



15. NOTICES OF MOTION

I, Councillor Ogy Simic, give notice that I intend to move the Motion outlined below at the Ordinary Meeting of Council on 20 June 2018:

That Council:-

1. As a Refugee Welcome Zone, urgently writes to the Federal Minister of Home Affairs and the Prime Minister asking the Federal Government to reverse the cuts to the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) program, highlighting the social impact of these cuts on Victoria's local communities;
2. Informs local State and Federal lower house members of Parliament and Victorian Senators and State Upper House MPs of Council's position;
3. Informs agencies and community groups assisting people seeking asylum in the City of Port Phillip, the Refugee Council of Australia and the Australian Council of Social Services of Council's position and its support of the alliance of community organisations;
4. Issues a media release outlining the City of Port Phillip's position and that our webpage be updated with Council's position and any associated actions;
5. Works with other Victorian Councils currently advocating on this issue.

Supporting Information

Overview

The Refugee Council of Australia estimates that proposed changes to the Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) will cause more than 7,500 people across Australia to become hungry and homeless.

Background

Since 1993 the Federal Government, in various forms, have financially supported people while their claim for asylum is being considered.

This program is now called the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) program. It provides a basic living allowance (typically 89% of Newstart allowance – currently equating to \$247 a week), casework support and access to torture and trauma counselling. It is delivered by not-for-profit agencies across Australia and is also used to support other vulnerable migrants in need.

From August 2017, the Department reduced who can get support from the program. For example students, including people studying English for employment were taken off the program.

Further changes to the eligibility criteria of the SSRS program took place on the 1st of May 2018 after which the re-assessment process commenced. As a result, SRSS asylum seeking recipients who are assessed as being job ready will now commence exiting the program, losing all income, casework and allied supports.

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Accurate job readiness assessment for sustainable employment is difficult to assess. Due to the narrow list of exclusions there is a strong concern in the sector that the majority of people seeking asylum will be affected by the action and be even more disadvantaged than other job seekers in the marketplace.

This action has started to leave many people destitute. People seeking asylum are already seeking emergency assistance in increasing numbers from agencies and other charities throughout Australia. Many of these are charities that receive no money from the government. Likeminded Councils have already strongly advocated for greater resources for agencies to deal with the humanitarian challenges of people seeking asylum in the community, acknowledging that they already live in poverty due to the limited financial support offered by the SSRS program and the inability to find work – this latest change will take it to the level of a humanitarian crisis as requests for places to live, and money for clothes, food and medicine, are already escalating.

An alliance of close to 100 civil society organisations, including the Refugee Council of Australia (Convenor of the Refugee Welcome Zones program of which this Council has been a member since 2002), and the Australian Council of Social Service (the peak body of community welfare agencies), is calling on the government to urgently reverse their position to cut income support for people seeking asylum. Also in the alliance are the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, Bapcare, Centrecare, Jesuit Social Services, Refugee Legal, St Vincent de Paul, The Salvation Army and the Uniting Church.

Across Victoria, we have thousands of people seeking asylum in the community awaiting a decision. The majority will be affected by these changes to the SRSS program and these people will continue to face significant challenges in finding employment. Loss of income and case management support will be accentuated by the uncertainty of their status in Australia, language and cultural barriers, and the effects of torture and trauma.