



Newsletter September 2023

Minister Clare O'Neil engages in meaningful dialogue with Grandmothers

We are excited to bring you an update on our recent advocacy meeting with Minister Clare O'Neil and her senior advisor Ann Clark.

We discussed several critical issues related to immigration and refugees, our meeting was robust and convivial, we were grateful for the Minister's time and interest.

These issues were addressed by the Minister and her advisor and by our advocacy:

Afghan refugees who arrived after the fall of Kabul have completed their application processing and have been granted permanent residency. This allows them to apply for family reunification.

The **offshore detention system** would not be dismantled.

The government has abolished the **Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT)** and plans to establish a new body within a year, which will handle various administrative appeal issues. Board members for this new body will be appointed based on merit.

We raised concerns about **stateless children born in Australia**. We learnt that if one parent holds permanent residency, their child born in Australia automatically gains permanent residency as well.

5,000 individuals have already obtained **permanent status through the ROS process**. The government's approach involves evaluating each person's case individually, which extends claim processing times.

We stressed the importance of prioritising family reunions for those granted permanent protection. When permanent protection is granted, the application for reuniting with a direct family member is provided cost-free.

We addressed the challenging situation of **men in Papua New Guinea (PNG)** who lack refugee status. We expressed concerns about their physical and mental well-being and the belief that the Australian government has a moral responsibility towards them and still owes them a duty of care.



Our advocacy included **extending ROS provisions to include the 11,000 individuals** currently excluded from the decision-making process. We suggested that those excluded be allowed to stay in Australia and receive an "Act of Grace" when they have no other options to remain.

We advocated for **improved work rights and increased support** for individuals already in Australia, particularly those awaiting visa outcomes. We emphasised the challenges they face and the strain on NGOs providing emergency relief.

While no concrete commitments were made during the meeting, Minister O'Neil expressed interest in the solutions we proposed. She acknowledged our advocacy as respectful and effective and has agreed to meet with us again.

Our vigils in collaboration with other local advocacy groups in Hotham have been effective. Together, we can work towards positive changes in immigration and refugee policies. Grandmothers are uniquely placed to work with local MPs around the country; recent meetings have also taken place with Kate Thwaites, Zoe Daniels and Andrew Giles.

Let's keep it up!

Janet Joss and Virginia Schneiders

Refugees abandoned in Papua-New Guinea

Senior journalists at *The Age* and *The Herald-Sun* recently shone a spotlight on the corrupt and wasteful use of taxpayers' money on the administration of Australia's offshore detention facilities.

This extensive coverage in two well-read newspapers has again focussed attention on those refugees left behind on Papua-New Guinea.

The 116 participants at a recent zoom meeting with PNG, organised by the Refugee Action Collective and the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, learned of the impact of that corruption on the lives of refugees living in Port Moresby since the closure of Manus Island at the end of 2021. They also learned of the hopelessness of people who have been languishing in this limbo for 10 years. These people have been cut off from their



families with no prospect of a future either in Port Moresby or elsewhere.

In the opinion of the Human Rights Law Centre, the Australian Government bears the same responsibility to those sent to PNG as to those sent to Nauru. All refugees from Nauru have

been sent to Australia.

There are seventy-five people remaining in Port Moresby. Many are now seriously ill; fourteen people have died. Time is running out for these seventy-five people. Those in PNG are not eligible for the Australia-New Zealand resettlement program. Many need mental health care that is unavailable in PNG.

The transfer of asylum seekers from Port Moresby is a high priority for the Grandmothers' and for many other advocacy groups. We need to take whatever action we can to remind this government of their duty.

Ann Butler

New momentum

ALP's renewed commitment to asylum seeker rights at National Conference



The Australian Labor Party (ALP) has ratified significant changes to its policy platform during its recent national conference. These reforms promise a more compassionate approach to asylum seekers and refugees.

Key highlights as reported in the *Australian* (Saturday 26 August) include the establishment of a parliamentary inquiry into offshore detention, following recent allegations of bribery and corruption; the creation of a special envoy for refugees, and the extension of work, study and welfare rights for asylum seekers, and endorsement of the "90-day rule" ensuring that

asylum seekers are not detained for longer than 90 days – a critical move toward more humane treatment.

The new platform acknowledges the importance of a community-sponsored refugee program, doubling the commitment to increase it to 10,000 places annually. This program allows individuals and businesses to sponsor refugees, aiding in their resettlement. Additionally, the humanitarian intake is to rise from 20,000 to 27,000, reflecting a substantial increase in the number of people Australia is willing to welcome.

The reforms represent a significant shift in policy, with a commitment to safe, orderly pathways for refugees and asylum seekers. Means-tested access to social services, including healthcare and education, will be available during the protection claim assessment process.

As quoted in the *Australian*, the Immigration Minister Andrew Giles hailed the unity within the ALP, highlighting that these changes were a pragmatic approach and a testament to the party's progress in supporting refugees and asylum seekers.

Grandmothers for Refugees welcomes Labor's more ambitious policies as a step in the right direction. While we recognise their potential to enhance the well-being of asylum seekers and our broader community, they do not go far enough. We are committed to advocating for the swift and effective implementation of the new policies by the Albanese government.

Read the full story in the *Australian* [here](#).

Janet Joss



A new way to say
'Welcome!'

Some of our GfR members are participating in the CRISP programme (Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Programme) is a programme operated by Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA).

CRSA is an independent Australian charity leading civil society efforts to establish community sponsorship of refugees as a common practice through Australia to benefit refugees and Australian communities alike.

CRISP was inspired by the successful community refugee sponsorship programme operating in Canada since the late 1970s. Visas for refugees made available under CRISP are currently drawn from Australia's annual humanitarian intake. The government has a stated goal of having 5,000 additional community sponsorship places for refugees each year but has yet to announce new measures to achieve this.

We are aware of at least two GfR members in WA who are participating in CRISP groups. These groups consist of five or more adults who volunteer to raise monies and provide 12 months of practical hands-on support to a refugee household from their date of arrival in Australia.

WA member Miranda Cooper, who is in one of these groups, says:

"When I heard the Federal government was allowing community sponsorship of refugees, I jumped at the opportunity to act in a more positive way

There are still two areas that need ironing out. I have heard my first concern will be rectified very soon ... that is, the refugees we help settle are not additional to the government's quota. This means we are doing some of the government's work for them (although they pay for the refugees to be brought to Australia). My second concern is that I cannot bring the refugees I know

personally. The government will select who comes. I guess this is a necessary safeguard against possible abuse of the scheme. I am able to say who I feel best able to settle, i.e. cultures

Our group of ladies complement each other with some good at the banking set up, some are marketing experts, others understand how to step us through the government requirements, or link new arrivals to services, and others of us are a keen support crew.

A budget of \$15,000 had been estimated using the government guidelines. The major expense of immediate temporary accommodation was partially reduced by some generous people offering reduced priced rentals.

Training – we have had to complete several hours of individual online training which wasn't too arduous. Now we have a three-hour group training coming up to complete the government requirements. Next, we will throw ourselves into more fundraising until we meet the budgeted goals.

The sharing of the tasks and the excitement of the fundraising is very satisfying – but the welcoming of refugees themselves will be incredible."

It would be interesting to learn of the experiences of other of our GfR members who are participating in CRISP groups. Do let us know. Whilst outside of the scope of Grandmothers for Refugees objectives some of our members might like to take a practical hands-on effort in such groups.

You can also donate [here](#) to a group in your area if you don't have time to actively participate.

Marita Keenan, Coordinator Greater GfR WA Group

Refugee advocate Neil Para calls for amnesty to provide hope for refugee children

Neil Para, the dedicated Refugee Freedom Walker, is urging policymakers to grant amnesty to 10,000 refugees still awaiting visas in Australia.

**His mission is clear.
To offer hope for all refugee children.**

Para's journey has seen him cover over 600 kilometres of his 1,000-kilometer Refugee Freedom Walk to Prime Minister Albanese's electorate office in Sydney. His walk resonates with the struggles of 10,000 refugees who, after a decade of uncertainty, await permanent visas.

This situation deeply affects families, limiting opportunities and keeping them separated. Nivash, Neil's daughter, 15, pleads for help in a letter to Prime Minister Albanese.

Neil Para is advocating for permanent visas that would prevent these children from being left behind emphasising hope and a brighter future for every child, regardless of immigration status.

Neil's invitation to meet with Prime Minister Albanese has not yet had a response.



 **Sign the Change.org petition [here](#).**

Follow Neil's progress and offer encouragement on Facebook [here](#).

For NSW Grandmothers – Join Neil Para's family for the final stretch of the 1,000 km Refugee Walk for Freedom. [Information here](#).

Here are Neil's three requests:

1. Ensure that children born in Australia enjoy the same rights as other Australian children.

2. Grant Australian citizenship or permanent residency, with a pathway to citizenship, to all children who have attended Australian schools.

3. Include all remaining refugees living in Australia in the permanent visa process announced by Andrew Giles on 13 February 2023.

Staying informed about Refugee and Asylum seeker issues can be challenging in the current information-rich landscape, where eNews and media content inundate us from various sources.

Have a look at our media blog curated by NSW grandmothers, Helen Snowden and Wendy Power. It's updated daily and provides quick access to the latest media information.

>> Go to our website [here](#)

The Kaldor Centre for International Law at UNSW has a comprehensive weekly update.

>> Join their mailing list [here](#)

Out and about with Grandmothers

A snapshot



Fremantle attended Regular Friday Standing protest (*above*) in the heart of Fremantle to mark the ten-year anniversary of offshore detention and resettlement cruelty. Two-day display in a local library to inform public re: ten-year anniversary. 40-50 people attended a public talk in Fremantle (St Paul's Church) by Betty McGeever, then PPP of artwork story of refugee Naser Moradi, presented by AGWA guide Gillian.

Macnamara supports the twice-monthly Hotham Grandmothers' vigils at Clare O'Neil's office. Attended ASRC rally at State Library. Twice-monthly vigils on Brighton Road.

Higgins attended vigils and delivered Refugee Stories at Clare O'Neil's office and attended '10 Years Too Long' rally organised by RAC.



Kooyong / Cooper

A very successful information session was held recently at Hawthorn U3A, (*left*). 16 people attended, four signing up to join GFR. The power point presentation, available to members to use, is proving to be a powerful and engaging tool to use for community education. Questions and discussion following the presentation were wide ranging with many participants recalling their own migration stories.



Casey Grandmothers hold a vigil on the 2nd and 4th Fridays of the month on the Maroondah Highway Chirnside Park from 2 to 3pm opposite the office of the federal Liberal member, Aaron Violi. (*left*) The vigil attracts an increasingly good response from motorists and passersby, especially when the **Honk for Humanity** sign is displayed.

On Monday 4 August, after our monthly meeting, we gathered at Seasons Restaurant at beautiful Cloudehill Gardens in the Dandenong Ranges to farewell our wonderful, inspiring leader, Virginia Schneiders, as she sets forth on her new adventure when she moves from Mt Dandenong to her new home in Melbourne. (*right*)

Virginia has worked tirelessly for many years as a member of Grandmothers for Refugees. Of course, she is not leaving Grandmothers as she continues in her role on the Executive and in her new group in Melbourne.

Prue Licht, our Coordinator, farewelled Virginia explaining how long they have been working together and wishing her well. Of course, we will miss Virginia; we have learnt much from her guidance, wisdom and advocacy.

In her farewell message she encouraged us to continue with our work, and advocacy for refugees and people seeking asylum. **Go well, Virginia – and thank you, for all your wonderful work and devotion.**

Valerie Mayer, Casey Grandmothers



Letters to the Editor

published in *The Age* on 23 August 2023

Great advocacy Virginia and Anne!

Inspiring refugee call

Nick Greiner's call ("Refugee limbo must end: Greiner", 22/8) to end the limbo of refugees caught by Australia's inhumane border policies is welcome and should inspire politicians across the political divide to end the 10 years of cruelty, inflicted on about 1,000 people, who were exercising their right under international law, to seek refuge in Australia. To leave them in limbo because they arrived by boat is a further abrogation of their human rights. As Greiner has stated, there is no purpose in maintaining this treatment; their plight could be quietly fixed by allowing them to stay.

Virginia Schneiders, Fitzroy North

Follow Grannies' lead, PM

I support Nick Greiner's call to end the cruel limbo for refugees. As a member of Wills Grandmothers for Refugees, I have been part of a weekly vigil that for seven years has called for the humane treatment of asylum seekers and refugees. In that time there have been slow changes: children (the reason for the Grandmothers' formation) are no longer imprisoned on Nauru; its detention centre has shut; refugees requiring medical care have been reluctantly medevaced to Australia (though not necessarily treated); the Tamil family has been returned to their Biloela community.

But more than 1000 people are being refused settlement simply because they arrived by boat. They cannot work, they receive no benefits, are supported by the wider community, their children must pay international fees to attend university, yet they have so much to offer. Over seven years, the Wills Grannies have seen a huge shift in community attitudes. It is time that the government caught up.

Anne Sgro, Coburg North

The shadow battle for Kooyong goes on

Paul Sakkal
Lachlan Abbott

Cutting script prices in half. Enacting climate change targets. Creating a national anti-corruption agency. This list of Labor's election pledges turned legislative wins. They are the changes Monique Ryan claims would not have happened if she and her teal allies weren't elected.

"That happened because communities like Kooyong brought in independents and demanded change. Those things happened in response to us being there," she said of the climate and integrity reforms. Of the controversial 60-day prescriptions change, Ryan submits she was the politician who put the issue on the agenda, saving the Kooyong Independent's voters hundreds of dollars a year.

At what could be the halfway point of her first term, the Josh Frydenberg-slayer admits her first 15 months in office – partly spent fighting a court challenge from her sacked former chief of staff over working conditions – has had some turbulence.

As the former paediatrician speaks from her office on Camberwell Road, she brims with enthusiasm for a job she says she adores.

Will she run again? Absolutely. Will she win? Yes, Ryan asserts, if she keeps reflecting the values of her voters, which they tell her she is. The Libs are firmly believe Ryan is the teal they can defeat. Coalition strategists think a win in Kooyong could catapult the party out of the doldrums and into a competitive position, especially if it is coupled with potential gains in outer-urban electorates smashed by mortgage stress.

"There's clearly buyer's remorse in Kooyong," says Liberal senator James Paterson, who lives in the seat.

"Monique Ryan has not turned out to be the small-L liberal she promised to be. And voters locally are questioning whether she's delivered anything for them or had any impact at all. The Liberal Party regards Kooyong as a highly competitive target seat at the next election."

The elephant in the room is the



Monique Ryan (front) and (back, left to right) Andrew Field, Eva Roge and Ally Gallagher. Photo: Joe Armo

82-year-old former treasurer, Josh Frydenberg.

He is still wrestling with his decision on whether to re-contest. This process has been made trickier by the emergence of a potential underdog prescription opponent, 30-year-old Amelia Hamer, who comes from Liberal royalty. She's the Oxford-educated grandniece of former Victorian premier Sir Rupert "Dick" Hamer.

Could Frydenberg win? Two polls suggest the seat is up for grabs.

One, conducted by polling firm KAC Research last week and paid for by Frydenberg's allies, shows him ahead 55.6 to 46.5, with Frydenberg's net favourability at +20 and Ryan's at +8. Another poll, commissioned by the left-leaning Australia Institute in late July, shows Ryan ahead 51-49.

Roche's edge pollster Kate Samaras, who has worked with the Climate 200 funding vehicle that helps finance the teal, believes Frydenberg's chances rely less on Ryan's local output than on national dynamics and a broader shift from

the two major parties. "The driver behind the teal movement was yes, the anti-Morrison factor, but underpinning it was a growing sentiment the two-party system wasn't working for people," he said, emphasising the Coalition's record: low vote had dipped nationally in polling since the last election and was even lower in Victoria.

Figures provided by Ryan's office show more than 15,000 voters have enrolled in Kooyong since the last election, including about 7000 aged under 34.

Kooyong's voter base could change yet again if it is affected by the redrawing of electoral boundaries.

ABC election analyst Anthony Green said it was likely Kooyong would take in more of the suburbs in Labor-held Chisholm, which sits east of Kooyong further away from the CBD.

"As you move away from Hawthorn and Kew," Green said, "it becomes less blue ribbon for the Libs and it will probably weaken their margin slightly."

Simon Holmes a Court, who lives in the heart of Ryan's electorate and founded the Climate 200 political crowdfunding group, said the "win" in the electorate had changed.

The grandmothers for refugees group previously held regular protests outside Frydenberg's office.

As Holmes a Court explains, Ryan invited them in for tea the first time she encountered them.

Ryan echoes Holmes a Court's explanation, should be less about coming road upgrades or swimming pools and more about her engagement with voters.

"They don't want pork barrelling, they don't want deliverables, they are sick of it. It's about values."

Others aren't so sure. Another federal election within the next year is unlikely, and most party strategists are discussing late 2024 or early 2025 as the next battleground. But in the streets of Hawthorn and Camberwell, the shadow campaign has never stopped.



Edward Camilleri: "They talked about going green when it came up to voting. But I'm not seeing it being put in place quick enough."



Claire: "I will be voting for someone who will bring in a little bit more (housing) density."



Craig Daniell: "I think people have woken up since the last election."



Juliet Fleisch: "I wouldn't vote for (Frydenberg) because I wouldn't vote for a Liberal."



Eva Roge: "I think we all seem to be quite deflated about Ryan's performance."



Andrew Field: "I'm a bit biased because I'm a Josh Frydenberg fan, but I think the problem with Monique Ryan is that there's a lot of words said but no action."

Did you see this in The Age on Saturday 26 August?

Wow ... fancy Grandmothers for Refugees being mentioned in the article in *The Age*. Thank you. That, and the retelling of the story is part of our recollection too.

Actually, more significantly, our current local federal representative has raised the issues that concern us in Parliament several times. And importantly has joined the outspoken in-house lobby group Friends of Refugees.

We regularly acknowledge these are meaningful differences between the past incumbent and our current actual representative. I wish they too had been instanced in the article.



Monique Ryan listening to our concerns – GfR invited in.

Thank you to all who contributed articles and photos. We really value the voices of our members. Please send any correspondence info@grandmothersforrefugees.org

Enjoy!

Go to Grandmothers for Refugees website [here](https://www.grandmothersforrefugees.org).