FAQ
Refugee settlement in Armidale

Armidale Regional Council has received so many phone calls and letters from people in our community excited about the news that our town will be settling 200 refugees from Syria or Iraq starting early next year. However we do know that some people have some questions about this. The following are some of the questions and our answers.

Why is the Council doing this? Why didn’t they consult us?

Refugees have been coming to Armidale ever since the last war. Recognising the benefits refugees bring to our town the Council has on two occasions unanimously voted to support such settlement. In 2003 it unanimously voted to declare Armidale a Refugee Welcome Zone. In 2015 it unanimously voted to apply to settle refugee victims of the war in Syria.

Knowing the many attributes of Armidale and the Council’s willingness it was the Commonwealth Government that decided to settle 200 Syrian or Iraqis here next year. The announcement by Minister Christian Porter and Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce was unexpected but welcomed. We now join many rural towns, e.g. Wagga, Coffs Harbour, Albury, in offering a welcome and safe haven to these very needy people from such horrific war-torn situations.

The many refugees who have so far come here are just part of our community. In fact when you see them on the streets, in our shops, picking up their children from school, in their work situations most people do not know that they originally came here as refugees.

Will they take our jobs?

Their arrival will actually make more jobs. We will need more teachers in schools, more nurses, more shops workers, more carpenters, plumbers and so on. Many empty rental properties will be filled, empty shops in our Mall and further down the street may have to be reopened. The more people who come the more jobs and the more services there will be. This means benefits to us all.

Will Armidale benefit?

Nhill, a small town in Western Victoria has found that over a five year period the monetary gain of 150 refugees coming to the town was $41.5 million net and there was an increase in social capital. Armidale is a larger town than Nhill and so our gains are likely to be even bigger. Google the report ‘Small Towns Big Gains’ to read the independent report.
Who will help them settle here?
They will have many helpers during the period of adjusting from their war experiences to living in our peaceful town. The government has contracted skilled settlement services people to come and live here and support all the several early needs of our new arrivals. This will include people who will help them to adjust to the Australian way of doing things such as banking, renting properties, enrolling their children at school, accessing Medicare and Centrelink and then finding jobs, learning English at TAFE and so on. These services will call on Armidale Sanctuary, an experienced refugee settlement group of volunteers, to respond to some daily needs that particular families might have. Several people knowing Sanctuary’s role have offered to help them if needed.

Why is Australia taking refugees?
There are about 23 million people who have fled their country because of the daily threats to their lives. Many of these are from northern Iraq and Syria. In the same circumstances we too would flee. No-one would stay in a country where their home and family are under daily threats of being bombed, where many immediate family members have already been killed, where young girls and women are captured and repeatedly raped by line-ups of terrorists, where young boys are forced to join the enemies and kill, sometimes their own families. Australia takes a small number of refugees compared with many other countries e.g. Jordan with a population of 4 million has taken one million fleeing from Syria, in recent years Germany has accepted over one million. Australia’s intake this year will be 16, 250 which is in fact a very small number and a very small proportion of its total annual migrant intake. However Australia once it does agree to provide a safe home for a particular person or family does help to settle these people in ways that perhaps lead the world. We Australians can be very proud of this.

Will they bring diseases?
No! They will have thorough medical checks before they arrive in Australia. No-one will come with any communicable disease. In fact it is far more likely that tourists, who do not have these checks, will bring diseases to Australia.

Some of course will need medical help and this will be available from Day 1. Extra special refugee nurses will be appointed by Hunter New England Health to ensure all the usual vaccinations are up to date and will check re any of the conditions suffered because of their terrible war and internal conflict situations. They will also have special trauma counselling if needed. The government has ensured that all services are adequately provided and these are in addition to the usual medical services of our town.

Why Armidale?
Perhaps the best question is ‘Why not’. There are so many benefits to us all as well as to the refugees themselves. The above explains the economic benefits but there are also many social benefits. We have already seamlessly embraced and been enriched by our multicultural community. The coming refugees will enrich our town even further. Soon they will just be ‘one of us’. In the meantime all of us need to hold out our hands and say ‘Welcome’.