

STRENGTH AND KINDNESS

Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP)



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*I was a stranger and you made
me welcome ...*

Newsletter 72 December 2014

The Project aims to:

- * provide hospitality and practical support for asylum seekers
- * actively network with like-minded individuals and groups who are working for justice for asylum seekers
- * promote advocacy for the rights of asylum seekers
- * raise awareness of asylum seeker issues and concerns through a range of activities



In Australia we have a predominant narrative that surrounds asylum seekers that seems strangely unrelated to reality. We are a country of 'fair go' and 'these people' don't understand they have to wait in turn. As one person said:

I think it's the Australian thing that you give people a fair go but you wait your turn. These people are queue jumping and that's what we don't like. It's not that they were from any particular background or anything like that but stand in line and wait your turn. It does amuse me a little when they go on about the conditions of living there [in the detention centres]. They are awful and fenced in and that but the actual conditions are not bad compared to what some of them – a true refugee, would have come from.

The waiting in turn is coupled with 'and they should be grateful for whatever we give them or do to them because it is better than they would have had in their own country'. There is a curiously disembodied stereotype of people who do not actually come from a place of persecution but are just waiting for some 'line' to jump into.

In this narrative there is usually either the explicit statement or the implication that such arrivals are illegal. This perhaps explains why the practice of arbitrarily detaining people for an unspecified time (now the average is 486 days) does not evoke outrage in the Australian community. We just assume they are 'illegals' even though statistically our own members of Parliament are more likely to break the law than asylum seekers.



How can we forge a new narrative that more truly fits the facts? Possibly by constantly reminding our community that a sizeable number of these 'illegals' who should have waited their turn and be grateful to us are children, some few of whom are pictured here. *And the rest are women and men who have suffered immeasurably.*



Donations to the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project are tax deductible

There is a bill currently before the Senate and the fate of many thousands of people (plus Australia's approach to democracy) rests on the result. BASP has been very busy trying to get Senators, particularly the cross bench, to oppose this Bill.

Below is our submission to the Senate Enquiry established to consider the Bill. Thanks to Jose Simsa for her help in this.

Submission: Migration and Maritime Powers Legislation Amendment (Resolving the Asylum Legacy Caseload) Bill 2014

In opposing this Bill, we tell a story—a story that is true

S.. (an Hazara) is an asylum seeker who left persecution and discrimination in Afghanistan in the late 1990s and made his way to Australia via Indonesia to seek refuge and create a safe life for himself and his family. After being detained, he was eventually granted a TPV and found employment in Sydney.

In the meantime, his mother and siblings plus his wife and 3 children were still in danger and S.. jeopardised his TPV by returning to Afghanistan in an attempt to move them to comparative safety in Quetta, Pakistan. Because he couldn't achieve the move for his family, S.. returned yet again to Australia via Indonesia and was placed in detention for almost 3 years. Now S.. began to show signs of mental ill health due to the hopelessness of his situation and his feelings of inadequacy in securing a safe future for himself and his family. When S.. was granted a Bridging Visa, he was given accommodation in a house in Dandenong provided by the Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project. He obtained night work as a cleaner in the city centre of Melbourne. Now he could send money regularly to his family and eventually they were able to relocate to Quetta in Pakistan. Finally, S.. was able to feel he was taking the first, small, tentative steps towards a safe future for all. However, along with thousands of others, his Bridging Visa was not renewed and the employer reluctantly had to let S.. go, or face fines of up to \$75,000 for illegal employment.

NO BRIDGING VISA MEANS A PERSON HAS NO ACCESS TO WORK, INCOME, AND MEDICAL SERVICES. THE ONLY HOPE IS WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATIONS AND RELIANCE ON THE STRENGTH OF THEIR SUPPORT BASES. S.. REMAINS IN THIS INHUMANE AND DEMEANING SITUATION.

Ironically, the teenage daughter of S.., who had pined his absence and her inability to go to school, had independently made her way to Australia and reached Christmas Island. From there, she was sent to the Immigration Detention Centre in Broadmeadows. After a period of 6 weeks, she was given a Bridging Visa and S managed to find accommodation for her with an older Afghan woman in Dandenong.

The frightening aspect of this true story is that it is almost commonplace. It, and similar stories, can be seen and heard many times over. There appears to be no understanding of the enormous impact such cruel treatment has on individual human beings. The mental torture is not easily erased or treatable. Yet, despite the circuitous routes undertaken by Australian governments to offload their responsibilities, the fate of people – whose only crime is to seek refuge and peace – will remain the problem of Australia, along with all its attendant consequences.

The above story illustrates the inadequate process of TPVs. S.. is presently waiting for another visa and if it is a TPV or SHEV then neither will provide him with a permanent pathway to settlement, leaving his only prospect as lifelong separation from his family, and the same fate for his daughter.

The Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project has been working with asylum seekers since 2001 and S. is one among many men the project has supported.

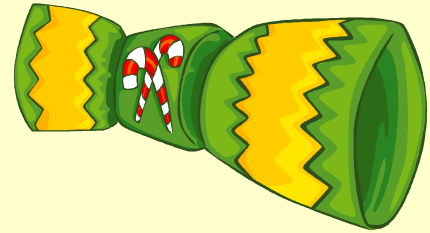


You are all invited to the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project Christmas party on Saturday 20th December.

Venue: 52 Beaconsfield Pde, Albert Park

Time: 5pm onwards

We would love to see anyone who has helped BASP or is connected to the Project in any way. It is a chance to meet other people who share a commitment to justice in this area as well as meet some of those who have been helped by the Project. It is also a chance for us to say thank-you.



You are all important to us as we try together to build a safer and more just situation for asylum seekers.



One small boy with an inquisitive face and a very lively personality recently spent his second birthday in detention. At the age of five, he has had to curb his immense energy within the small 3m x 3m room his family inhabits. And this for eighteen months.

On this birthday, he spent some time in Savers picking out three toys. There was a boat and a truck and a Donald duck. His parents said they knew he would not go to sleep for the next weeks without these toys on his bed.

And, luckily this year, he was able to spend a few hours at the beach in Albert Park. He was entranced by the sand and the shells and the water. It was wonderful to watch him come to life as the birthday progressed. He had the toy boat and he filled up the back with shells and was wide eyed then when a friend brought in a fire engine where bits actually move.

It almost seems bizarre that we have to keep asking what is being achieved for anyone - the government, the Australian community, this small boy—by continuing to keep this family in detention.

Of course, bad as this is in a detention centre in Melbourne, we have to ask even more questions about the children having birthdays on Nauru—and Christmas Island.



Australia: increasingly seen as a country that is flaunting its international obligations.

The government has sought to appease widespread public concern about the plight of asylum seekers, by claiming it has a deep concern for their safety. The conditions people are being kept in on Nauru and Manus Island clearly belie this claim.

In fact, the hypocrisy of the ‘compassion’ position has been highlighted by the government’s attitude to a proposed addition to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Australia is a signatory to that Convention. The proposed additional clause, known as the Third Optional, would allow anyone under 18 years of age to bring a complaint of violation of their human rights to the United Nations. So far, the Third Optional has been endorsed by ten nations, and another 45 have promised their support.

But the Abbott government refuses to sign on. This is understandable because more than 700 children are being held indefinitely in Australian detention centres, and the children of asylum seekers described by ASIO as a security risk, are in effect detained for life under present conditions. That would provide ample grounds for a case to be brought by the children against the government. However, that could only happen if the Abbott government signed the additional clause, and it seems there is no way it is going to.

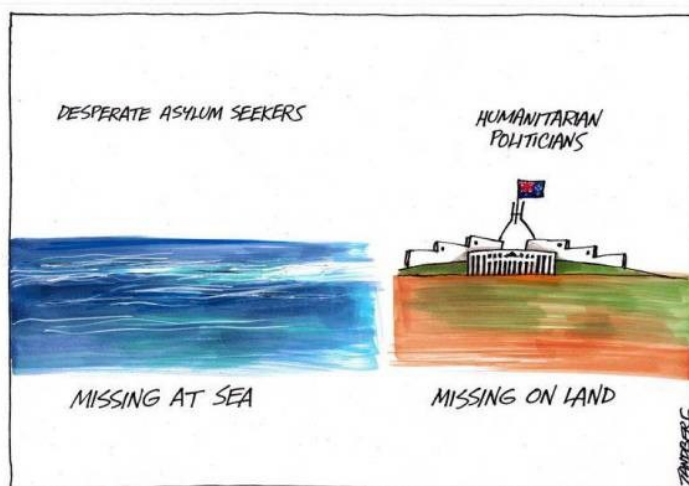
If the rest of the world followed Australia's lead in denying the right to seek asylum to people fleeing persecution, the International Refugee Convention would be destroyed.

How can Australia be acting towards asylum seekers as it is? This is increasingly the question being asked at all forums considering the displacement of people and their subsequent search for safety. It appears to UN officials and others that Australia is in total denial of its international obligations and responsibilities.

Despite many reports and critiques of Australia’s policies from the United Nations, the Australian government now wants to deny all asylum seekers a pathway to Permanent Protection. None who arrive in this country are to remain here – all will be sent offshore, even to Cambodia, one of the world’s poorest countries. The Minister for Immigration, Scott Morrison, said the critical issue is about “providing temporary safe haven” for asylum seekers.

Currently the Government is also arguing it has the right to return any asylum seekers who arrive by boat to whatever country or place they decide. Indeed, they have been sending Sri Lankan arrivals back after the most cursory of interviews for quite some time now. And this, in spite of the evidence that a number of those returned are put in prison and tortured.

Volker Turk, the UNHCR director of international protection, reminded Mr Morrison recently that the Convention is not just concerned with safety, but also with fundamental human rights, and that it requires



signatory states to ensure freedom of movement, education, access to health care and labour rights for refugees.

Morrison has argued that signatories to the Refugee Convention should have more say in defining their obligations under it – in short, that the Abbott government should be entitled to do whatever it sees fit.

Mr Turk replied that the Convention requires implementation of “fundamental principles of a standard of treatment that is adequate and dignified to the human being”, and that “this makes more sense because you need an organ that is the voice of reason above the fray of domestic politics.”

The Australian government argues “We are a sovereign body and we will protect our borders.” No one has suggested otherwise, but if the Australian government can do what it wants, so can the United Nations. And it would be entirely possible for the UN to formally declare Australia in breach of the Convention and remove it from the list of signatories.

UN officials are aghast that Australia has institutionalised mental torture on a massive scale, and facilitates the abuse of asylum seekers by sending them to places with inadequate medical facilities and an unacceptable risk of contracting malaria, dengue fever, cholera or infectious diarrhoea. They can’t believe we do this to pregnant women and newborn babies. But we do.

Family Reunion should be a right not a quagmire

Prior to June 2012, there were provisions within the Special Humanitarian Program for family reunion for those managing to get a Permanent visa, after arriving by boat. However the Expert Panel recommended this be discontinued and all applications for family reunion go through the ordinary Family Migration scheme. This automatically costs a lot more. It also takes along time. And it can’t happen until the ‘Sponsor’ here is a citizen (4 more years of anguish after getting a Permanent visa).

We know many men who are waiting for their families to arrive. Most of these are Hasaras. Many of their families have left Afghanistan and live in Quetta, Pakistan, which is possibly more dangerous than Afghanistan. Obtaining documentation and other evidence for the family reunion process is very difficult for people living in Quetta, both due to the security situation in Quetta itself (which makes travel to, from and within the province difficult) and the imperative to return to Afghanistan to obtain or certify documents. For applicants whose only adult male relative is their sponsor in Australia, arranging travel to Afghanistan will be particularly difficult and dangerous. Applicants seeking to undertake DNA or medical tests must travel from Quetta to Islamabad, a journey which is particularly risky for a readily-identifiable ethnic group such as the Hazaras.

In the meantime, the fathers who usually work in low paid jobs, have to support themselves and their family members overseas while simultaneously trying to meet the costs of visa application fees, migration agent fees and DNA tests (which could run into thousands or even tens of thousands of dollars).

The DNA tests are cruel because in a number of cases families have taken in the orphaned children of relatives and when the DNA proves they are not the biological offspring, they are rejected. We know of one man whose wife and four children will arrive soon without two other teenagers they adopted as babies. These two ran away to Iran because they did not want to cause problems. So what should have been a time of great joy after years of separation is now bitter sweet.



Books and novels on refugee and asylum seeker issues: compiles by RCOA (we will put some titles in the next few newsletters)

Fiction books for adults

Under the Persimmon Tree (2005)

By Suzanne Fisher-Staples

This widely acclaimed novel explores the relationship between a young American woman and an Afghan girl, Najmah, who is all alone in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. The story follows Najmah's perilous journey through the mountains in search for safety and refuge in Pakistan.

A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007)

By Khaled Hosseini

Set against the backdrop of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the rise of the Taliban, this novel follows the intersecting stories of two Afghan women. It provides an insight into the lives of women in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime.

The Kite Runner (2003)

By Khaled Hosseini

This novel tells the story of the friendship between Amir, the son of a wealthy Pashtun merchant, and Hassan, the son of a Hazara servant. It follows the flight of Amir's family from Afghanistan in the wake of the Soviet invasion and the persecution of Hazaras under the Taliban.

Non-fiction books for adults

The Suitcase: Refugee Voices from Bosnia and Croatia (1997)

By Rada Boric, Julie Mertus, Jasmina Tesanovic and Habiba Metikos

This is powerful collection of memoirs – including essays, letters, and poems – from refugees fleeing Bosnia and Croatia during the civil wars in the former Yugoslavia. Contributors from all ethnic groups and every region of Bosnia and Croatia describe their loved ones, their sense of community and their towns and homes that they have had to leave behind. These stories tell of perseverance, brutality, exile, and courage.

Tampering with Asylum: A Universal Humanitarian Problem (2003)

By Frank Brennan

Frank Brennan wrote this book in response to the 2001 Tampa Affair, when the Norwegian freighter *MV Tampa*, and its cargo of rescued asylum seekers, were denied permission to dock at the nearest landfall of Christmas Island. The book compares Australia's dramatic over-reaction with the response of the United States and Europe, and offers a practical blueprint for countries wanting to humanely protect asylum seekers.

The Happiest Refugee: A Memoir (2010)

By Anh Do

One of Australia's best-loved comedians, Anh Do, depicts his incredible, uplifting and inspiring life story. In his memoir he tells of his family's treacherous journey from war-torn Vietnam, surviving starvation and pirates in an overcrowded boat. He describes the pleasures and the pitfalls as he grew up in Australia as an outsider, and the struggles that his family faced. This heart-warming book captures Anh's gratitude for what he has, and his hope for the future.

What is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng (2006)

By Dave Eggers

This is the story of Valentino Achak Deng, a refugee in war-ravaged southern Sudan who flees from his village in the mid-1980s and becomes one of the so-called Lost Boys. Valentino's travels bring him in contact with enemy soldiers, with liberation rebels, with hyenas and lions, with disease and starvation, and with deadly murahaleen (militias on horseback) the same sort who currently terrorize Darfur. Eventually Deng is resettled in the United States with almost 4000 other young Sudanese men, and a very different struggle begins.

Freeing Ali: The Human Face of the Pacific Solution (2005)

By Michael Gordon

Michael Gordon was the first journalist to gain unrestricted access to the refugee detention centre on Nauru. *Freeing Ali* tells of detainee Ali Mallaie, and follows his story from Afghanistan to Nauru, and ultimately to Melbourne. He recounts the experiences of survivors of the SIEV X tragedy and the 'children overboard' saga. At a time when the Australian government was under growing pressure for a change in policy, Gordon assesses the human and financial cost of the former Pacific Solution.

Child Soldier (2004)

By China Keitetsi

This is a powerful true story of Keitetsi, a child soldier who joined the Ugandan National Resistance Army at just eight years old. Her story details the abuse she suffered at the hands of her officers and how she finally escaped to Europe to start a new life.

Now living in Denmark, she is an international campaigner on child soldiers.

Lives in Limbo: Voices of Refugees Under Temporary Protection (2004)

By Michael Leach and Fethi Mansouri

In this book, 35 refugees mostly from Iraq and Afghanistan talk directly about their quest for asylum in Australia. They provide poignant details of persecution in their home country, their journey to Australia, prolonged periods of mandatory detention, and life as temporary protection visa (TPV) holders. While the temporary protection visa regime has since been dismantled, their stories remain pertinent.

Borderline: Australia's Treatment of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (2002)

By Peter Mares

Written at a time when the arrival of "boat people" on the Australian coast was re-igniting fears of a massive influx of refugees and asylum seekers, Peter Mares examines the legal, moral, and political questions posed by Australia's treatment of asylum seekers and refugees.

Acting From the Heart: Australian Advocates for Asylum Seekers Tell Their Stories (2007)

Edited by Sarah Mares and Louise Newman

In this moving and inspiring collection of stories, poems and cartoons, fifty contributors describe how they became involved in supporting asylum seekers and refugees (to purchase, email Laura at Finch Publishing on info@finch.com.au).

Dark Victory (2004)

By David Marr and Marian Wilkinson

From two of the country's most accomplished investigative journalists, this book offers an inside account of the Tampa affair and the political campaigning that powered the ensuing crisis.

The Pacific Solution (2010)

By Susan Metcalfe

In *The Pacific Solution*, Susan Metcalfe asks how we can justify a policy that detained a total of 1,637 asylum seekers in offshore camps in Papua New Guinea and Nauru, causing undeniable damage and trauma. She brings together accounts of her own visits to Nauru, extensive interviews conducted with refugees and advocates, media reports, long-distance correspondence and new research. By engaging with the stories of people who have survived the experience and who are now our neighbours, workmates and friends, she encourages us to go beyond the labels of 'illegals' and 'queue jumpers'.

Human Cargo: A Journey Among Refugees (2005)

By Caroline Moorehead

This book looks at 'human cargo' from Afghanistan, Liberia, Palestine and many other places. Moorehead has visited war zones, camps, prisons - and the Dinka families from the Sudan who were re-settled north of the Arctic Circle in Finland. She follows the fate of 57 young member of the Mandingo tribe, who fled ethnic cleansing and ended up happily in America via Egypt.

Little Daughter: A Memoir of Survival in Burma and the West (2009)

By Zoya Phan and Damien Lewis

Zoya Phan was born to committed resistance fighters in the Karen State of Burma. Despite the civil conflict under the nation's brutal military regime, Zoya's early years were blissfully removed from the war. However, at the age of fourteen, Zoya's childhood was shattered as the Burmese army attacked and her family was forced to flee. Zoya joined thousands of refugees hiding in the jungle, before she sought refuge across the border in a Thai refugee camp. With her enemies still pursuing her, in 2004 she fled to the UK and claimed asylum, where she now acts as the face for UK's Burma Campaign.

Asylum: Voices Behind the Razor Wire (2003)

By Heather Tyler

This is a collection of first-hand accounts describing what has driven asylum seekers to flee their homelands to come to Australia seeking refuge, and detailing the traumas involved both in flight from their homes and in detention on Australian shores. Tyler also looks at Australia's perception of asylum seekers and media portrayals.

Alek: Sudanese Refugee to International Supermodel (2007)

By Alek Wek

Alek Wek grew up in the Sudan in the midst of the vicious civil war. Now, at age 28, she is one of the most sought-after supermodels in the world; as a model, refugee activist and businesswoman she is a worldwide inspiration. This remarkable real-life story sheds light on her journey from war-torn Sudan, her escape to London at the age of fourteen, all the way to new beginnings in New York. Alek's memoir is a poignant and powerful story that gives an unforgettable insight into her rise to fame and her dedication to refocus the world's attention on those she left behind in the Sudan.

Three young Somali women went to Sale. And spent time at Sale Catholic College

Ahlam shared her thoughts of each day:

26 OCT 2014

First time moving from Melbourne to stay in Sale which is a beautiful city in Victoria. Kristen (a teacher) took us for a safe drive and we arrived at Glenmaggie at about 5 pm. We stayed at Michael and Robyn's house. They were so great people; they welcome us as a part of their family and we felt so comfortable. We had a great dinner that was arranged by Robyn and we met some family members and some friends who were welcoming us as a refugees. We ended up with great tea and cake and had some good sleep.

27 OCT 2014

Second day was our first day at Sion Campus. We were so happy when first met the students from Year 7 and Year 8. Kayla was with us from the first minutes until the end. She showed many things to us and she is a super leader. When Dylan welcomed us as the oldest Australian culture that was so awesome and very nice. As refugees, he welcomed in that way was so special because through all our life we haven't met great people doing such a special thing for us. We think that is part of humanity that we felt. After that we met some Year 7 students and Michael created an ice-breaking activity which helped us to have chat with the students and break the ice and that was successful. Later on, the students asked us some questions and that was so fine.

Then we met Year 8 students and they were also nice. We were so surprised to have a great gift from them that was so special. On a card there was written "Welcome to Australia." We also met some other students from Year 8 and they didn't have any questions, but they were saying some good comments. In between that we did some shopping with Marg and after that we went to a tourist information office and people there welcomed us so much and they were so kind by giving Marg some ideas to show us around that was so terrific.

At the end of the day Michael took us to two places. First to Stratford and then on to Llowalong through to Newry before dropping into the weir wall at Glenmaggie. We ended the journey with a beautiful view up through the Macalister Valley. We enjoyed it so much and we thought we were in paradise. Hahahha! Really it was manufactured by God. We finished our day with cooking some special Indonesian food for dinner with some salad, it was delicious and we are happy that Michael liked it. In short, we are so happy and we do really respect people in Sale. They are so lovely and they deal with everyone with such humanity. God bless them all!

And so it went on— every day a wonderful time of new discoveries and new beliefs that no place on earth was as good as this—and no people as wonderful as these!

Thank you Sale for the blessing time we had.

One thing that debating the Legacy Caseload has done is make us very sure of the baseline things we believe in:

- The rights of refugees and asylum seekers must be upheld - Australia must maintain a clear commitment to the Refugee Convention and international law
- Small increases in the quota mean nothing unless permanent protection options are available to refugees
- The courts must maintain the power to scrutinize the Government's actions
- Bargaining and bartering for Senators support with offers to release selected children is unscrupulous



A MOST SUCCESSFUL FUNDRAISER

The invitation below was a hugely successful event. Friday 14th was a balmy evening and everyone enjoyed the company, food and drinks.

Robert Allanadale and his committee (hosts named in the invitation) have raised about \$45,000 for crisis accommodation for asylum seekers. Thank you so much to all the donors. The Committee aims to get a progress letter out to all donors as soon as we have established a property.

Every few days we have people who cannot find accommodation so there is a huge need.

The aim is to get some properties and make them available for people who have nowhere to go for a time until they are able to secure longer term housing. It may be possible to get houses that have been bought by developers with the intention of demolition and building new units. Often these houses are available in the period of time it takes to get all the requisite permits. If anyone knows of any such properties could you let Robert know (email: robert.a@mortgageeservices.com.au)

BASP is immensely grateful to Robert and his fundraising committee. And asylum seekers who benefit from their great efforts will be grateful too.

BASP Drinks Invitation

We are aiming to raise money for the **Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project** to provide crisis rental accommodation for people seeking asylum.

There is a specific group of people who have “fallen through the cracks” in terms of financial support for short term accommodation. These people have virtually no income, no work rights and have to rely on charity to survive.

Particularly we are seeking financial contributions for the Brigidine Community to rent a property and to purchase furniture & household goods for use by persons in crisis.

We would be delighted if you can join us for drinks & finger food on **Friday the 14th November** from 7pm to 9pm at 23 Sunnyside Avenue Camberwell, to meet Sister Brigid Arthur who runs the Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project. She will talk about the Project under the theme “*I was a stranger and you made me welcome*”.

To learn more about the Project go to <http://basp.org.au> If you can't join us but would like to donate*, banking details are:

Account name: BASP Trust Account; BSB 083 004 Account No. 56924660; Ref. “Crisisaccom”.

R.S.V.P. by **7 November 2014** to Prue Ogilvy at cogilvy@bigpond.net.au **M: 0411 876842**.

Hosts:

Chris & Rob Allanadale; Marg & David Brookes; Colleen & John Bolton; Prue & Chris Ogilvy; Jane & Peter Riordan

Good News



One of our new volunteers was asked if he had another language. He replied 'Yes, music- I play the guitar.' With that he was linked to a family with 2 children, traumatised by their extended stay in detention, who were thrilled at the thought of learning guitar. Through another contact, this story was relayed to St

Michael's School in St Kilda which immediately donated 2 new guitars. Our volunteer is also visiting a young man who is visually impaired who is loving the opportunity to learn and play music.



Geoff Lowther has distributed 283 bikes and helmets to asylum seekers in 2014. That is a fantastic effort.

Presentation College Windsor has accepted 3 sisters to attend next year. The girls, originally from Somalia have spent many years in Yemen, prior to arriving in Australia via Indonesia. The girls are among the 27,000 individuals dubbed the 'no advantage' arrivals who are in limbo waiting to see if, or when, or how their applications will be processed.

The girls are very excited about school in Australia and a new beginning.



Some classes at Xavier College (Kostka Hall) have collected children's books to be distributed to families in the community prior to Christmas. They are beautiful story books that will thrill children for whom English is a new language.



Patti, one of the volunteers in the Supporting Families through English Program, held a fund raiser in October—with the families she visits preparing the meal for the evening. The Iranian food was delightful and the evening provided a great opportunity to advance mutual understanding.

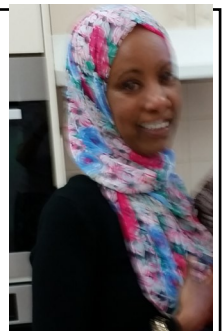
Ava Bennett from Elsternwick Primary school decided to do a collection of food items for her school project. At the same time, it was her confirmation and asked people

to donate myki cards and vouchers for supermarkets - again for asylum seekers- rather than gifts for herself.

The photo (opposite) is of Ava delivering the goods and vouchers to Sr Catherine Kelly.



Yohanni is one of our dearly loved members of the 60 Beaconsfield Pde, Albert Park BASP house. We were really excited when Johanni came in to tell us she had just received a Permanent Visa. Johanni has two children in Ethiopia so that means the (long) process of trying to get them to Australia can begin.



And in terms of family reunion we have a family whose story could well be a movie. The family from Chad are about to take another step towards being together. This time four girls of the family will join their mother and brothers. We will give a further update next newsletter.



Opportunities for asylum seekers to volunteer

Since our last newsletter, 2 Iranian women have commenced voluntary work in the office of Catholic Homes. They are enjoying this immensely and have been warmly welcomed. This initiative provides 2 way learning - for the asylum seekers to understand the working expectations in Australia and enhance their conversational skills and for the employees to meet asylum seekers and better understand the issues they are facing.

We continue to look for meaningful voluntary work for others in the New Year. Any ideas welcome!

An art exhibition and sale

Liz Gallois, a friend from St Kilda, set up an exhibition of paintings, sculptures and prints in her home as a fundraising opportunity got BASP. The actual days of opening will be just over when this newsletter is posted.

It was a beautiful experience being in Liz's kitchen surrounded by art and the warmth of the memory of Liz's kindness to an Hasara asylum seeker she befriended.

Letter writing to MP's

We had two sessions of letter writing at Beaconsfield Pde to Members of Parliament about the Bill the Coalition Government is trying to get passed in the senate. It is a most draconian Bill, from many points of view. Thanks to Kate Kennedy for launching us in this activity. It is a good way to get letters written—some good company and all the things needed to get a large number of letters written. Thanks to all who came.

Young people to the fore

One of the best ways of having the real stories of people seeking protection known and understood is personal contact. This happened when a young woman being assisted by BASP was taken into the home of a family and was invited to speak to the fellow students of a daughter of the household. Such happened with a family whose daughter is a student at Star of the Sea College in Brighton.

Star of the Sea also assisted with 3 laptops needed for students living in the community and attending local schools.

Thank you to all who made these things happen.

A true Good Samaritan

One volunteer's offer to help quickly expanded to family and friends in his local community. A mother with 4 young children needed immediate accommodation while seeking private rental accommodation. This volunteer and his community were able to house this family, as well as another mother and child and a couple of single men until alternative arrangements could be made. Their warm and immediate welcome to these people was spontaneous and generous, removing their initial panic and distress.

Country areas and enthusiasm to work for justice

As a part of BASP we have visited and talked to groups in Bairnsdale, Kilmore, Sale and Myrtleford. People in the country have been amazingly responsive and very conscious of the needs of asylum seekers and refugees. In fact, a dream could be of small communities in the country who could be supported and in turn would support each other. This has happened in places like Shepparton.

Pictured here is Elizabeth Walpole (a stalwart from Myrtleford), Brigid and Cathy McGowan, Independent MP for Indi.



How you can help with Christmas hampers...

Christmas Hampers

List of items suitable for Christmas Hampers for Families.

We would like these donations as soon as possible so that we can make up the hampers and get them delivered.

Items that would be very welcome:

Sugar, Tea, Coffee, Long life Milk, Cereal, Salt, Flour, Tomato sauce,
Oil, Flour

Canned –Tomatoes, Fruit, Green Peas, Beans (4bean mix, red kidney,
white), Chick Peas, Lentils,

Fish- Sardines, Tuna,

Rice, pasta

Drinks- especially Juices (orange, mango, apple), Milo, Fanta, Coke, etc.

Christmas treats- sweet biscuits, mince pies, sweets, chocolates, Christmas cake etc.

Toiletries-soap, toothpaste, shampoo, women and men's deodorants, shaving cream, disposable razors, after shave, body lotion etc.

Household Materials especially Dishwashing detergent, Washing powder, Toilet paper and Paper towels.

Vouchers for Coles, Big W, Kmart, Target or similar stores –These give people the independence to buy something they really want.

Socks and underwear-boys, girls, adults.



THANK YOU



We thank the people who came to help us write letters to Politicians about the Bill before the Senate. We thank those who have done fundraising for us. We thank our volunteers, particularly Libby Saunders—we could not do without her. Thanks to Phil and Sue who coordinate the Supporting families program. We thank all those generous supporter who just send us donations that means we can give to the asylum seekers who are often in quite dire need. And thanks to the Asylum Seekers themselves who never cease to amaze us with their stoicism and courage and often enough fun in the midst of it all.

A very happy Christmas to all. May this be a time when we enjoy each other and the peaceful and prosperous part of the world we live in.

And may 2015 bring a more just and kindly approach to refugees across the world and especially to those seeking asylum in Australia.

Brigid Arthur

Catherine Kelly

for BASP