Across Victoria, people are coming together to have values-based conversations about our asylum process and its impact on people.

We are an alliance of 13 community groups running conversations – usually with 4-6 people at a time – in our homes, workplaces, pubs, sports clubs, community centres, places of faith and public spaces.

So far, we've already welcomed over a thousand people into our conversations, hearing from people living in all 38 federal electorates in Victoria and two electorates in the ACT. Their views are presented here.

This report reveals the deep discomfort in our community about the way successive governments have chosen to treat people seeking asylum. You'll see that when we sit together and listen to the voice of someone seeking asylum, and have a conversation about their experience, overwhelmingly people are calling for a fairer asylum process and committing to take action.

Our elected representatives need to know that attitudes are shifting on this issue. Increasingly, people are looking for leaders who will advocate for a fair asylum process, and to grant freedom and safety to the men, women and children in detention on Nauru and Manus Island.

We are meeting with our elected representatives and other community leaders, and together we will keep reporting back to them as we continue to welcome people across the country into these crucial conversations in the lead up to the next federal election.

Getting on the #RightTrack to safety, freedom and fairness for people seeking asylum is up to all of us.

What happens in a conversation?

A host invites friends, family and others in their network to a venue of their choice, most commonly their home. They specifically invite people who haven’t made their minds up about the issue, and are open to learning more.

A facilitator from the local community group joins the conversation, bringing some discussion questions, two audio recordings and a survey for people to complete at the end. The survey responses give us this valuable data to report back to our communities.

Through the audio recordings, we listen to ‘Raj’, a young man seeking asylum who shares his experience of navigating the application process, and hear from a lawyer who outlines the legal process Raj and everyone else who came by sea are going through.

Conversations usually go for between 60 and 90 minutes, and provide a space for everyone to share their values, views, and reflect on Raj’s experience together.

“Every group has ended up asking the same question - why, why do we have a policy like this? People can’t fathom why such cruel, punitive and inefficient systems are in place. Everyone just seems really taken aback when they find out the reality of the situation.”

– Zoe, Greater Geelong Youth with Refugees

“So unexpected to invite a Jewish demographic to a Baptist church on a Sunday! It was brilliant.”

– Babs, Mac on the #RightTrack
Who have joined us in conversations?

1,014 people have joined us in conversations so far, with people from all 38 federal electorates in Victoria and two electorates in the Australian Capital Territory. A third live in regional communities and two-thirds in metropolitan areas of Melbourne. We’ve spoken with young adults (24% of people 18-35 years), older people (32% over 65 years) and people who are yet to cast their first vote (6% under 18 years).

What have our communities told us so far?

There is an overwhelming call for change in communities across Victoria.

- 92% want their MP to advocate for a fairer asylum process
- 93% want their MP to advocate for freedom and safety for the people in detention on Nauru and Manus Island

It’s time for our elected representatives to step up.

As a result of these conversations, a staggering 48% of people shifted their views - with some being further emboldened by what they’d learned, and others activated on this issue for the very first time.

Shifting attitudes

- 40% didn’t shift their views in the conversation
- 12% unsure if their views shifted
- 48% shifted their views because of the conversation

24 people entered conversations in support of the Government’s process. But by the end, only 7 people wanted the process to stay the same – with 17 people wanting it to become fairer in some way.

As a result of the conversations, 89% of people said they would talk to someone about an asylum process they believe is unfair.

People wanted to share what’s happening with their partners, friends and family, co-workers, community leaders, the media, our elected representatives and others who can influence the situation.

- “I know many people who don’t know much, I want to share what I have learnt.” – Conversation participant
- “Conversations can really fire some people up. They can spark ideas about taking all kinds of action.” – Terry, Gellibrand group
- “Our local MP has promised to advocate within her party ... 12 months ago we didn’t even know we could meet with our MP!” – Ale and Darcy, Jagajaga conversation group
What do we want the process to look like?

The current asylum process discriminates against people who came by sea, and overwhelmingly people in conversations are calling for change.

People want the process to:

- Have a fair review process: 86%
- Offer permanent (not temporary) protection: 71%
- Allow for family reunion after a visa is granted: 80%
- Be the same for everyone, whether they came by air or sea: 84%
- Provide everyone with access to funded legal assistance: 84%

We want people seeking asylum to have a fair chance to prove their case — that means access to a lawyer, and an independent review if their initial application is unsuccessful.

And we want people seeking asylum to be free to rebuild their lives here in peace — that means permanent, not temporary protection visas, and allowing people to reunite with their families.

“People are in a state of limbo for some 4-5 years or longer and face a great deal of uncertainty about the future. All people want is a quiet life, it’s incredibly unfair.”

- Peter, Mac on the #RightTrack

Getting on the #RightTrack to a fair asylum process is up to all of us!

We’re a growing movement who will be having thousands of conversations in the lead up to the next federal election. We will continue to bring new people into the conversation, and demonstrate to our elected representatives that community attitudes are shifting and our asylum policies need to change.

Let’s make safety, fairness and freedom for people seeking asylum a national conversation.

Visit www.righttrack.org.au/conversation to hold a conversation in your community and join the movement. It’s up to all of us!

When people come face-to-face with the fact that people who arrive by plane are treated entirely differently, they can’t believe it. They are shocked that one group of people, seeking exactly the same thing as the other, are so badly discriminated against just because of how they arrive.

- Linda, Combined Refugee Action Group (Geelong)

We pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We acknowledge these conversations all take place on Aboriginal land that has never been ceded.

Community groups holding conversations:
- Combined Refugee Action Group – Geelong (CRAG)
- Surf Coast Rural Australians for Refugees (SCRAR)
- Benalla Rural Australians for Refugees
- Bendigo Rural Australians for Refugees
- Greater Geelong Youth with Refugees (GGYR)
- Northsiders with Refugees
- Jagajaga #RightTrack Community Conversation Project Group
- Airleys Inlet Rural Australians for Refugees
- Mac on the #RightTrack Group – MacNamara Electorate
- Latrobe Conversation Project Group
- Gellibrand Right Conversations
- Wills with Refugees
- Canberra #RightTrack Group

Electorates with approx. 100 people or more in conversations: Corangamite, Higgins, Jagajaga and Macnamara (formerly Melbourne Ports).

Electorates with approx. 50 people or more in conversations: Bendigo, Cooper (formerly Batman), Corio, Gellibrand, Indi and Wills.