



Welcoming  
Australia

# 10 years of welcoming

Advancing an Australia  
where everyone can belong



## Acknowledgement of Country

Welcoming Australia acknowledges and pays respect to the traditional custodians and ancestors of this country, and the continuation of their cultural, spiritual, and ceremonial practices.

We respectfully acknowledge the past and present Traditional Owners of the land, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and respect their culture and identity which has been a continuum with the land and sea for generations.

We have a role to play in achieving a just Australia in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights as First Peoples are recognised, respected, and enjoyed. Welcoming Australia also seeks to engage local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as leaders in welcoming activities.

### Welcoming Australia

100 Drayton Street, Bowden SA 5007

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10 Years of Welcoming

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An Australia where everyone – regardless of culture, faith, gender, or sexuality – has equal opportunity to belong, contribute, and thrive. From the true owners of this country through to the most recent arrivals, and everyone in between, that’s the future those of us who’ve been part of the Welcoming Australia journey genuinely believe is possible.

The journey began in response to a prevailing political and media narrative that was training Australians to fear their neighbour – driving division, exclusion, and inequality that not only harms those being targeted but damages our social cohesion and collective well-being. We were determined to cultivate a culture of welcome by calling out the best in Australians, rather than appealing to their worst, and creating opportunities to offer personal and practical acts of welcome.

We had a relentlessly positive voice, celebrating any leader who would take a step towards welcome, generosity and inclusion while always striving for further systemic, cultural and policy change.

Over ten years, tens of thousands of people have advanced a more welcoming Australia. In our programs, walks, advocacy, and events – but more importantly through their own lives – spreading a spirit of welcome, embracing diversity and difference and ensuring our political leaders know that unity builds a better future than division ever could.

**Brad Chilcott**  
Founder

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It is a great privilege to recognise Brad Chilcott's work in creating Welcoming Australia and the staff he recruited along the way, all of whom have made this an exceptional organisation. Their commitment to creating a welcoming country has resulted in a visionary and strong group continuing to lead the way.

Over the past ten years, Welcoming Australia galvanised public attention to the need to welcome new arrivals to our shores.

The Welcoming Centre became a place of welcome and comfort and the control centre for a national program of actions and activities that inspired others to speak up, stand up, and join up.

The whole world benefits when single individuals can inspire others, create organisations, and commit to their sustainability.

Everyone who has been a part of this organisation deserves our congratulations. At the same time, we can all rest assured that the values that were the basis of its founding have driven it forward and will continue to be the core of its future.

**Anthea Hancocks**  
Chair



Long before tall ships stumbled upon a spectacular harbour, hundreds of First Nations lived and modelled social cohesion – maintaining cultural knowledge, language, and practice while co-existing amid great diversity. 'Welcoming' was a framework and agreement for how diverse peoples interacted, and it was embedded in cultural engagement and socioeconomic success.

Today, we acknowledge the work and knowledge of many who have come before us. As a practice, welcoming is far more than how we greet people at the front door. Welcoming is about how we value, engage, and interact with the people around us. Welcoming poses the question 'whom do we want to be?' and suggests how we might get there.

Our history and future, as Welcoming Australia, is a small contribution to advancing communities where people of all backgrounds can have a sense of value and belonging. Though we have little insight into what the next ten years may hold, we hope and intend to continue with a posture of humility – listening and learning, bringing people together, and amplifying the diminished or ignored voices.

Thank you to everyone who has journeyed with us this far. Our numerous advisors, supporters, donors, critics, volunteers, partners, and friends have all played a significant role in Welcoming Australia's development, learnings, and success.

As we acknowledge the past and look to the future, we have a profound opportunity to work towards 'welcoming Australia' being less an aspiration and more a reality.

**Aleem Ali**  
Chief Executive Officer



# Our timeline



## 2010

### Catalyst for change

In 2010, the refugee and 'asylum seeker' debate was toxic. Despite a call for 'ethical leadership' from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR),<sup>1</sup> people fleeing war and persecution were being referred to as 'the refugee problem'.

Public protests against the establishment of community detention facilities for people seeking asylum<sup>2</sup> centred on keeping people out of Australian communities rather than concern for their safety and wellbeing. Protest signs such as 'sink the boats' were not uncommon. The image of a child carrying such a message, advocating for the murder of people at sea, served as a chilling catalyst for change.

'Middle Australia' had disengaged from the extremes of a debate that had descended into hurling blame and abuse. There was an opportunity and necessity to change the conversation - engaging people in a positive, humanising dialogue and building connections with new arrivals.

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### October

'No to refugees' protests are being conducted outside Woodside Town Hall (South Australia) in response to the government plan to house refugees at Inverbrackie Detention Centre.<sup>3</sup> The protestors' primary concerns are 'house prices' and 'community safety'.

Adelaide TV news coverage shows a ten-year-old boy holding up a sign saying 'Sink the Boats'.

### December

#### 13th

A community meeting, organised by Brad Chilcott, is convened at a local cafe in Woodside (the location of Inverbrackie Detention Centre). The purpose of the meeting is to combine the resources of as many community stakeholders as possible (community agencies, churches and passionate individuals) for a positive and practical response to the 'no to refugees' protests.

#### 15th

Christmas Island tragedy:<sup>4</sup> a boat carrying 90 people seeking asylum, mostly from Iraq and Iran, sinks off the coast of Christmas Island. 48 people died and 42 survivors are rescued.

#### 21st

Faith Leaders in South Australia host a walk from the Adelaide CBD to Woodside. The walk, titled *In This Together: Walk Together in Solidarity*, culminates in a *Welcome Party* at Woodside Oval, which attracts more than 100 people. The key messages and themes are:

- Walk together in solidarity with asylum seekers living in detention
- Walk together in solidarity with those who live in the area wishing to welcome asylum seekers
- Walk together in solidarity with people of faith, demonstrating a shared concern for the dignity of all people



# 2011

## February

The Twitter account for *Welcome to Australia* is launched.<sup>5</sup>

## March

A Facebook page for *Welcome to Australia* is launched.<sup>6</sup>

A *Welcome to Australia* promotional video with Ivan Maric,<sup>7</sup> Adelaide Football Club player, is produced and distributed.

*Welcome to Australia* Ambassadors – in the areas of sport, music, and politics – are identified as the movement grows.

## April

### 20th

Official media launch of *Welcome to Australia* with community members and Adelaide Football Club players Ivan Maric, Aiden Riley, and Chris Knights.

## June

More than 40 'Welcome Parties' are conducted nationally throughout Refugee Week – hosted by community groups, faith communities, organisations and individuals.

## November

Ambassador Jessica Rowe hosts a Welcome to Australia Dinner at Parliament House (Canberra), attended by representatives of all major political parties; including future Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.





## 2012

### January

*Welcome to Australia* begins to coordinate community visits with families in Inverbrackie Detention Centre.

### March

A cross-partisan TV ad,<sup>8</sup> featuring musicians, politicians and sportspeople, is produced by *Welcome to Australia* for Harmony Day.

*Sounds Like Welcome* is launched, by *Welcome to Australia* Ambassador Katie Noonan. The initiative is designed to provide the gift of music to people seeking asylum, refugees, and other new arrivals. *Sounds Like Welcome* connects donated musical instruments, or the finance to purchase them, with specific requests from people in immigration detention or on humanitarian visas in the Australian community. Donations include a grand piano and 50 recorders. A Welcome Choir is also formed.

### June

#### 21st

A boat carrying people seeking asylum sinks off Christmas Island.<sup>9</sup> 17 people die and 110 survivors are rescued.

#### 23rd

During Refugee Week, the first national Walk Together is conducted in 12 capital cities and regional centres. The theme is *It's Time to Walk Together*<sup>10</sup> and the Adelaide event is attended by then Premier Jay Weatherill and former Premier Lynn Arnold.

#### 25th

Following the Walk Together event, Steve Georganas MP gives a constituency statement in Federal Parliament, stating:

"Throughout the walk, the thoughts of participants were with the people who lost their lives in last week's boat tragedy – 17 bodies have been recovered and 110 people have been rescued. If there is one good thing to come out of these terrible events, it is that it has become increasingly obvious that it is time to end the politics of fear and division when it comes to asylum seekers. We need to not only walk together but work together too—as a community and as politicians. If there is one resounding message from Walk Together, it is that change has to start from here, from this parliament we have been elected to. We cannot expect our communities to walk together if, as politicians, we are not willing to work together. That is why it has been great that *Welcome to Australia* has received so much support from across the political divide."<sup>11</sup>

In the years following a diverse range of Federal and State politicians will speak to the importance and impact of Walk Together and the work of *Welcoming Australia*.

### October

*Welcome to Australia* launches *Enhance Australia*, a mentoring program and support network to help international students feel welcome in their off-campus communities. *Enhance Australia* incorporates:

- peer mentors
- family/home-based mentors from similar cultural backgrounds
- student advocates to assist international students to understand and navigate workplace and tenancy rights

### December

Wally De Backer (Gotye) donates concert tickets to young people seeking asylum who are in community detention, and organises a backstage meet-and-greet.

# 2013

Throughout 2012 and 2013, people seeking asylum being released from immigration detention are granted Bridging Visa E (BVE), with no work or study rights. With limited social connections and opportunities, many BVE holders connect as volunteers through Welcome to Australia.

Upon turning 18, former unaccompanied minors seeking asylum are released from community detention with limited access to support. This need inspires the founding of the Welcome Centre.

## May

The Welcome Centre launches, offering the following services:

- furniture donations and material aid for families and individuals on Bridging Visas
- social support and conversational English practice
- volunteering opportunities
- an English language program for women who are illiterate in their own language, hosted in the participants' homes, known as *English Tea*.<sup>12</sup>

Initially, the 'Centre' is coordinated online until a physical location can be sourced.

*Welcome Soccer* launches, coordinated by people seeking asylum on BVEs. The initiative facilitates friendly and informal soccer matches on Saturday mornings in the Adelaide Parklands, for the whole community.

## June

Parliamentary launch and media conference for Walk Together with Ambassadors Steve Georganas MP, Senator Sarah Hanson-Young, Senator Scott Ludlam, Senator Christine Milne, Stephen Jones MP, Andrew Leigh MP, Russel Broadbent MP, Hon Judi Moylan MP, Senator Lisa Singh, Robert Oakeshott MP and Senator Ursula Stephens.

Walk Together is hosted across 16 cities with the theme *If We're All People, We're All Equal*.<sup>13</sup>

At the Adelaide Walk Together event, then State Premier Jay Weatherill announces plans for transport concessions to be made available to people seeking asylum on bridging visas in South Australia.

## July

"Mo-hair" fundraising campaign for the Welcome Centre commences. Volunteer, and future CEO, Mohammad Al-Khafaji commits to shave his post-shoulder length hair (30+ centimetres!) to raise funds for the opening of the Welcome Centre.

## August

### 3rd

Official opening of the Welcome Centre at 100 Drayton Street, Bowden. The event is co-hosted with the SA Muslim Youth Association and features a community Iftar for 150 guests. The opening is also the culmination of "Mo-Hair" with an auction to bid on personally shaving Mohammad Al-Khafaji's hair at the event. \$10,000 is raised.

### 25th

Welcome to Australia secures a \$160,000 Building Multicultural Communities Program grant to develop and expand the work of the Welcome Centre.

## September

The Wiggles donate two pallets of nappies to the Welcome Centre, give away concert tickets to newly arrived families seeking asylum in Adelaide and become Ambassadors for Welcome to Australia.

## October

Comedian Tom Ballard becomes an Ambassador for Welcome to Australia and uses his national comedy tour to raise funds and support for the Welcome Centre.

## December

### 12th

The newly elected Federal Government advises Welcome to Australia that the \$160,000 Building Multicultural Communities Program grant<sup>14</sup> has been withdrawn. That evening, the Welcome Centre hosts a community dinner and launches a crowd-funding campaign.<sup>15</sup>





## 2014

### January

The crowd-funding campaign reaches \$70,000 and The Project (Channel 10) profiles the work of the Welcome Centre.<sup>16</sup>

### February

The Welcome Centre is gifted tickets for volunteers and participants to attend a Dr G. Yunupingu concert with Kate Ceberano and the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra.

The murder of 23-year-old Reza Barati at Manus Island Detention Centre prompts nation-wide 'Light The Dark' vigils in every capital city and multiple regional centres. The vigils are co-hosted and coordinated by Welcome to Australia and GetUp!

### March

Welcome to Australia co-hosts a stall at WOMADelaide with Amnesty International. Volunteers collect 'welcome pledges' and create a 'Welcome Wall'.

Welcome to Australia wins a national Migration and Settlement Award, in the Settlement Innovation category, for Walk Together.

### June

*Asylum Sneakers* crowdfunding campaign featuring 'Mr Football', Les Murray, raises more than \$50,000 for sports shoes for children from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds.<sup>17</sup>

Welcome to Australia is established as a Public Benevolent Institution (PBI) with the founding Board of Directors consisting of: Brad Chilcott, Manal Younus, Mohammad Al-Khafaji, Pete Haskard and Kate Leaney.



### July

Welcome to Australia and World Vision Australia establish the 'Welcome to My Place' initiative, supporting churches and faith communities to encourage their members to actively model welcome and hospitality. The initiative was later renamed *Act Local* and broadened its reach beyond faith communities.

### September

The death of Hamid Khazaei,<sup>18</sup> declared brain dead after he contracted a leg infection in Manus Island detention centre, sparks more nation-wide 'Light the Dark' vigils.

### October

#### 25th

Walk Together 2014 moves to an October date and brings together 20 capital cities and regional centres with the theme *Common People, Common Dreams*.<sup>19</sup>

*National Day of Unity* is launched by Welcome to Australia and Lebanese Muslim Association bringing together Walk Together and National Mosque Open Day.

### December

More than 200 people attend the Welcome Centre Christmas Party.

## 2015

Welcome to Australia produces a mini documentary on the 'Cambodia deal'<sup>20</sup> which includes interviews with then Cambodian Opposition Leader Sam Rainsy, local business owners and everyday Cambodians about the plan to send refugees from Australia to Cambodia.<sup>21</sup>



### February

The Welcome Centre is gifted tickets for volunteers to attend the Paul Simon and Sting concert.

Welcome to Australia, alongside key partners, hosts a Welcome Picnic in Mirnu Wirra Park, Adelaide to celebrate City of Adelaide becoming a Refugee Welcome Zone.<sup>22</sup>

### April

The Welcome Centre is officially re-launched after crowd-funded renovations. The launch is attended by dignitaries such as then Premier Jay Weatherill, Senator Sarah Hanson-Young, Peter Drew (Peter Drew Arts), and Jayne Stinson (Channel 7).

Welcome to Australia's crowd-funding campaign, the Welcome 100, is launched to employ the organisation's first full-time staff member and CEO.

### July

After a successful crowd-funding campaign and recruitment process, Welcome to Australia appoints Mohammad Al-Khafaji as the inaugural CEO.

### September

Welcome to Australia co-hosts 'Light the Dark' vigils around Australia to remember Syrian toddler Aylan Kurdi and people who have died seeking safety.

The Australian Government grants 12,000 visas under a special humanitarian intake for Syrians and Iraqis, fleeing terrorism and civil war.

### October

Walk Together 2015 is hosted across 28 cities with the theme *Say Welcome*.<sup>23 24</sup>

National Day of Unity launched at Parliament House by then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, Opposition Leader Bill Shorten and Greens Leader Richard di Natale.<sup>25</sup>

### December

Scanlon Foundation partners with Welcome to Australia to establish the Welcoming Cities<sup>26</sup> initiative. After a national recruitment process, Aleem Ali is appointed National Manager, Welcoming Cities.



**scanlon**  
foundation



Shared learning is a powerful tool in advancing communities where everyone can belong.





## 2016

### February

The Australian Government attempts to return 267 people seeking asylum to Manus Island and Nauru, including children born in Australia. In response Welcome to Australia joins national campaigns, *Let Them Stay* and *Stand for Sanctuary*, co-hosting events in major cities. As a result, all 267 people, including the 37 babies born on Australian soil, are allowed to stay in Australia in community detention.

Following advocacy from Welcoming Australia, then State Premier Jay Weatherill declares the whole of South Australia to be recognized as a zone for the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV), positively benefiting more than 5,000 visa holders.<sup>27</sup>

### March

Scanlon Foundation and Welcome to Australia host Founder of Welcoming America, David Lubell, to coincide with the official launch of Welcoming Cities and inaugural Welcoming Cities Symposium at Melbourne Town Hall.

Welcome to Australia co-host the national Palm Sunday *Walk for Justice for Refugees* events,

Launch of *Welcome to the Game* and appointment of Program Coordinator, Maia Tua-Davidson.

### June

Hume City Council (Victoria) is the first member of the Welcoming Cities network.

### October

Walk Together 2016, *We Share Our Future*,<sup>28</sup> hosts events in 29 cities and towns, including the first international event - Walk Together Anchorage (Alaska). The Sydney event includes Hon. Tanya Plibersek, then Australian Race Discrimination Commissioner Tim Soutphommasane, the Hon. Jihad Dib, Deng Adut, Sara Saleh, Mariam Veiszadeh, and the Hon. Mehreen Faruqi.

National Day of Unity is extended to National Unity Week, bookended by Walk Together and National Mosque Open Day.

## 2017

### March

The second Welcoming Cities Symposium is conducted at Melbourne Arts Centre<sup>29</sup> and features Mayor Naheed Nenshi (City of Calgary, Canada) and Jill Helke (Director, IOM).

### July

In partnership with the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV), and supported by the Victorian Government, the first *Campfire Stories* is hosted in Melbourne.<sup>30</sup>

Campfire Stories brings together people from diverse backgrounds to tell stories of hope, culture and unity. Through the medium of storytelling around a campfire, the speakers share their experiences over a mug of hot chai and toasted marshmallows.

### August

Welcoming Careers, an initiative designed to cultivate pathways to employment and education, is launched at the Asylum Seeker Hub (Western Australia).<sup>31</sup>

The #PowerOfWelcome, a partnership between Welcome to Australia, Welcome Centre and Port Adelaide Football Club, is launched.<sup>32</sup>

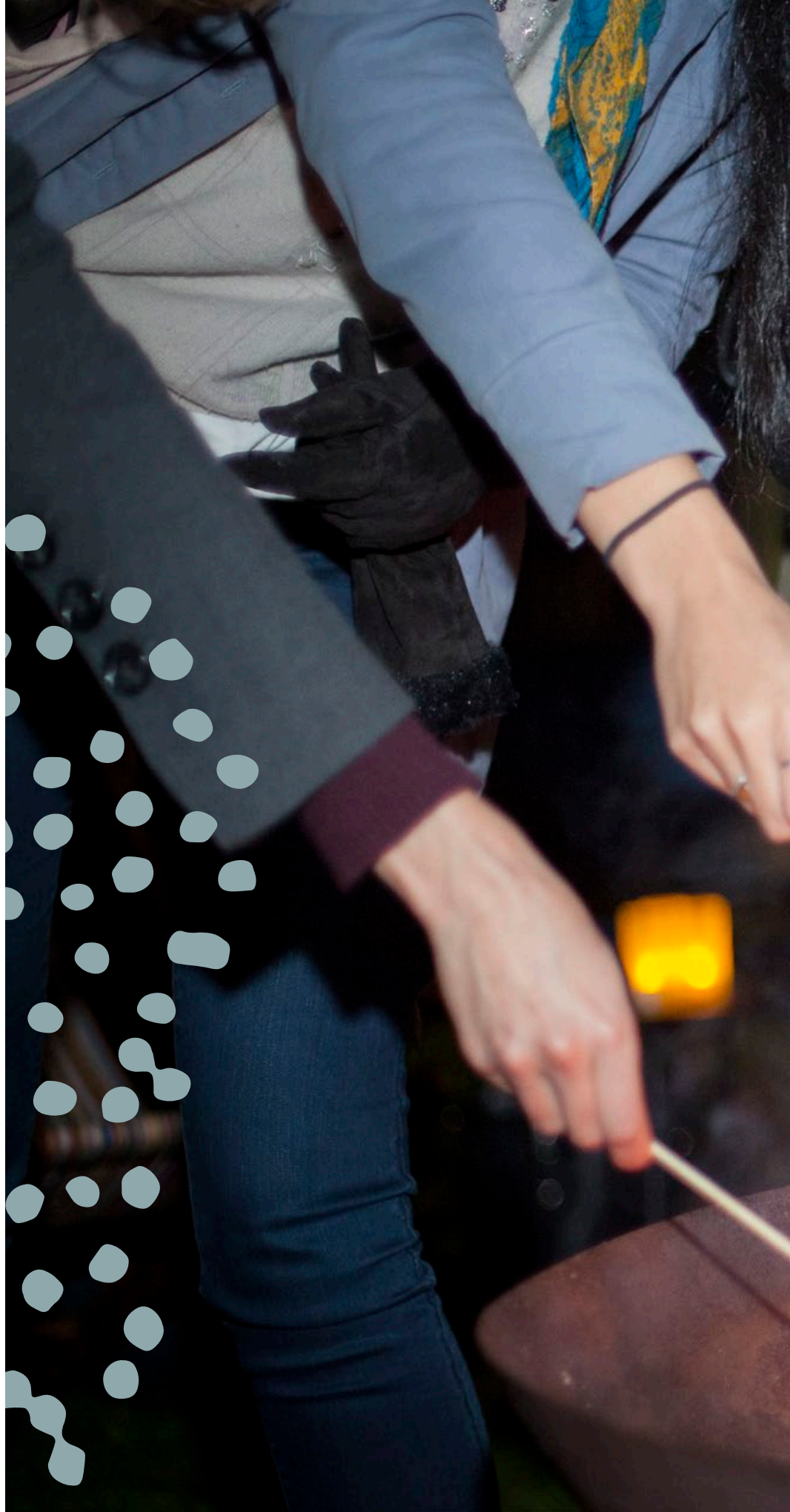
The City of Darebin (Victoria) is the 10th Council to join Welcoming Cities.

### September

Paralympics Australia<sup>33</sup> auspice a successful multi-year grant through the Victorian Government for the establishment of Welcome to the Game (Victoria). The initiative supports children and young people (and their families) from diverse backgrounds and abilities to access sport and recreation opportunities and connect with their local community.

### October

Walk Together 2017 is hosted across 20 cities with the theme *For Freedom*.<sup>34</sup> Anchorage (Alaska) host their second Walk Together event and a walk is also staged in Manus Island Detention Centre.







Through the  
medium of  
storytelling around  
a campfire, the  
speakers share  
their experiences  
over a mug of  
hot chai.



# 2018

## February

The Welcome Centre produces a show for the Adelaide Fringe Festival, *Refugee Stories and Secret Recipes*.<sup>35</sup> The show features Wajahat and Saiqa Ali, caterers and owners of Ali's Biryani and Tikka House, who share their story of seeking asylum in Australia and cook a meal for the audience.

The Welcoming Cities National Advisory Committee is formed, chaired by Dr Sev Ozdowski AM. The Committee includes representatives from all the peak bodies across the Migration and Settlement sector.

## March

Welcome to Australia announces a partnership with Adelaide United Football Club, *United in Welcome*,<sup>36</sup> as part of Harmony Day 2018.

The inaugural Intercultural Futures Fellowship commences, supporting young people from culturally diverse backgrounds to develop practical leadership skills.

The third Welcoming Cities Symposium is conducted at the Adelaide Convention Centre<sup>37</sup> at which the *Welcoming Cities Standard*<sup>38</sup> is launched. The City of Adelaide becomes the first capital city to join the Welcoming Cities network.

## June

Graduation of the participants in the Intercultural Futures Fellowship, hosted by Governor Hieu Van Le at Government House (South Australia). The event also includes the presentation of Welcome to Australia 'Life Membership' for Kate Leaney and Leah Marrone.

Welcome to Australia hosts a Community Iftar at the Welcome Centre.

The Community Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (CRSI) is launched. CRSI is a joint project of the Refugee Council of Australia, Amnesty International Australia, Save the Children Australia, Welcome to Australia, Rural Australians for Refugees and the Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce.<sup>39</sup>

## July

Mohammad Al-Khafaji finishes his employment as CEO of Welcome to Australia and is subsequently appointed CEO of the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia.



Funded by the Queensland Government, Welcoming Cities commences work in South-West Queensland to support three Local Councils to develop planned approaches to the attraction and retention of migrants in their communities.

## August

Amid the racist rhetoric of 'African gangs', Welcoming Cities brings together eight Mayors from across Greater Melbourne to stand in solidarity with African-Australian communities.<sup>40</sup>

Welcome to Australia's *Welcome to the Game* program and Football Queensland receive the Multicultural Queensland Ambassador award at the 2018 Queensland Multicultural Awards.<sup>41</sup>

## September

Welcome to Australia joins the sector-wide #KidsOffNauru campaign, bringing together ambassadors, partners, supporters and volunteers to advocate for children to be released from offshore detention on Nauru. The tireless advocacy and behind-the-scenes legal representation will result in the last children remaining on Nauru being flown to Australia in 2019.

Aleem Ali is appointed CEO of Welcome to Australia.

## October

Walk Together takes place across Australia, with a Unity Festival hosted in Adelaide, showcasing multicultural cuisines and cultures.

Welcoming Cities is a finalist in the 2018 Human Rights Awards for the 'Racism. It Stops With Me' trophy.

## November

*Welcome to Australia* formally changes its name to *Welcoming Australia*.

## December

The City of Newcastle (New South Wales) becomes the 25th member of Welcoming Cities.

A show is produced for the Adelaide Fringe Festival called **Refugee Stories and Secret Recipes**, featuring Wajahat and Saiqa Ali who share their story of seeking asylum in Australia.





# 2019

## February

Welcoming Australia's national Advisory Panel is formed.

The Welcoming Centre produces a second season of *Refugee Stories and Secret Recipes* for the Adelaide Fringe Festival – featuring Abdulghani and Fatima Alrahmo, caterers and owners of Melh wa Sekkar. The show wins the BankSA Best Show award.

The Welcoming Cities Symposium is hosted in Brisbane, and Brisbane City Council becomes the 33rd member of the network. The Symposium features the inaugural First Nations Keynote, presented by Professor Anita Heiss<sup>42</sup>.

Many men and women, who have been detained by the Australian Government for six years offshore, are still experiencing serious health conditions that cannot be treated on the islands. Welcoming Australia joins the national campaign, and engages in lobbying efforts in Parliament House, for the 'Medevac' legislation to be implemented. The legislation allows Australian doctors to identify and recommend to the Australian Government critically sick refugees and people seeking asylum for transfer to Australia to receive urgent medical treatment.

## June

As part the Queensland Day celebrations, Welcoming Australia's *Welcoming Clubs* initiative hosts the Inala Community Cup in partnership with local community organisations<sup>43</sup>. The event also realises the target of 1000 community football participants across three years of the initiative's activities – highlighting the ongoing need for regular, structured and accessible community sports opportunities. The 1000 participants represent 38 nations of origin and 48 languages.

## September

Townsville City Council (Queensland) becomes the 40th member of Welcoming Cities.

## October

Walk Together takes place with the theme *Stronger Together*.

National Unity Week broadens its reach, inviting attendees to engage more deeply in the week through the theme "putting welcome in your hands", encouraging individuals and groups to host events centred around Walk Together, Eat Together, Learn Together and, Play Together.

Welcoming Australia sponsors the inaugural Award for Excellence in Local Government at the national Migration and Settlements Awards. The City of Stirling (WA) is the 2019 award recipient.





## 2020

### January

Australia's first case of COVID-19 is confirmed.

### February

The Welcoming Centre hosts its third season of Adelaide Fringe Festival event *Refugee Stories and Secret Recipes*.

### March

Australian borders are closed to all non-residents due to COVID-19.

Because of the pandemic and risk mitigation, more than one million people in Australia have lost their jobs. The Australian Government announces a temporary JobKeeper payment and increase to unemployment benefits (JobSeeker). However, many people on temporary humanitarian visas, international students and migrant workers are not eligible to access the payments. In response, as part of the sector-wide #NobodyLeftBehind campaign, Welcoming Australia and Democracy in Colour organise Mayors from local councils across Australia to sign a Declaration committing to support and advocate for temporary visa holders.<sup>44</sup>

The Welcoming Cities Symposium, to be hosted at the National Gallery of Australia (Canberra), is cancelled and moved to an online format.<sup>45</sup>

Welcoming Cities publishes *Planning for Welcoming & Inclusive Communities: Guidelines for Regional Growth*.<sup>46</sup>

### April

Welcoming Cities commences regular online meetings with Local Councils to discuss learnings and responses to COVID-19.

### June

The City of Playford (South Australia) becomes the 50th Local Council to join Welcoming Cities.

Welcoming Australia launches a public draft of the Welcoming Clubs Standard<sup>47</sup> - a framework for sport and recreation clubs to progress their diversity and inclusion practices and create a

culture of welcome for all members of the community.

Welcoming Australia produces *Living Room Sports* - easy to follow online sports sessions hosted by athletes including Westfield Matilda's and Atletico Madrid star Alex Chidiac.<sup>48</sup>

Welcoming Australia supports the community response to the lockdown of Melbourne's public housing towers,<sup>49</sup> which includes coordinating the donation and distribution of more than 500 sports balls.

To support vulnerable families during COVID-19 lockdown measures, the Welcoming Centre commences home deliveries of pantry staples and fresh produce to more than 40 households (in Adelaide) each week.

### September

Graduation and launch of the Stronger Together exhibition for the second cohort of *Welcoming Futures* (previously Intercultural Futures Fellowship).<sup>50</sup>

More than 500 people are released from community detention and issued with Final Departure Bridging Visas. In response, Welcoming Australia coordinates housing and financial support in South Australia for more than 60 people.

### October

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, Walk Together is held online with the theme *In This Together* - a partnership with Forcibly Displaced People Network (FDPN), Iranian Women's Association, National Refugee-Led Action and Advisory Group (NRAAG) and Refugee Voices to host online actions for supporters to take in lieu of physical events.

National Unity Week, with the theme *Solidarity: Together We Rise*, encourages online events, and limited in-person gatherings where possible. The Week engages more than 20,000 people and launches a Statement of Unity.<sup>51</sup>

### December

Over the previous nine months, the Welcoming Centre disburses more than \$140,000 in emergency relief payments for recently arrived migrants and people seeking asylum who were unable to support themselves due to COVID-19.

The City of Greater Bendigo is the first Local Government in Australia to achieve accreditation as a 'Welcoming City'.<sup>52</sup>



## 2021

### February

The Welcoming Centre produces *Secret Recipes* for the 2021 Adelaide Fringe Festival with three different themes - First Nations, Ethiopian and Persian cuisines and culture.

Welcome to the Game (VIC), supported by Swimming Australia and Monash Aquatic & Recreation Centre, pilots a swim program for 15 young people from diverse backgrounds living with a disability.

### March

The Welcoming Universities National Advisory Committee is formed to guide the development of a new initiative for Welcoming Australia. Welcoming Universities seeks to establish a network that will inspire and support universities to develop a culture and practice of welcome and inclusion within their institutions, in the community, and across the Australian higher education sector.

## Welcoming Universities

### April

The Welcoming Cities Symposium is hosted at the Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney and live streamed.

A Gala Dinner is hosted at Adelaide Town Hall to celebrate Welcoming Australia's 10 year anniversary.

City of Greater Bendigo CEO, Craig Niemann after the Welcoming Cities accreditation ceremony in late 2020. Photo courtesy of the Bendigo Advertiser, 11 November 2020.

## What's in a name?

### From Welcome to Welcoming

**Welcome to Australia was conceived and named amid a political climate in which civility and our international responsibilities as good neighbours were being traded for expediency and populism.**

That the brand, and sentiment behind, Welcome to Australia even needed to exist indicates the culture of division and toxic response to humanitarian settlement, migration and visible minorities. As a name, Welcome to Australia, highlights the principle of the receiving community embracing newcomers. The name served the movement and organisation well.

Over the past ten years we have grown and evolved. Our approach is less about 'us' (everyday Australians) and 'them' (new arrivals), and far more about a collective approach. And in a country where First Nations still strive for recognition and treaty the initial welcome to Australia should be led by First Peoples and Traditional Custodians.

In late 2018, the organisation made the subtle but important shift from Welcome to Australia to Welcoming Australia.

Welcoming Australia is both aspirational and inclusive. Welcoming Australia promotes a nation in which everyone can belong, participate and thrive in social, cultural, economic and civic life. Welcoming Australia suggests, and requires, a coordinated whole-of-community approach to migration, settlement, cultural diversity and inclusion.

Welcoming Australia is both who we are and who we strive to be.

## Welcoming Centre

### The Heart of Welcome

**The Welcoming Centre (formerly the Welcome Centre) was birthed in response to the needs of young people seeking asylum who were being released from community detention.** Having sought safety in Australia unaccompanied by parents or family support, the Centre offered practical help and material aid, social connection, community dinners, volunteering opportunities, and conversational English practice. More than that, it quickly became a place of belonging amongst people who believed in their value, potential and common humanity.

The Welcoming Centre continues to provide practical support, emergency relief and social English while expanding its offering and reach to include:

- a community garden;
- financial resilience workshops;
- storytelling and cultural engagement at the Adelaide Fringe Festival; and,
- a hub for recently arrived migrants and refugees to access advice and key services.

The Welcoming Centre is frequently abuzz with conversation, food preparation (and consumption), and laughter. The activity can, however, mask the desperate nature of people's circumstances, and their desire for a better life and opportunity to contribute. Amidst the laughter, there are also tears.

While people may enter the Welcoming Centre uncertain about their future, the intent is that they would leave with a sense of support and hope.

Ultimately, the Centre seeks to model and encourage an Australia that embraces diversity and shared values - where people of all backgrounds have equal opportunity to belong, contribute and thrive.



## Welcoming Cities

5 years, 56 members, 8 million people

On March 9, 2016, more than 150 people gathered on level three of Melbourne Town Hall to hear from David Lubell (Founder of Welcoming America) and to learn about something called 'Welcoming Cities'.

We knew, at the time, that there was a need for a national network supporting Local Councils to advance welcoming and inclusion work in and with their communities. We also knew that it needed to be underpinned by strength- and evidence-based approaches and provide clear frameworks that would allow us to benchmark success. We couldn't, however, say with any certainty whether there would be broad interest in the initiative and if it would grow.

Five years on, Welcoming Cities has 56 members representative of eight million residents. We are truly grateful for the willingness of our members, supporters, funders and partners to get behind a fledgling initiative and actively contribute to its development.

In broad terms our members are grappling with one of two disparate issues, either:

- rapid growth and trying to advance social cohesion and economic participation; or,
- stagnation and decline and the challenge of attracting and retaining newcomers.

Addressing these challenges requires a whole-of-community approach. Welcoming Cities supports Local Councils as facilitators and brokers in their community to bring the rich diversity of local stakeholders to the table. A key aspect of this support has been the development of resources such as Stories of Welcome<sup>53</sup> and Planning for Welcoming & Inclusive Communities: Guidelines for Regional Growth.<sup>54</sup>

The greatest resource are the members and their commitment to collegiality and peer support. Shared learning is a powerful tool in advancing communities where everyone can belong.

## Welcoming Clubs

1000 participants, 38 nations, 48 languages

On June 8, 2019, Welcoming Clubs hosted the Inala Community Cup (Brisbane, Queensland) in partnership with local community organisations. 14 football teams and six volleyball teams competed, surrounded by more than 500 spectators and supporters. People could also participate in Zumba, rock-climbing, face painting, obstacle courses, jumping castles, basketball activities, and a community BBQ.

The event was a beautiful demonstration of community connection and support with a vast number of organisations getting behind the event, including: Inala Community House; Inala Youth Service; Brisbane City Council; Lions FC; Community Football Australia; Orienteering QLD; YMCA Acacia Ridge; South Sudanese Queensland Youth Council; Somali Community Association of QLD; Liberian Association of QLD Youth Group; and, the Queensland State Government.

The event also realised the target of 1000 community football participants across three years of the initiative's activities – highlighting the ongoing need for regular, structured and accessible community sports opportunities. The 1000 participants represent 38 nations of origin and 48 languages.

Sports and recreation clubs make a significant contribution to economic and social capital, and they have traditionally held a unique position in the community as a gathering and facilitation point for physical and community activity. However, modern clubs face complex challenges and they require resources and support to continue to be places where community connection can thrive and grow. This need informed and inspired the development of Welcoming Clubs and a coordinated framework and approach that:

- provides sports and recreation clubs with the know-how and resources to cultivate a culture of welcome and embrace diversity; and,
- supports people from all backgrounds including migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum - to access the support that is often required to participate in sports and recreational opportunities and broader community life.

# The Welcoming Australia Team

## Board

Anthea Hancocks, Chair  
Kin Ho, Company Secretary  
Brad Chilcott  
Jen Sharpe  
Kerrin Benson

## Advisory Panel

Brad Chilcott, Co-Chair  
Yamamah Agha, Co-Chair  
Celeste Shambrook  
Chris Kwong  
Fida Hussain  
Geraldine Chin Moody  
Kara Keys  
Mariam Veiszadeh  
Matt Osborn

## Staff

Aleem Ali, Chief Executive Officer  
Judy Thomas, Finance Administrator  
Kate Leaney, Campaigns & Communications Manager  
Maia Tua-Davidson, Welcoming Clubs Manager  
Sebastian Geers, Welcoming Cities Manager  
Alexandra Segura, Welcoming Centre Coordinator  
Bel Schenk, Welcoming Cities Coordinator (Victoria)  
Turkan Aksoy, Welcoming Cities Coordinator (New South Wales)  
Jane Jennison, Welcoming Cities Coordinator (Queensland)  
Jessica Scannell, Welcoming Clubs Coordinator (Victoria)

## Former Staff and Board members

*This is far from an exhaustive list. If we were to list our Ambassadors, Branch Coordinators, Event Coordinators, Partners, Sponsors, and other volunteers we would fill pages. Thank you to each and every one, you have made a profound difference to the Welcoming movement.*

Leila Stennett, Acting National Director (Apr - Jun 2014)  
Manal Younus, Assistant National Director (2014)  
Greg Lake, Act Local Director (Oct 2014 - Apr 2016)  
Kirsten Chow, Act Local Sydney Coordinator (Oct 2014 - Apr 2016)  
Elliot Keane, Act Local Adelaide Coordinator (Jun 2015 - Apr 2016)  
Hossein Sinaei, IT Support Officer (Jun 2015 - Sep 2019)  
Tina Karanastasis, Board member (Jul 15 - Apr 18)  
Leah Marrone, Board member (Jul 15 - May 18)  
Kathryn Girvan, Welcome Centre Manager (Jul 2015 - Dec 2016)  
Mohammad Al-Khafaji, Chief Executive Officer (Sep 2015 - Aug 2018)  
Helena Kyriazopoulos, Board member (Nov 15 - Apr 18)  
Anisa Leaver, Board member (Nov 15 - Nov 17)  
Kani Kenyi, Welcome to the Game Project Officer (Jun 2016 - Apr 2017)  
Kate Dooley, Board member (Sep 2016 - Apr 2018)  
Elizabeth Young, Operations Manager (Jan 2017 - May 2019)  
Carole Strong, Welcoming Centre Manager (Feb 2017 - Oct 2020)  
Eilish Maguire, Events & Fundraising Coordinator (May 2017 - Nov 2019)  
Nathan Hamilton, Welcome to the Game Project Coordinator (Victoria) (Oct 2017 - Sept 2019)  
Alice Rolls, Board member (Dec 2017 - Apr 2018)  
Alexandra McGee, Welcoming Futures Coordinator (Mar 2018 - Jan 2020)  
Kaysavan Subramaniam, Emergency Relief Coordinator (Jul - Dec 2020)

The growth of Welcoming Australia over the past ten years is testament to the daily commitment of ordinary people to extending a hand of friendship and working to ensure that people have equal opportunity to participate in community life.

## Growing Our Reach and Impact

**Over the past ten years, Welcoming Australia has become a truly national organisation in reach and impact. We have much more to achieve, and we remain deeply committed to this work.**

We are frequently humbled and amazed by the generosity of people and communities across this country. There are too many people and organisations to list and thank. If we were to do so, it would fill numerous pages. The growth and scope of Welcoming Australia over the past ten years is testament to the daily commitment of ordinary people to extending a hand of friendship and working to ensure that people have equal opportunity to participate in community life.

The people behind Welcoming Australia are not only generous with their investment of time and expertise, many also contribute financially.

Thank you to everyone who has journeyed with us this far. Your gift of time, energy, skills, ideas, goods and finance continues to make a profound difference.



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Welcoming Australia is a national not-for-profit organisation and non-partisan movement committed to cultivating a culture of welcome and advancing an Australia where people of all backgrounds have equal opportunity to belong, contribute and thrive.

[welcoming.org.au/10years](http://welcoming.org.au/10years)

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