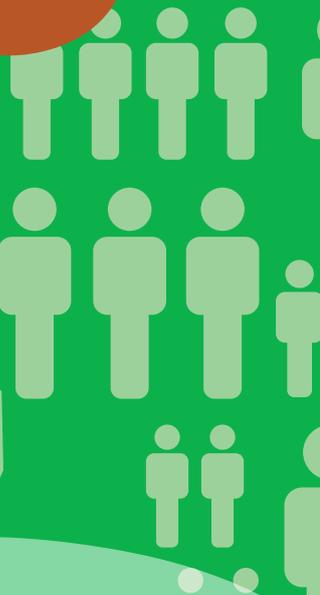




Refugee Council
of Australia

OUR IMPACT IN 2018-19



WELCOME
welcome
welcome
WELCOME
welcome
welcome



OUR IMPACT

We promote humane and compassionate policies for people seeking safety in Australia and around the globe. While we cannot predict the wars, conflicts and oppressive regimes that will force people to seek asylum, we can work to ensure that anyone who arrives seeking sanctuary finds the safety and support they deserve, so they can start to rebuild their lives with dignity.



Refugee Council
of Australia





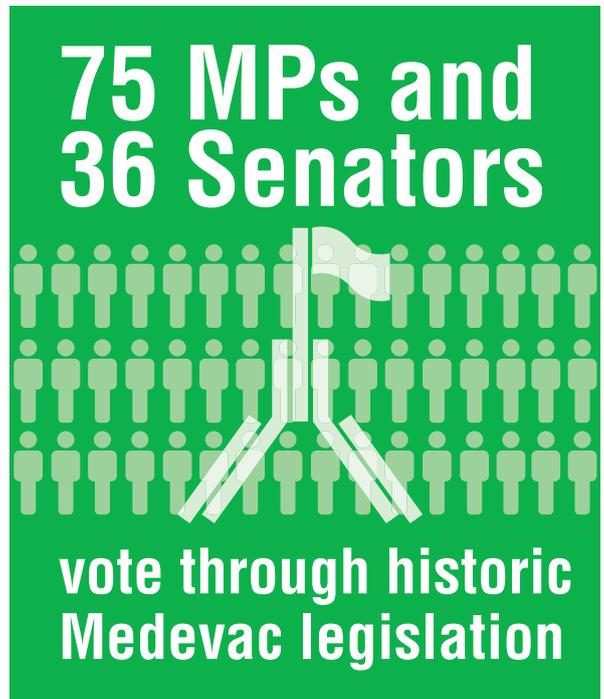
2500
meaningful
conversations about
Refugee Policy



In the lead up to the election, Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) staff and volunteers took to the streets around Australia as part of our 'Choose Humane' campaign. We had thousands of conversations with members of the public, who pledged their support for the Platform for Change, a five-part policy platform developed in collaboration with hundreds of people from across the refugee movement. The 10,000 pledges collected indicate the widespread support for a humane approach to refugee policy and will be delivered to the government along with recommendations for implementation of the platform. This kind of campaigning was a first for RCOA and allowed us to build our network and strengthen our organising capacity.

"I hadn't been involved before, though I care deeply about the issue. I found it empowering to be able to have conversations about it with people who were eager to make pledges as an easy but meaningful action."

Anna Langford, Choose Humane volunteer



**75 MPs and
36 Senators**
vote through historic
Medevac legislation



RCOA was part of a small group of organisations that successfully lobbied for the passage of the Medevac Bill in February 2019. This allows doctors, rather than bureaucrats, to decide who can be medically evacuated from Nauru and PNG to Australia.

After the passage of the Medevac legislation, RCOA convened the Medical Evacuation Response Group, a partnership of doctors and refugee specialist organisations that have come together to create a robust, safe and orderly implementation of the law.

This bill has since proved a lifeline to over 100 people in offshore detention in need of urgent medical treatment.

"With Medevac in place, medical decision making is where it should be; in the hands of medical professionals"

Paul Power, RCOA CEO

60 fellows trained as Champions for Change

RCOA ran our first ever community organising fellowship, training and supporting 60 fellows across four states. The fellows – including people with lived experience of seeking asylum - built their skills, experience and networks in campaigning and advocacy. They held campaign events, street stalls, webinars and community meetings to tie in with the Choose Humane campaign. These events educated and mobilised groups across Australia in support of humane refugee policies.

“(Champions for Change) is training us in advocacy, and giving us skills to talk to people around Australia. I know together we can help Australia have a very different kind of mindset about our refugees and people seeking asylum.”

Emeka Onwubiko, Adelaide

1st Asia Pacific Summit of Refugees

RCOA supported the first Asia Pacific Summit of Refugees in October 2018, with 104 refugees from 18 countries of origin connecting across six venues from Iran to Australia. Participants reported that they highly valued discussing future collaboration and priority concerns to strengthen the voices of refugees; and all of those who took part stated their wish to continue. The Asia Pacific Summit of Refugees led to the establishment of the Asia Pacific Network of Refugees (APNOR), the first regional network of its kind that includes representatives from across the Asia Pacific.

13 years of refugee-led advocacy



For the 13th successive year, RCOA supported refugee representatives to participate in UNHCR’s global NGO consultations in Geneva. This has given some of the people who are most affected by refugee policy the opportunity and support to advocate directly at the United Nations.

In 2018, RCOA backed the first Global Summit of Refugees in Geneva. This led in January 2019 to the formation of the first Global Refugee-led Network. This international collaboration of people from refugee backgrounds to advocate on the issues that affect them is a new and exciting development in refugee self-representation. The new global network is supporting the development of networks in six regions of the world and planning the second Global Summit of Refugees for 2020.

In December 2019, the first Global Refugee Forum will take place in Geneva.

“My experience with RCOA in Geneva has given me new energy and scope to work even harder as an advocate to proliferate the idea that refugees can be part of the solution and not just dismissed as a burden or problem.”

Muzafar Ali

350

Refugee Week events organised around the country



Refugee Week in Australia is coordinated by RCOA and is the world's longest running annual national celebration of refugee communities. In June, people from across Australia came out in their thousands to celebrate refugees and what they bring to our country; both sending a message of welcome and raising awareness within their communities. This year organisers were encouraged to include someone with lived experience to 'Share a Meal, Share a Story'. Over 350 events were hosted, including community celebrations, festivals, films, tours, exhibitions, seminars and more.

"I shared the story of my journey to freedom at the Refugee Week launch. It was an amazing experience. Not just because it was my story, but because I could see in people's eyes how it affected them to think about the situation for people seeking asylum."

Mina Abdolmaleki, Refugee Week participant

12

reports

12 reports produced highlighting issues impacting people from refugee backgrounds and proposing solutions to help people rebuild their lives.

These included:

- Comprehensive reports documenting the deteriorating conditions for people detained on Manus Island and Nauru;
- The situation for refugees left in limbo in Indonesia after Australia's turnback policies;
- The experience of refugees with disabilities in Australia, and the difficulties they face getting the support they need;
- A range of reports and analyses on the impact that cuts to SRSS are having on people seeking our protection; and
- Recommendations for alternative policies to better support refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia and internationally.

These reports were widely read by MPs, senior public servants, media and the wider Australian community. They brought attention to important and often under-examined issues faced by refugees and people seeking asylum. They have started a national conversation on important issues and continued to shine a light on Australia's harmful practices.



15

submissions

15 submissions made to Parliament, government agencies, and statutory bodies related to refugee policy solutions.

These included:

- Submissions on settlement services, including English language tuition, disability and employment;
- Submissions on asylum policy, including the oversight of detention centres; and
- Submissions opposing increased visa cancellation powers.

Our submissions helped stop unfair retrospective changes to asylum law, advocated against visa cancellation laws which would see refugees detained or forced home, and made recommendations for improving Australia's refugee and asylum policies.

10

years of advocacy
on community
refugee sponsorship

The Refugee Council of Australia has been advocating for community refugee sponsorship in Australia for over 10 years. Two years ago, we joined a number of other like-minded organisations to form a joint advocacy body, the Community Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (CRSI). CRSI received a significant investment from the Sidney Myer Foundation in June 2019 to continue our work in calling for an improved and expanded community refugee sponsorship program in Australia. We are working towards a truly community-led sponsorship program developed in Australia, where everyday Australians can support refugees to make Australia their new home.

Over 13,125

young people
and their
families
reached
through
Face to Face



75 schools and 15 government and non-government organizations participated in the Face to Face Program, with 15 refugee speakers trained and mentored during the 2018-19 financial year. As well as giving people from refugee backgrounds the opportunity to share their story and advocate to young people, this program gives school students a unique chance to hear first-hand about someone's journey to freedom.

"The presenter was absolutely outstanding, one of the most engaging, real and educational speakers I have heard in a long time. He related perfectly to the students and had them on the edge of their seats the entire time. The honest and thoughtful way he told his own story meant that the students engaged with him, felt a rapport with him and they learnt a lot from his story."

Teacher, Face to Face host school

350
people attend
**Refugee
Alternatives 2019**



350 people attended the Refugee Alternatives conference in 2019. People from refugee backgrounds, academia, service provision, advocacy, policymaking, government and more came together to collaborate and discuss policy and practice. It was an opportunity to learn, build networks and work together.

This was RCOA's 3rd national conference and was held in partnership with MARRNet in Adelaide. The program included 70 speakers from across Australia with over 50% from refugee backgrounds. The breadth of expertise resulted in a range of clear cross-cutting priorities, strategic outcomes and platforms for action including self-representation and leadership; working with people with disabilities; good practice in resettlement; innovation within education; mental health and resilience; youth engagement; deconstructing the drivers of forced migration and addressing xenophobia and racism in Australia.

'We must continue to have these conversations because the future of our humanity depends on them.'

Participant, Refugee Alternatives 2019

165
**Refugee
Welcome Zones**

165 local government authorities across Australia have signed up to the Refugee Welcome Zones initiative, making a commitment to welcome refugees into the community, uphold the human rights of refugees, show compassion and enhance cultural and religious diversity in their communities.

"Solutions to refugee crises start at the local level and require that everyone plays a part...the vital work that cities do can be a model for others, forging a path forward ...Our work as mayors and city authorities is primarily local, but when we are united in purpose with each other and our refugee residents, the impact of our solidarity will be global."

UNHCR Global Mayors Statement 2018

0
**children remain
on Nauru**



RCOA was one of the organisations that helped lead the high profile #KidsOffNauru campaign from August 2018. Within six months, the campaign achieved its goal of seeing children and their families moved out of Australia's offshore processing and detention arrangements on Nauru to safety.

2 cross-sector working groups tackle onshore and offshore processing

For over 15 years, RCOA has run a number of joint initiatives to foster collaboration in the refugee sector. These have included policy networks, teleconferences and more. Since July 2018, RCOA has convened working groups to look at two of our shared priorities. The first focuses on creating durable solutions for people trapped in Nauru and Manus Island. The second tackles the issues facing people in our communities who are seeking asylum; including both people on bridging visas who are being forced into destitution and those on temporary protection. These groups bring diverse actors together to strategise and take coordinated action, allowing our movement to work more effectively together. RCOA brought both groups together immediately after the election to begin planning and collaborating for maximum efficacy under the new government.

Over 400 individual and organisational members represented

Membership of the Refugee Council of Australia gives refugees and people seeking asylum a stronger national voice. Our members include key agencies providing front-line services to refugees, human rights groups, faith-based organisations and grassroots community organisations, including those led by former refugees. We consult with our members, bring them together to work on areas of common concern and coordinate advocacy so we can more effectively improve the lives of refugees.

"As a member agency we are grateful for the coordination role that RCOA plays and for their strategic and inclusive approach."

Carolina Gottardo, Director, Jesuit Refugee Service Australia



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of Australia**

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