



# **CAPSA**

CATHOLIC ALLIANCE FOR PEOPLE  
SEEKING ASYLUM

## **CAPSA School Resource Kit for National Week of Prayer and Action**

**All action, whether great or small, has the power to create change and make a difference in the lives of others. We can be the change we want to see!**

The Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA) brings people together to enact positive change for people seeking asylum and refugees. We work to build, mobilise and maintain support in the Catholic and broader community by encouraging people to take action in their local community. CAPSA was formed in 2014 to engage hearts and minds for greater compassion in the Catholic community for people seeking asylum and refugees. We dream of a community and political culture that values fair and humane treatment of people seeking asylum in Australia.

The National Week of Prayer and Action (NWP) is a CAPSA event that we run every year: this year it goes from 4th – 8th September. The theme this year is:

## **Freedom to live for people seeking asylum and refugees**

This has been inspired by the Pope's message for the 109th World Day of Migrants and Refugees on 24th September 2023. He spoke about the fact that refugees are not 'free to choose whether to migrate or stay'.

*"I have come to see that ensuring that freedom is a widely shared pastoral concern". Pope Francis.*

*"In whatever place we decide to build our future, in the country of our birth or elsewhere, the important thing is that there always be a community ready to welcome, protect, promote and integrate everyone, without distinctions and without excluding anyone." Pope Francis*



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## Refugees or people seeking asylum

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Below is the generally accepted legal definition of refugee:

*A refugee is 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.*

The term asylum seeker is often used interchangeably with refugee, but means something different under law. An asylum seeker is a person who has sought protection as a refugee, but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been assessed.

For more detail on these distinctions see [Refugee Council of Australia](#).

## The current situation

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[Here](#) you will find information about the current situation in Australia for people seeking asylum. It includes the recommendations CAPSA has made to the government in 2023 and links to the full CAPSA submission prior to the Budget this year.

## Key priorities for National Week of Prayer and Action

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- Offshore detention: 75 men still remain on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea (PNG). They must be evacuated, and offshore detention must end permanently so nobody who arrives by boat is sent to Nauru in future
- Onshore detention: we must end onshore detention, including in detention centres on mainland Australia, Christmas Island and hotel detention (as Alternative Places of Detention), and allow all those seeking asylum to live within the Australian community while waiting for the outcome of their permanent protection applications
- Short-term visas: there is currently no clear pathway to permanent protection for those who were Medevaced and those on Bridging Visas, and many do not have access to work rights, study rights, Medicare or Centrelink and continue to live with uncertainty for long periods of time. This must be addressed
- We call for there to be a clear pathway to permanent protection, and for those on temporary visas to have access to work and study, access to Medicare and to financial support while waiting for the outcome of their permanent protection applications
- Food and financial insecurity: the current crisis levels of people seeking asylum in the community struggling to have access to food, housing and an income on these short-term visas must be addressed
- Supporting those in the community ourselves and calling on the government to increase their support for people seeking asylum struggling in the community
- Climate-induced displacement: this is becoming a greater concern with increasing impacts of climate change and natural disasters, including within the Asia-Pacific region. We call for the government to be proactive in addressing climate-induced displacement.

## Actions

### Circle of Silence

The Circle of Silence movement originated in Toulouse, France in 2007, in an effort to express solidarity with people seeking asylum and immigrants who were experiencing injustice and being silenced. It is one way to engage people with the concerns of people seeking asylum, and to encourage reflection and discussion about the treatment of refugees and people seeking asylum in our communities.

A Circle of Silence involves participants standing in a circle in silence for some time, usually about half an hour. If in a public space, someone can stand outside the circle and can hand out flyers or talk to the public about what is happening.

For school activities, consider introducing a shorter Circle of Silence (say, 2 or 5 minutes) after hearing a related story, having a discussion or undertaking an activity.

When designing your Circle of Silence, you might consider:

- Listening to a personal testimony of a refugee or migrant about their experience before starting the Circle of Silence. If no one is available in person, there are many stories which could be read. See [here](#) for ideas
- Before or after the Circle of Silence, having a reflection, prayer or relevant passage from the gospels or Pope Francis. See [here](#) for primary schools or [here](#) for secondary schools
- Having posters or signs held by participants or displayed around the circle
- Printing flyers to hand out in public. See [here](#) for a flyer example (when printing the flyer, select A4, 2 pages per sheet, double-sided, short edge binding).



## Actions

### Writing to Members of Parliament

Letters can be sent to any member of parliament, but generally the most effective contact will be with your local member or the responsible Minister or Shadow Minister. Below is a letter which you can adapt to fit your preferences and whether you are contacting government or opposition members.

- You can find your local member [here](#)
- The Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs is Andrew Giles
- The Shadow Minister for Community Safety, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs is Stuart Robert.

For a school activity, consider encouraging students to compose their own letters, describing their opinions, experiences and thoughts on these topics.

*Dear .....*

*I acknowledge the positive steps which have been made by the current government in relation to people seeking asylum. I believe it is important that they receive the support they need to live peacefully and be able to participate in our community in Australia.*

*However, there are some aspects of current policy that need to be changed. The men who are still being held in Papua New Guinea should be free to come to Australia: they must receive all the support they need, especially given the many years they have not received the welcome and compassion that is their due. In addition, no person seeking asylum should be sent offshore, so the arrangement with Nauru should be ended.*

*Secondly, the system of detention within Australia is unfair. All those seeking asylum should be able to live within the Australian community while waiting for the outcome of their permanent protection applications.*

*Thirdly, there needs to be a clear pathway to permanent protection. Those on temporary visas should have access to work and study, access to Medicare and access to financial support while waiting for the outcome of their permanent protection applications.*

*I look forward to changes such as these to become part of government policy and urge you to work for them.*

*Sincerely,*

## Actions

### Meeting your local Member of Parliament

By meeting a politician you can communicate more than in a letter, but even more importantly you can have a discussion and build a relationship. Some politicians will be willing to come to a school, or to accept a small group to meet in their offices. Requests can be via email or post and should include who you are, the name of your school and what you would like to meet about. Mention that you will be in touch about a suitable time and then, to enhance your chances of a positive response, it is a good idea to phone a day or so later to ask for a time.

Once a time has been arranged, it is important that all who will visit know the name and correct way of addressing the person, as well as the name of their electorate. In addition, it is important to do some research into their stance on people seeking asylum, any previous mentions in parliament speeches or actions in their electorate, and of course the policies of their party if they belong to one.

It is useful to assign roles before the meeting, such as a facilitator and note-taker. The facilitator can make introductions, thank the MP for their time, and conclude the meeting. You need to have a plan that sets out:

- What issue you want to raise
- Your three main messages about this issue
- What you want to ask them to do.

It is important to remain polite and respectful during the meeting. If the MP says things that are offensive or upsetting, it's best to politely hold your ground and offer an alternative view. For example, 'I can see we won't agree on this point, but I want you to know that I think we can do better than this.'

[This website](#) gives access to the name of your local member. Clicking on their name takes you to a whole range of information about them, their speeches etc. Most will also have another personal website, listed under the Connect tab, which will give more information about local activities.



## Actions

### Having a chat about people seeking asylum

One option is to have someone with lived experience share something of their story with students. This could be followed by a time for sharing. [The Just Voices Speakers Program](#) provides information on the broad range of situations in which the program can benefit schools.

Alternatively, the views which are expressed in the media and our nation generally can provide food for reflection and discussion.

[Here](#) you will find two sets of views which students will likely have been exposed to at some point. They are followed by some texts from the gospels, from Pope Francis and Pope John Paul II, as well as the Jubilee Charter of the Rights of Displaced People.

Students could first read page one, have a short time to reflect on their own views, and then share them with a small group. Following that, students could be invited to find one or two of the texts on the following pages either to affirm or to challenge any of the views expressed. A broader discussion can follow.

### Providing practical support

The kind of support which organisations can receive from schools depends somewhat on where you are situated, so, especially out of the major cities, local knowledge will be the key. Below are some organisations which support people seeking asylum and may be able to receive food and other resources which schools can gather. It is very important to check with each organisation to ensure they can use what you can offer. However, it is safe to say that cash donations will probably always be welcome.

[Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project](#)  
Albert Park in Melbourne

[Jesuit Refugee Service](#)  
in Western Sydney

[Asylum Seeker Resource Centre](#)  
in Melbourne

[Romero – Mercy Centre](#)  
Dutton Park in Brisbane

