

ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

ACTIVITY BUST SOME MYTHS!

Ask the group to stand up. When you share the following statements, get them to put their hands on their heads if they think it's a fact or put their hands on their hips if they think it's a tall tale. Then share the correct answer.

- Refugees don't contribute to Australian society. **myth**
Quite the contrary, once refugees are established in Australia, they make positive economic and cultural contributions.
- There are more than 24 million refugees worldwide. **fact**
That's as many people as there are living in Australia.
- Asylum seekers who arrive by boat are illegal. **myth**
Seeking asylum, regardless of how you arrive, is a basic human right under the UN Refugee Convention that Australia is a signatory to, but not keeping its word on.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Ask the group questions then discuss the facts.

WHAT IS A REFUGEE?

A refugee is a person who is fleeing their homeland for their safety.

WHAT IS AN ASYLUM SEEKER?

An asylum seeker is a person who has sought protection as a refugee, but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been granted. They are still *seeking asylum*.

DOES EVERY ASYLUM SEEKER BECOME A REFUGEE?

No, if their application is declined, that means they can be sent back to the country they fled from.

WHERE DO REFUGEES COME FROM?

These five countries were responsible for 68% of all refugees resettled between 2004-2016:

The majority are staying:

- Burma 201,752
- Somalia 93,854
- Iraq 141,959
- Syria 68,225
- Bhutan 105,796

WHY DO THEY LEAVE THEIR HOMES?

Becoming a refugee is not a choice. People are forced to flee their homeland because of:

- War;
- Persecution on the grounds of race, nationality, sex and religion, or;
- Being displaced due to a natural disaster or the adverse effects of climate change.

HOW MANY REFUGEES COME TO AUSTRALIA?

In 2015-2016, the Australian Government granted 17,555 refugee and humanitarian visas. That's not many considering the 24 million refugees worldwide.

DAVID'S STORY

When he was 16 years old David was passionate about his beliefs and an active member of a social group in Sierra Leone. Because of this he became a target of extremists who believed his group was trying to go against their regime. He knew they had to leave, as they had received many threats against them. This extremist group had been responsible for the deaths of many of his family members and friends.

One morning he saw his mother killed and so became the sole carer for his little siblings.

David and his siblings travelled across Africa from camp to camp avoiding persecution. David found what little work he could as an interpreter as he spoke four languages fluently.

Coming to Australia was his only option as his home no longer existed and it wasn't safe for he and his siblings to return. They had no idea where their father was or if he was alive. In Australia, he was able to find education and a safe home for his siblings. He now works with refugees as a case worker, interpreter and advocate.

WHAT VINNIES DOES

VINNIES MIGRANT AND REFUGEE SERVICES

Across Australia, we also offer a range of services and programs for newly arrived families of migrant, refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds across Australia. These programs hope to enable newly settled families and communities to become self-reliant, to participate in the broader Australian community, and to develop a shared purpose and a sense of identity and belonging. We also aim to create opportunities to engage with local community.

These services include accommodation and material support, counselling and referrals, and education scholarships, amongst others. Many programs also run such as homework help clubs, learn to swim or drive programs, and social community events.

BUT IT'S A BIGGER ISSUE

"The tragic consequence of Australia's policy to turn back boats, replicated by nearby countries, is now leaving people with literally nowhere to go. The boats haven't stopped – they've just been turned away to other dangers" – Dr John Falzon, CEO, St Vincent de Paul Society Australia.

VINNIES CAMPAIGNS

The St Vincent de Paul Society is a vocal advocate for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers at the local and national level.

Check out the current campaigns at vinnies.org.au to get involved or to start your own local campaign. Sometimes all we need is enough signatures from everyday people to force the parliament to discuss an issue. You can help us collect these signatures!

"We can afford to line the pockets of corporations that manage offshore concentration camps in our name, a highly expensive exercise in cruelty and barbarism; carefully constructing limbos to which we consign people who, as it happens, believe so strongly in Australia that they risk life and limb to come here as they flee the cruelty and barbarism that has sadly overtaken their countries of origin.

"If we want to be clever, if we want to be innovative, these are the very people we should welcome with open arms – people who believe in us, who believe in and desperately want to build a different future with us."

– Dr John Falzon, CEO, St Vincent de Paul Society Australia.

ACTIVITY

Discuss how the decisions made by our government affect the lives of those seeking protection in Australia. In an ideal world, what decisions would you make to better help people seeking asylum?

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

BE ADVOCATES. Talk to your family, friends, classmates, and community to help raise awareness of the issues facing refugees and asylum seekers in the world today, and bust those myths!

RESEARCH THE TOPIC. See what Vinnies is doing in your local area and how they're advocating to government. Collect signatures for a Vinnies petition, start your own or invite a local MP or Mayor to your group meeting or event so you can share your concerns with them – and let us know about it!

BE GENEROUS. Run a fundraising activity at school. Volunteer at a local Vinnies service – as a volunteer based organisation, we always need more hands on deck! Check online to see what's in your area and how you can help.

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vinnies.org.au
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