlement and sponsorship – and RAR's campaigns on detention and asylum - cannot be seen in isolation. RAR is not alone in the sector in needing to rethink its campaigning and advocacy narrative and to develop a better understanding of

- the way that Government policy and programs work and especially the way the overall Migration Program operates (or not) and where the advocacy opportunities are
- what constitutes settlement success and how that is achieved through the support RAR offers to both asylum seekers and refugees
- how best to message in different circumstances in order to be heard
- how to build alliances at local levels and with local influencers

Emerging organisational issues for RAR National

Marg Rasa, Penny Vine and Dawn Davis have brought extremely useful policy, program and advocacy experience to their work. Their contribution has however involved considerable cost in time, financial contribution and personal credibility RAR will need to consider:

- How this work can continue – if at all and whether it wants to formalise this advocacy work into a stand-alone Sub Committee
- How it (RAR) relates to the CRSI Project going forward.
- How RAR groups build their capacity to engage with the changes to resettlement policy as it affects their communities