



Refugee Week

Coordinated by
Refugee Council of Australia

To all those who've come
from far and wide,

We're happy you're safe
We're happy you're free
We're happy you're here

18-24 June 2023

2023 Refugee Week Evaluation report

refugeeweek.org.au | [#RefugeeWeekAU](https://twitter.com/RefugeeWeekAU) |



2023 Refugee Week: Key Statistics



2

EVENT PARTNERS

3

PRINCIPAL PARTNERS

3

MAJOR PARTNERS

4

PARTNERS

7

REFUGEE WEEK SUPPORTERS

8

COUNTRIES CELEBRATED REFUGEE WEEK

39

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS
DELIVERED BY OUR
NATIONAL REFUGEE
AMBASSADORS



Refugee Week

Coordinated by
Refugee Council of Australia

602

MEDIA MENTIONS

Over
200

EVENTS SUBMITTED IN REFUGEE WEEK CALENDAR

Over
2,500

DESIGNS USING REFUGEE WEEK CANVA TEMPLATES



Introduction

Refugee Week is an important week where communities, schools, local councils, businesses, organisations and individuals across Australia celebrate and welcome refugees each year. From its beginnings as a small local event in the 1980's, to its now global outreach and impact, Refugee Week continues to grow as a powerful movement that links people across state and national borders. This hybrid celebration, with both in-person and online events and activities, demonstrates the impeccable determination, openness and pride of our community in creating awareness of the contributions and plight of refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia.

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) is proud to present an overview of this year's successful Refugee Week celebrations. This evaluation report provides a summary of Refugee Week 2023's highlights, themes and activities, all of which took place from Sunday 18th June to Saturday 24th June. Utilising information submitted to the Refugee Week online events calendar, analyses of digital tools and feedback from event organisers, this report includes an in-depth overview of this year's events and successes and offers a comprehensive internal assessment of the activities organised by RCOA.

Without the continued generosity and backing of our sponsors and donors, refugee communities and supporters, the undeniable success of Refugee Week 2023 could not have been possible. The overwhelming contributions, immeasurable time, resources and commitment provided by everyone involved in seamlessly organising events is greatly appreciated. Through this report, RCOA hopes to share our profound gratitude for these efforts.

Refugee Week: How the Dream of a Global Celebration was Realised

Refugee Week is Australia's peak annual activity to promote greater awareness of refugees, the issues they face, and the contributions they are making to the Australian community.

First proposed by the founding president of RCOA and Austcare (Australians Care for Refugees), Major-General Paul Cullen, Refugee Week celebrations began as a simple street procession and picnic lunch in Sydney in 1986. A mere 200 individuals representing Afghan, Eritrean, South African, Vietnamese, Chilean, El Salvadorean and other refugee communities participated in this event. From its humble beginnings, Major-General Cullen's vision for Refugee Week was always that it would become a global celebration.

For some time, the date in which Refugee Week was hosted varied. In 1987, Austcare and RCOA worked together to organise a series of Refugee Week events from 8-14 November in Sydney and Canberra – including a forum on international refugee issues, a concert in Sydney's Martin Place hosted by television presenter George Negus, a 20th celebration dinner for Austcare and an address at the Canberra Club by UNHCR's regional representative Iqbal Ali Mohamed.

Eventually, the first national celebration of Refugee Week took place from 18-24 September 1988, focusing on the theme "12 million lives on hold". Organised by Austcare, RCOA and UNHCR with the support of national and state committees, the week was launched at the Australian Pavilion at Expo '88 in Brisbane.

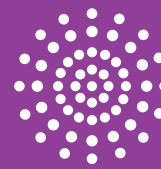
As per Major-General Cullen's vision, Australia's celebration of Refugee Week grew in prominence each year, with Austcare taking the lead, supported by RCOA and Refugee Week committees in different states. His aspiration for a global annual celebration of the contribution of refugees was achieved in 2001 when UNHCR coordinated the first World Refugee Day, holding it on 20 June to align with Africa Refugee Day.

In 2004, when Austcare stepped down from coordinating Refugee Week to focus on a wider humanitarian mandate, RCOA took the lead. Noting that it was far from ideal for Australia to continue to celebrate Refugee Week in October, four months after World Refugee Day, RCOA negotiated with the organisations involved in Refugee Week in Australia to align the national celebration with the global event.

In 2007, it was finally decided that Refugee Week would be hosted in June aligning with World Refugee Day. For RCOA, this was the full achievement of the goal outlined by our founding president in 1983 – a simultaneous national and global week of activities to draw attention to the needs and aspirations of refugees and to celebrate refugees' contributions to the communities in which they live.

Since then, Refugee Week has grown into a week in which hundreds of organisations – small and large, from local groups of volunteers to large statutory organisations, people of refugee background and allies from across the community, local councils, schools, students, faith-based organisations and businesses – can celebrate the week in the way they believe is most meaningful. In recent years, events have included celebrations of music and the arts, public talks and seminars on refugee issues, sporting events, rallies, and much more.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the 2020 and 2021 celebrations of Refugee Week to become a fully virtual celebration but created new possibilities for national and international participation in online events. While Refugee Week has returned to in-person events, virtual events remain an important part of the calendar. The modern celebration of Refugee Week blends the traditional, local events which bring people together in person to meet, eat and celebrate and online events which transcend borders and unite people.



The aims of Refugee Week are:

- to educate the Australian public about who refugees are and why they have come to Australia;
- to help people understand the many challenges refugees face coming to Australia;
- to celebrate the contribution refugees make to our community;
- to focus on how the community can provide a safe and welcoming environment for refugees;
- for community groups and individuals to do something positive for refugees, people seeking asylum and displaced people, within Australia but also around the world; and
- for service providers to reflect on whether they are providing the best possible services to refugees.



Ibrahim Ali

RCOA coordinates national Refugee Week celebrations each year, as part of our role as the national umbrella body for refugees, people seeking asylum, and those who support them. This coordination role aligns with goals identified in RCOA's 2022-2024 Strategic Plan which aims to increase public awareness and support for refugees (Focus Area 3).

Refugee Week is a unique opportunity for us all to experience and celebrate the rich diversity of refugee communities through theatre, music, dance, film, and other events which take place all over Australia and highlight the aims of the Week, as outlined above.

The full story of *How the Dream of a Global Celebration was Realised* can be found [here](#).



"I am happy in Australia. Life is normal here. Living a normal life is my freedom." Read more [here](#).

- Khrystyna from Ukraine

Refugee Week Around the World: Greece, Hong Kong, UK, Ireland, Malta, Taiwan & Germany

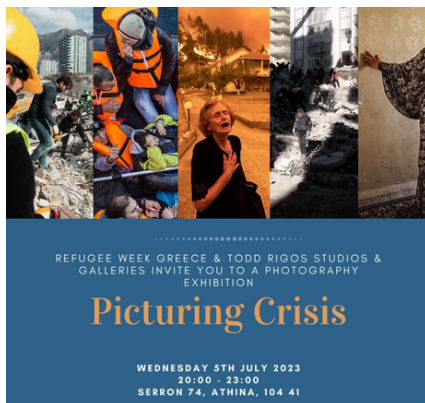
Refugee Week has now become a global movement where refugees and people seeking asylum are celebrated and welcomed into new communities across the world. Each year more countries get involved by sharing their support for refugees and people seeking asylum in their communities and across the globe. This year's Refugee Week success was not limited to Australia, as Greece, Hong Kong, UK, Ireland, Malta, Taiwan and Germany all hosted festivities of their own to acknowledge, celebrate and welcome displaced people to their communities. The week was filled with initiatives that highlighted refugee issues, ranging from the arts to networking events and workshops.

Greece

After its successful launch in 2022, Greece committed to hosting its second Refugee Week. This year's festivities included a range of immersive, thought-provoking and engaging events and activities to promote their support and encourage learning and unity amongst diverse communities. These celebrations ranged from film screenings, art exhibitions and workshops, family events, football matches, culinary experiences, movement sessions, music performances and much more.



Family event during Refugee Week.

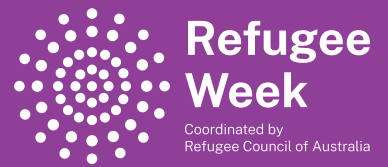


Picturing Crisis Photography Exhibition.



Celebrating the power of individuals.

About Refugee Week



Hong Kong

Also in its second edition, Hong Kong's Refugee Week 2023 sought to embody "compassion" as this year's theme. Aimed at celebrating the strength and contributions of refugees and people seeking asylum, some of this year's activities included a community art gathering with music performances, storytelling, a fashion show, and dances produced and performed by local refugees, a zine workshop, a community panel discussion and documentary screening, 16th Charity Refugee Film Festival, and a culinary experience titled - Tastes from (my) home: Roots and recipes where participants shared stories, while enjoying delicious dishes from the local refugee community.



The RUN Hong Kong Fashion Show in support of World Refugee Day.



Zine workshop to commemorate World Refugee Day.



UNHCR's City Canvas Project.

About Refugee Week

UK

This year the UK hosted several different events and activities across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Among the various events hosted were; *Home? Knowledge Exchange* where participants listened to lived experience stories to grow empathy and understanding; *Sanctuary Songs Arts Festival* which featured visual art, sound installations and live performances by refugees and people seeking asylum; and the annual *7 a side Refugee World Cup* to encourage community spirit and unity between diverse communities.



"Capturing the amazing RETAS team in action at the Refugee World Cup from Refugee Week."



"Afghan refugee and journalist, Zahra, in front of footage of her family after they were welcomed to the UK"

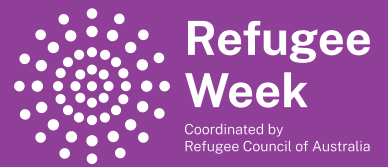


The Art Persists Podcast.

Ireland

2023 marked the beginning of Refugee Week in Ireland. This first edition of Refugee Week celebrations, much like Australia, Greece, Hong Kong and the UK presented a tapestry of events and activities to welcome diversity. Some of the events hosted throughout the week included; *Sanctuary Runners Fairview Run* held by an organisation that runs a community integration through sport initiative; *Festival of Belonging* which hosted an array of activities such as visual arts exhibitions, music and spoken word performances, a conversation café, as well as a conference on Belonging; and a *Migrant Political Participation Workshop* as a means of informing refugees and people seeking asylum who wish to get involved in the community.

About Refugee Week



Malta

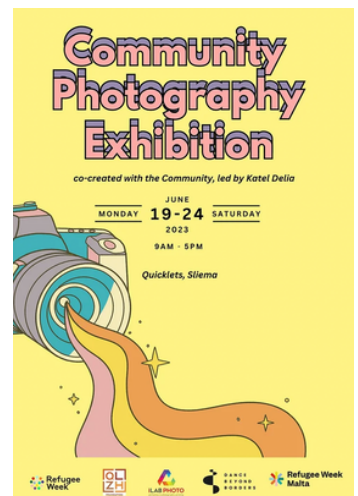
Following the success of Refugee Week 2022, Malta hosted another successful week of events to share their solidarity with refugee communities. Refugee Week in Malta centred around three action pillars: *Create, Connect and Cultivate*. These pillars helped guide and shape the nature of the week's celebrations. Their centrepiece event *March for Peace* was a silent march that took place in Malta's capital Valletta and used as a platform to encourage welcoming diversity. Other events ranged from community photography exhibitions to family day events.



Spark Fest poster.



Walk in Silence through Valletta.



Community Photography Exhibition poster.

Taiwan

Similarly, Taiwan hosted a number of events to celebrate their theme of “compassion”. These cultural events were used to inform, welcome and unite. Such events included webinars, film screenings, storytelling, talks including discussions of lived experience. *Compassionate Filmmaking During Displacement* was a keynote event hosted during the week, which explored the experiences of Ukrainian and Syrian refugees fleeing conflict and trying to find their place in the world.

Germany

Berlin’s 2023 Refugee Week also encompassed the theme of “compassion” and successfully did so through a range of events and activities that celebrated the contributions of refugees and people seeking asylum in their community. These events included; a film day which screened a number of shorts and feature films; an art exhibition titled Fragments of Impermanence: A Collective Experience that displayed the collaboration of refugee and migrant artists in Germany; Windfalls – Falling Fruit a music experience with workshops for individuals of migrant and refugee background followed by a musical performance; as well as a variety of day talks and networking events.



Windfalls – Falling Fruit : “saxophonist Conny Ottinger brings together musicians of different roots in her new band project: jazz pianist Reggie Moore (USA), folk bassist Michael Jach (D) and improvisational percussionist Martin von Allmen (CH).”
Photo by Walter Wetzler



Refugee Week theme poster.

Finding Freedom

One of the key features of Refugee Week is the overarching theme. The theme aims to highlight aspects of the refugee experience and help the broader community to develop a deeper understanding of these experiences. As the focal point for events across Australia, a theme provides a common, cohesive message which helps maximise the effectiveness of awareness-raising activities.

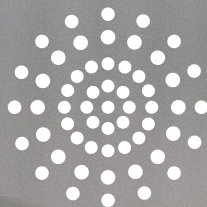
Our theme for 2023 - 2025, *Finding Freedom*, was developed through a public vote involving members of diverse refugee communities. Finding Freedom is the theme communities have decided best represents them, and we are deeply appreciative of their input.

What does it mean to be free?

To live without the fear of war, to have your basic human rights upheld, to live in equality and without the fear of persecution are just some of the examples of what freedom can entail.

Everyday millions of people across the world embark on dangerous journeys for the sole purpose of finding safety and freedom. From Australia to nations across the globe, settling into a new environment after experiencing the perils of a refugee's journey can also provide the opportunity to live, to love and to dream.

In 2023, RCOA invited organisations and individuals to utilise the website for Refugee Week resources and events that showcased the journey of finding freedom, whether it be through a new home, a new career, finding love or friendships. Let us show compassion and celebrate the resilience that makes up parts of our wider community. *For freedom should not be an ask, it should be a way of life.*



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Elite & Esperance

refugeeweek.org.au | [#RefugeeWeekAU](https://twitter.com/RefugeeWeekAU) |



Stories of Freedom

In celebrating Refugee Week 2023, we especially featured stories of what finding freedom means to individuals with lived refugee experience. 'Stories of Freedom', is a series of portraits featuring what freedom means to former refugees now living in Adelaide, and was shared throughout the week. We encouraged the public to examine their own version of freedom and reflect on what it would be like to live without fear of war, live in equality and have your basic human rights upheld.

2023 Refugee Week Photographer – Muzafar Ali

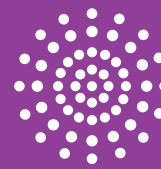


Muzafar is a Hazara refugee from Afghanistan. He is a photographer and human rights activist.

In December 2022 Muzafar, RCOA and Australian Migrant Resource Centre coordinated a photoshoot featuring a diverse group of refugees from countries including Iran, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ukraine and Afghanistan. Their rich stories and unique perspectives encapsulate the heart of our theme for Refugee Week 2023: **Finding Freedom.**

Muzafar most enjoys speaking to his subjects and getting to know them during the photography process, and it was no different for this Refugee Week photoshoot.

2023 Theme: Finding Freedom



Refugee
Week

Coordinated by
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Ackim Mulumba cultural ambassador and a member of the Congolese community.

Different people have different interpretations of freedom. For me, freedom is not just the absence of violence. It has a much deeper meaning. Freedom is belonging. Australia is my home and I 'belong' here now.

Freedom is the agency I have to do whatever I want to do, to practice my culture and religion, to express my opinion without fear of persecution.

I am a volunteer for my community, and it gives me immense joy to work with them, celebrating our cultural events and bringing people together.

I love that I am living in Australia now. I like the warm weather here.

Australia is a country where people are free to enjoy their rights. It is peaceful here and I feel I am free. I can do whatever I like. I love the ocean and I go to the beach quite often to swim and enjoy the sun. I also like riding a bike and hiking. Fresh air rejuvenates me.

I did not choose to leave my country. No one wants to leave their country if there is peace. We want peace in Ukraine and to return home.

Read more 'Stories of Freedom' [here](#) .



Our Refugee Week Partners



Refugee Week 2023 would not be possible without the support of our sponsors. We extend our heartfelt thanks to these organisations:

COORDINATED BY



EVENT PARTNERS



PRINCIPAL PARTNERS



MAJOR PARTNERS



SUPPORTERS



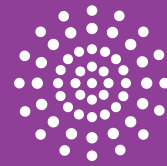
2023 saw an impressive array of partners and sponsors including many RCOA member organisations and representatives from the refugee sector including a return of Event Partners Settlement Services International (SSI) and Canva. Our partnerships with SBS Food, City of Sydney and Multicultural NSW also continued as Principal Partners. We welcomed Australia Post as a new corporate sponsor.

A new method of acknowledging sponsors was introduced this year as part of the social media strategy. We shared messages from sponsors about how they supported refugees to find freedom, giving this committed group the opportunity to help broaden and enrich the engagement of Refugee Week to supporters and stakeholders. Sponsor specific social media posts were easily identified as they used the colour blue.

Social media posts from sponsors reached **over 20,000** and were part of our record Refugee Week engagement across all platforms.



Our Refugee Week Partners



Refugee
Week

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17,534

REACH

18,276

IMPRESSIONS



3,140

REACH

3,559

IMPRESSIONS



4,527

IMPRESSIONS



3,340

IMPRESSIONS

Overall

29,702

IMPRESSIONS

4.43%

ENGAGEMENT RATE

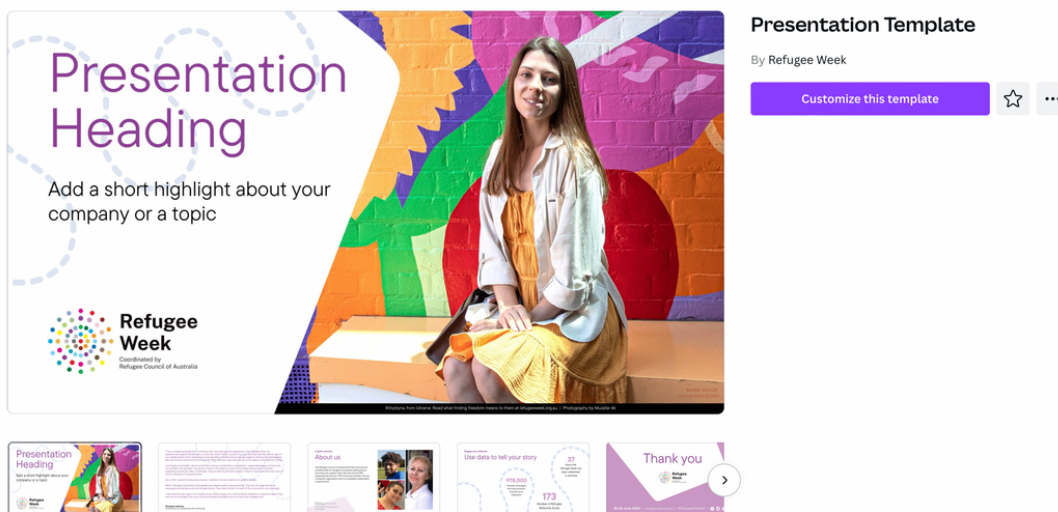
Canva Partnership

We continued our partnership with Canva, the widely popular online design tool to create a range of fantastic editable resources for organisations and individuals to use in the lead-up to and during Refugee Week.

The Canva resources included the following editable templates and messages to share with friends, family, or colleagues:

- email signature
- event invitation
- infographic
- post card
- presentation
- report
- social media posts and headers
- video template
- Zoom or Microsoft Teams background

The Refugee Week templates were applied to over 1500 designs and exported over 900 times. The top 5 templates used were the email signature block, Facebook header, square Facebook image post, landscape Facebook image post, and the postcard.

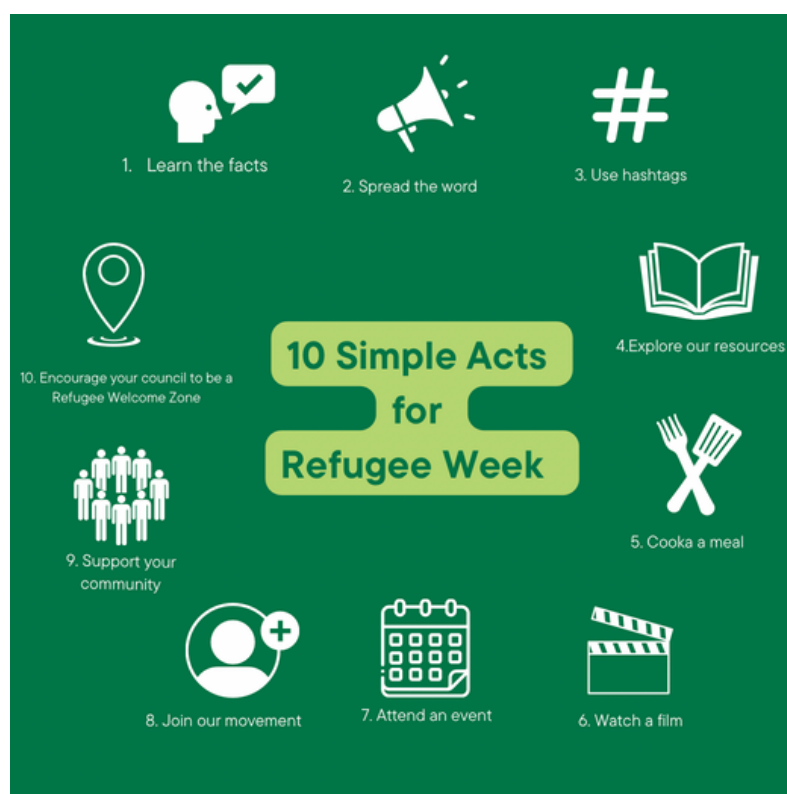


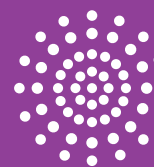
More Canva templates can be found [here](#).

Before and during the Refugee Week 2023, Refugee Council of Australia offered a range of resources to support event organisers to plan and host their celebrations. These resources are located on the Refugee Week website and are updated annually.

They include:

- A refreshed [Refugee Week logo](#)
- [Refugee Week poster](#) featuring Elite and Esperance, former refugees from Democratic Republic of the Congo. Digital and limited hard copy versions were available. The poster was downloaded **3,653 times**.
- [Canva templates](#) for use on social media and to support events.
- [Online calendar](#) of events with **over 200** public events held during Refugee Week
- **Simple acts** – This included nine actions that anyone could do to celebrate and show support for refugees.





- [Refugee FAQs & myths](#): a 2-page document that provides information about who a refugee is, how they come to Australia, the number of refugees in the world, and responses to common myths.
- [Teachers' Resources Kit](#) which provides information on how schools can get involved. This was downloaded **659 times**.
- **General Resource Kit** for individuals and organisations which was downloaded **391 times**.
- [Film list](#)
- [Books](#) written by refugees and/or about the refugee journey.
- [Share a Meal, Share a Story Cookbook](#) with recipes from Australia's refugee communities accompanied by special stories of what each dish evokes for that person.
- Guide to [working ethically with refugees and people seeking asylum](#)
- [Event planning](#) guide
- Guide to [getting publicity and media coverage](#)
- Educational [Webinars & Podcasts](#)
- Educational [Videos](#)



Elizabeth former refugee from Venezuela

Website

The Refugee Week website (refugeeweek.org.au) has continued to be the central point for information sharing and supporting our networks with **97,321** landing page views from 23 February – 30 June 2023.

Refugee Week EDM

Two dedicated Refugee Week electronic newsletters (EDMs) were sent to RCOA members and supporters. The EDMs included information about the Refugee Week theme, Canva resources, and sponsors. It also encouraged registration to events on the Refugee Week website, information about the Refugee Week Ambassadors, and how to book them online for Face-to-Face presentations. The EDMs reached **32,744** people with a **27.99%** open rate.



Andrea Rico from Colombia

Social Media

Our social media campaign for Refugee Week 2023 saw a dramatic increase in results compared to previous year's outcomes. The six-week campaign included more than 252 posts and stories on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn, we achieved:

122K

IMPRESSIONS (46K IN 2022)

2,734

REACTIONS

154

COMMENTS & REPLIES

386

SHARES & RETWEETS

183

LINK CLICKS

During the campaign period, we also gained **698** new followers across our four channels.

While Facebook generated the highest number of impressions (**43,766**), Instagram gave us the best overall engagement rate (**7.02%**) and the largest follower increase (**3.3%**),.

Sponsors' content generated close to **30K** impressions, with healthy overall platform engagement rates ranging from **2.63%** (Twitter) to **7.7%** (Instagram).

Refugee Week received wide coverage across local and national outlets. The types of media stories included radio, TV and online stories, as well as a partnership with SBS TV.

Overall Refugee Week was mentioned **602** times between 1 June 2023 – 30 June 2023 and had a collective audience reach of **291 million**. The targeted media campaign included a Refugee Week media kit, which highlighted a range of spokespeople including RCOA staff and National Refugee Ambassadors across the country.

A Meltwater summary of the key media report indicators revealed:

- The highest number of total mentions were captured on World Refugee Day at 130.
- The article with the highest syndication across the country was a feature piece on our National Refugee Ambassador Abang Othow, with more than 77 publications.
- Our partnership with SBS Food continued with Season 5 episodes of The Cook Up with Adam Liaw, featuring our National Refugee Ambassadors, Abang and Oliver.
- RCOA CEO Paul Power spoke to SBS TV, ABC Darwin, SBS Radio and Simon Marnie for the Simon Marnie Show (ABC Radio Sydney) on policy issues, to mark Refugee Week and shine a spotlight on pressing areas, including the latest UNHCR “Global Trends” in forced displacement report.
- RCOA Deputy CEO Adama Kamara spoke to Hobart-based radio station Ultra106Five and the Illawarra Mercury online paper on Refugee Week, the theme and history.
- RCOA National Refugee Ambassadors were covered by multilingual media, including SBS Assyrian for a multimedia story and SBS Swahili radio.

To view some of the stories included in the Refugee Week 2023 media coverage click the images below.



The Canberra Times

Teacher's journey from refugee camps to fashion catwalk

By Abdul Hekmat
Updated June 18 2023 - 7:31am, first published 7:30am



Abang Othow doesn't want people to identify her as a victim or feel sorry for her trauma. (Dan Himbrechts/AAP PHOTOS)



Take Time to Pause and Learn about Refugees this Refugee Week
Refugees are often seen as recipients of aid rather than the ones who can actually make decisions about policy.



"...basic human rights shouldn't be something that anyone should forgo," – Adama Kamara, Refugee Council of Australia

Brunswick
Voice

New artwork commemorates life of Iranian martyr

The mural was unveiled during Refugee Week in June



The artists who produced the new mural at its unveiling with Merri-bek Mayor Angelica Panopoulos (far left). Photo: Merri-bek City Council

This Refugee Week, two Darwin locals reflect on their journey to find freedom

ABC Radio Darwin / By Jo Laverty and Stephanie Doole
Broadcast Mon 19 Jun 2023 at 6:00am



The theme of this year's Refugee Week is 'Finding Freedom' (ABC News)



Cumberland Council Marks Refugee Week, Celebrates Diversity and Resilience

Cumberland Mayor Lisa Lake said it was an important week to acknowledge the challenges and contributions refugees make to the Cumberland community.

"Cumberland is home to a very diverse and multicultural community with 53 percent of our population born overseas, so it's important that we create an environment that is inviting, safe and accepting of others who have had to rebuild their lives irrespective of their home country or circumstances," said Mayor Lake.

"We value the unique skills, cultural richness and diverse perspectives that refugees bring into our community and stand united in our commitment to welcome refugees, recognise their contributions and advocate for their rights."



Search for freedom continues after refugees find safety



Many refugees face ongoing struggles and trauma after resettling in Australia. (Lukas Coch/AAP PHOTOS)

National Refugee Ambassador Program

Since 2014, the Face-to-Face Schools and Community Education Program has been training and supporting refugee speakers to share their personal experiences with schools, universities, community organizations, local councils and business. The program aims to educate the wider Australian community on who refugees are, where they come from and how to support them.

Launched in Refugee Week 2021 as part of the Face-to-Face Program, the National Refugee Ambassadors form a key part of the week's celebrations. Refugee Ambassadors draw from their lived experience to help change the national conversation about refugees across Australia. They deliver presentations, participate in panel discussions and participate in media interviews to speak on their personal or community's experiences.

A total of 38 Refugee Ambassadors from countries such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, Burundi, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Syria and Turkey participated in this year's Refugee Week activities. Seventeen new Refugee Ambassadors were recruited in 2023 and participated in tailored training that would equip them with the skills and resources to tell their stories and engage an audience. The training included public speaking, presentation development and how to tailor their talks to meet the audiences' requirements.

In addition, media and social media training was delivered to support Refugee Ambassadors with the public representation aspect of their role. The training included media engagement objectives, digital media strategies and guidelines, tips for media interviews and social media engagement.

The request for Refugee Ambassadors increased in 2023 with over **172 inquiries** received for Refugee Week. Virtual sessions were delivered, and bookings extended to July and August in response to high demand. Booked presentations increased by more than **30%** from previous years, with Refugee Ambassadors delivering 38 presentations to over 4,100 audience members across Australia.

Partnerships were developed with local and state libraries in South Australia, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory. These partnerships included promotion of Refugee Week resources and the availability of Refugee Ambassadors for presentations. RCOA's Vice President Bill Maley was invited as a guest speaker at the launch of the Power of Colour exhibition at the ACT Heritage Library.

Feedback

A short online survey was administered to obtain feedback about the impact of Ambassadors' presentations on the audience. Written feedback (in the form of emails) was also received.

Participants' responses were overwhelmingly positive, reporting that presentations were 'extremely helpful' in understanding the journey of refugees and the challenges they face. In addition, respondents also stated that the presentation significantly changed their perception of refugees.

Respondents found the following valuable about the Program:

- Hearing refugee stories first-hand
- Gaining more awareness of the refugee experience
- Giving refugees a platform to share their personal experiences.
- Learning of life in Australia for refugees
- Being able to directly ask questions.

Presentations delivered by National Refugee Ambassadors also support the skills and knowledge development of individuals working with refugees. The top 5 skills identified include:

- Valuing and respecting refugee speakers as consultants who deserve to be remunerated for their time and skills.
- Storytelling is a powerful tool for refugee advocacy.
- Treating lived experience as expertise
- New ways of supporting the refugee communities in Australia
- Engaging ethically with refugees and asylum seekers as speakers

Participants frequently commented that the presentations were engaging and captured the audience's attention.

"Milad was an excellent speaker. He engaged a large group of Year 10 students and shared so many personal stories. The question time was a reflection of student engagement with it extending over 20 minutes."

~

"Thank you for organising R. U. to come and speak to us. His presentation was excellent, and he really did make the students engage more deeply with what it is people who are living as refugees and asylum seekers experience."



National Refugee Ambassador Sarab (centre) with Bennelong Foundation and Refugee Council of Australia staff.

Image credit: Bennelong Foundation



National Refugee Ambassadors at the training day in March 2023.

Image credit: Damon AMB

The Refugee Welcome Zone (RWZ) initiative was developed by RCOA in 2002 as a component of Refugee Week celebrations. A RWZ is a Local Government Area (LGA) that has made a commitment in spirit to **“welcome refugees, uphold their rights, demonstrate compassion and promote a celebration of cultural and religious diversity”**.

In committing to this initiative, councils demonstrate their public support for refugees and people seeking asylum, whilst acknowledging the important contributions refugees make to society. Historically, local governments have played an important role in promoting the social inclusion of diverse communities and its links to Australia’s migration and humanitarian programs.

Becoming a RWZ benefits councils through the promotion of social cohesion and harmony, whilst raising awareness about refugee issues and encouraging a culture of community respect.

There are currently 173 Refugee Welcome Zones across Australia, seven of which form the RWZ Leadership Group. The Group works closely with RCOA staff and is given access to resources regarding key areas of refugee policy.

RWZ councils celebrated Refugee Week in a myriad of ways, from talks by National Refugee Ambassadors in local libraries, staff training sessions on working with refugees, community celebrations, film screenings, seminars on topics of interest to refugees and much more.

An example is the ten-year anniversary of Toowoomba Regional Council’s (TRC) declaration as Refugee Welcome Zone. RCOA staff were invited as guest speakers at this event. The council was the third in Queensland to become a RWZ and is currently one of eight in the state. Toowoomba is a regional town with a significant refugee population. It has Australia’s largest Kurdish population (predominantly followers of the Yazidi faith), comprising 3,000 refugees who were resettled there along with around 2,000 additional Kurdish people who moved here from other parts of the country.

Mayor Antonio noted,

“Today we are home to residents who hail from many parts of Africa, especially North and South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the latest arrivals from Afghanistan and Middle Eastern countries, such as Iran, Iraq, Syria and our Kurdish community.

Council is indebted to the organisations and individuals who set the groundwork for our acceptance as a Refugee Welcome Zone.

I’m confident our community has a deep wellspring of compassion that will provide comfort, purpose and extend a welcome to new residents into the future.”



Image credit - Toowoomba Regional Council: CatholicCare Director Kate Venables (left), with TRC Multicultural Advisory committee member Anyuon Liai Mager, Mayor Paul Antonio, Refugee Council of Australia Manager Rebecca Langton, Multicultural Australia CEO Christine Castley, Geneene Meijer (who performed the Welcome to Country) and TRC Community Development Officer Roberto Garcia at the 10-year anniversary commemorations.

During The Week

Thousands came together across the country to celebrate and welcome refugees and people seeking asylum to their workplaces and communities. It was a special week for many reasons, including the opportunity for people to connect at events in every state and territory to talk, educate, learn and in some cases dance and cheer.

We were blown away by the creative ways schools, businesses, community organisations, groups and government agencies celebrated refugees. From the launch of the 'Billion Dollar Benefit' report by our Event Partner Settlement Services International, to screenings of the 2023 Refugee Week official photographer Muzafar Ali's new film *Watandar, My Countrymen*, SBS Food airing episodes of *The Cook Up* featuring Abang and Oliver our National Refugee Ambassadors, awards nights, panel discussions, training sessions, art exhibitions, sporting events and much more!

There were over 200 public and private events registered on the Refugee Week website, however these were only some of the celebrations held across the country. There were many more events held throughout the week that were not registered through our site, including internal events not open to the public such as within schools and workplaces.

Watandr, My Countryman film screening



Image credit: Jolyon Hoff

SBS Food The Cook Up with Adam Liaw featuring Abang (left) & Oliver (right)



Image credit: Jiwon Kim

SSI World Refugee Day Fair



SSI CEO, Violet Roumeliotis, joins event attendees in proudly launching SSI's report: The Billion Dollar Benefit.



Musician playing on stage in front of Parliament House at the World Refugee Day Fair.



RCOA CEO Paul Power, speaking at the World Refugee Day Fair.



Attendee grabbing some delicious lunch from the African Food Feasts stall at World Refugee Day.

City of Sydney Refugee Week events



City of Sydney promotional video for Refugee Week.



Abang & Simon, Refugee Week Ambassadors.

Photo by Abril Felman/City of Sydney



City of Sydney's Lord Mayor Clover Moore features on their 2023 social media post.

STARTTS NSW Humanitarian Awards

Each year the Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) hosts the New South Wales (NSW) Humanitarian Awards to acknowledge and thank those people who have made an exceptional positive contribution towards refugee issues in NSW. Individuals and organisations in various fields who are doing outstanding work to support refugees were eligible for the Awards. The award ceremony was held on 12 July 2023 and presented officially by Patron of STARTTS, Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC QC, Governor of New South Wales, in an official ceremony at Government House, Sydney.



STARTTS Awards recipients group photo

Image credit: Brad Hunter from Salty Dingo

The Refugee Council of Australia is a proud partner of the Awards. The 2023 winners are:

Welcome Merchant

Business

Small or large businesses employing, assisting, established/run by or in any other way supporting refugees.



Marjorie

Image credit: Brad Hunter from Salty Dingo

Marjorie is the Founder & Director of Welcome Merchant, a social enterprise that provides a free, consolidated business development platform resourcing entrepreneurs who identify as a refugee, a former refugee or as a person seeking asylum.

Since commencing as a social enterprise, Welcome Merchant has assisted people from refugee and refugee like backgrounds to generate more than \$100,000 in revenue. Welcome Merchant offers curated events, social media support, an online directory, skill building workshops and merchandise partnerships. Through the support of Welcome Merchant, entrepreneurs with refugee and asylum-seeker experiences can tell their unique stories and showcase talents in their own voice.

Prior to starting Welcome Merchant in 2020 on Instagram, Marjorie worked in promoting social justice at organisations such as Amnesty International Australia and Metro Assist. Marjorie didn't plan to start a social enterprise, until she realised that Welcome Merchant could be so much more than just an Instagram account.

Odarka Brecko

Education

Schools, universities and other educational institutions, or individuals working at such institutions, who assist former refugees by breaking down barriers to education.



Odarka Brecko

Image credit: Brad Hunter from Salty Dingo

For more than 50 years, Odarka has been a dedicated advocate for Ukrainian language, culture, and traditions. Her work in education and with young people reflects a commitment to the opportunities made possible through learning. Odarka holds key positions such as Teaching Principal at St Andrews Ukrainian School in Lidcombe and Executive Board Member in organisations dedicated to Ukrainian studies. She is actively involved in the Ukrainian Women's Associations at state and national levels and serves as the Australia Liaison Officer to the World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organisations.

As an educator, Odarka has contributed to the development of over 5,000 school-age students by promoting innovative teaching approaches and coordinating the development of the first Australian-focused Ukrainian bilingual dictionary. She has advocated for the recognition of Ukrainian language achievements by educational authorities and mainstream schools.

Beyond the classroom, Odarka has worked to build social networks and community connections for Ukrainian families and children, especially newly arrived migrants. She actively participates in Ukrainian community events, showcasing student achievements and ensuring the inclusion of children with autism. Odarka has organised fundraising activities to support students' needs, including those displaced from Ukraine. Odarka's passion and commitment have left a lasting impression on so many within the Ukrainian community and beyond.

Sonal Singh

Education (Highly Commended)

Schools, Universities and other educational institutions, or individuals working at such institutions, who assist former refugees by breaking down barriers to education.



Sonal Singh

Sonal is an experienced equity practitioner with fifteen years of work in higher education and the social sector. Currently, Sonal holds the position of Executive Manager, Student Equity at the Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion, UTS. With a focus on NSW, Sonal has led important national research projects that centre on refugee-educational outcomes, culturally inclusive research methodologies, and partnerships. Sonal has contributed to developing educational programs aimed at increasing access to higher education for refugee students in NSW universities.

Sonal played a central role in implementing a fee-waiver scholarship program for individuals seeking asylum at NSW universities and establishing the LEAP-Refugee Macquarie Mentoring Program. Notably, Sonal has also been successful in leading fundraising initiatives to provide financial support to students in need.

With a wealth of expertise in equity and education, Sonal's career is marked by dedication and impactful contributions to promoting inclusivity and access to education.

‘After the Fall’, Australian Story, ABC TV

Producers: Olivia Rousset and Greg Hassall

Media

Media outlets, journalists or media officers supporting, prioritising and/or raising awareness of refugee issues.



Greg Hassall, Olivia Rousset & Mahboba Rawi
Image credit: Brad Hunter from Salty Dingo



Mahboba Rawi & her son Nawid 'Sourosh' Cina

Olivia Rousset is a decorated documentary maker who has worked at Australian Story for the past two years and spent her professional life making current affairs documentaries on social justice issues globally. Olivia first came to prominence in the 1990s for her insightful contributions to the ABC's 'Race Around the World', a travel documentary competition that sought stories from young lone documentary makers as they met impossible deadlines and lived out of their backpacks.

Greg Hassall is an award-winning journalist who began his career in print and spent several years as a television critic before he decided it was time to actually make television and took the courageous step to the other side, joining Australian Story as a researcher and producer in 2013.

Olivia and Greg co-produced the story, 'After the Fall' to highlight the inspirational work of Mahboba Rawi and her son Nawid 'Sourosh' Cina in evacuating a group of orphans and their carers from three orphanages run by Mahboba's Promise in Afghanistan, to resettle in Sydney. Sourosh, Mahboba and Sarah Dale from the Refugee Advice and Casework Service (RACS) worked together to navigate a path through the dangers of Taliban controlled Afghanistan and the pitfalls of Australian bureaucracy to ultimately bring a group of almost eighty children and their carers to these shores.

Oliver Slewa

Government And Legal

Individuals or organisations from the government or legal sectors working to advise, assist or support asylum seekers or refugees.



Oliver Slewa

Image credit: Brad Hunter from Salty Dingo

Oliver Slewa is a dedicated legal practitioner and CEO of SHAYNA Humanitarian, a not-for-profit organisation in South Western Sydney. With over fifteen years of experience as a solicitor and migration agent, Oliver has provided free advice and support to refugees and people seeking asylum. He has worked in the government sector, particularly in migration law, helping refugee clients, and reuniting families in Australia. Oliver's personal experience as a refugee fuels his passion for assisting others in their settlement journey.

Oliver is a national refugee ambassador for the Refugee Council of Australia and has worked continually to challenge misconceptions about refugees. He shares stories of courage and resilience across the country, advocating for the rights and well-being of marginalised communities.

Through SHAYNA Humanitarian, Oliver provides free legal advice to women escaping domestic violence, along with finding resources to support their families. Oliver conducts sessions in community languages, runs staff development projects, and collaborates with health, education, religious organisations, NGOs, and government agencies.

Aynalem Tessema

Refugee Community Worker

A former refugee working on refugee issues with their own or other refugee communities, in either a paid or unpaid position.



Aynalem Tessema

Image credit: Brad Hunter from Salty Dingo

Aynalem Tessema arrived in Australia as a refugee in 1993 and began working as a volunteer to provide settlement support to refugees and migrants. Aynalem's dedication and passion led her to become a Settlement & Community Inclusion Manager, where she gained extensive experience working with multicultural communities and diverse clients, including refugees and humanitarian entrants. Her work focused on promoting cultural awareness, understanding diverse worldviews, and respecting values and traditions.

Aynalem's contributions have extended beyond her role, as she facilitated multicultural interagencies, organised events such as International Women's Day and Refugee Week, and conducted cross-cultural training and community leadership roundtables. Through her work at the Accessible Diversity Services Initiative based in Auburn, Aynalem has supported a wide range of communities with a focus on ensuring cultural appropriateness.

In addition to her professional accomplishments, Aynalem has engaged in voluntary work, assisting individuals with housing, employment, education, legal issues, and navigating the Australian system. Aynalem is recognised for the significant and often unsung work she does in the community, inspiring others and contributing to making society a better place.

Mahmoud Murad

Refugee Community Worker (Highly Commended)

A former refugee working on refugee issues with their own or other refugee communities, in either a paid or unpaid position



Mahmoud Murad

Image credit: Brad Hunter from Salty Dingo

Mahmoud Murad is a bilingual community worker and researcher dedicated to promoting cultural awareness and improving access to services for individuals from migrant and refugee backgrounds living with a disability. Since arriving in Australia in 2015, Mahmoud has engaged in paid and volunteer community work. He founded the Syrian Australian Forum on Facebook, offering support to Arabic-speaking refugees. In 2017, he created the Refugee Hub blog to provide information in Arabic.

Mahmoud focuses on advocating for and empowering individuals from a humanitarian background to participate in the workforce. He has worked in the Youth Transition Support Program (YTSP) to enhance employment and education outcomes. As a youth support worker and a research assistant, Mahmoud has been involved in formal and informal advocacy. He recognises the challenges faced by disabled individuals from Syrian and Iraqi refugee backgrounds in accessing information and services in Australia, impacting their quality of life and sense of belonging.

Currently, Mahmoud works as a Local Area Coordinator at Settlement Services International, supporting disabled people from refugee backgrounds in accessing the National Disability Insurance Scheme and community services. He collaborates with local organisations, employment agencies, and educational institutions to advocate effectively for and support his clients. Mahmoud's passion, empathy, and genuine care for his community make him an inspiring individual who consistently works towards a brighter future.

Miriam Pellicano

Refugee Supporter

A member of the broader Australian community, of any background, supporting and assisting refugees in any capacity, in either a paid or unpaid position.



Miriam Pellicano

Image credit: Brad Hunter from Salty Dingo

Miriam Pellicano has worked for ten years as the Executive Manager of the House of Welcome, a direct service provider based in Granville dedicated to supporting people seeking asylum and refuge. The House of Welcome is responsible for providing a wide variety of much needed social assistance to a highly disadvantaged group of clients with its programs including housing, casework, employment and the House of Welcome Catering Social Enterprise.

Previously, Miriam worked for many years on widening participation programs that build equity and access for students of diverse backgrounds and means to pursue higher education.

Outside Australia, Miriam worked as a human rights monitor in the Middle East, reporting on access to education and freedom of movement for workers and students. Other work included with Defence for Children International, whose mandate is to ensure effective implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) at the local, national and international level. Whilst working in the Jerash refugee camp in Jordan, Miriam collaborated with the community development team to establish an income generating English Language program.

Miriam represents the House of Welcome in their advocacy work, and is working to drive policy changes and mitigate the negative impacts of policy settings that unduly affect asylum seekers.

Sydney Youth FC accepted by Jabir Hosseini

Sport

Awarded to an organisation or individual for outstanding efforts in promoting sporting endeavours among people from refugee backgrounds.



Jabir Hosseini

Image credit: Brad Hunter from Salty Dingo



Sydney Youth FC

Sydney Youth FC is a football team dedicated to engaging Afghan Hazara youth in sport and contributing to their development as people.

Jabir Hosseini, who founded the team, came to Australia as an asylum seeker from Afghanistan in February 2012. With a passion for football (soccer), Jabir created a space where Afghan youngsters could come together and enjoy themselves. Sydney Youth FC's focus is on well-structured games, teamwork, and overcoming obstacles to achieve success. These achievements foster a sense of belonging and recognition among the players that further motivates them.

Sydney Youth FC offers a safe and supportive environment for players to develop on and off the field. They have participated in various Afghan National Tournaments, representing NSW and demonstrating their progress. Soccer not only improves their physical fitness but also instils valuable life skills and discipline.

Jabir's decision to coach the team stemmed from his desire to provide Afghan youth with an alternative to wandering the local streets or train stations. Joining Sydney Youth FC offers players not only soccer skills but also support and camaraderie. Together, they have built a strong community and mutual support.

Tin Hta Nu

Rural and Regional

Organisations or individuals working in regional areas of NSW to assist refugees.



Tin Hta Nu

Image credit: Brad Hunter from Salty Dingo

Tin Hta Nu is a founding member of the Mid North Coast Refugee Support Group and has championed support for refugees through fundraising, financial aid, advocacy, and public addresses.

Tin arrived as a refugee to Australia in 1990 from Myanmar after participating in the 1988 democratic reforms movement and enduring persecution under the military junta.

In the community of Kendall, Tin has made notable contributions as a tutor and teacher, specialising in Buddhist living, meditation, and Asian and Middle Eastern cuisine. Additionally, she has actively participated in community organisations like the CWA, Op-shop, and the establishment of a local community garden and café.

Tin's efforts have garnered recognition, including the Living Treasure Award from the Port Macquarie Council. Continuing her community involvement, she organises multicultural lunches, supports educational initiatives, and fosters understanding of refugee experiences.

Tin's commitment to assisting refugees has extended beyond her local community and included visits to refugee camps on the Thai-Myanmar border, offering financial aid and advocating for the rights and well-being of refugees from Myanmar.

Posthumous Award to Marlene Griffin accepted by Ms. Danielle Townsend, Interim CEO of the ASC

Rural and Regional (Highly Commended)

Organisations or individuals working in regional areas of NSW to assist refugees.



Marlene Griffin

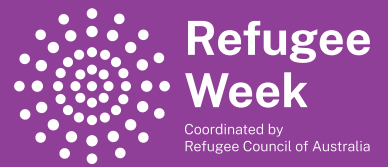
Prior to her death in May 2023, Marlene Griffin was Co-convenor of the Nambucca -Bellingen Rural Australians for Refugees. Since 2017, Marlene was instrumental in reinvigorating the work of the group to advocate, outreach and fundraise in support of refugees and people seeking asylum on the Mid North Coast.

Marlene was also an enthusiastic advocate for the arts that led her to hold positions on the Nambucca Arts Council and the Nambucca Community and Arts Centre, securing grants for its improvement.

Marlene's creativity and boundless energy shone through in her artistic endeavours. Marlene used her talent for painting to raise funds to support refugees, organising exhibitions and selling her artwork, with all proceeds benefiting the NSW Asylum Seekers Centre. Even in her final days, Marlene continued to paint for a forthcoming exhibition.

Marlene's legacy extends beyond her individual contributions. Through her work, a strong community of advocates and leaders has developed that will carry on her mission of welcoming people seeking asylum and refugees to the Australian community.

What You Told Us: Feedback Surveys



Refugee Week 2023 Online Feedback Survey

A short online survey was administered to event organisers, requesting feedback on the resources provided by RCOA with suggestions for improvement. A summary of the feedback received is outlined here.

Respondents indicated the resources created to support organisations and individuals celebrate Refugee Week were easy to find and utilised widely. The poster, and logo were the most commonly used resources. The customisable templates in Canva, Myths and Facts factsheet, General Resource Kit and Getting Publicity and Media Coverage were also popular.

Top 3 resources

17

REFUGEE WEEK POSTER

16

REFUGEE WEEK LOGO

9

EDITABLE CANVA TEMPLATES

Your feedback and suggestions:

"The live performances were great and there could be more of these."

"More publicity. Place articles & photos in local papers."

"To continue your great work on expanding on your social media outlets."

"Despite the terrible weather this week, our event was warm, inclusive and welcoming. Everyone felt very comfortable and included."

"More rural and regional information and networking."

"It would also be wonderful to have some messages translated and provided in both English and the individual's other language/main language spoken."

Recommendations

We are committed to continuously improving Refugee Week celebrations. Each year, we conduct an evaluation of our work coordinating the annual Refugee Week celebrations. The evaluation includes seeking feedback from event organisers, staff, students on placement, sponsors, and stakeholders who celebrate Refugee Week. Based on the collated information, we have identified the following key recommendations to strengthen our coordination of future Refugee Week celebrations.

Lived experience guides our work

We will continue to ensure that Refugee Week is guided by lived refugee experience and the focus of celebrations.

RCOA is committed to ensuring our work is guided by the experience, views and concerns of refugees and people seeking asylum. This commitment is affirmed in the 'lived experience' guiding principle, one of six guiding principles which direct how the organisation operates.

Refugee Week celebrations were guided by this commitment, reflected in the development of the 2023 theme which acted as a focus of celebrations, inclusion of the National Refugee Ambassadors, informed the content of the social media campaign and 'Stories of Freedom' photo series.

On World Refugee Day (20 June), an international day to honour refugees and celebrate their strength, we shared what finding freedom means to individuals captured in the 'Stories of Freedom' campaign. Unsurprisingly, this was the most viewed content on all social media platforms during the campaign.

Project planning

New project implementation timeframes were established this year. This enabled longer lead times for project coordination, theme launch, sponsor liaison, National Refugee Ambassador recruitment, training and booking, establishing media partnerships and social media campaign development. These timeframes will continue to inform future Refugee Week planning.

In addition, interns are an important part of the project team, supporting a range of project activities including research and development of resources, design of content and responding to general inquiries. The positions provide students or skilled volunteers an opportunity to be involved in a real-life campaign. Due to the university schedule, the internships ended before Refugee Week celebrations started. The timing of internships will be reviewed to ensure the interns are available during the busiest period of project implementation.

Partnerships

We will continue to expand the number and type of partners for Refugee Week. Our partners and sponsors are vital in amplifying the message of Refugee Week. We plan to continue to work with existing partners and sponsors and expand to new areas for a broader reach to people not currently engaged in Refugee Week celebrations.

Further, we aim on increasing our engagement with Refugee Welcome Zone councils during Refugee Week due to their vital role in creating a welcoming environment and supporting social cohesion.

Social Media

This year's campaign had the highest level of engagement on all social media platforms. We will continue to implement the successful strategies and explore new opportunities to expand reach and engagement. A streamlined process for sponsor's social media content will be investigated.

Resources

Resources produced for Refugee Week continue to be widely accessed including the customisable templates available in Canva. We will continue to provide these resources to support celebrations across the country.

A new resource introduced this year was the '*9 actions you can take to show support for refugees*'. This was used as a social media post and was well received. Due to its popularity and success, it will be converted into a downloadable resource available on the Refugee Week website in 2024.



Refugee Week

Coordinated by
Refugee Council of Australia