

STRENGTH AND KINDNESS

Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP)



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

Newsletter 122 October 2025

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

A small snapshot of latest news about people seeking asylum in Australia

We have been very happy over the past short while to have a number of our friends from the group who arrived by boat between 2009 and 2015 get news of permanent visas. It is a 'trickle' of people but, so long as it continues, it feels like a new era. We have some details about a few of these instances later in the newsletter.

Those who spent time on Manus Island or on Nauru have been assured they will not ever be able to stay in Australia. Being told they have to seek a third country alternative is meaningless. New Zealand promised to take 450 people and give them permanent visas on arrival. So far recent figures show they have accepted 343. It has been a very slow process and even when the final 107 are moved there will still be quite a number who have no third country option.

There is of course a lot of assistance needed even after permanent residence is achieved – more for some than others. We meet quite a number who have managed to establish themselves in this country even without permanency. They are amazing in the way they have worked, sometimes going into business and, as they say, paying taxes, employing others and so on. Always, of course, longing for some guaranteed security.

However, there is a small number for whom any change is too late. They have decided to return to their original homeland. This is not always easy. One barrier can be having debts in Australia. For example, any tax owing has to be paid before anyone is allowed to leave Australia. This may sound like a harmless piece of legislation but if an asylum seeker has been working in one of the gig economies – typically Uber Eats – they need to save the money to pay the tax accruing. One of those we have known is in this predicament – he is not eligible for his ticket back to his home country because he has been earning money (he has none of this). Another man would willingly return because he is desperately unhappy in Australia but he has not kept any contact with family or friends in his home country.

The next few weeks

We look forward to welcoming **Renee Mazloun** who will begin working at BASP in the leadership position with Libby. On the next page we include this announcement made by the BASP Chairperson, Julie Francis. This obviously entails a number of changes. Brigid will be part time and will assist Libby and Renee in what emerges as needs.



Amineh is a woman of immense courage and dedication whose only focus has been getting permanent visas for her children. This has happened for the whole family just last week.

Donations to the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project are tax deductible

The Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP) is entering a new chapter with a change in leadership

Sr Brigid Arthur, co-founder, will be taking a step back from leading the day-to-day work of the Melbourne-based initiative that has, since 2001, provided essential support to asylum seekers and refugees. Brigid will continue to play a key role in BASP going forward, particularly around advocacy and community education and connections.

With Brigid changing her role within the organisation, the Board is pleased to announce the appointment of **Renee Mazloum** to the position of co-CEO, to take on the role alongside Libby Saunders, who has been in the co-leadership role with Brigid since 2015. Renee will commence on November 5, 2025. A statement from Julie Francis, BASP Board Chair is included over the page.

Brigid is known for her tenacious advocacy, compassion, and support for many people in the community – but particularly for those who are newly arrived to Australia, embodying the Project's motto of "I was a stranger and you made me welcome". Her work extends to advocating for systemic change and has earned her numerous accolades: an Order of Australia; Catholic Social Services Victoria Life Membership and recently the international UNANIMA Woman of Courage Award. Brigid is an experienced educator who has taught in and led schools in Melbourne's western suburbs, where she witnessed firsthand the difficulties faced by new migrants and refugees, leading her to establish BASP with Sr Catherine Kelly csb.

Renee has 12 years of leadership in migrant and refugee services, and holds formal qualifications in both Australian Migration Law and Human Resource Management. She is the founder and leader of the LAHA Association, which supports refugee and migrant women. Renee also brings a deeply personal understanding to her work: she grew up in a family where her mother was an asylum seeker and her father a refugee. Having experienced the hardship and isolation that her parents faced, and the challenges she herself encountered as a child in that environment, Renee has developed a lifelong passion for ensuring that people in similar situations today receive the support and dignity her own family was denied. She is fluent in both Arabic and English, allowing her to connect more meaningfully with many of the people and communities she serves. She has been appointed following a thorough and competitive recruitment process, where her combination of professional expertise, academic qualifications, lived experience, and clear commitment to human dignity shone through. Throughout the selection process, her professionalism, deep concern for the people BASP works to serve, and considered faith were consistently evident.

While the change in Brigid's role is a significant shift for BASP, she is still involved to provide her wisdom and guidance, and Renee and Libby will continue to be faithful to the mission of attending to the many and varied needs of people seeking asylum and impactfully working for broader systemic and community changes. Brigid says "BASP is at a very interesting and exciting time in its history. We are so fortunate to be able to stage a change in leadership. As Renee settles into the work of BASP, Libby will continue to contribute with her inimitable skills and knowledge. Under the guidance of our talented Board members, Libby and Renee will shape a new chapter of BASP history."

The Board acknowledges Brigid's incredible contribution over the last 25 years. For decades, Sr Brigid has championed the rights of people seeking asylum, working tirelessly to provide practical support to people and to challenge the system that leads to the ongoing destitution and distress of so many who have arrived in Australia fleeing persecution. She has inspired many to join her in this endeavour, as evidenced by the strong supporter and volunteer base of BASP. The Board looks forward to Brigid's continued involvement in BASP and to welcoming Renee into a leadership position alongside Libby.



This is taken from the statement made by Julie Francis, BASP Board Chair

Discussion Session
Wednesday, 19 November
2pm – 3.30pm

**Brigidine Ministry Centre,
54 Beaconsfield Pde, Albert Park**

Rebecca Eckard, Director of Policy and Research, Refugee Council of Australia will provide an update on current refugee government policies.

This is an opportunity to meet Renee Mazloun, the new Coordinator/CEO.

Our last discussion afternoon: Josh Burns MP at St Joseph's Port Melbourne

On 20 August, Federal Labor MP for Macnamara Josh Burns spoke at BASP's regular discussion session. Josh gave some insights and advice about the process being followed by the Department of Home Affairs in dealing with visa applications. He also said that the culture in the Department had changed.

Quite a large number of people from community groups, volunteers and others, came from within and outside the electorate to hear from Josh and have the chance to engage directly and personally.

It was a very worthwhile sharing of views and we had extremely positive feedback. Thanks to all who attended – we hope you enjoyed it.



It's (nearly) the time of year when we invite everyone to celebrate Christmas!

**SAVE
the
DATE**

**Please join us for a Christmas afternoon tea at
3pm on Sunday, 14th December at 54
Beaconsfield Parade, Albert Park.**



**People seeking asylum, volunteers, donors and supporters of BASP –
All are welcome at this friendly get-together.**



Woman of courage

In August we celebrated Sr Brigid Arthur as she received the UNANIMA International Woman of Courage Award. As many will know, Brigid has worked tirelessly for years – offering housing, food, legal help and community to refugees and asylum seekers in Australia.

In nominating Brigid for the award, Noelene Simmons, a Marist Sister and former president of Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans, wrote: “Brigid’s passion to see the human dignity and rights of all people respected has compelled her to stand beside those who experience incredible hardship and vulnerability.”

Brigid received the award surrounded by supporters from near and far, including many via video link. In her acceptance speech, she quoted Australian historian Manning Clark and the idea of being a “life-enlarger” and seeking bold, inclusive, and humane ways of acting to challenge the systems that harm people. She warned against being complacent in the face of injustice: “We can’t claim we didn’t know what was happening. We do know. And it’s up to us to do something about it,” she said. We are grateful to Brigid for her courage and compassion, and for challenging us not just to admire her example but to follow it.

Letters to advocate for men in PNG

There is a small tenacious group of people who continue to advocate for the men left in PNG, having been transferred there from Manus Island to Port Moresby between 2016 and 2019. The convenor of this group is Kevin Sweeney. The group raises money to keep these men alive but life is extraordinarily hard for the 30 or so men involved. Kevin is asking as many as possible to write a letter asking for these men to be brought to Australia.

Facts:

- Out of the more than 3,000 refugees sent to Manus Island and Nauru in 2013 and 2014, only 36 remain in offshore limbo
- All of the others have either been transferred to Australia, or resettled in the US, Canada, NZ or another country
- The last of the 2013/2014 cohort of refugees remaining on Nauru were transferred to Australia in 2023 – to the credit of the Australian Government
- However, the remaining refugees on PNG have been left to languish there with steadily deteriorating mental and physical health
- Their ongoing entrapment in PNG is continuing to harm their physical and mental health
- They remain Australia’s responsibility as we sent them there. The UN has been very clear that countries, including Australia, remain responsible for people they transfer to a third country for ‘processing’
- It is not a safe place for refugees to bring their families
- It has limited healthcare available and the refugees are not receiving the health care that they need

Dot Points: (you only need to select a few of these to make a powerful letter)

- Leaving the remaining refugees in PNG is causing them further harm
- PNG is not a suitable place for refugees to resettle and make a new life for themselves and their families
- All of the remaining refugees in PNG should be offered the option of being transferred to Australia where they and their families will be safe and can receive the medical care that they need

Send to:

- Your local MP (include your name, residential address and email)
- Minister Burke with a cc to Minister Thistlethwaite

Sabir from the maintenance team at Kilbreda with all the household donations from the students



Schools support

BASP is fortunate that it is part of Kildare Ministries, comprising ten schools as well as Saltbush, Balnarring, and Wellsprings in Dandenong. Students in many of the schools run collections throughout the year and we are really appreciative of the groceries they gather to replenish our pantry. The girls at Star of the Sea had a recent collection and we asked two of the asylum seekers who help with odd jobs to collect them from the school. The girls had written notes of encouragement (three are under Sabir's photo) as well as the grocery items. The notes really indicated an awareness of the long, uncertain road so many of the people we see have faced. The two men reading them had been on Manus or Nauru for seven years, then hotel detention for two more, then in the community now for three but still with no certainty. They loved the understanding and encouragement expressed in the notes.

BASP was also delighted to have the assistance of five girls and two staff from St Columba's as part of the Year 12 Ministry Retreat experience. They did a massive 'end of lease' clean of a house, making it ready for the new occupants. Many of us commented that it was a bigger clean than we do at home, but the spirit of good will and camaraderie lasted all day, with a sparkling result at the end.



Issues of identity have become one of the major barriers to asylum seekers getting visas

In BASP's experience, most of those who have waited for many years for Australian visas where identity has been an issue have come from an Afghan/Pakistan background. Our understanding is that one of the major reasons for this centres around the history of the Taliban in the region.

The Taliban is a Sunni Islamist nationalist and pro-Pashtun movement founded in the early 1990s that ruled most of Afghanistan from 1996 until October 2001. The movement's founding nucleus—the word “Taliban” is Pashto for “students”—was composed of peasant farmers and men studying Islam in Afghan and Pakistani madrasas, or religious schools. The Taliban found a foothold and consolidated their strength in southern Afghanistan.

Ali (not his real name) first came to Australia in 2000. He was a young man, a Hazara born in Afghanistan and threatened by the Taliban. His father and brother were killed by the Taliban. He spent some reasonably short time in Australia and then was very worried about the welfare of his family so returned to Pakistan. He married a woman who had been born in Pakistan with her parents of Afghan background. They had three children and again Ali was threatened by the Taliban and came to Australia by boat. As part of the documents provided for his protection case he had a marriage document his father-in-law organised. All the details in this document pointed to Ali having a Pakistani name and background. When Ali realized he had potentially provided both Pakistani and Afghan documents he had this legally stated. In spite of all this care he waited for another ten or more years to finally convince Australian authorities that his identity was very clear (if the history of this group of people caught in the whole Taliban saga is accepted).

Fifteen years, much advocacy and a lot of heartache later seems extraordinary.



Recently Brigid was welcomed by St Martin's Hawksburn to be part of the Sunday liturgy. Brigid remarked that this community has become great supporters of BASP and we feel very much at home being with them.



Zalmi was one of eight Afghan men who lived in a house BASP rented in about 2013. Only recently he managed to get a permanent visa. For the first time in his life, last December Zalmi celebrated a birthday (he was 53). The irony is that Zalmi did not ever have an actual birthday because birthdays are not celebrated in Afghanistan and the Department of Immigration assigned a date – 31st December or 1st January – to all arrivals who can't name a date.

Trivial pursuit

The Foxworthy family and St Mary's Hampton held another successful Trivia Night for BASP. This is great fun, enables participants to stay at home or be with friends and test their knowledge or lack thereof. The BASP team 'Sisters Galore' did not excel at the latest evening but congratulate the winners 'Les Quizerables' and team captain Michele Connell who obviously knew more than us.

The questions and answers are clever, the night is enjoyably shared with others and it raised over \$6,000 for BASP. Keep your eye out for the next one in May 2026.

The Brigidines have a small community in San Antonio Texas. Over the many years they have been there they have worked closely with the migrants (mainly Mexicans) who cross the border and become part of the large Hispanic population in Texas.

President Trump continually vilifies these migrants and labels them 'illegals'. "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people."

Mary Teresa, an Irish Brigidine who has lived all her working life in San Antonio wrote recently: *Tonight, I go to teach my Citizenship Class and hopefully prepare them for a successful interview in the near future. I have two scheduled for Nov. 7 and the rest wait patiently to be called! The really troubling part is that 90%+ of U.S. born citizens would not pass the Civics Test section! Sound familiar?*

Debts

A joy of getting a permanent visa or at times of applying for citizenship is this event seems to prompt Immigration to send what they call debts owing to the person concerned. These are for costs incurred and seem mainly to be for the costs incurred at the Federal court stage of the application for protection. Other times they can be costs associated with community detention. The amounts are not small – \$22,000, \$11,000 \$15,000.

This seems very punitive and unfair. The process that caused the asylum seekers to proceed to a judicial review was because the first review (for many years) lacked procedural fairness and resulted in incorrect decisions. The system, introduced in 2014 and abolished in 2023, was criticized for making it more difficult for asylum seekers to meet protection criteria. It was essential that a judicial review was possible and now, years later, people with no warning are being charged large amounts of money.

#EndTheWaiting vigil – Macnamara electorate

On 3rd September we saw a large turnout for the BASP vigil held as part of the #EndTheWaiting campaign. Claire Griffin, a Brigidine Sister, led the gathering with prayers and introduced several asylum seekers, faith leaders and community advocates who spoke about the precarious and difficult conditions experienced by the thousands of people waiting more than 12 years for a resolution of their protection claims. Libby told us that the process for those having to renew their visas and Medicare is “a roller-coaster of hope and despair.” The situation for many is leading to family breakdown, domestic violence, and children having to take on the role of adults and begging for help, robbing them of the normal childhood they deserve. Brigid spoke about the background to the #EndTheWaiting campaign and the need for advocacy and action. Brigid then introduced Amineh K., who spoke movingly about her family’s ordeal over more than a decade without permanent status.



Norman Katende, a Ugandan man seeking asylum who is on the board of BASP, talked about his experiences of waiting and the indignity of being seen as an immigrant, rather than a person. “No one chooses to leave their home. They do it because they have to,” he reminded us. Major Colin Elkington (Salvation Army) and Father John Petrulis, a local Parish Priest, both spoke with compassion about the extreme suffering of people forced to spend so many years in asylum limbo and the urgent need for policy change.

A special thanks to the students from Killester College who brought youth and enthusiasm to the gathering, which concluded with the lighting of candles as a sign of hope and a commitment to continued efforts to achieve justice.

Volunteers and supporters

Several years ago we asked Michael, a retired lawyer, to help a man with his complex visa application. He is learning the hard way how slow the process is, but his messages continue to keep us amused. “Moussa’s applications for Ministerial intervention continue to languish some 2 plus years later. I send some reminders to the department, every 6 months or so. Moussa continues to contact me about progress. I don’t think Moussa has ever watched “Yes Minister”. I feel like I’m in an episode that refuses to conclude. If I took a hammer to the telly, would that help, do you think? God give you strength as well as blessings.” Thank you, Michael.

Anne has been visiting a young woman who was struggling with a new babe. After a recent visit, she received a message thanking Anne for her visit and saying she felt like her mother was with her today.

The Mariana Community of women have treated many asylum seekers to a weekend away at their Millgrove home over many years. They recently hosted 2 recently arrived men from Ethiopia who loved the weekend—the friendship and welcome, and the rural beauty. They were so fortunate to see such Aussie icons—koalas and cockatoos.



Use your recycling to help BASP



There's an easy and rewarding thing we can all do to protect the environment and help asylum seekers at the same time. Instead of putting empty drink containers in your own recycling bin, you can take them to a bottle depot or refund point and get a refund, which you can choose to donate to a charity.

This is part of Victoria's Container Deposit Scheme (CDS), a state government plan to transform the waste and recycling sector by keeping materials in use for as long as possible and minimising waste.

Donate your refund

Most aluminium, glass, plastic, steel, and liquid paperboard (carton) drink containers between 150ml and 3 litres are eligible. Milk containers, wine and spirit bottles are not eligible. Yes, you can leave the lids on!

You can return and claim the 10-cent refund for each container at reverse vending machines (usually in shopping centre car parks), depots, or over the counter in certain shops. There are also sometimes pop-up refund points at events. This useful website tells you all about it, including where the points are: cdsvic.org.au/refund-point-types. To donate, you can use a phone app called Zone Operator and search for BASP, or use the 'Donation Partner ID' at your refund point. The BASP Donation ID is 20000103362.

Since January 1st this year, BASP has received just under \$700 in donated refunds from very generous and conscientious people! Thank you!



Homeless Jesus, the Timothy Schmalz sculpture, occupies a prominent place in the courtyard at Newman College in Melbourne. At the time of its installation, then Rector Fr Bill Uren SJ said the placement was intended to bring people's attention to those on the margins of society.

Photo: David McMahon

Andrew Hamilton wrote in a piece for Homelessness Week this year. *Housing should be seen as a human right not a financial investment. Instead, we have allowed it to be treated as a financial investment. We have allowed biased regulation of taxation, investment and security of rental tenure, and the reduction of government investment in social housing to make it impossible for most families to buy houses, and for people without reliable income to rent accommodation.*

This is particularly pertinent to the situation of asylum seekers.

We have quite a lot of visitors at BASP, many wanting to know more about how asylum seekers are treated in Australia. Others just want to know about BASP.



One visitor who was quite intriguing was Yurina Sugano Himeji, a student from the International School Hyogo High School from Kobe in Japan.

This young sixteen year old came to Australia by herself. She was passionate about the human rights of refugees and believed her country is not doing nearly enough to help. She intended to return to Japan and undertake a program to alert young people especially about the global situation for refugees and try to get action. Yurina concluded the world needs more Yurinas.

On the other hand, perhaps we should acknowledge that we have many many idealistic young people—we just need to encourage them and make sure our own values are evident in the position we take on major issues.

Housing update: Ins and outs!

In recent times, we have seen some movement in a few houses.

One woman returned to her homeland after being widowed in Australia. This was a distressing time for her and we thank Liz her volunteer for the support she gave her through these difficult times. Thanks also to Marg who took her to the cemetery several times before she flew out.

This departure enabled BASP to help a woman and her daughter with a home. They had been in a refuge for several months following domestic violence and were now required to leave. The timing worked perfectly.

We were also able to help another woman and her teenage son escape a toxic household.

Manouchehr (pictured below with Libby) who was released from hotel detention in 2022 and housed by BASP since then returned his keys before flying to NZ. He chose to take the third country option for those who had been offshore and will have permanent residency on arrival in NZ. This will enable him to meet up with his family in a safe country after 13 years before returning to settle in NZ for good. We wish him well.

The Brigidine Southern Cross community provided a unit for two men for two years. One was able to move into private rental at the conclusion of the lease. The other had a full time job until his work rights stopped (no reason given). He has been able to pick up some cash in hand work but not enough for private rental. He moved to another BASP share house. When the existing residents were advised he was coming, one replied: "He's already my brother and family. I'm impatient waiting for him."

The Brigidines have extended our occupancy at another unit and we were able to transfer a mother and daughter there after two months in a share house for women. They had just received their bridging visa, allowing the year 7 daughter to commence school and a Kildare Ministries school warmly welcomed her into their school.

A recently arrived man appeared at our office one morning with his bags. He had used up his funds on a hostel and then had been sleeping rough at the railway station, until someone told him about BASP. Fortunately we had one spare room in a share house and he was greatly relieved to have food and shelter.

We continue to have requests for people to cover their rent in the broader community. One man came in, having been couch surfing or sleeping in a car. He had no money but felt confident if he secured a room, he would get work and be able to pay after that. BASP paid for a month's rent up front for a room in a rooming house and gave him \$100 for basic needs. He sent the following text: "I'm really grateful for your help and until my last breath I will never forget that and with that cash amount finely and after long time I went to hairdresser's and now I feel much better and always you have my prayer." This was accompanied by a picture of him with his haircut. Such a simple thing that can make such a difference.



Another thank you: "Libby ma'am, what you've done for me is something that no one else has ever done in my life. I've sought help from my family, from so many places, like the Red Cross, and nobody helped me. But you've been incredibly helpful, ma'am. No one has ever given me even a hundred rupees before. I will never forget you in my life. Thank you so much, ma'am." How humbling is this – for \$100?

On 21st September, Jean Kerr-Walsh from the Grandmothers for Refugees organised an afternoon for Mostafa "Moz" Azimitabar, a Kurdish refugee artist and activist who has been an Archibald Prize finalist, to speak at the Brigidine Centre. Moz is inspirational in talking about his experiences in offshore detention and since.





Good news stories

Sometimes we get news of people we knew from years ago – often enough when we met in one of the detention centres. The following news was shared with us by a friend in Ballarat. We both used to visit Sarah in Maribyrnong. When she was released Sarah lived in out Brigidine house in Albert Park. She had twins she had had to leave overseas.

Hello Brigid. Thought I would let you know news of Sarah who spent 12 months in MITA 10 years ago. This afternoon I met up with Sarah and the twins, Diego and Daniella, now 17. The twins arrived last week. She told us how you helped her a lot when she got out of detention. It is good to hear some good news. The sad part is the oldest daughter is now 24 so is not eligible for family reunion.

Sarah is waiting for a date for her Citizenship ceremony.

A Nepalese couple, Raj and Susan Dahal received permanent visas for their 2 older children recently. They had had to leave their two children with their grandparents when they fled to Australia many years ago. Saslesh (18) and Eunice (13) arrived at the Melbourne Airport a few weeks ago.

Susan and Raj have had two more children born in Australia. The parents and the younger child born in Australia (Suyog) are waiting for their Citizenship ceremony. Success (their other child born in Australia) got his when he turned 10, in April last year. When Raj asked a couple of months ago why he was not notified when Susan and Suyog were, he was told he had a debt to the government for legal fees from at least 8 years ago. He has been paying off a huge debt for at least the last 6 years. Imagine researching this family history in years to come.

A 14-year saga

A few weeks ago we received a message from Alice, one of the volunteers who has been very supportive of a family from Iran that has had a long struggle to get permanent visas. Alice has helped them through many steps along the way, from taking them out for meals to letter-writing and meeting with the local MP about the family's situation. There are two daughters in the family – the younger one goes to the local primary school where she has “two best friends”, and the older daughter, a teenager, is an Australian citizen.

“Their current bridging visa expired on 14 July and migration agent and lawyer (costing about \$4,000) were not able to get it extended. So they are now in that even worse limbo of not having a valid visa through no fault of their own – in their case for several weeks now.

S. is currently undergoing tests for potentially quite serious medical issues, and almost every day either she or T. is at Cabrini or St. Vincent's for medical appointments. She says her inability to sleep is even worse, lying awake thinking ‘why, God, why all this?’

However on the bright side, she loved the holiday at Balnarring [Saltbush respite accommodation], as did the children. All her positive comments are about help from BASP and the medical care from Cabrini and SVH, and about the family – their youngest daughter turned eight last weekend.”

The letter goes on with an update about Alice's efforts to bring the family's case to the attention of the MP. This week they had great news that they are being allowed to apply for a ‘Resolution of Status’ visa which will enable them to stay permanently in Australia. S. is still very anxious about an upcoming medical procedure, but after 14 years of waiting, this is a huge relief.

While they were on bridging visas, S. and T. went for long periods without work rights and struggled to get cash-in-hand work. For many years, they have had to rely on charities such as BASP, Salvos, Asylum Seeker Resource Centre and the Red Cross for survival, and for some time they had no access to Medicare. Permanent visas mean all that uncertainty is finally over.

We are so happy for the family and wish them the best for a safe and happy future.



A welcome break on the Mornington Peninsula

Libby arranged for about 15-20 women and children asylum seekers to have a day at Saltbush, a site on the Mornington Peninsula with six holiday units for people needing respite and relaxation. A group of Brigidine College students had travelled from Sydney to organise a day of activities as part of the Duke of Edinburgh program. They made everyone feel included and welcome and were a truly inspiring bunch of young people! Saltbush starts from the point of view that everyone has a lot to offer, and the girls did a great job of creating an atmosphere where people felt comfortable and relaxed to be themselves and share their experiences and talents.



The weather being a bit chilly, Julie made colourful headwarmers for all from scarves that had been donated to Saltbush.

Another guest had brought home cooked charcoal lamb kebab and Afghan flat bread, even though the girls had also prepared a great lunch. As well as enjoying delicious food, a few guests said the highlight was meeting people from different cultures, and Inno, who's 14 and came with his mum, liked "playing a slug with the girls" (meaning a game of table soccer).

Dorothy, who came for the day, wrote to thank BASP for a fun experience and made special mention of the friendly volunteer Sheila who was

"full of smiles". We're so grateful to Sheila and all the volunteers who make Saltbush run and enable people to enjoy some peace and lots of smiles!



A costly and difficult process

After the excitement of getting a RoS visa, there are still huge barriers for people who desperately want to be reunited with family members they haven't seen for so many years.

The biggest obstacle is the huge fees that have to be paid to the Immigration Department to sponsor a partner and children for visa: A partner visa currently costs over \$9,000. Each dependent child 18-22 is an extra \$4,550, and children under 18 are \$2,280. So, application fees for a family can quickly get up to \$15-20,000.

As well as the visa cost, there is often money to be paid to a lawyer who is needed to assist the person with the applications. For a private lawyer, this adds thousands to the cost.

Once the money has been paid and the application is in, processing is very slow and the number of visas issued each year is capped, so it might be a very long time before the visas come through.

In the meantime, and without knowing how long it will be before their loved ones arrive, the person needs to find a house for the family to live in. While they can be helped with things like setting up the house with furniture and appliances, they need to raise the bond and show that they are capable of paying the rent.

The financial barriers to family reunion are enormous. It's also heartbreaking for people that they are unable to bring children who are 23 or older – for those who have been stuck in limbo in Australia for up to 15 years and whose children have now become ineligible, this is particularly harsh. As is the fact that the partner visa doesn't allow people to bring other family members, like parents or siblings, to settle in Australia.



Ata is one of our long term friends who has just brought his family from Afghanistan. His 4-year-old son, Ali, was so obviously relishing his father's presence.

We are grateful for any of the following food items (or vouchers to buy food and household necessities)

We currently have enough tinned food, except for cans of fruit, peas, carrots, corn.

The following are still very much appreciated:

- 1 kg sugar, oil (olive and vegetable), salt, pepper, tea, coffee
- Herbs and spices, especially coriander, cinnamon
- Blocks or individual wrapped cheese
- **Eggs are really appreciated**



Long-life milk, **honey is a most appreciated food**, noodles, tuna, basmati rice, dates, jam

(especially any red jam), cans of fruit (especially pineapple)

Gladwrap, tinfoil

Flat bread in sealed wrapping, as people often ask for bread

Sweet and savoury biscuits, snacks for school lunches (even when home!)

Shampoo, shaving cream and shavers, toothpaste and toothbrushes, soap, deodorant

Garbage bags and bin liners (small and large)

We seemingly never have enough washing powder, dish washing detergents or 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 email us at contact@basp.org.au after making a donation so we can send you a tax deductible receipt. We will send a newsletter but feel free to tell us that you don't want one.



We always want all BASP supporters to know how much your help is appreciated and how much difference you make to the lives of quite a large number of people seeking asylum.



Places like BASP always face challenges and these seem to change in nature or remain unmet. Some of the unmet ones are around resettlement and can vary from increased proficiency in English with the opportunities to get better jobs to establishing new friendship groups. With new relationships.

Health issues that may or may not be related to the trauma of leaving home, usually in very difficult situations, remain a major issues that will need to be addressed for a long time.

We look forward to seeing many of you before Christmas. For those we won't see, we wish you every blessing for the Christmas and holiday time.

Brigid Arthur

Libby Saunders

(BASP Coordinators)