



A proposal to declare the Sunshine Coast LGA a REFUGEE WELCOME ZONE

by

Buddies Refugee Support Group Ltd

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ACN 606 820 302

www.refugeebuddies.org



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Executive summary

Buddies Refugee Support Group Ltd is seeking to have the Sunshine Coast Council declare the local government area (LGA) to be a Refugee Welcome Zone (RWZ). The concept of RWZs was established by the Refugee Council of Australia in 2002 to enable local governments to make a public commitment in spirit to:

- welcoming refugees into the community
- upholding the human rights of refugees
- demonstrating compassion for refugees, and
- enhancing cultural and religious diversity in the community.

In making such a declaration, the Sunshine Coast Council would be joining five other councils and shires in Queensland and 127 across Australia that have already declared themselves to be a RWZ.

The Sunshine Coast region has an existing broad ethnic diversity, with almost one in five residents being born overseas, and with people from more than 150 different countries of birth living here. In addition, there is a growing awareness and support in the community for migrants and refugees, as exemplified by the estimated 500 people who recently joined in the *Welcome to Australia Walk Together* at Cottontree, one of the largest regional gatherings at this national event.

Buddies is partnering with **other community groups** in presenting this proposal for submission to Council. We have obtained input from organisations and agencies that currently provide services and support for refugees, or that have an interest in becoming involved.

Buddies recommends that the Sunshine Coast Council gives favourable consideration to this proposal and if agreed to, decide that the Mayor could make this Declaration public at the Refugee Week celebration on 18 June 2016.

Buddies contact persons for this proposal are:

Garry Bates

Email: gfbcons@bigpond.net.au. Phone: 5445 1710, and

Diana Woolley

Email: dianawoolley@bigpond.com

Introduction

The Sunshine Coast (SC) has existing broad ethnic diversity. 19% of the people living in the Sunshine Coast Council (SCC) area were born overseas (*Source: ABS 2011 Community Profile*) and a total of 156 different countries of birth are represented in the population (*Source: Nambour Community Centre*).

The community spirit to welcome refugees already exists on the Sunshine Coast. In 2013, the **Australian Homestay Network (AHN)** received 400 SC residents willing to home-host asylum seekers released from detention on bridging visas awaiting the processing of their claims for Temporary Protection Visas. There is now a growing awareness and support in our community for migrants and refugees. By November 2015 over 80 local residents had already registered their interest in providing temporary accommodation for Syrian refugees under the AHN invitation.



About 300 people attended the public **Light the Dark Vigil for Aylan Kurdi**, a young Syrian boy found drowned on a beach in Turkey. Approximately 500 people joined in the **Welcome to Australia Walk Together** at Cotton Tree on 31 October 2015 (pictured), one of the largest regional gatherings at this national event (*Source: Sunshine Coast Daily reports*).

REFUGEE WELCOME ZONE

A Refugee Welcome Zone is a Local Government Area which has made a commitment in spirit to welcoming refugees into the community, upholding the human rights of refugees, demonstrating compassion for refugees and enhancing cultural and religious diversity in the community. The Refugee Welcome Zone initiative began in June 2002 as part of Refugee Week celebrations.

This public commitment is also an acknowledgment of the tremendous contributions refugees have made to Australian society in the fields of medicine, science, engineering, sport, education and the arts. By making this Declaration, it is hoped that local government will be encouraged in their continuing efforts to support the men, women and children who make the difficult journey to Australia to seek our protection.

The contribution of Australia's local councils to welcoming humanitarian arrivals has been documented in a research paper* which sets out the benefits of becoming a Refugee Welcome Zone and highlights examples of best-practice from some of the local councils.

The importance of local government in building strong, socially cohesive communities has led the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government to develop an on-line interactive resource for Councils**, *Building Social Cohesion in our Communities*, which is aimed at assisting Councils understand and engage with their communities.

* http://refugeecouncil.org.au/g/131219_RWZ.pdf

** <http://www.acelg.org.au/socialcohesion>

THE REFUGEE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) is the national umbrella body for refugees and the organisations and individuals who support them. It has more than 200 organisational and over 900 individual members.

Formed in November 1981, RCOA is a non-profit, non-government organisation registered as an incorporated association in the Australian Capital Territory.

RCOA's own work is centred around five key areas: policy, support for refugees, support for its members, community education and administration. In addition, RCOA seeks funding for specific projects that directly relate to our objectives and enhance our capacity to serve the refugee community.

These goals are outlined in more detail in the *RCOA Strategic Plan 2016–20*.

Aim of the proposal

The aim of the Buddies Refugee Support Group Ltd (Buddies) proposal is to request the **Sunshine Coast Council** to sign and publically release the **Refugee Welcome Zone Declaration** as published by the **Refugee Council of Australia** (see below) and to nominate a Sunshine Coast councillor to oversee this initiative across our community.

The Refugee Welcome Zone Declaration

(Council crest/logo)

The _____ Council,

Declares the Council of _____ a

Refugee Welcome Zone

This Declaration is a Commitment in Spirit to

Welcoming refugees into our community,

*Upholding the **Human Rights** of refugees,*

*Demonstrating **Compassion** for refugees and*

*Enhancing cultural and religious **Diversity** in our community.*

[name and title of signatory]

Date: _____

This Declaration is proudly supported and endorsed by the



The Refugee Council of Australia is a national umbrella organisation representing over 1,000 organisational and individual members. The aim of the Refugee Council is to promote the adoption of flexible, humane and constructive policies toward refugees and asylum seekers by the Australian and other Governments and their communities.

Extracts from the Sunshine Coast Council Social Strategy

SOCIAL VISION

“Our community will continue to thrive and enjoy a lifestyle that sets us apart. In all of our communities, people are included, treated with respect and opportunities are available to all.”

– Sunshine Coast Social Strategy 2015 (June 2015 edition)

OUR STRATEGY

Key challenges – population change

“Our population is becoming more diverse. Welcoming and embracing increasing cultural diversity among residents and tourists will assist in building a cohesive community.”

“Our response to social challenges and the opportunities that arise require leadership, collaboration and partnerships between a range of government agencies, organisations and various communities across the region. Working together will ensure we build and support an even stronger Sunshine Coast community, living in what we hope will be Australia’s most sustainable region – vibrant, green, diverse.”

– Mayor Mark Jamieson

THE ROLE OF COUNCIL

“It is council’s intention to fit within this network and complement existing activities by others in particular those that ‘support an engaged, resilient and inclusive community that embraces diversity.’”

Outcomes for a strong community – Key initiatives

Outcome 2 – Resilient and engaged communities

- 2.7 Promote/provide leadership through strong messaging on social issues (e.g. domestic violence, disability advocacy, homelessness, multiculturalism).

Outcome 3 – Culture, heritage and diversity are valued and embraced

- 3.2 Develop actions and partnerships which recognise, value and support people from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background.

Outcome 4 – People and places are connected

- 4.4 Support initiatives that endeavour to improve the capacity of volunteers and provide ongoing opportunities for people to undertake volunteering activities.

*‘ A strong community – supporting
an engaged, resilient and inclusive
community that embraces diversity ’*

– Sunshine Coast Council



Objectives

The Objectives of this proposal are:

- A. To **engage the commitment** of the SCC together with the SC community, in the acceptance of refugees from around the world living in our community as a valuable contribution to achievement of the SCC 2015 Social Strategy.
- B. To enhance the **culture of acceptance** within the community for tolerance and compassion toward these refugee families and asylum seekers.
- C. To facilitate a **welcoming, safe and supportive experience** for new arrivals as well as present asylum seekers and refugees within our community.
- D. To enable support programs to be developed to facilitate the **engagement, education and employment** of the refugee cohort based on the MDA model and English Language Holiday program administered by Buddies and others.
- E. To energise community groups to instigate and co-ordinate their **ongoing support activities** across the SC community; including Buddies, Young Buddies, MDA, Refugee Council of Australia, church groups and the Australian Homestay Network.

“ We aim to enhance the culture of acceptance within the community for tolerance and compassion toward these refugee families and asylum seekers ”

– Buddies Refugee Support Group

The Sunshine Coast – been there, done that!

ACCOMMODATION, MENTORING AND ADVICE

The Australian Homestay Network has engaged with Buddies over many years, and has established appropriate contractual and legal protocols for its temporary home placement with local residents for asylum seekers released from detention awaiting processing of their visa applications.

Australian Homestay Network

Anne Jacobson (AHN)

cpn@homestaynetwork.org

The Australian Homestay Network (AHN) Community Placement Network (CPN) Program was first launched in 2012 by AHN, and was successful in placing over 600 Australian asylum seekers in the process of being released from detention centres, into AHN-managed hosted accommodation in Australian cities and regional areas through a Federal Government / Red Cross CPN program in 2012-2013. The results for both hosts and guests were outstanding.

Sunshine Coast: Asylum Seekers (Community Placement Network – CPN) program

Approximately 80 asylum seekers were placed in the **Sunshine Coast** area. These placements were regarded as the “**most successful**” across **Australia**. Guests felt connected to the community & appreciated the support and sense of acceptance offered to them. This was a result of-

- The support provided to asylum seekers from the local Sunshine Coast Buddies organisation – which included transporting asylum seeker guests to English classes, community programs, organising picnics, cricket matches with local families, introducing guests to local business and community members and offering voluntary activities in the community.
- The support provided from host families that taught guests skills (from fixing machines, using technology, financial management, gardening and cooking) and explaining Australian culture (language and sense of humour, Australian laws and sense of trust)

- Many host families were instrumental in arranging employment for guest, assisting with securing lease at rental properties, collating household furniture and fundraising for purchasing scooters
- Support provided by volunteer community organisations (Fusion, Mens Shed, Landcare) to provide skill program for guests (gardening, building, woodwork, plant cultivation) to enable guests to “give back to the community”
- Local businesses that employed guests
- Local churches members that offered household furniture and rental homes to guests
- Local community neighbourhood centres that provided English language classes and place for social interaction



Buddies member Kayla Szumer, convener of the Learn English Holiday program, at the joint Buddies/University Women's Federation picnic, 2011

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND WELFARE SERVICES

Social Integration

Social Integration begins with a genuine and personal welcome. Buddies has developed a program over many years for the insertion with the local community during its week-long Learn English Holiday and can expand this model to accommodate incoming refugee families and individuals. (See photographic collection of Buddies activities [Appendix 2].)

Religious and community facilities

Religious and community facilities already exist and are being utilised by refugees currently in our community.

Medical facilities

Medical facilities already exist and local practitioners are already familiar with refugee case management and their Medicare entitlements.

Cultural Diversity

- (1) **Festuri Multicultural Festival** encourages the participation of the whole community in celebrating and valuing the cultural and linguistic diversity of the Sunshine Coast.
- (2) **Harmony Day** is held every year in March to coincide with the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The message of Harmony Day is 'everyone belongs'. It's a day to celebrate Australia's diversity – a day of cultural respect for everyone who calls Australia home.



- (3) **Refugee Week** is Australia's peak annual activity to raise awareness about the issues affecting refugees and to celebrate the positive contributions made by refugees to Australian society. It is held nationally in June.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAINING

English educational programs already exist, eg Buddies Learn English Holiday Program, Smith Family View Club, LFL, libraries etc.

Buddies Learn English Holiday Program

Kayla Szumer (Buddies), Nambour

The Learn English Holiday Program began in January 2012 and has been operating successfully over the last 4 years. The aim of the program is to extend a warm welcome and hospitality to asylum seekers and refugees from Brisbane by hosting them in our Sunshine Coast homes for 6 days while they attend English classes in Nambour to improve their English language skills. We believe this to be an important key to successful settlement in Australia. Since 2012 we have hosted 117 asylum seekers from the Middle East, Africa, Sri Lanka and South East Asia. Many of them have stayed in touch with their hosts after their visit and have become close friends. Our engagement with refugees and asylum seekers on this personal level is mutually beneficial as we both learn about the other's culture while fostering deeper and more meaningful understanding of each other.

Sunshine Coast Intensive English Unit

Lynette Kerr (Nambour State High School)

Intensive English Learning program is for those who have English as an additional language and are in the Queensland Education System. Refugee children have been assisted with their education in this program. Buddies provided financial support to a Tamil family with students at Nambour High School.

WORK READINESS AND EMPLOYMENT

Skills training is already undertaken **on a voluntary basis** by local asylum seekers and refugees.

Barung Landcare

Fergus Fitzgerald (Buddies)

A total of six asylum seekers in community detention or on bridging visas without work rights have volunteered during the past two years. Barung Landcare has benefitted from volunteer labour in the native plant nursery, with environmental land management and at its annual Wood Expo, as well as the informal cultural exchange taking place amongst its staff and volunteers. The asylum seekers have benefitted from on-the-job training and acquired skills, English language (including Australian vernacular) and local knowledge and friendship.

Buderim Mens' Shed

Garry Bates (Buddies)

Three Sri Lankan asylum seekers have been enrolled in the Buderim Men's Shed program. One person has so impressed the Men's Shed that the President wrote a personal letter of recommendation to the Minister for Immigration extolling the character and work ethic of this man over a period of years and endorsing his application to be granted a Temporary Protection Visa.

Endeavour Foundation Tip Shop, Buderim

Garry Bates (Buddies)

Three Sri Lankan asylum seekers volunteered to act as shop assistants and loading crew at the Buderim Tip Shop. They were issued with workboots and high visibility jackets by Endeavour for the tasks.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Employment opportunities already exist: eg Strawberry farms, Gympie Meatworks, fruit picking orchards, the building industry (a growth market), road works (signage), tourism services, hospitality (chefs, cooks assistants and waiters) and medical services.

MDA Work and Welcome Program

Bronwyn Bell (Buddies)

workwelcome@mdaltd.org.au

Work & Welcome is a partnership between MDA and participating workplaces in Brisbane. Work & Welcome draws on the generosity of companies, their employees, community groups and the public to pool together funds that will create employment for a newly-arrived refugee on a short, fixed-term contract. MDA administers all program funds (making program contributions tax-deductible) and serves as the formal employer of all program participants (avoiding any additional administrative burden for the partner workplace). As Buddies is a corporate member of MDA, this model could be developed on the Sunshine Coast if a significant group of refugees were to be assigned here.

Nolan Meatworks Gympie

Ross Atkinson (Buddies)

In Nov 2012, four Sri Lankan refugees were placed in work with Nolan Meats in Gympie; these were the first refugees that Nolans had employed. **This resulted in the eventual employment of some 35-40 refugees at Nolans while these refugees had work visas.** They were embraced by the Gympie community and Nolan Meats, a local family-owned business. They were a real asset to the company according to the HR manager at Nolan Meats. Nolan was very disappointed and alarmed when these refugees were unable to retain work visas as they had become valuable and well respected members of the company's workforce. This illustrates how refugees can become valuable members of Australian society, and I have no doubt we could continue to find employment at Nolans and other employers for further refugees.

Noosaville Restaurant

Brenda Smith (Buddies)

An asylum seeker has been engaged as a cook's assistant in a Noosaville restaurant, having run his own restaurant in Sri Lanka for several years.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainable future social and economic benefits will ensue from the integration of families into our numerous child and adult education establishments on the SC. Cultural diversity will flow from their incorporation into our workplaces, social events and gatherings, in keeping with Social Strategy 2015 Outcome 3.2.

Opportunities for and benefits to the Sunshine Coast

Federal and State funding and resources often flow from refugee initiatives. The following opportunities and benefits are foreshadowed:

- A. **Federal and State recognition** will ensue, for the SC as an LGA willing and able to contribute to their initiatives taken in respect of refugees.
- B. Local and regional council **networking** and collaboration will occur on multicultural issues (SCC Outcome 3.2).
- C. Community, school and hospital **grants**, eg special needs teacher placements, events and facilities, may be available.
- D. A **common sense of purpose** will be provided for the previously unexposed community at large to positively contribute to lessening the plight of these persecuted people (SCC Outcome 4.4).
- E. **Community attitudes and understanding** will be enhanced. Refugees bring diverse skills and experience to the community that contribute to the economy and enrich the society. Such positive messaging will contribute to the moderation of racial discrimination (SCC Outcome 2.7).
- F. **Economic benefits** will ensue with both a skilled and unskilled workforce and potential professional and cultural qualifications, as have already been experienced by current arrivals. For example:
 - Study shows refugee resettlement gives regional community a \$40m boost
<http://amesnews.com.au/lead-story/ref...>
 - Refugees are Australia's most entrepreneurial migrants, says research
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015...>
 - The big myth about refugees: Refugees can be an investment, rather than a burden
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wo...>

Participating councils across Australia

THE REFUGEE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA (RCOA)

RCOA states that as at September 2015, 124 regional councils (now 127) had now signed RWZ declarations, including five in Queensland (Brisbane, Toowoomba, Townsville, Diamantina and Flinders). An extract of the activities being undertaken by those councils considered analogous to the Sunshine Coast Council's population, including Toowoomba Regional, Coffs Harbour and Leichardt City Council, is as follows:

Coffs Harbour Refugee Welcome Zone

A **Multicultural Reference Group** was set up in 2006 to promote the benefits of a culturally diverse community and engage with and provides services for Coffs Harbour and local district residents. The group is made up of representatives from the local refugee community, service providers, interested community representatives, government and non-government organisations plus a councillor and Council staff.

- Declared a Refugee Welcome Zone in 2008.
- The region incorporates both townships and rural localities
- Has committed to this declaration by hosting annual celebrations of Refugee Week, Multicultural Harmony Festival (in recognition of Harmony Day), citizenship ceremonies, performances, film festivals and other initiatives that support and sustain their refugee community.
- Some of the key initiatives Council has been involved in to better welcome refugees to the area and create an inclusive society include:
 - o In partnership with the NSW Premier's Department, Council hosted the **African Cultural Awareness Forum** in 2007 for local service providers and government and non-government organisations, with the opportunity to share experiences of settlement with refugees in their own words, around the issues of housing, employment, health and education.
 - o Council also has representation on the **NSW Community Relations Commission Northern Regional Advisory Council**, which meets quarterly.

- o Council adopted its **Multicultural Policies and Services Programme 2010-1014**.
- o Council's representative also attends the regional **Multicultural Network Group**, which discusses and works collaboratively to address settlement issues.
- Recent event: **'Write for Rights'** Letter writing has been at the heart of Amnesty International's work for 50 years. Participants bring paper, postcards, pens & family, friends and enthusiasm.

Toowoomba Refugee Welcome Zone

Toowoomba Region has for many years been designated by the Federal Government as a refugee and humanitarian settlement area because of the success of well-established collaboration and partnerships at different levels of government, settlements services, NGOs and the diverse community who have provided new arrivals support. Toowoomba is proud to recognise the work of families, schools, churches and service providers who have made Toowoomba a place of welcome for refugees over the years.

Toowoomba was officially named an RWZ on 21 June 2013 – the third Queensland council to sign to this

- The mayor Paul Antonio, in a public event hosted at the final destination of the Walk Together event, signed the agreement with the Refugee Council of Australia.
- The mayor will lead the Walk Together event every year with other key community representatives.
- The mayor will officially and publicly encourage participation of new Australians in the broader community .
- Toowoomba Regional Council in partnership with Pure Land Learning College's Goodwill Committee, the University of Southern Qld (USQ), the community and faith groups are working together to make Toowoomba a model city of **City of Peace & Harmony**.
- Toowoomba Regional Council **Multicultural Policy** and **Cultural Awareness Training** is an integral part of the induction orientation & training for all Council staff.
- English language programs and access to translating and interpreter services.

- Celebrating community events
- Harmony Day in March
- Refugee Week in June
- Australia Day – an event where refugees can participate and feel part of their new home and adopted country
- Welcome to Toowoomba – a biannual event held by Council
- Citizenship ceremonies
- Toowoomba Languages and Cultural Festival – coordinated by the Community Development Officer – Multicultural
- Cultural Diversity Network (CDN)
- Refugee & Migrant Settlement Services Support Interagency – focuses on settlement services and regional issues for refugee and humanitarian migrants.

Leichhardt Council Refugee Welcome Zone

One of inner Sydney's largest – and most fought over – open spaces issued plans to transform part of Callan Park's 61 hectares and its buildings into a temporary home for refugees – including newly-arrived Syrians – and to act as a settlement hub providing support services and facilities.

It is a bold gesture but with many of the Lilyfield site's historic buildings in a woeful state of repair, the Council has indicated it will pursue state and federal funding to cover the cost of renovations. "Using a portion of Callan Park to help settle refugees will bring Australia's great humanitarian project back into the city's beating heart," Mr Emsley said.

The site was once home to Rozelle Hospital before it was closed in April 2008 and the final few mental health patients moved to Concord Hospital. It is still occupied by drug, alcohol and mental health NGOs, the University of Tasmania, the NSW Writer's Centre, NSW Ambulance headquarters and Sydney College of the Arts, amongst others.

- Declared a Refugee Welcome Zone on 8 December 2015.
- "An opportunity to open its arms to people fleeing war and famine."
- The park's tranquillity offers an ideal environment for the traumatised and disorientated victims of war who have been accepted by our government as future Australian citizens.

Examples of success with asylum seekers on the Sunshine Coast – accommodation, mentoring and advice

A number of Buddies members have acted as mentors to asylum seekers, either professionally or on a personal basis. Due to the cultural differences of various asylum seekers, Buddies has linked a Buddies member to each supported asylum seeker, both male and female, and offered advice and support to their financial, social, voluntary employment, religious and administrative needs. At present six asylum seekers are being supported through this process.

BUDDIES IMMIGRATION SUPPORT GROUP

Brenda Smith (Chair BISG)

BISG has a database which lists the assistance required and the services provided by assigned mentors. This process has been used to achieve a number of significant government department decisions as well as local placements, and is in place to assist future refugee arrivals.

Examples are:

Save Nadir campaign

Fergus FitzGerald (Buddies)



Nadir, a young Hazara man who fled Afghanistan after the Taliban had killed several family members and threatened his life, sought asylum in Australia in 2010. He became well known to Buddies, initially through the Learn English Holiday program. In May 2015, Nadir was facing imminent deportation to Afghanistan and probable death, following an unsuccessful attempt to be

granted protection as a refugee.

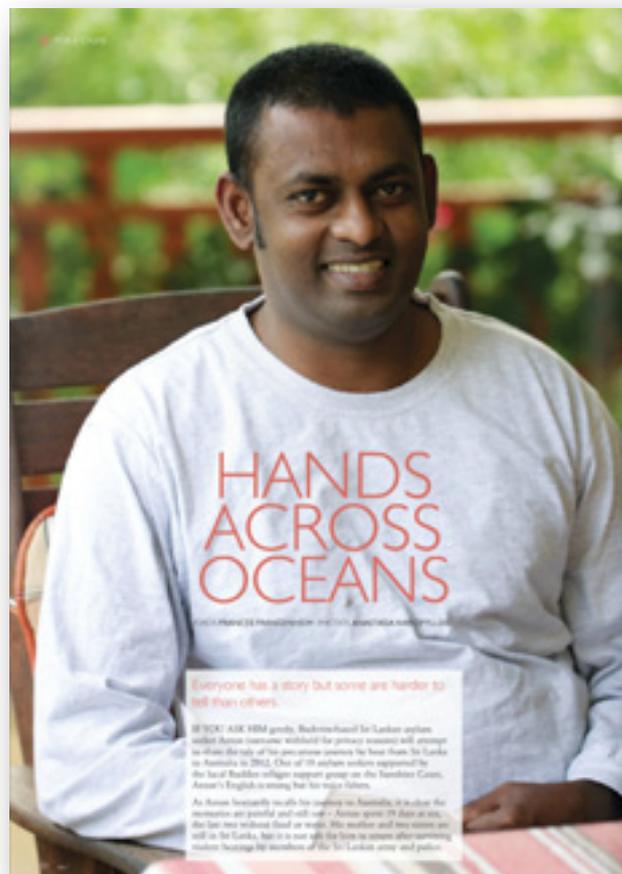
Buddies mounted a nation-wide “Save Nadir” campaign that solicited more than 65,000 supporters and raised sufficient money to engage a registered migration agent to represent him. As a direct result of this campaign, which included representations to the Minister for Immigration and Border

Protection, Nadir's deportation was deferred. He was issued with a short-term bridging visa while the Department completes a further assessment of additional material provided through the International Treaties Obligation Assessment process. Buddies continues to provide material and emotional support to Nadir and will continue to vigorously oppose any moves by the government to deport him.

Temporary Protection Visa granted

Garry Bates (Buddies)

Buddies supported a Tamil asylum seeker over a period of 4 years until he was successfully granted a Temporary Protection Visa. During this time, he was home-hosted by a number of families and also co-housed with three other asylum seekers in a Buderim home unit, supported by the Uniting Church and Buddies members. He received excellent treatment for various medical conditions from Nambour Hospital and a number of Buderim medical service providers. His plight was featured in SALT Magazine 'Hands Across Oceans', SALT Magazine, Winter 2014 (pictured).



National initiatives

THE 'FRIENDLY NATION' – BUSINESS COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA, AUSTRALIAN INDUSTRY GROUP and the AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

The Friendly Nation plan is the brainchild of former **Business Council president Tony Shepherd** and the **Migration Council's chief executive Carla Wilshire** and is being launched as the Federal Government signals it could increase the emergency intake down the track, subject to the first wave of refugees being settled successfully. Australia's three largest business groups have teamed with the Migration Council to help rapidly resettle the extra 12,000 Syrian refugees coming to Australia.

The Friendly Nation initiative is designed to get the special intake of refugees fleeing the Syrian civil war settled quickly and happily, and could potentially smooth the way to more refugees being brought to Australia from the conflict zone. Mr Shepherd said the program, which has the support of the Business Council of Australia, Australian Industry Group and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, was an opportunity for business to show what it could do to help resettle refugees "quickly and more sustainably" by helping new arrivals find jobs and get accreditation for their skills. Ms Wilshire said the program had the potential to fundamentally "change the way Australia resettles people". "It will also, absolutely, make it possible for Australia to take more than the 12,000 Syrian refugees that we are already taking," she said. "This about getting people settled more quickly and getting people into jobs." Under the program, which has the support of the Federal Government, Australian businesses can sign up to be 'corporate mates' and hold in-office fundraising events (such as casual clothes days), become 'corporate mentors' to offer work experience and business services, or 'corporate champions' to offer jobs and skills training, as well as sponsoring specific projects.

WELCOME TO AUSTRALIA

Welcome to Australia commences the Welcoming Cities Initiative in March 2016

“We may not agree on everything, but we do agree that we embrace freedom, justice and opportunity for all people – so let’s work together for that.”

<https://twitter.com/welcome2aussie>

<https://twitter.com/citiesofwelcome>



Dear Welcomers,

Forgive me for stating the obvious, you are amazing!

I became involved with Welcome to Australia last year as the volunteer Director of the Brisbane branch. Over that time, I have been continually impressed by how generous you are as volunteers and supporters of what is an exceptional grassroots organisation.

In my opinion, Welcome to Australia almost stands alone in their willingness to work with anyone in which they can find some point of agreement. They mobilise you, their dedicated supporters and volunteers, to lead and communicate a culture of welcome in Australia. A culture that says, "we may not agree on everything, but we do agree that we embrace freedom, justice and opportunity for all people - so let's work together for that."

I have recently been appointed to lead an exciting new initiative, [Welcoming Cities](#).

Funded by the [Scanlon Foundation](#), Welcoming Cities seeks to facilitate a national network of Local Government organisations and representatives who are striving to foster social cohesion and welcoming communities.

Local Governments are at the frontline of receiving, settling and integrating recently arrived migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum into their communities. We envision cities, towns and council areas across Australia where people have a sense of belonging and a voice in their community's future. My role is to assist Local Governments to do that well - through connection, research, highlighting leading practice, policy frameworks and certification.

If you work in Local Government or as a Community Development worker, it would be great to have your involvement. Welcoming Cities will launch in March, so in the interim, please follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Thank you for all you do to encourage a culture of welcome in your community.

Warm regards,

Aleem Ali
 Manager - Welcoming Cities
 Twitter: [@aleem_ali](#)

Buddies Refugee Welcome Zone contact persons

Diana Woolley

RWZ Buddies Representative

Email: dianawoolley@bigpond.com

Garry Bates

RWZ Campaign Manager and Initial Director Buddies Ltd

Email: gfbcons@bigpond.net.au

Phone: 07 5445 1710

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LEH Reunion Picnic, Roma Street Parklands, December 2013

APPENDIX 1**SC supporting organisations and contact members**

The following organisations operating on the Sunshine Coast and beyond have offered their endorsement of the RWZ proposal and their ongoing support to the Council and Buddies in this initiative.

MULTICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION (MDA)

Angie Spencer (Executive Manager)

MDA is a nationally-recognised independent, non-government settlement organisation. MDA assists refugees to successfully establish their lives in Australia and to become independent and active members of the community.

MDA has worked in partnership with Buddies Refugee Support Group since early 2013 through an auspice agreement that enables Buddies to fundraise to support refugees settling in the Queensland community. In addition, Buddies donates money raised to MDA to help fund a work-readiness training program for asylum seekers in Brisbane.

Following the establishment in June 2015 of Buddies Refugee Support Group Ltd as a not-for-profit public company limited by guarantee, the formal relationship with MDA is being extended to reflect Buddies' corporate status. MDA, as an incorporated body, will apply to become a member of Buddies Ltd and pay a premium membership fee. It is proposed that, subject to successful election to the position at the inaugural general meeting, MDA will join the governance group as one of the directors of Buddies Ltd.

MDA would expand its active settlement program in response to significant numbers of refugees taking up residence in the Sunshine Coast area.

UNIVERSITY OF THE SUNSHINE COAST

Lindel Gregger, Rada van der Werff and Quinn Kerr (Buddies)

Over the past few years, Buddies has provided input for students and lecturers regarding refugees and asylum seekers. Some of the projects we have been involved in have included a charity film night fundraiser which was an assessable study project by final year public relations students at the University of the Sunshine Coast who staged an open air film night to raise awareness and funds. This year we have worked with the IT department to

provide input for student development of 'serious games' – and the students have designed a video game based in a detention centre. We have also used the University facilities for our public forums. Students in a number of local schools as well as the University have had refugees and asylum seekers studies on their curriculum.

UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE (U3A)

Audrey Raymond (Buddies)

A Buddies member has delivered a number of two hour lectures on refugees and asylum seekers at the U3A.

WOMEN OUTFRONT

Lisa McDonald (WOF)

Women OutFront (WOF) is a not-for-profit, volunteer organisation based in the Sunshine Coast hinterland town of Maleny, Queensland. WOF was established in 1998 and has been committed to supporting, empowering and promoting women in the arts. WOF has produced numerous concerts showcasing both emerging and seasoned performers, coordinated and run local and regional pop-up events, exhibitions, workshops and film screenings. For many years WOF hosted a chalk-up event at the Woodford Folk Festival.

In 2014, WOF joined the national campaign advocating for asylum seekers and refugees. They added to their commitments issues impacting asylum seekers and refugees, aiming to demonstrate and promote 'compassion without fear'. WOF has donated funds to various refugees support agencies, most of all Buddies Refugees Support Group. WOF are dedicated to offering their expertise and support throughout the Sunshine Coast in terms of event production and management, as well as raising awareness and funds in relation to asylum seekers and refugees. Women OutFront fully endorse the Sunshine Coast becoming a Refugee Welcome Zone.

SUNSHINE COAST COMMUNITY REFUGEE SUPPORT GROUP

Jocelyn Geraghty (SCCRSG)

At the initial meeting of the Sunshine Coast Community Refugee Support Group on 29 September 2015, there were some 50 people present despite a raging storm! These people and the 30+ others who came to the second meeting (amid yet another raging storm!) expressed very sincere support for the notion of the Sunshine Coast hosting and mentoring some of the Syrian refugee families who are soon to come to Australia. Garry Bates addressed

our second meeting and outlined his proposal to ask our Council to consider making the Sunshine Coast a Refugee Welcome Zone. Garry's proposal was very positively endorsed by the meeting.

Our group was very encouraged by the 400-500 people who attended the 'Say Welcome Walk Together' gathering on 31 October 2015. This represents a large group of Sunshine Coast residents who support and welcome the idea of refugee people being included in our community.

CALOUNDRA CATHOLIC COMMUNITY SOCIAL JUSTICE NETWORK

Bob Cullen (CCCSJN)

CCCSJN is very pleased to support any efforts to have our Council apply for regional status for the purpose of receiving refugees and to promote Buddies activities. We are able to engender support for Buddies in the light of the wider parish involvement in supporting Syrian refugee families as planned by the Federal Government and the Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane. The Director appointed by the Archbishop is working in conjunction with the governmental settlement agencies to assist our parish in the successful placement of refugee families.

UNITING CHURCH CALOUNDRA

Margaret Landbeck (Buddies)

The Caloundra Uniting Church has agreed to support the move to lobby the SCC to have the Sunshine Coast declared a Refugee Welcome Zone. The Church has received several calls from people wanting to help out with various aspects of the impending arrival of Syrian refugees.

NEW WORLD RHYTHM INC.

Sue Ennis (Buddies)

New World Rhythm choir is an auditioned community choir that sings world music in many languages and performs at local festivals, charity events and fund raisers. The choir would like to support any celebrations of multiculturalism on the Sunshine Coast and supports the declaration of the Sunshine Coast as a Refugee Welcome Zone. The choir is a welcoming family of adult singers with a wide range of ages, country of origin and first language. Singing brings people together and is an excellent activity that refugees could participate in or enjoy the music the choir shares at community events. Community choir participation will help refugees build friendships and a sense of belonging.

NAMBOUR CIVIC CENTRE

Kendal Snowden (Buddies)

Each year Buddies organises a fund raising film night at the Nambour Civic Centre. The support of Centre staff Kathy Castellaro and Ian Parfrey, on a voluntary basis, is always outstanding. As a consequence, Buddies has been able to inform the community and promote awareness of the plight of asylum seekers and refugees in Australia. By facilitating displays of refugee art work, information leaflets, guest speakers and raffles, as well as providing bar and beverage facilities, the Centre has enabled Buddies to raise in excess of \$2,000 at the latest event in 2015 and have assured Buddies of their ongoing support.

NAMBOUR COMMUNITY CENTRE

Allan and Kaye Spierings (Buddies)

SCC may be favourable to having refugees housed in and around the Nambour area. Businesses in the Nambour CBD would possibly welcome an influx of people as there have been a number of empty shops. Nambour General Hospital is one of the larger hospitals in Queensland and as such will be able to provide a wide range of services. The train station is located centrally in Nambour. Outside the train station is a bus terminus with links to all major destinations on the SC including the Uni.

NAMBOUR COMMUNITY CENTRE

Linda Dennis (Migrant Settlement Worker)

www.nambourcc.org

In partnership with relevant agencies (e.g. Centrelink, MDA, Sunshine Coast Council) I coordinate a series of workshops about living in Australia (eg managing finances, writing a resume, having a market stall). The aim of the workshops is to increase the clients' understanding of Australian policies, procedures and systems (e.g. health, legal, social, economic and political).

I have established networks and strong relationships with government agencies, local groups and community organisations that support migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. I advocate on behalf of clients and work with these organisations regularly to promote and represent clients' needs.

Nambour Community Centre has developed strong partnership and referral networks for migrant clients with the following organisations:

TAFE Queensland East Coast (particularly with staff from the Adult Migrant English Program)

Buddies Refugee Support Group
 Sunshine Coast Multicultural Network
 Sunshine Coast library
 Diversicare
 Inplace (formerly Lions Emergency Accommodation and Women's
 Refuges)
 Domestic violence organisations eg Scope/Centacare
 Aussie Indo Sunshine Coast Community
 Chinese Christian Church
 Filipino Community Council of Queensland
 Intensive English Program Education Queensland
 Suncoast Community Legal Service
 Centrelink
 Job service agencies/employers
 Emergency relief agencies

The Sunshine Coast Council has a history of funding projects which assist people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds – some of those involved have been/will be refugees.

The Sunshine Coast Council area becoming a Refugee Welcome Zone is in many ways an expansion of the support already shown to migrants through the following initiatives.

Harmony Day 2016

Nambour Community Centre on behalf of the Sunshine Coast Multicultural Network was recently successful in a grant application to celebrate Harmony Day in 2016. We will hold a free community event in Cotton Tree Park on Saturday 19 March from 10am to 2pm. Councillors have already been invited as special guests to participate in a celebration of Australian multiculturalism featuring traditions and entertainment from around the world. It will be a day to celebrate Australia's cultural diversity. It's about inclusiveness, respect and a sense of belonging for everyone who 'calls Australia home'. There will be traditional food, dance, face-painting and a balloon artist plus more!!! The Sunshine Coast Multicultural Network will also screen ColourFest films at Caloundra on Monday 21 March.

Global Living Libraries Oct-Dec 2015

Nambour Community Centre obtained funding earlier in 2015 to run eight 'Global Living Libraries' throughout the Sunshine Coast. Local residents had the opportunity to visit a living library and have their ideas challenged by having a 20 minute conversation with a living book, a person from a multicultural background who has a very different story from their own. One speaker was a refugee and another an asylum seeker.

Talk 2 Friends

A conversational English class is held at Nambour Community Centre on Friday mornings (in partnership with Solutions 4 Learning). This is an opportunity for people from culturally diverse backgrounds to learn or improve their English, meet people and make new friends and have fun. It is run by a qualified TESOL teacher. Asylum seekers and refugees attend/ have attended this class.



Forum @ USC: Refugees – there is a better way. Sippy Downs, September 2014

APPENDIX 2

Some Buddies activities 2010-2015

