

Item 3.2

Support for Refugees and Asylum Seekers

File No: S051491

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

In 2005, the City of Sydney became an official refugee welcome zone, an initiative of the Refugee Council of Australia. At that time, and reaffirmed in 2014, Council declared its commitment to welcoming refugees and people seeking asylum into our community. This was also a commitment to upholding human rights, demonstrating compassion and enhancing cultural and religious diversity in our community. The slogan 'Refugees and Asylum Seekers are welcome in our city' is proudly presented on our website.

The Refugee Council has invited the City to become a founding member of a Refugee Welcome Zone Leadership Group. The City would be the first Australian council to officially sign up to the group.

As a member of the leadership group, the City would continue to communicate regularly with the Refugee Council through our staff and provide feedback on what we are doing to support refugees and contribute ideas on how the refugee welcome zone initiative can be expanded and improved.

An annual financial contribution of \$5,000 from the City to join this group would assist the Refugee Council being able to provide more resources for refugee welcome zone councils such as webinars, policy briefs, an annual conference, opportunities for information sharing between other refugee welcome zones and showcasing successful programs and projects implemented by councils.

The City has always taken its commitment to refugees and people seeking asylum seriously, and this is reflected in our activities, including:

- A partnership with CareerSeekers that the Council unanimously endorsed in November 2018, supporting its Article 23 Program. The program derives its name from Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which sets out an individual's right to work. The City is contributing \$10,000 each year for three years, until 2021 to support this campaign. The City is also participating the New Australian Internship Program – and has engaged two interns through this program since 2016.
- Free or discounted access to City programs, venues, facilities and services for refugees and asylum seekers including:
 - a concessional rate at our five swimming pools;
 - free and low cost activities and concessional rates at our community centres;
 - free gym attendance for up to 20 visits over six months with the Juanita Nielson Community Gym Outreach Program through partner agencies such as the Asylum Seekers Centre;

- special free special temporary membership at our nine libraries;
 - the Fireflies capacity building program in our libraries held in 2018 in collaboration with Red Room Poetry and Strategic Community Assistance to Refugee Families – this program supported employment pathways into public libraries and early childhood educational organisations; and
 - coordinating the International Student Leadership Ambassador Program which builds the leadership capacity of international students including students from refugee backgrounds through training, mentoring and real life project management experiences.
- Our grants and sponsorship program, which provides financial assistance to a wide range of community organisations and agencies that assist refugees and people seeking asylum. Over the past five years, this program has provided more than \$275,000 in cash grants and nearly \$26,000 value-in-kind support in venue and street banner hire waivers.
 - A grant of \$100,000 to Settlement Services International to deliver the highly successful Welcome2Sydney pilot program that connects local volunteer residents with newly arrived refugees and people seeking asylum from Western and South Western Sydney. In 2018, more than 800 people participated and 40 City residents volunteered. The City and Settlement Services International co-designed this program.
 - Encouraging community members holding events that support refugees and people seeking asylum to promote them on the City's 'What's On' website.
 - Hosting programs and events with the Asylum Seekers Centre, the Refugee Council and other groups to mark Refugee Week.
 - Running a 'Refugee and Asylum Seekers are welcome in the City' campaign during Refugee Week and periodically throughout the year.
 - Hosting 'People just like us' – talks during Youth Week and Harmony Day celebrations in partnership with the Refugee Council.
 - Joining the Welcoming Cities Network in 2018 – this is a network of cities, shires, towns and municipalities that are committed to an Australia where everyone can belong and participate in social, cultural, economic and civic life. On 6 November, the City hosted the Welcome Cities networking event for New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory which included representatives from local governments and other organisations.

This year the City actively encouraged organisations that support refugees and people seeking asylum to apply to our Charity Partners Program. I was pleased when the Refugee Council was chosen as the City's charity partner for New Year's Eve 2019/20.

The request from the Refugee Council to join the Refugee Welcome Zone Leadership Group offers the City opportunities to share our experience and knowledge, to learn from other refugee welcome zone councils and to contribute even further to support refugees and asylum seekers. It will also showcase our work to a global audience through the Refugee Council's relationship with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees who perceive local authorities as potential allies in showing solidarity with refugees.

I strongly support this request as a way for the City to boost our support for refugees and asylum seekers in Australia and across the world.

Recommendation

It is resolved that the Chief Executive Officer be requested to:

- (A) write to the Refugee Council of Australia confirming the City's acceptance of their invitation to join the Refugee Welcome Zone Leadership Group; and
- (B) arrange annual payment of the \$5,000 contribution to confirm the City's membership, with the initial membership to be funded from the 2019/20 General Contingency and that funding will be included in future years operational budgets to maintain the membership.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor