

MEDIA RELEASE

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461 – 463 Oxford St

PO Box 39

Paddington NSW 2021

PH: 02 9331 2691

ABN: 67 064 978 347

Refugee Week: Celebrating the Year of Welcome

Australia has always embraced diversity and the richness that multiculturalism brings into our lives and community.

This year's theme is one of Welcome, so we celebrate with activities, diverse foods, dance, music, and we invite children, adults and families to participate and experience the delights of this cultural experience which adds to the fabric of our Australian society.

Here at St Francis Social Services and the House of Welcome, one of our core values is to WELCOME. To welcome people who seek safety, security and hope. The way in which we endeavour to welcome people is by providing an environment for people to feel valued, wanted and important, regardless of gender, faith, race or social circumstances.

St Francis Social Services and the House of Welcome greets people who come to our door with warmth, engagement and an open heart. We tailor our support service to meet their individual needs. As we reflect on St Francis's 'Instrument of Peace' prayer, we are provided with an insight into what it feels and looks like when we our heart is genuinely open to welcoming people.

"Where there is despair, we provide hope, where there is darkness, we shine a light, where there is sadness, we will bring joy" (adapted from St Francis Peace Prayer).

When we consider that there are "over 21.3 million refugees seeking a home globally and over half a million are children" [UNNHCR 12 June 2020](#), to open our doors and to be hospitable is worthy of celebration. Providing shelter, protection, healthcare, education and psychosocial support is an essential, and welcoming, service of care. It is essential if we are committed to welcoming people who have endured enormous hardships.

At this time, when the world and our country are experiencing the challenges presented by COVID-19, this celebration may seem out of place. However, it further heightens our awareness of what is critical at this time - that we can try to ensure people who are at a greater risk in our community, are provided with whatever assistance they need. Especially, when so many are losing jobs and struggling with finances and difficult living conditions.

Therefore, as we enter into Refugee Week and experience the exotic food, music, dance and colourful dress styles, these are gifts that are being shared with us, and contribute to our multicultural Australia.

We are still the lucky country, and for people who are forced to leave their native home, it is still a country of hope, and endless opportunity.

Maurizio Vespa

CEO | St Francis Social Services and House of Welcome