

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES HEARING: 13 FEBRUARY 2012

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(AE12/0410) Program 4.2: Onshore Detention Network

Senator Cash asked:

I refer to an article published on the ABC News Northern Territory website which describes the St Vincent De Paul and other volunteers taking asylum seekers out of detention centres for what are described as 'dates'. What is this program, how long has it been running? What are its aims? What is the cost? What security is provided on each 'date'? What reportable incidents if any have occurred for the duration of this program and is the program being run elsewhere or considered for expansion?

Answer:

The article is referring to the Directed Persons Pilot (DPP). The DPP is designed to facilitate community based excursions for suitable clients currently in an immigration detention facility. Appropriately trained volunteers from approved non-government organisations (NGOs) who become directed persons are authorised to accompany persons in detention while they are outside a usual place of immigration detention. The Department is conducting the DPP in Melbourne, Brisbane and Darwin in order to assess its effectiveness across different client cohorts.

The DPP aims to contribute to the Department's duty of care towards the mental well-being and general health of people in detention.

Two NGOs, Catholic Care and St Vincent De Paul, are participating in the DPP in Darwin and the pilot will conclude 12 weeks after to date of the first excursion. St Vincent De Paul and Catholic Care commenced their excursions on 26 January 2012 and 10 February 2012 respectively.

Romero Centre (Brisbane) and Hotham Mission Asylum Seeker Project (Melbourne) are the two other NGOs participating in the DPP. They have been involved in many excursions since early December 2011.

To ensure the security of these excursions the following is required:

- Irregular Maritime Arrivals considered low risk can participate;
- Directed persons are trained by the Department;
- The Department conducts risk assessments as to the suitability of the proposed excursions.

Each NGO has signed an agreement with the Department which includes the provision of funding for the reimbursement of costs associated with the excursions and administration.

One reportable incident has occurred since the DPP commenced.

Expansion into a program will be considered at the conclusion of the pilot.