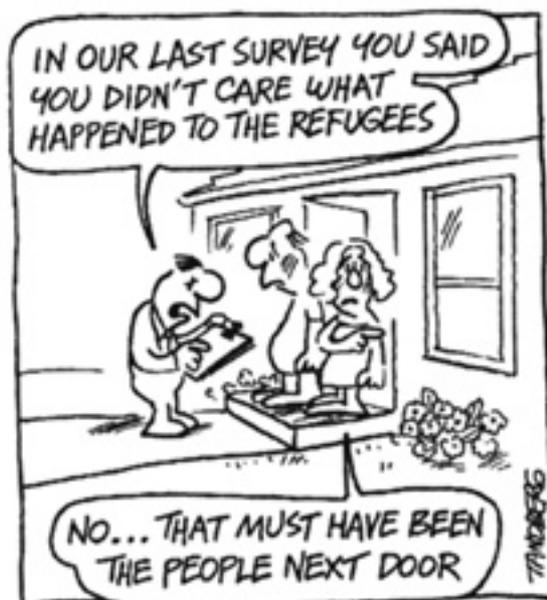


THE ADVOCATES' HELP KIT



*Your guide to
successful and responsible advocacy
for refugees and asylum seekers*



**The Refugee Council of Australia
a representative voice for refugees**

www.refugeecouncil.org.au

THE ADVOCATES' HELP KIT

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This advocacy kit has been developed by the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) on behalf of the Detention Working Group for use by advocacy groups and those working with refugees and asylum seekers in NSW. The kit has been designed to assist advocates working with:

- * asylum seekers in detention centres;
- * asylum seekers living in the community;
- * refugees on Temporary Protection Visas.

It is intended to promote more affective advocacy and to be a quick reference guide which advocates can use to update their knowledge, find a phone number for a service provider, or find out where to get some more information about a particular issue. If you have questions you are welcome to call RCOA on 02 9660 5300 or email at INFO@REFUGEECOUNCIL.ORG.AU.

SOME BASIC FACTS

WHO ARE REFUGEES?

A refugee is legally defined as:

Any person who owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country.

This definition comes from the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (the Refugee Convention) and is used by the Australian Government to determine whether our country has protection obligations towards an individual. If a person is found to be a refugee, Australia is obliged under international law to offer support and to ensure that the person is not sent back unwillingly to his/her country of origin.

The United Nations body responsible for protecting refugees and overseeing adherence to the Refugee Convention is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

ASYLUM SEEKER OR REFUGEE?

Asylum seekers are people who have applied for protection and are awaiting a determination of their status. Not all asylum seekers will be determined to be refugees.

Refugees are people who have been determined by UNHCR, the Australian

Government or another government as meeting the criteria for the grant of refugee status as set out in the Refugee Convention.

The term refugee is often used colloquially to refer to people who have been displaced due to a natural disaster (eg an earthquake or volcanic eruption) or environmental change. Such usage is not strictly correct.

REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

Refugees are not in the same situation as migrants, although the two groups are often confused.

Migrants choose to leave their country to seek a better life. They choose where they migrate to and they can return whenever they like.

Refugees are forced to leave their country and cannot return unless the situation that forced them to leave improves. Some are forced to flee with no warning; significant numbers of them have suffered torture and trauma. The concerns of refugees are human rights and safety, not economic advantage.

Because refugees and migrants are different groups of people, with different pre-arrival experiences, it is important that the distinction be made in the services provided. Refugees have needs distinct from and additional to those of migrants, in particular in relation to torture and trauma counselling, secure housing and medical care.

HOW DO REFUGEES COME TO AUSTRALIA?

Refugees arrive in Australia in one of two ways:

- * through the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program;
- * as asylum seekers;

The Refugee and Special Humanitarian

Program is administered by the Department of Immigration. Refugees and other humanitarian entrants are selected by Departmental officials overseas according to specific criteria, details of which can be found on www.immi.gov.au. Most successful applicants are issued with a permanent residence visa and are eligible for a wide range of settlement services upon arrival.

Asylum Seekers seek refugee status after arrival in Australia. Most enter as visitors or students. Some arrive without authorisation. The process for seeking refugee status is outlined below.

REFUGEE STATUS DETERMINATION

Australia has a two-stage administrative determination procedure:

Primary Stage: An asylum seeker lodges a written application for refugee status with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA).

The application is then assessed by an officer of the Department to establish whether the person is eligible for the grant of a protection visa. For this the person must:

- * be a refugee as defined by the Refugee Convention;
- * have undertaken a medical check;
- * have passed a character check.

If the decision is positive, the asylum seeker is granted a protection visa, the type of which is determined by the person's immigration status when they applied:

- * asylum seekers who had entered Australia with a valid visa are granted a Permanent Protection Visa (PPV);
- * asylum seekers considered unauthorised arrivals are granted 3 year Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs).

If the decision is negative, the asylum seeker has 28 days in which he/she can seek another opinion.

Review Stage: this is undertaken by the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT). The RRT is an independent Commonwealth statutory body whose members are appointed by the Governor General on the basis of a recommendation from the Minister for Immigration.

RRT Members make a fresh (*de novo*) determination about whether a person is a refugee. Exactly the same criteria are applied as at the primary stage.

Unless a member accepts an application on the papers alone, all applicants to the RRT are invited to attend an oral hearing. The hearing is formal but non-adversarial.

There are two possible outcomes from the review stage:

- * the RRT overturns the original decision and grants refugee status. This happens on average in approximately 10% of cases (though this is much higher for some nationalities); or
- * the RRT upholds the original decision.

In the event of the claim being rejected by the RRT, it is expected that the applicant will leave the country. There are, however, two

further avenues open to applicants dependent on their circumstances:

- * **Humanitarian Status:** claims rejected by the RRT are sent back to DIMIA where they are reviewed. If it is considered that there may be compelling humanitarian reasons why an applicant should not be returned to his/her country of origin, the case is referred to the Minister for Immigration who has non-compellable discretionary powers (under Section 417 of the Migration Act) to grant a visa. Failed refugee status applicants can also make a direct approach to the Minister seeking his consideration of their case.
- * **Judicial Review:** applicants who have been rejected by the RRT can, in certain circumstances, lodge an appeal to the Federal Court. The Court is not able to determine refugee status. It is the role of the Court to consider whether the determination was conducted in accordance with the law. If the Court finds in favour of the applicant, the case is referred back to the RRT for reconsideration. A favourable court decision does not necessarily mean that the applicant will be granted refugee status when their case is remitted to the RRT.

TREATMENT OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

The majority of asylum seekers arrive in Australia with permission to enter (i.e. they have a passport and a valid temporary visa).

If they lodge their application for refugee status within 45 days of arriving in the country, they are given a **bridging visa** with permission to work (attached to which are Medicare entitlements). They are not eligible

for any Centrelink payments nor most federally funded support services.

If the application is made after 45 days, the asylum seeker is given a different type of bridging visa that has no work entitlements (and thus no Medicare coverage). They too are not eligible for Centrelink support.

Because they are ineligible for most support services, asylum seekers are typically supported by family and community members. Limited support is available through agencies listed in the Key Agencies Section of this kit.

Bridging visas allow an asylum seeker to remain legally in the community until 28 days after a final decision is made on their claim.

If asylum seekers arrive without authorisation or their visa is cancelled at the point of entry, the law requires that they be detained for the duration of the refugee status determination process.

There are 6 immigration detention centres on the Australian mainland:

- * Villawood (Sydney, NSW)
- * Maribyrnong (Melbourne, Vic)
- * Baxter (Port Augusta, SA)
- * Woomera (SA)
- * Perth (WA)
- * Port Hedland (WA).

There is also a centre on Christmas Island which is south of the Indonesian island of Java.

Australia is the only western country to have a policy of mandatory, non-reviewable detention. This policy – and the conditions within detention centres – is the subject of growing community concern.

ALTERNATIVES TO DETENTION

The NGO sector in Australia has been working towards improving the plight of asylum seekers. To this end it has collectively produced alternative models, examples of which are published on the RCOA website: www.refugeecouncil.org.au.

The Alternative Detention Model, as its name suggests, seeks to provide an alternative to the current regime whilst addressing the stated security and financial concerns of the Australian Government. The Justice for Asylum Seekers (JAS) Model can also be found on the RCOA website. These two models provide examples of developed policy alternatives to the current situation

The **Detention Standards Document** has been produced to set out the minimum standards and condition under which detainees should be held if the current policy continues.

TIPS FOR THOSE WORKING WITH ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

Because of the lack of government funded services for asylum seekers and some refugees, many new support groups – often made up of volunteers – are forming. The following are offered as suggestions to help people new to this sector.

1. Asylum Seekers' Safety:

Our first concern must be the safety of asylum seekers and TPV holders. To ensure this, there

are some very important things to keep in mind:

- * **Identification:** make sure that you do not do anything to identify a refugee or asylum seeker publicly without their informed consent. This is not only out of respect of their right to privacy but also because it can put them or their families in danger. **DO NOT** put names in any electronic transmission (email or website), mention them in the media or use them in speeches. It is not an exaggeration to say that there are people in Australia who systematically pass information back to foreign governments. This can place family members at home in danger or cause problems for the person if they return to their country;
- * **Public protest:** encouraging asylum seekers to speak out against their country of origin may be putting them at risk and does not necessarily assist their asylum claims. DIMIA is reluctant to grant protection to claimants whose primary basis for refugee status was committing an act of protest while in Australia, when they suspect that the protest has been undertaken to create or enhance the asylum seeker's grounds for a refugee claim. Advocating publicly might not only be detrimental during status determination, it can have an impact on their safety if returned.

(See later section on Informed Consent)

2. Sensitivity:

At all times be aware of the potentially fragile emotional state of asylum seekers and

refugees. Remember that many have been or are currently living through a traumatizing experience.

Following are some 'Dos' and 'Don'ts' for ensuring we all behave with sensitivity, especially when visiting detention centres:

DO ask detainees how often they want to be visited; respect their decision to have time away from visitors and let detainees decide how long you will spend together when visits take place.

DON'T raise detainees' expectations regarding release or the refugee determination process.

DO only make promises that you can keep

DO think about what you wear when meeting with asylum seekers. Both men and women should wear conservative clothing – not shorts, singlets or other revealing attire.

DO behave in a culturally appropriate way. In terms of language and gestures, you're your cues from them. Women, in particular, should avoid initiating physical contact with men – even shaking hands – until you get the sense that this is acceptable.

DON'T touch or pick up children unless you have been given permission by their parents. People who have been deeply traumatised are often very protective of their children and may be anxious if a stranger engages with them.

DON'T venture into areas you don't know much about – especially those related to the processing of asylum seekers application.

DO bear in mind that asking asylum seekers and refugees to repeat their traumatic stories

may have a re-traumatizing effect on the individual. Although you may be curious about their past, they might not be comfortable about divulging too much. Let people tell their stories in their own time.

Imagine if you had been raped or physically/psychologically abused and were asked to recount the details to people whom you barely knew... how would you feel? Would you want to share details with people had not yet earned your trust?

DO treat asylum seekers like normal people. Remember, they are normal people in abnormal situations.

DON'T feel compelled to bring asylum seekers and refugees into your home if you don't feel comfortable doing this.

DO allow time for trust between you and the asylum seeker/refugee to develop – just like in any other friendship.

DO remember that refugees and asylum seekers have just as many failings as anyone else in the community. They are survivors, not heroes.

3. Looking after Yourself:

People working with those who have experienced severe and ongoing trauma are at risk of becoming traumatized themselves. This is especially the case in the current political climate. The affect can present in many different ways: emotional, physical and/or

spiritual and can influence relations with family and friends.

"I don't have a problem stepping into their shoes, it's the stepping out again that's difficult"

Vicarious Traumatization: this is the name given to the transfer of the affects of severe trauma from the person who was traumatised to a worker or supporter.

Like the experience of trauma, vicarious traumatization can affect a person's:

- * sense of meaning;
- * identity;
- * world view and beliefs about self and others;
- * interpersonal relationships;
- * private life and relations with people you are working with and for;
- * sensory memory;

and can result in:

- * imagery associated with the client's story intruding into waking fantasies or dreams;
- * the same nightmares as the client;
- * preoccupation with scenes of violence from the trauma story;
- * a heightened emotional state: crying easily, engaging in uncharacteristic displays of anger etc;
- * over-zealous behaviour: working all hours, neglecting other aspects of life, guilt that contributions are not good enough ...

Anyone working with refugees and asylum seekers should have a self-care plan in place

(see below) and also watch out for signs of vicarious traumatization in themselves and others.

If you think that you might be experiencing vicarious traumatization, it is important that you:

- * give yourself permission to take time out doing non-refugee related things;
- * treat yourself to some things that you really enjoy;
- * avoid using alcohol, sleeping pills or tranquilizers as a crutch;
- * seek someone to provide professional debriefing.

Debriefing processes include:

- * information and understanding of workers' emotional reactions and their "normalisation";
- * reducing stress by sharing experiences of difficult situations in a group or team setting;
- * learning stress management strategies;
- * reinforcing the value of one's work;
- * gaining an understanding of the causes of one's difficulties, frustrations and learning what one can do through considering alternatives. A group consisting of people doing similar work can be useful way of generating solutions because group members usually have the experience and the ideas to produce a range of alternatives.

If you see signs of vicarious traumatization in someone else, take responsibility for talking to them and encouraging them to take some time to look after themselves.

4. Giving Immigration Advice:

A very important thing for anyone working with asylum seekers or TPV holders to know is that it is illegal to give immigration advice if you are not a **registered migration agent**.

Lawyers and solicitors must also be registered as migration agents to give immigration assistance. The Migration Act details various fines and penalties for those offering migration advice without being registered.

What is immigration advice?

You are giving immigration advice if you:

- * use your knowledge of the migration procedure to prepare or help prepare someone else's visa application or cancellation review application; or
- * give someone advice about the visa application or cancellation review application; or
- * prepare a person or their paper work for a court proceeding in relation to their visa application; or
- * represent a person at court or at the Refugee Review Tribunal regarding their visa application.

What is NOT immigration advice?

You are not giving immigration advice if you:

- * tell a person that he/she needs to apply for a visa; or

- * pass on information from another person (e.g. a registered migration agent) without commenting or explaining the information in depth; or
- * do clerical work (like typing or writing) to prepare (or help prepare) a visa application or other document; or
- * provide translation or interpretation services to help prepare an application or other document.

If a person is in need of immigration advice refer him/her to one of the organisations listed in the 'Legal Assistance' section, for expert immigration advice.

5. Lodging 417 requests:

If you are working with an asylum seeker who has been rejected by the Refugee Review Tribunal, consideration can be given to helping him/her appeal to the Minister for Immigration.

Section 417 of the Migration Act vests in the Minister the power to substitute a more favourable decision.

Sound reasons have to be presented to the Minister if he is to consider using his powers. Where applicable, representations can be made on the grounds that a person would face an abuse of his/her human rights if returned. The Refugee Convention only covers narrow grounds for protection. Other UN treaties that are applicable in such circumstances include the 2 Statelessness Conventions, the Convention Against Torture, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The Refugee Advice and Casework Service ([RACS](#)) has information sheets on how to make a representation to the Minister within the 417 guidelines.

6. Asylum Seekers and the Law:

Australian law states that asylum seekers convicted of an offence where the maximum penalty is 12 months imprisonment or more will be excluded from eligibility for protection visas. Escaping from an immigration detention facility carries such a sentence.

Facilitating the escape of an asylum seeker from detention or encouraging a person to escape may result in that person being excluded from the protection not receiving the protection to which he/she is otherwise entitled.

TIPS FOR ADVOCATES

If it is your aim to change government policy or public opinion, you will be engaging in some form of advocacy. The following is intended as a guide to those coming new to this area.

1. Check Your Facts:

It is really important that all your information is factually correct when advocating publicly

or publishing information with the aim of educating the public.

Remember that your whole argument could be discredited if you report false information so always:

- * ensure your information sources are reliable and will back up your story;
- * check your data with experts before releasing it.

It is also important to be mindful of the fact that sometimes detainees offer information that is affected by their traumatic experiences. Also, advocates may misinterpret the words of refugees and asylum seekers because of cultural and language differences between detainees and advocates.

There can also be a danger in basing your entire argument on one specific case. If the case has legal holes then it will be assumed that your argument does too. Further, if advocates use a case that is not legally watertight as the basis of their advocacy, they risk discrediting other advocates' work.

2. Some Pitfalls of Protest Action:

While the right to protest is a very important part of living in a democracy, there are some pitfalls about which one must be mindful.

Protests at detention centres: protests outside detention centres can have outcomes for those on the inside. Many detainees are heartened by the visible sign that people outside are aware of their plight but some can find the protest very frightening. Protesters at detention centres need to be aware of the

volatility of detention centres and the unexpected effects protest can have. Protests can also have the unintended effect of retraumatizing detainees.

Media coverage: the media enjoys sensational news, and a peaceful protest that has escalated into a violent showdown between protesters and police provides the media with just the type of story they like to report. It also gives the media an opportunity to label refugee and asylum seeker advocates as 'troublemakers', while portraying the asylum seekers as a threat.

Public reaction: not all members of the Australian public are sympathetic towards refugees. Negative media reports they witness simply reinforce their point of view.

Before undertaking a protest action check with an expert as to what the unintended consequences of your protest could be. Good planning avoids most unexpected outcomes.

You're welcome to call the Refugee Council or the Detention Working Group for advice on advocacy strategies. We can also talk you through the possible pitfalls of some forms of action.

3. Naming Names:

Everything that appeared in the previous section about the need to be extremely cautious about identifying any asylum seeker or refugee is as applicable – if not more so – for advocates as it is for helpers.

Always ensure you have the **informed consent** of your clients before recording their names,

through the media or via email, and that you have explained **where** their name could be seen as a result of you releasing it.

Practical questions to ask asylum seekers to ensure consent is informed:

- * are you aware that any use of your name on emails or in the media might lead to your government knowing about your whereabouts and activities?
- * are you confident that your family and friends back home will not be in trouble if your name is published?
- * are you comfortable about letting members of the Australian public know about your story?
- * have you obtained advice that releasing information about your background will not have a negative impact on your immigration status?
- * do you give me permission to use your personal details in my advocacy?

It is only when EVERY question is answered with a "YES" that it can be said that informed consent is given.

4. Using the Media:

The media plays a very important role in influencing public opinion. If used skillfully, the media can be a great ally. It can also, however, do enormous damage to a campaign if certain precautions are not taken. There are a few basic things to bear in mind when using the media:

- * think very carefully about the message you want to get across;
- * make sure this message is simple and unambiguous;
- * designate a spokesperson;
- * set ground rules before an interview – for example stipulate the kind of questions you will not answer.

If you are arranging for a refugee or asylum seeker to speak to the media, they might like to consider making use of an **anonymity agreement** that the journalist is asked to sign. A copy of a pro forma agreement is available from the Refugee Council.

5. Harm Minimisation:

Many refugees and asylum seekers are very grateful for the support you are showing them and they will want to do anything you ask of them. The responsibility therefore has to be with advocates that – in making requests – they are not doing anything that will cause harm or trauma to the person they are seeking to help.

The section on “Tips for those Working with Asylum Seekers and Refugees” covered many things that need to be considered. Effective advocacy, however, often uses the voices of the victims. If this is what you are planning, think carefully about the issues outlined below.

Firstly, do not forget that if an asylum seeker speaks out publicly in Australia, it might

influence his/her asylum claim and future safety. If a decision maker concludes that actions undertaken in Australia were for the sole purpose of strengthening a claim, the law enables them to be discounted in the claim, even if they could lead to the person experiencing problems on return. If there are any doubts – seek advice from the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre in Victoria.

Secondly, it is important to remember that recounting their story publicly can have a profoundly traumatic impact on many asylum seekers and refugees. Even where the person might feel he/she is emotionally strong enough to speak about past experiences, it is important to explain to them that the act of recounting their stories may result in their reliving of these experiences and suffering as a result.

It is essential that a refugee or asylum seeker giving testimony is prepared in advance. It is important that you:

- * obtain informed consent for the person’s participation (see section 2 above);
- * let the person know exactly what to expect – who will be there, how many, who else will be speaking, how long they are expected to speak, what are the things they should speak about ... ;
- * make sure that the refugee/asylum seeker knows exactly where to go and is able to get there (do not add to the stress of the occasion by having the person get lost on route);
- * go through their story with them before they share it publicly. This will give you a

chance to assess how well or otherwise the person will cope in a public setting;

- * give the person permission not to speak about things he/she does not want to – either in their presentation or in response to questions from the floor;
- * make time after the presentation to spend with the refugee/asylum seeker to talk informally about how they felt about the session. **This form of debriefing is very important and should not be omitted.** If he/she appears distressed, be prepared to spend as much time as is necessary so that they are composed before they leave **AND** make sure that they know how to contact the Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture (VFST) if they need professional assistance;
- * give them a call a day or two later to thank them for their participation and to check that there have been no ill effects.

The needs of the individual should outweigh the need for public education.

Case Study:

from an experienced refugee advocate

I was organising an awareness-raising event and had asked a refugee man to speak about his experience. It was only later that I realised that his speech had triggered a very strong emotional and physical reaction within himself and he had had to re-enter counselling.

It was probably a combination of factors. I didn't warn him sufficiently about the probable emotional effect in my haste to organise the event. I may have over-emphasized what impact his speech would have on the audience. Publicly denouncing your persecutor can be an important part of the healing process, but it may not be if your audience doesn't join you in the denouncement. Perhaps he gave so many of the gory details because he thought that is what I wanted and prioritized that over his own needs and limits.

In hindsight I should have briefed him better on what are essentially normal reactions to public disclosure of trauma. I should have assured him that the audience did not need to know more than he was comfortable telling. I should have checked on him periodically afterwards so that I could have referred him to STARTTS if he had not known where to go for intensive support.

I don't know how he looks back on that event now, but I still feel a bit uncomfortable about it.

WHERE TO DIRECT YOUR ADVOCACY

When planning advocacy it is important to think about WHO you want to influence and WHAT you want to achieve.

Given that politicians are the people who make decisions about policy, they are important targets. Following are some suggestions about lobbying politicians.

1. Local MPs:

Your local Member of Parliament wants your vote so he/she is a useful person with whom to make contact.

Before approaching your MP it is a good idea to do some research about his/her views and interests. The best way to get this information is from the MP's maiden speech, a copy of which can be found under their name on the Parliament House website at www.aph.gov.au.

Approaches to MPs can be via letter but a meeting is often a good way to explore issues in more depth and to get feedback on what the MP intends to do for you as a constituent on this issue.

2. Parliamentary Committees:

Parliamentary Committees periodically conduct inquiries into refugee related issues.

The Committees most likely to hold enquiries into refugee and asylum seeker issues are:

- * the Joint Standing Committee on Migration,
- * the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties,
- * the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee, and
- * the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade's Human Rights Sub-Committee.

More often than not, inquiries are initiated by politicians who refer a matter to the relevant Committee. Committees can also decide to conduct an inquiry into an issue the members see as relevant.

It is also possible for advocates to write to the Chair of a Committee to encourage the committee to undertake an inquiry into a particular issue. Before doing this, however, it is a good idea to speak to the Committee Secretary to get a sense of the best way to frame such a suggestion.

If, on the other hand, there are concerns about a new piece of legislation, advocates can approach Senators asking them to refer the bill to the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee. This will give you a chance to make a submission in which you can outline your concerns.

Information about the Committees and their inquiries can be obtained on the Parliament House website at www.aph.gov.au.

[LODGING A COMPLAINT](#)

If you have concrete evidence about mistreatment of people in immigration detention centres or inappropriate behaviour on the part of government officials or centre staff, there are a number of avenues through which complaints can be lodged.

The Office of the Ombudsman

Advocates who want to make complaints about Government agencies can do so to the relevant Ombudsman.

There is a Commonwealth Ombudsman who deals with complaints against Commonwealth Departments and their services and there are also state and territory Ombudsmen.

The role of each of the Ombudsmen is to investigate complaints impartially, assist in resolution of disputes, and address defective administration. As a general rule, the Ombudsmen will not, and in some cases cannot, investigate complaints until they have been raised with the agency.

There are various sections within the office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman. For information see the relevant sections of the Ombudsman's website:

[Commonwealth Government agency complaints](#)
[Defense Force complaints](#)
[Freedom of Information complaints](#)
[Australian Federal Police Complaints](#)

In addition, a complaints form can be downloaded from

www.ombudsman.gov.au/complaints

To contact the Victorian Office:

The Ombudsman Victoria
Level 22, 459 Collins Street
Melbourne 3000

Tel. 03 9613 6222

Fax. 03 9614 0246

Email. ombudvic@ombudsman.vic.gov.au

Web. www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au

Toll Free. 1800 806 314

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC)

Complaints may be made to the Human Rights Commission if it is perceived that there has been an abuse as defined by one or more of the following Acts:

- * Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986
- * Sex Discrimination Act 1984
- * Racial Discrimination Act 1975
- * Disability Discrimination Act 1992

Specific grounds for complaint include race, sex, pregnancy, marital status and disability in specific areas of public life such as employment, education and in the administration of Commonwealth laws and programs.

The Commission also inquires into allegations of breaches of human rights by the Commonwealth Government or its agencies. The types of human rights breaches the Commission may investigate include allegations of cruel, inhumane and degrading

treatment, allegations regarding conditions of detention, and the rights of children.

The Commission is not able to review or overturn decisions made regarding visa applications

All complaints must be made in writing or electronically. You can either:

- * send a letter to the Commission;
- * contact the Complaint Infoline (1300 656 419) and ask for a complaint form;
- * print the form off the Commission's website at http://www.humanrights.gov.au/complaints_information/complaints_form.
- * lodge your complaint electronically: http://www.humanrights.gov.au/complaints_information/

There is no charge for lodging a complaint.

On average it takes seven months from the time of receipt to finalise a complaint. More complex complaints may take longer. Most of the complaint process is undertaken by letter or telephone, so a complaint can be lodged by people irrespective of where they live and whether or not they are a resident of Australia. If a face-to-face meeting is deemed necessary, the Commission staff will travel interstate or to rural or remote areas to provide those services.

Contact Details

Complaints Infoline:
1300-656-419

Tollfree: 1800-620-241

Tel: 9284-9600

Facsimile: 9284-9689

E mail:

complaintsinfo@humanrights.gov.au
newcomplaints@humanrights.gov.au

Interpreter Service: 131 450

Health Services Commissioner of Victoria

In Victoria, detainees or refugees and asylum seekers living in the community can make complaints about the health care they are receiving to the Health Services Commissioner. Complaints can be lodged over the phone, but need to be followed up in writing.

Contact Details:

Health Services Commissioner
Complaints and Information
Telephone: (03) 8601 5200
Toll Free: 1800 136 066
E-mail: hsc@dhs.vic.gov.au

or write to:

Health Services Commissioner
30th Floor
570 Bourke Street
Melbourne. 3000
Victoria, Australia
(Tel: 131450 for an interpreter)

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC)

For a complaint about phone cards or telephone services at detention centres on behalf of detainees (or detainees wish to make complaints themselves) these can be made to the ACCC.

The ACCC is an independent statutory authority responsible for administering the

Trade Practices Act 1974. The goal of the ACCC is to enhance the welfare of Australians through the promotion of competition and fair-trading, and provision of consumer protection.

To make an inquiry or lodge a complaint, contact the ACCC information line on **1300 302 502** or visit the website: www.accc.gov.au

It is also possible, under very limited and specific circumstances, to make a complaint to one of the complaints mechanisms with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Complaints can only be lodged when all domestic remedies have been exhausted and the processing of complaints can take many years.

It is wise to seek specialist legal advice before commencing with such a complaint.

Concerns can also be brought to the attention of the following advisory bodies:

The Immigration Detention Advisory Group (IDAG)

The Immigration Minister formed IDAG in February 2001 to provide advice on the appropriateness and adequacy of services, accommodation and facilities at Immigration Reception and Processing Centres (IRPCs) and Immigration Detention Centres (IDCs). IDAG has a broad range of powers and it reports directly to the Minister.

Advocacy groups with substantiated evidence about improper practices in immigration

detention centres can bring this to IDAG's attention.

Contact details

IDAG Secretariat
C/- DIMIA
PO Box 25
Belconnen ACT 2616
Website: www.immi.gov.au/detention/idag

Community Reference Committees

Community Reference Committees have been established in each DIMIA detention facility around the country.

Each Committee focuses on matters pertaining to the conditions and services provided at the particular centre.

Membership of Community Reference Committees is by invitation only, and includes representatives of DIMIA, representatives of Australian Correctional Management, detainees, community-based service providers and local community representatives.

Advocates with concerns about Maribyrnong Detention Centre can contact:

Maribyrnong Detention Centre Advisory Committee

C/o Centre Manager
Maribyrnong Immigration Detention Centre
PO Box 275
Avondale Heights VIC 3034

The DIMIA-IGO-NGO Forum

The Department of Immigration has, in the past, met on a regular basis with

representatives of intergovernmental agencies (IGOs) – namely UNHCR and the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) – and delegates from invited national peak non-government organisations (NGOs) and other representative agencies.

The DIMIA-convened forum did not meet in 2002 but is to be reinstated in 2003.

The Forum provides a venue for discussion about legislative developments and national policy issues and for raising community concerns.

People wishing to have concerns raised at the Forum can contact the NGO participants. These include: RCOA, the National Council of Churches, Red Cross, the National Torture Trauma Forum, the International Commission of Jurists and Amnesty International.

It is also possible to raise concerns directly with the Minister for Immigration or the Department.

Minister for Immigration

The Hon. Philip Ruddock MP
Minister for Immigration and Multicultural
and Indigenous Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA)

DIMIA is the main Government body dealing with refugees and asylum seekers. Amongst other things, DIMIA processes onshore and offshore applications for refugee visas, has carriage of border control (including detention) and funds settlement services.

The DIMIA website, www.immi.gov.au provides information regarding:

- * Australia Government policy;
- * government rebuttals to criticisms;
- * mandatory detention issues;
- * visa applications;
- * migration agents, including information about how to register complaints about migration agents;
- * children in detention;
- * Temporary Protection Visa entitlements;
- * Australian population changes and predictions;
- * settlement services;
- * statistics.

Contact Details:

National inquiry line: 131 881

Central Office:
PO Box 25
Belconnen ACT 2616

Victorian NETWORKS

One of the best ways to learn more about the issues is to participate in one or more of the established NGO coordinated networks.

They bring together representatives of the many agencies that are working in the sector to exchange information. They are also useful places to build alliances.

Justice for Asylum Seekers (JAS) alliance

JAS is an unincorporated alliance of over 25 community organisations working with and for refugees and asylum seekers in Victoria. Established in 1999, JAS aims to challenge negative perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers in the media and in current public and political debate.

A key activity of JAS has been the development and economic costing of the [JAS Alternative Model](#). This model provides a practical and viable alternative to current immigration detention policies. JAS has also been engaged in broad political lobbying at a State and Federal level on issues of detention, asylum and temporary protection. Part of JAS' work also involves public education and community capacity building.

The broader JAS membership meets bimonthly and the JAS Campaign Working Group, which involves a smaller group of representatives, meets more frequently.

Attendance is open to agency representatives who work with or for asylum seekers and

refugees. Individuals not representing an agency may be able to attend upon request.

Contact Details:

Lyndene Wan
JAS Campaign Worker
Ph. 03 9926 5727
Email: lwan@melbourne.catholic.org.au

Network of Asylum Seeker Agencies in Victoria (NASA-Vic)

NASA-Vic is a recently formed alliance of agencies whose particular focus is providing services and supports to community-based asylum seekers. NASA-Vic formed to improve the level of this support through a coordinated response involving sharing information and resources, joint advocacy and working collaboratively toward policy change.

NASA-Vic meets monthly and locations are rotated through the various member organisations.

Members of NASA-Vic provide a range of services including:

- * legal support
- * housing
- * material aid and financial assistance
- * health care
- * English classes and education
- * volunteer coordination and training

Contact details:

NASA-Vic Convenor:
Ms. Jacki Dillon
Victorian Research and Policy Officer
Refugee Council of Australia
Ph. 03 9416 0044
Email: rcoa.vic@bsl.org.au

Melbourne Refugee and Asylum Seeker Health Network (RASHN)

RASHN formed in late 2001 aiming to improve the level of health services to asylum seekers not eligible for Medicare and advocate for the health rights of asylum seekers in the community and those in immigration detention.

The Steering Committee of RASHN meets regularly with the broader network gathering 3 or 4 times a year. Three Working Groups of RASHN have established themselves to progress the aims of the network. These include Education, Advocacy and Facilitation .

RASHN is a non-incorporated alliance with member organisations including the Refugee Council of Australia, the Asylum Seeker Project, Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, The Australian Red Cross (observers), the North Richmond Community Health Centre, the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre (Footscray); the Bula Bula Health Clinic and the Centre for Culture Ethnicity and Health among others.

Contact Details:

Web. <http://www.rashnmelb.org/>

Statewide TPV Service Providers Forum

This forum provides an avenue for service providers, community leaders and policy workers throughout Victoria to share information and issues of concern regarding refugees on Temporary Protection Visas.

The Forum aims to provide support to workers and the TPV community alike through seeking ways to improve access to services and resources and addressing advocacy concerns.

The Forum is convened by the Ecumenical Migration Centre and meets on a 6-monthly basis or more frequently if required.

Contact Details:

Ms. Ainslie Hannan, Convenor
Coordinator
Ecumenical Migration Centre
95-97 Brunswick St, Fitzroy VIC 3065
Tel: 03 9416 0044
Fax: 03 9416 1827
Email: ahannan@bsl.org.au

Northern TPV Service Providers Network

The Forum offers TPV service providers and members of the local TPV community the opportunity to share information and problems concerning the provision of services and issues around advocacy and the media.

The Northern TPV Service Providers Network meets monthly at the Thornbury Asylum Seeker Resource Centre.

Contact Details:

Jackie Mansourian
Darebin Community Health
Corner of Blake and Crevelli Sts,
East Reservoir VIC 3073
Ph. 03 9478 5711 ext 240
Email: jmansourian@darebinch.com.au

KEY AGENCIES

1. POLICY & ADVOCACY ADVICE

Refugee Council of Australia

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) is the peak refugee organisation. It was established in 1981 and has over 90 organisational members.

The aim of the Refugee Council is to promote the adoption of flexible, humane and constructive policies towards refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons by the Australian and other governments and their communities.

In order to achieve this aim, RCOA engages in activities which include research, policy development, advocacy and community education. RCOA also provides advice for member agencies and others working in the area.

RCOA Networks:

RCOA has links to many international and domestic organisations. RCOA can be contacted regarding further access to its networks. RCOA networks include:

- * ties to United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM);
- * links to Refugee Councils in other countries;
- * dialogue with both federal and state government departments, in particular;

- the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
- the Department of Foreign Affairs,
- the Attorney General's Department.
- * dialogue with other relevant agencies including:
 - the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT),
 - the Australian Council for Overseas Aid (ACFOA)
 - the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC)

RCOA is a non-profit organisation. It is funded through contributions from its members, charitable trusts and foundations and by project grants from government agencies.

Contact details:

National Office:

Refugee Council of Australia

PO Box 946, Glebe, 2037

Tel: 02 9660 5300

Fax: 02 9660 5211

Email: info@refugeecouncil.org.au

website: www.refugeecouncil.org.au

Media Contact: Margaret Piper, Executive Director.

Victorian Office:

Ms. Jacki Dillon

Victorian Research and Policy Officer

PO Box 1389 Collingwood, VIC 3066

Ph. 03 9416 0044

Fax. 03 9416 1827

Email. rcoa.vic@bsl.org.au

2. LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre (RILC)

RILC is an independent community legal center, specialising in refugee and family immigration law, policy and procedure. RILC offers telephone and evening advice services.

Telephone Advice Service

Ph. 03 9483 1140 - ask for the duty solicitor

Wednesdays: 10am to 4pm

Fridays: 2pm to 4pm

The Night Service is available by appointment only through the Telephone Advice Service.

Sessions:

Monday evenings 6.30pm and 7.00pm

At the EMC (next door to RILC)

97 Brunswick St

Day Service

Due to limitations in funding RILC this service is for current clients only.

Contact Details:

95 Brunswick St, Fitzroy

Tel. 03 9483 1144

Fax. 03 9483 1136

Email. [rilc@rilc.org.au](mailto:riloc@rilc.org.au)

Web. www.rilc.org.au

Advice Line. 03 9483 1140

Wednesday 10am to 4pm

Friday 2pm to 4pm

Victorian Legal Aid (VLA)

Victorian Legal Aid (Civil Section) provides advice on general immigration matters and casework for eligible refugees and

humanitarian matters. VLA also provides a telephone advice service during business hours.

Contact Details:

Victorian Legal Aid

Civil Section

350 Queen Street, Melbourne 3000

Tel. 03 9269 0234

Web: <http://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au>

Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau (SCAAB)

SCAAB offers a range of services including legal advice on migration matters. Migration Agents are available:

Tues/Thurs/Fri: 9am - 5pm

Mon/Wed: 1pm - 5pm and 6.30pm - 9pm

Contact Details:

Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau

5 Osborne Avenue, Springvale 3171

Tel. 03 9546 5255

Fax. 03 9548 4821

Email. scaabspr@vicnet.net.au

Asylum Seekers Resource Centre, Footscray

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre Inc. (ASRC) is a non - profit, politically independent, community organisation that provides a range of free services to asylum seekers.

The ASRC provides free legal advice and assistance to asylum seekers and people on Temporary Protection Visa's in the community and in immigration detention. The legal assistance is provided by registered migration

agents, solicitors and barristers who give their time for free. All legal assistance is provided on a pro - bono basis.

The ASRC provides legal advice and casework in addition to community education about all aspects of immigration and refugee law.

Contact Details:

207 & 211 Nicholson Street, Footscray 3011
Tel. 03 9689 5075
Fax. 03 9362 0810
<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~asrc/index.html>

North Melbourne Legal Service

This service provides migration advice and assistance in relation to family, refugee and humanitarian streams. Available to residents of North Melbourne, West Melbourne and Parkville who are able to demonstrate inability to afford a private migration agent.

Contact Details:

North Melbourne Legal Service
1st Floor, Victoria Street, Nth Melbourne 3051
Tel. 03 9328 1885
Fax. 03 9326 5912

Migrant Resource Centres

Migrant Resource Centres are situated throughout Victoria and offer a wide range of services to assist refugees with settlement. Appointments with registered migration agents can be made through most MRCs.

A full list of MRCs in Victoria can be found at
<http://www.immi.gov.au/settle/help/vic4.htm>

3. COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The Ecumenical Migration Centre

The Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC), established in 1962, is one of the oldest agencies of its kind in Australia. The EMC works statewide and across ethnic, faith and language boundaries for the full participation of migrants and refugees and the development of Australia as a multicultural society.

The Centre's activities include:

- * casework/counselling,
- * community development and organisational support for new and emerging communities;
- * service development and special projects across sectors;
- * policy analysis and advice; and
- * information, action research and publications.

Contact Details:

95-97 Brunswick St Fitzroy VIC 3065
PO Box 1389 Collingwood VIC 3066
Ph: 03 9416 0044
Fax: 03 9416 1827
Email: emc@bsl.org.au

Australian Red Cross Asylum Seekers Assistance Scheme (ASAS)

ASAS is a Commonwealth Government funded program administered by the Australian Red Cross. The Scheme assists eligible asylum seekers in the community to meet some of their basic financial and health care needs.

Eligibility

To be eligible for ASAS an asylum seeker needs to have:

- * applied for a Protection Visa (either 866 or 785) with the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA);
- * not had a decision on their primary application within 6 months of applying.

An asylum seeker can be exempt from the 6-month waiting period. Consideration for exemption is given for:

- * financial hardship;
- * unaccompanied minors (under 18 years of age);
- * elderly applicants (females over 62 or males over 65);
- * inability to work due to illness;
- * parent(s) with a child or children under 18 years of age;
- * full time carer, where the person being cared for is living at the same address as the carer and the carer is unable to work because of care responsibilities. The person being cared for must not be eligible for a mainstream benefits;
- * inability to work as a result of the effects of torture and trauma;
- * pregnancy, where the medical or social circumstances are such that the woman's health, or that of her baby, are at serious risk if she does not receive assistance;
- * the person is a spouse, defacto or sponsored fiancé/e of a permanent resident or citizen of Australia or New Zealand, whose combined income is lower than ASA payments available to eligible asylum seekers of the same family composition;

- * financial hardship resulting from a change in circumstances beyond a person's control since they (last) arrived in Australia.

Note: The above criteria also apply to those applicants whose case is at the review stage (Refugee Review Tribunal). Furthermore, an asylum seeker who is about to undergo or has completed a health and medical check for their protection visa application, may also be entitled to ASAS if they are assessed as being in financial hardship.

If a client meets the above criteria, and is in need of financial assistance and/or health care, they can be referred to ASAS. If unsure if a client is eligible for assistance, they can still be referred to ASAS, who will assess the client's eligibility.

The Red Cross provides over the phone translation services for clients who need translators.

Contact Details:

Colin Briton
Coordinator ASAS Victoria
23 - 47 Villiers St, Nth Melbourne, VIC 3051
Ph. 03 8327 7700

Please note that you will need to make an appointment before you come to the Red Cross.

Asylum Seeker Project –Hotham Mission

The Asylum Seeker Project is a non-profit community organisation that works to provide support to community-based asylum seekers who have no income or work rights. The Project also cares for a number of vulnerable individuals and families released from

detention on medical and psychological grounds. The Project provides:

- * Temporary accommodation
- * Basic living assistance (cash relief)
- * Referral
- * Volunteer support (Link-up Project)
- * Material Aid

The Asylum Seeker Project also coordinates a number of local Asylum Seeker Support Networks throughout Melbourne. If you would like to find out about the Support Network in your local area please contact the Project on the numbers below.

The Asylum Seeker Project is also the recipient of the 2002 Human Rights Award from the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. This award not only highlights the services that the Project delivers but also the Projects involvement in advocacy and structural policy change.

Contact Details:

Asylum Seeker Project –Hotham Mission
2/579 Queensbury St,
Nth Melbourne VIC 3051
Ph. 03 9326 8343
Fax. 03 9326 7470
Email. asp@sub.net.au
Web. www.asp.hothammission.org.au

Asylum Seeker Welcome Centre

The Asylum Seeker Welcome Centre is a community based organisation that aims to provide a warm and welcoming environment for asylum seekers. The Centre is largely volunteer run and is assisted by community donations. The Centre offers the following services:

- * Casework, information, referral and linkages. Appointments advisable for more complex matters.
- * Migration advice - Mondays and Tuesdays.
- * Employment assistance available as required.
- * Computer access for word processing and Email. Classes and tutoring can be arranged.
- * English tutoring on a one to one basis. Access to English classes arranged as required.
- * Recreational and fitness programs.
- * Community lunches monthly, generally on the first Monday of the month at 1.00 pm.
- * Group activities for youth, women and children and single men according to demand. Contact the Centre to discuss your needs.
- * Excursions and visits as required.

Opening hours:

Monday to Thursday 11.00 am - 4.00 pm.
Outside these hours appointments by arrangement.

Contact Details:

Asylum Seeker Welcome Centre
212 Sydney Road, Brunswick, VIC 3057
Ph. 03 9388 2459
Fax. 03 9388 0951
Email. aswc@uniting.com.au

Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau (SCAAB)

SCAAB is a community-based organisation, established in 1972, which exists to provide practical services for people in the community.

SCAAB offers a variety of services including:

- * Refugee settlement and migration services
- * Emergency relief and a no interest loans scheme
- * Outreach services – Asylum Seekers Assistance Scheme, trauma and torture counselling, migrant community support workers
- * Housing assistance

Contact Details:

Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau

5 Osborne Avenue, Springvale 3171

Tel. 03 9546 5255

Fax. 03 9548 4821

Email. scaabspr@vicnet.net.au

Web: <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~scaab/>

Fitzroy Learning Network

Fitzroy Learning Network is a non-profit community organisation that provides a broad range of services to migrants and refugees, including those on Temporary Protection Visas. These activities include:

- * English language classes and literacy
- * Sewing, cooking classes
- * Computer classes
- * Social and community activities

Contact Details:

198 Napier Street Fitzroy VIC 3065

Ph: 03 9417 2897

Fax: 03 9417 2663

Email: fitznet@vicnet.net.au

Web: <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~fitznet/>

**Asylum Seeker Resource Centre
(Footscray and Thornbury)**

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre is a non-profit community organisation providing a broad range of services to refugees and asylum seekers. The centres provide:

- * material aid
- * medical care
- * counselling
- * casework
- * legal advice
- * English classes
- * a drop - in – centre
- * detention centre friendship program
- * support
- * information
- * education
- * social and recreational programs and
- * referral

The Centres also coordinate the training and support of volunteers.

Contact Details:

Footscray

207 & 211 Nicholson St, Footscray VIC 3011

Ph. 03 9689 5075

Fax. 03 9362 0810

Thornbury

112 Dundas St, Thornbury VIC 3071

Ph. 03 9484 9655

Fax. 03 9484 9855

Web: <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~asrc/>

Asylum Seeker Assistance Project

Situated in Melbourne's southeast this project associated with the Urban Neighbours of Hope assists community based asylum seekers in a variety of ways through providing:

- * Material aid
- * Casework and support
- * Housing assistance
- * Referral
- * English language tutoring
- * Social activities
- * Volunteer coordination

Contact Details:

66 Regent Ave, Springvale VIC 3171

Ph. 03 9547 1129

Fax. 03 9540 3663

Email: asap@unoh.org

By appointment only.

Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project

This project provides a number of services to asylum seekers in the community and those who remain in detention including:

- * Housing assistance
- * Material support (phone cards, toiletries, clothing)
- * Support and recreational activities

Contact Details:

Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project

52 Beaconsfield Pde, Albert Park VIC 3206

Ph: 03 9696 2107

Email: bssc@cyberspace.net.au

4. HEALTH AND COUNSELLING SUPPORT FOR REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture (VFST)

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (VFST) is a rehabilitation centre for people in Victoria who were tortured or traumatised in their countries of origin, in other countries, or while fleeing those countries. It is non-denominational, politically neutral and non-aligned.

The Foundation provides direct care to survivors of trauma and torture in the form of:

- * Counselling
- * Support
- * Advocacy
- * Family support
- * Group work
- * Natural therapies

The Foundation also undertakes:

- * Training and consultancy
- * Program / project development
- * Policy development
- * Research

Contact Details:

PO Box 96, Parkville VIC 3052

Ph. 03 9388 0022

Fax. 03 9387 0828

Email: administrator@survivorsvic.org.au

Web: <http://www.survivorsvic.org.au/>

Bula Bula Health Clinic

The Bula Bula Health Clinic is located at the Footscray Asylum Seeker Resource Centre and was established to meet the health needs of asylum seekers who do not have the right to Medicare. The Clinic will also see clients who hold a TPV. A network of GPs, Physiotherapists, Nurses and other medical and health professionals work at the Clinic or in the community on a pro-bono basis.

The Clinic provides:

- * Free medical service
- * Physiotherapy
- * Natural Therapies
- * Counselling
- * Some assistance with purchase of pharmaceuticals
- * Limited referral for radiology and pathology
- * Volunteer training and support

The Clinic operates Mondays to Fridays and appointments can be made through the contact numbers below. Please also contact the Clinic if you would like to volunteer your time.

Contact Details:

Bula Bula Health Clinic
207 & 211 Nicholson Street
Footscray VIC 3011
Ph. 03 9689 5075
Fax. 03 9362 0810

Asylum Seeker Specialist Clinic

The Specialist Clinic for Medicare-Ineligible Asylum Seekers is a clinic specifically designed to offer general specialist services to asylum seekers who do not have access to Medicare.

Clients require a referral from a General Practitioner in the community.

The Clinic operates every alternate Thursday from 9.00am to 11.30am. By appointment only.

Contact Details:

For appointments contact the North Yarra Community Health Centre in Fitzroy on:
75 Brunswick St, Fitzroy, VIC 3065
Ph. 03 9411 3555

5. TRACING LOST FAMILY MEMBERS

Australian Red Cross

Asylum seekers and refugees wishing to locate and contact family overseas or elsewhere in Australia can enlist the help of the Australian Red Cross Tracing Agency and Refugee Service. There is no charge for this service.

The criterion of the Red Cross is that contact must have been lost due to war, internal conflict or natural disaster. This service may be especially helpful for detainees who lack either the means or the resources to be able to contact their family at home or in detention centres elsewhere in Australia or the Pacific region.

The Australian Red Cross sends tracing enquiries via the extensive network of the International Committee of the Red Cross to try and locate missing family members. In some countries, messages can be sent between family members, and family reunion

(particularly between children and parents) can be facilitated.

The Australian Red Cross is able to provide *Attestation Certificates* where someone has been imprisoned overseas and they were visited and recorded by the International Committee of the Red Cross. *This can be helpful for some refugees and asylum seekers to prove their whereabouts at a certain time.*

Searching for loved ones may take months or even years. It is also important to note that while the Red Cross can assist refugees and asylum seekers by locating and contacting family members, they are often unable to assist in family reunions across countries. Refugees and asylum seekers using the services of the Red Cross need to be aware of any restrictions on their particular visa regarding family reunion in Australia and leaving the country and seek advice from legal representatives.

Providing information and referral services:

Australian Red Cross can provide helpful information to families and individuals on a broad range of services as well as referrals to other public and private agencies.

Detainees can contact the Red Cross either during Red Cross representatives' periodic visits to detention centres, or by telephone or letter. Counsellors and welfare workers at detention centres are aware of Red Cross Tracing services and regularly refer detainees to them.

Contact details:

23 - 47 Villiers Street
North Melbourne VIC 3051
Ph. 03 8327 7700

6. CHURCH-BASED AGENCIES

The Catholic Commission for Justice Development and Peace, Melbourne (CCJDP)

The CCJDP is the social justice agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne. The Commission's role is also to prepare submissions and make representations to Government, politicians, public and statutory inquiries and other organisations. It monitors the development and the implementation of social policy as it affects the disadvantaged members of the community.

The CCJDP has worked extensively on refugee and asylum seeker issues producing numerous research documents and position papers. The CCJDP also co-convenes the Justice for Asylum Seekers Alliance.

Contact Details:

383 Albert Street
East Melbourne VIC 3002
Ph: 03 9926 5710
Fax: 03 9926 5792
Email: gryan@melbourne.catholic.org.au
<http://www.melb.catholic.aust.com/ccjdp/>

The National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA)

The NCCA is concerned with policy relating to refugees, asylum, settlement, access and equity.

The NCCA is comprised of fifteen major Christian churches working together to strengthen relationships and understanding of each other and to fulfill common witness,

mission and service. The National Program on Refugees and Displaced People operates under the Christian World Service Commission of the NCCA. It is also involved in awareness-raising, education, community development and advocacy.

Contact Details:

Caz Coleman
National Program for Refugees and Displaced People
4th Floor Causeway House
306 Little Collins St, Melbourne VIC 3000
Ph. 03 9650 6811
Fax. 03 9650 8383
Email. ccoleman@ncca.org.au
Web: www.ncca.org.au

Mercy Refugee Service

Mercy Refugee Service (MRS) recruits, trains and coordinates volunteers. The work also involves education and advocacy on behalf of asylum seekers and refugees.

Through the MRS Volunteer Community Links Project volunteers are also recruited and trained to assist refugees and their families. This program is only available to permanent visa holders. The trained volunteers provide practical assistance, friendship and support for refugees in their settlement needs. It currently works with refugees from a variety of backgrounds such as Somalia, Sudan, Iraq, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan providing whatever assistance is needed, whether it be finding accommodation, gaining employment, offering social support or starting school.

Mercy Refugee Service is always looking for volunteers to assist in their programs. Refugees and asylum seekers who require

assistance of the type MRS provides can also be referred to them.

Contact Details:

Victorian Office:

Mercy Refugee Service
Geraldine Wilson
29 Hutcheson Street, Moonee Ponds VIC 3039
Ph. 03 9375 1806
Email: gwilson@mercy.org.au
Web: <http://www.mercy.org.au/refugees>

Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office

The MCMRO is an agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne and is primarily concerned with the pastoral care of migrants and refugees in parishes. However, due to the changing nature of immigration and border protection, the issues go well beyond the traditional Catholic migrant.

Through a Commission on Migration and a network of ethnic priests, the MCMRO endeavours to provide advice and guidance from a Catholic perspective in response to policy and program issues relating to migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, population and multiculturalism.

Through other organisations, such as NCCA & JAS, the MCMRO supports programs that raise social awareness and provide education and advocacy around the many issues pertaining to immigration and the treatment of asylum seekers in Australia today.

Contact Details:

Mrs. Brenda Hubber, Executive Secretary
Melbourne Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office
The Cardinal Knox Centre

383 Albert St, East Melbourne VIC 3002
Ph. 03 9926 5720
Fax 03 9926 5617
Email. mcmro@melbourne.catholic.org.au

Justice and International Mission Unit

The Uniting Church's Justice and International Mission unit works on a wide range of justice and international issues, including refugee and asylum seeker issues.

The JIM Unit is directly involved in activities of the National Council of Churches in Australia and the Justice for Asylum Seekers alliance. Members of the unit sit on the boards of the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre, the Asylum Seeker Project, and the Asylum Seeker Welcome Centre.

The JIM unit is involved in a range of activities including:

- * Community education
- * Public speaking
- * Information dissemination on current issues
- * Organising regular forums
- * Regular mailouts

Contact Details:

Ms. Stephanie Tashkoff
International Mission Development Officer
Justice and International Mission Unit
Synod of Victoria and Tasmania
Uniting Church in Australia
130 Little Collins St, Melbourne VIC 3000
Ph. 03 9251 5266
Fax 03 9654 3126
Email. steph.tashkoff@vic.uca.org.au

7. OTHER SERVICES

Migrant Resource Centres

Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) are situated throughout NSW. These centres are non-profit, community-based organisations, established to promote the well-being of migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants from non-English speaking backgrounds living in the local area surrounding each centre. Migrant Resource Centres are able to provide services to refugees on permanent protection visas but are unable to provide services to asylum seekers and TPV holders.

General Services:

- * bilingual settlement casework services;
- * information on basic services;
- * advice on settlement problems;
- * referral to Government and other services in the local government area;
- * regular English classes;
- * migration agents available to give free advice (by appointment only);
- * call local MRCs for more information);
- * free use of computers, telephones, faxes and photocopiers for people looking for work;
- * access to information sessions on settlement issues – health, education, immigration, housing and social security;

Contact Details:

A full list of MRCs in Victoria can be found at <http://www.immi.gov.au/settle/help/vic4.htm>

There is also an increasing number of community-based groups who have become involved in working with asylum seekers and TPV holders. For information about the activities of these groups, visit the RCOA web page (www.refugeecouncil.org.au) and follow the links to News and Events.