



30 May 2012

Julie Dennett
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Legal and Constitutional Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Sent By Email: legcon.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Ms Dennett

Submission for "Inquiry into the Australian Human Rights Commission Amendment (National Children's Commissioner) Bill 2012"

Endorsement of Submission

The Brotherhood of St Laurence endorses the submission made by Hotham Mission Asylum Seeker Project (HMASP) to this Inquiry.

Overview of Brotherhood of St Laurence work with refugee children and youth

Through its refugees, immigration and multiculturalism area, the Brotherhood actively works at reversing the difficulty in the circumstances of refugees in Australia. By working with migrant and refugee communities, we are able to contribute to both a deeper understanding of and advocacy to alleviate the exclusion and disadvantage they experience.

To address the impact of displacement on newly arrived refugee families and work through their transitional challenges during settlement, our family counsellors offer culturally-sensitive support, including therapy and advocacy to refugee children, adults and families through the *Stronger Families and Family Support* programs. Last year, 80 at risk families were supported by our counsellors to take control of their circumstances while maintaining nurturing environments for healthy connected families.

We also offer a suite of programs that provide one-on-one support to assist families - *Mama's Plus* and the *Refugee Child Outreach Program* are complementary in helping address difficulties experienced by migrant, refugee and asylum seeker women and their children in accessing appropriate support services through collaborative engagement and referral pathways. The program enhances personal and social engagement opportunities to address isolation of mothers with large families, providing an environment that encourages and promotes positive parenting and the developmental needs of children. Last year we provided intensive practical, emotional and parenting support to 10 families, and worked with 2 African women's groups in preparing to run a creative art project and cross-cultural cooking classes.

The Brotherhood is bringing new leadership to improve settlement outcomes of young people and enhance their societal participation through programs such as *Youth2Youth* and the Community Justice Worker, as well as the *Refugee Youth Development Program (RYDP)*.



Youth2Youth, a peer-education program, has delivered 4 training sessions for 34 young people from African backgrounds to enhance their capacity to facilitate workshops for other disengaged young people in their communities. Almost 30% of the young people were employed as casual workers to facilitate 5 workshops on cultural transition delivered to an additional 74 young people who were at risk of marginalisation. These young people now have the capacity to anticipate issues they may face as newly-arrived young people and feel supported with strategies to address any arising settlement situations.

The *RYDP* provided 150 refugee teenagers the opportunity to have fun developing their leadership skills. This year we delivered 2 training activities during school holidays to create employment pathways for 30 refugee young people by increasing their capacity to negotiate entry into the workforce through a combination of practical exercises, experiential learning, visits to workplaces and inviting career advisors to share employment related information. With NMIT, we successfully piloted a *Community Service Volunteering Program* where we acted as a broker with external agencies to support 20 young people to take up volunteering roles by taking them on site visits to experience a range of volunteer activities.

The Community Justice Worker provides a link between the local African Australian community (with a particular focus on youth) and the justice system in Melbourne's west through information provision, referral pathways and brokering mutual understanding and relationships.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me (contact details below).

Yours sincerely

HUTCH HUSSEIN
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Refugees, Immigration & Multiculturalism (RIM)
Brotherhood of St Laurence