REGIONAL NSW TO REACH OUT TO REFUGEES

NSW Coordinator-General for Refugee Resettlement Professor Peter Shergold has met with nine regional council mayors and managers, together with Local Government NSW (LGNSW), to discuss the next stage of the Syrian and Iraqi refugee settlement.

As of August 2016, NSW had accepted around 3000 refugees fleeing the conflict in the Middle East since July 2015, including more than 640 from the federal government’s additional intake of 12000 humanitarian entrants.

“Many communities out there want to help. We are delighted to be working with councils, schools and employers who think they may be able to provide opportunities for refugees,” Prof. Shergold said. “I am encouraging any interested councils to reach out and actively promote their region to refugees who have been resettled in NSW.”

Prof. Shergold noted that while settlement locations are selected by the Commonwealth, there were clear ways that other regional centres could attract refugees, such as by connecting local businesses with refugee employees and inviting families on guided tours.

“Once in Australia, refugees are free citizens like the rest of us and can choose to move. That’s why it’s important that local councils make contact with refugees who would be interested to move to their area once they are ready to live independently.”

The meeting explored many ways that regional councils could promote the support services, lifestyle and employment opportunities available to refugees in regional towns and cities.

Refugee settlement locations are chosen by the Commonwealth Government and include Sydney, Wollongong, Newcastle, Coffs Harbour, Wagga Wagga and Albury.

Council mayors and senior representatives from these regions, and LGNSW, attended the meeting along with Armidale and Maitland City councils, home to large migrant populations. NSW Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier Catherine Cusack also joined the discussion.

“The regions have our full support in reaching out to refugees,” said Prof. Shergold. “We know it can be done, and have seen great successes in local communities.”

The regional councils roundtable last met in late 2015. Since then, universities across NSW have banded together to pledge targeted support for refugees; private sector organisations have committed to developing employment opportunities; and the NSW Government has announced funding for new community hubs, youth mentoring and employment support.

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