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The Secret Release of Recent Offshore Arrivals: Two early experiences

On the 7th December 2012 I had my first taste of the Minister's decision to release asylum seekers from Christmas Island and Curtin detention centres in Sydney.

A Pakistani asylum seeker had just arrived in Sydney and had been put up in very basic accommodation in the Auburn area by Settlement Services International (SSI), an organisation I'd never heard of until now.

He phoned me in great distress. He had no Bridging Visa, no Medicare Card and no ID -these had all expired in November 2012. He had Hepatitis B and needed medicine urgently. But when he went to an appointment at the Hospital Medical Clinic to get a prescription he was turned away for not having a Medicare card or any ID or any money to pay privately. His Immigration Case Officer no longer had any responsibility for him and I could not contact his Case Manager at SSI. So I phoned and emailed the Minister's Office and suggested it might not be in the Government's best interests if the media learned that the Minister had released a sick asylum seeker with Hepatitis B into the community without access to the vital medications which stop the infection spreading. There was immediate action from the Minister's office and the man got another appointment at the Clinic.

This is not an acceptable state of affairs.

Two months later on the day Sydney had heaviest downpour of rain and flooding it had ever experienced (20th Feb 2012), a mentally disturbed stateless asylum seeker from Iran phoned me. He had no English but was able to say he was from Iran. I phoned him back with a Persian interpreter and learned he was sleeping rough in doorways and intended to sleep in the park in the drenching rain. The boarding house charged \$30 a night plus extra for food he could not eat. He had no money left and wanted to find a family he could live with. I had intended to go to him but he did not know where he was and could not read any of the names of the street sign nearby nor read any of the English letters on the sign to the Interpreter. I asked him to stay on the phone and go and knock on the door of the nearest house and give his phone to whoever answered the door so I could work out where he was. Then his phone battery gave out. I phoned the police and Immigration. The police could not help - they already had crisis conditions that day and Immigration said they would

alert staff to help him if they picked him up so he would not be put into detention. By nightfall he had managed to recharge his battery and I persuaded him to return to the boarding house and Balmain for Refugees (BFR) would pay for a few nights till I could contact his Case Manager. There was no neat solution but I was aware from these two incidents and the stories which started trickling out that there were large numbers of asylum seekers quietly being dumped into Sydney without the means to survive.

The Cut-throat No Advantage Rule

I had never heard of asylum seekers being released on such conditions before and realized these newer offshore arrivals ('boat people') were being treated very differently from previous offshore asylum seekers or those who arrived by plane when they were released from detention on Bridging Visas. Then the penny dropped. This was probably the Government's "No Advantage Rule" in action.

The confused Bridging Visa Situation for Offshore Asylum Seekers ('BoatPeople')

The table below shows the different payments and conditions for asylum seekers released from detention based on date of arrival in Australia.

Since February the media have managed to expose the different conditions under which offshore asylum seekers released from remote detention centres are living. The variety of different Bridging Visas have one thing in common - they provide such stringent funding to asylum seekers who came by boat that individuals and families cannot survive without the help of already overstretched charities trying to feed, clothe and house Australian families and individuals without jobs and living in poverty in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis in 2010.

BASF

The Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation will play its part in this desperate situation and, with your help and generous donations will do what it can to assist. It will continue its fund raising efforts for destitute asylum seekers irrespective of whether they arrived by boat or plane and irrespective of the date they arrived in Australia.

If you missed the excellent interview of Leigh Sales on the 7.30 Report on Wednesday 15/05/2013 on the plight of asylum seekers released from detention without the means to survive and the desperation of the charities trying to assist them, the transcript can be found at <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2013/s3760182.htm>

Frances Milne AM
Member of BASF Management Committee

Payments and conditions for asylum seekers released from detention based on date of arrival in Australia

Table researched and compiled by Pamela Curr from the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre, Melbourne

Arrival dates:	Adult payment per week:	For 2 parents with children per week: (One payment only per age group even if more than one child in group. A supplementary \$3.50 per week for third or more children)
Pre 13 Aug 2012 Have the right to work-but few employers want workers with temporary visas.	- Under 21=\$141 - Over 22=\$177.50 - Partner relationship:=\$141 each for under 21 =\$155 each over 21	\$154 Add per week: - \$55.50 per child 0-12yrs - \$77 per child 13-17yrs - \$4 per 3rd child
Post 13 Aug 2012 Released under No Advantage Rule	- Under 21=\$121 - Over 21=\$148 - Partner relationship:=\$121 each under 21 =\$133.50 ea over 22	\$132.50 per week Add per week: - \$51 per child 0-12 yrs - \$66 per child 13-17 yrs - \$3.50 per 3rd child
		Those who arrived after 13th August can be re-detained anytime or sent offshore to Nauru or Manus Island. They are given no time lines for when and if a person's refugee claim will be processed. Even, if after a person has been found to be a refugee, there is no timeline for granting of a visa.

Debby Nicholls' last hurrah

We note with sadness Debby Nicholls' retirement from the BASF Management Committee after 10 years' hard work. We will miss her wise counsel and assistance. More recently, her knowledge of how to run a silent art auction was invaluable. New Management Committee Member Caroline Mackie, a long time supporter, has joined the committee.

The Silent Art Auction

The Management Committee thanks the Balmain Association members who kindly provided the Watch House premises, as well as the donations of art works from artists and friends of Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation and Balmain for Refugees.

Well-known author and member of PEN, Rosie Scott, opened the function for us.

We expect to have raised just over \$10,000.

End of Financial Year

As the end of the financial year approaches, we hope you may be able to make a tax deductible donation to enable us to continue supporting destitute asylum seekers who rely

entirely on BASF's support.

We are proud to have funded 113 people from 20 countries to total of \$180,330 this financial year and thank you for your contributions to make this possible.

Virginia Walker
Honorary Chairperson

BASF Donation Form

Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation: PO Box 829, Five Dock NSW 2046. ABN 78 722 539 923

Donations of \$2.00 and over are tax deductible

Donations can be made by credit card, electronic funds transfer (eft), cheque or money order by any of the following means:

Mailing: PO Box 829, Five Dock NSW 2046

Telephoning: 0418 261 160

Emailing: asylumseekersfoundation@bigpond.com

Payment by credit card please provide the following details:

Donation amount: \$ _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Visa or MasterCard. Card No: _____ CCV _____

Expiry Date: ____/____

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Signature (if posting printed form): _____

EFT (direct deposit) to: Bridge for Asylum Seekers Fndt

BSB: 634 634

Account no: 100028813

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