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Preparing to take refuge

By Fi Poole

Sanctuary Foundation Australia has been in talks with the government about supporting Syrian families that might resettle in the region.

For the past 26 years Sanctuary Foundation has supported refugees to rebuild their lives in Australia from war zones around the world.

Over that time they have resettled more than 3000 people from many countries in Africa and the Middle East.

When the government announced last week that they would accept a one-off intake of 12,000 refugees displaced by the Syrian and Iraq conflict, Sanctuary immediately put their hand up to help.

"We'd be capable and hopeful that we would be able to resettle some of these people," Founder and CEO, Peter Hallem said.

"Our capability is quite strong here because we have a lot of people in this region who want to assist these families."

The Government is expecting that the first group of refugees will arrive by Christmas, with priority placements being given to women, children and families.

"All we know at this stage is that the government said intake would begin in December, but it may take a little longer for people to arrive," Peter said.

"There are a lot of minority groups, not just Christians that would need to be resettled."

Once people start arriving Sanctuary will begin integrating them into communities.

"We meet them off the plane, find them housing, enrol them in English classes, and connect them to Medicare and to all the vital services," Peter said.

"We also connect the children into the schools."

For those granted refugee status by the Australian Government, Sanctuary can also offer interest free travel loans.

"Once they've been given a letter to say their visa is approved, they often don't have the means to get here.

"So we are able to loan them interest free, the airfare to come to Australia."

Once settled, each family gradually repays their loan back (over two or more years).

That money goes into a fund which is then 'recycled' to assist the next needy refugee family.

In 2008 Steph Cousins, Acting Humanitarian Advocacy Coordinator, Oxfam Australia said that the work that Sanctuary does is both rare and important.

"The Sanctuary Australia Foundation is a community-based organisation that

"The Sanctuary Australia Foundation is a community-based organisation that receives no Government funding and provides valuable services to refugees seeking to resettle to Australia," she said.

"This type of work is rare and incredibly important in the broader context of refugee protection and resettlement support in Australia."

Peter Hallem is hoping to have further discussions with the government in the coming weeks to get an indication of how many families will be resettled in the region.



Tantak family still in Syria (Supplied)

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