

STRENGTH AND KINDNESS

Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP)



54 Beaconsfield Pde, Albert Park 3206
Ph: 96962107; barthur@basp.org.au
Website: www.BASP.org.au

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

Newsletter 84 June 2017

The Project aims to:

- * provide hospitality and practical support for people seeking asylum
- * 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

Some serious questions for our Immigration Minister

So Mr Dutton who is and what is fake? Or by definition, who and what is not genuine, or an imitation or counterfeit?

In a press statement on Sunday 21st May you asserted that there are 7500 people who are refusing to provide details about their claim for protection and that ipso facto they are fake refugees. Could we alert you to a few facts (not fake) that we have presumed you would know.

You threaten to deport 7,500 people in the Fast Track Assessment process. These are people seeking asylum who arrived in Australia by boat on or after 13 August 2012 and before 1 January 2014. You also said that if they don't get their applications filed by the arbitrary deadline of 1 October they would have their Centrelink payments stopped. You would know that none in this whole group were allowed to put in an application for protection until you gave permission for them to do so. We assume you realise that most of these people waited for up to four years to hear from you and during that time have been desperate to make such an application. And indeed the last batch of letters from your department allowing them to apply, were only sent out last October. You have doubtless seen the form they all then have to fill in—forty pages long and 100 questions and a statement making a claim that surely needs to be contexted within the framework of the Refugee convention. Only a lawyer or migration agent can do this to ensure any kind of possibility of getting a positive response.

Perhaps we should ask you to talk to the legal firms and individual migration agents doing this work for information about the long queues of people seeking help in making their applications. This whole process was made a lot worse when your government removed any financial assistance to the legal centres to give this assistance. So now it is lawyers and agents doing this on a pro bono basis. I am sure you are grateful to them for supplying this service to people, most of whom will be future citizens of this country.

So what is the reality of what is happening now? There are thousands of these people still in the queues waiting for help and you are calling them fake! Worse, you say they are 'ripping off the taxpayer' and they are 'conning' the system and the game's up. We don't like accusing you of hypocrisy but isn't this a bit much?

After all, this all comes about because of the set of punitive policies devised by successive governments including your own.



Donations to the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project are tax deductible

What is the situation with Manus and Nauru?

Manus Island

The men on Manus Island are desperate. There are between 250 and three hundred who have had negative decisions from the PNG Immigration process and they have been put back into detention and told their options are to go home or to go into a jail on either Nauru or in Port Moresby. Presumably this is an indefinite sentence!

The men who have had a positive response to their applications are to remain on Manus in the community. As is now well known, there are problems integrating this large group of men into a small local community. And again what long term hope for the future is there for these men? Australia has a deal with the US to take some of them but there is no guarantee how many it will accept, and indeed if the deal will eventuate.

A little bit of ongoing history

Late last year, the Australian Government announced that they would introduce legislation into the Parliament to deny permanently entry into Australia to anyone who had been taken to Nauru or Manus Island after July 2013. It would block these people from obtaining any visa for this country unless they were granted an exemption by the Minister. This Bill was punitive, retrospective, and in violation of major international conventions such as the Refugee Convention, the Rights of the Child Convention, and the Conventions on Political and Social Rights.

In spite of this, the legislation has passed the House of Representatives and is now before the Senate. However it has not been debated in the Senate because it was made clear to the government that it would not pass. Our understanding is that it is effectively dead (in this Parliament anyway). There is an opportunity to lobby Senators to make sure this legislation does not pass. Because the Manus Island centre is effectively being closed down, it is urgent that a humane resolution is reached about the fate of the men there and we strongly believe they should be brought here to Australia. They have suffered enough.



Nauru

At least Manus is a beautiful place—not of huge benefit to the population of asylum seekers. But Nauru is by all reports harsh and inhospitable. Nauru, a tiny, impoverished island of 21 square kilometres, or eight square miles, is smaller than Melbourne's airport. The population is 10,000. The island's interior, devastated by 40 years of



phosphate mining, is mostly uninhabitable and uncultivable. Employment opportunities are scarce, and basic services, such as health and education, are largely inadequate. The asylum seekers and refugees who are there are desperate. Journalists are still barred from entry but we have many stories of assaults and intimidation by some in the Nauruan population inflicted on the refugee population.

There are a small number of families on Nauru who have some part of their family here in Australia. Those people have not been interviewed by the US authorities. Some others have been interviewed but again there is no indication of how many will actually be given protection visas to go to America. In theory the detention centre is now an 'open' camp but in reality there is nowhere else safe to live so most live in the tents that are part of the processing centre.

What a waste of enormous sums of money (about \$400,000 per person every year) on enormously disproportionate punishments, for almost no real outcome other than suicide and despair.

Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project

Discussion Night 2 - 2017

Thursday, June 29th, 2017

Making sense of the tensions between Islam and the west and the implications for Australians of Islamic faith

Professor Joe Camilleri

Emeritus Professor at La Trobe University

Joe will also address in his presentation questions such as: Who are the terrorists? What motivates them? What is their understanding or grasp of Islam, and what of the responses of Western governments, including our own - What does the 'war on terror' imply?

We will give an update on the various ways BASP is helping people seeking asylum and also explore the needs and what further assistance is needed.

Time: 7.30 – 9.30p.m

Venue:

St Joseph's Hall

(beside the bluestone church)

274 Rouse St , Port Melbourne



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

One man's story is the story of many

Ali came to Australia by boat in 2010 and sought asylum. He was eligible for citizenship in June 2014. The Department of Immigration claims "80% of Australian citizenship applications are processed within 80 calendar days. But this is not the experience of those who originally came by boat when they make citizenship claims.



On numerous occasions Ali contacted the department requesting an explanation for the protracted citizenship application delays.

"Each time I called, the department merely advised me that my application was still in process and that I needed to wait," he said. "I asked them, do you require any documents which I have not provided. But they said no, we have all documents required. After I passed my citizenship test, they said I would be called for a ceremony within six weeks. I called after six weeks and they said I needed to wait a further six months. I waited another six months, but didn't receive any notice from them. So I called again. They repeated yet again, wait another six months. Over two and half years has gone by. I just don't know what to do."

He is one of thousands of individuals who are in a similar quandary. They have passed their citizenship tests and 80 calendar days have well and truly elapsed, but they are yet to be called for a ceremony.

In a report published last year, the Refugee Council of Australia found that the overwhelming majority of individuals experiencing citizenship application delays were refugees who came by boat and held Onshore Protection Visas. The same report also disclosed that refugee visa holders experienced not only delays in citizenship ceremony but also delays in being provided a citizenship test date.

The citizenship delay is the cause of anxiety and depression for many Hazaras in the community. The biggest factor in this is that they need citizenship status before they can apply for family reunion. Like most refugee visa holders, Ali fears for his wife's safety.

The context for all this: the attacks on Hazaras in Afghanistan continue As we write this, scores of civilians have been killed after a massive explosion in a highly secure diplomatic area of Kabul left 64 people dead and more than 300 wounded. The huge explosion went off close to the German embassy in the Wazir Akbar Khan area of the capital. And mixed messages come from the Australian bureaucracy. Until at least September 2016, DFAT had been issuing reports on security in Afghanistan indicating that the IS affiliate in Afghanistan was only of limited significance – in the face of abundant expert evidence to the contrary. On the basis of those reports many Asylum Seekers from Afghanistan were being denied protection in Australia and told it was safe for them to go back. Even after the massive IS-related July 2016 bombing in Kabul attacking gathered Hazaras, killing 80 and injuring 230, DFAT said it was just a one off event. Since then there have been several more IS-related major attacks killing a total of 120 and injuring 200, not to speak of many smaller deadly incidents. No admission yet of getting it wrong. Now Julie Bishop said she knew 3 years ago that Islamic State would be a growing threat in Afghanistan.

Maybe DFAT could suggest to DIBP that they reverse some of the flawed decisions for Hazaras where it was claimed it was quite safe for them to return home.

Mandatory Detention (which means being locked up indefinitely with no chance of review because you arrived by boat)

It is sometimes salutary to go back in history and remind ourselves how it all began. It might help to explain why Australia is in this awful black hole where mandatory detention seems to have been accepted as the norm.

Let's go back to twenty five years ago, May 1992. Two hundred and seventy Cambodians had arrived in Australia by boat over the preceding years and this had created mild hysteria in the Australian public. Before the results of an application arguing they should be released from detention was given, a law was rushed through Parliament to say "boat people" *must* be detained and no court was able to order their release. This law was accepted by both the major political parties.

The Immigration Minister of the time Gerry Hand assured the parliament that it was "only intended to be an interim measure". In fact he said that the detention would be for a limited time—may be up to 293 days. In 2004, the High Court upheld mandatory detention with not even the pretence of an upper limit, acknowledging the possibility of detention for life. A quarter of a century later, unlimited mandatory detention is seemingly immovable government policy.

Today there are still nearly 2000 people on Manus Island and Nauru and 1300 or so individuals detained on the mainland. The time span for detention varies but there are people in detention who have been there for up to eight years. As well as this, there are up to 30,000 'boat people' living on Bridging Visas in the community, just waiting to firstly get a chance to make an application for protection and then waiting for a long time for these applications to be processed.

One of the most striking aspects of mandatory detention is that the law demands each boat arrival be detained. There is no actual decision to detain. Normally Government works in such a way that decisions can be appealed or reviewed by the courts. As mandatory detention is decision-less, courts have nothing to review. Although release is now possible, it is at the absolute discretion of the minister.

Most Ministers seem unfazed by this untrammelled power but in 2008 Chris Evans, who was Immigration Minister at the time said "I have formed the view that I have too much power, I think the [Immigration and Citizenship] Act is unlike any other act I have seen in terms of the power given to the minister to make decisions about individual cases.

I am uncomfortable with that, not just because of concern about playing God, but also because of the lack of transparency and accountability for those decisions and the

lack in some cases of any appeal rights against those decisions." Senator Evans said he did not want to play God. Other Ministers have not seemed fazed by the extent of their power. As anyone working in this area will readily admit the number of times we are told by people at every level of the Immigration Department echelons 'we can't do anything—we have to wait for the Minister to make a decision.

This legislation is not etched in stone—we need to tell everyone a mistake was made in 1992 and the consequences are horrendous.



Cartoon by Eaton Fish, asylum seeker on Manus Is.

Community Sponsorship of Refugees

For years at BASP we have been wondering how to get involved in sponsoring family members to come to Australia. Wouldn't it be wonderful to assist families torn apart by distance and separation to reunite? So for a while now we have been trying to get facts about any possibility of doing this. Canada seems to be the shining light in terms of a country that has had a sponsorship scheme for some time.

Canadian Model:

Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program has allowed Canadians to offer protection and a new home to more than 275,000 refugees since its beginning in 1979.

- Privately sponsored refugees are resettled refugees. In other words, they are approved overseas and arrive in Canada as permanent residents.
- Private sponsors are groups of Canadians or organizations. Many sponsors represent faith-based communities. Others include ethno-cultural groups and settlement organizations. Private sponsors provide financial support and settlement assistance for the refugees they sponsor, usually for one year after arrival.

Privately sponsored refugees are **over and above** the refugees resettled by the government (Government Assisted Refugees). Sponsors can propose the individual refugees they wish to resettle.

In Australia:

The Community Support Programme was begun in Australia in 2013 as a Pilot program with 500 places and sponsorship had to be made through five organizations based in Vic. NSW and SA. The individuals who proposed applicants had to pay the costs associated. (\$30,000-\$40,000). In the recent Budget announcement the number to be included in this program was increased to 1000.

Unfortunately there doesn't seem to be any comfort in this budget item:

- this number of refugees comes out of the existing refugee quota and therefore reduces the government's commitment to resettlement of refugees.
- It is a very small number
- The people eligible to be part of the scheme have to be employment ready and employers have to pay quite a large bond for each person.

Tim Watts Labor MP has recently called in Parliament for increased private sponsorship of refugees from the proposed 1000 to 10,000 and has been supported by Victorian National MP Andrew Broad and Victorian Liberal Russell Broadbent.

We are just imagining how exciting sponsorship to Australia would be if it was for the families of

Ali* who came to Australia in 2008 from Afghanistan, went back to rescue his family, came again in 2010, spent ages in detention, and still suffers with poor mental health. He has a daughter who also escaped and came to Australia in 2015. He has a wife and two sons still in Quetta and he constantly worries about them because they have to live with another family and are not being treated very kindly.

Or

Sukineh who has three children in Uganda and had to leave because of political reasons

We will keep you up to date.

Trying to guess

The Immigration Department decisions continue to confound us and people seeking asylum. It is hard to find consistency or sense in some decisions.

One young man in his late 20's sought our help with finding some voluntary work, given he is in Community Detention and therefore has no work rights. His days are long and monotonous. Marian, a volunteer at BASP, found suitable voluntary work once a week where he would be able to mix with others and feel useful. He needed permission from the Immigration Department, the case manager then needed to escalate it to Canberra and he was advised he could do only one voluntary job, not a second he had sourced himself for another day.

Another young man who had a job and a rental property had his work rights and access to income support revoked when he received a negative finding for his application. Like most people, he appealed this immediately but was still without income or the right to work. BASP paid the remaining 2 months of his lease, provided some food and moved him and his 2 brothers into one of our crisis houses. After 2 months, the Department reinstated his work rights, so now he has to start again in seeking employment.

Another man has had no work rights for over a year, all of a sudden gets a letter to resume work rights while asking him to leave in 6 months. He is appealing his rejection.

A sincere thank you

A young man from the Cameroons was absolutely ecstatic because he had, for the first time, had a positive response to his claim for protection. He is still in detention having spent his last three plus years there. He had had no assistance in filling in forms or going to interviews. He said "Judy (BASP Migration Agent) rescued me". By coincidence one of our volunteers had met him in the Centre and realised he needed legal representation and we were able to enlist the help of Judy.

The joy of working

After 5 months waiting Jamir finally started his job in the public service.

What's the best thing about the job ? I asked.. thinking it was probably the money

"I have a reason to wake up at 5am every day...that makes it all worthwhile!"



School and community help with food.

The staff and students at **Bialik College again did a food drive** as part of their tradition which involves giving to others. BASP provided them with 15 family profiles, to give the students a more personal perspective in their donations and extend their understanding of the range of nationalities and people seeking protection from their homelands. The students bought goods according to the family composition and covered the boxes of each donation with drawings for 'their' family. Many thanks to Helen and Josh and their team at Bialik.

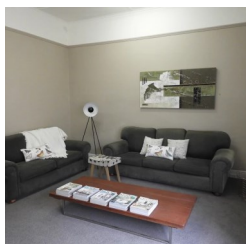
The food donations from parishes, schools and community groups continue to arrive and replenish our food store and for this BASP is most grateful. We are seeing more and more people without any income. Some have flown in and sought asylum and are in the process of applying for financial assistance. Others are in the appeals process for their protection visa and have income support and /work rights withdrawn. Each fortnight two food runs deliver food from our food supplies, plus fresh vegetables and fruit from Second Bite. These are provided to vulnerable folk unable to get to BASP. Others come to the centre to collect food when and as needed.

Housing and increasing demand.

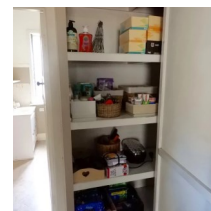
BASP has been inundated with requests for housing for people facing homelessness. Amidst this deluge, we have been fortunate.

Robert Allanadale and his committee are seeking ongoing support from the group who have so generously enabled us to provide crisis housing over the past 3 years.

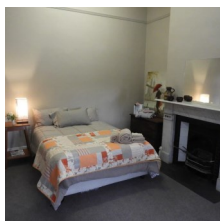
We have also had a very generous benefactor purchase a house for BASP's use. This will become available in mid-June.



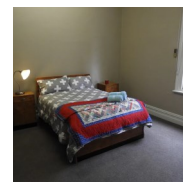
We could fill these places many times over, so we were delighted when St Columba's College in Essendon offered us the use of a house for 2 years. This has been fully furnished in 2 weeks with many donations - from St Columba's school community, donations to BASP and a wonderfully generous fundraiser from Clonard College in Geelong. The



staff at Clonard heard we had two new houses to fill so they had a fundraising drive and purchased things like rice cookers, mixers, microwaves, pillows, hangers, kitchen, laundry and bathroom items- all so necessary for a household. Cathy and Jan from St Columba's co-ordinated all the donations and did a



remarkable job in pulling it all together. Their flair for making a house a home surpassed all expectations, including a robe and matching slippers for each of the 5 young women to be housed there. Five moved in over three days, one from Saudi Arabia, another from Iran, another from Tibet, one from Pakistan and the fifth from Ethiopia. They were thrilled with their new home - and so welcome



after sharing with strangers in dormitory hostel accommodation. The photos tell the story of the care that has been taken to make this a truly welcoming home.

Many of the referrals come from case workers at Red Cross or Life Without Barriers. Once recently we were sent this message: "Thank you so much for your assistance with this couple in assisting them with accommodation. Your organisation is amazing and so supportive of our clients, we cannot thank you enough as you help us to focus on getting them an income by providing relief housing while they are without any financial support." BASP can only do this through the amazing community support it receives.

Despite the increasing demand, it is also pleasing when people can move on from the BASP housing to greater independence. One couple with their 2 year old was in emergency housing for 7 months due to long delays in getting any income support and work rights. As soon as these were approved, they found a flat to rent and have moved into it, searching now for work.

A single man from Nigeria was housed for 3 months when he was facing homelessness. He then secured a meat packing job on the other side of town so was able to find a share house nearby. Two other couples have taken over the leases of houses originally taken out in BASP's name to ensure we secured the properties.

We have between 115 and 120 people currently in accommodation that BASP has organised. We could fill another ten houses right now if we had them with people who are either homeless or on the verge of becoming so.



Asylum Seekers'
COMEDY
BENEFIT

★ **DAVE O'NEIL, SAMI SHAH,** ★
MR BARRY MORGAN,
MONICA DULLARD MC,
DENISE MCGUINNESS,
FRED ROWAN & MANY MORE!*

*LINE-UP SUBJECT TO CHANGE

DOORS OPEN 6 PM	ST KILDA TOWN HALL	FRIDAY JULY 28 2017
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TICKETS & DETAILS:
TRYBOOKING.COM

 **basp**
Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project

 Proudly supported by
the City of Port Phillip

Trivia night



St Marys School, 5 Hayward Grove Hampton, Vic.3188
Friday 11th August 7.30 pm

You are invited to make tables of 8 or come and join a table



Palm Sunday walk

An amazing amount of energy had gone into preparing for the Palm Sunday walk—and then it rained—a lot. Not as bad as was forecast but it was very wet!



In spite of this, the walk was a good success. It was very encouraging to see so many people turnout. We estimated the crowd was 4000 -

5000 ... all undaunted with rain coats and beanies and placards!

It was fantastic to see so many different groups represented, including the Mayors of the Cities of Yarra, Darebin and Hobson Bay.



Thanks to Paul Dunn for the photos.

A real hero

Mohamed, one of our asylum seekers works in maintenance around Melbourne. A few weeks ago when working near the Victoria Market he saw a man suddenly fall down onto the tram tracks.

Mohamed quickly raced to the man's side. The man had no pulse or breath!

As he had learned in his first aid course, Mohamed immediately assessed the situation and began CPR resuscitation. And he continued on for the five minutes it took the ambulance to arrive.

By that time Mohamed found a weak pulse and the man was breathing. The ambulance officers then whisked the man to hospital and he made a successful recovery from a heart attack.

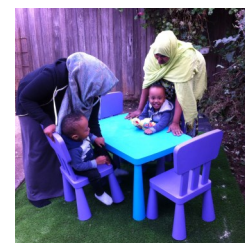
Thank goodness Mohamed did the First Aid course.....through our friends at MultiSkills Training.

Life outside is better

An example of our wonderful volunteers

Joady, one of our volunteers was asked to assist a single mother with twin boys to get to a health appointment. This was done and they all connected well. She and her sister happily agreed to assist the mother - and through this, the boys - with English.

As often happens, other benefits emerged. The 2 innovative sisters wanted to enable the boys to spend more time outdoors. So they tidied up the backyard and made it more appealing for the boys to play, laying some artificial grass. They also happened to come across a kiddie table and chairs that were being put out in their area and voila! the backyard was transformed, the boys loved it and so did the mother.



Letter writing

BASP has just begun a group where people can come to write letters to Members of Parliament about the various issues facing asylum seekers. These sessions will be held at 54 Beaconsfield Pde, Albert Park. At the present time these will be on Wednesdays and Fridays from 10am till 12pm each week. If you are interested in being part of this please contact Rita Hayes at rhayes@basp.org.au . Rita will have all the things you need to write the letters.



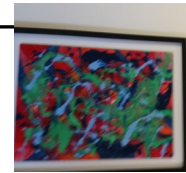
Fr Pat Negri sss

Fr Pat Negri sss worked at St Francis Church in the city among other places. He died late last year. Pat was an artist and after his death, his twin brother, Michael, ‘unearthed’ over fifty of Pat’s paintings, many unframed. Michael prepared them all for sale.

Pat had a long history of support for refugees and it was his wish that all proceeds from the sale of his art works be donated to BASP.

This has happened and we are very grateful to the Negri family. We remember Pat with affection and respect.

Pictured here is a painting by Pat that was bought by a kind person and donated to us and the second by another artist which Pat used to have in his office. He asked that this painting of Christmas Island be given to us.



On March 26, 49 people seeking asylum, Brigid and Libby had a wonderful day at Hanging Rock, where a picnic and friendship was provided by 2 church groups in the Macedon area, RAR Macedon and Hobson’s Bay Support group.



Gordon, the bus driver from Hannon’s Busline, was to pick us all up at Spencer Street. A detour meant we needed to walk couple of blocks to connect with him, with Brigid looking somewhat like the Pied Piper. The welcome by the host groups was warm and generous, we were blessed with a good day and the families enjoyed it all- the walks, the space, the kangaroo, the llamas and the delicious food provided. The buzz and smiles by all in the bus on the way home was a joy to behold. Feedback included “It was wonderful, especially loved by the kids”, “thank you for this amazing time”



A beautiful little book by MemFox—’I’m an Australian’ with a beautiful child who is herself an asylum seeker waiting to be an Australian!



Again the Friendship Through English program shows how families connect and share outings together.

The first thing he said was ‘all the stars are aligned today’

He could hardly stop smiling. He had just arrived almost non-stop from Christmas Island having been released two days before. It was nearly nine o’clock at night a week or so ago and he was in a strange city, and he had only ever been in detention centres since he came to Australia four years ago. As well as Christmas Island, where he had spent most of that time, he had been in Darwin and Yongah Hill (north of Perth).

He communicated with a supporter he had met in Darwin via Facebook. Nearly three years ago he had appealed to the AAT (an Appeals Tribunal) and his case was again rejected. He appealed to the Federal Court and the Minister conceded the case and sent it back to AAT. Since then, until quite recently he was waiting for date of next AAT.

Because he was always afraid in the detention centres he spent most of his time in his room. All of his interviews and appeals have been done by video links. He only has a Bridging Visa after all this time and hopes to get a barrister who will represent him in the Federal court. This man is a thirty year old from Vietnam and he has spent four years inching his way towards this crossroads. We are hoping he will be given some reason to continue smiling.



Things we need

Sugar , flour , tinned tomatoes, tins of fruit, Tuna (plain), Long life milk, tea and coffee, cheese, biscuits, honey, noodles.

Toothpaste and shampoo

We seemingly never have enough washing powder, cleaning products and toilet paper.

Cooking oil is also always welcome.

Quite a number of families have small children, so **disposable nappies and wipes** are an ongoing need.

Vouchers are really appreciated eg. for Coles, Big W, Kmart or similar stores; this allows individuals and families the independence to buy something they really want and need.

Other needs

Fitted sheets, flat sheets blankets or doonas for single, double or queen beds, towels, new pillows (because most used pillows are somewhat stained).

We could do with lawn mowers as it is helpful to have one in each house. These need to be workable as our folk are often not very technically astute!

Fines

One of the things that happen more often than we would hope is that people get parking fines (sometimes because of an inability to understand the signs - one family saw Clearway after 4pm and thought that meant you didn't have to pay after 4pm. Other get fines that are very unlucky—one young man was moving a friend's car from in front of one house to two doors down. One of the young men we help had his Centrelink almost halved because they claimed they had overpaid him and he had money deducted for traffic fines as well. A kind person who heard this story helped pay Centrelink and now our friend has some chance of survival.

For anyone wishing to make a donation, the Project Bank details are: Brigidine Asylum Seekers Trust Account: bsb: 083-004; a/c: 56-924-6603; NAB.

Please put your name on the entry and if possible send us a message so that we can send you a receipt. This could be a text message on 0438 001 515 or an email to jcaldwell@basp.org.au.

Thanks once again for the support that you give BASP. Every bit helps. The story is told of the little sparrow lying on its back with its feet up in the air. A large and important looking rooster comes along and inquires what the sparrow is trying to achieve. 'The chickens down the road told me that the sky was about to fall in, and I'm doing my bit to hold it up,' replied the sparrow. 'What' asked the rooster, 'do you think a little twerp like you could possibly do to keep the sky from falling in?' The sparrow replied, 'One does what one can.' That's what we are all doing and we confidently expect that in the end, good will triumph.



Brigid Arthur

Libby Saunders

(BASP Coordinators)