



NEWSLETTER July 2020

www.grandmothersforrefugees.org

To all Grandmothers and Frogs in the Melbourne and Mitchell Shire Covid-19 lockdown zone, this newsletter brings special greetings of our concern and good wishes for you.

Thinking about what support we might offer you whilst 'confined to barracks', we decided to include a quiz and wordplay in this edition as a small diversion. We hope you enjoy them as well as the latest in information and updates.

Leading our news is the **Unhappy Anniversary** of seven years since people arriving by boat to seek asylum were told they would NEVER be allowed to settle in Australia. It is **#7yearstoolong**.

There are news and views on this **19 July** anniversary and a **call to action** for us all to do or say something, however small, in defence of refugees.

Grandmothers and Frogs in the outer regions of Victoria and interstate are less constrained by the Covid-19 restrictions. In this edition we outline steps to strengthen co-ordination and offer additional resources to support your actions wherever you are around Australia.

The pandemic may have cramped our style but not our commitment to refugees. Let's keep going!



Copies of this **new full colour, 6-page flyer** are **available now**. You can read it on our website www.grandmothersforrefugees.org or request copies be sent to you for local distribution in your electorate by emailing info@grandmothersforrefugees.org.

Visit our website today www.grandmothersforrefugees.org

CALL TO ACTION 1

From your kitchen table... please **write or call your local Federal MP and Senator** to:

- Alert them to the 7-year anniversary of shame and your disappointment with the current 46th Parliament.
- Ask for details of the Government's plan to resolve the situation of refugees and asylum seekers not yet resettled.
- Ask for information on the health care being provided to men being held in the Mantra hotels in Preston (VIC) and Kangaroo Point (QLD).
- Ask your MP to forward a request to Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton seeking an explanation for the continued detention of the children Kopika and Tharunicaa on Christmas Island and two-year-old Isabella and her mother Huyen in the MITA (Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation) centre.

CALL TO ACTION 2

During your permitted exercise... please **letterbox your street and the neighbouring area with the latest flyer** which is ready and available from your electorate co-ordinator or on request from info@grandmothersforrefugees.org

CALL TO ACTION 3

Watch this short video clip created by RAC Canberra and share it with your social media friends and followers. #7yearstoolong #freetherefugees

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ca6AazRH7HkgPJVG4-z2rx_UegEOP8Bo/view



VIEW

MANUS – An Oscar qualifying documentary short film by Angus McDonald is a 13-minute documentary that shines a light on the plight hundreds of refugees & asylum seekers held captive offshore by the Australian Federal Government for over 6 years on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea. Hear the stories of the men on Manus in their own words from secretly captured footage. You can **watch the film** here: <https://howlingeagle.com/manusmedia>



Were you there? 19 July 2019

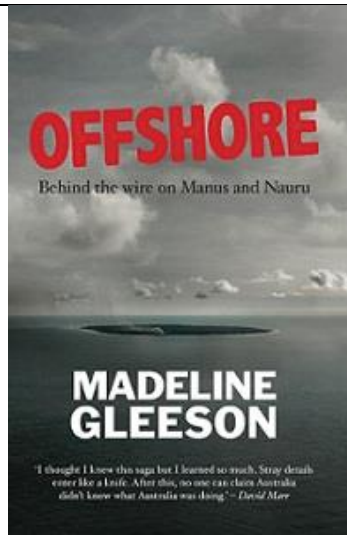
When 'social distancing' was not required behaviour?

When Zoom was not ubiquitous?

When face masks were preferred for doing nefarious deeds?

When 'Staying Alive' was a nostalgia trip with the Beegees?

What a difference a year makes... but not for some...



Twelve months ago on the 6th anniversary of the offshore processing deal struck by between Australia and PNG, the Kaldor Centre Senior Research Associate **Madeline Gleeson**, a lawyer and author of the award-winning *Offshore: Behind the Wire on Manus and Nauru* (UNSW Press), responded to five simple questions:

Q1 Why is July 19 significant for people seeking asylum in Australia?

Q2 What was the background to this new policy?

Q3 What has changed since then?

Q4 What does the future hold?

Q5 Is there a better way?

A year later, and these questions remain relevant. For desperate people suffering another year of hopelessness, things are worse.

Read the full article here: <https://www.kaldorcentre.unsw.edu.au/news/five-questions-six-years-australia%E2%80%99s-offshore-processing-policy>



We at Jagajaga/Menzies were expecting 13 a couple of days ago but then a couple chose to access the program on Zoom from their own homes and two more found themselves double booked so we were down to 9. By the end there were some in tears. The words and their readers were so powerful. We also found question time with Christine was very interesting. She was generous with her time. I am sure there will be more sales of the book after that session. Attached is a photo Gillian took of us tuning in, social distancing so a couple are off screen. - Meg L'Estrange

Thank you to all those who sent feedback on our World Refugee Day virtual Afternoon Tea:

Thank you for organizing yesterday's event. It was such an informative day and I was very moved by the stories of such bravery and endurance of the refugees. I am ashamed that our government exacerbates the suffering of these people. - Suzie Riordan

Thank you for the time & effort that went into this afternoon's zoom meeting which brought all us GFR members together in a wonderful way in this isolating time sharing over a cuppa. The book readings & readers were excellent & have certainly fired me up to buy the book for many people. So well done to all of you, not only for today but for all you do to keep us informed & motivated. - Nan Stevens (Casey electorate)

At the suggestion of Kooyong/Higgins Grandmothers, a copy of ***Dignity in a Teacup: True stories of courage and sacrifice from Christmas Island by Christine Cummins*** has been sent to the Biloela Library as an acknowledgement / thank you to the community for their support of Nades, Priya, Kopika and Tharunicaa.

Visit our website today www.grandmothersforrefugees.org

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND CAMPAIGN - UPDATE from RCOA

Overview

There are currently around 16,000 children in families seeking protection in Australia. Many people seeking asylum have lost their jobs due to COVID-19, as they often work in the service sectors which are worst affected. People seeking asylum are not eligible for the JobSeeker or JobKeeper payments. **They have been left with nothing.** It will be hard for them to re-enter the workforce, especially in the current economy.

There are serious concerns that many families seeking asylum have been left in a situation where they have no work, no income, and no way out. Demand on emergency relief at asylum agencies has in most cases trebled, with unprecedented demand for food, medicines and rent relief.

We are building a coalition of educators, parents, carers and students who are working to put pressure on the Federal government to ensure adequate support is provided for people in this situation. The campaign is being led by educators including retired NSW principal Dorothy Hoddinott AO who had many children seeking asylum at her high school in Western Sydney.

To date, we have already secured powerful media stories, such as [this piece in The Saturday Paper](#) and [this segment in Channel 9's The Today Show](#).

How to get involved

The campaign is going well, but we need your support! We are asking individuals and education-focused organisations to sign on. We have a joint statement for educators and a separate petition for the general public, both of which [can be accessed here](#).

Here is what you can do to help the campaign:

1. **Sign on to the joint statement or petition** – [You can view and sign on to either the petition \(for the general public\) or joint statement \(for educators\) here](#). We are seeking signatories from individual educators, principals, parents and students as well as representative education bodies to a joint statement. For those not in education, the above link will direct you to a petition where members of the general public can support the campaign.
2. **Share the statement and petition among your networks** – We have drafted [this short article](#) that you could use in any bulletins or newsletters you send out.
3. **Connect us with educators, principals, parents or students you may know to speak to media about what they are seeing** – we are looking for any educators (retired or current) who might be interested in speaking to the media about what they are seeing at their schools with children seeking asylum, or just generally on the issue of the lack of support afforded to some families. We know that the way to build this campaign and achieve what we are trying to, is by having consistent media from educators. Email me with any contacts.
4. **Connect us with families seeking asylum** – If you know of any families seeking asylum who are in a tough situation as a result of Covid please get in touch. These direct experiences are the most powerful way to build the campaign. You can either [fill out this form](#) or email me directly.
5. **Help us organise the schools National Day of Solidarity** – On August 25 we are aiming to get 50 schools around the country involved in a day of solidarity with children and young people seeking asylum. The action will simple but powerful. Email me with any contact!
6. **Share content on social media** – We have put together a kit you can use to promote the campaign on social media, [it includes Facebook posts, tweets, graphics and more](#).

INCREASING OUR IMPACT

We have been thinking of ways that we can work together to spread the message of our Four Demands more broadly.

We want to make sure that every MP in Victoria, at least, and their constituents hear our message!!

We are proposing that clusters of Victorian electorate groups collaborate so that where our numbers are small, support can be provided from neighbouring electorates.

Different groups would do this differently, but ideas might include Zoom meetings across electorates (Bendigo has reached out to Ballarat, for example), joint letter writing or telephone campaigns, letterboxing and, when we are freer, protests outside MPs' offices.

HEARING MORE VOICES

We are also suggesting that each cluster be invited to nominate one person to a new coordinating committee; we would like to hear more voices around the table (or via the Zoom screen).

For more details, see the attached letter sent recently to Electorate Coordinators.

SEND US YOUR EVENT PLANS

We would also like to be able to list upcoming events in your electorates. They might be regular or occasional vigils, meetings or letter writing sessions via ZOOM, or spatially

With best wishes to all for your continued safety and good health,

Jean, Margaret, Jane and Di

info@grandmothersforrefugees.org

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distant walks with other refugee support groups.

We understand activities are limited now, especially in Melbourne metro area and Mitchell Shire.

If you let us know how you are continuing to advocate for our Four Demands, we will include it in the newsletter and on the website.

LATE NEWS - CALL TO ACTION



All people in Mantra and MITA should be tested for Covid-19, reassured of their status - so urgency in communicating results. If negative, release people into the community so as not at further risk (there is a 2 yr old and a man with cancer in MITA plus many others who are vulnerable).

Please contact Acting Immigration Minister Alan Tudge's office urgently on 03 9887 3890.