

Multicultural matters



Amber Flohm
Senior Vice President
November 01, 2019

Members aid refugee families

For many people facing violence and oppression in their homelands, fleeing to another country in search of refuge is their only hope for keeping themselves and their families alive. As public school teachers, we see the effect that such traumatic experiences have on the families and children who have so far made it into our classrooms and communities.

Federation believes that mandatory detention is not only an unfair and unjust way to treat refugees, but is cruel to those who legally seek our protection.

The union has long been a proud advocate for refugee rights in society.

The entire process under our immigration system is set up to delay, fail and entrap people, all because they legally sought asylum by sea.

People live for years separated from their loved ones, including their children.

Many are forced into exploitative work or are entirely dependent on charity to survive, with no safety net of income support or medical care. To that end, the union and Federation Health have long been supporters of the Asylum Seeker Centre, located in Newtown.

The not-for-profit organisation provides practical and personal support for people living in the community who are seeking asylum. Services include accommodation, legal advice, financial relief, health care, employment assistance, education, food, material aid and recreational activities.

Once a day the centre serves hot meals and, once a week, families are given the opportunity to fill their bags with essential foods and items to get them through the week.

The loss of the Status Resolution Support Service in mid-2018 — due to Federal Government cuts — continues to affect families and individuals, as it provided a basic living allowance, casework, and access to torture and trauma counselling.

In reply to the effect of the cuts on our public school students and their families Federation has strengthened its partnership with the Asylum Seeker Centre. Over the past year, more than \$2000 worth of Opal and gift cards have been donated by generous Federation members. These were collected and donated by schools



and individuals to assist with the cost of transport and other necessities.

Federation has also instigated a long-term strategy to ensure that families affected by the cruelty of the Federal Government's decisions know that public school teachers stand with them and offer all the support they can to ease the difficulty of their situation.

The union has been coordinating a steady supply of items to the Asylum Seeker Centre throughout the year — with donations from members in Fairfield, Eastern Suburbs, St George, TAFE and Newcastle teachers' associations, plus Federation officers and staff.

Members are encouraged to raise with their associations the prospect of adopting a month or longer to commit to supplying items to donate to the Asylum Seeker Centre.

Organisers can provide additional details on how this can be done or contact multicultural@nswtf.org.au for further information.

Federation continues to take a strong and principled stand on matters relating to those seeking Australia's protection and mandatory immigration detention.

We are proud to stand with those families and communities affected, to amplify their voices and to support them to take back power in a system that has dehumanised and disempowered them for too long.

At Federation's state Council in September, members unanimously endorsed a statement relating to a Tamil family settled in Biloela, which condemned the Australian Government "in the strongest possible terms, for its treatment of this family" (see [Facebook post from 7 September](#)).