

STRENGTH AND KINDNESS

Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP)



54 Beaconsfield Pde, Albert Park 3206
Ph: 96962107; barthur@basp.org.au
Website: www.BASP.org.au

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

Newsletter 97 August 2020

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

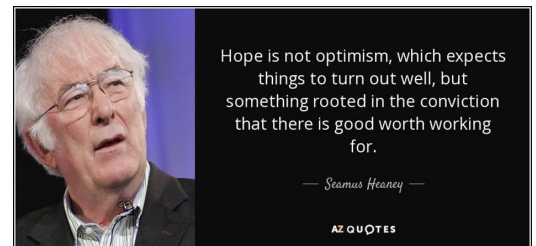
The pandemic and the fate of those seeking asylum in Australia

There are many vulnerable groups in Australia and a lot of inequality. We like to see our country as egalitarian and leaders often talk about the ability to 'get on if you have a go'. This is far from the reality as we all know. There are significant power and resource imbalances. Even in a country like Australia that prides itself on a public health coverage for all, we have seen that many elderly people in aged care have not had the care we would have expected due to cost cutting measures. Underpayment of low-paid workers is regularly and repeatedly exposed and those in casual jobs as well as those forced to become contractors rather than employees are often exploited.

A question for us is: after the pandemic what will the situation be like for the less privileged among us. History tells us that in similar disasters in the past the poorer people get poorer and the more affluent retain their privileged position.

Among the very vulnerable groups are people seeking asylum. This is even more so during this time of Covid 19. There has been support, albeit in some cases modest, for businesses, workers, and many of the unemployed. However there has been virtually no help for those seeking asylum. So post this current disaster we have to hope for a change of heart towards those who are now in a totally precarious situation.

We certainly need a systemic approach to change the way asylum seekers are always left out of the support net. There has been a level of cooperation between governments who have worked together and offered some reasonably coherent leadership. If there are to be moves to greater equity in incomes, wealth, and opportunity for all in Australia this will have to include everyone at any stage of the application for refugee status. In most cases these will be future citizens of Australia and in most cases they will be fine citizens. Right now they are struggling to maintain any hope.



In order to hope, they need to know that there will be employment and a safety net for them, like for everybody else, if for reasons outside their control, they cannot at times be employed.

They must be given the assurance that that they will not be discriminated against simply because they asked for protection in a country that said their application to live here would be looked at fairly. For this to happen we need the community to say no to this sort of discrimination which, unfortunately, is happening now.

We need to be explicit about what we are saying no to—no to cruelty, no to treating people differently because of their colour or religion or gender or ... and yes to the acceptance of all, the embrace of the different, the assurance that everyone will indeed get a fair go.

Donations to the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project are tax deductible

Living in Australia and having NO money is dehumanising

'Hamid' rang recently to ask what avenues were available to him for financial assistance.

He is a proud man who has worked for seven years and as he said, "I paid my taxes. I have never needed to ask anyone for money." Hamid lost his job at the beginning of Covid and he expected to get it back a week or so ago—only to discover that, with the new restrictions, his employer can't take him on—maybe he will at the end of six weeks. BASP has been paying the rent and utilities and giving a small amount of emergency relief money to Hamid for three months. He has a wife and three small children.

When asked how much money he still had, there was a significant pause before he said, 'Twenty five dollars.'

And he added, "I am trying to keep it so that I have at least a few dollars".

He then tried to fill in an application for the Extreme Hardship Support Program. Even though Hamid is reasonably fluent in English, the requirements of this application exceeded his language and computer skills.



The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) has released a new report examining the cost of not supporting people seeking asylum and refugees during the Covid-19 pandemic. The research indicates that excluding refugees and people seeking asylum from financial support could cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars and exacerbate the nation's health and homelessness crises.

The key findings of the report are that:

- Nearly **19,000 refugees and people seeking asylum will lose their jobs** as a result of the current economic turn-down;
- **Unemployment rates** in this group are projected to **more than double**, from 19.3% to 41.8%;
- For those that remain employed, weekly wages could fall by an average of \$90 per week, with **92% of workers earning less than the minimum wage**;
- Those in this group who lose their employment, leave the labour force or live below the poverty line are at high risk of poor health and homelessness, with a projected **12% rise in homelessness**. As a result of this we expect to see:
 - o Increased hospital admissions could cost an additional \$23.4 million/year;
 - o The increase in homelessness will cost governments an additional \$181 million/year.

In 2015, a program called Status Resolution Support Services payment (SRSS) was implemented to assist asylum seekers who had no income or ability to work. This entitled the recipients to \$247 (89% of Newstart) a week whilst an asylum seeker sought a visa. These payments have been removed from 7,000 of the 12,000 asylum seekers, leaving thousands with no welfare safety net as they lose their jobs to COVID-19.

Up to 90,000 (includes plane arrivals) asylum seekers have no access to welfare payments, no work rights and delays in renewal of work visas. (*Source: Refugee Council Of Australia*).

Just to reiterate an answer to the still repeated "why didn't they come the right way"!

This usually refers to the intake of refugees from refugee producing countries via UNHCR. The annual refugee intake of this cohort to Australia is 12,000.

Currently, less than a third come in through the UNHCR program. Over a third are family members of refugees already residing in Australia. (There are calls for a separate intake for family reunions.)

Worldwide there are now 70 million refugees. Of these, most are internally/regionally displaced – they have *not* applied for UNHCR resettlement. Many are in countries like Lebanon, where the whole population is struggling to survive.

Currently only 3.5 million have applied for resettlement. UNHCR) annually only resettles 100-90,000.

If you are born in a refugee camp you will most likely die in the refugee camp .

We are asking for everyone in immigration detention to be released

It is probably very good luck that there has not been an outbreak of COVID-19 within Australia's immigration detention network. However, this does not mean that the status quo is necessarily in the interests of detainees' health and in the public interest.

There are a number of concerning issues, which clearly merit attention, if an outbreak is to be avoided in the medium term. In particular:

- Most rooms are configured with bunk beds and shared bathroom facilities which impact upon detainees' abilities to practice social distancing
- There are also other common areas such as dining areas where it is impossible to avoid close contact
- Security personnel go in and out of the centres and may be the source of infection; some we are told work between places of work
- The numbers of people in immigration detention facilities have increased during COVID-19
- Anecdotally, hygiene conditions are less than good. As Andra Jackson reported in an article in Eureka street recently, giving a current glimpse inside an Australian refugee detention facility:
"Broken wall hand sanitizer containers, hand soap shared by a large number of people, and six people sharing a bedroom would not be allowed at hotels where returning travellers are in 14-day lockdowns. They would be viewed as breaking government restrictions on safeguarding against the spread of COVID-19. But these are the conditions at Kangaroo Point hotel, the Brisbane hotel where around 114 refugees and asylums seekers are under the coronavirus lockdown".

On 1 July 2020, the Commonwealth Ombudsman released a statement on the management of COVID-19 risks in immigration detention centres. In it, the Ombudsman states, "it has become apparent in other residential settings that just one mishap can lead to a serious outbreak in facilities where large numbers of people are housed in close proximity to one another."

We believe releasing people from immigration detention should happen not only because of Covid 19. Refugees, people seeking asylum, and migrants should not be detained arbitrarily or indefinitely in immigration detention facilities. In particular, those who have been expressly brought to Australia for medical treatment should not remain in environments, including facilities such as hotels, which exacerbate mental and physical health problems.

As the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) notes in a recent statement, "many of these alternative places of detention are exceptionally restrictive environments which lack dedicated facilities for exercise, recreation and activity, and where access to open space and mental health care is severely curtailed."

Irrespective of the risk of COVID-19 spreading in immigration detention facilities, we support the RANZCP call to "release people in detention facilities who do not pose a significant security or health risk into suitable community housing, and to enable them to manage their health and wellbeing and successful integration into the community."

The average detention period for asylum seekers in Australia is 545 days. (In Canada the average is 12 days). Some men at the Melbourne Detention Centre in Broadmeadows - currently a COVID-19 hotspot area, have been held in detention for many years. Indeed, one man was released recently after nearly eleven years in the Melbourne Immigration Transition Accommodation (MITA).

There is a punitive and cruel culture that allows a country to do this to people detained for immigration purposes.

One current example of this is that the government is trying to ban detainees from owning mobile phones. There is a Bill before the Parliament which, among other things, is trying to do this.



Release refugees to stay @homesafelywithus

A coalition of refugee support groups today offered to open their homes to asylum seekers and refugees currently held in Australia's immigration detention centres.

The **@homesafelywithus** initiative is being offered to the Commonwealth Government as a concerned community response to reduce overcrowding and the risk of Covid-19 cluster outbreaks in immigration detention facilities.

The move follows an Australian Border Force (ABF) announcement last week that it needs to relieve capacity pressure across the immigration detention network in Australia and will transfer people under a 501 visa classification to the reopened Christmas Island detention centre.

"For months medical experts have warned there is a high risk of coronavirus cluster outbreaks in overcrowded immigration centres and the hotels being used as alternative places of detention," said Pamela Curr, spokesperson for RAN (Refugee Advocacy Network) and the **@homesafelywithus** coalition of support groups.

"Releasing asylum seekers will reduce the public health risk which is paramount at the moment," Ms Curr said.

"It will also save taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars being wasted on all this unnecessary security around administrative detention because Government refuses to give refugees and people seeking asylum the protection they deserve.

"This is all so costly and unnecessary - spending millions on keeping people who pose no risk in immigration detention," said Ms Curr. "It is totally unnecessary to be moving people around like pawns on a chessboard during a pandemic when there are homes for them to go to.

"The safe, sensible and cost-effective thing to do is to release people who came here seeking asylum into the safe keeping of their families, friends and supporters. There are more than enough family and friends ready to welcome refugees into their homes and communities."

While the ABF has said the Christmas Island option would only be used for people whose visas have been cancelled on past conviction or character grounds and whose deportation has been delayed due to Covid-19 travel restrictions, refugee supporters are concerned about a hidden agenda to move around 200 refugees brought last year from PNG and Nauru for medical treatment. The medical evacuees are still being detained in suburban hotels in Melbourne and Brisbane. Many have still not received the medical treatment they need.

"Our real fear is that the medical evacuees may be moved from the eastern states to the Yongah Hill detention centre 100 km outside Perth," Ms Curr said.

"Yongah Hill has limited access to medical treatment and would remove vulnerable people far from the support of their families and other supporters in the community," she added.

Convenor of ARAN (Australian Refugee Action Network), Marie Hapke said over \$7billion has been spent keeping refugees on Manus, in PNG and Nauru since 2013.

"Now, yet another bucket of money is being spent on Christmas Island which has become a monument to the Government's punishing treatment of people who need our protection," Ms Hapke said.

She urged the Government to recognise the **@homesafelywithus** initiative as a commonsense solution against the alternative of keeping people indefinitely detained at unnecessary risk of infection with Covid-19 and at massive cost for years to come.

"There is no plan for these people. Australia should not be a country that deprives innocent people of their freedom, especially during a global pandemic", Ms Hapke said.

The **@homesafelywithus** coalition of refugee supporters currently includes the Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project, Grandmothers for Refugees, Refugee Action Coalition Sydney, and Rural Australians for Refugees.

Media contact: Pamela Curr, Refugee Advocacy Network 0417 517 075

Also available: Marie Hapke, ARAN 0409 252 673; Marie Sellstrom, RAR 0417 398 528

[@homesafelywithus coalition groups as at 9 August:](#)

Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project

Grandmothers for Refugees

Rural Australians for Refugees

Tassie Nannas

Tasmanian Refugee Rights Action Group

Refugee Action Collective Queensland

Refugee Action Campaign, Canberra

Refugee Action

More details on the next page!



Men being held in Kangaroo Point Hotel in Brisbane.

We emailed those BASP supporters for whom we have email addresses the following message:

BASP is part of a new campaign @safeathomewithus to get people who are in immigration detention released into the community. To make this at all convincing we need to be able to demonstrate that there is a reasonable capacity within the community to house people. Most of those detained are men. Some have family who can accommodate them but many don't.

We are of course sceptical that this will succeed in getting people released but their situation is so bad, for all sorts of reasons, that it is worth a try.

What we need now is an indication that you are willing to take someone or allow them to use accommodation you have access to.

If you are willing to offer a room or a place, please fill in the CONFIDENTIAL REGISTER form attached and send to austrefugeenetwork@gmail.com.

We realise that this won't be possible for many people but we are making this request to a lot of people so we may be able to back up the plea to the Government to release those detained with some options for housing.

Please note:

- At this stage we are only providing an estimate of the number of people who could be accommodated
- advice and support will be offered if the initiative succeeds in getting the release of detainees
- Offers of accommodation will then be discussed further.
- If you wish to discuss this request further, feel free to ring Brigid Arthur on 0408101134.

All names and details will remain confidential to the core organising group for this initiative:

Marie Hapke and Pamela Curr (Refugee Advocacy Network),
Jean Ker Walsh (Grandmothers for Refugees),
Louise Redmond (Rural Australians for Refugees),
Sr Brigid Arthur (Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project).

The information we need is:

- Date information provided
- Name of person offering accommodation
- Email phone
- Group association (if any)
- Number of rooms available
- Number of people to be accommodated
- Type of accommodation (eg house, unit, room, bungalow, etc)
- State/City/suburb/town/district/postcode
- Other comment

If you are able to help please send to both austrefugeenetwork@gmail.com and to BASP

The power is all on one side

On the 11th August, Justice Murphy in the Federal Court of Australia ruled a man in his 60s must no longer be held at an immigration detention facility in MITA, Broadmeadows, due to the risk of him contracting coronavirus. Australian Border Force then (predictably) said they would transfer him to Yongah Hill (90 km north of Perth). On 13th August, the lawyers for the man returned to the Federal Court arguing that this long flight was not fulfilling 'duty of care'. Unfortunately the current Migration Act gives virtually untrammelled powers to the Minister for Home Affairs (to be exercised through Australian Border Force).

For those who like to keep up to date with numbers! As much as possible these are true for June

Off-shore

There have been 3,127 asylum seekers sent to Nauru or Manus since 19 July 2013, that is over 2,500 days ago.

(Seven years prison for no crime.)

Still off-shore: 353 (May 2020).

- 148 in Port Moresby
- 205 on Nauru.

More than 180 of these have been declared not to be refugees. (But some of these refused interviews as a 'protest' in 2014 hoping to be interviewed later in Australia because they did not trust PNG or Nauru system. They have since been refused any chance at an interview).

On-shore

In Australia there are 1440 people in mainland detention. This includes

- 569 people who arrived by boat or air ('unlawfully'),
- 675 people who have had their visas cancelled (somewhere near 300 of these are not asylum seekers but are being detained pending deportation),
- 130 people who have overstayed their visa, having come here on a tourist, student or other visa,
- 135 Medevac arrivals (those brought to Australia under a special piece of legislation to get medical attention). Most of this latter group of men are held in hotels in Preston, Melbourne and Kangaroo Point, Brisbane.

Legacy Caseload - This is the name given to those who arrived by boat between 13 August 2012 and the 1st January 2014. There were 31,024 people in this group; 24, 848 have had their case finalized; of these 17, 185 have been successful, 7663 have failed and 6176 are still waiting for a decision.

Those who were successful, that is judged to have a refugee case, are on Temporary Visas (TPVs or SHEVs).

BVEs At the end of last year there were 13,144 people seeking asylum who arrived here by boat and had a Bridging Visa E (BVE) However, 2156 of these BVEs had expired and not been renewed. This leaves those people with no rights at all and with the possibility of being re-detained. 46.1% of those without any visa are in Victoria and that amounts to 1,171 people.

Others who came to Australia from off-shore are on a 6 months BVE Final Departure Visa. They have to renew their visa each 6 months.

2020.

Other facts:

There are more than 16,000 children and young people seeking asylum in Australia, and their families are ineligible for JobKeeper, JobSeeker and Medicare.

There are 845 people in **Community Detention** around the country (this includes 284 children).

US Deal: 702 people have accepted USA visas. It is expected that only a few more will be accepted by the USA.

People who have 'voluntarily' returned: 854 'Voluntary' returns. Most of these are refugees and many are returning to danger.

Deaths: 13 of those detained have died.

Filling ever widening cracks

BASP is a small organisation supporting people seeking asylum both with immediate, basic needs as well as advocating for a more just government approach to people seeking Australia's protection.

BASP operates with the support of the Brigidine Sisters, generous donors and no government funding. Since inception, its goal has been to assist those who fall through the cracks of government and other supports – not to replicate these services.

In the last 2 years, the cracks have widened, and BASP has needed to respond to ever increasing requests for basic support to stave off destitution and homelessness.

In earlier years, people who came by boat and those arriving by plane were generally able to get SRSS- a less than adequate but at least some income support- 89% of the old Newstart.

Since 2018, the government has redefined eligibility for SRSS making it much less accessible to people. At around the same time, a number of those who arrived by boat were being rejected at the tribunal stage and then seeking a hearing in the Federal Circuit Court- a wait of 2-3 years. At this point, any SRSS ceases. So, if people are well enough to work and able to secure employment, they could meet all or most of their costs.

If they are unwell, a single parent with children, had poor English, did not have work rights, they need support from BASP and other charitable groups.

Covid 19 has increased this demand, as people who were previously able to work and meet needs have been stood down. They have no government support through the safety net programs of Job Keeper or Job Seeker. State and some Federal monies have been made available through Red Cross and ASRC to help with Emergency relief and this is welcome. It can give around \$400 to an individual, more to a family, every 2-3 months.

However, this does not cover even one month's rent, let alone the utility bills as well as food, phone, travel card and medication costs.

Example

Adam has a wife and three children. He has been in Australia for seven years and has applied for protection but has not yet had an interview with Immigration.

He has worked full time for three years in a building business. When it closed due to Covid 19 all his fellow workers (more than twenty people) received Job Keeper. He received nothing. He has used any savings and his super to cover costs to now. Last week nothing was left and he had to cover rent, utilities and food. BASP was able to assist for this month and maybe a few more. However, ongoing support at this level is unsustainable for the many in need.

Emergency Relief (ER)

BASP offers emergency relief with cash, payment of bills and food donated by many to our food bank. In mid 2019, the monthly ER expenditure was about \$8000 to \$9000 a month. The last four months, the average ER cash has been \$19,761 a month plus a further \$8000 for bills a month.

Housing:

BASP has always provided a limited amount of housing for people- initially to enable people to leave detention. Over recent years, with donations of houses and rooms for use by people seeking asylum and the ability and need to lease houses for some unable to access the rental market, housing under BASP's management has grown to 38 locations for 136 people. This costs BASP about \$33,000 a month



However, with the widening gaps in income support over the last year, BASP is now also paying rent for people who are in their own rental properties but unable to meet their monthly payments.

Over the last 3 months, BASP has paid an average of \$53,000 a month for these rentals.

BASP encourages people to seek emergency relief from Red Cross and ASRC where eligible and other charities like the Salvation Army also assist. What this is doing, is making people beg from agency to agency to make ends meet. This worsens an already very undignified situation for so many. However, it is also important that the government who provides funds for these programs can get a truer picture of the numbers in need.



BASP housing

	April	May	June	July
People housed BASP houses	118	126	131	136
People in rentals in their name - rent paid by BASP	93	120	129	126
Total rentals	211	246	260	262

Value of housing provided is \$100,000 a month; BASP actually pays \$83,000 because of donated housing.

Emergency Relief

	April	May	June	July
Cash	18,600	19,439	19,790	21,655
Electricity	2,288	2,116	1,920	2,605
Gas	414	1,849	1,237	1,965
Water	416	1,062	2,256	75
Other	1,541	3,687	4,235	2,353
Totals	\$23,259	\$28,153	\$29,438	\$28,653

So currently, we are spending at least \$100,000 per month on basic necessities for people seeking asylum. This is a significant increase on BASP's activity 6—12 months ago.

While we feel fortunate to be able to meet these immediate and urgent needs of desperate people, thanks to the generosity of our supporters, we must also continue to seek systemic change.

BASP works with other groups to highlight the inequities in the current government responses - or lack of them - and to advocate for change. What we need is:

- Income security safety net for all, including people seeking asylum. A resumption of SRSS while inadequate is better than nothing. An inclusion in Job Seeker would be preferable
- Provision of Medicare and work rights for all who are seeking asylum throughout the assessment and review stages
- Fairer and more timely assessment and review of applications
- Provision of ongoing bridging visas during assessment and review of visa applications, enabling a fairer chance of securing work for those who are able.

Volunteers.

BASP has many volunteers- around 150. Many of these share friendships with individuals and families by visiting on a regular basis. This has had to cease for most through the Covid restrictions except for those maintaining contact through phone calls or video. A few are continuing with their English teaching through these means.

Volunteers also deliver food and cash to people who are vulnerable and are unable to get this assistance by other means. Non-perishable food is donated by churches, schools and individuals and the food bank is managed by a volunteer 2 days a week.

2 volunteers delivered to 14-16 households a fortnight (8 one week, 6-8 the alternate week) prior to Covid 19.

Since then 2 further alternate week runs have commenced to an additional 14 households, assisted by extra food from a very welcome City of Port Phillip initiative. (Thanks Lou and the team!)

The deliveries and the pantry organisation are done by people in the older category (bar one), vulnerable to the virus, but all have insisted they are able to continue with their duties. We have been greatly appreciative of their efforts.



Tom, a 'food deliverer', is about to leave with the next delivery.

Covid and BASP

We have maintained a skeleton staff at Albert Park through Stage 3 and 4 and have not been idle.

We have had 2 residents in separate houses who have tested positive. One young woman was taken to a quarantine hotel, one of her house mates remained away with a friend and the 3rd resident in the house was tested and waited 7 days for the result which was fortunately negative. BASP was able to say to her that she was not to go to work - casual in Aged care- that we would cover the rent, send food and cleaning products until she knew the outcome. What a shame this option was not available earlier to so many others who went to work to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table.

A man in another house remained in self isolation in his room and is now back at work- but not yet feeling fully fit.

The restrictions and lockdown have added stress to most people and especially so for many of those with whom we work. It has been positive for a few to be assisted with some online training during this period to be more job ready in the future. As indicated earlier in the newsletter, it is predicted that people seeking asylum will be negatively impacted in gaining employment when we emerge from the restrictions.

The restrictions have impacted the mental health of many in the community and asylum seekers are no different in this regard.

BASP has always worked closely with Cabrini Health Hub in Brunswick in supporting the health and wellbeing of vulnerable people.

Cabrini staff have maintained their responsive and understanding service throughout these tough times, reaching out to those who are struggling and being flexible in their approach. BASP was delighted to hear the service has received funding to expand its mental health outreach to Shepparton and regional Victoria- a much needed aid to people at present.

A young Sri Lankan man had been living rough for 6 months until he received help from Red Cross, BASP and others to cover a few weeks in a motel while his health and legal situations were investigated. He called during the lockdown to say these things were beginning to settle but he was SO lonely- he just wanted to chat to someone. We talked then but also called a young volunteer to see if he'd be happy to call over the weekend and from time to time – just for a chat. The volunteer was delighted to help. Again - our good fortune to have so many fine folk to call on for all sorts of reasons





Nicole has orders for 600 masks! Some helpers were turning them right side out!!

With the requirement to wear masks, at least 2 of the women we know got to work.

Nicole in Echuca is a seamstress and moved quickly from her usual fashion line to masks. They were in great demand and BASP appreciated her sending a box to the office to make available to other asylum seekers.

Another, Melbourne based single mother of 2, set up her cottage industry to make masks for BASP, her daughters' school and others in the community. She has been dealing with serious health issues and she has found that this activity of being active and useful has given her a great lift.



The Kilbreda bus full of goods!

The goodwill of others continues despite these tough times.

Kilbreda donated a bus load of food for the food pantry in June and the staff at Star of the Sea replenished this with more wonderful donations in July.

Others have also continued to bring in food and we have been fortunate to get additional donations through a Food

Bank in Port Melbourne, distributing Oz Harvest boxes and other items. This has enabled BASP to double its food delivery to individuals and families in need of this, having 2 runs a week to approximately 12-14 households.

The volunteers who prepare and deliver the food each week have all continued to undertake this work throughout Stages 3 and 4, taking precautions as required but committed to help those most vulnerable.

Many schools continue to support BASP by sending food and household requirements, and other schools are still having some fund-raising activities which all help.

Amazing people!

Ram- a young man who came from Bhutan via Nepal was detained offshore in 2013, then brought to Australia for medical reasons and placed in community detention. In September 2017, he was in a group of people given a 6 month bridging visa and told to fend for themselves. BASP was able to provide a room in one of its houses while he could establish himself. He found work and by June 2018 he had found his own housing closer to his job. He then changed jobs, working in a timber company until June 2020 when

he decided to accept the "American Offer" . In July he came to say farewell and thanks. He was ambivalent about his decision. It means starting again after beginning to feel at home in Australia. However, the rhetoric of the Australian Government saying "those here from offshore detention will never settle in Australia" was too uncertain for him. What strength and resilience we see in many who have faced such an ordeal from our country.



The recurring theme at present is how hard life is for people with no income safety net and trying to find work.

This impassioned plea from a father of 2 sums this up, sadly- "Please ask the .. government to scrap this short term(3 months) bridging visa E...it has made me disabled. I do not have word to express how damaging (this is to) people. I done nothing wrong except seeking asylum and I do not know why (they) keep damaging my life since 2010. It's completely unfair what they are doing for innocent poor people like me." This man applies constantly for work and the reason for his rejection is given by some as his short term visa.

BASP has been paying the rent while he continues to seek work, but his despair was mounting. So, we were delighted to be able to introduce this family to a couple who offered their 3 bedroom house to a family in need. They moved immediately after meeting the hosts. The 2 primary school aged boys love the outdoor space and trampoline – a great change from their apartment life. What a boost this has been for the family. What a gift from the hosts.



Pat Agostino, one of our stalwart volunteers, told us this story. She and John Addie, her partner, were delivering food for us. They met Mani who lives in the housing commission flats. For a long time Mani didn't come down to meet the volunteers. However lately he has been coming and looking much more cheerful. Apparently the authorities at the flats had made an area available for gardening for those who live there. Mani showed his garden to Pat and John and said proudly, "This is my farm". Unfortunately, restrictions have caused a temporary halt to his farming.



We had a ring recently from a person who said, "I'm Jackson—I lived in the Brigidine house in Ardeer house in 2004. I have a Permanent Protection Visa. I am currently doing a Masters degree in Social Work." We don't have the capacity to follow up people once they have moved on in their lives—and indeed many probably want the chance to just start a new page! However, a number do contact us and it is wonderful when they are doing well.

Trudy Hairs is a long time advocate and supporter of people seeking asylum including those in detention. She has now set up a 'service' to assist asylum seekers with form filling if they need help. She can do this from home over the phone and it can make the difference between getting help- or not. Her email is formfillingmelbourne@gmail.com

BASP and CAV- the Colostomy Association of Victoria—have worked together over a number of years now to match volunteers to assist in CAV's provision of supplies to its client base. Again through these restrictions, CAV was able to take on a young woman to work on reception. She has been unable to find work and was becoming despondent and also isolated with the restrictions on outings. This opportunity is providing work experience, company, a reason to go out and a sense of helping others. She called BASP after the first day, exclaiming she was exhausted but delighted, having taken 35 calls.

Another long time supporter had a significant birthday in June and asked her friends to donate to BASP via Paypal, rather than give her presents. This was a wonderful gesture raising \$2670 for BASP - sorely needed and greatly appreciated. This supporter's equally generous husband has again provided prompt and free dental care to a couple of asylum seekers in pain with their teeth and facing an indefinite wait for the Dental Hospital or community dental care. BASP's strength is its amazing supporters who contribute in so many ways.

In early June, we also received a huge windfall of



food from a combined Mansfield effort. It was the local parish, primary school RAR- Rural Australian For Refugees- and other community members.



Some of the women in the house in Albert Park are taking the opportunity during this time of enforced 'stay at home' to do some short courses that may help them get jobs when it is possible to start looking for employment.

How fortunate to have these stocks as we headed into a further lockdown. The food goes quickly through those coming in (when allowed) and those to whom we deliver.

It also gives them some activity that takes their mind off the problems that they all face—the uncertainty of their future—and their worry about their families in the countries they have left.

It is difficult for many of those who normally bring food to stock our pantry. However a number of places and individuals are still bringing in food and others have donated vouchers.



The following are still very much appreciated:

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

Blocks or individual wrapped cheese.

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

Gladwrap, tinfoil, pegs for hanging out washing,

Sweet and Savoury Biscuits, Snacks for school lunches (even when home!), Salt and pepper, Spices: coriander, cinnamon, ginger, Shampoo and Conditioner, Shaving Cream and shavers, Toothpaste and toothbrushes. Soap, deodorants

Toilet paper

Garbage bags (small and large)



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

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 please email us at queries@basp.org.au after making a donation so we can send you a tax deductible receipt.



Thanks everyone. We all have unanswered questions and concerns at this stage. It is heartening to hear many say, “Compared to others I am not in such a precarious state”.



We all need to sustain our hope that justice and goodness will prevail in our world. This is not easy—even when we remind ourselves that things have been bleak before and somehow we have survived—and usually we find a new sense of well-being. In the end, we probably all find hope in a sense of community and the experience of bearing the tough times with others.

We are very conscious that many of the people we are helping—the majority of whom are only surviving because of BASP supporters—have no-one to interact with. When life is difficult this sort of isolation is really hard.

We do thank you all for your encouragement. We hope you are all well.

Brigid Arthur

Libby Saunders

(BASP Coordinators)