

# An Open Letter.

We are students of Dickson College in the ACT. At our school we value Excellence, Opportunity and Community. We are committed to every student having the chance to strive to be the best they can be, to have access to a great education which has rich opportunities for learning and to belong within our school and our broader community. Every day we and the staff at our school work hard to make this commitment into reality. However, we believe that regardless of how hard we work, there are some students in our school for whom this, right now, CANNOT be a reality. These are our Asylum Seeker friends and fellow students and we are very worried for them.

A boy at our school has just turned 18. For any other person this would mean celebration. But for Asylum Seeker children in Australia, this means trouble. This young man has been living in Australia on a week by week basis, he is having to report to the Department of Immigration once a week to receive another week long visa. Every week he is asked if he will 'go back home', and every week he says no. He cannot 'go back home'. If he goes back to where he was born he may be killed. He may be murdered, by someone whose crime will go unpunished. As of now, he is an adult. An adult in the eyes of the Australian law. This means he is no longer supported by the Australian Government. The small amount of funding he has been receiving via the Red Cross has been cut off, and he needs help.

Before we continue, a question must be asked. How many people really believe that 18 means adult? Yes, it is old enough to make choices, but is it old enough to stop being a child? Most Australian born children continue to have fun and be childish when they're 18, even into their 20s they are children. Parents certainly don't think their children are grownups. In fact, over 50% of young adults (15-29 year olds) are still living with their parents. How can we as a nation stop children from being children? Not let these children live life the way everyone around them can?

Our school has the only College refugee bridging program in the ACT, we have over 35 students in this program. These young people have all had a refugee experience, some are permanent refugees but others are asylum seekers who don't know what the future will hold. These children are all important, and loved members of our community. We see them for what they are- fellow students and friends who deserve a chance to live life. These people are some of the most hard-working and committed students at our school. They may never be allowed to use this education as they are always at risk of being sent away, but they still have hope that one day they may be allowed to live as we do- with real homes, jobs and higher education. Because now they can't. These wonderful and intelligent children are not eligible to receive a university education, some are not allowed to work. People say that they are lazy, they live off taxpayer's money and leech off the Australian economy... well they don't. They just want to have a fair go, have the same chance as any other Australian, any human, has the right to do. They are treasured members of our community, but they are not being allowed to become members of our society. These people are not criminal masterminds, intent on jumping the queue, they are children, just like your children, just like us.

Refugees and asylum seekers aren't bad people. In fact, one of Australia's favourite comedians was a refugee. Anh Do was a refugee from Vietnam, he came in as a child and is now living in Australia with his wife and children as an Australian citizen. All of our students have this potential, what they lack is

the opportunity to achieve it. One of these refugee children may become an accomplished scientist, an actor, a musician, a teacher. But they cannot become anything under current policy.

The average Australian teen on an average week will be trying to decide whether or not to go to a party on the weekend, some of the teens in our bridging program will be wondering whether they will be able to feed themselves, whether they will be able to stay in Australia for another week- whether they will be forced into a detention centre.

For all those who say that boat people and asylum seekers are criminals, just think. Imagine Australia was a war zone. You're the minority and if you and your children stay, you die. Wouldn't you run? Take whatever hope you could? If it meant you could survive, wouldn't you take a boat out? And where would you run? An overpopulated and poor country where you have no hope of living outside of a camp? Or a land of opportunity? A land people say will give you a fair go? Where you may be able to live like a real human being?

Our asylum seeker student did.

But this is not just in our school, this is happening all over Australia.

You may not yet realise this, but these children are being persecuted. Not just in their home country, but here in Australia as well, they are being dehumanised. Believe it or not, this sort of dehumanisation has happened before, in another country, with a different minority. For example: These lazy and greedy people are stealing our jobs! They are the cause of unemployment in our Country! They aren't real people of our country! Send them away! They're criminals! Sound familiar? It should, we have been hearing this sort of thing since childhood. This same method has been used throughout history, with dire consequences. If that isn't a scary thought, what is?

This is happening here. Here in Australia, the land of plenty. Isn't it our national anthem that says "for those who've come across the seas, we've boundless plains to share"? Maybe that's why we don't sing that second verse.

These asylum seeker students are people we are growing up with, we care for and about them, and we want them to be a part of our community. When we've all grown up, we are determined that these people will be with us. They will be our workmates, friends, husbands, wives, and partners. They will be with us, they will be Australians and they will be treated as humans, as equals.

Thank you for taking the time to read this,

Please, pass this along, make people notice and understand. Help us save our friend. We hope, that one day soon people like our courageous students will not have to live week by week, that all people will be allowed to live in safety, as they should, here in Australia. Add your voice to the list of people who care and who want things to change.

Thank you again,

The Students of Dickson College.