



Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation

UnitingCare NSW.ACT

Newsletter
October 2008

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People we are Assisting

We are pleased to report that the number of people on Bridging Visa Es, who come within our guidelines for assistance, has declined. For the funding period from August to November 2008, our numbers have dropped to 104 from a peak of over 130. This has meant that there is not such a drain on our scarce resources. Nonetheless, we are still assisting many Chinese (some of whom are Falun Gong practitioners, while others are underground Christians and dissidents); African nationals (including Algerians and Moroccans); Middle-Eastern nationals, Burmese, Nepalese, sub-continental Indians and Sri Lankans and Acehnese. Many of those we are assisting are awaiting decisions from courts and tribunals or have made applications to Senator Chris Evans, Minister for Immigration, under sections 417 and 48B of the Migration Act.

Our Funds

As I noted in our May newsletter, **our funds are drying up!** The Management Committee anticipates that we can continue to provide funding only until February 2009. We will require additional donations if we are to continue after that. Although many of our recipients are likely to obtain work rights within the next few months, this does not necessarily mean that they will find work. As we have reported before, employers are reluctant to give work to people whose visas will expire in 3 months time and for whom there appears no guarantee of long term employment. This particularly affects men with families to support.

In addition, although the new policy on mandatory detention is a step in the right direction, many asylum seekers are still being detained while their identities are ascertained and then encouraged to apply for Bridging Visas, even if they have no friends or relatives in this country. Even if they are given work rights, they experience problems in finding work. We also

continue to be approached by individuals who have not been detained but are experiencing severe financial hardship while living with friends or relatives.

We are very grateful for the support we have received since June 2003. Without those who have provided large donations from time-to-time, and those who have provided regular support through fortnightly or monthly donations, we would not have survived for over 5 years.

Our Administration Costs

I think that many of you are not aware that we keep our expenses to a minimum by maintaining a very strict regime. Last financial year, for instance, our administrative expenses were less than 2.1% of total expenditure. To a large extent, we must thank the staff and support from UnitingCare NSW ACT. The financial branch of UnitingCare, Uniting Financial Services maintains our bank account and the only bank fees we pay are for credit card payments. Our letterhead is provided by UnitingCare; while other friends provide some stationery and stamps, as well as printing our snail mail versions of newsletters.

Needless to say I need to have access to email, a mobile phone, landline and a fax, without which I could not manage to undertake the tasks of keeping the Foundation alive or keep in touch with the Management Committee members, supporters, asylum seekers and refugees. Without our website, managed at no cost by Scooter Marketing, we could not get our message to people in the wider community.

CDSE Program

The Community Development and Support Expenditure scheme is a shared State Government-Club Industry program, funded by a 1.5% gaming machine tax rebate for clubs with gaming machine profits in excess of

Lunch at Renate's

Come to lunch at Renate and Frank Kelaher's home in Cammeray on **Thursday, 30 October 2008.**

Guest speaker: Human rights lawyer, journalist and author Jackie Everitt.

See over page for details or contact Kate:
katemaclurcan@hotmail.com or
9810 5826.

\$1 million per annum. Kate Maclurcan, the Asylum Seeker Project Coordinator, who is funded by Councils including Leichhardt, Marrickville, the City of Sydney and North Sydney Council, is responsible for preparing submissions for funding to those registered clubs in local government areas where our recipients live. The CDSE Committees comprise representatives of the relevant Shire or Municipal Council, the relevant Clubs and the Department of Community Services.

This year the following clubs have provided us with a total of \$72,029.00 through the CDSE program:

- Canada Bay Club: \$11,000
- Canterbury Bulldogs: \$10,000
- City Tattersalls Club: \$8,000
- Wests Leagues Club Ashfield \$8,000
- Dooleys Lidcombe Club: \$7,000
- Parramatta Leagues Club: \$7,000
- Petersham RSL: \$6,500
- Merrylands Bowling, Sporting & Recreation Club: \$6,000
- Balmain Tigers Leagues Club: \$4,529
- Ashfield Catholic Club: \$2,000
- Hornsby RSL Club: \$2,000

We are extremely grateful for the financial assistance given under the CDSE Program.

Report from Kate Maclurcan – Asylum Seeker Project Co-ordinator

Refugee Week Art Show

Held from 15 to 22 June, at the Circle Café in Balmain. Refugee artists Mira, Omary, Lee, Mohand and anonymous artists from Vietnam, Indonesia and Chile received their proceeds. The rest went to BASF. Some \$6,600 was raised.

Thanks to prominent artists and sculptors Greg Hyde, Ann Cape, Geraldine Berkemeier, Steve Coburn, Daniel Connell, Carolyn McKay, Justin Liebmann, John Balint, Carol English, Beryl Ferguson, Barbara Fisher, Frank Marjason and Rose Moxon.

The week culminated in a celebration for **BASF's 5th Birthday** on Sunday, 22 June. One hundred supporters were greeted by African drummers The Rhythm Creatures and enjoyed heavenly food (thank you Gillian Flower of Spiced Lemon Catering). Thank you to Lester Coombs of Captain Cook Cruises for their donation. Tanya Plibersek, Federal Member for Sydney & Minister For Housing, spoke glowingly of the achievements of BASF. Special thanks to Leichhardt Council and City of Sydney whose funding supported this event.

Kate's Talks

I have spoken to various groups recently, including So-optimists International, Hornsby; senior students, Mount St Benedicts College Pennant Hills; Zonta International, North Sydney Breakfast Club; St David's Uniting Church, Lindfield; and the Catholic parishes at Paddington and Edgecliff. Thank you to each of these groups for their donations.

Theatre tickets for asylum seekers

Thanks to our friends at City of Sydney for providing over 70 tickets to *Valley Song* - a play at the Seymour Centre.

Events and training grants

We would like to thank City of Sydney also for two Community grants of \$5,000 for our events and for training our pro bono lawyers, psychologists and researchers.

Lunch at Renate's

Steadfast BASF supporters Renate and Frank Kelaher have once again offered to host a lunch at their home in Cammeray.

Date: Thursday, 30 October 2008.

Cost: \$60 per person.

Guest speaker: Human rights lawyer, journalist and author Jacquie Everitt whose book *The Bitter Shore* will be launched on 26 October 2008.

The Bitter Shore

To escape religious persecution in Iran, Zahra and Saeed Badraie made the heart-breaking decision to leave their home and find safety. After suffering the smuggler's lies and deceit, and a voyage across dangerous seas in a small boat, Zahra, Saeed and their young son Shayan landed at Darwin. In Woomera Detention Centre they were treated like criminals and surrounded by barbed wire and despair. For Shayan, Woomera was unbearable. He witnessed horrific acts and was subjected to appalling treatment. Australia was not freedom – it was irreversible psychological damage and almost certain death.

Jacquie is a vocal campaigner against mandatory detention of refugees and was instrumental in helping the Badraies gain refugee status. Lyrical, moving and shocking, *The Bitter Shore* is her account of the atrocious experiences of Zahra, Saeed and Shayan in Woomera and Villawood and the court case that took on the Howard government.

Please book early as spaces are limited.

Contact Kate at katemaclurcan@hotmail.com or call 9810 5826.

If you would like to host an event, no matter how small, please call Kate on 9810 5826.

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I would like to help the Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation provide direct support for Visa "E" and special category refugees. 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 \$

Card number

Exp date

Signature

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