

STRENGTH AND KINDNESS

Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP)



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

Newsletter 99 December 2020

The Project aims to:

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

Our indigenous people tell us that many years ago amongst the Wurrundjeri (and other) people of this land, it was the sacred task of the women in the tribe during the grey, wet winter months to carry the fire. Fire meant life. In the drizzle and the damp that we associate with winter months, it was not possible to start a fire again at every camp site. The fire had to be carried. This was achieved by maintaining hot coals in shell cones bartered from the coastal people like the Bunarong. Upon setting up camp, the coals could be fanned into life. So a vital and important duty was to carry those shells with the coals inside them, carefully and with a great sense of responsibility.

Like the indigenous women, our own freedom as individuals and as a country, is only secure when we care about the safety and security of all other people. *Peace and prosperity, tranquility and security are only possible if these are enjoyed by all without discrimination.* [Nelson Mandela]

Part of recording history is to ask questions—even if we are not being given the answers by leaders, our responsibility is to keep asking questions:

How have we become the oppressors of the people who are fleeing other oppressors?

How did we become the people who break hearts?

How did we get to the stage when we imprison people without justification?

How did protection of Australia's borders become so important that we would do anything to protect them, even if this means turning away genuine refugees?

If we were as cruel to kittens, there would be an outcry. Why is there no national revolt at the way we treat asylum seekers?



It is important to acknowledge that the current policies are the collective efforts of the Abbott, Rudd, Gillard, the Howard, Turnbull and Morrison governments, with the original deterrence policy, mandatory detention for boat arrivals, being introduced by the Keating Government in 1992. A bi-partisan policy is hard to change. But Governments are there to do the will of the people.

All of these Governments have talked about an orderly migration program. It's all fine and dandy for Australians to long for an orderly migration system, except for the inconvenient fact that the world's nearly 80 million forcibly displaced people do not flee persecution and disaster the way one files out of the Melbourne Cricket Ground after a Grand Final.

So we look after the coals—and try to fan the life of justice and compassion to the embers.

Donations to the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project are tax deductible

**Australia needs a total re-think of the mandatory detention of people seeking asylum who arrived by boat.
(By the way, no boats are coming)**

What is the present policy?

It is now part of Australian law that all ‘unlawful non-citizens’ must be detained and must remain in detention until they have been granted a valid visa or they leave the country. This requirement is designed primarily to deter unauthorised boat arrivals. It was introduced in 1992, in response to people from Cambodia arriving here by boat. One of the worst aspects of this policy is that there is no time line for people’s release. Some have been detained for more than ten years.

After 19 July 2013, the law got worse because since then any asylum seeker who arrived by boat without a valid visa was sent to Nauru or Manus Island in Papua New Guinea for processing and was barred from entering Australia on a permanent basis.

How many boats come now?

None have arrived in Australia since September 2013 because those that attempted the entry have been turned back by Operation Sovereign Borders. None of those intercepted were deemed to be owed protection obligations. The last boat reported to be turned around was in January 2020 and contained 6 people from China and Indonesia.

Why is this inhumane and cruel?

The consequences of having arrived by boat continue to affect people for years and years. Even after they are found to be in need of protection, they are granted a Temporary Protection Visa, not a Permanent visa. It is estimated that 18,000 people are on these TPVs. They are not able to sponsor family members for Australian visas, or be granted any substantive (permanent) visa while in Australia. They have to reapply for another temporary visa after three or five years and have no rights to citizenship.

Why the law needs changing

Our overriding impression: the people we have locked up are very similar to us – same hopes and dreams – they have suffered – we are increasing that level of suffering and it could just as easily be us – in a different set of circumstances. Moreover, as others have said, we are diminishing our common humanity by our treatment of these fellow human beings. We have demonised those arriving, particularly by boat and we claim the cruelty meted out to people is to deter others.

How many people are still detained?

Of that offshore group, 290 are still on Nauru and PNG while 200 who were medevac’d here are in hotel prisons in Melbourne, Darwin and Brisbane.

What changes are needed?

- An independent review of each person’s case so that they cannot just be left indefinitely in detention.
- There should be time-lines for every part of the application for protection process. We suggest no more than a month for the administrative health and other checks.
- All places of detention should be in cities with access to lawyers, health practitioners, visitors and any family members or friends. Christmas Island and other remote places should not be used.
- Solitary confinement and the use of physical restraint should not be allowed.
- Access to good medical care should be available. This should include dental care and specialist medical care. Many of those who arrive from places of war and persecution have significant health problems.
- Access to phones and other forms of communication (especially with lawyers) is essential.





We are very sorry that we cannot have the usual Christmas BASP party this year. The numbers allowed to gather make it impractical.

We hope to have some alternative gathering next year. We will let you know when things are clearer. We hope you all enjoy Christmas, even if it is quieter than usual.

Time for a Home campaign

**TIME FOR
A HOME** 

This is a campaign calling for the Government to immediately release people seeking asylum and refugees from immigration detention facilities, and commit to their resettlement in a safe, permanent home by World Refugee Day, 20 June 2021.

There are 122 groups signed on as supporters of this effort.

We suggest letter writing Members of Parliament (especially your own member) and the following are some points to make:

- Hundreds of people seeking humanitarian protection in Australia are being held in indefinite detention here in Australia – with no plan for their release.
- Most of these people are recognised as refugees by UNHCR, and cannot return to their home countries because it is unsafe for them there.
- We cannot hold these people in detention indefinitely – it is very damaging, and it is unnecessarily costly to Australian taxpayers. It is not reasonable for Australia to expect other countries to resettle these people - we are shirking our international responsibilities .
- These people should be resettled in our community with safety net income support until they are able to support themselves.
- Everyone needs a secure future and a place to call home.
- These people came to Australia seeking safety and a secure future for themselves and their families – they are keen to make a contribution to our community.

Over the next months, BASP and all the other organisations behind this campaign will be suggesting actions to take. It would be wonderful if we can achieve a pathway out of misery for those who have come to us in hope asking for protection.

Getting jobs in the country

As the Covid restrictions began to ease we were fortunate to have a final year RMIT student, Aviva, to undertake a project to help people seeking asylum gain work in regional areas. One of the men who has gone cherry packing in Yarck, near Mansfield, had called BASP for help with rent for a 2nd month in October. We suggested the regional working option and he jumped at the opportunity. Once selected, he sent us a text to say: “Thank you so much you guys help me in situation of my homelessness in this very difficult time I never forget I really appreciate”.



Aviva and the men

Aviva’s University requirements ended mid November but she has continued to come in and work on employment options. She has been joined by Harry, who has volunteered with BASP through the University holidays. He has taken on the work and continues to work with asylum seekers, regional employers, RAR and other support people to get work for asylum seekers and to get the farmers’ produce harvested.

Aviva reflects on the process

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been much talk within Australian media of a shortage of workers within rural farms. Simultaneously, however, not necessarily consequential of the pandemic, the job acquisition process for asylum seekers has become extremely difficult. This year, the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project aimed to bridge the gap between these parties - by securing jobs for unemployed asylum seekers on rural farms in country Victoria.

Historically within Australia, migrant workers have played a central role in agriculture, contributing to quite a culturally diversified industry. However, Australia’s reliance upon itinerant workers has intensified drastically within the last decade - with backpackers, seasonal workers, and working holiday makers comprising 80% of the workforce in fruit and vegetable harvesting. This influx of seasonal workers came to a complete halt following the border closures that resulted from COVID-19, consequently causing serious labour shortages. This matter was a hot topic within mainstream media, specifically within talkback radio. Solutions to such shortages were a topic of widespread discussion within both the media and the agricultural industry. Some people even proposed trading time in the country for a lessened HECS debt, or even swapping strawberries for citizenship as a means by which refugees on Safe Haven Visas could gain permanent residency. No-one in the Government took up these suggestions! We also noticed an unsurprising exclusion of those on bridging visas as options for a potential solution. Unfortunately - instances such as this are not isolated incidents. Government initiatives aimed at helping vulnerable populations often leave out asylum seekers - especially those on bridging visas.

Our project began in response to this widespread coverage of the matter within the media. What was noticed was a prevalent attitude which suggested a lack of willingness to work - that there was plenty of fruit to be picked and plenty of jobs available, but nobody willing to do so. Talkback radio hosts and guests boasted of the simplicity of such a process; one would just hop in their truck, drive up north, and would have work - characterising those who choose not to do so lazy. Unfortunately, most asylum seekers on bridging visas don’t have their own truck - let alone money for petrol, accommodation, and job-specific clothing. The suggestion that unemployed migrants and refugees have the resources to engage in these processes without assistance is just wrong.

The difficulty an asylum seeker faces with regards to job acquisition is quite obvious under normal circumstances - however, when this is coupled with, and exacerbated by a global pandemic, the task seems almost impossible. However, with both persistence and time on our side, we continued to research the processes concerned with acquiring work in the country. There was certainly no shortage of work available. However, not as much as suggested by talkback radio hosts. In late September, when the project began, fruit in Victoria wasn’t rotting or falling off trees due to a shortage of labourers - it was barely even ready to be picked. Most of the work advertised

online was due to begin in mid-late November. There was a lot of work advertised, however not all workplaces were eager at the thought of a group of asylum seekers, from different backgrounds, coming up from metropolitan Melbourne in the midst of a global pandemic. We ran into a range of concerns, ranging from COVID-19, to English language proficiency and cultural concerns. The foremost complication was a lack of access to transport within rural Victoria unless one had a car. Public transport could help us get there at a small cost - but transport to and from work each day was the biggest issue. This made the notion of accommodation even harder as proximity to work was necessary. It's not hard to send someone to a country town by bus, but organising where they would stay, how they would get to work each day, and who would be there to support them was tricky. Initially, we hoped that some of these matters might be assisted through government relocation grants which were advertised as a solution to these labour shortages. However, after research, we realised that although appearing promising, many of the application processes were extremely bureaucratic and difficult to adhere to.

After a tumultuous beginning, we revisited a listing we had seen earlier in the project looking for packers on a large cherry orchard in Yarck, Victoria. Having never even heard of Yarck, we really did not know where to start, and were lucky enough to come into contact with a local community group working in the region. Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR) from Mansfield, offered invaluable assistance in understanding the locality, as well as finding accommodation, transport and most importantly providing local support for those making the trip to Yarck. Without this, the project would have been impossible. What was also special about this assistance was their willingness to not only organise logistical matters, but also provide meaningful support to the men whilst they were away from home. Robyn, Maree and Marie - thank you!

We also developed a great relationship with the orchard itself, who were extremely understanding of our situation,

and did everything they could to make the process easier for us. As a result of a major team effort between all of these parties, we were able to secure six packing roles on the farm with accommodation booked in a fully converted sheep shearing shed. What followed was a process of booking bus tickets, organising food deliveries, securing six bikes and buying work boots. All of this led up to the departure date on the 9th of November, leaving Southern Cross Station coach terminal in the morning, and arriving at Yarck by midday. The Yarck project was a huge success for everyone involved. Supervisors from the farm reported great things back about the men, specifically their punctuality, behavior and work-ethic. Most importantly the men themselves have really taken a liking to Yarck, and being in a new environment. Some have even given horse riding a go on their days off!



Men leaving for Red Cliffs

Overall the project was a huge team effort, resulting in success. Since then, we've secured a forklift role for another candidate on the same farm. As well as beginning a new project in Red Cliffs, where we've sent three more candidates to do regional construction work. Overall resulting in ten roles for asylum seekers secured in total across regional Victoria! We have learned a lot during these projects, and hope to continue engaging in regional options for future employment!

BASP has provided housing to an older woman from Ethiopia for the last 12 months. She has no English, and over the year her cataracts have deteriorated, with both eyes needing surgery. She is unable to walk outside the house on her own and needs assistance from those in the share house with meals and basic tasks. Public hospital waiting lists advised the wait is 1-2 years. Despite efforts by ASRC health to hasten this timeline, we were faced with her being homebound for a very long time as well as placing an extra burden on the others in her share house. We have one more hope to access the public system through a contact, but if this does not eventuate, BASP has agreed to pay privately to get at least one eye done. This can then be done in January.



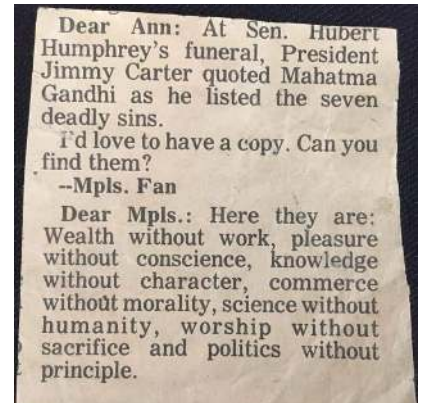
The saga of the Medevac Bill—and people in community detention

Hundreds of people who were sent offshore to Manus Island and Nauru have been transferred to Australia, mostly for medical treatment that they could not get off-shore. In Australia, these people have usually been held either in a detention facility or in community detention. Legally, they can be returned off-shore at any time, and cannot work or study unless given permission.

The Australian government also decided, in 2017-18, to put some of these people into the community on a so-called ‘final departure bridging visas’ without any income support, housing or other supports. State governments stepped in to support these highly vulnerable people. BASP helped quite a large number of these people in Melbourne with accommodation and other services.

In 2019 some of these came via the Medevac Bill

A campaign in 2018 led to the passing of a law, known as the Medevac Bill, in February 2019. This allowed independent doctors to recommend that those held in PNG and Nauru should be transferred to Australia for health care. The Bill was passed while the Coalition government did not have a majority in Parliament. However, when the Coalition government was re-elected, it sought to repeal the Medevac Bill as a priority.



Not sure which paper this is from

The law was repealed on 4 December 2019, as a result of a ‘secret deal’ with independent Senator Jacqui Lambie. During this time, 192 people were transferred to Australia as a result of this law.

Most of these people were transferred and held in detention, rather than living in the community. About two hundred of them are being held in ‘alternative places of detention’, in particular two motels—the Mantra in Preston and Kangaroo Point in Brisbane, under extremely strict supervision.

The Government then transferred people who were ill to detention centres like the MITA in Melbourne

The irony is that a number of these are being released into the community to live while none from those brought to Australia under the Medevac legislation have been released! 20 of the 35 have been released to Community Detention in Darwin. Their release were granted 3 months after arrival in Australia from Nauru.

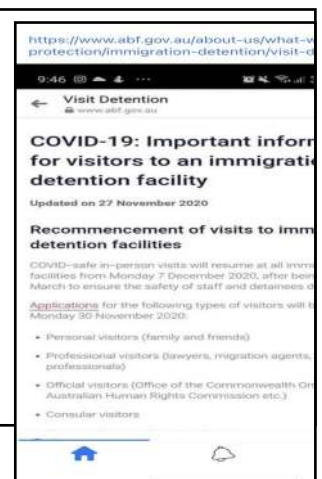
... and they transferred people from the motels to detention centres.

As well, men who have raised their voices or spoken to Media have been transferred back to detention centres like MITA and Villawood from the motels and many into isolation cells for different periods of time.

We abhor this punitive and coercive treatment of men who have already suffered so much in off-shore places and have been brought to Australia because they are ill.

Visits to detention centres have not been allowed since March of this year due to Covid restrictions. It appears they are to begin again this month—but cubicles have been built so only one person will be able to visit one person detained and it will be through glass. Again ironic—no attention was paid to the dangers of having people detained within small spaces and little opportunity for fresh air and so on but visits have to be controlled so that there is little opportunity to really relate to a person. The number of visitors will obviously be far fewer as well.

So much for helping the well-being of those detained for so long. People who are sick, lonely and depressed.



Political and other updates

The Federal Budget that was released on 6th October brought no joy for asylum seekers. Specifically it:

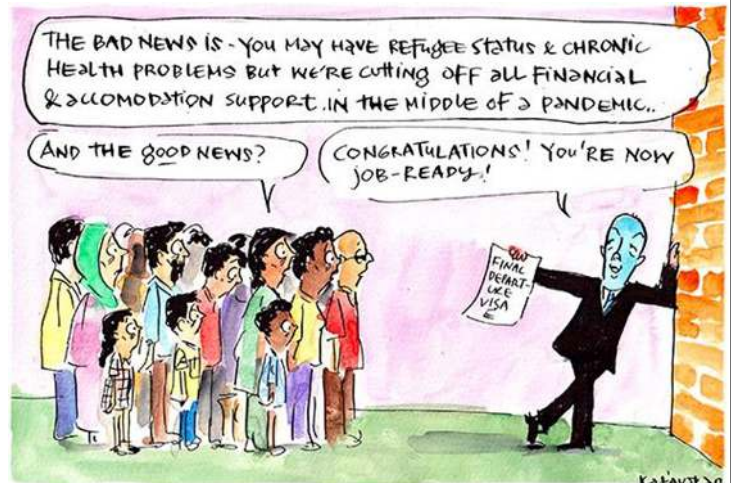
- continued to exclude from JobKeeper and other pandemic-related government support.
-
- provided \$55.6 million to 'reactivate' the Immigration Detention Centre on **Christmas Island**. The parents and two children from Biloela were sent there nearly three years ago. About 250 men classed as 'high-risk detainees', have been transferred to this facility.
- included a \$120 million cut to financial support for families and individuals who were transferred onshore for medical reasons. The cut took charities by surprise and meant that many were exited from community detention.
- removed 5,000 places from the annual humanitarian quota to save almost \$1 billion. Meanwhile the annual intake of refugees in 2019-20 fell short of the allocation, due to COVID-19 response measures.
- announced spending of \$1.19 billion on 'offshore processing', even though there are only 145 refugees still in PNG and 146 on Nauru. All of these are now living in the local community. So what is this money being spent on? Certainly not on improving the lives of this less than 300 people.

A new group of people who will need accommodation and assistance

A couple of months ago, BASP received advice that Department of Home Affairs was planning to remove a number of people/families from Community Detention to Bridging Visas. This has now happened in other states but not in Victoria because of Covid.

Those affected have a very short time to find rental housing and means of support. In Victoria there may be between 100 and 150 people affected.

The main housing providers in the asylum seeker arena are all reporting they are at capacity. BASP has some flexibility to juggle some of its existing housing, pay some rents on a short term basis and match single people with the offers of community host housing- if a suitable match is possible, meeting both parties' needs. When the federal government has exited people in CD in the past, there was some State government money to help through the transition. At this stage, there is no indication this will be forthcoming this time.



Spare a thought for Uber Eats deliverers!

Mohamid has been working for Uber eats. One day he made \$42. Another time he worked all night and each day and eventually made \$189 for over week. He said he was OK and when questioned said he had only eaten rice for a week. He does have to hire an e-bike to do the work.



BASP accommodation and Emergency Relief

Accommodation remains a crucial part of BASP's work- directly providing it or paying rent until tenants are able to resume payment of rent.

We have had the use of a house from one generous owner for the past 5 years. It has housed 15 people over this time. Some for short periods while they found work and moved on. Others were there for several years while they waited for visa determinations and were able to secure work. It has been a saving grace for all these folk and we are most grateful to have had the use of it for so long. The family now need it back and we needed to re house the 2 women living there. When one door closes.... Almost simultaneously, we were offered a 2 bedroom unit in Carlton and one of the residents moved in there with another young asylum seeker. Another member of the community offered us the use of her house while she works overseas in an Aid program. This provided ideal housing for the other resident and her young son. The generosity of people in the community is truly heart-warming.

Two and a half years ago Fatima was in detention and was released on the condition she was supported with housing and basics in the community. BASP agreed and one day we received a call to say she was on her way. She was not granted income or work rights for 2 years, so was solely dependent on BASP. It was a tough 2 years which she handled with amazing good will and grace. Then things started tumbling into place. She was granted a permanent visa and Centrelink. She was able to move into a beautiful self-contained unit behind the owner's home. She won custody of her daughter after some difficult times and then her partner was released from MITA after 4 years- again with no notice- just out, no money but with work rights. The host/ owner of the unit has been very accommodating of these changes and has welcomed both additions.

Post Covid

Some of those whose rent we covered during Covid are returning to work, which is great for them- and us!

Others are facing homelessness as Immigration cancels their Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) benefits; these are meagre, but at least some money helps!

Two recent requests highlight the uncaring and rigid response so many experience.

- One man came to Australia by boat with his then 4 yo daughter in 2012. His wife and other child were due to follow but changed plans as the Australian response changed and they would have been sent to Nauru. During this year's Covid period, raging unchecked in Iran, his wife became ill and he sent her \$400. Immigration discovered this and stopped his SRSS benefits, leaving him and his 12 year old daughter without any money. They have been in emergency accommodation in a motel pending BASP finding more secure housing for them in mid December. Since being homeless, the daughter has refused to attend school, her depression worsening.
- Similarly a mother with 4 children under 8 was managing until her husband died a year ago. She applied for and received SRSS. However, she received \$100 from an uncle in the USA to buy food so Immigration ceased her SRSS payments because she had received money from overseas.

When people reach the Federal Court stage, SRSS generally stops, with occasional exceptions due to extreme vulnerabilities. One family now waiting for a Court hearing have had their SRSS cut despite the wife having serious mental health issues and the husband being required to be with her 24/7 to ensure she and the children remain safe. How can this not be regarded as extreme vulnerability?

“The ache for home lives in all of us.”
—
Maya Angelou

Thanks for your help

BASP paid \$85,000 in September—accommodation for 264 people and \$39,000 Emergency Relief for X people. This of course does not include all the in-kind donated houses, host families, and housing permanently available to BASP.

For last four months donations averaging \$80,000. We have had money in reserve so we have been able to fund this level of assistance.

Abdul, Afghanistan and Australia

Australia's role in Afghanistan in the past two decades has come under sharp focus. This is not the time to critique that role, other than to try to point to the absolute irony of what has happened to one young man, Abdul, against this backdrop.

We echo the sentiments in the letter to The age by Jean Ker Walsh. We plead for some justice for Adbul—and a resolution of his situation.

Novels are written and films made, music sung and poems inspired by refugee stories. Many of these link Afghanistan and Australia. They are fascinating art forms. However, the reality of an individual who seems to have been caught and destroyed in the tangled mess of domestic and international politics leave one more sad than inspired.

We will begin this small piece with a potted history of Australia and Afghanistan's relations and move to the story of a young man seemingly shattered by the political cruelty and ineptitude of both countries.

The Cameleers—the first Afghans to come to this continent

From the 1860's till the 1920's 'camel trains', driven and managed by men largely from Afghanistan and India, contributed to transport and trade routes across what was the driest populated continent on the planet. Interestingly, these men seem to have had good relations with our indigenous people. With the advent of railways and road transport the need for the cameleers passed. The camels were released into the wild (and we know the result of that) and all that remains of the era is the name of the railway between Adelaide and Darwin: the Ghan.

Invasions of Afghanistan: The Russian invasion

In 1979, after a violent coup in Kabul, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. The years that followed were marked by murderous divisions and the rise of the power of the Mujahideen resistance.

The US invasion

After the tragic terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, the US invaded Afghanistan. Ostensibly this was to dismantle al-Qaeda, the militant Islamist organization founded by Osama bin Laden in the late 1980s, and deny it a safe base of operations in Afghanistan by removing the Taliban from power. The Taliban are very hard line Sunni Muslim group, speaking Pushto, and intent on restoring Afghanistan to an austere version of Sharia, or Islamic law, once in power. They introduced public executions of convicted murderers and adulterers, and amputations for those found guilty of theft. Men were required to grow beards and women had to wear the all-covering burka. The US and their allies (including Australia) have attempted peace deals but the actual violence and persecution has endured. The Taliban are virtually in charge of the country and they carry on a 'reign of terror'.

The Hasaras

Because they are Shia Muslims and are seen as different racially, the Hasaras are particular targets of the Taliban. They have bombed and kidnapped civilians, particularly on remote highways, with some of the victims killed while others have been held for ransom.

LETTERS

Call for an act of contrition

The national disgrace of the Afghan killings and cover-up calls for more than the sincere apology to the Afghan people from Defence Force Chief Angus Campbell.

In recognition of the killing of people our forces were supposed to protect, our Prime Minister should grant permanent protection to Afghani refugees and people who have sought asylum here since 2001, the year of the first Australian defence force deployment to Afghanistan. This would be statesmanship akin to the granting of protection, by Bob Hawke, to Chinese students in Australia following the 1989 Tiananmen Square tragedy.

Afghan people who fled here from the Taliban are in detention or living precariously in the community, unable to settle or be reunited with their families who are still witnesses to, or victims of, this ugly war. True regret calls for an act of national contrition. It is time to release and resettle the Afghan refugees.

Jean Ker Walsh, Woodend

Today's Paper

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What difference would it make to anyone to just give me a visa?

Abdul (not his real name) was a fifteen year old, Shia Muslim Hasara lad, on a boat carrying 175 people that landed on Christmas Island on the 29th May, 2012. He had left Afghanistan months before, and smugglers, commissioned by his uncles, had made the arrangements to get him to Dubai, Jakarta, Bogor and then Australia. This followed the murder of his father, Najib, by the Taliban. Najib was a truck driver for a road construction company. This occupation was seen by the Taliban as consorting with the enemy. He had to go to the mountains to get material for the roads and he was pulled out of his truck by the Taliban.

He was killed on the road from Ghazni city to Kabul, a notoriously dangerous road for Hasaras. Abdul explains ‘Our family was threatened with death when we tried to find our father’. Since Abdul left, his younger brother has been killed – this murder was on the road from their village to Ghazni city.

Abdul was born in a small village of maybe one hundred houses in Ghazni Province. He was the eldest of four, with two brothers and a little sister. **Nine years later, he has no visa, no Medicare, no work rights and no hope.**

Of the thirty or more minors who came on that boat to Christmas Island, Abdul doesn’t know anyone who hasn’t a Permanent Visa. And that’s why he asks very sadly, *What difference would it make to anyone to just give me a visa?* Abdul knows what some of those who came with him are doing - working in construction, car wrecking, one is married. ‘I still go out with them at Christmas and on public holidays, we play soccer and pool. But they all have Visas and they can get on with their lives and they can send money to help their families.’



Is Abdul the only person who arrived in similar circumstances who does not have any visa?

No. There are 2025 people who do not have any visa (September figures from the Department of Home Affairs). They do not have current rights to work, study or access Medicare.

So why doesn’t Abdul have a Permanent Protection visa?

We can suggest a few reasons – based on what we know of Abdul’s story and others like him.

- The ‘system’ is clearly shambolic and if a person’s initial application is rejected, it becomes very difficult to get a decent hearing. The process of applying for asylum is one that many liken to a lottery. There are anomalies, injustices and arbitrary aspects of this currently complicated, unpredictable and drawn-out process.
- The country information used by the decision makers has often been outdated or incorrect.
- For his first interview the Department of Immigration assigned him a migration agent whose English (and possibly knowledge) was insufficient to make a clear argument for Abdul. (One of these notoriously poor agents wrote in an official document about the ‘profit Mohammad’).
- The lawyer he was assigned for his Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) hearing did not contact him before the hearing, and even on the day of the hearing did not advise him in any way.

We in BASP have known Abdul for many years. He came to live in the house we had in Ardeer when he was seventeen. It is sad to see so much potential in a young man and no way of helping him realise any of his dreams. “I would love to learn. I think I’m a bit smart guy – I was top of the class in primary school.”

Because Abdul does not have a visa he has no work rights. He manages to get a few hours work here and there for people who don’t ask about his visa status. He says, ‘At times when I have been permitted to work, I have had two jobs at the same time, so that I can send some money to assist my mother and my family’.

Listening to Abdul’s story one of the saddest parts is when asked What is the happiest time you have had since you came to Australia, he says without hesitating ‘When I was in Leonoroa camp. We had activities and there were a lot of us young ones and we had fun.’ Leonoroa was an immigration detention centre, 230km north of Kalgoorlie.

Is this the best we can do for this earnest, clearly intelligent and perceptive young man?



Esa is a young man from Uganda. He has been working at a factory site, part time. He rang one day to tell us that he had another job, also part time and he was going to do both jobs. One finished at 3.30 and the other started at 5. He said ‘You know the place I am going to –it’s got to do with cooking.’ Not a great clue! We went via a circuitous route to cakes and then what makes cakes work—



Mackenzie's Baking powder! He drives a forklift there—he had a chance to learn this skill when BASP was first helping him. Lately he told us the team he is working with like him because if there is nothing to move by the forklift he just helps with the other work. His workmates have apparently not been used to this.

St Mary’s of the Cross – Aspendale and Mordialloc

ran a very successful ‘silent auction’ and donated \$8030 to BASP. Amazing work—thank you.

Two women from the Congo have made contact with each other. Chantelle who lives in a BASP house recently decided to make some shorts. She had her mobile phone beside her as Nicole who is a professional dressmaker (living in Echuca) instructed her how to proceed.



One of the men BASP has helped contacted us with this message: I got a job at Coco Cola for 2 or 3 days a week and if there is anything I can do to help you I will—you reached out to me when there was no-one.

Marian is a volunteer who continues to assist asylum seekers look for work. She recently sent this to us, saying how proud she was of her niece and the message she sent to friends and family.

“In a pre-pandemic world, you would have come to my party, shouted me a drink or bought me a present, I ask you now to put that money towards this fundraiser for the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project.

Many thanks Amelia. Greatly appreciated.

Brigidine support

Maureen Keady, a Brigidine Sister in Sydney, has a loyal group of supporters who often send donations to BASP via Maureen. Indeed our Brigidine Sisters in NSW (as well as Victoria) are great advocates and help us a lot.



BASP gets salaries paid, office space and lots of donations from the Brigidines.

And then there are all the incidental gifts. One example of this is the raffle of Christmas cakes (made and decorated) by Rosie Joyce each year.



And very recently the donation of a car that enables Kalai to go and live with a host family near Port Arlington. Karlai will hopefully be able to travel into Geelong and work. This would be impossible without a car.

And many other church groups regularly collect food and do fundraising. Just one example, St Josephs, Malvern collected \$8720 last month for BASP.

Amazing volunteers

One of our volunteers has been visiting a family for several years, supporting the mother in particular as the primary carer of a significantly disabled child. So much focus has been on the sad and exhausting situation this family finds itself. However the child is now at kinder and the volunteer met the mother in the city. She said it was wonderful to see this mother having fun and just being a happy young woman for a time.

5or 6 years ago a volunteer started visiting another recently arrived family. It developed into a friendship and BASP really played no further role. When we met up with the volunteer recently, she said she had been to their daughter’s wedding- some time ago- and was in regular contact still. Not every connection lasts so long or develops into a mutual friendship but many do with such positive results for all.



Christine brought in her three children with a scooter (plus helmet and accessories) and some toys.



These were given to a family with two little girls who were very excited with their gifts.

It is difficult for many of those who normally bring food to stock our pantry. However a number of places and individuals are still bringing in food and others have donated vouchers.



The following are still very much appreciated:

Sugar , flour , cooking oil, Cans of fruit and tomatoes.

Blocks or individual wrapped cheese.

Long life milk, tea and coffee, cheese, **honey is a most appreciated food**, noodles, tuna, basmati rice, dates, jam

Gladwrap, tinfoil, pegs for hanging out washing,

Sweet and Savoury Biscuits, Snacks for school lunches (even when home!), Salt and pepper, Spices: coriander, cinnamon, ginger, Shampoo and Conditioner, Shaving Cream and shavers, Toothpaste and toothbrushes. Soap, deodorants

Garbage bags (small and large)



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

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

Please put your name on the entry and please email us at contact@basp.org.au after making a donation so we can send you a tax deductible receipt.



Again we thank you all for your support.



It is amazing how many big and small ways people help BASP to help others. Pope Francis recently wrote a letter—it is really a letter to everyone—not just Catholics. In it he writes about the need to build bridges – bridges of dialogue and bridges of encounter. And to break down walls – to try to find common humanity between people.

As we watch the USA almost self destruct and often enough our own country struggle to maintain civility between different groups, we certainly feel the need for less populist rhetoric and more emphasis on the common good.

BASP's logo "I was a stranger and you welcomed me .." focusses on being open to the other who comes as a stranger. We believe that all of us involved in BASP, directly or indirectly, are doing something about today's divisive world in terms of people seeking safety from persecution.

Maybe Covid will awaken in our community a new consciousness of what it is like to lack freedom of movement and to face a very uncertain future.

Thank you again for your part in helping 'the stranger'. And may you all enjoy a happy and peaceful Christmas.

Brigid Arthur

Libby Saunders

(BASP Coordinators)