

Heart and Hope

A History of the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project

2001-2018

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

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Preface

We would like to acknowledge and pay respect to all the asylum seekers involved in this Project who have shown so much courage and compassion as they experience the ongoing trauma of not having control over their own destiny in the long wait for protection.

In particular, we would like to thank the asylum seekers whose stories are referred to, where appropriate under pseudonyms, in this history.

We pay homage also to the hundreds of people in Melbourne and across Victoria who have worked so willingly as BASP volunteers, without whom the project could not do the work it does. Thanks also to the many generous sponsors who have ensured the financial viability and independence of BASP.

We would also like to acknowledge and thank the members of the former BASP Committee and Council, and current members of the new Board, who have guided and assisted the Project since its inception in 2001.

Thanks also to BASP staff who have assisted us in maintaining the day-to-day running of the project.

We thank Ursula Groves, the author of this history, for her research and dedication and Delia Bradshaw for her input and support.

Finally, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Brigidine Community and, more lately, Kildare Ministries for their steadfast support, without whom this Project would not have existed.

This history is important because it documents stories of courageous asylum seekers and the generous response of many in the Australian community.

The image shows two handwritten signatures in dark ink. The signature on the left is 'Brigid Arthur' and the signature on the right is 'Libby Saunders'. Both are written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brigid Arthur and Libby Saunders
BASP Coordinators
March 2019

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1. Introduction

This history outlines the evolution and development of the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP or ‘the Project’) over the last 18 years since its beginning in 2001. It traces BASP’s response to Australia’s increasingly cruel and chaotic policy regime for asylum seekers. It demonstrates how ‘listening with a heart’ to asylum seeker needs and how ‘working to maintain hope’ can make a big difference, both to the lives of individual asylum seekers and in shaping community debate around this important issue of social justice in Australia.

Born out of the Brigidine tradition of education and empowerment, BASP 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; and
- raise awareness of asylum seeker issues and concerns through a range of activities.

BASP emerged from the social justice outreach work of the Brigidines in the 1990s in Victoria. In ‘discovering’ that there was a regime of mandatory detention of asylum seekers operating in Australia, and that there were asylum seekers living close by, the Brigidines decided to respond. As outlined in this history, their response, which in time became the Project, demonstrates two things – a humane, practical response to individuals and families in need and a defiant advocacy response to their treatment in Australia’s name.

Since the Tampa incident in August 2001, which is explained briefly in the body of the history, the Project has employed a unique approach to meeting the immediate needs of people caught up in Australia’s immigration detention system. This approach is based on strength and kindness, the Brigidine motto, and a desire to gladly receive strangers and make them welcome.

This history also documents key elements of Australia’s official approach to people seeking asylum over the following two decades, whether those people came here to seek protection by boat or by plane. The Australian Government’s approach could perhaps best be described as a ‘start, stop and start again’ approach, a series of policy ‘about faces’, accompanied by an increasingly cruel and inhumane regime of policy and treatment. *Heart and Hope* shows the significance of a values-based, community-oriented approach, one that has been key in providing a friend to people seeking protection as well as challenging the assumptions of the Australian policy framework.

Eighteen years after the Tampa incident, it is timely to detail the work of the Project to ensure a record of its work; to document the effects of some of our country’s actions; to acknowledge the plight of many asylum seekers, and to acknowledge the work done by the many people involved in the Project thus far.

The views in this history reflect those of BASP itself and have been derived largely from BASP newsletters, published continuously since 2001, and interviews with key project stakeholders undertaken in 2017 and 2018.

Who are the Brigidines?

The Sisters of Saint Brigid (Brigidines) were founded in Tullow, Ireland, by Daniel Delany, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin in 1807. Daniel Delaney said he was refounding the ancient order of Saint Brigid, which existed from the fifth century, and named Saint Brigid as the patroness of the new congregation.

The story of Saint Brigid clearly captivated his imagination and provided the inspiration for this small group of women he was asking to leave their families and work for the impoverished local people.

Why Saint Brigid – then and now?

One of the informing stories about Brigid is that one day when she was still in her father's house in Munster, a nobleman came to the house for dinner. Food was prepared for the nobleman and his retinue, and they were made welcome. Five pieces of bacon were given to Brigid to prepare for the feast. At that moment, a "very hungry miserable hound" came into the house. Brigid saw how starved the dog was and fed him a piece of the bacon. He immediately brightened, wagged his tail, and asked for more. She of course gave him the rest of the bacon. Miraculously, when her father came for the platter of bacon, all five pieces were present. The nobleman, who had watched as Brigid fed the hound, was so moved by the miracle of abundance that he offered the bacon to the poor of the region.

What would Brigid tell us at this time of global uncertainty? Maybe that there is bacon for the hound, and bacon for the ones who are coming for dinner. She may tell us to be community, to help one another welcome the strangers both within and without. Brigid may remind us that hospitality is central to our tradition and that it should inform all human interactions.

What do Brigidines do?

Initially, Brigidines established primary and secondary schools in Ireland then Australia, New Zealand and USA. More recently while continuing in the ministry of education, they have also moved into a variety of other pastoral settings, working particularly in areas where injustice seems to be the cause of oppression and denial of human rights.

In the late 1960s, sisters went to Hohola, Erima and Kiunga in Papua New Guinea and subsequently to Zambia, Kenya and Mexico in the 1970s and 1980s.

Some Brigidines from across the Congregation moved to minister for specified periods in new lands, in collaboration with other congregations – in Africa, Iceland, Latin America, Bangladesh, the Philippines and China.

The future for Brigidine ministries?

The Congregation was never large – about 800 women in the 1960s and now about 180. The age profile of the present Brigidines and the fact that there are no new members means that the active involvement of Brigidine Sisters is coming to an end. However, the work will continue through others, and currently the aim of the Brigidines is to support these individuals. In 2011 the Congregation Forum concluded:

The Congregation, in partnership with others and through the ministry of individual Sisters will continue to engage in justice initiatives, such as working with **asylum seekers and displaced peoples, and in anti- human trafficking and eco-justice initiatives.**

And recently, the Handbook of the Congregation, February 1, 2019, included the following:

The 2018 Council of the Congregation described this time in our history as a threshold time, a time of loss and also a time of opportunity. Never before have we had to ask the questions we now ask with such seriousness. Yet we approach these questions with a genuine sense of trust in our purpose and our mission.

2. Project start-up: The why

While the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project more formally came into being around the time of the Tampa incident in 2001 – a critical turning point in Australia’s history of migration that is explained later – its genesis was a lot earlier.

Since the 1980s the Brigidines in Victoria had convened two discussion groups, the Justice Group and the History Group. These two groups consisted of Brigidines and people with similar concerns and values. The purpose of the groups was to identify issues of concern in the community, to conduct research and analysis and to bring that analysis to one or both groups to decide on what actions would be taken. In the 1990s the Justice Group identified people seeking asylum in Australia as an issue needing attention.

The early steps were tentative, partly because so little was known of the existence of people seeking asylum in the Australian community at that stage. Who were they, where were they and what were their needs? The Brigidine Community first became involved in providing a house for an El Salvadorian family near the Springvale Enterprise Hostel in Melbourne. It was thought that other people asylum seekers were also living in the Hostel. This was 1992 and many of the people there came from South America. The Brigidines, with their educational focus and expertise, thought they might be able to help by teaching English.

They started working with a small number of people from the Hostel when they disappeared from the Hostel without warning. Subsequently, some of them were found to have been transferred to and detained at Villawood in Sydney and others at Port Hedland in Western Australia. The Justice Group was made aware, for the first time, that people without permanent visas were being detained under a ‘mandatory detention’ regime instituted in Australia in 1992 by the then Labor Government of Paul Keating.

Towards the end of the 1990s, the Brigidines stumbled on the fact that there was a detention centre in Maribyrnong, Melbourne, later called the Melbourne Immigration Detention Centre (MIDC), and that asylum seekers were also being detained there.

Visiting the Maribyrnong detention centre

An early attempt to visit people at Maribyrnong was fruitless as names were needed to get access to individual people. Fortunately, one of the Brigidines, Sister Marie O’Kelly, met a cousin of the cook at the Maribyrnong centre. Through the cook, they elicited a list of names of refugees detained there. The list also contained each detainee’s nationality and their educational background. Looking at this list, Sister Brigid Arthur decided to target two Pakistani men who had professions, one an engineer and one a journalist, in the hope that they might have some English. Before she got the chance to try to visit them, she most unfortunately became a victim of a random assault, leaving her with a broken hip. During her convalescence she started writing to these two men, sending them some reading material and asking if they wanted visitors. When Sister Brigid was able to, she paid her first visit to Maribyrnong in 2001 to meet the engineer, the journalist having since been deported to Pakistan.

Her first visit was revelatory; the engineer told Sister Brigid that she was the first person from the outside world he had met in five months in detention. After a few more visits, the engineer requested that Sister Brigid ask to visit a young boy, also from Pakistan, who had arrived at the Centre and who was then in a bad way. This young boy, whose name is Ghulum, was in his early 20s at the time. He had been sent by his parents to Australia to learn English and to remove him from what they considered a school/madrassa environment in Pakistan where he was in danger of being radicalised.

He had arrived in Australia by plane on a valid student visa. Under-confident and frightened, he chose not to attend the course, hid himself in a hotel room until the money ran out, and then found work in a pizza shop. He was eventually picked up by Immigration officials and taken into detention at Maribyrnong. He became the first of many people who, over the last 18 years, the Brigidines and BASP have assisted to find their place in Australia and to become enthusiastic Australian contributors.

It was not a simple process.

Sister Brigid and others worked with Ghulum to get him out of detention and to settle him into the community. A lot was learnt about Australia's asylum seeker policies and processes at the time, and about the needs of asylum seekers integrating into the Australian community and how these needs might best be met. In August 2001, the Brigidines were able to get Ghulum out of detention on a Bridging Visa, on the payment of a bond of \$3000. This process was possible because he had arrived by plane, rather than by boat, an arbitrary distinction that had crept into Australian asylum seeker policy of this era, and which still endures. On his release, Sister Brigid realised that they had to look after him, with many others to follow. (*Sister Brigid Arthur interview, November 2017*)

Through ongoing visits to Maribyrnong, Sister Brigid, with the help of others, was able to secure the release of a further 16 people through the payment of bonds, later refundable, providing no problems arose. This process only applied to those who had a valid visa on entry. As the cost of the bonds escalated, this strategy had to be abandoned. The Government subsequently discontinued this approach.

Realising that funds would be needed to support people in detention and in the community, Sister Brigid and another Brigidine, Sister Margaret Fyfe, came up with the idea of asking the members of the Brigidine Community to consider donating \$1/day per person to provide a source of funds for this work. There was an enthusiastic response, providing support for the early stage of the Project. Sister Margaret left Australia shortly afterwards, for an overseas posting, and Sister Catherine Kelly joined Sister Brigid in the shared role of joint BASP Coordinators, effectively informally launching the Project. There was no formal Project launch. Sister Brigid describes the process as, "it just dribbled into existence"! (*Sister Brigid Arthur interview, November 2017*)

In order to clarify nomenclature, while Sister Brigid Arthur is called Brigid by many people, and she has no real preference in most situations, for the purposes of this history, it has been decided to refer to her, and other Brigidines, with the name Sister, as a mark of respect.

There was no formal Project launch. Sister Brigid describes the process as, "it just dribbled into existence"!

3. Early days of BASP (2001-2002): Establishment of direct services to asylum seekers

A primary aim of the Project has always been the provision of hospitality and practical support for people seeking asylum in Australia. While BASP services have developed over time, and are continuously changing, two major factors drive these needs. Firstly, the nature of the different groups and individuals fleeing their own countries determines what services are needed. Secondly, service needs change as a direct result of changes in the Australian Government's policy response to people arriving in Australia, by boat or by plane, to seek asylum.

From the beginning, the Project has reflected its commitment to the gospel message, "I was a stranger and you made me welcome". It embodies the Brigidine values of strength and kindness.

Ghulum's case in 2001, highlighted above, demonstrated the need to provide temporary accommodation for people released from detention into the community. At the time, a house owned by the Brigidines close to the convent at Albert Park became vacant when tenants moved out. Sister Brigid successfully requested that the Brigidine Community make that house at 60 Beaconsfield Parade available for asylum seekers in desperate need of temporary accommodation. It can house up to six people at a time and has been used continuously since 2001 for that purpose. At this time, it was used to house men straight from the detention centre. In time, it became a women-only house.

It was established early on that the Project would only support those people who do not have other options to help them get on their feet as quickly as possible. People who have stayed at BASP houses have not usually had to pay rent. In the main, they have received some small

financial support until they are able to get other assistance or earn money. Once they begin to earn their own income, they move out of the house, making accommodation available for someone else.

From the start, Sister Brigid and Sister Catherine played complementary roles.

One need identified at an early stage was to understand Australian migration law and policy. Sister Catherine undertook a Migration Agents' Course and, in doing so, became certified to act legally on behalf of people seeking asylum. Her knowledge of immigration law was critical to the Project, as it enabled her and others to understand and help people navigate the system.

Sister Brigid's main focus in the beginning was to continue to visit the Maribyrnong detention centre, identify people in need, provide support for them in detention and work with others to get them out of detention.

An early communication to the Victorian Brigidines in 2001

The last couple of weeks have been busy establishing the house at 60B Beaconsfield Parade. The Albert Park community has been very hospitable and welcoming to the first person to be released because we have provided accommodation, food, transport etc. Ghulum is a young man from Pakistan, 25 years of age. He has been released on what is called a Bridging Visa E which does not allow him to work or study, and he has to report twice a week to the Department of Multicultural Affairs.

His case is before the Federal Court and in the next few months he will either be deported or allowed to stay in Australia on a Temporary Protection

Visa. This will enable him to work but not to leave the country or bring any of his family here, and at the end of three years he may still be ineligible to stay long-term.

Like all people who are just released from what is effectively jail, he is sometimes elated and thinks his release may turn out to be a dream, other times he is depressed and scared because the future is very uncertain; he sometimes feels guilty because others are still detained. All those who have been through this experience are going to need a lot of support.

Brigidine communities have responded generously – we have about \$1800 from our communities and promises of more. Cheques can be made out to Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project and sent to Brigid or Catherine at 52 Beaconsfield Parade, Albert Park.

We will be establishing a Committee to organise the project and a Support Group who will offer practical assistance both to those at 60B and perhaps also to detainees and others who have been released. Our aim is to network with other groups doing something of the same work. Already we know those people working in the area are overwhelmed with the need and are delighted with our beginning project.

If anyone is interested in assisting in either of these ways, would you please let Brigid or Catherine know?"

Support structure for BASP

Sister Brigid and Sister Catherine were not working alone. There was an increasing awareness and concern in the Australian community that asylum seekers were being detained in detention centres around the country. Mandatory detention was emerging as a 'political hot potato'. Other Brigidines and many supporters and volunteers from the community were also part of BASP from the early days. Around this time, a BASP Council (at first referred to as a Committee) was set up to support and advise the Project. One of its early tasks was to establish the aims of the Project.

In 2001 they agreed that the Project aims were 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; and
- promote advocacy for the rights of asylum seekers.

This Council, chaired by Delia Bradshaw for much of this time, continued to assist the Project for the next 18 years, providing a reference point for priority setting, decision making and governance. At times the aims of the project were revisited and discussed.

In December 2012 a fourth aim was added which is to:

- raise awareness of asylum seeker issues and concerns through a range of activities.

These four aims continue to guide the Project today.

In the latter half of 2018, BASP became incorporated and adopted a new governance structure. It became part of Kildare Ministries and a new Board was set up to replace the former BASP Council. (*See Acknowledgements for membership of the Council and Board*).

Over the years, with the support and input of the BASP Council and its members, the Project has at all times tried to remain flexible and nimble, consciously trying to avoid many of the pitfalls of bureaucracy and administration often associated with a more formal organisation. This flexibility has emerged as a key success factor. While the new legal entity for BASP provides a solid structure for the future, the hope is that the Project will continue to operate in the same agile manner as it has always done.

4. The impact of Tampa

In 2001, just as the Project was coming to understand the immigration system existing in Australia at that time, two significant events occurred within a couple of weeks of each other that would have long term implications for Australian immigration policy.

The following report of these events draws directly from the BASP newsletter of September 2002, one year later.

The first event

On 24 August 2001, a sinking boat carrying 438 asylum seekers, mainly Afghans and Iraqis trying to reach Australia from Indonesia, was rescued by a Norwegian tanker, the Tampa. Instead of being taken to Christmas Island as per the prevailing policy, the Tampa was asked by the Australian Government to take the people back to Indonesia. The Norwegian captain refused on safety grounds. After a standoff of three days, the asylum seekers were taken off the Tampa and transported by the Australian Government to the Pacific island of Nauru.

The second event

On 11 September 2001, the world watched as the twin towers in New York, USA, were destroyed in a terrorist attack which had world-wide impact then and still does. John Howard, Liberal Prime Minister at the time, used this event to link national safety and autonomy in arguing against an influx of asylum seekers, an argument that was supported by the Labor Party.

For subsequent years, and to this day, these two events have significantly shaped Australia's asylum seekers policy.

The impact and consequences

Immediately following these two events, in October 2001, two further boats, labelled SIEVs (Suspected Illegal Entry Vessels) by the Australian Government, arrived. The first boat, SIEV 4, with 436 people on board, mainly Iraqis, became embroiled in a Government allegation, subsequently shown to be false, that children were being thrown overboard by these asylum seekers. The people on SIEV 4 ended up on Manus Island, a remote island in Papua New Guinea (PNG), for many years. On the second boat, SIEV X, 353 people, including 150 children, died, drowned at sea. There were 44 people who survived.

The arrival of these two boats of asylum seekers became clouded in accusations based on misinformation and lies. The Australian public was left divided and confused after the first of them, and largely in the dark over the second.

The discourse in the media and in the political world was changing quickly. The vilification and demonisation of asylum seekers had begun. Anti-Muslim prejudices were being stoked and human rights, not just the right to ask for asylum when fleeing persecution, but the rights of children under the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, were being routinely flouted in Australia, in the name of national security. For those in BASP and many others in the community, including other groups and individuals directly supporting asylum seekers, it was a totally new 'ball game'. There was now a strong need to engage in community debate and political advocacy on behalf of asylum seekers and their rights, at the same time as continuing to support people in need.

5. Post Tampa Phase (2002-2018): The policy and political context and the response by BASP

This period can be divided into three stages. These stages roughly equate to the impact of changes in government policy according to which party was in power, and to changes made by the people incumbent in two key positions: that of Prime Minister and of Immigration Minister.

These changes in policy are important, as one of the major concerns of asylum seekers is understanding how changes in government policy affect them. From the point of view of the Project, one of the key frustrations is the 'start, stop and start again' nature of changing government policy, often caused by an election resulting in a change of party in power, or a change within the political party in power, including a change in Prime Minister or Immigration Minister.

During this 17-year period there were two changes in government and six changes of Prime Minister. There were also numerous changes of Immigration Minister, and many changes to the title of that role.

BASP has evolved largely in response to these changes in government and policy. The history of the Project documented in this history reflects the impacts of:

- **Stage 1:** The Howard Coalition government during the period 2002-2007 (this government was in power from 1996): Coalition governments in power in Australia for most of the duration of this project and consisted in each instance as a coalition of the Liberal and National Parties, with the Prime Minister having always been from the Liberal Party.
- **Stage 2:** The Rudd/Gillard/Rudd Labor Governments of 2008-2013, and
- **Stage 3:** The Abbott/Turnbull/Morrison Coalition Governments of 2013-2018 (this government was still in power at the time of writing of this history).

BASP has often had to change tack along with each change of government. The Project has also had to retrace its steps a number of times, as policies which had previously been abandoned by one government have sometimes been reinstated by another.

At all times BASP remains nonpartisan and does not shy away from challenging the inhumane practices of any government.

BASP has often had to change tack along with each change of government. The Project has also had to retrace its steps a number of times, as policies which had previously been abandoned by one government have sometimes been reinstated by another.

Stage 1: 2002-2007

The Howard Coalition Government – The policy and political context

The first use of offshore detention on Manus Island and Nauru

Australia began the process of offshore detention of asylum seekers arriving by boat as an immediate response to the Tampa incident. This was the start of a policy called 'the Pacific Solution' of pushing responsibility for people arriving by boat and seeking asylum away from Australia onto nearby countries willing to house detention centres. Nauru and Manus Island in Papua New Guinea were used for this purpose for the first time in 2001. From 2002 onwards, under the Coalition government, a process of dehumanising asylum seekers began with the direction to stop referring to people by name, using only their identification number. Eventually almost all the people from this period who were not resettled elsewhere, for example New Zealand, were brought to Australia and given some form of visa. Most of the resettlement occurred under the Howard Coalition Government but, for some asylum seekers, this dragged on for many years and was only finalised in 2007 after a change in Government, to the Rudd Labor Government.

Use of Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs)

Permanent protection is the achievement of the right to residency and a necessary step on the path to citizenship. It is the positive outcome of an asylum claim. Prior to the introduction of Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) in this era, all successful outcomes of asylum claims had resulted in permanent protection.

Under the ongoing government policy of mandatory detention, asylum seekers arriving by plane, who were not immigration cleared, were incarcerated in detention centres on the mainland. On being released into the community, most people were given Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs), for three years in the first instance, even if their claim for refugee status had already been accepted. Compared with permanent protection, which had previously usually been awarded, TPVs are a harsh alternative, as they prevent access to family reunion or travel rights outside Australia. Of the more than 11,000 people receiving a TPV in this period, eventually 95% were given permanent protection. (*Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law – Website, 29 May 2017*)

Compared with permanent protection, which had previously usually been awarded, TPVs are a harsh alternative, as they prevent access to family reunion or travel rights outside Australia.

Stage 1: 2002-2007

The BASP Response

Networking and advocacy

While BASP had always sought to broaden engagement of the community in asylum seeker issues and concerns, the immediate post-Tampa environment demanded a new level of influence and coordination. With the introduction of offshore detention, the Project engaged in calling for those on Nauru and Manus Island to be brought to Australia. It did this both independently and with other groups and organisations.

In order to ramp up and better coordinate the efforts of the various service providers in Victoria and to amplify their advocacy efforts, Sister Brigid and BASP helped set up the major service group Network of Asylum Seeker Agencies in Victoria (NASAVIC), which consisted of the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre (ASRC), the Hotham Mission (now Lentara Uniting Care) and BASP. This group continues to meet and has grown to include many other service providers.

As new advocacy groups have emerged BASP worked with them and supported them. These included the Refugees Advocacy Network (RAN), the Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA), the Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce (ACRT) and the Australian Refugees Advocacy Network (ARAN). BASP continues to work with new groups as they emerge. While these groups attract people with diverse backgrounds, they all share the same basic philosophy and values when it comes to 'how you see people and how the body politic in Australia works.' (*Brigid Arthur interview, November 2017*)

Typical activities engaged in by these networks, aside from direct services to refugees and asylum seekers, include lobbying politicians of all parties and seeking to call them to account, organising and conducting public rallies and other forms of protests, and giving voice to refugees and asylum seekers in the public arena. In conjunction with network partnerships, a number of significant letter-writing campaigns have also been initiated by the Project.



Palm Sunday Rally



A lobbying visit to Canberra by the Brigidines

With the introduction of offshore detention, the Project engaged in calling for those on Nauru and Manus Island to be brought to Australia.

Education and awareness raising in the Australian community

Community education took many forms, including the highly informative BASP Newsletter and website, regular public forums, guest speakers and discussions in schools and with community organisations, the support of art projects such as films, theatre and exhibitions. The newsletter contained stories, policy shifts, BASP activities, current events and ethical reflections.

An example of the range of topics covered in the public forums can be seen below. Each forum was addressed by a specialist in their field:

- Asylum seekers being deported from Australia (refoulement) and asylum seekers stranded on Lombok, Indonesia – Carmel Leavey (researcher) and Kamal Ghulam as Hazara advocate
- Update on asylum seekers stranded on Nauru – Marion Le, asylum seeker advocate
- Asylum seekers and work – Experiences of asylum seekers seeking work, a commentary by the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre and an update by Lorna Hannan on behalf of BASP
- West Papuan asylum seekers – Louise Byrne, West Papuan Association
- Sri Lankan asylum seekers – Stancea Vinchie, Hotham Mission Asylum Seeker Project.

Richard Jasek, Bill Hannan, Mairéad Hannan and others donated their time and talents to making a short film *The Veil*, a commemoration of the SIEV X tragedy. Study notes accompanied the film. A BASP forum included a showing of the film and a discussion with the film makers and the working party.

BASP advocacy and education was not restricted to people seeking asylum that were in offshore or onshore detention. During this period, the Project worked tirelessly on bringing to public attention the plight of individuals in the community who were referred to BASP when other service providers were unable to assist them. Not only were individual stories highlighted through regular newsletters and public forums, but the underlying causes of persecution and dangers faced at home by various ethnic groups were carefully researched and communicated.

A large number of people helped by the Project in this period were ethnic Hazaras, mostly Afghans, readily recognised due to their different appearance from the other main ethnic groups in Afghanistan. As Shia Muslims, they have experienced persecution over a long period of time and remain persecuted in Afghanistan today. Many of them had arrived in Australia after fleeing Afghanistan for neighbouring Pakistan or Iran, where they were treated as refugees without rights, unable to settle there permanently. While Hazara men were the main group the Project supported at this time, there were many other individuals and groups whose plight was also dire, including significant numbers of Iranians, Iraqis and Sri Lankans.

A remarkable story, drawn from an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in February 2019, details the success of Nabi Baqiri in fleeing his home country of Afghanistan and risking a perilous journey at sea with his young family, surviving a hunger strike while in detention on Nauru, and finally achieving success in Australia.

Nabi - from Nauru detainee to fruit-packing millionaire

Nabi Baqiri (not a pseudonym) arrived in Shepparton, Victoria, having spent more than two years with his family in detention on Nauru after fleeing Pakistan in 2001 for Indonesia and then undertaking the hazardous journey to Christmas Island, nearly losing two of his children in the sea in the process.

Born into a Hazara family in Afghanistan, Nabi, who initially left his own country with his older brother for Pakistan, aged 13, sees himself as a risk taker. In Pakistan, he became a successful businessman before fleeing that country with his family when he saw how precarious life would be for them there as a Hazara family.

Following his family's release from detention in Nauru, under an opaque 'lottery' system operating at the time, Nabi set about finding a niche from which he could rebuild a life for his family in his new country of Australia. Quickly sensing the opportunity that fruit picking in the countryside might offer a hard working but illiterate man such as himself, he started out by working double shifts and relying on over-the-counter painkillers to ease his backache. Within a couple of years, his character and competence – he was described as 'quite gentle and a great businessman' – drew him to the notice of a local man, Alampai, who offered him a partnership in a family orchard business called Kaarimba. While the early years were tough, Kaarimba is now valued at around \$10m. Today Nabi and his family, his wife and six children, live near the property in Shepparton. He can still be found fruit picking alongside others when the need arises. His children are clearly focused on education. *(Extracted from an article by Alana Rosenbaum, Sydney Morning Herald, 24 February 2019)*

When Nabi's family had initially arrived in Melbourne, BASP helped them furnish a house in Dandenong and helped them put in their application for protection. On a memorable day, Nabi was at Albert Park with his brother Jamshed who had already established himself as a labour hire contractor in Shepparton. During the morning, as Sister Catherine was assisting

Nabi with some paper work requirements, news came that Jamshed had been given a Protection Visa. It was the first such visa BASP had been able to celebrate.

Detention centre visiting

In this period, Sister Brigid and others continued regularly visiting those in detention in Maribyrnong, Melbourne. The focus of these visits was to connect with asylum seekers in detention, ascertain their needs and, where possible, help them to be met.



Grandmothers on a day outing from immigration detention

Thinking outside the 'system'

An early example of the type of practical support Sister Brigid was able to supply due to her regular presence at Maribyrnong was a solution for the cold conditions being reported by asylum seekers when the centre's heating system broke down. As it was a Melbourne winter and some of the detainees were recent arrivals from tropical countries or Australia's offshore detention centres, she arranged for blankets to be brought in immediately, while the authorities sorted out the technical problem with the heating system. While this is a simple example, it exemplifies the practical, human response that typifies the Project. *(Sister Brigid Arthur interview, November 2017)*

Sister Brigid was often approached by community members who wished to visit a detention centre themselves but didn't feel confident enough to go alone. They usually wanted to find out directly what was going on

and to see if they could do anything to support people being detained. In this way, Sister Brigid introduced quite a few community members to the detention regime, easing the way for them to become involved in supporting one or more people in detention. At the time it was seen to be bad enough that people were locked up. In retrospect, however, it was relatively easy then to gain access to individual people in detention. As will be indicated later in this history, access has become far more difficult in recent years.

For a number of years, the Project organised a Christmas party in Maribyrnong and, on one occasion in 2003, was able to facilitate a request for an Eid celebration at the end of Ramadan. Later, when a facility in Broadmeadows was developed into the Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation (MITA) Centre in 2008, it became the primary place of immigration detention in Melbourne. Christmas parties continued to be held at Broadmeadows every year until 2017, when they ceased for reasons explained later in this history.

Expanding accommodation availability – the Ardeer house

Given the cost of rental accommodation and the precarious circumstances of many asylum seekers, sourcing and providing accommodation emerged at this time as a critical function of the Project and continued to remain so.

In 2003 the old Brigidine convent at Ardeer in western Melbourne became vacant and was made available to the BASP Project for accommodation purposes. Up to 13 men, on either no income or a meagre one, were accommodated there at any one time, until an accidental fire ended its use in 2016. During most of this time Sister Catherine and another Brigidine, Sister Martin Jones, lived next door and, through being very attuned to the men's needs, were able to assist many of them to move on to greater independence. Both spent a lot of time looking after the men in the Ardeer house – teaching English, helping them with

other courses, taking food in to them every week, cleaning the house and making sure the maintenance of the place was kept up.

After Sister Catherine died, Sister Geraldine Hambling moved into the house and Sister Martin continued, helped by Sister Geraldine.

In conjunction with the house in Albert Park, the Ardeer house increased the housing stock available to the Project. Over time, additional accommodation has been generously made available to the Project by individuals, parishes and other organisations.



BASP House at Ardeer

A home for an unaccompanied minor

During this period, BASP housed and assisted mainly boys and men of varying ages. For example, BASP assisted a 17-year-old unaccompanied minor who was released from the Broadmeadows centre on a protection visa. He was assigned a worker through the Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors Program which was a program run through the Department of Human Services in Victoria. Between the worker and BASP, BASP agreed to ensure that this particular boy was assisted in accessing his health, education and social and practical needs. He continued to stay in a BASP house until well after he was 18 years old.

BASP has also assisted other young men, from 18 years old upwards. Many of the young men that BASP assisted were in their early twenties.

The vagaries of the visas offered to people seeking asylum – Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) and Bridging visas

In the Newsletter of October 2002 Sister Brigid wrote:

“It is only in Australia that refugees are given a kind of half refugee status. TPVs are not in line with the spirit of the Geneva Convention which Australia and most other countries signed in 1951. That agreement stated that people have the right to seek protection in another country if they are being persecuted. It did not say anything about temporary protection.

The temporary nature of the visas (usually three years) is cruel because of the insecurity for the refugees and the fact that they cannot bring any family to Australia during those years. Moreover, we do not know what happens at the end of that time – do they just get another three years with the same conditions or are they sent back to their own country.” (*BASP Newsletter #10, October 2002*)

At least a TPV enabled its holder to work. To support those who did have work rights, BASP set up the Brigidine Job Network. While there have been successes, this effort was, and continued to be, very challenging. For example, it was impossible to get an apprenticeship or a job where an employer had to invest a lot in training because most employers did not consider this to be a good investment.

Those most discriminated against were (and have continued to be) people on long term Bridging visas. A Bridging visa simply allows a person to be legally in Australia pending a process to determine their eventual status. The conditions for these have varied greatly. Sometimes they include work rights, sometimes study rights, sometimes both – or neither. Often, they are for a duration of six months, but they can be indefinite or for any other length of time. Very often they are not renewed leaving the person illegally in Australia.

BASP has worked with people in every possible category and decries the uncertainty and apparent capriciousness of the whole system.

The most invidious form of Bridging visa was, and is, a Bridging visa E. People with this visa had no work rights, no Medicare and no Commonwealth support, effectively rendering them destitute. These asylum seekers needed housing support, financial support and often assistance with food to just get by. Many people in this situation in Victoria were helped by BASP. In 2005, BASP, along with other refugee advocacy groups, campaigned hard for work rights for Bridging visa E holders, unfortunately without success.

An early version of a food bank was set up by the Project around this time.

Throughout the Project, but particularly during this period, the Project has needed to access legal advice and migration assistance. Much of this was provided by pro bono migration agents, Judy Dixon and Franco Del Monaco. At times it has also been necessary to pay for specialist legal expertise at various levels.

A significant concern for asylum seekers encountered by the Project was, and continued to be, the apparent arbitrariness of the decision-making process in relation to asylum claims. Some asylum seekers arriving on the same boat from the same country, with similar claims, received different kinds of visa outcomes. While a successful outcome for one asylum seeker was always celebrated, the lack of clarity around the basis for decision making, and the apparent inconsistency in outcomes, added to the agonisingly long waits without progress for many.

The pain of waiting, being separated from family and being unsure of a future ...

Issues of concern raised in BASP newsletters during these years talk of the agony of uncertainty while waiting for a refugee determination and/or a permanent Protection Visa. The newsletters describe the mental health issues arising both in detention and in the community. Sister Brigid wrote in 2004 of the pain caused for asylum seekers here and for family members elsewhere when asylum seekers phoned home. For example, a 29 year old year Indian man in the Maribyrnong detention centre told Sister Brigid that he did not need as many phone cards any more as his calls back home caused so much pain for his mother that his sister told him “don’t ring Mum too often”. Another asylum seeker said “I take several days to get enough courage to call my family. They cry and I cry”. Another said “I can’t give them any hope. I cannot provide for myself here, how can I promise them I will look after them?” The death of a close family member not seen for years caused particular pain.

“I can’t give them any hope.
I cannot provide for myself here,
how can I promise them I will
look after them?”

The editorials in the newsletters, largely written by Sister Brigid with Sister Catherine’s support and input, drew attention to the inhumanity of Australia’s policy environment, stressing the need to keep a human face at the forefront of every interaction with a stranger who is seeking a welcome.

... turning to joy for some

From 2004 onwards, some of the people BASP was supporting had their TPVs converted to permanent Protection Visas eliciting great displays of joy and excitement. BASP began directing some of its efforts to assisting family reunions. It was frequently difficult to find family members in dangerous places, get them to safety (where necessary), and then get the required documentation to enter Australia. This was often expensive and could take a number of years to achieve. After years of waiting, a reunion was a joyful occasion for each individual and those around them.

After five years, Ghulum, the first person helped by BASP in 2001, successfully gained Australian permanent residence. A decade later Ghulum and his wife have two children and Ghulum is employed as a social worker.

Family reunions and the gaining of permanent residency were, and continued to be, always celebrated keenly by the Project.



A happy moment at a wedding



A ten year relationship with BASP – Sadou & Mariama

Securing a more sustainable financial basis for BASP

In 2004, BASP gained tax deductibility status. Since that time the majority of its funds have come from individual donations, supplemented by fundraising efforts offered by community groups. The Project continues to be sustained by the key involvement of the Brigidines themselves and the provision of Brigidine facilities and resources to fund additional staff.

In this period, BASP volunteers undertook a wide variety of activities to raise funds for the direct service provision of the Project. Chief among these were the *Bid for Freedom* Art Auctions organised from 2003 to 2008 under the leadership of Ann Morrow and Jenni Mitchell, who were supported by a large team of helpers. These auctions raised more than \$250,000 over the six years, an invaluable and vital contribution.

The Project has never sought or accepted government funds or private corporate sponsorship.

Clarifying values associated with all BASP activities – and those demonstrated by asylum seekers

The BASP Council around this time adopted the motto 'Strength and Kindness', drawn directly from Brigidine values. It became the title of the regular BASP newsletter to evoke the spirit of the Project's work.

What follows is a story by Sister Brigid, late in 2006, of asylum seekers demonstrating values of compassion, altruism and love for each other.

The values that emerge as we work with asylum seekers ...

Thien was plainly distressed and disturbed. He is a sick man having been assaulted and as a result he has acquired brain damage. He had been housed in one of the BASP houses for several weeks. This was a temporary arrangement and it was time for him to move on. He was finding it difficult to agree to a new possible place to live; this was a big difficulty for the wonderful young case worker, Chris from the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre assigned to help him. It was also somewhat difficult for us as we had no room to continue to accommodate him and had to move him out of his room for two other people who had been promised the room back.

Things came to a head when I came to help Thien move. He began throwing things around, breaking a few things and quite uncharacteristically swearing and yelling. Abraham and Mohammad came as a response to the noise. The scene I will never forget is Mohammad, a Tamil from Sri Lanka with little English, with many worries about his case, distressed about the safety of his wife and children, putting his arm around the distressed Vietnamese man who was clearly vulnerable and scared and saying, "My friend, you will be alright. Calm down. We will help you." At this stage Thien began to sob, put his hand in Mohammad's and said, "My head hurts." Abraham and Mohammad stayed, made coffee, gradually helped Thien to pack and set up a temporary bed in Mohammad's room. He stayed there for a week until Chris helped him find a room elsewhere.

Abraham and Mohammad displayed the values of compassion, altruism and love. Surely we must wonder about the demand that the Abrahams and Mohammads of the world adopt 'Australian values.' I would like to think that instead we are challenged by the courage and humanity of such people and to know that our society is so much the richer by their presence. (*BASP newsletter #33, October 2006*)

Stage 2: 2008-2013

The Rudd/Gillard/Rudd Labor Governments – The policy and political context

A ‘Tough but Humane’ approach

A change of government in Australia occurred in December 2007. The Howard Coalition Government was replaced by the Kevin Rudd Labor Government, which came to power after campaigning on a ‘Tough but Humane’ policy platform for refugees and asylum seekers. As a result, there was considerable hope that the conditions for asylum seekers would significantly improve in Australia. Promises included an end to offshore detention; that the processing of refugee claims would take place on Christmas Island and would be expedited, and that there would be an end to Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs). Subsequently, Nauru was closed early in 2008 and TPVs were abolished in August 2008, going some way towards fulfilment of the pre-election promises.

Australia’s new asylum seeker policy was lauded by some nationally, and even internationally, as ‘positive’. Small numbers of boats arriving in 2008, carrying a total of 161 people, did not raise any alarm. However, the legal basis for offshore processing remained in place. Those people whose claims were processed on Christmas Island had fewer appeal rights than those processed on the mainland, leading to different outcomes based solely on where processing was occurring – another example of the arbitrary nature of processing and its impact.

Swelling numbers of people seeking asylum triggered a harsher rhetoric and treatment

As 2009 progressed, the number of boats arriving in Australia increased. People who arrived this way were taken to Christmas Island for processing. By the year’s end the number was approaching 3000 people. With Christmas

Island swelling beyond capacity by mid-2010, the Rudd Government reopened detention centres on the mainland, in contradiction of its own policy of processing people on Christmas Island. The Government also took stronger action to stop boats reaching Australia by getting agreement from the Indonesian Government to detain people in Indonesia and ramping up the language against ‘people smugglers.’

However, the environment with respect to race and racism in Australia was hardening, with a number of violent incidents targeting Indian students and concerns about the successful integration of Somali youth into the community. Concern among Australians about the number of people arriving by boat was being stoked by Opposition politicians, among others. By the middle of 2010, under pressure on immigration and a number of other policy fronts, the Labor party chose to replace Prime Minister Rudd with Julia Gillard. Very shortly after Gillard’s installation as Prime Minister, boat arrivals spiked and the new government, apparently ‘spooked’, reacted very harshly. A return to offshore detention was under consideration.

The return of offshore detention and the introduction of Bridging Visas, creating a ‘no advantage’ or ‘legacy caseload’ group

Several offshore detention options were considered. An East Timor option was flagged, to be quickly discarded. A proposed Malaysia deal was blocked by the High Court of Australia. Previously the people who arrived in Australia by boat before 2008 were primarily men who were being put on Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) which did not allow for family reunion. Now it was seen as necessary that whole families needed to travel by boat in order to avoid this restriction. There were several incidents where men, women and children drowned. Prime Minister Gillard used these tragedies as a pretext for setting up an Expert Panel, with a brief to advise on *How do we stop people drowning at sea?* Among its recommendations was the reopening of Manus

Island, Papua New Guinea, and Nauru. Offshore detention recommenced 15 September 2012 on Nauru and 21 November 2012 on Papua New Guinea.

On 7 May 2013, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship announced the decision to release families who had arrived by boat with children aged 16 years and under onto Bridging Visas. These people, who arrived in Australia by boat between 13 August 2012, and 19 July 2013, became the subject of a new punitive set of decisions. The processing of their claims could happen in Australia but under a separate and procedurally inferior system to the Protection Visa application process. In order to ensure that they get no advantage over other asylum seekers in the region, these individuals were to be kept on a Bridging Visa until a place became available in Australia's regular Humanitarian Program. While on a Bridging Visa they were not to have the right to work or the right to family reunion and their social assistance entitlements were to be confined to receiving a minimum level of income support from the Government, 89% of that given to unemployed members of the Australian community.

This effectively meant that they would remain in limbo indefinitely. The number of people impacted by this decision stretched from 11,000 at as April 2013 to a figure of around 30,000 by 2016. This group has subsequently been referred to as 'the legacy caseload group' and this term will be used from now on in this history. As of December 2018, many of these families were still waiting for an assessment of their protection claims.

Focus on children in detention

Meanwhile, on the Australian mainland, asylum seekers were being moved around from one detention centre to another, seemingly with little forethought. There were two deaths in detention, and numerous instances of attempted suicide and hunger strikes. There was a strong focus in the media on the numbers of children in detention.

In order to reduce numbers in detention centres, people were released into the community on Bridging Visas, pending processing of their cases at some indeterminate point, with a significant cost saving to the budget. Despite this measure, in February 2012 there were still 4000 people in detention centres, including between 300-400 children.

A tougher approach, ratcheting up deterrents

At the same time there was an increased effort on removing people from Australia. By December 2012, about 700 Sri Lankans had been deported, with minimal screening, and the Labor Immigration Minister, Chris Bowen, was attempting to deport Afghans. As well, family reunion was made more difficult and more expensive.

By June 2013 the impact of pressure on the Gillard Labor Government on multiple policy fronts, including the assault on its immigration policies by Tony Abbott, leader of the Opposition, under the slogan 'Turn back the boats', caused the Labor party to remove Julia Gillard and reinstate Kevin Rudd as Prime Minister.

In his short time as Prime Minister for the second time, before being replaced by Tony Abbott at the election called shortly afterwards, Kevin Rudd made an announcement which still reverberates. Standing next to Papua New Guinean Prime Minister Peter O'Neill in Brisbane on July 19, 2013 Rudd said that "from now on, any asylum seeker who arrives in Australia by boat will have no chance of being settled in Australia as refugees". The scene was thereby set for the indefinite incarceration of asylum seekers who arrived by boat from 1 August 2013. They would be held in offshore detention centres and further, should they be brought to the mainland for any reason, they would never be allowed to permanently settle in Australia.

Stage 2: 2008-2013

The BASP Response

Under 'Tough but Humane' a welcome shift to family reunion and settlement support

In the early years of the Labor Government in 2008 and 2009, in its 'Tough but Humane' approach, Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) were eliminated and many people were granted permanent Protection visas, which opened up the pathway to citizenship. BASP activity took on a new focus of helping individuals and families to make the adjustments necessary for starting a new life in Australia, as well as continuing to help people apply for family reunion. It was a challenging but largely positive period for the Project, despite some ongoing and new concerns on the horizon.

Effectively, the Project, alongside other institutions and volunteers, helped reunite families with very few resources to set up house in Australia. Family reunions, engagements, marriages and the birth of children in Australia were happily celebrated. Two previous residents of 60 Beaconsfield Parade were among those who successfully brought their families to Australia. There were challenges of social and emotional adjustment as fathers were reunited with their wives and, in some cases, met for the first time their youngest child, born after their departure. The reality of a new family life in a new country presented many challenges, particularly after long separations. Notably, a BASP discussion night in October 2009, on the subject *Making a life in Australia*, focused on helping community volunteers understand the challenges being faced by these individuals and families starting to make a life in Australia. Prospective volunteers heard asylum seekers outline their settlement experiences and challenges and learnt how BASP volunteers were partnering with families to respond to their needs.



Hospitality in Echuca



Beach day – learning water skills

The challenge of family reunion

Sometimes miracles do happen. In 2005 a young man named Jiddo fled Darfur in western Sudan when his village came under attack from the military and the Janjaweed, a local militia. His father found him in Chad, five months later. With cash money from selling his camels, he arranged to get his son to safety. He thought that he was sending him to England, but Jiddo arrived in Australia and was initially sent to the Baxter Detention Centre in South Australia. This young man finally received his permanent Protection Visa in 2009, nearly four years later. His first thought was his family, but he had not been able to contact them for 15 months. The last contact had been when they were barely surviving in the terrible conflict on the Chad/Darfur border.

Since arriving in Australia alone aged 18 years, this young man had learnt English and worked while living in the BASP house in Ardeer. He had endured immense sorrow when he learnt that his mother had not survived. The truck in which she travelled had been strafed with bullets. His only family possession was a stamp sized photo of his older brother who was also shot down as

they escaped. The surviving family members were Jiddo's young wife, his father, brother and his wife's brother.

On gaining his Permanent Visa, Jiddo decided to go to Saudi Arabia to pray for his lost family. In Jeddah and Medina he met many Darfurians, hiding and working underground. While we rely on computers and documents to find people, the African way is different. Jiddo asked around if anyone had news of his father. It is amazing how word of mouth works and how people can be identified to their place of birth and tribe by facial and other characteristics. The miracle happened – a cousin with a mobile phone was found who knew where his father was hiding on the Chad/Darfur border.

Jiddo flew to Cameroon and his father travelled overland by truck for three days to reach him. There they were reunited. It was too dangerous to bring his wife. Plans were made to get them all out. There was a reliance on the father as a former farmer and trader – he had survival skills and the others had hope. Then the father was also killed.

The group of young people managed to get to Egypt and Jiddo returned home to Australia to work to send them money to survive in Egypt. While Egypt was hostile to Sudanese refugees, processing of applications by the Australian embassy needed to take place there. Pamela Curr (formerly Refugee Advocate with the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre, has worked closely with BASP over most of the project's history) and Sister Catherine, did the painstaking work in getting these young people to Australia.

Jiddo and his wife have settled in Melbourne, have three children and Jiddo has worked in a hospital administration job for the past ten years or so.

The loss of a father and husband

Ananda had been in Australia for a few years. He was assisted by BASP and initially he lived at 60 Beaconsfield Parade but moved to the nearby Brigidine convent when he



was diagnosed with cancer. His wife, Vijitha, was allowed to come on a visitor's visa for a few weeks to see him. Generous donations made this possible. Ananda revelled in Vijitha's cooking and he proudly invited people to a party.

The Immigration Department said that his sons would only be allowed to come to Australia one by one after Vijitha returned to Sri Lanka.

After Vijitha returned home, Ananda opted to move to the Brigidine house in Ardeer when his youngest son was allowed to come out for six weeks to visit him. By this stage he was quite sick and he did not like being in a place he saw as a long way away from his son. Subsequently, two of his supporters, Cathy and Melanie arranged a flat for him in Fairfield but he lived there for a few days only and spent the last part of his life at Caritas Christi.

Family reunion – a long wait continues

Ali is from Ghazni, in central-western Afghanistan. He grew up on his father's farm, where he began his working life. They grew wheat, vegetables and kept cows, sheep and goats. Ali married Fatima, with whom he initially had four children.

When the Taliban took over control of Afghanistan, Ali's family were at risk of persecution as they are Hazara. This risk intensified at the time of the Western Allied invasion of Afghanistan. Fearing for their lives, Ali, Fatima and their children fled into the mountains in a bid to reach Pakistan, where they thought they would be safe. Unfortunately, there was no food in the mountains; in desperation the children ate grass, and the three older children died of malnutrition; only the youngest survived.

Ali settled in the city of Quetta in Pakistan, where he and Fatima restarted their lives. They had four more children. It was hard for Ali to find work in Quetta, so he went to Saudi Arabia where he worked as a chef and sent remittances home to his family.

Meanwhile, life became more and more difficult and dangerous in Quetta as many Taliban moved

into Pakistan and were terrorising Hazara people there. By 2011, Ali decided that his family's situation was once again intolerable, and that they should seek asylum in Australia. This time he decided to initially travel alone, as the journey would be too dangerous for his children to undertake.

In late 2011, Ali began his journey, first travelling by plane from Quetta to Dubai, and then Dubai to Bangkok, then travelling by foot and by car to Malaysia. From Malaysia he travelled by ship to Indonesia. In Indonesia he met another refugee, Reza, from Iran. They have been close friends ever since. From Indonesia, Ali and Reza boarded a boat bound for Australia with 176 other refugees. It reached Christmas Island on 20 March 2012; all survived the passage. Ali spent four months in detention on Christmas Island.

In July 2012 Ali was released to Melbourne on a Bridging Visa. He and Reza were both helped immensely by a wonderful woman in St Kilda. She and her family have continued to support Ali.

In May 2013, Ali was acknowledged as a genuine refugee by the Australian government and was awarded permanent residency in Australia. Ever since then he has been trying to have his family join him here, and BASP (with help from a volunteer migration agent) has spent endless hours supporting him in this quest. Tragically, Fatima died of cancer in 2015 and then his eldest daughter was killed in terrible circumstances. He has still not been able to get his other children (plus another nephew he adopted) to Australia despite all possible efforts. Family reunion is extraordinarily long and complex.

In the meantime, Ali works long hours as a baker hoping against all hope that he will live to see his remaining children.

Ali's 15-year-old daughter, Nazifa, still lives in Pakistan. Despite her lack of access to a formal education there, she hopes to become a doctor, so that she can heal people who have cancer, indicating that she still maintains an incredible seed of hope for the future, despite all that has happened to her family.

Challenging the increasingly hostile discourse

While an earlier group of refugees was getting settled in Australia, from around mid-2010, the number of new arrivals seeking asylum rose sharply and the political discourse became increasingly hostile. Editorials in BASP newsletters focused on trying to temper the negativity being generated in the community by educating Australians about the forces in the countries of origin pushing people to flee their homes; by countering the demonising of 'people smugglers' in every case, and by dispelling the myths leading to fear of asylum seekers in the Australian community. In writing these editorials, Sister Brigid and Sister Catherine focused on promoting shared values based on faith and/or common humanity, empathy and care for each other, indeed seeing the asylum seekers through the prism of strangers who needed welcoming. Titles like *We can do better than this*, *Have we seen the normalisation of evil?* and *The issue of credible witness* indicate the flavour of their writing in this grim period.

Have we seen the normalisation of evil?

It seems that our leaders have found a new alternative to public debate – they simply say the same words over and over again. This is very common in public statements about asylum seekers where we hear the endless repetition of phrases like 'stop the boats' or 'break the people smuggler's business model'. Instead of presenting sound arguments, politicians seem to believe that they have justified their policies by repeating these phrases which encourage and reinforce people's racism, prejudice and fears of the unknown. This brings about a normalisation of evil, where Australians are led to accept inherently evil policies and actions as normal and reasonable. (BASP newsletter #56, December 2011)

Building confidence in, and relationships between, asylum seekers and the community: food as a medium

From the beginning, the provision of food and the value of bringing people together for a meal has been a key element of the Project for promoting friendship and demonstrating mutual respect. Initially, it was taking cakes when visiting people in detention centres and later hosting Christmas parties with homemade food in detention centres. Christmas parties have also been held every year at the Albert Park BASP office to thank Project volunteers and supporters. These annual events encourage the continuation of friendships developed between volunteers and asylum seekers living in the community. As well as being a celebration, the parties are a serious enterprise. The quality of the food, as well as the skills of the Brigidines and the volunteers in the kitchen, demonstrates a mark of respect for the crowds of people who attend.

The Edmund Rice Asylum Seeker Project (a drop-in centre in Richmond, Victoria) was established in 2008 as a response to a recognised need in the community. Over the years until 2012, asylum seekers in the community frequented the drop-in centre to gather for a shared lunch, recreation and friendship with each other and volunteers from the Australian community. Increasingly this involved people from the detention centres or recently released from these centres. This was organised by Liam Lucas at first and then by Caterina Mezzatesta. BASP was a part of the regular Sunday lunch and activities for many years and was closely involved in organising the food and bringing people known to the Project together in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. BASP took a key role in providing the meal. In her indomitable fashion, Sister Brigid led a team of volunteers in cooking up a storm, to the delight of all participants, a task made much easier after the installation of a new kitchen at the Richmond drop-in centre.

From 2012, when it was permitted to take people from detention centres on 'excursions',

Pamela Curr and Sister Brigid began requesting Immigration officials to take families and single people out for a short time for an outing or sometimes to visit other family members. This arrangement lasted for several years until Immigration rules became more stringent and it was no longer allowed.

Many memorable moments were shared on these occasions, some hilarious and some sad, but always with food.



Christmas Party preparations



Celebrating a successful visa application



St Finbar's Christmas hampers

Outings – some memorable moments, both happy and sad

On an occasional outing from the detention centre Sister Brigid found that men would often make comments on cars such as “There’s a Peugeot” and “What’s the best car in Australia?”. On one outing two young men pointed in horror at Sister Brigid’s car and let out a sort of anguished noise. They pointed out the relatively flat state of her back tyre, something she was totally unaware of.

Some of the outings involved visiting an area of Dandenong, now dubbed Little Kabul. Usually people rush up to Sister Brigid and her friends from detention and explain to her that they were together “on the boat” or “on Christmas Island” or that “he comes from my village”. On one occasion a man told Sister Brigid he didn’t want to visit Dandenong with her because, after nearly 30 months, he was the last person from his boat in detention. He cannot bear to answer the question of why he is still in detention, over and over again. He doesn’t know how to answer them. (*BASP newsletter #59, June 2012*)

Pamela Curr talks of her delight and surprise when she accompanied Sister Brigid and Sister Catherine, among others, on a trip to Canberra to talk to politicians. At a roadside stop Sister Brigid opened the boot of the car and proceeded to lay out a lunch of delicious and nutritious home cooked food. Pamela noted wryly that, with BASP, money was never spent on anything non-essential, like eating out, if it could be avoided. In Canberra overnight, they stayed at a basic motel. (*Pamela Curr Interview, March 2018*)

Educating the community

BASP discussion forums continued to be held regularly, about four times a year, to educate the public about Australian asylum seeker policy and its impact, and to encourage those present to participate in being part of service provision and advocacy. The forums canvassed a broad

range of relevant issues and speakers. Over the years, they have attracted a range of high-profile speakers and have been strongly supported. Topics have included:

- Young asylum seekers – including a report of the High Court case brought by Sister Brigid (see below for an explanation of this high-profile case)
- A visit to Scherger immigration detention centre on Cape York Queensland (see box below).
- Processing of asylum seekers in detention
- Community detention
- A journalist’s view of asylum seeker issue – Michael Gordon – The Age newspaper
- Asylum seekers and Malaysia – Helen Doyle
- Why asylum seekers are fleeing Afghanistan – Professor William Maley
- Why Tamils are fleeing Sri Lanka – Professor Damien Kingsbury.

Each forum also provided an update to the BASP community on the work of the Project, always seeking input from those present, thereby providing a two-way communication process between the Project and the supporter community.

As part of its commitment to community education, BASP facilitated, and continued to facilitate, discussions between school students and asylum seekers. This work builds understanding in younger generations about asylum seekers in the community and more globally. Sister Brigid is still a regular speaker in schools and for other community groups. Teachers and students in Brigidine schools were part of the Justice and Democracy Program since the 1990s. Sister Brigid, Sister Catherine and others have worked with teachers to encourage students to get actively involved in social justice projects. Many individuals and groups of students have chosen the topic of asylum seekers as their topic for research

and action. Sister Brigid has also spoken to interested groups in many metropolitan and regional centres, often taking asylum seekers with her.

BASP also hosted a group of young Muslim leaders as part of their leadership development program at La Trobe University for several years.

Responding to a need far from home – visit to Scherger Immigration Detention Centre, Cape York, Queensland

Late in 2010, Sister Brigid and Pamela Curr heard talk of a number of people being detained in a detention centre in a remote area of Cape York, Queensland, the then Scherger Immigration Detention Centre, a remote place even by Australian standards. These detainees appeared to have almost no contact with the outside world and very little was known of them. Worried about who might be there and what their needs might be, Sister Brigid and Pamela spent a week at Scherger listening and talking with the men, documenting their legal assistance needs and showing them friendship. Pamela said of Sister Brigid: “She sits and listens with a warm heart”.

What Sister Brigid and Pamela found at Scherger were a group of mainly Sri Lankan, Rohingya and Hazara Afghan men ‘banged up there’ with no process in place to interview them about claims for asylum. They spoke with the Hazara men in the mornings and the Sri Lankan and Rohingya men in the afternoons. The men were desperate and full of hopelessness, but they remained courteous, grateful and hospitable to their visitors. Sister Brigid and Pamela also heard disturbing stories of tactics being used by the Centre administrators to try to frighten people, such as ‘play acting sending an asylum seeker home’. Sometime later there were reports of a suicide and hunger strikes occurring there. The Centre was subsequently opened up for more outside scrutiny. (*Pamela Curr interview, March 2018*)



Scherger Immigration Detention Centre

Australia-wide advocacy ramps up

In 2010, a new advocacy group commenced, the Victorian Refugee Advocacy Network (RAN). Sister Brigid, on behalf of BASP, joined and is still a key participant and supporter. Two large rallies were held in June and November 2010 in Melbourne, in addition to the annual Palm Sunday rally. A significant letter writing campaign under the auspices of RAN was undertaken in 2012.

Also in 2012, the Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce (ACRT) was formed. Sister Brigid became a member and was Vice-Chair of this group until 2017.

Asylum seekers had been charged for the cost of being detained in Australia, a debt whose very existence many Australians found incredulous. In 2009, legislation was passed waiving detention debt accrued as a result of lobbying and advocacy in which BASP was a senior partner.

Sister Brigid Arthur acts on behalf of young detainees

In 2011-12 there were nearly 3000 minors in closed detention in Australia. A large cohort of these was in the Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation (MITA) in Broadmeadows. For some time Broadmeadows was used solely for minors. By 2013 the numbers of families in detention in Australia had also increased dramatically.

As previously mentioned, there was significant disquiet building in the community as the number of unaccompanied children in detention rose in 2011. Sister Brigid identified a group of very vulnerable, young Afghan boys at the Broadmeadows detention centre, Melbourne. She became their litigation guardian and, with appropriate legal assistance, brought action all the way to the High Court against the Minister for Immigration, initially Chris Evans then Chris Bowen, for failing in his responsibility as guardian of these minors. The intention of this litigation was to change the law to stop children being held in detention. While her intervention initially helped get these boys out of detention and into community care, a year later Sister Brigid agreed to mediation and to settle out of court, in the best interests of the children.

Sister Brigid has also acted as a litigation guardian for a significant number of people, adults and children, in different contexts over the life of the Project.

Sister Brigid also helped families and singles endure detention in a very practical way. In 2012 and 2013 televisions were provided for many families and individuals in the Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation (MITA). Previously there were only one or two large screens in an open area. It was too cold for the families with little children, so Brigid managed to secure cheap new television sets for the families to put in their rooms. It was a practical way for them to keep their children safe and warm at night.

More housing needed

As more people were released into the community with little or no support, efforts were stepped up in the provision of accommodation, with the speedy identification and preparation of a rental property in Dandenong providing an address needed for the release of five men who had been in detention for many years.

In 2012, the Brigidine house in Albert Park was dedicated to the needs of women asylum seekers, giving them a safe and supportive

place to live adjacent to the convent. Mary Kingsbury was the coordinator of the women's house and contributed in many other ways to the BASP project over many years. Volunteers enthusiastically renovated the back garden to provide a place of peace and security for the women, as well as a productive vegetable garden. Kate Beeston has been an enthusiastic supporter of this garden.

Other action was needed, too.

Following the decision in May 2013 to create the 'no advantage' or 'legacy caseload' group of asylum seekers referred to previously, there was now a large group of people in the community who were seeking housing and other assistance while they waited on Bridging Visas, with a very basic level of income support.

In Melbourne the Government temporarily housed many of families recently released from detention in a building in Maidstone that had been a nursing home. They were assigned a housing worker and given six weeks to find accommodation and leave. There were complex rules about the amount they could spend on rent and the money they could access for furniture and other material needs for their rental properties.

BASP became very involved with these families and did a lot of work taking people to see houses and getting material goods not able to be provided within the money allocated. One young mother with a child under one was left without a home. She and her little boy came to live with the Brigidine Sisters in Albert Park for about three years.



Dealing with despair and lack of hope

As previously mentioned, the period late 2012 to early 2013 was marked by the return to offshore processing on Nauru and Manus Island. Tens of thousands of people were placed into the 'legacy caseload' group and subsequently had no access to a process for resolution of their asylum claim. Also, there were higher rates of rejection of claims for people who had previously been released into the community, but now faced forced deportation. When Rudd was briefly re-installed as Prime Minister and stated that those sent to Nauru and Manus Island would never be allowed to settle in Australia, it became very emotionally challenging to visit people in detention centres as there was so little hope to be offered.

Sister Brigid, and no doubt others who had made many visits over many years, reflected on the impact on people who have had their claims rejected and the people who have to tell them. She reported the comment of one desolate man who said, "They are playing with me, and I don't know how to play."

BASP played a significant role in lobbying for policy change and more humane treatment during this period. It used its newsletters and community forums for critiquing Australia's approach and building community knowledge about the impact on people. Sister Brigid also authored a critique of the report and recommendations of the Expert Panel set up by Prime Minister Gillard in 2012, noting that while there were some welcome recommendations, overall it was a cruel response.



Long term accommodation & friendship for a family by BASP supporters



Myrtleford visit; organised by BASP supporters

Community fund raising: a chance to contribute

Fund raising activities of this era played a dual role. They gave the Project additional funds as well as a voice and method of contributing to people in the community alarmed at Australia's increasingly harsh response to asylum seekers and refugees. (See *Acknowledgements at the end of this history* for details of some of these activities.)



"Friends of Brigid" – a Kildara Centre community group – support BASP with donations of food and money

A Christmas reflection

In a beautiful but ironic twist to the cruelty involved in not welcoming strangers into our midst under the existing policy regime, Sister Brigid and Pamela went out to Tullamarine airport a couple of days before Christmas 2012 to support the family reunion of Dawood. Dawood was an asylum seeker who had arrived in Australia from Afghanistan and he was one of the young men Sister Brigid had acted for as litigation guardian. He now had a permanent Protection Visa and visas for his wife and young son. Sister Brigid had helped Dawood find affordable accommodation for his family in Dandenong. He was now nervous and excited about welcoming his family to his new country. As they looked for Dawood at the airport, Sister Brigid and Pamela found he was parking in the McDonald's restaurant car park to avoid the parking fees. He raced in at the last minute to join them for the wonderful reunion. As the young family drove away to their new home, Sister Brigid and Pamela reflected on the 'nativity-like' scene which had unfolded in front of them and were quite emotional about the privilege they had had to welcome a stranger and his family to Australia and give them shelter. (*Sister Brigid Arthur interview, November 2017, Pamela Curr interview, March 2018*)



Stage 3: 2013-2018

The Abbott/Turnbull/Morrison Coalition Governments – The policy and political context

Turn back the boats

With the return to power of the Coalition in September 2013, first under Tony Abbott as Prime Minister and then Malcolm Turnbull, the full impact of the policies put in place by the Gillard and second Rudd Labor Governments was felt. From this point onwards, both major parties in Australian politics have remained in almost total agreement policy-wise. Both have stressed the priority of preventing people arriving by boat and maintaining offshore processing, and both have made it clear that those contemplating entering the country to seek asylum were unwelcome.

Introduction of quasi-military style operations and reintroduction of Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs)

In addition, in September 2013, Prime Minister Tony Abbott, with his Immigration Minister Scott Morrison, introduced a new management regime called Operation Sovereign Borders, thereby creating a quasi-military style operation. The former Department of Immigration and Citizenship was renamed the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, signalling a move away from an emphasis on inclusive citizenship to giving priority to protecting borders from 'potentially unwanted' citizens.

At this time, Prime Minister Abbott also mentioned the possible reintroduction of Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) which, along with offshore processing, are another example of the type of 'start, stop and start again' policy approach of Australian governments since Tampa 12 years earlier. Following rejection of their reintroduction in the Senate in December 2013, a new type of TPV, along with a new category of visa called a Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) was introduced in September 2014.

Australia's international reputation subject to scrutiny

Australia's international reputation began to suffer, with the UN Human Rights Committee finding Australia guilty of violations of human rights with practices described as cruel, dehumanising and punitive.

On 3 February 2014, a National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention 2014 was launched by Professor Gillian Triggs, the President of the Australian Human Rights Commission. The Commission's Report, *The Forgotten Children: National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention 2014*, was tabled in Federal Parliament in February 2015. The report highlighted the harm done to children in detention through their lack of liberty and their exposure to high numbers of mentally unwell adults. The contents of the report were somewhat obscured by the government's subsequent denigration of Gillian Triggs.

Human and financial costs of deteriorating situation in offshore detention centres

In February 2014 Reza Barati, an Iranian man detained on Manus Island, was killed in a violent attack in the detention centre when a planned peaceful protest turned into a riot. Many other people were injured, an indication of the lack of safety for detainees on Manus Island. Soon afterwards, detainees issued a letter calling for help from the Australian people and Australian politicians.

By this time, the economic cost of offshore detention, with 2457 people on Nauru and Manus Island, was estimated to be in the vicinity of \$3.4b a year.

In September 2014, another resettlement deal was done, this time with the Cambodian Government. Under this deal people on Nauru were able to be resettled in Cambodia. As of June 2018, there was only one refugee still in Cambodia from a total of seven people who

took up this option during the intervening years. (*Radio NZ, June 7, 2018*)

With a price tag of around \$55m, this has been judged, by most parties, an expensive and failed exercise, largely due to the understanding by asylum seekers and many others that Cambodia was not a suitable resettlement destination.

Inconsistent and unequal treatment of groups of asylum seekers

Meanwhile, on the mainland, the cruelty of the new regulations around family reunion meant that after many years waiting for progress, even after gaining a permanent Protection Visa (designating residency), family reunion visas were being indefinitely denied to people who came by boat.

Furthermore, people who arrived by boat after August 2012 have had no formal access to permanent Protection Visas at all, whereas access remained, and still does, for those who arrive by plane and who receive a positive refugee assessment.

This further formalised discrimination based merely on the method of arrival, by boat or by plane, in Australia. This is despite the fact that before 2015, even in years with high numbers of boats arriving, the people who came by boat comprised just over half of onshore asylum seekers in Australia and that a much greater proportion of those arriving by boat were recognised as refugees compared to those arriving by plane. (*Asylum seekers and refugees: What are the facts? 2 March 2015, Janet Phillips, Research Papers 2014-15, Parliamentary Library*)

Although the Australian Government was applying these inhumane measures to undocumented people arriving in Australia seeking asylum, in 2015, in the context of the civil war in Syria, the Government decided to accept 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees as part of its annual Humanitarian Program. The Project welcomed this decision although it highlighted the inconsistency in the way Australia welcomed different groups of people. Citing humanitarian

reasons, selected refugees caught up in the civil war in Syria and who were living in camps in Syria or neighbouring countries, were welcomed to Australia with the full range of settlement services available to them, while people detained on Manus Island and Nauru and those who came to Australia by boat waiting progress on their claims, were treated very harshly.

The boats have stopped – or have they?

While only one boat reached Australia between September 2013 and August 2018, which was in 2014, 33 boats carrying 820 people were intercepted at sea and turned back when it was ‘deemed’ that none of those intercepted was owed protection obligations. The last boat known to be turned around was in August 2018 and contained 17 people from Vietnam. (*Asylum Insights, 26 January 2019, quoting Senate Estimates and The Guardian as sources*)

Shortly after the replacement of Tony Abbott as Prime Minister by Malcolm Turnbull, another federal election came and went in September 2015. Asylum seeker policy did not figure as a significant issue in this election due to the essentially bipartisan nature of the existing asylum seeker policies.

Challenge to offshore detention on Nauru and Manus Island and these detention centres ‘opened’

In October 2015, possibly due to an impending High Court case, the Nauru Government ‘opened’ the processing centre, leaving people to move freely around the island. However, conditions on the island, particularly for women, were deemed unsafe for most detainees who felt safer staying in the grim conditions of the processing centre. (*Protection Denied, Abuse Condoned: Women on Nauru at Risk, Wendy Bacon et al, 2016*)

Asylum seekers coming to Australia from Nauru or from Manus Island for medical treatment reported appalling conditions and treatment

on both islands. They were, and still are at the time of writing, very fearful of being sent back.

In February 2016 the High Court ruled that Australia's offshore detention system was legal, opening the way for people then in Australia for medical reasons to be sent back to Nauru or Manus Island. Significant protests were held around Australia at the High Court ruling, effectively launching the *#LetThemStay* campaign. The GetUp activist organisation, in association with many other groups, coordinated much of the protest activity. A few days later, doctors at Brisbane's Lady Cilento Children's Hospital refused to release a badly burnt one-year old girl, baby 'Asha', from hospital to be returned to Nauru because Nauru is not 'a suitable home environment for her release'. A protest at the hospital, in support of the doctors' stand, was successful in preventing her return to Nauru with her parents. A 'sanctuary' movement, involving many Churches around Australia, was launched shortly afterwards to provide sanctuary, should it be needed, to other asylum seekers in a similar position. BASP was one of the participants involved in working out the sanctuary proposal.

In April 2016 PNG's Supreme Court ruled that the detention of asylum seekers on Manus Island was illegal and in breach of the PNG constitution. Late in 2017 the PNG Government moved to close down the Manus Island detention centre and transfer people to two other facilities on the island and one in the capital, Port Moresby. Fearing for their safety and an even more uncertain future in PNG, most of the detainees barricaded themselves inside the detention centre and tried to survive there without food, water or power supplies for many days – a totally desperate situation. Eventually they were forcibly removed to one of the centres in PNG where, as of December 2018, many of them still lived but with greatly reduced services, including lack of access to essential medical services like mental health services. Throughout this ordeal appeals from inside and outside Australia called for more humane solutions, including bringing the refugees to Australia.

Deal with the USA

In late 2016 Prime Minister Turnbull sought and agreed to an Australia-United States Resettlement arrangement with USA President Obama. This meant up to 1250 people on Manus Island or Nauru, those already recognised as refugees, could be settled in the USA, providing they met eligibility conditions. The change of government in the USA shortly afterwards, with the election of President Trump, appeared to put this deal in jeopardy for a while. After some uncertainty, the deal was upheld, albeit reluctantly.

During 2017 and 2018 small groups of people on Manus Island and Nauru were offered and accepted resettlement in the USA. One fortunate man on Manus Island was sponsored to go to Canada, as a result of contacts he had made throughout his time in detention on Manus Island.

Pressure to bring all detainees to Australia mounts

Throughout 2016 and 2017 many people from both islands, Nauru and Manus, were medically transferred to Australia, many of them after court orders overturned Minister Dutton's intervention orders. Increasingly the medical profession in Australia spoke out strongly on the critical levels of ill health on both islands and the need to bring people to Australia, particularly children. The doctors were supported by numerous other high-profile groups and individuals, including some individual sympathetic politicians.

At the same time as the fifth anniversary of people being detained on Manus Island and Nauru passed in August 2018, and public sentiment was building to bring all children to Australia as soon as possible, the government was in the midst of another leadership crisis and, on 24 August, Prime Minister Turnbull was replaced by Scott Morrison.

With public sentiment seeming to be changing, and a critical by-election highlighting the plight of people on Manus Island and Nauru, the Federal Government announced that it would

remove children and some family members from Nauru by the end of 2018 and bring them to Australia. Subsequently, more than 135 people were brought to Australia by this date, including at least 47 children. Many of them were, and continue to be, subject to disheartening conditions on the Australian mainland. After a short time in mainland detention centres, most people enter Community Detention with housing and minimal financial support, unable to work and even unable to study if over the age of 18.

As of December 2018, more than 1000 people remained on the two islands. There were still a small number of children on Nauru (fewer than 10), despite the Government's stated aim of removing them all and reporting that they had. On the Australian mainland, 1327 people were reported to be in detention of one form or another (in an onshore detention centre or in Community Detention). (*Asylum Insights*, 26 January 2019)

Government moves to remove income support from asylum seekers living in the community

Since 1992, asylum seekers living in the community while waiting for their claims to be processed have had access to limited government-funded support under a scheme today called Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS). This entitles them to the equivalent of 89% of the Newstart allowance, or approximately \$35/day, and other limited casework services.

Late in 2017 however, the Turnbull Government moved to end income support and other forms of support for the approximately 400 asylum seekers who had been transferred from Nauru or Manus Island to Australia for medical reasons. These 400 people have been living in the Australian community in Community Detention following the *#LetThemStay* campaign.

This policy started by targeting around 60 single people in the *#LetThemStay* cohort

all over Australia, mainly men. These people were given three weeks to leave government-supported accommodation under a 'Final Departure Bridging Visa E'. They were no longer to receive income and housing support but could seek employment. In effect, the Government compelled these asylum seekers to immediately find work to support themselves. After around five years in one form of detention or another, this was an almost impossible task. Without the support of community-based services, most would have quickly become homeless and destitute. Then in May 2018, the Government extended this policy to some of the families in the *#LetThemStay* cohort of people.

In May 2018, another large group of around 7000-8000 people living in the Australian community, those who are part of the previously mentioned 'legacy caseload' group of 30,000 people, were also threatened with loss of SRSS entitlements. It was quickly realised that such sizeable numbers would overwhelm the already inundated, community-based support services, including BASP, and there was strong lobbying to resist its implementation. Implementation nevertheless proceeded throughout the rest of 2018 with the predicted impact on availability of services being quickly realised. Many desperate asylum seekers faced, and still do, grim realities and choices as a result of this decision.

In December 2018, the Australian Labor Party conference indicated it would review the removal of income support, should it win government in the 2019 Federal election. Reinstatement of income support would certainly ease the grim situation for many individuals, families and the services that support them.

However, at the end of 2018, both major political parties remained committed to most of the difficult elements of the current clutch of Australia's immigration policies, which included continued mandatory detention, turning back boats and offshore detention.

Stage 3: 2013-2018

The BASP Response

Who says so and in whose interests?

BASP began this period with a call to use respectful language when referring to people who are seeking asylum in Australia. BASP aims to explicitly model humane and ethically justifiable terminology and will question false, insinuating and prejudiced language, habitually asking “Who says so and in whose interests?”

By 2013, 12 years into BASP, there were people linked with BASP at all stages of the process from new people seeking asylum to others celebrating successful integration into the Australian community. Most people being supported by BASP however were still waiting for their claim to being heard or for an outcome of a legal process, often with no progress for many years, and in need of help. These people included those struggling in detention facilities and others living in the community.

Focused advocacy campaigns

In 2014, another advocacy group started up in Sydney and expanded nationally. Called *Love Makes A Way*, it is a Christian group seeking compassion for people seeking asylum through prayer and non-violent love in action. Sister Brigid is also a member of this group and has participated in several ‘sit-ins’ in offices of parliamentarians, including in the office of Opposition leader at the time, Bill Shorten.

In 2015, a new campaign was established called No Business in Abuse. This campaign aimed to end human rights abuses in detention centres. Speaking as one of the directors of the campaign, Sister Brigid, on the Government awarding of a second management contract on Nauru to Transfield Services, said “it’s inconceivable that despite the abuses which have been inflicted on helpless people on Nauru and Manus Island, that the operator of those facilities, Transfield Services, has been awarded another 5 years to inflict even more harm”. Subsequently No

Business in Abuse was credited with contributing significantly to a campaign run by unions to force HESTA, the major superannuation fund for health and community service workers in Australia, to ditch their extensive investments in Transfield Services. This demonstrated the powerful ability of boycott and divestment tactics to disrupt the political economy of the detention industry. (New Matilda, 8 September 2015)

BASP has been supported over many years in letter writing by Rita Hayes, a BASP volunteer who has also engaged in other significant advocacy initiatives. Other BASP volunteers have helped with research and writing, in particular Anita Devos.

A big loss: Sister Catherine Kelly dies

The beginning of 2015 was marked by sadness when Sister Catherine Kelly died unexpectedly, after a sudden illness. Sister Catherine was one half of the two-person Brigidine team that had coordinated BASP since its inception in 2001. Her death was significant for all who knew her, particularly those asylum seekers who had benefited directly from her love, care and attention to their needs.

An ethnic Albanian woman fleeing the Bosnian civil war with her husband and two children, arrived in Melbourne in 2001 with little English. She was one of the earliest refugees to be directly supported by Sister Catherine. She describes Sister Catherine as “like more than a family, like an angel practically. Sometimes she was there almost every day. She came because of her heart, no other reason.”



*Sister Catherine Kelly
with Danni and Aurora*

Sister Brigid wrote a tribute to Sister Catherine in the BASP newsletter of March 2015.

Vale Sister Catherine Anne Kelly

We remember Sister Catherine, supporter and encourager, confidante of many. She remains with us. She exists in the men and women who were helped by her. In the echo of yesterday's laughter and the certainty of tomorrow's devotion. She hides in the crevices of memory. We see her – suddenly – briefly – in the many stories people tell of her kindness and quiet assistance. On all that she touched; she left a part of herself for us to remember. And all the love – which went forth from her to others and back again.

You have left us with so many memories ... so many joys ... so many dreams ... of our special yesterdays and you have helped us touch tomorrow ... just by loving us and encouraging us. We are those who have worked with you in BASP and those who have supported BASP and those who have been helped by BASP.

Sister Catherine was also described in another tribute as “an intelligent, kind and principled woman” and in another as “a woman of great compassion, courage and strength... humble, smart, fearless and love in motion”. In 2016 Sister Catherine was inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women.



Ahmet's story illustrates Sister Catherine's tenacity and passion for justice.

A never ending story

During the civil war in Chad (2005-2010) Ahmet's father was accused of siding with the rebels and was killed in 2008. Ahmet's family, the mother and nine children were Bedouin living a semi-nomadic life and after their father was killed, they struggled to survive. It was a custom for the rebel fighters to scour the country picking up young boys who they forced to become child soldiers. This happened to Ahmet, but he managed to escape because his uncle paid a bribe to his captors. Subsequently a 'prince' in Saudi Arabia paid for him to escape from the Cameroons and come to Australia. Because his documents were not genuine, he was immediately put in detention. Surprisingly, Ahmet was allowed to come to BASP at Albert Park for English lessons, probably because he was by himself in the Broadmeadows Detention Centre for some time. Sister Jude Caldwell taught him English. From the time he arrived in Australia BASP has been able to support Ahmet, and then gradually his whole family, with the exception of the oldest daughter, to join him here.

This took years of writing letters, working with the UN, liaising with Australian officials in Nigeria and getting permission for the mother and three other sons to come and then eventually the four daughters (minus the eldest).

The painstaking work for all this was done by Sister Catherine. She used her expertise as a migration agent to undertake the mammoth task of getting identity documents (they don't really exist in sub-Saharan Africa), getting go-between people in Chad to travel to the north of the country to meet Ahmet's family, paying bribes and other monies to arrange transport, paying to rescue a brother who was also captured as a child soldier ... and the list goes on. It would be impossible to count the hours and days and weeks involved. After Sister Catherine died, one of BASP's volunteer migration agents, Franco Del Monaco, continued the struggle to get the oldest daughter to Australia, and that continues.

The Project must continue

Despite the loss of Sister Catherine, the needs of asylum seekers were pressing, and the Project had to continue. Some months later the Brigidine community nominated Libby Saunders, who had been coordinating volunteers for BASP, to join Sister Brigid in the shared role of BASP Coordinator. Libby has continued to coordinate Project volunteers, and also plays the key role in resourcing and organising the ever-increasing accommodation needs of asylum seekers.

The Project continued to experience both highs and lows.

Positive developments in BASP services: some highs

With increasing concern and awareness in the community of the plight of asylum seekers, many more volunteers stepped up, enabling BASP to initiate new services and extend existing ones.

The following new services came into being at this time:

- In 2013 the teaching of English became a serious enterprise. Called Teaching of English through Friendship, the program was coordinated by volunteers Phil Steele and Sue Wood. It began in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, with 20 families, and grew to include 80+ families and more than 170+ volunteers throughout Melbourne. This program pairs volunteer tutors with people seeking asylum. As well as teaching English, the tutors assist asylum seekers with what they need to do to get by in Australia and how to operate effectively within Australian culture. In many cases these relationships develop further, with tutors helping people gain driving licences, navigate systems such as Centrelink and medical services, and sometimes assist in gaining paid employment. Often tutors have become part of the 'extended family' for asylum seekers and vice versa. Tutors often report 'receiving more than they are giving' from the relationship.

The friendships generated by this program often make the difference between successful settlement and ongoing displacement.



A volunteer teaching English

- BASP has facilitated study assistance to young refugees who would otherwise not be able to continue their education post school due to the prohibitive international student fees charged for non-residents. For example, three Year 12 students who had refugee but not residency status were offered financial help, once they secured a university place, from The Sisters in The Little Company of Mary congregation. In this case and many others, BASP is the conduit between an asylum seeker in need and a solution available in the community.
- Employment is often the best path to asylum seekers making their own way. Through the BASP supporter network, opportunities are found for asylum seekers to do voluntary work, thereby gaining valuable Australian work experience. Voluntary work helps asylum seekers build confidence, skills and relationships, all of which aid the settlement process. Some asylum seekers gain work experience through assisting BASP service provision in areas such as furniture and food delivery.
- A food run started up, and continues as of December 2018, for people in need and who are unable to access the food bank at the BASP office in Albert Park. The food bank

has been coordinated by Noelle Mawdsley over many years. Other BASP volunteers distribute this food and frequently befriend the people they take the food to. John Meyer does all the furniture deliveries. John is often assisted by asylum seekers gaining work experience.



Julie helping Haile get his construction industry 'white card'



Furniture deliveries – John with volunteer asylum seekers

- Marian Steele, a volunteer for some years, has assisted BASP secure paid employment for some people by establishing links with job providers, contacting employers and helping people with resumes.

- Accommodation became a higher priority. Some houses are rented by BASP, some have been made available to BASP, and some asylum seekers are living in community members' own homes. Some Victorian parishes sponsored housing placements, often following up with integration activities, the most important of which are job placement for adults and education for children. A number of fund-raising activities during this period contributed towards the cost of housing and utilities for BASP supported asylum seekers. A significant sum was raised by BASP supporter, Robert Allanadale, and his committee. As well, early in 2017, a very generous benefactor purchased a home exclusively for BASP use. Other houses have also become available temporarily. Karin Butterfield was the main volunteer helping to source rental housing.

- In 2015, a newly announced Fast Track Assessment Process with a very tight deadline was hastily made available to asylum seekers in the 'legacy caseload' group. Many volunteers came forward to be involved in assisting people prepare biographical material in readiness for this assessment. The documentation requirement was challenging; the volunteers could only take it so far before skilled migration agents or lawyers were needed to complete the documentation with each asylum seeker. BASP worked closely with the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) and Refugee Legal who had pro bono legal practitioners working tirelessly to meet time frames.

- Parish and community groups across Melbourne and Victoria offered to hold frequent picnics, BBQs and other social activities. BASP assisted to link them with individuals and families seeking asylum in the spirit of friendship and welcome. There was even a picnic at Hanging Rock!

Opportunities for a new life

Ayaan, a Somali mother of six, fled Yemen, taking an additional three young single Somali women under her wing en route.

Coming by boat they went to Christmas Island and were then separated by Immigration, sending the mother and three school age daughters to an Adelaide detention centre and the remaining young adults to the detention centre in Broadmeadows, Melbourne.

During her visits to Broadmeadows the over a nine-month period in 2014, Sister Brigid Arthur became aware of the presence and circumstances of these young people. BASP was advised that if it could provide housing, the young adults could be released. Fortunately, BASP was offered an unused aged care hostel for use until the plans for its redevelopment were completed. This enabled not only the five young people at Broadmeadows to be released, but also for Ayaan and her three children in detention in Adelaide to join them and set up a joint household. The move from detention to a room each with an ensuite was quite a change!

Initially, they all attended relevant outlets to improve their English. The three school aged children sought entrance to Presentation College Windsor – a school that welcomed them warmly, waived their fees and organised headscarves in school colours. After 18 months they moved into their own rental housing.

The young adults began various courses to prepare them for work. One works full time in a childcare centre, another is a library assistant, a third is in hospitality and the son has taken up a factory role. Two of the ‘adopted’ women married within the Somali community. The third one met an Australian PhD student on line in a chess club, and their wedding was a blending of both cultures. Applications for protection by the Somali family were granted and they have Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEVs) which will transfer to a Permanent Visa when policy hopefully changes.

In 2014, a scared young woman came to BASP having fled the Taliban in Pakistan and made her way to Australia. Zahra had just completed her medical degree in Pakistan. Shortly after her arrival, BASP introduced her to a wonderful family who took her into their home, incorporated her into their family and supported her through the many hurdles of seeking asylum as well as meeting the Australian Medical standards. After four and a half years she received her permanent Protection Visa and is completing her second year as a doctor in one of Melbourne’s major public hospitals.

Arzhang’s is an unusual story by any standards. A Hazara man from Afghanistan, he has made the journey to Australia not once, but twice – by air, land and sea – seeking safe refuge for himself and his family.

He first fled the Taliban in 1999, leaving from Quetta, Pakistan. After spending some time in detention in Australia, Arzhang was living in Sydney in 2001 when the World Trade Centre in New York was destroyed. His wife and daughter were still living in Kabul in Afghanistan, and he was so afraid for their safety in a war zone, he went back there and evacuated them to Pakistan.

Seven years later, Arzhang fled Pakistan for the second time during a period of violent Taliban attacks targeting Hazaras, this time leaving his wife and three children behind. On route to Australia, he was arrested in Indonesia and returned to Kabul. He immediately left again to take the same journey, this time arriving in Australia by boat in 2010.

Two and a half years later, shattered and despairing after 30 months in four different detention centres, Arzhang was released. During his time in detention Sister Brigid had got to know him well. In the community, supported by BASP, he was gradually regaining some sense of security and normality but was surprised and dismayed when he learned that his teenage daughter Maryam, desperate to reunite with her father, was following in his footsteps. He knew only that she was somewhere in Indonesia preparing to take the perilous journey to Australia by boat with another Hazara family. Happily, Maryam arrived

safely, was briefly detained, and then released into the care of her father.

Arzhang was living in a shared BASP accommodation with other men at the time, and with insufficient means to properly support Maryam, he initially felt incapable of properly looking after her and arranged for her to live with a Hazara family in Melbourne. After two years it unfortunately became necessary for her to leave this family's home just as she entered her final year of schooling. Again, with BASP support, Arzhang found suitable accommodation for Maryam, and was able to support her directly for this important year.

Despite the insecurity of back- to-back bridging visas over the last nine years, and the heartbreaking knowledge that his wife and two sons are living in precarious circumstances in Pakistan, Arzhang has been able to provide a safe and supportive environment for Maryam to study and flourish. He has reliable work that BASP was able to access. He still struggles to support an extended family in Pakistan, and he has fears about his mental health reserves. However, he has the comfort that Maryam has very successfully completed her first year of Biomedical Science on a university scholarship in Melbourne. Her ambition is to study medicine in the future.

While BASP was engaged in servicing asylum seeker needs with new and expanded services, the policy environment was steadily deteriorating, prompting a series of lows for the Project.

Impact of a deteriorating environment for people seeking asylum: some lows

People in offshore and onshore detention, as well as people already in the community, had lacked any real security with respect to their future over a long period of time. Throughout 2017, and for much of 2018, attitudes within the Australian community appeared to have stagnated, with little progress seemingly gained by the many groups and individuals advocating strongly for positive change. BASP believes that where there is antipathy in the Australian population towards asylum seekers, it is as a result of the way asylum seekers are portrayed by our political leaders and the media.

This deteriorating environment posed a number of difficult issues for BASP:

- › Mindful of possible repercussions on individuals or campaigns, BASP has struggled with decisions around how much publicity to seek for people's stories.
- › The Brigidine Sisters joined the 'sanctuary movement' as part of the broader strategic campaign called #LetThemStay. This movement offers sanctuary to asylum seekers in the event that they may be about to be deported and is particularly focused on those who are under threat of being returned to Nauru or Manus Island. It also incorporates a demand to bring people in offshore detention to Australia. While #LetThemStay has so far stopped most transfers back to Nauru or Manus Island, there has been no change in the policy of indefinite offshore detention and the sanctuary movement remains in place.
- › Sister Brigid penned an article around this time challenging the fear of Muslims being generated in the community: Should we be fearful of Muslims? And should Muslims fear us? With fear being deliberately fuelled in the community, some visibly Muslim people were, and still are at December 2018, suffering

harassment on the street, particularly women wearing a hijab. In this article Sister Brigid argued that the small Muslim community in Australia “has much more to fear from us than we do from them”.

- Despite the help of committed migration agents and lawyers, increasingly our immigration laws fail to support the 1951 Refugee Convention and have become and, continue to be, ethically unacceptable. BASP believes that Australia needs a Bill of Rights or Human Rights Act. Equality of opportunity should be offered to people regardless of their race, religion, ethnic background or mode of arrival in Australia. BASP agrees with the respected Australian author Richard Flanagan when he said, in 2015, “One day, many years from now, another Prime Minister will stand up and to a teary gallery apologise for the damage done to refugees in detention”.

At times the Project has been quite dismayed by the increasing number of people suffering from hopelessness, mental strain and the threat of impending homelessness.

An excerpt from an interview of Sister Brigid on ABC radio in 2014 captures some of this dismay.

What is so bad about what is happening to people in detention?

“I have never met a person who came to an immigration detention centre who didn’t think that they had a very good reason for seeking asylum, that in a democratic country they would be listened to, they would be treated well and that they would get a visa. They believe this because they think that their own experience is something that will speak to people in this country.

However, as the months go on, each detainee’s whole emotional and mental approach changes – this happens typically after about three months. They seem to be able to sustain being detained for that long and then the prolonged and indefinite detention experience almost invariably takes its toll.

People begin to use phrases like “I’m between earth and sky”; “I’m between life and death”; “I’m a person with a body but no heart”; “I’ve done nothing wrong, why am I here?”; “They give me sleeping medicine but I try not to go to sleep because the dreams are too bad”. This is the sort of story that one hears over and over again from detainees.

One of the things that people in that situation live with that I constantly hear is that thing about “I haven’t done anything wrong”. One man said to me “I’ve done nothing wrong. Just convince them to let me out and then if in the next two years, even ten years, they find out anything I’ve done wrong they can put me back into prison and they can lock me up forever because I haven’t done anything wrong”. That is reiterated over and over again. Another repeated sentiment is “one day in here seems like a year”.

It is a roller coaster ride for people who are in detention. It seems that there is very limited human rights protection for them. The issues affecting people in this situation are not overt ill treatment – it is much more subtle than that.

Personal development is on hold. That is especially true for children and minors. It is absolutely important that kids have an opportunity to make some decisions. There are no decisions that they can make about their own wellbeing, about what is going to happen to them at all. Decisions are made for them. There is a loss of competency and a lack of opportunity to continue acting and developing as valued members of a society.

For all detainees, there is debilitating dependency, even for the most basic of needs. For parents, there is an inability to continue exercising any responsibility for family. For those who have family overseas, they are guilt ridden about how their family is surviving. There is little opportunity to develop and interact socially.

The whole process seems to me steely and unforgiving, destined to rob people of hope and in the end of any belief in their own ability to help themselves or anyone else.”

What about children?

“There are obvious things that children suffer in detention – around education (can never really be normal when you come out of and go back to detention at the beginning and end of the school day); food; witnessing self-harm; having security officers giving certain directions and acting in supervisory roles; and so on, but the real difficulties are probably more subtle. For our Australian kids life is punctuated by special times – outings, visits from grandparents or friends, sleepovers, birthdays – for children in detention it is one day after another. The average time in detention now is over a year – and gradually the light goes out of their eyes; there is a wariness in relating to others especially as they get older. And parents are at a loss in dealing with the anger, aggression, withdrawal on the part of their kids – living in really cramped conditions from which there is no alleviation.

Children feel responsible for their parents: can you stop my mother being sad? My mother did something very bad ... symptom of her ill health ... ill health being called misdemeanours, which presumes people could be better if they wanted to. Teenagers in particular usually feel resentful and hurt.” (*Sister Brigid interview with Raf Epstein ABC Radio August 2014*)

An unbearable burden

Mina, Abbas, their two children and Mina’s brother left Iran as Christians seeking religious freedom and fearing persecution for their beliefs.

They arrived by boat two days after the cut-off date where all arrivals were sent to Nauru or Manus Island. One of their children aged three or four had epilepsy and diabetes and because of this, they were not sent to Nauru but, as a single person, Mina’s 18-year-old brother was sent to Manus Island.

After some time in a mainland detention centre, then Community Detention, Mina and her family received a Bridging Visa and required help from BASP to secure private rental. Abbas has struggled to maintain full time employment, in part due to emergency hospital visits for their daughter, his limited English and his attempt to run his own painting business. Mina’s fragile mental health at times has also affected the family. This seems mainly around her brother’s deterioration in Manus and her ‘guilt’ about his predicament, his having come with her initially. The children struggle with school work given the trauma and distress they have experienced, and both are responding to one-on-one volunteer assistance through BASP.

“The whole process seems to me steely and unforgiving, destined to rob people of hope and in the end of any belief in their own ability to help themselves or anyone else.”

—Sr Brigid Arthur

Another low: draconian measures in onshore detention centres impacting asylum seekers and visitors

From 2012-2015 it was possible to get permission take people out of detention for short periods of time. For example, Pamela Curr occasionally hosted small groups of asylum seekers from the Broadmeadows detention centre to relax in her home over a meal. (*Pamela Curr interview, March 2018*)

BASP excursions from Broadmeadows detention centre ceased soon after the Australian Border Force came into being in 2015. Until this time families and singles were taken out to picnics, visits with friends, shopping and cafes as a break from oppressive detention centre life. The Friday night indoor soccer followed by dinner at Pamela's house was discontinued also. Even though the men were accompanied by guards and no one attempted to escape, this respite from detention was disallowed. (*Pamela Curr interview, March 2018*)

Extreme modes of restraint, more akin to prison-like security, came into being in detention centres like Broadmeadows. The use of handcuffs or other restraints makes some asylum seekers attending medical appointments feel like criminals, which they are not; they are in administrative detention. Some even prefer to miss important appointments to avoid this humiliation.

The detention regime became harsher. In order to visit the Broadmeadows detention centre (as of December 2018), five days' notice by email is required, and 10 days if more than one person is to be visited. At this time, there is a 100-point security check and drug testing system being introduced. Detainees are now prevented from freely moving around inside the Centre, with people who know each other separated in different areas. The introduction of metal detectors negatively impacted women in particular as many of them have been issued

with underwire bras which trigger an alarm as they pass through security. This leads to loathsome body searches every time they go from one section to another.

BASP Christmas parties at Broadmeadows detention centre proceeded smoothly in 2014, 2015 and 2016 but, in 2017, the occasion became a complete fiasco when detention centre management took control of who could attend and in what order. People could only attend in small groups and women were separated from men and left until last. Understandably many people chose not to participate, and it was decided not to continue with this activity.

A visit to Christmas Island

In August 2016 Sister Brigid and Pamela Curr decided they needed to visit Christmas Island as they had heard there were asylum seekers detained there but there was little information on who they were and their needs. Despite difficulties in securing access, they eventually managed to meet with most of the asylum seekers.

Sister Brigid and Pamela's report of their Christmas Island visit shone a light on a group of 'invisible' people and their plight. The major sentiment they encountered was "I am so tired". This was both vocalised by asylum seekers and observed. The conditions had become much harsher after an incident in November 2015 when an Iranian Kurdish man, Fazel Chegeni (not a pseudonym) committed suicide. After his death there were fires, a lockdown and an even more punishing regime. "It's all much tougher now," they told Sister Brigid and Pamela. As a result of this visit to Christmas Island and the earlier one to Scherger Detention centre, some of the men have come to Melbourne seeking support after release. They have said, "You were the only visitors we saw in those years." Sister Brigid has provided them with emergency accommodation and helped them find work and safe housing. (*Pamela Curr interview, March 2018*)

Yet another low: destitution on the horizon

From 2014 onwards, BASP has been approached by several people who had been medically transferred from Manus Island or Nauru and who were living in the community under Community Detention. While they had housing support and a small allowance, they were unable to work or study, unless they were under 18. BASP became involved with some in Victoria to provide social support and, where necessary, material aid, including cash payments. This was necessary, given these people had spent years in offshore detention and had significant medical problems.

Throughout 2017 and 2018 provision of housing and meeting basic needs of financial support for all groups of people seeking asylum continued to be the focus of much of BASP activity. By mid-2018, with increasing numbers of people denied further income support (the SRSS), BASP was housing around 120 people at any one time, in about 35 houses. This labour- and time-intensive task, requiring much ingenuity, has been largely undertaken by Libby Saunders. Over the life of the project, many hundreds of people have been able to live in BASP houses.

Subsequently in late 2017, some of the group in Australia from offshore was targeted for a 'Final Departure Bridging Visa E' and were taken out of Community Detention with just a few weeks' notice. Initially it was mainly men targeted and, of all the providers of services in Victoria, it was BASP who placed 13 out of 20 people in Melbourne in housing when they had their housing and income support taken away. These people then desperately needed to find work, to

whatever level their medical condition allowed. Through its supporter network BASP tried to find work, including voluntary work, for this group. In May 2018, this deliberately punitive Visa scheme was applied to more people, including families. The Victorian government made funds available through the Red Cross to reimburse some of the costs associated with housing and daily living expenses.

The majority of people in BASP-supported accommodation have striven to become independent as quickly as possible, freeing up room for others in need. However, given the lack of income support, the loss of work rights for some and difficulty in job seeking, as of the end of 2018, it is now much harder for people to gain independence and this in turn makes it harder for BASP to accommodate the needs of new people seeking help with housing. In May 2018, BASP Coordinator Libby Saunders said, "we could fill another 10 houses right now if we had them". (*Libby Saunders interview, May 2018*)

In August 2018, as reported above, the government announced that a further 7000-8000 people, mostly people in the 'legacy caseload' group of 30,000 people who had been in limbo for the last five years, were also to be denied ongoing income support. Desperate to avoid the impending avalanche of people in need, a concerted campaign was waged by all advocacy groups, including BASP, to try to stop this policy going ahead. Nevertheless, the policy was implemented and, as of the end of 2018, all of the community support agencies were at capacity point.

"We could fill another 10 houses right now if we had them".

—Libby Saunders, May 2018

Housing challenges

Nala, a Somali mother of five children under six, arrived on a spouse visa seeking asylum. She left her husband following domestic violence and not was entitled to any government support until her spouse visa expired in 15 months' time. BASP had a large house, bought by a generous donor, for BASP's use. This family was housed there, given money and food fortnightly until the spouse visa expired. She was immediately recognised as a genuine refugee, gaining permanent protection status and able to access ongoing financial support, dependent on need, as for any other community member.

Nala then made arrangements to move into private rental promptly, so that BASP could use the house for others facing homelessness.

Ragan and his two younger cousins fled Sri Lanka and were working and renting privately when they lost their first appeal for asylum. They also lost their work rights and with no income, could not maintain their rent. They appealed to the Federal Circuit Court – with a date two years hence. BASP accommodated them in a house it rented and gave them money for food and basics (phone, myki). After several months their work rights were restored, they commenced part time work and were able to pay BASP rent and utilities when funds permitted. They sought private rental for many months before they were accepted, moving out for new people with no income or work rights to move into the house.

Sarah is a young woman who was in the Broadmeadows Detention Centre for four months. Her lawyer contacted BASP to say the Immigration Department would release her on the condition of housing and full support pending consideration of her protection application. BASP agreed to house her and pay \$100 per week, given she was not granted work rights. This was eight months ago, as of December 2018, and there had been no action about her protection application. She likes to be useful so works as a volunteer five days a week.

For the last 18 years BASP has operated as a provider that steps in when other agencies, for a range of reasons, are unable to support people seeking asylum in need. BASP's ability to act without long lead times or externally imposed and inflexible guidelines is one of the keys to its success. BASP has been told by some of the other agencies caught up in vagaries of the asylum seeker system in Victoria that many asylum seekers in need would be much worse off if BASP could not help them. (*Libby Saunders interview, May 2018*)

Without a change in policy or a significant new injection of funds, it is hard to know how BASP and the other support services will cope with the overwhelming prospect of many asylum seekers becoming homeless and destitute, adding to the already high level of homelessness across the broader Australian community.

Given the prominence housing has played as a BASP service over the 18 years life of the project from 2001 to 2018, a recent reflection on this service provision and its challenges will be outlined here in some detail before concluding this history.

Reflections on housing as a major BASP service

Since 2001, BASP has arranged housing for people seeking asylum. Initially this was in two Brigidine-owned houses. Over time, the need has increased substantially and BASP has sourced a range of housing solutions with help from the community. Some people have low incomes, while others have no income.

In 2018, housing options range from houses owned by religious congregations (5), one house owned by an individual and given to BASP for ongoing use, rented properties (12), Parish supported housing (4), and housing offered by people in the community (20 places). We have one family who gives two weeks crisis accommodation as required.

In addition, BASP helps individuals navigate the housing market in a temporary or ongoing way.

Emergency Housing

Sometimes BASP assists people with community crisis accommodation, usually because other possible options (through service providers such as Life Without Barriers, AMES and Red Cross) have been exhausted. Crisis accommodation is usually in backpackers or rooming houses. While these may be better than sleeping on the streets, it is difficult for many asylum seekers who have recently experienced trauma to find themselves in a shared room with others who have mental health issues or who are drug or alcohol affected. It is not cheap either – between \$25-30 a night in bunk beds in a shared dormitory. It may also be unsafe, particularly for women.

Rooming houses

BASP is dismayed by the quality of housing available to people on very low incomes in Melbourne. BASP recently found a room in a rooming house in Kew for a young man. It is a dismal room, about 2x3 metres with a tiny alcove for a chest of drawers. It has access to a shared kitchen, toilets, showers, in an area quite some distance from the room. And this for \$130 a week.

Finding the four weeks rent in advance and two weeks bond was beyond our friend's capacity without assistance from BASP.

Key concerns re stable housing for people seeking asylum

BASP makes the following observations about the challenges facing people seeking housing in the private rental market. These include the initial cost of renting, the demands of the market and the risk of overcrowding and exploitation, as outlined below.

When those BASP helps get a job or other means of support, they are asked to move from BASP housing so that others who have no income can take their place. At that stage they need to find a place, and usually to provide four weeks rent in advance and a bond equivalent to another four week's rent. This is a considerable initial outlay.

The other option is to find a shared room via the internet, but the other occupants tend to choose someone who has a higher and more stable income than asylum seekers. The same amount of rent in advance and bond is required.

Public housing is not available to people on Bridging Visas so asylum seekers must try and enter the private rental market. Around 2011, BASP could rent houses/units in the price range of \$250-300/week, usually on the outskirts of Melbourne. This same housing now costs \$350-400/week and there is more competition.

Families with children need to be in reasonable proximity to schools, where housing is more costly. Access to public transport is critical in finding work and getting to appointments, yet housing near railway stations is more expensive and more hotly contested.

A lack of a rental history is a particular drawback. Most real estate rental agents will pass over applicants with no referees in favour of those with a good tenancy history. Prospective landlords, too, may be wary of entering a lease with people on a Bridging Visa, when their length of stay in Australia is uncertain.

Getting to see a range of properties within 10 to 15-minute inspection time slots is also difficult for people who are only beginning to find their way around. Filling in application forms that ask for documents most asylum seekers don't have (such as work or housing references, bank statements) is another challenge.

Sometimes people can only afford a room or part of a house, which can result in impoverished and overcrowded conditions. BASP has seen many examples of up to 13 people living in a three-bedroom house. They are also at risk of exploitation by unscrupulous landlords or agents. In one house, the floor boards still in place were infested with white ants and covered over with mats.

Asylum seekers may lack the English language skills needed to communicate effectively on housing issues. They may not fully grasp the nature of tenancy arrangements or feel confident to advocate successfully on their own behalf.

Some more disadvantaged than others

Some asylum seekers are especially disadvantaged.

Since most available housing is shared, it is very difficult for those with specific needs associated with physical or mental health issues to get sustainable places. They need a level of support that is not often available. BASP needs to think of the overall good of the house where different people are cohabiting, which can mean not being able to include a person with specific needs.

Women with children who are on their own due to domestic violence are a particular subset who find it hard to get housing. Sometimes they have short term housing provided by agencies who have assisted them after a domestic violence report, but then they have to find an independent place to live while they struggle with the impact of violence while caring for their children.

Single men and women usually have no Government income support, and until they can

get a job they cannot afford housing. Ironically, it is almost impossible to get a job with no fixed address and some money to travel to and present for interviews.

Homelessness

There are no official statistics, but BASP has witnessed a level of homelessness in the asylum seeker population. This is often cloaked as couch surfing or sleeping in cars, but many are also sleeping rough. BASP has met a few people who have been attacked in this situation, compounding the trauma they have experienced and exacerbating mental health problems.

Housing and applying for a protection visa

Destitution – of which lack of housing is a substantial part – makes applying for protection much harder. At a basic level, asylum seekers may not receive correspondence from Immigration authorities if they are constantly moving to a new house or have no permanent address.

Because the Australian Government has introduced policies which significantly lengthen the period of time asylum seekers may be in the community without a permanent resolution of their case, the housing that asylum seekers need is no longer for a short transitional period but can, and normally does, extend over many years.

A glimmer of hope: call to get people off Nauru and Manus Island strengthens

Sadly, in the latter half of 2018, the Minister for Home Affairs (then encompassing responsibility for immigration) Peter Dutton warned that one act of compassion could ‘undo overnight’ five years of hard work in stopping boats coming to Australia with asylum seekers on board. This time, the clamour in the Australian community to get people off Nauru and Manus Island and bring them to Australia reached fever pitch. Even the conservative press was reporting that the attitudes of sufficient Australians were shifting in favour of bringing all children on Nauru to Australia. It seemed that, having recently lost an attempt at taking the Prime Minister’s role himself, Minister Dutton’s statement clearly did not carry the same weight as previous scaremongering tactics had.

In a by-election environment in October 2018, this shift in sentiment translated into minor political shifts by both major political parties in Australia. It is this shift in attitudes in the Australian population that offers a glimmer of hope when those working with asylum seekers in Australia are experiencing an overwhelming demand for their services.

The fifth anniversary of the reopening of Manus Island and Nauru in August 2013 was marked by rallies around Australia at which a statement was read from Behrouz Boochani, a refugee writer on Manus Island. Behrouz has not only survived his long incarceration there but has managed, through his writing and film making, to document and communicate the real situation on Manus Island over the course of five years, despite communication blackouts. In 2017, Behrouz used his mobile phone, his story-telling skills and external support, in the person of co-director Arash Kamali Sarvestani, to make the film *Chauka, Please Tell Us The Time*. He also wrote the award-winning book *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison*. As an example of its continuing commitment to

community education, in August 2018, a BASP forum featured Behrouz’s film and book. It was introduced by Janet Galbraith, poet and founder of Writing Through Fences, a writing group made up of people who are, or have been, detained in immigration detention.

A final note

Despite the challenges and the workload, the Project continues to celebrate important events and successes, particularly those of individual asylum seekers or families. In a clear example of the compassion and practical support offered by the Project, in April 2018, Libby Saunders attended the birth of twins as the support person to a young woman who had fled her home country without knowing she was pregnant. There are hundreds of other such acts of humanity that exemplify the work of the Project over the last 18 years, and such support will continue to be characteristic of BASP.



Libby and twins

In the November 2018 BASP newsletter, Sister Brigid and Libby signed off by thanking BASP supporters for the many ways in which they support asylum seekers, directly and indirectly, under the auspices of the Project. They wrote “May 2019 see changes that make Australia a much kinder and more humane place for all those seeking refuge and protection.”



Sister Brigid at a protest rally

Despite the challenges and the workload, the Project continues to celebrate important events and successes, particularly those of individual asylum seekers or families.

6. The unique approach of BASP

This history seeks to demonstrate the unique approach taken by the BASP community and the impact it has had. The leaders of the Project, the joint BASP Coordinators and the BASP Council/Board have striven to demonstrate behaviours aligned with the values of kindness and strength, to set a tone for Project staff and volunteers to always respond in a non-judgemental way, and to approach everyone with respect. This alignment of principles and practice has enabled a high level of trust, stability and reliability in the entire Project. Despite the sad loss of Sister Catherine in 2015, the perpetual presence of Sister Brigid, and then Libby Saunders, and many others around them has given a high level of stability to the Project over its lifetime. *(Delia Bradshaw interview, June 2018)*



Brigidine Ministry Centre team joins Blue for Nauru campaign

In particular, tribute needs to be paid to Libby Saunders. Libby joined BASP in 2014. Libby came to BASP with extensive experience as a social worker and in human service management. She had been involved in the early development of community health services, then moving to the disability sector in the Senior Social Work role at the Spastic Society of Victoria. Libby joined Silver Circle, (now Calvary Community Care) in 1993 and had a significant role in developing it into a national community care organisation,

overseeing acquisitions within it, and of it, as CEO and National Director Community Care in the Calvary Health Care group. Libby resigned from this position in 2013.

Libby brought to BASP her social work and management skills, a passion for justice and care of those seeking protection. She graciously accepts being often called 'Sister Libby' and is known for her kindness, her practicality and her sense of humour.

BASP has always relied on volunteers and Libby has been instrumental in bringing a new level of management and support for those offering to help. This has flowed on through to being able to provide support for more people seeking asylum.

BASP is an independent, cost efficient, provider of much needed help often unavailable anywhere else. Flexibility has been key to its evolution. BASP has developed a suite of services designed for asylum seekers which meet their immediate practical needs and give them a modicum of stability and confidence to take the next step themselves, as soon as that is possible. This suite of services includes housing, income support and access to food, transport, legal advice and representation. Many other indirect services are also facilitated by the Project through the many contacts and networks of Project volunteers. These include educational and job opportunities and the chance to participate in community events like picnics, holidays and concerts. BASP provides what is needed, customised as much as possible to the needs of the individual, trying to avoid a 'one-size fits all' approach.

From asylum seekers themselves, the qualities valued most are friendship, a warm heart, and the kindness they have been shown. Many asylum seekers talk of warm relationships of long duration with Sister Brigid or Sister Catherine, relationships that have sustained them during the difficult times. *(Interviews with asylum seekers over 2016-2017 conducted by*

Ursula Groves). For more recently arrived people, this offer of friendship and listening has been maintained by Libby and many volunteers.

For those touched by BASP, volunteers and other contributors, the discovery of people with a common purpose and a shared solidarity is highly valued. BASP supporters and participants welcome belonging to an ever-widening community that embodies and enacts a vision and mission they cherish.

In her partnership with Sister Brigid, Pamela Curr talks of Sister Brigid's courage and compassion in her approach. The nurturing, while it might start with food, consists of listening and responding from the heart. With respect to courage, Pamela has seen Sister Brigid repeatedly challenge the immigration and detention centre authorities and embassy officials. She simply will not take 'no' for an answer. In nearly every case, her perseverance wins out. While this may be explained by the dictum 'no one challenges a nun', it is also made possible by BASP's independence from any public or private funding arrangement, a deliberate decision on the part of the Project. (*Pamela Curr interview, March 2018*)

The inner strength of Sister Brigid herself is an inspiration to all. Sister Brigid, as the Project's primary representative, is free to call any situation as she sees it. She does this frequently and consistently, in line with Brigidine values, and hers is the strength behind the Project. (*Pamela Curr interview, March 2018*)

Chair of the BASP Council (formerly Committee) between 2002 and 2017, Delia Bradshaw describes Sister Brigid as the guiding force of the project, someone who has the rare capacity to both respond compassionately to the practical needs in front of her, and to see the big picture within an ethical framework. She combines everyday kindness with a sharp intellectual discernment. For Delia, Sister Brigid is not motivated by self-interest. "She acts without ego, infusing everything with a collective endeavour of goodwill and compassion." Delia praises Sister Brigid as a wonderful orator, feisty

when necessary, but otherwise humble. Delia praises Sister Brigid as a wonderful orator, feisty when necessary, but otherwise humble. "Sister Brigid has provided stability and ensured that cultural memory has been sustained over the many years of the project. She and the BASP Council have seen the virtues of not growing too quickly, despite operating with an open-door policy where no one is turned away." (*Delia Bradshaw interview, April 2018*)

Asylum seekers who have spoken to the author of this history have reported Sister Brigid as literally life-saving, able to predict needs before they arise and to act quickly to provide assistance. They see her as someone they can rely on when hope is all but lost. (*Interviews with asylum seekers over 2016-2017 conducted by Ursula Groves*)

When questioned about being taken advantage of, due to the non-judgemental attitude of the Project, both Sister Brigid and Libby talk of the very rare circumstances where they have been taken in by someone's 'story'. When the truth is uncovered, they prefer to be misled occasionally than to not believe the vast majority who are genuine.

BASP prizes and demonstrates kindness, justice, stability, flexibility and courage. It is a powerful example of 'Small is beautiful'.

7. Conclusion

This history outlines the approach of the Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project (BASP) to Australia's constantly changing policy framework for asylum seekers over the last 18 years. This policy framework has evolved under both Coalition and Labor governments during this period, often shaped by a change of government, Prime Minister or Immigration Minister. The policy framework has demonstrated two disturbing characteristics, firstly, showing an increasing cruelty towards people reaching Australia seeking protection and, secondly, making chaotic and almost random decisions with devastating impact.

With respect to the charge of cruelty, the 'start, stop and start again' nature of government asylum seeker policy over the course of the last 18 years has been very harmful in its impact on asylum seekers. This is clearly illustrated in the use of Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) and the use of onshore and offshore detention – specifically indefinite offshore detention. Similarly cruel is the increasingly draconian treatment of people incarcerated in detention centres and the restriction of their access to support services and the outside world.

With respect to the charge of randomness, the opaque nature of asylum claims processing and the often-arbitrary nature of decision making appears unfair. For many asylum seekers it has impacted significantly on their physical and mental health and wellbeing as they frequently wait many years in the system without progress or information. Some examples cited in the history include:

- treating people differently with regard to processing priorities based on their mode of arrival, by boat or by plane;
- the forcing of large numbers of people into limbo for long periods of time, with no information provided as to when their claim may move forward;
- the lack of income support for some people living in the community for long periods of time awaiting an outcome of their claim, while others are able to access that support;
- the different outcomes received by different people with a very similar basis for their claim; and
- the seemingly deliberate slowing down of processing to delay family reunion.

The response of BASP has been shaped by this policy environment.

First and foremost, BASP prioritises direct practical support to asylum seekers looking for help. Despite the breadth and depth of despair that the Project has seen over more than 18 years, those leading and supporting BASP's work have never given up providing a friendly welcome and practical support and hope to many asylum seekers who have arrived in Australia in genuine need.

The positive difference BASP services have made to individual asylum seekers is willingly acknowledged by the asylum seekers themselves and all who come into contact with the Project. While the impact of the Project is primarily located in Victoria, there have been many cases of direct services being given to people right across Australia. BASP has done this as an independent, nimble, cost efficient provider of last resort, supported by the Brigidine Community, private donations and fund-raising activities.

Secondly, BASP has initiated and supported community-wide advocacy for the rights of asylum seekers and the need for Australia to both meet its international obligations as well as demonstrate humanitarian values. BASP has continuously called out political leaders to govern with more compassion, to depoliticise the debate around immigration more generally,

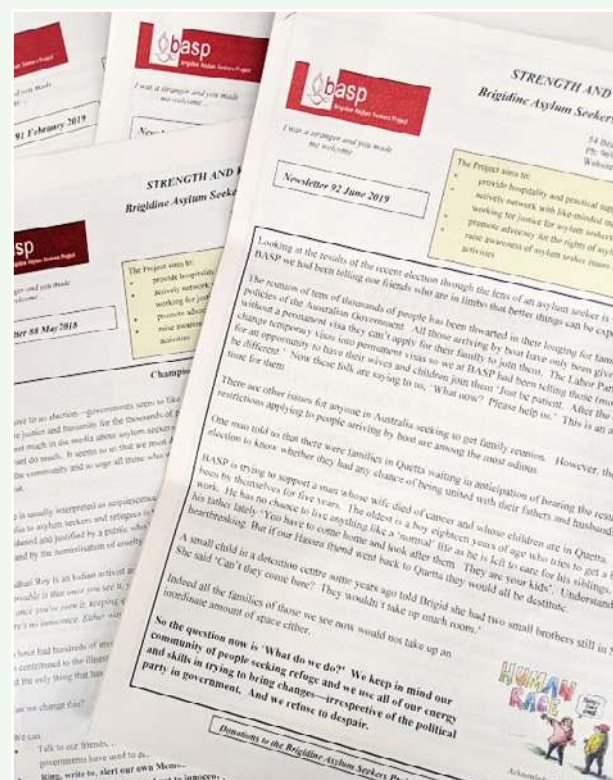
and to focus on uniting and not dividing the Australian community around issues like race or religion. Sister Brigid has written extensively about the need to stop stoking Islamophobia and division based on difference of any kind.

Thirdly, BASP has worked extensively with other organisations and networks in calling for a fairer, more humane approach to the treatment of asylum seekers in Australia. It has worked both out front and behind the scenes for better treatment and outcomes for people. The Project has asked ordinary Australians to be individual advocates and to get involved in calling for change, and on many occasions involved them in doing so.

Lastly, the Project has worked hard to educate and develop awareness in the Australian community of the needs of asylum seekers in Australia and of the circumstances of their treatment in Australia or in offshore processing. There have been 18 years of education forums, community briefings and newsletters' informing the public about what is actually happening to asylum seekers in Australia, in onshore and offshore detention centres, as well as in the community around them.

Significant numbers of volunteers have embraced the values and priorities of the Project and worked to support them.

This history seeks to put the Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project experience between 2001 and 2018 on record for future generations of Australians. The Project believes, along with many others, that there will be a future reckoning for this period of Australian history. When that happens, this history may contribute to the understanding of what did happen and how one community-based project, BASP, responded. The values and work of BASP have been a beacon for many. There is no doubt that they will continue to be a source of inspiration and action, a living example of heart and hope.



Regular, informative newsletters for BASP supporters



One of numerous advocacy events



Christmas celebration

8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Overview of the Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project (BASP) Activities as of December 2018

AWARENESS/EDUCATION

- › Talks at parishes/schools/other groups
- › 90+ BASP newsletters to a distribution list of 1700
- › Preparation of talking points for presenters
- › Organisation of discussion nights/public forums
- › Story telling in speech and writing
- › Website
- › Workshops on asylum seeker issues for volunteers and other groups
- › Publicity – book launches, film nights, seminars, conferences, rallies, lobbying

HOSPITALITY/PRACTICAL SUPPORT

- › Housing – provision of houses, help finding rental or donated accommodation and assistance with costs
- › Emergency relief – food, vouchers, shelter, utilities, transport
- › Family Support Through English (tutoring)
- › Assistance finding employment – paid work experience, voluntary
- › Support and hospitality at detention centres
- › Furniture /food/cars/driving lessons
- › Friendship and day-to-day navigation of Australian society
- › Direct financial assistance – education, medical, phone and Myki cards
- › Social outings, picnics and weekends away
- › Arrangement of pro-bono legal support
- › Assistance with family reunion
- › Help gaining access to medical services and treatment

ADVOCACY

- › Participation in public advocacy events such as Palm Sunday
- › Extensive lobbying, including visits and letters to politicians
- › Policy development/Policy papers
- › Contact with case workers from Immigration Department
- › Referrals – legal, employment, other agencies
- › Acting as Litigation Guardian

NETWORKING

- › Regular contact with allied agencies – health, housing, education, legal representation, case workers
- › Participation in advocacy groups – NASA Vic/Aust Churches Task Force for Refugees/CAPSA/RAN/Asylum Seeker Parish Support Program/Liberty Victoria
- › Ongoing contact with possible employers
- › Ongoing contact with helpful real estate agents

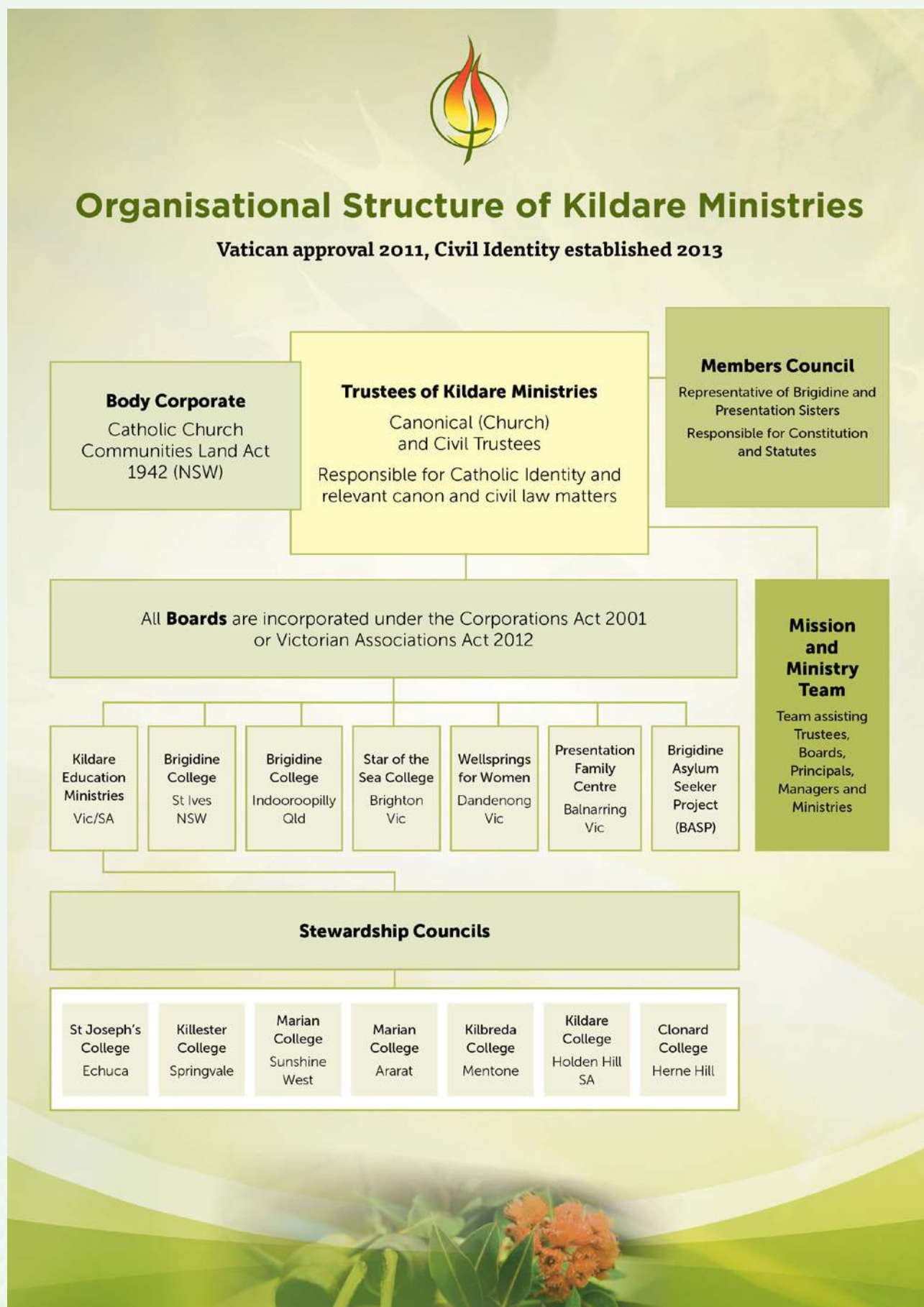
SUPPORT STRUCTURE FOR BASP

- › TRUSTEES OF KILDARE MINISTERIES: Provision of umbrella church and civil authority
- › BOARD: Advice and governance
- › STAFF: Leadership in community education, advocacy, networking and practical support; management of day-to-day issues; project administration; interactions with people seeking asylum, agencies, donors and volunteers
- › DONORS: provision of money or goods
- › VOLUNTEERS (donors of time and talents): A variety of roles, as described in history

SOME STATISTICS

- › Number of BASP Houses in operation (owned, rented, on loan): **27**
- › Number of people being supported in accommodation by BASP: **110-120 at any one time.**
- › Number of asylum seekers currently being supported by BASP: **Around 250 families or individuals at any one time and reaching around 300 people per year.**
- › Number of active volunteers: **200**

Appendix 2: Organisational Structure of Kildare Ministries



Appendix 3: Sources – BASP Newsletters and interviews

BASP Newsletters: Issues 1-90 can be accessed via the State Library of Victoria website or through a visit to the BASP office in Albert Park.

Interviews conducted for this history are lodged at the BASP office in Albert Park.



Cast Away, by Nerida Thompson

This artwork was given to BASP as a gift. It depicts displaced people fleeing persecution & war.



Brigid Arthur, Libby Saunders, Delia Bradshaw and Ursula Groves

9. Glossary

Asylum seeker	A person seeking international protection but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined.
Refugee	A person who has been recognised under the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees to be a refugee. The Convention defines a 'refugee' as any person who: owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.
Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program	Australian Government program which helps people in humanitarian need who are outside Australia (offshore) and need to resettle to Australia when they do not have any other durable solution available or who are already in Australia (onshore), and who want to seek protection after arriving in Australia.
Immigration detention	The holding of non-citizens in immigration detention facilities if they do not hold a valid visa or are suspected of visa violations or unauthorised entry.
Offshore detention	The holding of people suspected of unauthorized arrival in Australia in detention facilities outside Australia, currently Nauru and Manus Island (as of December 2018).
Onshore detention	The holding of people in detention facilities on the Australian mainland and Christmas Island (as of Dec 2018).
Community detention	The placement of people in the Australian community who are still classed and treated as being 'in detention'.
'No advantage' group, later referred to as the 'legacy caseload' group	People who arrived in Australia by boat between 13 August 2012 and 19 July 2013. They were issued Bridging Visas until a place became available in Australia's regular Humanitarian Program. They were to receive a minimum level of income support from the Government, 89 per cent of that given to others in the Australian community (Newstart allowance and benefits) with no other means of support. Most members of this group have remained in limbo indefinitely.

Bridging Visa (various types)	A form of visa issued to people in Australia seeking asylum who have not been assessed for permanent protection and have not been issued with any of the visas below.
Permanent Protection Visa	This visa designates a person as a permanent resident of Australia, with all the rights that entails.
Temporary Protection Visa (TPV)	This visa is for people who arrived in Australia without a valid visa and who are found to have refugee status and who want to apply for protection. It currently applies for a period of three years.
Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV)	This visa is for people who arrived in Australia without a valid visa and who are found to have refugee status and who want to apply for protection. There are some restrictions associated with this visa, such as an intention to work or study in a regional area. It currently applies for a period of five years.
Centrelink	Government agency charged with responsibility for managing all Government income support processes, among other functions.

10. Acknowledgements

Fundraisers additional to those mentioned in the history

Many individual, community and parish fundraising efforts helped add funds to the finances of the project. These included concerts, a photographic exhibition, a garden party, trivia nights, high teas, community benefits and arts events. Some highlights include:

- Two comedy nights with Monica Dullard as compere, assisted by a large team, featured the cream of Melbourne's comedy circuit donating their services for the night.
- The Bugger the Polar Bears exhibition featured ornamental tea cosies and it was MC'd by Rod Quantock, one of many Melbourne-based artists who have supported fund raising activities for asylum seekers over many years.
- A fun run included 'Nuns on the run'!
- A group of expatriate women from Germany raised money from a Christmas market three years in a row.
- Several individuals donated second hand cars.

Donations to the Food Bank have been substantial and continuous over the life of the project.

For many years, 'Friends of Brigid' at Kildara Centre supported BASP with donations of food and money.

Thanks are extended to everyone involved in the above activities and to others who may have been involved in activities not listed here.

BASP Committee/Council Members: 2002–2018

Bill Armstrong, Sister Brigid Arthur, Delia Bradshaw, Sister Anne Boyd, Sister Jude Caldwell, Sister Margaret Cassidy, Sister Louise Cleary, Sister Margaret Fyfe, Lorna Hannan, Sister Catherine Kelly, Kevin Peoples, Wendy Poussard, Libby Saunders, Sister Helen Toohey

BASP Board: 2018 to present

Julie Francis, Margaret Hill, Norman Katende, Joshua Lourensz, Cecilia Merrigan, Mark Northeast, Libby Saunders and Sister Brigid Arthur, BASP Coordinators and Julie Catalano, Board Secretary

BASP Coordinators

Sisters Catherine Kelly (2001-2015) and Brigid Arthur (2001-), Libby Saunders (2015-), Wendy Poussard (2011-2012)

BASP Staff

Sister Jude Caldwell – Bookkeeping

Patrick O'Connor – Pro bono accountant

Julie Catalano, Sue Goonan, Anne-Marie Lochery, Mary Kingsbury, Monica Lang – Administrative support at different times during the life of the project

Website and Publicity support

Steve Brasier, Joady Donovan, Jude Love, Phillipa Smythe, Dani Valent

Housing

These are not all active now, but all have assisted in housing people at some time during the life of the project.

Houses made available

Brigidine Sisters- Albert Park, Ardeer, Echuca, Mordialloc

Cabrini Outreach

Carolyn Chisolm School

Catholic Archdiocese- Kingsville

Columban Community

FCJ Sisters

Pallotti College

Sisters of Charity

Star of the Sea/Bayside Council

St Columba's School

Parishes

Camberwell, Diamond Creek, Greythorn, Hawthorn, Kilmore, Kyneton, Malvern, Mooroolbark, Scoresby, South Yarra

Individuals

Felicia Di Stefano, Honor Elvey, Mary Holland, Ria and Peter Parlevliet, Ruth O'Rourke, Barbara Sawyer, Ingrid Wilson

Community Hosts

Dy Bailey and Kerrie Godbold, Rom Brady, Elizabeth Anne Buckingham, Julie Dehm and partner, Jim Finlayson, Viv and Gerry Fitzgerald, Mona Gholami and James, Lis Grove, Trudy Hairs, Dean La Fontaine, Kirstin and Charlie Lethbridge, Robyn and Malcolm McCormick, Bill and Marie Martin, Muriel Mathers, Richard Mitchell and Barbara Shalit, Zac Murphet and Sam Kaye, Arthur Paradises, Bernadette and Nick Phillips, Phil and Louise Reid, Denise Rodgers, Dan and Gina Ryan, Emma and Matt Stewart, Anne Taib, Miranda Thomasine and Marlis Dopheide, Tom Tierney, Bill and Deb Wiglesworth, Adrian and Trish Wilson.

If there is anyone else who has acted as a Community Host and has not been not listed here, BASP sincerely apologises and thanks you for your contribution.

