

# **ENGAGE HEARTS AND MINDS**

**A TOOLKIT FOR REFUGEE ACTION**

**CAPSA**  
CATHOLIC ALLIANCE FOR PEOPLE  
SEEKING ASYLUM



Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead, Anthropologist



# OUR CALL TO FIGHT FOR JUSTICE

When people come together to effect change in their community, their parish, their nation – the task at hand often seems daunting and overwhelming. We convince ourselves of all the reasons why we can't achieve what we want, or get scared that we might fail, and so never give it a go!

What we forget is that we are no different from those who have fought for positive, progressive ideals before us. We are exactly the same. Change agents don't have special powers – they don't need them! Our faith, our passion, our drive, our sense of justice is what inspires us. Once we connect with those around us who feel similarly – we are unstoppable.

The Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA) brings people together to enact the change they want to see. This toolkit is a resource to help make this happen.

CAPSA was formed in 2014 to engage hearts and minds for greater compassion in the Catholic community for people seeking asylum and refugees. We dream of a community and political culture that values fair and humane treatment of people seeking asylum in Australia.

We work to **build, mobilise** and **maintain** support in the Catholic and broader community by encouraging people to take action in their local community.

## How this toolkit can help you

In this toolkit, CAPSA has compiled a range of resources to equip parishes, workplaces and local community groups to get involved. We want to provide people with tools to take the lead in their community and seek out support from CAPSA where needed.

These activities are inspired by the Gospel and the teachings of the Catholic faith. As modelled by Pope Francis as our leader, we strive to welcome refugees and migrants to our communities and promote an acceptance of diversity. Our work is now needed more than ever!

We look forward to working with you and know that, together, we can hold our government to account, build support for compassion and stand in solidarity with refugees and people seeking asylum.

We encourage you to engage with the contents of this toolkit, which provide key tools to run the following activities focused on shifting community attitudes towards people seeking asylum:

- Circles of Silence
- #RightTrack Community Conversations
- Meetings with members of parliament

This toolkit caters to the needs and interests of a diverse group of people and communities. We encourage you to think about what your local group, whether it be a parish, an active social justice group or a Catholic workplace, might be interested and capable of participating in. We would love everyone to go and meet their local MP but understand that for many people this might seem a little daunting – so pick what works for you!



I encourage you, then, my brothers, to confront the challenging issues of our time. Ever present within each of them is life as gift and responsibility. The future freedom and dignity of our societies depends on how we face these challenges.

Pope Francis



# STAGE A CIRCLE OF SILENCE

The Circles of Silence movement originated in Toulouse, France in 2007 among Franciscan groups in an effort to express solidarity with people seeking asylum and immigrants experiencing injustice who were being silenced.

Circles of Silence are an effective and easily adaptable activity. They can involve anywhere from a handful to hundreds of participants and can take place in schools, churches, and large public spaces. Conducting a Circle of Silence is one way to engage people with the concerns of people seeking asylum, and encourage reflection and discussion about the treatment of refugees and people seeking asylum in our communities. Through Circles of Silence we have an opportunity to express support for people seeking asylum, and renew hope for participants through the ritual.

## How are Circles of Silence run?

Circles of Silence have a loose structure, allowing space for individual interpretation and expression depending on the particular location, number of participants and context of the ceremony. At its essence it involves participants standing in a circle of silence in a public space for half-an-hour, with a person on the outside handing out flyers or explaining to the public what is happening. We've included a couple of extra ideas you might also want to consider.

## Planning your Circle of Silence

If the Circle is organised in a public place, it is helpful to have a large banner or sign to indicate the purpose of the ceremony, and volunteers on the outside to distribute information or answer questions from members of the public, who can be encouraged to join the silent protest.

When designing your Circle of Silence, you might consider:

- Beginning with a personal testimony of a refugee or migrant about their experience
- Beginning with a reflection, prayer or relevant passage
- Having participants hold candles during the Circle
- Having participants tape their mouths during the Circle
- Having a range of posters, signs or placards that can be held by participants or displayed around the circle
- Printing flyers to hand out in public
- Having the circle for 30 minutes to one hour
- Concluding the Circle with another text, passage or hymn

## Register your interest

You can register to attend or host your own Circle of Silence, as well as find prayers, flyers and other resources, on our website: [www.capsa.org.au/circles-silence/](http://www.capsa.org.au/circles-silence/)



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## Who is this for?

Great for small local parish groups who are new to taking action in their community, and for large groups who want to make a public demonstration.

# HAVE A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

When a connection is made between people, their values and an issue of justice, it has the potential to shift attitudes and provide a powerful space for new voices to be heard and amplified.

Community conversations are a great way for people to learn about the issues affecting people seeking asylum, and to join the discussion about how we can be treating people with dignity and respect. We believe that when a community is made aware of an issue and works together in defence of what is fair and right, anything is possible.

During the 2016 Federal Election, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) coordinated 23 community conversations in the federal electorate of Higgins. The most common values that emerged from these conversations were: empathy and care; respect; 'Do unto others'; and fairness and equality. These values were then used to explore the process of seeking asylum in Australia, with many attendees concluding that it's deliberately unfair.

Following the conversation, **47 per cent of people expressed that their views had changed**, with 52 percent of people saying they supported a fair response before the conversation. There was a resounding commitment after the conversation to take collective action to affect change.

## How are Community Conversations run?

We follow the #RightTrack Community Conversations approach developed by the ASRC. #RightTrack Community Conversations use evidence-based materials to enable people to run conversations with their friends, family, colleagues, parishioners and others.

These small-scale, personal conversations are one of the most effective ways to influence someone to develop a compassionate response to an issue. Attendees are encouraged to consider what values are important to them and then to explore how these align with the current treatment of people seeking asylum in Australia.

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## Who is this for?

Ideal for active social justice groups, Catholic workplaces and for active individuals who want to reach out to their friends and family.

## How can I get involved?

There are three ways you can be involved in a #RightTrack Community Conversation:

- **Facilitate:** you will attend a training session and commit to facilitating one or more conversations throughout the year in and around your local area
- **Host:** you will find a venue and invite guests to attend, and we'll provide you with materials to assist in hosting a conversation.
- **Attend/Bring a Friend:** you will attend a conversation with an open mind and maybe bring a friend along!

The process for running a conversation is as follows:

1. Facilitators attend training session
2. Host and facilitator liaise to arrange a date, time and location for a conversation
3. Host invites guests to a conversation
4. Conversation happens!
5. Host and Facilitator encourage attendees to consider hosting or facilitating their own conversation
6. Facilitator gathers survey results and sends them to the CAPSA team

## Register your interest

We can provide you with a number of resources to be involved in a community conversation. Register your interest at [www.capsa.org.au/capsa-community-convos/](http://www.capsa.org.au/capsa-community-convos/)



# MEET YOUR LOCAL MP

Visiting your MP takes your advocacy to the next level! By meeting a politician you can communicate more than in a letter, but even more importantly you can have a discussion and build a relationship.

If you're active in a local social justice group or church you can join with others as a delegation (no more than 3-4 people). A local group is more likely to secure a meeting than a single concerned citizen.

## Requesting a meeting

Make sure you know the full name of your local MP and the name of your electorate. You can find this on the Australian Electoral Commission website, as well as the contact details for your MP. Visit: <http://electorate.aec.gov.au/>

You should request a meeting by email or post. Say who you are, if you are representing a local group, and what you want to meet about. Conclude by saying you will be in touch to find a suitable time.

Follow up that day or the next with a phone call to the electorate office to advise that you have written requesting an appointment and would like to discuss when might be suitable for a meeting. It's likely they will not book the appointment straight away and will tell you they'll get back to you, but this will put your letter nearer the top of the pile.

## Before the meeting

Once you've secured a meeting you should go about familiarising yourself with your local MP, including:

- Their position in parliament (Minister, Shadow Minister, parliamentary secretary, etc.)
- Whether the seat is safe or marginal
- Any prior involvement they have had with refugee issues (e.g. - a Refugee Week event they hosted, a speech they made about multiculturalism)
- The policy relating to refugees and people seeking asylum for their party

A good way to get to know your MP is to visit their page on the Parliament of Australia website where you can find a copy of their maiden speech. Visit: [www.aph.gov.au/Senators\\_and\\_Members](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members)

It is useful to assign particular roles before the meeting, such as a facilitator and note-taker. The facilitator can make introductions, thank the MP for their time, and conclude the meeting.

You need to have a plan in advance that sets out:

- What issue you want to raise
- Your three main messages about this issue
- What you want to ask them to do (your 'call to action')

Think about the most pressing issue you want to raise – are there children being detained? Are thousands of people being held in offshore detention? Do refugees living in the community need more support? Is the government using negative rhetoric around refugees?

## In the meeting

You are likely to only have 20–30 minutes. The first few minutes will be taken up with introductions and you thanking them for taking the time to meet with you.

A good way to begin the meeting is by sharing a personal connection you might have with the MP. Do you share a faith? Are they a parent? Or a long term resident of a place with a multicultural community? These are just some of the things that might enable a connection to be established and discussion to begin.

Do try and initiate discussion, rather than just doing all the talking. For example, 'Like you, I am a Christian and am deeply concerned that the Government's policy of holding children in detention is contrary to the Gospel's message of valuing every human person. What do you think the Government can do to value and protect these children?'

If the MP says things that are offensive or upsetting, it's best not to get angry or argumentative, but to politely hold your ground and offer an alternative view. For example, 'I hear what you are saying about your objectives, but I can't accept that using one person to send a message to another is a credit to our country. We have to find a way that avoids this harm' or 'I can see we won't agree on this point, but I want you to know that I think we can do better than this'.

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## Who is this for?

Perfect for active social justice groups, refugee support groups, engaged parish members or even just a group of concerned constituents who want to come together!

## Wrapping up

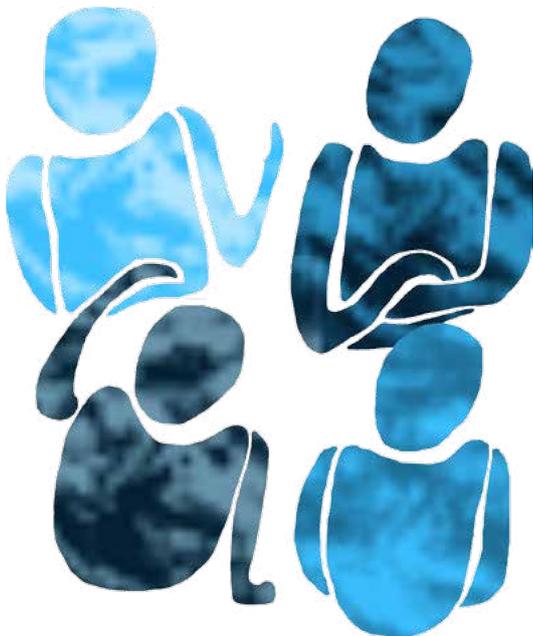
You can ask them to do something for you even if you don't agree. Examples include asking them to raise your concerns with the relevant Minister, to raise a question in Parliament, to talk to fellow MPs or raise the issue in the Party room, to table a petition in Parliament, attend a local event in support of refugees or put a sign up at their office saying 'Refugees are Welcome'. Establish what they will do (and when) before you leave the meeting.

## Follow up

Send a follow up letter or email to the MP. Thank them for meeting with you, outline your understanding of any actions they committed to take and indicate that you look forward to hearing from them. Include any information you agreed to send to them.

## Register your interest

To register your intention to meet with your local MP or request support from us, fill out the form on our website: [www.capsa.org.au/quick-tips-for-visiting-your-mp/](http://www.capsa.org.au/quick-tips-for-visiting-your-mp/)



This toolkit contains just a few ways you can participate actively in the movement for compassion in Australia. Become further involved in the work of CAPSA by signing up to our email list at [www.capsa.org.au](http://www.capsa.org.au)

**We look forward to working with you.  
Together we find our power.**



Questions? Need support?  
Want to let us know how it went?

## CONTACT CAPSA

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