

Radio Transcript

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TITLE: MIM HOOK INTERVIEW WITH SYLVIA DAVEY.

DESCRIPTION: MIM HOOK INTERVIEW WITH SYLVIA DAVEY DISCUSSING THE BASS COAST REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP GROUP AND THE GOVERNMENT'S REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM.

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MIM HOOK: Sylvia Davey is member of the Bass Coast Refugee Sponsorship Group. Welcome to ABC Gippsland, Sylvia.

SYLVIA DAVEY: Thank you very much.

MIM HOOK: Sylvia, what's happened?

SYLVIA DAVEY: So, what's happened is back in December '21 the federal government announced a plan where they would run a pilot scheme for community refugee sponsorship. This was to ensure that refugees were met with a warm welcome, and Bass Coast Refugee Sponsorship Group certainly put up their hand to be one of these groups.

MIM HOOK: And you've been accepted. What does it mean?

SYLVIA DAVEY: We've been accepted. Naturally we have some really exciting news. Yesterday we were informed of the flight details of our refugee family, and they're arriving in two weeks' time.

MIM HOOK: Incredible. So because your group put their hand up and has advocated for refugees, a family who currently don't have a place to call home or a safe place, they can come to live in Wonthaggi?

SYLVIA DAVEY: That's correct. The refugees are through the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, and they've been identified as in urgent need of resettlement. The refugees that are coming to Australia can come from a wide range of countries, but they've been waiting a long time for the opportunity to settle in a safe country.

The refugee family, we've been lucky enough to sponsor, a Syrian, currently in Iraq. A husband and wife and four children under the age of eight.

MIM HOOK: And they've been living in a refugee camp situation?

SYLVIA DAVEY: Not in Iraq. They've actually been living in the community but struggling on a day-to-day basis.

MIM HOOK: How incredible. What do you need to set up in Wonthaggi for this family to come over, Sylvia?

SYLVIA DAVEY: Well, probably our urgent need is some rental accommodation in Wonthaggi, and that's what we need to secure in the next couple of weeks. We have done a lot of fundraising over the last two years because we knew we would be able to provide for this family when they arrived. We're responsible for meeting them from the airport. So they actually come straight to Melbourne Airport in two weeks' time. We pick them up from the airport. We bring them back to Wonthaggi, put them probably into short-term accommodation, provide clothing, food, anything they need for those first few weeks until they get on their feet.

MIM HOOK: And just, you know, playing devil's advocate, housing is tight. We know Bass Coast is another area with tight housing. We've got Gippsland locals who can't find a house to live in. Why should we give up another of our houses that just means someone else won't have a house for someone to come over as a refugee?

SYLVIA DAVEY: Okay. We think that we're a really welcoming community. And we need to welcome people into the community. The reason housing is tight is because we have so many job opportunities. We're providing a family now that will be able to have employment in this area, and I'm sure – we're quite confident that we will be able to find accommodation for them.

MIM HOOK: So, yes, so tell us more. What else do you have to set up? Do you have to liaise with schools, with other community groups?

SYLVIA DAVEY: The whole works. So these people have no English. They speak Arabic. So the first priority will be over the next few months of getting them English lessons through Bass Coast Adult Learning, the children into school or kindergarten, although one is still preschool. And giving them the means to live within the community. Yeah, so all those things happen. Because they're United Nations humanitarian refugees they qualify for Centrelink, Medicare, all those type of things, but we had to go through the process of enrolling them in all of those systems.

MIM HOOK: Well, thank you very much, Sylvia Davey, from the Bass Coast Refugee Sponsorship Group for speaking with us. We look forward to following the story of this family coming from Iraq but originally from Syria to Wonthaggi. Is this the beginning of something more, do you think?

SYLVIA DAVEY: Well hopefully. Some of us were involved some 15 years ago sponsoring some families at that stage from Burma who were in Thai refugee camps. And they're still in Wonthaggi. They're part of our community, part of our extended family. And it's been a real success story. So we're hoping this time it will be another great success story for us.

MIM HOOK: Thank you very much. Sylvia Davey, member of the Bass Coast Refugee Sponsorship Group, who are bringing a family originally from Syria who have been living as refugees in Iraq over to Wonthaggi.

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