




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Syrian and Iraqi Refugees

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (10.04 am): Growing our economy and creating jobs is the Palaszczuk government's No. 1 priority. As Minister for Multicultural Affairs, I know that employment is a key pathway to success for members of our multicultural and multifaith communities and, in particular, our newly arrived refugees. In October I was proud to see our government show leadership and compassion when the Premier announced that we stand willing and able to accept up to 3,500 refugees fleeing conflict in Syria and Iraq. The reception of this decision has been overwhelmingly positive. Queenslanders have spoken up loudly and proudly in recent months to say that they are keen to help Syrian refugees start a new life. I am proud of the way our community has responded, and our offer to settle up to 3,500 refugees reflects the Queensland spirit of generosity.

We have had communities, religious groups, local mayors and others all speaking up to ask how they can help, and in some cases families wanting to offer rooms in their own homes. The unfolding human tragedy in Syria and Iraq reminds us that, no matter who we are or where we come from, we all share a common dream of stability, family and a place to call home. Of course that includes the dignity of having a job. Employment is not just about bringing in an income. It creates a purpose, the feeling of being a part of community and a stake in society.

As we welcome additional refugees from Syria and Iraq to our state, this provides an opportunity to focus on the need to provide employment opportunities for all refugees and migrants. That is why it is important that we work in partnership with local industries and businesses to achieve the employment outcomes we want and need to see. I was honoured to be asked by settlement service provider MDA to be a patron of their recently launched Work & Welcome 500 program. This program recognises that navigating the Australian jobs market and understanding Australian workplace culture are important in finding a job.

Workplaces signing up to be part of this initiative help to ensure that their experience is positive and supportive. Work & Welcome 500 improves future employment outcomes beyond the initial work experience because participants begin to build networks and have a reference at the end from an Australian employer. I am delighted to announce that my department is committed to being a corporate partner of Work & Welcome 500, immediately offering two workplaces within the department. We will also be working to promote the initiative across government and generate opportunities for paid work experience in Australia for newly arrived refugees.

I commend MDA for its innovation and commitment to Work & Welcome. It has been heartening to see so many schools, businesses and individuals come forward to be involved in such a fantastic program that will make a real difference to people's lives. I am not surprised by the number of people reaching out to help, because I know Queenslanders are generous of spirit and our multicultural state is one of our greatest strengths.