



Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation

UnitingCare NSW.ACT

Newsletter
December 2006

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Seasons Greetings

The festive season is once again nearly upon us, and again we are very happy to thank all those wonderful people who have supported us in some way or other during the year. We have received some very generous donations and many people have been providing ongoing contributions through a banking scheme with Uniting Financial Services; others have provided money on a credit card basis.

Several people have held lunches at their homes; another raised some money for us from participants in her book club lunch. The Greens came to our rescue when we were in dire straits by kindly suggesting that we join in when they had their walk-a-thon in November to raise funds for ourselves. This we duly did and raised our profile, as well as raising funds from sponsorships and the raffle which Kate and her assistants always seem to manage to provide.

The people we assist

Our list of recipients changes every month. We are currently helping 96 people from a variety of countries. Many of our early recipients have been given protection visas, some have been provided with permanent protection visas, others with temporary protection visas. Most recipients are seeking humanitarian visas from the Minister for Immigration, Senator The Hon Amanda Vanstone. These visas often take quite a long time to process. Therefore some of the people we are assisting who are living in the community have been with us for almost the whole time we have been in existence. They cannot obtain Centrelink benefits, Medicare, work rights, study rights or transport concessions. It is a very difficult life for them even with the sort of assistance we provide.

This Christmas we have given all recipients a bonus of \$30 to assist them to buy

a Christmas treat or do something they would not otherwise be able to do. We are still providing approximately \$90,000 every three months to asylum seekers awaiting finalisation of their cases.

Fundraising

This year Kate Maclurcan's position of Asylum Seeker Project Co-ordinator has been ongoing thanks to funding from many Councils who support our cause. They are Botany, City of Sydney, Canterbury, Marrickville, Leichhardt, Hornsby, Fairfield, Randwick, Strathfield and Waverley.

Awards

In November, the 2006 Law and Justice Volunteer Award was presented to Balmain for Refugees Group of the Balmain Uniting Church, which is an integral part of the BASF organisation. The Award is sponsored by the New South Wales Bar Association and is presented to an individual, or a group of volunteers who demonstrate an outstanding commitment to improving access to justice, particularly for socially and economically disadvantaged people. The New South Wales Bar Association is a voluntary association of barristers who promote the administration of justice, make recommendations on legislation and law reform, and have a strong commitment to pro bono work.

On 7 December, the 2006 Human Rights Medal and Awards were presented at a ceremony at the Sheraton on the Park Hotel in Sydney. Virginia Walker, the Honorary Chairperson of BASF, was presented with a Community Award in the individual category. The awards recognise significant contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights in Australia by both individuals and organisations. Julie McCrossin was MC for the awards, and Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission President John von Doussa QC delivered the Human Rights Day address.

Refugee Art and Craft

2-4 February 2007, Balmain Watch House, 357 Darling Street, Balmain.

Featuring art and craft by asylum seekers in Villawood Detention Centre and art works donated by members of the community.

Opening: 6-9pm Friday, 2 February 2007. Then continuing on Saturday, 3 February and Sunday, 4 February from 10am to 4pm.

Admission is free with donations to Balmain for Refugees and BASF welcomed. Proceeds from sales art work will be given to the artists. Proceeds from sales of donated works will go to Balmain for Refugees for its work with asylum seekers. BASF will be there to inform the public about its work, recruit new members, and raise money through a raffle.

Balmain Kids Proms

On Sunday, 3 December, Martin Jacobs of the Circle Cafe in Darling Street, Balmain hosted Balmain Kids Proms, a very enjoyable afternoon of music and Christmas carols for young children presented by members of the Sydney Opera House Proms Orchestra with "Big G" George Ellis, Georgie Parker, Amie McKenna. Children clapped, danced and sang during the performances. The afternoon was sponsored by Pinpoint Marketing and Harris Partners Real Estate of Balmain.

We urgently need dentists, doctors, psychiatrists, lawyers to do pro bono work and research cases. We also need friends to help in our fundraising efforts by selling raffle tickets or to help at community fairs.

Highlights from Kate's Asylum Seeker Project

A busy few months—fabulous October lunch at Osteria Dei Poeti, Glebe, packed with nearly 80 guests. Special thanks to Osteria's Aurelio Spagnuolo, foodie John Newton, musicians Touchwood and donors Sydney Gondolas, Cathy Wilcox and Louise Hume. October lunch at Mosman Art Gallery was also a packed house with 70 plus. A big thanks to Mosman Mayor Denise Wilton, Council staff, local artists for beautiful prizes and guest speaker Maxine McKew. Refugee Week from 22-29 October was HUGE: I was involved in seven events, including the Northshore Multicultural Network forum, Rozelle/Balmain

Amnesty Picnic (thanks to Amnesty International, Vara Whale and the generous Darling St retailers), various church groups and a gathering at Mosman Library showcasing the plight of Villawood detainees and those on temporary protection and bridging visas. Thanks to Laura Cunningham and Amir for their heartfelt stories. November's Walk for Change, organised by the Port Jackson Greens, brought us more funds and supporters—thank you Susan Meyer and Rochelle Porteous.

Thank you to my wonderful committee, Frances Milne, Debby Nicholls, Virginia Walker, Ro-

chelle Porteous, Damian Copley-Finch, Stuart Gibb, Susana Ng, Mei Ye Leung, Susan Meyer and Shannon Lewis. Blessings to all our helpers who have supported our work this year. Please stay with us in 2007, there is much to be done!

Kate Maclurcan.

BASF Website

A special thank you to Lyndal Coote of Scooter Marketing who has generously renovated and is managing our website in an honorary capacity. Prior to that Peter Richardson of Doorstep Organics managed this task for us. keep watching it, you may see yourself at one of our events!

Mr & Mrs Sparkle - Supporting Refugees

An Iranian man, who spent many years in Villawood and is now married to young Chinese woman, also a former detainee, has established a cleaning and gardening agency called Mr and Mrs Sparkle. He is anxious to find employment for the hundreds of individuals on bridging and provisional visas who have been given work rights but do not have access to

Centrelink, and therefore have difficulty in finding work. If you need or someone you know needs domestic or commercial cleaning, gardening, rubbish removal, painting and even carpet fitting and laying you can phone Mr & Mrs Sparkle on 9632-4624; 0432 706 146 or email amirmesrinejad@yahoo.com.au.

Refugee Conference:

31 March - 1 April 2007
Manning Clark House, ACT, with Julian Burnside QC.

The Gift of a Donation

In lieu of presents for birthdays or flowers for funerals, some supporters have asked their friends to make a donation to BASF which are gratefully received.

Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation

PO Box 829, Five Dock NSW 2046 (02) 9810 5826 www.asylumseekersfoundation.com

I would like to help the Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation provide direct support for Visa "E" and special category refugees and lobby for their better treatment. Please send me:

- () more information about Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation
- () information about direct bank or credit card debits for regular donations

Name

Address

Postcode

Phone

Email

Herewith by cheque/credit card - Visa/Mastercard/Bankcard

\$

Card number

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Signature

DONATIONS of \$2 or more to Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation are fully TAX DEDUCTIBLE