

Amazing year for refugees, helpers

The first year of refugee resettlement in Dunedin has been "huge" but "amazing", a Red Cross spokeswoman says.

Red Cross southern humanitarian services manager Sue Price said welcoming six groups of refugees had been "amazing" for both the former refugees, the volunteers and Red Cross staff.

The seventh group of refugees were set to arrive on Friday.

Dunedin Multi-Ethnic Council deputy chairwoman Lina Lastra said many of the earlier former refugees were interested in the different projects and groups the DMEC offered.

Ms Lastra has been involved with refugee resettlement before the first arrivals last year, having visited several of the schools attended by former refugees to teach the children about the refugee journey their classmates may have experienced.

She said many DMEC members had been involved with helping the refugees settle in and were keen to keep helping.

"So for everyone, it is positive."

English Language Partners and former Refugee Steering Group member Paul Naidu said he thought the year had gone "very well".

His organisation - which is teaching English to about 70 of the former refugees - had become "more robust" in dealing with the number of students, as new groups of pupils arrived every eight weeks.

He said the collaboration between service providers was the city's "biggest strength".

Mayor Dave Cull said the "sustained" support from Dunedin residents who have volunteered both goods and time for refugee resettlement had been a positive over the past year. He said the growing "critical mass" of Syrian residents meant there was an established community who could support incoming families.

While Mr Cull believed the city could continue supporting refugees, there were "a few issues" around housing that needed to be looked at - both for refugees and other new residents - to make sure the city could attract, support and retain people.

Ms Price said the first group of former refugees, who arrived in April 2016, were now settled in well, enjoying Dunedin, learning English, going to school and becoming part of the wider Dunedin community.

While the initial volunteer groups' advice and planning had been based on discussions with other refugee resettlement areas, they had gradually "localised" the processes.

"We've learned the Dunedin way of doing things ... It's our experience now."

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