

Here is an article from the Pakenham Gazette, 4 November, 2020

This is a great example of local action on the issue of refugees being removed from community detention without appropriate support.

Refugee treatment cruel, inhuman

Across Australia today there are 515 refugees and asylum seekers being moved from community detention Final Departure Bridging visas with no access to any Federal financial support. These people were brought to Australia from PNG and Nauru for urgent medical treatment and have been living in rental accommodation in the community provided by the Federal Government in some cases for years. It was in March 2020 that the Federal Minister for Home Affairs, Peter Dutton, decided to begin moving people who were classified by the Australian Government as “transitory persons”, from community detention on to these new visas.

The visas would grant them the right to work but no access to Federal Government financial assistance.

In August the Minister began to use his ministerial intervention powers to decide who to remove from community detention and when to do it.

Families and individuals who were selected received a letter informing them that they had three weeks to vacate their accommodation. Most of them will lose their financial support as soon as they are issued with the new Bridging Visa.

As of 23 September 2020, 188 people across NSW, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia have been moved from community detention.

A further 327 people (164 in Victoria) are currently under consideration for this move.

Refugees living in Victoria have been spared so far due to the lockdown restrictions but community activists fear that it will happen soon.

People may say this is good that they are being given more freedom now, but they will not have accommodation and will certainly not be in a position to secure and afford rental housing. The Government will now expect them to find jobs and support themselves.

With no prior work experience, and no right to study or gain relevant qualifications, few will be able to find jobs at a time when unemployment is at an all-time high due to the pandemic.

Some are fluent in English, but many are not, having had no access to the Adult Migrant English programs. How will they feed themselves and their families?

It is extraordinary that after seven years in detention these refugees are being given just three weeks to become self supporting!

It will be the State and Local Governments and charities who will be needing to step in to support them.

There are refugees living in our area who will be affected.

All the people affected by this new arrangement were brought to Australia from Nauru or PNG because they, or a family member, suffered serious physical or mental health issues.

They are all very vulnerable, and it seems incredibly harsh and cruel to treat them in this manner.

We need proper, humane solutions to resettlement of our refugees and asylum seekers who came to this country in search of freedom and peace.

We must expect better than this from our politicians!

*Margaret Edwards,
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