

STRENGTH AND KINDNESS

Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP)



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

Newsletter 116 July 2024

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

We seem to be at an impasse. And we work within an inbuilt set of ambiguities.

Many people seeking asylum are being helped. There are many (mainly small) groups and individuals welcoming them in practical ways. On the other hand, there is not enough capacity in the community to support—at even a basic level—the number of asylum seekers who need help.

There are great efforts being made to bring about change (again by groups and individuals). But there is no indication that the situation is soon going to change politically.

One of the things that is hard for us at BASP is trying to convince people seeking basic help to survive that they need to be hopeful, maintain their efforts to scrape out an existence when at another level we are saying to ourselves this is all so grossly unfair.

We have to convince the asylum seekers that we are not judging them or blaming them for the situation they find themselves in and there is a reality none of us at this stage can change. It is understandable that the victims of the situation find this hard to accept.

The people who come to BASP for basic help—rent, bills, food, clothes, work—are increasingly desperate and defeated. As much as possible we try to convince them they need to keep trying to do as much for themselves as they can because there are insufficient supports from the community to help them with all their (quite legitimate) requests. Some are absolutely committed to doing whatever they can to help themselves, others are broken and incapable of taking steps to help themselves.

It is almost a truism to say we need root and branch change to convince the government that the system is unjust, causing extraordinary hardship for no good reason. It is unfair and it could be changed but it needs the political will to make that happen. In spite of some ‘wins’ at the High Court level the whole system of status resolution for asylum seekers remains totally convoluted, extraordinarily slow and for many terribly unfair.

It is winter and an increased numbers of visa rejections have taken us to a new level of need. Forceful transfers to Nauru are on the increase again with 100 individuals there—with seemingly conditions just as bad as ever. There are fifty or so individuals who sought protection in Australia stuck in PNG, almost all living in abject poverty. They are kept off the street (which is dangerous in Port Moresby) only by money being sent from a small group of Australians. Philomena Murray reflects on the change of narrative and political thinking needed to change Australia’s humanitarian direction and we have included some of her thinking in this newsletter.

It can be done!! In April, Spain's lower house of parliament voted to start working on a bill that would legalise hundreds of thousands of undocumented migrants, based on a proposal by civil society groups that had collected more than 600,000 signatures backing it.

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Housing

BASP housed an average of 165 people each month over the past 12 months. Many of these are the same people for the whole period, while some others have moved in and others have moved on. In the last 6 months, BASP has housed 27 new people- 10 singles, 3 families and 1 couple.

We secured 2 new properties to house 2 of the families, housed the couple in a share house with a single mother and her 2 children and housed the family of 4 in a house previously occupied by 2 of the men who moved on. One of the new properties was offered to us by an asylum seeker we housed years ago. He has set up a Barber business, rents a shop with housing above and offered us the well established rooms above. "You helped me when I needed it, now I can help you."

4 of BASP's leases ended, 3 with their owners choosing to return to live in the property or sell. The 4th was a family of 3 who had arrived 5 years ago with no English and no income. Eventually, the husband began work and contributed to the rent. They then gained their permanent residency and were able to take over the lease from BASP to be totally independent. This is the ideal!

As well as this family, a number of others moved on from BASP housing in recent times, taking on private rental or moving interstate or to NZ.

One man who moved out into private rental after being supported for 3.5 years in a BASP place, sent the following message "Hi, how are you? I just wanted to let you know that I have moved out from my room. I also want to say thanks from the bottom of my heart to you and your wonderful organisation for providing me the help and support when I needed it the most. I wish you best of luck for all the work you are doing." This man would have moved earlier but the housing crisis is such that finding alternative, affordable housing has become so difficult for people with no rental history. Since securing work some time ago, he has contributed to rent but our preference is for people to find other housing at that stage, so that BASP can house those with no income or security.

We see a wide variation in people's response to contributing to rent when they can. We have a few who are reluctant to do so, many who make a contribution within their small and often irregular income and others who initiate payment as soon as they are able. Recently a newly arrived young man, whom we had housed, started work 4 hours a day. He advised us of this immediately and asked how much he needed to pay towards the rent. Another family, recently arrived and housed by BASP but not yet working, continued to say they did not need financial assistance for food or basics. We wondered why this was so and then they advised us that they go out at night and collect cans and plastic bottles, receiving 10 cents an item through the recycling program. We are sure they'll do well once they enhance their English and start working!

BASP also supports another 75-80 people each month with payment of rent on their own rental properties. While this is fewer in number than previous periods, it is similar in cost as rents have increased significantly and people are coming in with arrears as well as seeking help with bonds and first month's rent due to landlords ending their old leases.

BASP gave \$189,000 in direct support to asylum seekers in 28 days from 24th June to 18th July. Most of this is rent payments but it also includes utility bills, some emergency relief money and other items.

We have had an increasing number of requests from people for rents, especially from the Tamil community. These are people- single and with families- who came in 2012/3, have no benefits or work rights and make ends meet through cash in hand work when they can get it. Over the winter months, jobs like gardening and mowing are reduced and some employers take holidays. Generally, it seems there are fewer options for these people. Something needs to change and after being here so long, surely there needs to be a line in the sand that they can stay, work legally and establish themselves? It is so disappointing that this situation continues and it is uncertain how organisations like BASP and others in the sector can continue to support this growing number in need.

In the meantime many have a roof over their heads because of the generosity of our supporters.

Discussion Session

2pm – 3.30pm

Wednesday, August 21st

At 54 Beaconsfield Pde Albert Park

We will address these questions:

- Why have a large number of Tamils from Sri Lanka been rejected by Australia?
- What political forces have enabled such cruel policies to be implemented?

Speaker: Linda Cusworth

From Combined Refugee Action Group (CRAG)

CRAG keeps an up-to-date report of conditions in Sri Lanka



We will also have a BASP update.

Keep the date for the next trivia

Friday 8 November



Cause for great celebration

Libby was awarded an OAM in the 2024 Kings Birthday list of people contributing significantly to community health, particularly asylum seekers.

Libby has helped so many—it is impossible to give that a number. With no fuss she organizes housing, addresses issues, connects people with people and places and generally leaves the rest of us just wondering how she can do so much!

We are so pleased that Libby has been recognized in this way. Her work at BASP is invaluable and it is wonderful to have others publicly acknowledge this.



Sister Jane Keogh (a Brigidine Sister in Canberra) was given an award for her work advocating for better treatment of refugees in Australia. Sr Jane Keogh, a Brigidine Sister, was made a Member of the Order of Australia for significant service to the community through social welfare advocacy, and to primary human rights. Jane has worked in particular over the past few years helping people wanting to take up the option of going to Canada and for those men stuck in PNG who are destitute.



Philomena Murray is a very well known academic who has done extensive research into movement of people and refugee policies across the world. She is also a strong advocate for justice for refugees. Philomena (known to us as Philo) has been very supportive to BASP.

Philo spoke recently at a forum entitled 11 Years Too Long: Campaigning to get Refugees Off PNG and Nauru. The breaking open of the concept of externalizing refugee policy and the need to regularize and legitimize the movement of people escaping persecution provides a narrative that could change Australia's approach. Philo's talk follows:

Australia's policies of offshoring responsibility for refugees and asylum-seekers, have, astonishingly, been admired by politicians across many nations, especially in Europe, and even been put forward as a putative model.

The process of externalizing refugee policy is when states seek to deny access to their territory and to send asylum-seekers to another jurisdiction, the latter carried out by deals between richer states and less wealthy states in the region. Australia offshores responsibility for refugees in neighbouring states, like the European Union's deals with Turkey, Libya and Tunisia.

But these policies have drawn criticism for violating international refugee law, human rights law and maritime law. Australia's mandatory detention has been criticised for breaching 'international conventions' and being complicit in widespread physical, mental and sexual abuse of detainees.

Externalization approaches de-legitimise the rights of refugees. The policies of deterrence and offshoring responsibilities transform the governance of refugee protection. Australia denies access to timely processing of claims for protection and to health care and welfare. It prevents access to scrutiny by civil society; the media; parliament; experts and international observers. Much of this is characterised by secrecy and lack of adequate information from government.

*But externalization is not simply a policy. It is a **narrative** of exclusion. Australia is increasingly moving away from the values of the liberal democratic state and from international obligations. This involves abandoning refugees offshore, with a denial of responsibility.*

*Governments also distance themselves - **and us** - from access to information and scrutiny. Corrosive narratives often co-exist with the absence of adequate knowledge. These narratives gain legitimacy through repetition by politicians and through a media prism of punitive language, while all the time refugees are denied rights.*

*It is not just that we are denied access to adequate knowledge. **Refugees themselves are denied agency.** This externalization accompanies securitization, with politicians framing refugees as a security risk, with a narrative that society is more secure if it denies access to people seeking asylum.*

Parties adopt simplistic and reductionist rhetoric across much of the political spectrum for a reason. Corrosive narratives can win votes. Untruths are repeated over and over. Voters respond to narratives from political parties, which often obscure the truth of the refugee experience. Many political parties in Australia and Europe have, for some decades, won votes with harsh policies. Refugees are portrayed as outsiders, under narratives of terrorism and crime.

Australia's main political parties have engaged in competitive cruelty, apart from the Greens. Boochani referred to 'a competition on cruelty' between major parties, where 'refugees are used as political scapegoats to garner public support prior to an election'.

*Externalization results in severe harm to refugees. It is also incredibly costly and has largely failed to achieve its objectives. It does not fully prevent departures, because asylum-seekers find alternative and increasingly dangerous routes. It does not 'save lives at sea' and 'break the business model' of people smuggling networks. Despite these failures, these policies are maintained for electoral success. There is little intention to respond to real problems, a strong motivation for some politicians to tell untruths. These policies undermine Australia's and Europe's global standing as liberal democratic states. The policy convergence taking place among western governments risks eroding the international refugee system. **If refugee protection norms are not upheld, then they risk becoming obsolete.***

So where to now?

*It is a major challenge to combat refugee externalization policies. A recalibration of policy, **narratives** and conduct by politicians and the media is required.*

*To put it starkly, politicians supporting the policies described today need to stop acting for their own electoral advantage. They need to stop telling untruths. Many in the media need to hold them to account. Those politicians and leaders who oppose externalization must coalesce more around **alternative narratives** that challenge these cruel practices. Politicians should be held to account, regularly and consistently, by refugees, advocates and experts. **It is essential that there be far more representation of refugee voices in policy, politics and the media.***

We can insist on enhanced scrutiny of the harms of these policies. Those who oppose them should call for regular debates in parliament. Media reporting should be responsible and avoid sensationalist language.

***We need an ambitious and motivated national conversation on a just and fair society.** This national conversation is required to discuss how externalization harms refugees; involves human rights abuses; is financially very costly and is a failed policy. The conversation could include the legal accountability of Australian governments' contracts with private firms, including oversight of offshore processing and other externalization arrangements.*

***Policymaking can be humane.** The parliament, public service and media should ensure that policies are enforced in ways that uphold the human rights of refugees. This includes compliance with international legal commitments and ensuring that people are not sent back to a real risk of persecution; the provision of humane, fair reception conditions; and providing people a fair hearing.*

The media should take a leadership role in investigative reporting of refugee policy and enacting a shift in rhetoric, drawing on best practice and consultation with refugees, along the lines of the small group of journalists doing this already.

We can more actively use print media, TV, radio, social media, direct connections and campaigns to hold politicians to account.

Despite extensive advocacy, especially by the groups at this forum today, and compelling evidence of the harms enabled through externalization policies, Australia remains committed to harsh policies, and we need a culture of political leadership dedicated to making a difference.

There is a need for more recognition that seeking asylum is a global issue requiring more comprehensive and transnational responses in a fair, equitable and humane manner.

*Finally, Australia **can** do better and **should** do better. We want decent prospects for our society, one that includes refugees. We can no longer be a cautionary tale of cruelty and harsh narratives. We need to regularise policy with fair outcomes. We must regularise visas, especially permanent visas. We need to regularise narratives.*

In May we had a very well attended Discussion afternoon. Two of the lawyers from Human Rights Law Centre, Sanmarti Verme and Laura John gave us an expert commentary on the proposed Bill before Parliament that will further punish those seeking asylum in Australia. Sanmarti and Laura outlined how:

People who have migrated to Australia are under a fresh wave of attack. In the latest kneejerk response, the Albanese Government is trying to rush through dangerous new laws that will criminalise and punish people because of their visa status.

Under the proposed new laws, people could be thrown in jail for five years for not assisting with their own deportation – no matter how long they've been in Australia, or whether they have family here. People who have fled persecution could be stripped of their refugee status and returned to harm.

Astoundingly, the new laws could allow the Government to ban people from certain countries from ever travelling to Australia. Should the legislation pass, the Minister could impose a Trump-style travel ban by preventing visa applications from people from 'removal concern countries'.

At the time of printing, we are hopeful this Bill will not be put to the Parliament.



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Hussein's Story *

As told to Delia Bradshaw—one of our long term volunteers 4/6/2024

Hussein from Iraq arrived in Australia in December 2013. He came from Indonesia by boat, about a one-day trip. He said that the Navy who intercepted the boat tried to move them back to Indonesia but didn't tell the asylum seekers this was their intention. He believes they lied. It was the driver of the boat who brought them from Indonesia who warned them. The Navy denied they were trying to turn them back. "We are waiting for the government to give permission for you to land on Christmas Island."

Some of the asylum seekers threatened to jump off the Navy boat. He said the Navy officials replied: "Jump if you wish. There's a shark there." Two or three did jump. When they saw this, the Navy realised we were serious and said: "Don't jump" and saved those who had jumped in.

We asked the Navy people to stay close, within sight, of Christmas Island. We stayed a day and a night on that smaller Navy boat then an official from the bigger Navy boat visited, telling us: "I have good news for you. I'll take you to Christmas Island."

I stayed on Christmas Island for five days. I had come alone, without family or friends. On the fifth day, they called our numbers and then took us, with many guards, to a compound in a separate area of the detention centre and told us: "We are taking you to Nauru." About half went to Manus and half to Nauru. I don't know how they chose who went where. They told us: "You are lucky to be moving to Nauru. We can process your case there." They said, if necessary, they would take us by force. We left for Nauru by plane the same day.

When we reached Nauru, we were shocked. It was like a prison. They put us in the middle of the island where no-one else lives. Just phosphate and rocks. This camp in the middle only had tents, with about 40 people to a tent, with double beds, one up and one down. It was hot all the time, day and night, and there were no fans. There were mosquitoes everywhere. We couldn't sleep much at all, mostly between 5 and 9 in the morning when it was a little cooler and there were fewer mosquitoes.

Immigration told us we had two choices. We could stay here or return to our country. They tried to make it very hard for us. There was little water and sometimes it was cut. Showers had to be one-minute long. We tried to save water in a jug and, one time, they came and took it away. Some people tried suicide – mosquito repellent, shampoo, razor blades, hanging or setting themselves on fire.

I went on hunger strike for one month. As my blood pressure was so low, they took me to hospital, gave me some injections and then sent me back to the camp.

The staff working there did not care about our suffering. Most asylum seekers had mental health problems, but they were only given tablets. If people felt worse, they kept increasing the dose. "People need freedom. Not tablets." But most of the staff didn't care; they just came for the money. They'd stay for two weeks, then go back to Australia, then come back again.

I was seven years on Nauru. They tried to process our case. Lawyers and judges came from Australia. I was interviewed three different times. After waiting for a result for two years, I was given "Refugee Status" but, I still had to stay there. I was told the decision meant I could live in Nauru but not in Australia. I knew it was unsafe to live outside the camp due to assaults and robberies of asylum seekers. I said: "I am going to stay inside. It's not safe outside." They tried to force me, but I said "No."

After one or two years, I had to live outside in a community still in the middle of the island. There were houses with fans, but some people caught dengue fever. In this settlement, we could cook for ourselves. In the first camp, they had cooked for us. I learnt to cook in the second place; before this, I had not even cooked an egg. We were given a little bit of money for shopping, but everything was so expensive. A kilo of tomatoes cost \$20. A kilo of bananas \$16. A kilo of onions \$12. We also spent money on cigarettes as smoking gave some relief from all the stress.

I kept asking myself: "We have refugee status, so why are we kept here?"

Then, another 'game' began. This time, we were told we had to apply for America. Another interview, this time, we

PTO

were told, with the UN. “Why again?”, I wondered. First, one interview. Many months passed and then a second interview. I was waiting for months and then a third interview. I was told: “Now, you will have to wait for a decision”. The process started in 2016 and the result came at the end of 2018. They said: “America has rejected you and you can’t appeal.” No reason was given why they rejected me. They rejected more than they accepted. It was just a game.

After that, in 2020, they made another game. “Now, you can apply for Canada.” I felt they were just wasting our time. We just want to leave “that shit island”. This time, we had to apply online. One person gives the case to another person who gives it to MOSAIC (a Canadian immigrant settlement service) who gives it to Canadian immigration. I was telling my story over and over again.

In 2021, I was moved to Australia for medical reasons. I was in very poor physical and mental health. I had to sign to go back to Nauru after treatment. I was taken to Villawood detention centre in Sydney for six months. I was treated for my serious ulcer condition and given medication. Then, I was moved to the Park Hotel in Melbourne where I stayed for eight months.

At the Park Hotel, I received an email from Canadian immigration, after two and a half years, for an interview. I asked Serco (the people overseeing us there) for the documents I needed for my interview. After a week, I gave another interview and was told my application had been cancelled because I was **not** still on Nauru. They knew I’d moved because they had told me to update my address, phone number etc. So, they knew but still cancelled my application. I felt they are still playing the same game. Many people who applied through MOSAIC in 2020 are still waiting to hear.

One month after my release from the Park Hotel, I was sent another email from Canada. But I said: “I’m not going to do another interview. Ten years, I’ve been doing interviews.”

After 11 years, Australian immigration said to apply to New Zealand. I told them: “I’ve had enough”.

There is no justice. Some of the people who have been given permanent visas came at the same time and the same way as I did. It’s like a chess game. Why not send us to a third country from Nauru ten years ago? They will be happy if I go back to Iraq. The situation there is getting worse. I could die there. They wouldn’t care. There are not many of us now from Manus and Nauru. The people who set fire in Nauru were brought to Australia and now have permanent visas. We were good people; we did nothing and have nothing.

They have destroyed eleven years of my life. They don’t have to do something big. Just a signature.

The only time I forget is when I go to the gym. It is good for my mental health.

My family in Iraq cannot understand why they won’t give me a visa.

*Hussein is not his real name which has been changed for privacy and protection reasons.

Sadly Zia Haydari , a young man originally from Afghanistan died in May.

Zia came to Australia by boat in 2013 as an unaccompanied minor. After his release from an immigration detention centre, he was placed in 'Community Detention' which involved living in a government paid and furnished house and receiving some income support. He was enrolled in the Salesian College in Chadstone and given great support by the school, where he thrived. On turning 18, his housing and income support ceased. This was early in Year 12.

At that stage, BASP was able to house him with a local man Rom Brady. Rom and Zia had a great friendship. Zia left Melbourne in 2019 to study in Wagga where he completed a degree in Social work. It seemed all was going to be good for Zia because he had a Permanent Visa, a degree, friends but he was found to have cancer which caused his death in a very short illness. Zia had always kept in touch and he was a beautiful person. We are so sad he did not get a chance to see his mother before he died.

A learning for everyone who relates to asylum seekers in Australia is that the longer a person has spent in detention the longer it takes for them to settle into a new life. This is so whether it is in New Zealand, Canada, or the USA. It is a sobering thought. We believe that the effects of detention are felt well into a persons life if they have spent more than a few months detained. We have people who spent ten years, eight years, five years in detention and they are very damaged, in particular those who spent the longest time locked up. The repercussions of the experience play out in all sorts of ways, sleep patterns, general well being, suspicion of others, lack of hope, a general feeling that things will never be right, hurt that they have missed all sorts of opportunities to do things with their families and many more.

It becomes very frightening and bewildering when we see our country opening up Nauru again and sending people there with all the same lack of certainty. They know nothing about the length of time before there is any processing of their claims, who will do this, where they will ever be able to settle permanently and indeed if they will be deported to the country they came from. This is all with the heat, the crowding in tents and the antagonism of the local people—things we have heard about for twenty years now.

There is \$640 million in the budget to keep Nauru open and this has almost certainly been increased to take into account the number who have actually been transferred there this year. Worse than this of course if the fact that there is no support for the fifty or so men abandoned in PNG.

Volunteers

We recently sought an update from our volunteers –over a hundred who are still actively involved. If spirits flag with the lack of heart from politicians, they sour when hearing back from volunteers.

So many have remained in contact with their person or family for years. Some are happy to continue with that and no more, others are open to doing more.

Thousands of hours of support have been provided by BASP volunteers.

A selection of replies are as follows:

“Thank you for being in touch. Anna and I continue to be in regular contact with this lovely family. We usually visit the family each Thursday afternoon as well as accompanying them to various medical appointments from time to time.

A couple of weeks ago we took the family to the Melbourne Zoo for a day out in the school holidays which was fun for children and adults alike!

Both parents continue to have physiotherapy appointments which seem to have been beneficial.

As you would be aware, they have been approved for resettlement in Canada and just completed the medical assessment part of this process. It is unclear when they move to Toronto but we will certainly be sad to see them go (as well as being happy for them of course that they will finally have permanent visas in another country and the possibility of reunification with their daughter). When this eventuates, as seems likely, we would very much like to continue our involvement with your wonderful organisation if you believe there is another suitable match. “

“I am still in regular contact with N and her sons. We are currently in the process of applying for citizenship for them. Her eldest finishes school this year so we are looking into work training with Uniting for him. The younger one is doing very well in school and I am attending Student Support Group meetings each term with N.

I am very grateful that you have put me in contact with this beautiful family. Thank you.”

“Doing a dummy run to Swinburne Uni At Hawthorn and back in preparation for his orientation day next week - baptism of fire!”- Helping a newly arrived young man to navigate Melbourne and public transport.

“Look, you don't get rid of me that easily! Like so many of your dedicated volunteers, some of whom have given selfless service for far longer than me, I'm still plodding on, trying to help when and where I can, whilst hoping not to get into too much bother in the process.



It is so important to recognize the good things that happen—this takes a community to achieve.



A 27 yo man who has been here for 12 years, was couch surfing until he was referred to us by a health service. We were able to provide a room for him but with no work rights, the days were long and boring. He was interested to do some voluntary work and we arranged this with the Colostomy Association of Victoria (CAV) which has helped others over the years. After his first visit, we received such a happy phone call, recounting what a fantastic day he'd had and how friendly and funny the other people were and how good it was to feel useful. He goes in 2 days a week and more if requested and this will be positive work experience if and when he gets work rights and seeks work. Thank you all at CAV.

Another young man who arrived recently and was waiting for his work rights to come through after 3 months, found his own volunteering job. He assisted River Nile, a program supporting asylum seeker women with English, by setting up their website for them.- enterprising and helpful.

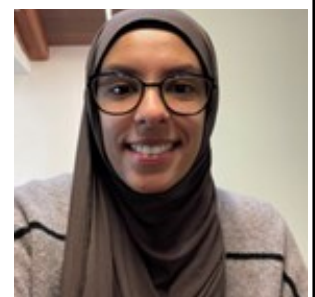
We have a brave volunteer who has given driving lessons to a woman who arrived late 2023. She drove in Uganda but needs confidence in Melbourne and we thank Mark for giving this a go.

The Sisters of the Little Company of Mary provide an Endowment Fund each year for an asylum seeker pursuing tertiary studies. This year they are supporting a young Rohingya man who is delighted by this support- the first in his family to continue studies. He reports he has successfully passed his first semester subjects Indigenous affairs, Diversity- LGBTQI and PSA, Group work/teamwork for social work. He was also selected for the University soccer team- another thrill although he was not able to travel with the team to Canberra for a tournament.



A young eighteen year old man from Ethiopia who is a recently arrive asylum seeker won a marathon race in Melbourne—only weeks after he arrived! Go Yohannes.

BASP Housing Support Officer. In 2021 the Sisters of St John of God provided BASP with a grant to fund this full time position for 3 years. BASP has been fortunate to have received a grant from the Sisters for a further 3 years starting July 1, to enable the role to continue. Hana Hussein has been in the role for most of the time and is continuing. These funds came as the BASP housing program was expanding and has been a great support to the coordinators and the program. Hana checks on the properties regularly, ensure that maintenance issues are acted on promptly and helps residents understand the expectations and responsibilities of renting.



Hana was asked about the challenges and highlights of the role. Her response:

“Throughout my time in this role, I have gained more knowledge in terms of house and garden maintenance which I try to teach the residents to implement in their homes. It can be challenging walking into some houses and seeing the place in a mess after showing them how and what needs to clean. Some places require constant reminders to clean, especially before an inspection with an agent however measures in place such as giving them a checklist, a cleaning roster in shared places and photo accountability of regular garden maintenance has helped with this issue.

It's a great feeling to be able to put a smile on the faces of residents from as little as receiving a thank you for dropping off food or stopping by for a visit, to seeing them gain permanent residency and helping them apply for Centrelink and receive a regular income.”

Many thanks to the Sisters of St John of God and to Hana.



We are thrilled to inform you that today we made another donation of \$739.80 to BASP from the sales made at Moongala, through the wonderful and generous work done by Rosy one of our participants.

As explained last time Rosy regularly makes jams and chutneys which we sell for her and 100% of the takings goes to BASP and in addition she makes gorgeous crochet topped tea towels and we are able to forward half of the proceeds to BASP and the other half we return to Rosy so she can buy the lovely tea towels and keep making them for all to enjoy!

I have attached our newsletter and you will see Rosy featured on Page 2 and at that time we thought we were donating \$380 but were then able to increase it to \$500! We will include a write up about Rosy's wonderful, generous work she continues to do for us and BASP in our next newsletter which I will forward on to you (probably June).

Thank you for the wonderful work BASP does in supporting Asylum Seekers.

Kind regards
Jude Rangitaawa



Speaking recently with a human rights lawyer we noted that many MPs had some empathy for asylum seekers. He said with some irony: In this game there are no points for good intentions.

If we get no changes before the next election there will be a lot of dispirited asylum seekers and advocates.

Two young people struggled into the office with a piano and stool and music books. They are all now hopefully being enjoyed by some young people who would not otherwise be able to learn to play.



Barb Venn, a teacher from Marian Ararat, brought some Year 9 students with a beautiful ceramic HOPE that they had made. The sculpture piece is on the front desk at our offices in Albert Park. It is a wonderful reminder of the need to give something to allow those in very difficult positions a reason to hope.

The students ent to the Immigration Museum—and found it a good experience. The staff there are very helpful.

Thanks so much to these students and Barb.

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In June, a group of 14 people, recently arrived from Colombia, spent a weekend at Saltbush Balnarring, a wonderful holiday retreat which is part of Kildare Ministries. 3 Brigidines (Marg, Ged and Celie) and Libby drove the families and individuals down on the Friday. Brigid and Libby visited for lunch on Saturday, joined by one of the family donating the weekend costs in memory of her sister

who had died a year earlier and had worked with refugees. A volunteer from Colombia was present and interpreted for the families who were able to express their appreciation of the event and assistance in general.



As well as the communal lunch (cooked by the group), they played games, walked in the bush and along the beach and met fellow countrymen. The break enabled them to set aside for a time, the uncertainties and sadness of leaving their homeland and starting afresh. The 3 Brigidines and Viv, another longtime volunteer, drove them back on Sunday, with everyone – volunteers and participants- feeling uplifted by the experience.



From Sacred Heart Primary school in Kew. This school contributes this every year on their feast day.



Students from St Columba's College in Essendon visited BASP Office and cooked a couple of dishes with the women who live in the BASP house in Albert Park. It was a great experience.



St Martins and Christ Church in South Yarra are amazingly generous to BASP and often bring in a large quantity of food and groceries.

Thanks to Fr John and the parish.



Several knitters sent in beanies and scarves. These were done by Bev in Cheltenham

One of the women's response to us was "thank you for introducing us to such lovely people".

Can we change the narrative and the policy around asylum seekers?

Spain shows it can be done.

MADRID, April 9 (Reuters) - Spain's lower house of parliament voted on Tuesday to start working on a bill that would legalise hundreds of thousands of undocumented migrants, based on a proposal by civil society groups that had collected more than 600,000 signatures backing it.

Most countries are now adopting harsher policies but some like Germany had a time of more enlightened approaches.

Every so often BASP is gifted with a car from a generous person. We are then able to provide an asylum seekers (usually a family) with a means of transport. A few week ago we were able to do this for a family who are in a suburb where public transport is difficult. Several needs in this family have been addressed by getting this vehicle.

We are grateful for any of the following food (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, ginger,
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)

Gladwrap, tinfoil,

We would like to try Flat bread in sealed wrapping a 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, deodorants

Garbage bags and bin liners (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. We will send a newsletter but feel free to tell us that you don't want one.

Thanks to all of you. We can never say that enough.



Whether it is knitting beanies or bringing in food or making financial donations your help is greatly appreciated.

In May and June donations received were really generous, The end of the financial year is a very good time for BASP!!! Luckily this was so because of the spike in requests for rental assistance. We cant say Yes to everyone who comes to us. Where at all possible we help in some way. It would be much easier if there were other options for people to get help but in most cases this is not possible.

If everyone had work rights it would make getting and maintaining a job more tenable. If any of you get a chance please ask your local MPS to support work rights and Medicare for everyone no matter what stage of their application for recognition as a refugee.

Brigid Arthur

Libby Saunders

(BASP Coordinators)