

STRENGTH AND KINDNESS

Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP)



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

Newsletter 93 October 2019

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

Why do we punish those who have mental illness rather than treat them for health issues?

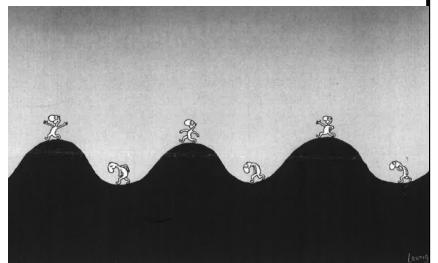
Many of the health issues suffered by those in detention are caused by the immigration system itself. Those detained wait for an inordinately long time (many years now) for a decision from the Australian Government for a decision that will profoundly affect the rest of their lives. Indeed it may be a life or death decision. And yet the monotony of prolonged detention is often the worst of the experience.

Being an asylum seeker is inherently stressful. Most have experienced or feared some degree of persecution or trauma prior to leaving their own country. When arriving in Australia and being detained, it becomes a kind of continuation of that persecution. There are also many asylum seekers who are re-detained having been in the community for some time after an initial time of detention. The fear that asylum seekers have that, even when released into the community, they may be re-detained is very real.

It is our experience that everyone in detention is mentally affected and their mental ill health increases with time. The main reason for this is that they have no control over the process and are usually kept in the dark about what is happening to their case. The normal response to their questioning is “It is in the hands of the Minister”. The limited treatment that is offered for mental health is undermined by the fact that the system is causing or exacerbating the person’s illness. In extreme cases people are sent to a general or psychiatric hospital but after a period of treatment are sent back to the detention centre. For some this is a revolving door. This is not only useless but cruel. Almost all those we visit in detention are suffering depression and anxiety and at best their treatment is medication. Many talk about not remembering even vital things—one man said he couldn’t remember his children’s names. The level of self harm is alarmingly high. Experts say this is because the only limited control those detained have is over their own bodies. A most important part of the day is queuing for medication.

The staff who exercise control of detainees are not trained to care for people who are mentally unwell. Questions that visitors ask about the well being of a particular person are usually seen as a personal affront by staff. Detainees are told by staff things like “If you just behaved you would be OK”.

Australia has signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). Taking this seriously would mean we do not incarcerate people with mental illness. Immigration detention would not exist.



Acknowledgment to Simon Kneebone

Donations to the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project are tax deductible

You are all invited to the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project Christmas party on Sunday 15th December.

Venue: 54 Beaconsfield Pde, Albert Park

Time: 5pm onwards



We would love to see anyone who has helped BASP over the past year. It is a chance to meet other people who share a commitment to justice in this area as well as meet some of those who have been helped by the Project. It is also an opportunity for us to say thank-you.

You are all important to us as we try together to build a safer and more just situation for asylum seekers.

To cater adequately we would like to hear from you if you are coming.

RSPV: queries@basp.org.au or email barthur@basp.org.au

The poster features a blue background with palm trees in the background. The title "Asylum Seekers' 2019 COMEDY BENEFIT" is written in large, stylized orange and yellow letters. Below the title, it says "JUDITH LUCY, DAMIAN CALLINAN, DAVE O'NEILL, BRAD OAKES, KIRSTY WEBECK, MONICA DULLARD MC & MORE!*" with five star icons on either side. At the bottom, it says "DOORS OPEN 6 PM", "ST KILDA TOWN HALL", "SATURDAY DECEMBER 07 2019", and "100% OF PROFITS DONATED! TICKETS AT TRYBOOKING.COM". Logos for Refugee Legal and basp are at the bottom right, along with a small note about funding.

7th December

**At the St Kilda Town Hall
for a great night. Terrific
line-up of artists includes**

Judith Lacey.

Please consider
booking now through
[Trybooking.com](http://trybooking.com) so
that the amazing
people who are
organising this event
know there is support.

How to denigrate asylum seekers

As reported on 26th August Mike Pezullo, Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection secretary told a Senate committee hearing on Monday. *Only four of the 111 refugees and asylum seekers transferred to Australia under controversial medical transfer laws have been admitted to hospital for treatment. When these patients arrive, we see very low instances of hospitalisations - and in fact there are very few outpatients.*

The implication being made is that the men being brought down to Australia for medical treatment are not really ill. It is part of a government campaign to repeal the 'Medevac' laws that enable seriously ill refugees from Manus Island and Nauru to Australia for treatment. **Mr Pezzullo's remarks are appallingly unjust because he blames the detainees for not getting to the hospital or doctor.**

Some of the men are in a hotel in Preston and quite traumatised. They have no access to fresh air or activities. Others are in MITA and we have visited some of these. Some are in the high security section of MITA. Almost none are receiving the medical care which they were transferred to Australia for, except for drugs administered by IHMS in detention. They are waiting and waiting—some for many months now. They are being told they are in a queue to see specialists or get dental treatment or have an operation. They came with hope that they would get help and little is forthcoming. It is rubbing salt into their wounds for the Head of the Department to say there is nothing wrong with them.

There are husbands and wives transferred from Nauru and the same thing is happening to them.

The Government is seeking to overturn this Medevac legislation that gives doctors more say in transferring asylum seekers from offshore detention to Australia for medical treatment. A motion to achieve this is expected very soon. **We believe that not only is the Medevac legislation required to prevent further deaths, but ethical meaningful medical treatment of the people when they get to Australia is essential.**

For many the suffering continues

For most people seeking asylum, the trauma is not over when they arrive in Australia. A young man we have in BASP accommodation and to whom we continue to give some support rang to say his brother had disappeared back in the country he had escaped from and his girlfriend had been taken in by police and warned that she had to give any information about him that she had. As a consequence the young woman's family said his name was never to be mentioned in their household again.

It is so important for these young men to have someone to talk to. Imagine being in a new country and having your father and girlfriend ring with this news and to just be isolated.

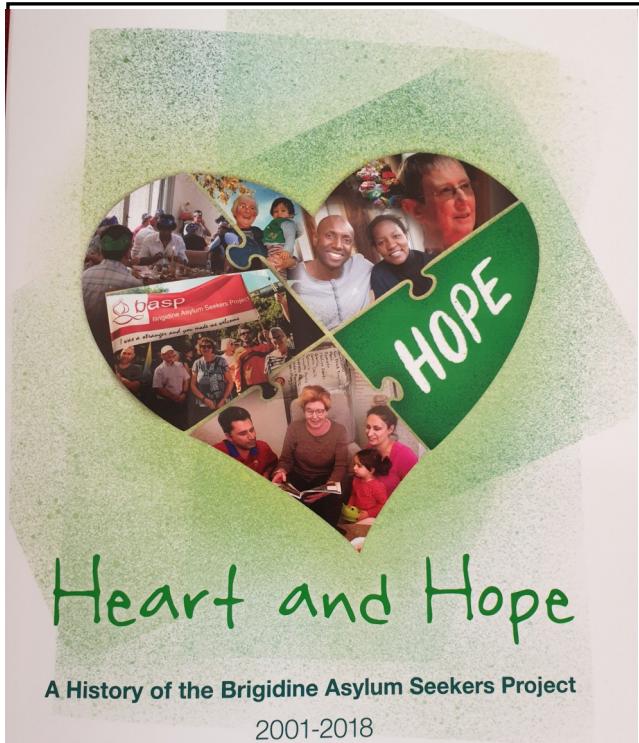
And a young man from Darfur who has been brought to Australia from Manus Island is very sad about many things but the one thing he tells us about each time we visit is that his mother won't talk to him now (over six years since she saw him) because he must have done something very wrong if he is being locked up all this time.

He is able to talk to his sister who is in a European country and he begs her to try to get his mother to talk to him.

Just a comparison

In Sweden no child may be detained by immigration longer than 6 days. In the UK it is no longer than 72 hours. Australia has detained children for 4.5 years.

We have yet to see the long term effects on children who have been subjected to Australia's detention regime.



Heart and Hope

A History of the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project
2001-2018

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

I was happy to be part of the celebration yesterday which was truly joyous and I do hope the BASP community continues to feel good about the recognition the history gives them and the work they do. - Ursula

The stories told by the three asylum seekers who have been assisted so marvellously well by BASP highlighted beautifully the role that this organisation has taken on.

The hospitality, food and drink made it such an enjoyable afternoon and as for THE CAKE! amazing. - Barbara

On September 11th we celebrated our History of BASP (2001-18). It was a very happy occasion. Thanks to the St Josephs Port Melbourne parish, we had a great space in the hall. We would have loved to invite all who have been part of the history. That wasn't possible but we would love to send a booklet to anyone who would like one. Just send us an email or message and we will send a copy.

We thank Ursula Groves, who wrote the text, for her dedication. It took many hours of labour over many months to do this work. We thank Delia Bradshaw for her support in getting the final copy to print.

We are proud of the publication because it chronicles both BASP history and the political context during which BASP has operated. However, more than the contribution of BASP

supporters, the history is a testament to the courage and resilience of so many asylum seekers.

Included here are a few of the many responses we received after the day.

It is very nicely produced and admirably inviting to read. I don't know who wrote it, but whoever put it together did a fine job. I thought the interweaving of politics and BASP responses to the changes was effective in that being made aware of the political stages gave the reader a helpful mental structure. to guide their thoughts. - Frances

Our thanks to everyone who made last Wednesday such a positive occasion. As usual the hospitality & warmth were palpable. The written history is very interesting & gives us, the more recent volunteers, an excellent sense of the early days. - Maree and Carole

The next page shows some of the people present and they evidence a lot of the joy and satisfaction of our celebration. Opposite is the cake which was big enough to give many people present a piece and still have a lot left over to give away to some who couldn't make the event.

Sorry it's all gone now!



Many of us at BASP love this photo of Libby (BASP Coordinator) holding the photo of Catherine (one of the first Coordinators).



Accommodation

The need for housing support is continuous and heartbreaking for many.

Given the variety of housing provided by BASP, it is able to respond quickly at times to emergency needs –for example, 2 men released at short notice from the detention centre in Broadmeadows were able to be housed in the shared cottage made available by the Columban Mission in Essendon. A one bed unit was rented for a young man who was sleeping in his car and whose mental health was seriously deteriorating. The security of housing and the associated support provided has greatly improved his health and his ability to become self-sufficient. We may pay a one off payment, as per the letter below, to enable the person to take the next step in independence.

BASP has been increasingly called upon to pay rent for individuals and families, already housed in rental properties but unable to maintain the payments due to loss of income support and / work rights. This is around an additional 10 households, supporting 40+ people per month (over and above the 110 people in B ASP housing). Many of these people are waiting for their appeal at the Federal Circuit Court which has waiting periods more than two years.

Where possible, BASP will assist those who are in BASP housing but now earning to move into their own private rental or to take over the lease from BASP.

For those from Manus or Nauru, their visas are only for 6 months at a time, so no agent or owner would rent under these conditions. In a couple of these cases, BASP has taken out the lease, while the residents pay all expenses.

Dear Libby

I hope you are doing well.

I believe we already spoke about one of my other clients.

I have another enquiry regarding one of my other clients.

I have a client who is an Asylum Seekers and has no work rights or Medicare eligibility.

He also has two daughters age 4 and 5 to support and his only source of income is his SRSS payments which is only enough to pay his rent and bills.

My client just contacted me today and mentioned that the department of immigration asked him to finalize his bond debt to department (Total of \$670.00) as soon as possible otherwise the process of issuing his permanent visa will delay.

I am aware of your limitation, however considering the above facts I was wondering whether you can assist this client with the borrowing of \$670.00

My client stated on receiving his visa he also obtains work rights which enables him to commence an employment and would be able to repay his debt.

Members of staff in other organisations we work with are very appreciative:

Dear Libby and Brigid

I just writing this email to thank you for your act of kindness in assisting my client and making a huge difference in many people's life especially vulnerable groups.

Wishing you all the best in your amazing job that you are doing.

Kind Regards

Case Worker –Life Without Barriers

All those who help with food for asylum seekers

Port Phillip Council has assisted BASP with a Community Food Grant of \$5000 for the past 3 years. This enables us to offer food to people who come to our office and to give food to the women who have accommodation in the BASP house in Beaconsfield Pde, Albert Park.

Many parish groups collect food and household items and regularly bring them to the office. We keep a well stocked pantry—due to the magnificent work of Noelle, Gwen and Julie. It is great to be able to tell many of the people coming in for help that they can take the things they need.

Food is also distributed to a number of families in the community who cannot easily access food elsewhere. Those who do these deliveries bring food and some company. Thanks to Pat and John, Tom and Jeremy. The VCAL class at Albert Park Secondary College also provide some frozen meals for distribution.

Why the Biloela family story is a travesty

A Tamil family fighting deportation from Australia will remain in legal limbo for months, stuck in a detention centre on Christmas Island. The Federal Government has said the family will remain on Christmas Island until their legal matters are finalised, despite a request from the United Nations on October 2 that the family be transferred to community detention within 30 days.

The case is due to return to court on December 16 but the Federal Court has yet to set a date for the trial, or decide whether the case will be heard by one judge or the full court.

Unfortunately this family's experience is but the tip of the iceberg when contextualised in the history of Australia's treatment of people seeking asylum, particularly of those who arrived by boat and even more particularly those from Sri Lanka. Sri Lankans have been routinely held for many years in detention, or have been turned back at the point of entry into Australia. Often they have been accused of being members of the LTTE (known as the Tamil Tigers) which was the de facto government in northern Sri Lanka for years.

Northern Sri Lanka, home to most Tamils, is still highly militarised and there are many reports that torture, disappearances, arbitrary detentions, harassment and sexual violence still persist. In the wake of the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks that killed more than 250 people in hotels and churches earlier this year, DFAT continues to instruct Australian travellers to "exercise a high degree of caution" in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka is still very corrupt with a few ruling families almost taking it in turns of forming government. Many who have key roles in the government have been responsible for the torture and harassment of the Tamil minority.

One Tamil man who was accused of having links with the Tamil Tigers, was found by Australia to be a refugee two years ago and is still in detention—and this is his eleventh year of being detained.

We believe that the Tamils will be found by history to have been very unjustly treated. Certainly the Minister could intervene for any person (including the family from Biloela) - he did for the 'au pairs'!



Sadness of Community Detention- government policy.

We recently met with a couple who were on Nauru for 3 years and then brought to Australia for medical reasons. They have 3 children and live in Community Detention. This means they have a government sponsored house and a small allowance but are not allowed to work. They have 3 children – 2 at school. The father, an engineer, has written to Mr Dutton asking to be allowed to work and he would take responsibility for rent and all expenses. No reply. Our hearts ached when he said his son aged 7 is embarrassed when his classmates ask what his dad does and he has to say nothing- he is in CD. What are we doing to people and their children?

Refugee Week

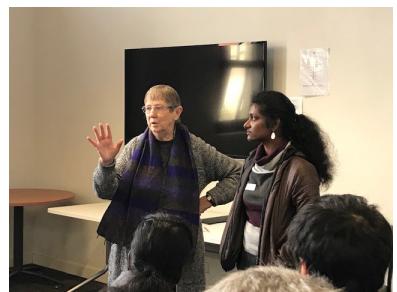


As part of Refugee Week, Martin Foley State MP for Albert Park prepared a video for Refugee Week at BASP's offices, involving several people seeking asylum who live in this municipality.

Martin is in the photo here with twins of one of our guests. Jane, the mother, decided to go to Kenya (not her own country) so that she and the twins can be re-united with her other children. She could not wait for the long delay of processing her claim here.



Also, as part of Refugee Week, BASP held a Discussion Afternoon, where a number of people seeking asylum shared their stories. Monika, one of our friends is talking to the group and is being encouraged by Brigid.



Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA) held an event in the city to mark the week. Brigid spoke and is pictured here with Josh who is the Executive Officer of CAPSA and a

Outings/ a break from the routine of day to day

The Presentation Family Centre in Balnarring is a community works of Kildare Ministries and offered to provide a break for a family in July. A couple and their 12 year old son jumped at the opportunity and Marg Fyfe offered to drive them there for the few days they could stay. They loved the opportunity to see more of Victoria than their suburb, Lalor and the city. All 3 felt reinvigorated by the change.



The Mariana Community offers 2 weekends a year to families to get away to their retreat in Mill Grove. It is a picturesque area, with open spaces for people to explore as well as the llamas in the front paddock. Two women with their children were hosted by Cheryl and other community members. The

mothers were thrilled to be able to give their girls a treat as their day to day existence does not extend to such luxuries.



One of the bitter sweet joys of finally getting a Temporary Protection Visa or a Safe Haven Visa (SHEV) is that it enables the recipient to apply for a travel document to visit family. This cannot be in the person's own country but if the family can move (or has moved) to another country.



This is usually an amazing reunion but the agony is leaving again and not knowing when the next reunion will be.



Ata to get SHEVs. Here Ata is with his wife and family in Iran. He came to Australia from Afghanistan. The family are Hasara and they were in danger in their home country. They had not seen each other for eight years.

Thanks to two community minded employers

Getting that first job in Australia is often really difficult for asylum seekers

The most common obstacles are:

- lack of local experience
- communication skills in English
- lack of "cultural awareness"

Our sincere thanks goes to these employers

- **Will at Enzie Stairs**, makers of award winning spiral staircases, who has given two of our people their first job. With this work experience both people have gone on to further employment
- **Peter at Brighton Land Rover** whose firm has given job opportunities to four men over the past 3 years.

If you or your company need workers, casual part time or full time please contact us on 9696 2107 or email contact@basp.org.au

What a difference an email can make

A director of a consulting firm recently responded to our website advertisement - wanted a job for a Admin/researcher

She sent us an email about what she required. and the next day Sollie met with her..... and yes, it seems a good match

'You were right on the mark with thinking that he would suit what I was after' she said.

Sollie who is well qualified with a Masters had been trying unsuccessfully to get a job for sometime ...

Appreciation of BASP Support

Marian assists people with CVs and seeking employment. Having assisted Dejene with finding a job, he arrived with a beautiful cake to say thanks.



Thanks to those who have donated via the Give Now link. We are in the fortunate position of being to give virtually all the money donated (by whatever means) to those in the community seeking asylum and vulnerable.

<https://www.givenow.com.au/basp>





Saliou arrived in Australia early this year, with nowhere to go. BASP has been able to provide housing and has linked him to part time work while he orients himself to his new environment. He recently sent through a number of poems, including this one.

Although the poetry entitled "Broad Shoulders" was written a few years ago, I believe it captures what I feel about BASP and the work you do. So, allow me to dedicate it to that purpose to express my gratitude. Thanks!

Broad Shoulders

As the eddying air encloses the bird, so they carry me on their shoulders through the storm.

As the rain showers on the parched ground to yield greenery, so they gave me hope to smile.

As the sun that cast its rays on the cornfields, so they offer me their unshakable support.

As the tender grass is covered by the dew, so they cover me with the words of love and peace.

As the guiding stars in the dark night, so they open their rich heart to a friend in utter distress

As the mighty baobab tree gives its shade in the tropics, so they share warm shelter and laughter during melancholic winter days.

As friends for real, they gave me not stones when I asked for bread.

Indeed, they are my broad shoulders!

They know Love with their mind, vivify it with their heart and fulfill it with their acts.

At their generous source with pouring water, I went to assuage my dry lips under the heat.

They send me the ever needed rope downhole so that I can witness a nascent spring.

They reinvigorate me through relentless care, inspire me with wisdom and gave me hope.

They are my brothers and sisters with whom I share common humanity.

They have changed the mute branch into a singing flute that celebrates Love.

They prefer the polychrome of the rainbow to the monochrome of ethnicity.

Blessed are they who can make a falling tree blossom anew in the ocean of life.

May the winds that blow over the deep valleys, spread this message of gratitude.

May the river stream in its continuous flow, witness these innermost words of Love.

May what is sown in the garden of Love, grow into a cypress of joy and magnanimity.

May the friendship we share and the brotherhood we sustain, withstand the mutations of time and space.

Amen.

Saliou Kane, 14.8.2014

We recently made contact with a number of volunteers to get an update on where they were with the individuals and / families they visit. Some reported that their families were now established and not requiring regular visits. Some were continuing as ever, having formed close bonds in relationships which were mutually positive. The one below shows how generous and connected one match became.

"I am still supporting -the couple we started visiting about 5 years ago- and their two beautiful children- one aged 7 and the other born December 2018.

They now live with us.

We live in a very large house and have been able to arrange things so that there is room for all of them and Zahra's brother as well.

All three adults are now working and Zahra has returned to work after the birth of her son..

The couple have excellent conversational English but the brother is not as good but getting better.

Zahra can read a bit but still needs a lot of work.



Nicole came to BASP in May last year. She had only arrived in Australia a couple of weeks previously and with three small children she was desperate. With her husband, Chicco, she had lived in Namibia for some years. Originally the family escaped from Congo.

Chicco, a doctor, had gone missing after he was kidnapped and tortured in Namibia. BASP was able to get accommodation for the family with the Brigidine Sisters in Echuca where they have lived since. Chicco escaped his captors and made contact with Nicole earlier this year.

Nicole is a dress designer and the following excerpts are from the local paper about the fashion parade which hopefully will launch Nicole's label Molato.

CONGOLESE refugee and Echuca resident Nicole Dilubbenzi's dreams came true when she held her own fashion runway event at Moama Bowling Club recently.

More than 300 people showed up for the local fashion event which featured 20 of Nicole's stunning original designs from her label Molato.

The event was made possible by the support of numerous community members, as well as St Joseph's College and Moama Bowling Club (MBC) who joined forces to stage the event.

It aimed to establish a platform for an income stream for Nicole and her family after they were forced to flee their home in Namibia last year.

And with all tickets selling out three days before the event, you couldn't wipe the smile off Nicole's face on the night.

"It was amazing, I felt overwhelmed with happiness," she said.

"A lot of people came and many said the designs were beautiful and nicely made."

While the amount of money raised from the night is yet to be calculated, Nicole said she already had several keen customers looking to snap up a Molato original.

"Right now I'm looking through expressions of interest from the night and what I can make for people," she said.

"This will really be a step forward for my fashion label."

After sewing furiously for weeks on end to be ready for the runway, it's no wonder Nicole spent the weekend recovering.

"I was so tired. I had to make 20 garments, there was so much preparation," she admitted.

But the reward for her labour made it all worthwhile.

Especially when she got to call her husband Chicco. He is currently in the US continuing his medical studies, with plans to eventually join his family in Australia.

"Chicco was really proud of me when I told him about the parade," Nicole said.

"He was so happy and so supportive."

Nicole said the event would not have been possible without support from the EchucaMoama community, particularly St Joseph's, Moama Bowling Club and the Molato committee.

MBC donated \$5000 towards the purchase of equipment and materials for Nicole's designs, and supplied the venue for the fashion parade free of charge.

Meanwhile, the St Joseph's Year 12 textile class offered to help organise the event as well as add a little of their own style to the show. This included contributing a number of their own designs to the parade — the first half featuring 20 designs by St Joseph's students, followed by 20 from Nicole.

Many people and groups bring in food and vouchers.



Sugar , flour , cooking oil, Cans of fruit and tomatoes.

Long life milk, tea and coffee, cheese, honey, noodles, basmati rice, dates, jam

Gladwrap, tinfoil, pegs for hanging out washing,

Sweet and Savoury Biscuits, Snacks for school lunches, Salt and pepper, Spices: coriander, cinnamon, ginger,

Shampoo and Conditioner, Shaving Cream and shavers, Toothpaste. Soap, deodorants

Toilet paper

We seemingly never have enough washing powder, dish washing detergents and household cleaning products.



We have enough cans of beans, tinned soup, beetroot and corn.

Vouchers are really appreciated eg. for Coles, Big W, Kmart or similar stores; this allows individuals and families the independence to buy something they really want and need.

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 if possible send us a message so that we can send you a receipt. This could be a text message on 0438 001 515 or an email to jcaldwell@basp.org.au.



As usual, thanks for your support—given to us in so many ways. Many people talk to us of their satisfaction (and joy) in giving. We trust you all know the difference this giving makes to the lives of asylum seekers.



Bringing many BASP supporters, and some people who have been helped over the years by BASP, was a wonderful experience at the recent celebration of the history ‘Heart and Hope’ (pictured here Makfire, Betelhem and Sabir from the different periods of our history).

Brigid Arthur

Libby Saunders

Brigid Arthur

(BASP Coordinators)

Libby Saunders