



Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation

UnitingCare NSW.ACT

**Newsletter
June 2009**

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Dear supporters and friends

Our special thanks must go to all those people who have continued to keep BASF afloat from June 2003 until now.

Since the last newsletter BASF has held a couple of functions that raised our profile and provided additional funds for our coffers, which will help us to meet our commitments to asylum seekers until at least the coming quarter. We are grateful to those who attended both functions and made donations for our work. Kate Maclurcan, the Asylum Seeker Project Co-ordinator, provides a detailed report about the functions later in this newsletter. We were also delighted when a number of people shared their \$900 bonuses from the government with us as their way of stimulating the economy. There is no doubt the funds will be used in that way!

The Good News

The 2009-10 Federal Budget has brought some good news. Some of the community based asylum seekers we are currently assisting and most of those who are yet to lodge applications will be granted work rights and Medicare if the proposed abolition of the 45-Day Rule goes through. Additionally, many of those who are currently in detention and suffering from mental anguish and psychological problems will be released into the Community Care Program which is managed by the Red Cross. This should make BASF's situation less precarious.

And the Bad News

To our great pleasure, a number of the people we have been assisting have received their long-awaited visas and are now able to plan their futures. However, we still are providing financial assistance to just below 70 people, of whom seven are children.

As always, our recipients come from a wide variety of countries including China, the Indian sub-Continent (Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan), the Middle East (Egypt, Iran and Iraq); Burma; Nepal; and African countries (including Nigeria and Cameroon).

The current economic climate is not conducive to those seeking work, even when they have received work rights, so life remains difficult for those asylum seekers who are in the community. Because they have been denied any access to free English language lessons, and many of them are traumatised due to the suffering and persecution they received in their countries of origin they many not be able to obtain work. Therefore, we may have to support some of them for some time to come. The global financial crisis has also meant that the types of employment available to asylum seekers, such as kitchen hands where a high-level of spoken and written English is not required, are few and far between.

Unfortunately, unless the number of those we are assisting drops dramatically, by the end of this year we will not have sufficient funding to provide any money to assist asylum seekers. The Management Committee determined at its meeting in May that it will make every possible effort to continue to provide financial assistance until November. But this is extremely difficult in the current financial climate. The local clubs, businesses and other organisations from whom we receive funding are suffering financial losses. And of course all of you, our generous supporters, are feeling the same effects.

Virginia Walker
Honorary Chairperson
BASF

Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation Donation form

I would like to help the Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation provide direct support for Visa "E" and special category refugees.
() more information about BASF, or () information about direct bank or credit card debits for regular donations.

Name

Address

Postcode

Phone Email

Herewith by cheque/credit card - Visa/Mastercard \$

Card number Exp date

Signature

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

Singing the Spirit Home... A TRIUMPH!

On the afternoon of Sunday, 5 April, nearly eight hundred people filled Sydney University's gorgeous York Theatre at the Seymour Centre. They came to hear a stellar line-up of performers pay tribute to legendary Australian singer/songwriter **Eric 'And the Band Played *Waltzing Matilda*' Bogle**. They were not disappointed.

Huge thanks to our stars: **Martyn Wyndham Read, Chris While** and **Julie Matthews** on tour from the UK; and Aussies **Eric Bogle, John Munro, Colcannon (John Munro, Kat Kraus, Peter Titchener, Damian Steele Scott and Emma Luker), John Williamson** and **Judy Small** who flew in from all over Australia to give their wonderful talents for our refugee cause.

We were sad that **Graeme Connors**, who had generously agreed to be part of this event, was unable to fly at the last minute due to illness. Sorry Graeme to profit by your misfortune, but this enabled **me** the opportunity to open with Bogle's beautiful song simply entitled 'Refugee' setting the tone for the concert. The finale had all the performers on stage for the moving chorus of Bogle's *Singing the Spirit Home*. The audience loved all the performances, which was obvious by the queues at the CD sales tables – many sold out!

A few days before the concert, doing a final check of the theatre, I lamented we had no backdrop – nor any money for one. Seymour Centre staff rushed to the rescue, hijacking exactly what we needed from the set of the *Beauty Queen of Leenane* which was just closing. The large potted tree looked grand and suitably forlorn – perfect! We thank you all for coming to hear these glorious musicians and songs, which were heart-warming, moving, joyous and funny, and for contributing so generously. Many people bought tickets which included a donation component; others donated seats for our refugees or worthy volunteers who would not have otherwise attended. **A whopping \$35,000 was raised** for BASF.

Thank you to our sponsors: the fantastic **Leichhardt Council** – who do so much to support us – provided \$1000 to print fliers, posters and programs. **Sky High Mt Dandenong** spon-

sored us for \$1000. Graphic designer Simona Green designed our beautiful posters and fliers. Linda Shaw gave many volunteer hours. As did my wonderful sister, Mary Brabenec who flew from Melbourne to work with me in the last frantic week and also be the stage manager. Thanks also to my sister, Liz Fitzgerald who flew in to hold the fort at home. Warren Fahey donated some gorgeous items for the cause. Peter Robinson videoed the concert. I'm looking forward to seeing the footage. (If anyone has any photos please get in touch!) Andy Busuttill of **Blue Mountains Sound** gave sage technical advice and encouragement, as did Chris Wheeler from the band *Wheeler and Dealers*. Dallas and Jim Baxter helped ensure all our artists were looked after and trusty volunteers staffed the sales tables in the foyer.

Acoustica: Balmain's outdoor music festival was held on Sunday, 19 April. In spite of atrocious weather, many came to hear the terrific performers and gave generously. Thanks to raffle sellers Trish Evans and Kaylene Emery, we raised \$900. Thanks to Leichhardt Council and Damian Cobley-Finch for making BASF's mission a feature of this wonderful event.

Lunch at Beauty Point. Twenty six supporters enjoyed a superb lunch overlooking Middle Harbour at the home of Denise Wilton on Wednesday, 6 May. Thanks to Denise's generosity, \$2,310 was raised.

A Toiletries Drive: Jade de Leon has organised a toiletries drive. Basic and luxury items should be ready for Refugee Week (14-21 June) to be distributed to our clients and to those we visit in Villawood. Thank you Jade!

If you are able to host a luncheon, drinks or any other sort of event for the benefit of BASF, I would love to hear from you. We need to keep the funds rolling in! Thanks to all of you for your support in so many ways.

Kate Maclurcan
Coordinator
Asylum Seeker Project