

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 91 February 2019

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

The ironies are too much to bear

In Malcolm Turnbull's infamous January 28, 2017 phone call with US President Donald Trump, Turnbull, assured the President that there was nothing to fear from the 1250 refugees on Manus Island and Nauru if Trump honoured the deal to resettle them.

It is not because they are bad people, the Prime Minister said. It is because in order to stop people smugglers, we had to deprive them of the product. So we said if you try to come to Australia by boat, even if we think you are the best person in the world, even if you are a Nobel Prize-winning genius, we will not let you in.

Our present Prime Minister and all the senior Ministers of the Government now claim that rapists and murderers will be coming to Australia if those requiring urgent medical care are allowed to come to Australia as a result of the Medivac Bill. (At the same time assuring us that the US will continue to take these same people from both islands.)

And the problem about the Bill—it will restart the people smuggling business. And Australia will be inundated with people seeking asylum. The irony of this is that more people are arriving by plane seeking asylum than ever came by boat.

The Minister for Home Affairs, Peter Dutton, wrote in a twitter that *the Bill takes decisions about medical transfers out of the hands of Government and gives it to two doctors in Australia, who most likely will never have met the people on Nauru or Manus. Don't forget, the changes mean people can be transferred even just for assessment.*

In a democracy the rule of law protects the rights of citizens, maintains order, and limits the power of government. This Bill was passed by a majority in the Parliament and, as a Minister, it is Mr Dutton's obligation to enact it. It is hardly revolutionary to ensure that asylum seekers (human beings) be assessed by experts (doctors).

Actually the Minister has been making life determining decisions for these same people without ever seeing them!

The truth matters and the good of individual people matter. Both seem casualties in the present playing out of our chaotic immigration policies and practices.

What we do know is that people who try to find asylum in our country are often not helped by Immigration authorities and more often than not are actually harmed by Government policies. This is in spite of the fact that thousands in the community do what they can to offer support and extend compassion to those asylum seekers they meet.

The current government rhetoric is ugly and shameful.

Donations to the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project are tax deductible

For those who have long enough memories, the present time is feeling like 2001.

Remember ‘the children overboard’ who were never overboard? Remember being ‘spooked’ by the Tampa that was never allowed to land with its desperate passengers pleading for help from one of the wealthiest nations in the world?

And the subsequent story of human beings stranded in both off-shore and onshore prisons with successive governments justifying this in terms of border security? If you keep repeating a lie often enough, people believe you!

Slogans versus facts

They are “illegals.” First, no one is an “illegal person” and seeking asylum is recognized as a universal human right. Current international agreements about asylum stemmed from a desire not to repeat the fate of Jews during the Second World War, who were denied entrance to many countries. And one requirement for asylum is to be physically present in a country in which you are seeking asylum, which is exactly what these men, women and children from the Middle East, and other countries are trying to do. In fact, it is illegal to dismiss asylum seekers without hearing their cases.

We cannot afford them. Many people believe that Australia cannot afford to take in refugees. This is false. The majority of the world’s refugees live in poor or middle-income nations. Eight out of 10 of the world’s refugees are sheltered by developing countries. In 2016, for example, Turkey, Pakistan and Lebanon hosted the highest number of refugees, a combined total of 5.4 million refugees. Of the 15 million refugees worldwide, 86 percent reside in developing countries. By contrast, Australia, one of the wealthiest countries in the world, is allowing only 17,000 refugees in each year. We can afford it.

They are mainly criminals. Claims that these off-shore asylum seekers are virtually all criminals, that this exodus harbors terrorists from the Middle East, are unfounded. Are there a few criminals somehow mixed in? No more than with any other group in the past and that would include the immigrants who came to this country in the last 200 years: Italians, Irish, Germans, and on and on. People fleeing Somalia, for example, are mainly women and children, facing some of the worst violence, inequality and corruption in the world: criminal gangs, rape and persecution, on top of poverty.



And the truth matters

Scott Morrison says he didn't put any children on Nauru. However after holding them at sea for a month, Morrison, then Immigration Minister, sent 157 Tamil people, including around 150 children, to Nauru in 2014.

Peter Dutton says he didn't put any children on Nauru. However in 2016, Dutton, then Immigration Minister, did his best to return baby Asha to Nauru. The baby had been born in Australia, sent to Nauru with her parents, accidentally burned in a tent they lived in and brought to Brisbane for treatment. It was only pressure from medical authorities and the general public that made Mr Dutton agree to release the family into community detention.

Everyone is entitled to their own opinion but no one is entitled to rewrite the facts.

The impending election is an opportunity to break the cycle of ‘using’ asylum seekers

We have already had elections in 2001 and 2013 run (and won) on ‘stopping the boats’. We sincerely hope that such divisive and inhumane politics wont happen again in 2019.

BASP Discussion Night 1 – 2019
Wednesday, 27th March, 7.30 – 9.30 pm
At St Joseph's Hall 274 Rouse street, Port Melbourne
(back of bluestone church)

Arnold Zable, acclaimed writer and friend of Behrouz Boochani who wrote No Friend but the Mountains, will speak about Manus Island and his interactions with men on the island

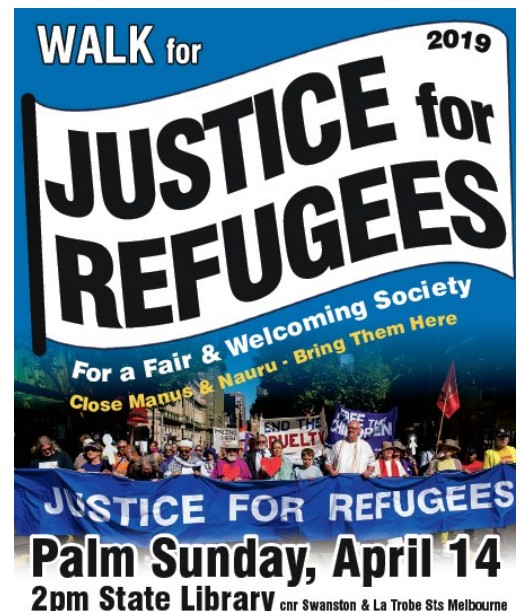
There will be an update on BASP and the general situation for asylum seekers in Australia.

Why it is important to walk for justice

Particularly at this time as an election is looming, we need to deliver the message to all politicians that we want a fair society that welcomes refugees.

The tremendous community support for the #KidsOffNauru campaign has been effective in getting nearly all children and their families off Nauru. However, unfortunately, Australia's treatment of refugees and people seeking asylum remains punitive and unjust:

- * More than 1000 people are still languishing on Nauru and Manus, most of whom have been processed and recognised as refugees.
- * The USA has only provided selective resettlement (over 400 so far) for certain refugees from PNG and Nauru. Australia needs to take responsibility to find alternative, safe and permanent places for those refugees the US does not take.
- * The Australian Government is neither processing nor offering protection to the children and their families brought here from Nauru, who are placed mostly in community detention – so their uncertainty continues, which impacts on their health and well-being.
- * The Australian government still refuses New Zealand's offer to provide permanent protection for some of the refugees on Nauru and Manus Island.
- * Nearly 300 people continue to be held in on-shore detention centres – some have been held for more than 10 years.
- * Over 40,000 people are still on Bridging visas in the community, some waiting for years on their protection claim being processed
- * More than 1000 individuals in 2018 and 6000 more in 2019 face destitution in our own communities as the government withdraws basic income, case management and torture and trauma counselling support to people seeking asylum, many of whom have difficulty getting full time employment, having been denied the right to work for many years.
- * Even though eligible for citizenship, many people granted refugee status and permanent visas continue to wait for unreasonable periods, making it more difficult for them to feel secure and settled.
- * The Government actively separates families: husbands from wives, parents from children, siblings from each other. Families belong together.
- * The Government is continuing to deport people to danger, and thousands of people live with the threat of deportation
- * The Australian government continues to effectively deny many refugees permanent protection and access to family reunion.



Housing and Emergency Relief Crisis

Readers of the BASP newsletter know that housing has been a constant issue and need. However the constant requests being received daily is greater than ever before.

This is in part due to the government ceasing payments to people for a range of reasons, including those waiting for 2-3 years for a hearing in the Federal Circuit Court. Many of the people also have their work rights cancelled so they have no way to be self-sufficient, even if they were able to be so.

The agencies involved with asylum seekers are at capacity.

This is why BASP is developing a strategy to seek additional funding from donors in order to meet some of this demand. One mother of 2 children chose to return to Ethiopia saying “Even if I am in prison, someone will care for my children and they won’t be on the streets of Melbourne.” How has it come to this?

Other examples of people seeking help

- ◆ a couple from Pakistan with a pending Federal Circuit Court Case hearing. No work rights, no money, both have contributed a lot to the community, wife having cancer treatment
- ◆ A mother with two adult sons, one with Acquired Brain Injury and cancer and the other needed for help to interpret, manage transport to hospitals and other places; this family managed to get small income for three months.
- ◆ A mother with two sons, a fifteen year old at a special school and a twenty-one year old, no work rights and no money at least until October 2020 when a Federal Circuit Court case is scheduled.
- ◆ A Tamil mother with a two year old, with husband in immigration detention
- ◆ A Pakistani mother with a six week old baby and issues with domestic violence

The list goes on and on. There are some common elements even though every person’s situation is unique.

- ◆ Waiting for a Federal Circuit court case. These are being set two years or longer ahead. And during that time people generally do not have work rights and have no income.
- ◆ Family breakdown (due probably in part to the trauma and insecurity of the process).
- ◆ Having work rights but finding it impossible to get work or getting casual work that is very inconsistent.
- ◆ Health issues—including mental health problems.
- ◆ Being released from Immigration Detention with no money and no accommodation—and no work obviously.

This is what prompted us in our December newsletter to ask for support in providing housing and emergency relief to people. The response before Christmas was extremely generous. It enabled us to continue the level of support we have been giving.

However, we believe we need to double the cover we are offering and that, if we can raise about \$650,000 a year, we can do that. It sounds a lot of money but it is the difference between a roof over people’s head or homelessness and destitution. **A number of our supporters give regular donations via direct debit. Large or small amounts are really helpful.**

Visa applications, air arrivals and distortions in the system

Asylum seekers arriving by plane: In 2017-18, there were zero applications for asylum from people arriving by boat, while there were over 27,931 from people who arrived by plane. This figure set a new record for asylum seeker applications in a year yet notably has provoked nowhere near the outrage of lesser number of boat arrivals over previous years.

In his December 2018 article, Abul Rizvi, posting on respected former diplomat and senior public servant John Menadue's website, argued this large number of plane arrivals is caused by a crisis in our overseas visa processing system. The problem starts, he argues, with the huge backlog in processing visa applications. Figures provided in a Home Affairs Migration Program report also reveal visa applications in many categories as at June 2018 well exceeded the number of places, sometimes by a factor of between 2 and 4 times.

People are therefore unable to get their application for protection considered and hence are entering Australia on visitor visas and then applying for the visa they really want. Over 24 per cent of net migration in 2017-19, almost a quarter, was people arriving on visitor visas then requesting to change their status.

Source countries of applications from air arrivals: The Department of Home Affairs describe a large portion of these as unmeritorious, driven largely by citizens from China, Malaysia and India, and more recently, Vietnam, and only very small numbers of these are successful (eg 2 % of applicants from Malaysia).

Due to the backlog, there is a massive increase in the number of people on bridging visas (BVs). These are given by the Department when it cannot process applications quickly enough. Over the period 2014-2018, the number of people on BVs grew by almost 100% from 107,191 to 194,875.

The backlog is also felt at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT), where Rizvi quotes AAT data that the backlog is increasing at a net rate of 1600 per month.

The increased flow of asylum seekers by air reflects a tweaking of strategies used by people smugglers as they adapt to Australia's punitive policies on boat arrivals. The trend to air arrivals reflected in the data means citizens of those countries *most in need of asylum* have little or no chance of seeking it.

As well, citizens of countries like Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Myanmar, Pakistan for instance, have little or no access to Australian consulates where they might lodge an application, be granted an interview, and given a visa to enter Australia.

The extent to which the number of applications *so far exceeds the number of places* available also reduces the chances people *genuinely in need of asylum*, should they actually be able to get to Australia in the first place to exercise their human right to seek asylum, might be offered a place.

- Based on an article by [Abul Rizvi](#) who has been a senior employee of the Immigration Department and currently doing a PHD on Australia's immigration policies, December 2018.

What's happening with the people who were brought down from Nauru and Manus for medical treatment?

Over the last two to three years, about 800 people have been brought to Australia from Manus Island and Nauru for medical reasons. In many cases lawyers had to bring cases to the court before people were actually allowed to come. These have included both families and single people. They are being brought into most Australian capital cities (Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth).

As at 8 January, 2019, 450 people remain on Nauru and about 600 men on Manus Island. The majority of those are recognised refugees and a very small minority are failed asylum seekers.

After the trauma of years of detention on Nauru (up to 5-6 years in some cases), many asylum seekers are excited to arrive on shore. They may have high expectations of life in an Australian city. When they arrive, they may find themselves in a situation with poor housing, no work rights, no access to education and training, nor to services. In many respects their situation has not improved radically from Nauru.

Some people are put in closed detention centres or in hotel rooms under guard on shore.

Normally this is for some few weeks and then they are put in community detention.

Community detention is still cruel.

Individuals and families in community detention have a house and a very small income provided. They are free to move about in the community as they choose so they have relative freedom. However, the adults have no work or study rights. They have to report regularly to Immigration authorities. Their children under the age of 18 are allowed to go to school but older children, 18 and over, are not permitted to enrol in any formal education or training and hence are at a loose end.

One family arrived here recently having spent 5 1/2 years on Nauru. They have 2 daughters aged 15 and 18. The 15 year old has been allowed to attend school from the start of the 2019 school year. The older daughter is not permitted to enrol in formal education or training. However she is going to River Nile Learning Centre in North Melbourne, a wonderful place supporting women with opportunities to engage in learning when other doors are closed.

Limited support is provided to help families like this one to settle in to life in Melbourne.

And all the time there is the threat (repeated many times over the past few weeks) that all those in this situation will be returned to Manus or Nauru.

And what happens to those still on Nauru and Manus?

These are still in limbo. Among these are 87 stateless people (from Immigration Department figures).

It is totally untenable to keep people in such a state of fear for years and years. We must keep the pressure on those who have the power to change this to act. As the 1986 Nobel Peace Prize and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel said:

"We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Wherever men or women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must – at that moment – become the centre of the universe..."

Our Australian community will never be able to say "We didn't know".

Citizenship delays

An audit of citizenship applications and conferrals conducted by the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) shows that the Immigration Department's processing of citizenship applications was neither resource-efficient nor time-efficient, causing significant delays for people waiting on a response to their citizenship application. The rate of processing for people who arrived by boat are considerably longer than for anyone else—but all are incredibly long. Hakeem al-Araibi, the soccer player detained in Thailand, had filed for citizenship and may not have been in the situation he was if the delay had not been so long.

As a footnote to the reference to Hakeem, Mr Morrison said he was horrified to see that Hakeem had leg restraints when he was taken to the Bangkok court. Does he know that all those detained in Australian detention centres are in handcuffs when they are taken anywhere outside the centre. People go in handcuffs to the hospital, the dentist, appeal hearings—indeed they are not allowed to have the handcuffs removed when they go to the toilet!

A young man 'A' drove to Canberra and back this week because he needed to provide proof of his identity and it is necessary to go in person to the Afghani embassy to get a copy of an Afghan identity card called "tazkiras" [taskera]. This man has been in Australia since 2010 and has been unfortunately in a small group who never got a chance to be considered within the usual asylum seekers cohort. His identity has been questioned because even though his father got a taskera from Afghanistan it was not stamped. A stamped document is only available if the person is present in Afghanistan—obviously impossible if the person has left the country to seek protection elsewhere.



Identity is a major issue for most applicants at present and extraordinary reasons are given for questioning identity. All that officials need to say is that they don't believe what the applicant is saying—for example that their parents died or that they lived in a particular place. They seemingly don't need any evidence to back up such assertions.

Employment initiative

In conjunction with Jesuit Social Service BASP plans to trial a Workplace Employment Pathways Initiative. This involves providing 3 weeks subsidized on the job training for entry level positions such as cleaning and factory jobs

Financial assistance is available for an employer to take on a new employee to provide on-the-job training and experience.

If you know of any potential employers that might want to participate.... please contact us.

Jobs needed

Dej is a very experienced and skilled driver with more than twenty years' experience driving for various international consulates in Ethiopia . He has gained a full Victorian drivers licence and has trained in mechanical maintenance. Anyone who knows of a driving or mechanical orientated position - full time or part time - let us know.

Three people have got White Cards which will be very useful finding a construction job.

Several women are seeking cleaning jobs—domestic or commercial.

Success

Two of our guys have been employed at a timber yard - on a full time basis.



Many in BASP circles know Sadou. He has returned to a country in Africa (not the one he left to seek protection in Australia). The family had been separated for some time. Sadou writes:
A lot has been happening since I have moved to here, first, I found Mariama and the kids are very well, Amina has turned 2 on the 3rd of February, we had a little celebration a week after the actual date as both Amina and Abdou were sick on that day however it was a nice little party and we had lots of fun.



I have spent most of the past few weeks taking Abdou (who only has few English words left in his vocabulary but has completely switched to French) to school and other activities and playing with Amina who had no idea who I was

Sadou has lived in Australia for several years, has a Permanent Visa here and is reflective about the whole refugee issue. His perspective on what is happening in various African countries, is interesting. He tells us that ‘people on the move’ is the norm in African countries. As most of these countries have been colonised by various European nations, there is a lot of unrest because there is no opportunity work, study or even visit Europe. And the colonisers have made and keep making money from the places they occupied!



Isa, a young man from Uganda, has been in Australia now for a few months. He has been living in Richmond in a house provided for BASP by Cabrini Outreach. Just recently he has moved to live in a church based property in the western suburbs. He can ride his bike to work. He is excited by the fact that he is learning all manner of new things at work and he says he is most happy when he is at work.

He was very moved when he was introduced and welcomed at Mass and the congregation clapped and were very welcoming after the service. He said ‘I feel like I’m home now’.

Isa at the zoo. He went with a volunteer, John, and another asylum seeker.

Summer Holidays

The Bayside Refugee Advocacy and Support Association - donated money towards outings for people over the summer holidays. Families and a few individuals were delighted with the opportunity to have an outing as a treat.

The Melbourne Zoo was the most popular but there were also tickets for the Werribee Zoo, pool and Bounce. The tickets allowed the parents the dignity of giving their family a day out and also gave the children something to talk about on their return to school. Greatly appreciated by all involved.

Lifesaving Victoria also offered a day at Port Melbourne Beach for fun and Safety tips to people seeking asylum. It

fell on one of the few wet days of the summer but was greatly enjoyed by the 20 who participated- from very young to a



grandmother. The safety information was great- and so important for people not used to beaches.

As in previous years, BASP was fortunate to receive a donation from a group of German women currently living in Australia. They create beautiful items for a German Christmas Market each year and BASP and Very Special Kids are the beneficiaries of their proceeds. Many thanks to Goesta and her team.





Michael arrived with little English having run a training college in his country. He learned English and studied a Certificate 3 in Aged Care. He then found casual work in an aged care facility in Oakleigh which was a long trek from Broadmeadows, especially after late shifts.

He followed up a lead from L'Arche, an international federation of faith communities where people with and without an intellectual disability share life together. Michael met the others in the household and moved in around Christmas. He looks so happy with this move and reports that he feels they are all family and are learning from each other.

In 2014, a scared young woman came to BASP having fled the Taliban and needing housing. She had just completed her medical degree in Pakistan. BASP introduced her to a wonderful family who took her in, incorporated her into their family and supported her through the many hurdles of seeking asylum as well as meeting the Australian Medical standards. She and her Aussie mum came to celebrate with us in December. She has a permanent visa and she is a doctor at a Melbourne hospital. How fortunate she has been to have this family!



Celebrating

The CAV (Colostomy Association of Victoria) continues to provide meaningful voluntary work and 'Australian work experience' to a number of people seeking asylum.

The latest recruit sent this message: 'Hello Libby, I just want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to volunteer at CAV. It's the best thing that ever happened to me everyone there is so lovely. And I'm actually working it's just been 1 week but I learned so much already. Every moment here is so valuable. I just wanted to update you about my days.'

St Joseph's Malvern has a group of volunteers who visit families in the Werribee area. They sent this update. One of 2 sisters they have been visiting married a man she met on Christmas Island. The volunteer visitor was asked to be the bridesmaid at the wedding. They now have a daughter who is almost 1 year. Financial hardship continues but their daughter is a wonderful gift.

They also sent this, with a request.

Two other sisters of the Congolese group have permanent residence in Australia. The older one is guardian as their father died before they came to Australia and their mother returned to the Congo, summoned by her employer, in 2014. She has not been heard from since. The younger one completed VCE in 2018 and has been offered a place in Architecture at RMIT. She has deferred for a year to try and secure a scholarship as well as a job so she can save some money. She is hoping to get a job in the office of an architect/s to gain some experience. **If you know of anyone who could help her achieve this goal, please let BASP know.** A wonderful achievement for her as it is the most 'sought after' architecture course in Melbourne.

The group, Befriend a Child in Detention, provided some beautiful books and toys which they had as surplus to be distributed to families. Some of the children who donated the books also wrote letters.

One letter read:

Hullo!

My name is Dimi. I am 13 years old and I live in a small place called Kurrimine Beach. Even though I will never fully understand your situation and emotions I just want you to know that you are very brave and inspiring.

Keep your head up high and stay strong.

Good luck.

Asylum Seekers - getting on.

Generosity comes also from those seeking asylum. Two young men assisted by BASP on arrival in Australia are now working and living in private accommodation. In mid-January, 3 large boxes of non-perishable food arrived by mail- as contribution to our pantry for other asylum seekers and as thanks for the help they received when they needed it. Another young man, now settled and no longer in need of help from BASP, came to discuss what help could be given to women who were isolated in their homes in the Dandenong area. He was directed to Wellsprings also a part of Kildare Ministries and a multicultural neighbourhood house as a first point to pursue some solutions.

BASP has received some funding to assist with helping people seeking asylum to be 'work ready'. This includes pre-employment training such as getting a white card for construction work and a forklift licence and buying the required work clothes. Julie, who works with BASP helps people in this process. Here she is with Haile preparing for the white card.



BASP also hosts a Christmas Party as a way of thanking our supporters and showing hospitality to some of the asylum seekers we house and assist. We are assisted in this endeavour by more goodwill - drinks supplied by Francis and Phil, salads prepared by staff of Clonard, the KM school in Geelong and the bbq run by some Afghani friends of BASP.

It was a happy occasion as usual and lovely to watch a newly arrived family from Nauru meeting up with people also from Nauru who have been here a couple of years - reducing their isolation to some degree.



Christmas seems a fair while ago, but BASP was again heartened by the good will of many in the community.

The hamper preparation and delivery to over 90 households are always a busy time pre-Christmas. St Finbar's East Brighton arrived with 80 hampers ready to be distributed.



Phil and volunteers from St Finbars

Noelle, our volunteer who oversees the food pantry every week, co-ordinates the hampers and did an amazing job in having these all ready to go. We thank all involved including the many drivers who took them across all of Melbourne in late December.

Responses from some of those who received a hamper:

Thank you so much for kids' gifts and food. Love you. God Bless you.

Thank you to help you! and my child love you Miri Christmas and happy new year

What a beacon of hope and love through action! So very blessed by your kindness, support and generosity.

Thank you – plus 15 smiley emojis :)

We are happy because you and your group send gift for my family yesterday, we were surprised yesterday. Thanks for send gift and thanks for make happy time for my family yesterday.



Four years ago, a young Afghani lad turned 18 during year 12. The government ceased payments and housing immediately and he was bereft. A man in his 80's took him into his home and supported him as he finished school and got work. This young man is now moving to Wagga to undertake a university degree, having worked and saved to embark on this next phase. What a wonderful support and springboard this opportunity has been.

During the holiday, a father of a family who live in the country rang asking if there was any way his wife and nine year old son could come to Melbourne so that the son could have some holiday (an away from the two small siblings)! They came to spend a couple of days with the Brigidines at 52 Beaconsfield Pde.

From the father on behalf of his wife and nine year old son:

Dear Sister,

For Tara and Arya It was really a big treat to spend a weekend with you and sisters in Melbourne, I don't know how to thank you adequately for all the trouble you took to make their stay there so pleasant and memorable. I can see they enjoyed your help and hospitality to their heart's content.



Their weekend stay with you gave both of them a golden opportunity to talk so many interesting things and to come still closer to each other as very close and sincere Mother and Son.



Besides enjoying the Aquarium, visit to the Melbourne museum and Luna park was really exciting memories.



We could return your generosity with praying for you and hope

Blessings Upon you ,Sister you were always in our hearth but now we even got feeling like we have mother here even if we are both far from our mothers.

We would like to share with you some of our memories as photos, please see them in attachment files.

BASP Volunteers are simply amazing.

John, a volunteer of many years, continues to assist us most weeks in collecting and delivering furniture. We don't know what we'd do without him, his ute and his trailer!

Where possible he is assisted by one of the men seeking asylum who either does not have work rights or has not yet secured work.

A Pakistani man in this situation has been a great help in recent times - not only assisting John but also helping maintain the garden in some of the BASP houses.

Margaret Fyfe, a Brigidine Sister who was part of the initial group that established BASP, is now working with us for two days a week.

Occasionally, we get very good news. A few days ago, a woman who fled to Australia because her husband disappeared, got an email from him. She had been in Australia with her children for nearly six months so the relief was extraordinary. The nine year old son's response was "Good—now my Dad will be able to help with my Maths homework". While there are a few giant steps to take before that, it is wonderful to see a family with renewed hope.

Food is being distributed very quickly at present. We have a lot of calls.



Sugar , flour , cooking oil, Cans of fruit

Long life milk, tea and coffee, cheese, honey, noodles, basmati rice, dates, jam

Gladwrap, tinfoil, pegs for hanging out washing,

Sweet and Savoury Biscuits, Snacks for school lunches, Salt and pepper, Spices: coriander, cinnamon, ginger,

Shampoo and Conditioner, Shaving Cream and shavers, Toothpaste. Soap, deodorants

Toilet paper

We seemingly never have enough washing powder, dish washing detergents and household cleaning products.



The only canned food we need at present is canned fruit. We have enough tinned soup, beetroot and corn.

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.

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.



Dear Everyone,

Thanks for all your help. Christmas was a wonderful time for us. It was a chance to say 'Thank you', a time to have a party and a time to build up our bank account from donations.



We are indeed anxious at this time that the vitriol that is being expressed about asylum seekers by our political leaders will lead to an even more polarised response within the Australian community. Indeed over the eighteen years of BASP's existence, asylum seekers seem to be even more than ever being used for political purposes. We are incensed that such disregard for people who have done nothing to deserve such treatment, is being perpetrated by leaders who must know better.

Brigid Arthur

Libby Saunders

(BASP Coordinators)