



Assyrian Australian Association

Assyrian Resource Centre

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The Assyrian Australian Association – Assyrian Resource Centre

The Assyrian Resource Centre was established by Australian Assyrian Association in 1984 to provide assistance in the settlement needs of the growing community in the Fairfield and Liverpool areas. The work undertaken by the organisation is a prominent and core component of the Assyrian-Australian diaspora.

As a member of the Assyrian community in Fairfield, it has come to my attention that the services for migrants and refugees are not generating the best outcomes for migrants. While there are many organisations who strive to do the best, and large amounts of funding flowing into this area, the lack of oversight and coordination is not generating the best results. Many people arrive without support and assistance, have experienced torture or trauma of some kind and need specialised and sustainable support. The current system of services is not meeting these needs, and regularly in my daily work I see the effects.

One example I can share is of a family who had recently arrived. They had experience trauma before arriving to Australia and their financial support (for housing in particular) had run out as they had been in Fairfield for over a month. This family came to visit me to see if I could help. I deal with families and conflict on a daily basis, and to me it was clear there was violence occurring in the family. We needed to convince the family to take part in counselling and providing incentives to do this was the only way forward. This disconnect between the services providing counselling and psychology services and the case workers who had managed their case was evident as many families are distressed in taking part in counselling providing services. Further, the cultural differences in the acceptance of mental health issues was more than clear. To help this family get the support they needed, specialised, ongoing and persistent support was needed to achieve a result. While I was able to help this family, there are many others who do not know where to go and are left isolated without support.

Issues Arising

- Throughout the Fairfield LGA there is an increase in the number of refugees settling within Fairfield. The need for affordable housing is on the rise. The Australian Government should be providing assistance and incentives in allowing refugees to reside within other suburbs. This includes rent assistance and also having medical centres and

churches to have people who speak their language. The cost of living has risen and for the refugees it is a struggle with some reporting only having one meal per day.

- The ARC has advocated to real estate agents and Housing NSW to provide affordable housing. Unfortunately, assistance has not been forthcoming. Housing NSW has over 5000 families and individuals awaiting housing to be granted.
- The Torture and Trauma faced by many families and not being able to gain employment is leading to domestic violence within the household. This is as the dominant male is unable to provide for his family which is highly stressful. Due to this reason, I have joined a steering community on domestic violence in order to cater for these families.
- The ARC assists all clients with anything and everything, we also speak their language and we are knowledgeable in all mainstream services.
- The ARC also advocates to mainstream services in relation to current issues.

- Newly arrived youth are often involved in erroneous activities. Funding sought by the ARC for youth and aged care has been unsuccessful and therefore, a specialised and targeted ethno-specific service for Assyrian-Australians in this regard is not present. That being said, we continue to assist the elderly and youth on a voluntary basis.

The mix, coordination and extent of settlement services available and the effectiveness of these services in promoting better settlement outcomes for migrants

- Spread of services needs to be considered, centralised services create tensions by facilitating an atmosphere of competition.
- Many people who migrate or come as a refugee have faced torture and trauma – if this is not addressed it attracts the wrong behaviour as they have not dealt with their past experiences.
- Policies currently do not address the need for services beyond the 1-month period, particularly in the area of housing and food support.
- Influence of religious organisations – convincing migrants/refugees to join the religion in exchange for services and support, putting them in a place of vulnerability.
- Not enough support for living and rising costs of living in Fairfield.
- Case workers – lack of follow through beyond the initial consultation and service provision.
- Migrants become lost in transit, completely isolated from the community.
- This isolation contributes to anti-social behaviour in young people, their parents aren't able to offer them enough support so they seek validation through maladaptive means.
- Need for training and support for family and sponsors for a longer period of time.
- Need for non-religious, non-judgemental support.
- Services are inappropriate and patronising – particularly when migrants first arrive.
- Services don't factor in the lack of awareness about mental illness and cultural sensitivities around mental health. This needs to be dealt with through reflexive practice and ongoing support.
- English Intensive classes should not be delivered with an entire group of refugees of which speak the same language, as they remain speaking to each other in their native language.

As one of the main intake groups under Australia's humanitarian program, the Assyrian-Australian community continues to grow into one of the largest diaspora communities in Australia. The unique challenges faced by the community are exacerbated by the need for the diaspora community to continually provide assistance of the kind highlighted above to new arrivals. It is imperative that the Australian Government supports existing diaspora communities to better harness their existing strengths and capabilities to support new arrivals into their community.

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I pay my respect and acknowledge the **Cabrogal** people as the traditional owners of the land which I work & live on