

## STRENGTH AND KINDNESS

### Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP)



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

**Newsletter 98 October 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

Do you ever feel you are going round in circles? Or experience the need to get off the treadmill and find a new starting point? Or want to stop, revisit the arguments that you and others are using and plot a new way forward? Do you find yourself saying “We may be still here in several decades from now at the rate we are going”. If so, perhaps you are advocating for changes to Australia’s refugee policies.

**It seems fairly obvious that we cannot look for a new direction by looking harder in the same direction.** There are many questions to ponder. For example, questions about how democracies function. So often, in Australia, we have Governments justify every aspect of governing as justified because the ‘people voted us in’. We don’t vote on a single issue. BASP maintains that many of the policies in this country that govern the treatment of people seeking protection are fundamentally wrong. And that we will never get a right direction by tinkering around the edges. Most theories of change appear to accept that major change is incremental. Our question is ‘But what does the final destination look like?’

In the often quoted Alice's Adventures in Wonderland: "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" "I don't much care where—" said Alice. "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat. "—so long as I get somewhere," Alice added as an explanation. That is where we are, in terms of the policies (or lack thereof) governing our treatment of people asking for protection in this country. Many have been made ‘on the run’. There are laws that are morally indefensible and are used to justify reprehensible and often chaotic practices.



**We believe the slate should be wiped clean and a new humane and responsible set of policies instituted.** Could this ever happen? Experience tells us that we are much more likely to change our views when we actually meet ‘the other’ than when we simply are told some arguments. We know with people seeking asylum this has been made very difficult because of the retribution that has been meted out to many people seeking asylum who have appeared publicly.

We are also more likely to accept change when we trust those with authority. Trust in government has never been so low. And this is nowhere seen so clearly as in the government's failure to address the human rights of those who came seeking protection.

On both these counts we need a cultural change. And that comes from fearless and humane leadership. However, leadership does not rest solely with the government. We look to civic and church leadership to be much more vocal in support of refugees.

**Donations to the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project are tax deductible**

## **Jobs - especially the jobs in regional Victoria**

BASP, like many in the sector, is concerned about the difficulties of people seeking asylum getting employment when restrictions lift. This has been heightened by the budget incentive for employers to get a subsidy to employ under 35 year old Australians. New research by the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) estimates that nearly 19,000 refugees and asylum seekers on temporary visas will lose their jobs in this recession, with unemployment rates projected to double among this group.

We are fortunate to have a final year RMIT International Development student working at BASP at present, investigating work opportunities in rural and regional areas for some of those with whom we work. We all hear stories of the need for fruit pickers and farm assistance but the logistics of getting this work also needs exploring. Aviva, the student, and Marian, BASP volunteer who helps with employment, are mapping out where jobs are, what housing is available in that area, whether transport is needed or there are pick up options, how long the work will last and so on.



This option will not suit everyone, but it will open the opportunity for some and to have more detailed information, is more likely to succeed. (Cars are often needed to get from town to the farms so if you have a spare one needed, we'd be pleased to hear from you!)

### **An idea being put that could be a win-win**

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) has proposed that people on Temporary Protection Visas be given a Permanent visa if they work in a regional area for at least two years. We have some reaction to this proposal—some positive and others a little less so.

Any pathways to permanency for refugees are certainly positive. Having employment makes all the difference to someone and this could be a great opportunity for work. Permanent Protection Visas would enable applications for family reunion and that is a high priority for all those whose current visa precludes any application.

However, general concerns rest on two key issues. There is potential for exploitation. A recent article in The Age detailed how a Dandenong-based recycler – and contractor of Greater Dandenong Council – is under investigation for alleged wage theft from asylum seekers. Most of the workers were Tamil asylum seekers.

Our other concern is more philosophical. BASP strongly objects to giving temporary protection visas (and that in Australia these are the only visas open to refugees who arrived here by boat) linking getting permanent protection to, or be determined by an individual's productivity in the workforce, is therefore problematic.

### **Opportunities for work in the country for others**

We would love to be able to get a job in the regions for Abbas (not his real name). Abbas is about 24 years of age. He came to Australia as a minor and unlike virtually all those who came with him, has been rejected in his application for protection at every stage. He is now without a visa, finds it very hard to get a job without a visa or work rights—but manages most of the time to get a few hours of work and he survives. Every so often he will approach BASP for some financial assistance—but not often. Abbas is decent, came from Afghanistan and it is inexplicable why he hasn't been given a visa to stay in this country. Can't we give him a chance to work in the country and give him a Permanent visa?

## **Donations to BASP and where they go**

As you all know, BASP is a non-funded organization that relies on donations to help those who are seeking protection in our country. We are currently helping 264 people with accommodation—either by paying rent or in housing that has been provided to BASP rent free or subsidized. We are helping more than this number with emergency relief money.

BASP has continued to operate over the lockdown period with increasing demand for financial support, food and housing. We continue to receive requests for housing, often women with a child, with no money or likelihood of getting income support or work. We were able to assist a new mother with a 1 month baby recently, moving into a share house with other women - potentially some helping 'aunties' while the mother settles into her new role.

In September we paid \$114,070 for rent and emergency relief. Donations were \$68,854 and we certainly value this level of support. However, the needs are increasing and the number of places people can go to for help are decreasing. It is truly awful that the folk we hear from have to almost beg for help. A text from one man: "I feel sorry & it's hurt my dignity too but due to current circumstance I am just wondering is it possible to assist us this last month by rent as I understand we were obliged for two months but if possible as lockdown is going to ease soon that able me to manage. Thanks & Regards."

We have been pleased that State and some Federal funds have gone to Red Cross primarily to assist with emergency relief assistance. This helps with daily living and some bills but is generally not enough to cover rent. For many of the people we help it is not always easy to access and the time delay is some weeks.

Uniting Care has recently been funded to assist people seeking asylum with managing their utility bills, seeking payment plans where needed and discussing ways to reduce usage. BASP is also taking advantage of this for some of the people we know.

### **All of this is needed because there is virtually no income support for asylum seekers.**

The SRSS payment, which many received several years ago while they were waiting for their application to be processed, has been gradually withdrawn over the last 2 years. It was only 89% of the old Newstart, hardly enough to live on but it was something. We have outlined the cuts in the Budget on the next page. We have been advised by case workers that instructions are to cut further.

This has a direct impact on BASP as well as others in the sector supporting people seeking asylum. Currently we have 5 families and 2 individuals in BASP houses who are contributing to the costs with their SRSS payment. These include a couple with a baby under one, learning English to become job ready asap. Another is a couple in their 60's with a high school age son, both parents with health issues, limited English and the likelihood of getting work is very low. Another is a mother of a 1 year old, 2 primary students, having fled domestic violence and learning English. None have had an interview about their application yet, having all been here over 12 months.

We have also taken in others, on the basis that we will provide a home pending them getting SRSS and can move into private housing. These include a 21 yo mother with a 1 month old baby, a physically unwell mother of 2 primary school children, impaired by abuse, and another mother fleeing family violence with a four year old mildly autistic child.

These are the ones we are supporting right now, There will be many more as the cuts take effect and with a scarcity of jobs for those able to work, the situation is looking grave.

### **This is a government policy we cannot accept.**

## **What difference did the Budget make to people seeking asylum and refugees?**

We are deeply disappointed in the recent Budget. It not only does not provide additional support for people seeking asylum but further erodes existing programs such as the Refugee and Humanitarian Program.

### **Income support**

There was no change to the lack of access to income support for those on Bridging Visas. In fact the number who will be granted the Status Resolution Support services (SRSS) has been cut again. These payments have been cut each year from \$139.8 million in 2017-8 to \$39.5 million in 2019-20 and will be cut to \$19.6 million in 2020-21. These savings are being achieved by refusing income support to the majority of people seeking asylum regardless of need.

### **Cuts to the Refugee and Humanitarian Program**

The number of refugees allowed into Australia under our Humanitarian Program will drop by 5000. The Government has introduced a new cap of 13,750 places a year, a move that is expected to save \$958 million over the next five years. The number had been 20,000 when the current Government was elected in 2013.



This program encompasses claims by people who apply for protection after arriving in Australia, those who are brought to Australia via agreements with UNHCR and refugees who are sponsored by individual or organizations. The savings predicted from this measure will come from a reduction in the demand for settlement services provided by the Department of Health and the Department of Social Services to approved refugees.

### **More money going to Christmas Island Detention Centre and ‘shoring-up’ our borders**

The Budget provides for \$55.6 million to be spent on the facilities on Christmas Island to house 250 people. An extra \$41.4 million is allocated to an arrangement with Indonesia—basically to stop people leaving there to seek asylum in Australia.

### **Provision for Reviews of applications for protection**

Some money has been allocated to the Immigration and Assessment Authority (IAA) and to the operations of the Federal Circuit Court (FCC) to assist processing of claims for asylum.

### **Leaving asylum seekers and refugees offshore - Nauru and PNG**

Very little money is being given to those left offshore in PNG and Nauru. The actual detention centres are closed in both places. Millions of dollar are being paid to large corporations in both places. Australia is paying \$2 billion for offshore processing of asylum seekers claims.

### **But we need migrants (including refugees) in the current economy**

A report from Oxfam and Deloitte Access Economic looking at the economic and social impact of increasing Australia's humanitarian intake (August 2019) details the importance of a refugee intake to Australia

Australia has settled more than 880,000 refugees over the past 60 years and over 500,000 since the first official refugee policy was created under the Humanitarian Program in 1977. In 2017, the humanitarian intake was 16,250 people — accounting for 9.1% of Australia's total permanent migration. The Oxfam report suggests that Australia's humanitarian intake could be reasonably expanded to 44,000 per annum over a five year period.

It is our experience at BASP that many families are split indefinitely by our policy of not allowing anyone on a 3 or 5 year Temporary Protection Visa to even apply for family reunion. **Let's change these Temporary visas to Permanent and allow the families to come.**

## **An imminent problem: Governments decision to move people out of community detention**

Lately BASP learned that refugees and people seeking asylum in NSW, Queensland and South Australia who have been in community detention, were being moved on to Bridging Visas with no form of financial safety net. This group of people were transferred to Australia for medical reasons prior to February 2019.

### **What is community detention?**

People subject to community detention (also known as “residence determination”) are required to live in accommodation determined by the Government but can move freely within the community during the day. They do not have the right to work and only children under the age of 18 can study. Their accommodation is paid for and managed by services contracted by the Government under its Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) program and they are given an allowance of less than \$100 per week to cover food, basic needs and essential items.

### **What is happening to those in community detention?**

In March 2020, the Federal Minister for Home Affairs, Peter Dutton, decided to begin moving more than 500 people who are classified by the Australian Government as “transitory persons” from community detention on to Final Departure Bridging Visas, granting them the right to work but no access to Federal financial assistance. Implementation of this decision was delayed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In August, the Minister began using his ministerial intervention powers to decide who to remove from community detention and when to do so. As decisions are handed down, the families and individuals being removed from community detention are given three weeks’ notice that the accommodation will end. For most, financial support ends as soon as they are notified that they have received the Bridging Visa.

We know some of the families and individuals in Victoria who have been notified that they will also be given this Final Departure Bridging Visa E as soon as the Covid restrictions are lifted. The “transitory persons” affected by this decision are refugees and people seeking asylum previously transferred by the Australian Government from Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Nauru to receive medical treatment not available in those countries or to accompany immediate family members who were transferred for medical reasons. Those being moved out of community detention are people who do not have active applications for resettlement to the United States.

### **Other states**

As at 23 September 2020, 188 people have been moved from community detention (76 in Qld, 60 in NSW, 30 in SA and 22 in WA). Consideration is being given to removing the remaining 327 people who do not have an active US resettlement application (96 in Qld, 39 in NSW, 28 in SA and 164 in Victoria). It appears that 268 people with US resettlement applications will not be included unless their application is rejected.

### **Why is this a problem?**

The people moved out of community detention will, for the first time since attempting to enter Australia to seek asylum in 2013 or 2014, have the right to work and the right to decide where to live. The problem is that they will have no access to any Federal financial assistance other than Medicare (and no clarity about their future).

### **What about the men brought to Australia for medical care after the Medivac legislation?**

Those affected by this decision were brought to Australia under arrangements established, supported and managed by the Coalition Government. The Medevac legislation passed by the Parliament in February 2019 with the support of Opposition and crossbench MPs and Senators, resulted in the transfer of around 250 refugees and people seeking asylum to Australia from PNG and Nauru. Even though that legislation was repealed in December 2019, all of those people remain in locked detention. Most in the Mantra hotel in Melbourne and Kangaroo point in Brisbane) with no justification of why this is necessary.





## The importance of legislation governed by decency and compassion



### The phone Bill saga and Jacqui Lambie (recognized that banning mobile phones in immigration detention would make an inhumane system even crueler)



BASP, along with many advocates, put in a submission to argue that people in detention should be allowed to have mobile phones. This is for many reasons. Those detained need to communicate with family and friends, they need access to their lawyers, they have some way of getting news from and about a world outside of detention.

We welcome Senator Jacqui Lambie's decision to block the Federal Government's legislation on this issue. Lambie announced her position in an email to voters who took part in a poll she ran, which concluded with 100,000 responses and 96% opposed to the controversial bill.

Lambie wields the deciding vote, as the measure is opposed by Labor, the Greens, Rex Patrick and Centre Alliance.

We assume then that this Bill will not be put to the vote in the Parliament—or that it will be introduced and defeated. If this happens we will have seen the power of advocacy for those unable to speak for themselves.

### Strengthening the 'Character test' Bill

Another proposed Bill that is probably even more worrying is 'Strengthening the Character Test'. This is part of the issue of visa cancellation—and that is a constant fear for those with an application for protection in train. The Bill sets a very, very low bar for visa cancellations.



This proposed bill needs to be put in the context that people seeking asylum in Australia do not have some fundamental rights that we take for granted in a free world.

#### Background to our concerns about this Bill:

Many of those BASP are supporting are part of a group of people who have been termed 'the legacy caseload'. The name has been given largely for political reasons and to categorise them by reason of their mode and date of arrival in Australia.

Some of the exceptional measures applied to the asylum-seekers in this group include:

- preventing them from lodging visa applications for up to four years following their arrival in Australia;
- removal of legal assistance and translation services with few exceptions;
- removal of permanent residency and any realistic prospect of attaining citizenship;
- removal of the right to be reunified with immediate family members, even after recognition of refugee status;
- the attainment of only temporary protection requiring periodic re-assessment of protection needs;
- the removal of procedural safeguards that are fundamental to a fair and efficient protection assessment process; and
- the imposition of a "fast track" protection assessment process comprising curtailed appeal rights.

**The proposed Strengthening the Character Test Bill is another punitive measure that could further discriminate against individuals in this cohort (as well as others).**

BASP has seen how the current regulations involving character assessments are very harsh. A man who was accused of a very small criminal action (eventually ruled by a magistrate as inconsequential) was re-detained in an immigration detention centre for 18 months). Another man lost his Permanent Visa because he was accused of a

crime he has since been cleared of. Another young man was detained for over two years for a ‘crime’ that was clearly a manifestation of a serious mental health break-down.

### **So what powers would the Bill enshrine?**

Under the Minister’s proposed new powers, if a person has been convicted of an offence that falls into a category carrying a possible term of imprisonment of at least two years, they will automatically fail the ‘character test’. Even where they actually receive a light penalty, such as a fine or a short community-based order, indicating a less serious crime, they will still automatically fail the character test, and then likely be subject to immigration detention and forcible removal from Australia. This may well mean back to the country where they may face persecution or other serious human rights abuses.

The sheer breadth of the Minister’s powers (over and above the powers and authority of the courts) is very frightening.

The Bill is estimated to potentially result in a four -fold increase in the number of visa cancellations, and therefore the number of people in immigration detention. For those owed protection obligations or who cannot be removed, their detention may be indefinite.

This Bill will very negatively impact on a legal system that is already totally over extended. Both the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) and the Courts already have massive backlogs. People must wait in immigration detention for their case to be dealt with, This Bill will massively increase both the numbers of people held in immigration detention and the duration of their detention.

People will be put into immigration detention as a punishment and that changed the designated nature of immigration detention, which is supposed to be for determining a person’s right to asylum. Immigration detention should not be an extension of the prison system.

In some cases BASP knows, the punishment for a visa cancellation for a man has impacted severely on a partner and their children. This is not fair.

### **What offenses are we talking about?**

The offenses include crimes committed before the asylum seeker came to Australia (where the law may have been very different) and crimes committed in Australia prior to the passing of the Bill.

Examples of people who would face likely visa cancellation under this Bill:

verbal threats, such as telling a person you want to slap them, or sending a text that you will punch the person’s new partner;

assault, such as grasping a person by the sleeve;

any form of contravention of an intervention order, including where the offender was approached by the protected person, or even merely responded to a text from that person;

### **So what are we advocating?**

That this Bill should be rejected in its entirety because it will lead to unfair, arbitrary cancellation of people’s visas. Asylum seekers, like everyone else, should be judged on what they have done and not penalised because of what they are accused of..

**Do the unbridled Minister's powers seem like a revisit of the convict days—people sent to the colonies for often small crimes, sent on again to Van Diemen's Land or Norfolk Island if they transgressed again!**

## A happy reunion



Huyen Thu Thi Tran and her two-year-old daughter Isabella, who was born in detention, were released from the Melbourne immigration detention centre. This followed a lot of advocacy for Huyen and Isabella. The Government claims that there are no children in detention.

Apparently any number under 5 are not counted! Until there is legislation that no children are to be detained, we fear the practice will continue.

## We need a compassionate decision

The situation for one of the men detained in the Kangaroo Point hotel in Brisbane is depicted opposite.

As we can see, Saif has a wife and son living in the community—a stones throw from the hotel where he is detained. This seems farcical—and sad.

**They met on Nauru. Fell in Love. Got married. Had baby Sammi, who had breathing problems. Sammi and his mother came to Australia for the baby's health.**

**Saif remained on Nauru until he was medicated to Australia. He has not held his son or wife since visits to Kangaroo Point were stopped. They live half an hour from each other.**

**Like many other refugees, Saif Al Saif was detained offshore for 6 years. What's the Plan?**



**#SafeResettlementNow**

We have been listening to a lot of talk about money and the economy this last week.

We are often reminded of tangible contributions to the workforce. They are doctors, dentists, engineers, teachers, lawyers or IT and finance specialists hoping to rebuild the careers they had in their home countries before they found themselves forced to leave due to persecution, civil unrest or war. Then there are others who have had no chance to be formally educated but are willing to work at anything here in the hope of a better future—sometimes only for their children. One young man we are supporting is working at Uber Eats. On a bicycle, he has been out in wind and rain—making \$65 one day, \$35 another day. Another young man works as a hospital ‘trolley pusher’. He longs for the day when he can study and actually care for patients.

*"Only free men can negotiate. Prisoners cannot enter into contracts... I cannot and will not give any undertaking at a time when I and you, the people, are not free. Your freedom and mine cannot be separated."*

From a letter by Nelson Mandela during his imprisonment, 10 February 1985

As Nelson Mandela says in the quote above, while we allow these young people to live on the fringes of our society with their rights to a full life diminished, we all suffer loss. We know we are enriched by the diversity of the migrant and refugee experience—and our freedom is inextricably linked to that of those our society by and large is ignoring.

## No visits to detention Centres

Visits have not been reinstated for the immigration detention centres. We are nervous that this will not happen for a long time. We talk to a few people in the MITA and the Mantra Hotel and they are very depressed.

We understand that during the time of lock down, booths have been set up in the visitors' area. This means that a visitor can only see one person and there will be no sense of a community visiting. This has in fact been becoming increasingly so over the past couple of years. The places are more and more like prisons!



MITA



## Parish Support.

Many parishes have supported BASP over many years in a variety of ways. This has been integral to BASP's ability to support so many people facing dire times.



**St Mary's of the Cross in Aspendale and Mordialloc** is one such parish. It collects food for us, has a JAG- Justice Action Group -which writes letters each month and also has hosted a wonderful picnic for asylum seekers and parishioners for the last few years.

Recently the JAG group decided it wanted to do more. Some members contacted BASP and we discussed the range of issues- injustices- faced by people seeking asylum as a result of government policy and practice. The group took up the issue of the planned release of people in Community Detention onto Bridging visas with 3 weeks' notice to find a house and job to fend for themselves. This group of people have come from Nauru and Manus Island for medical reasons, have lived in government paid houses with a small allowance and been forbidden to work. Now, they expect a 3 week turnaround to become self-sufficient- as soon as the Victorian restrictions ease. ( It is already occurring in other states).

The JAG group prepared material on this and circulated it widely seeking 10000 letters to key MPs opposing this position.

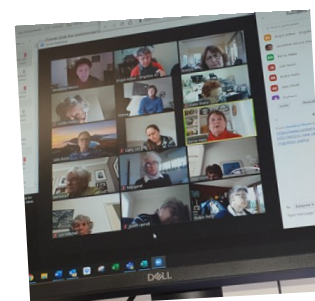
Their message spread to many, including the year 10 students at Kilbreda also took up this human rights issue, with their own letter writing.

The JAG group is also holding a Silent Auction, starting October 16- details are elsewhere in this newsletter.

**St Mary's Hampton** has also supported BASP for many years , including an annual Trivia Night. Restrictions this year impacted the usual format but not the night and a Zoom Trivia Night was held on October 9. It was great fun, with tricky questions and it raised \$6485 for BASP.

Who knew there were more kangaroos in Australia to humans? 60 million to 25 million?  
Could be helpful for the next trivia night!

Many thanks to Paul and Nicola Foxworthy and others involved in this most enjoyable function.



**St Mary's Williamstown** has continued its support of a household in Newport. They have paid the rent on this house for a single woman and a woman and daughter who share the place. They have recently had a hugely successful food drive and shared some of this with the residents. BASP also asked if someone could help with the grass and pruning. The parish provided funds for a mower so the women could do this as needed. A much better solution and greatly appreciated.

**St Martin's Hawkesburn** has a food relief program and BASP has been the recipient of the donated food this year . The parishioners of Christ Church South Yarra assist in this food relief program. Brigid was a speaker on a webinar organized for people from St Martins and neighbouring parishes. This worked very well.

**St Georges Malvern and Christ Church South Yarra** have been amazingly generous in their donations—money and goods.

Many parishes and schools continue their support and for this we are very grateful.



Several people have contacted us to provide a house or a room in their home for people seeking asylum. These are wonderful offers which we greatly appreciate - all the more so as we anticipate the needs of those leaving community detention and needing urgent housing.

It is so important to match the host and guest well. A good fit may occur quickly - but it can also take some time. These arrangements are wonderful to witness, seeing the benefits of this offer being positive for both parties.



This van was donated to BASP by a very kind family for the use of an asylum seeker.

It is great to be able to enhance the prospects for getting a job by giving someone a vehicle. Thanks Liz.

### Help Appreciated

The Little Company of Mary community supports a refugee or asylum seeker each year with post-secondary study and related expenses. This year they assisted a young woman with fees and rent as Covid had meant she had lost her part time job and income. She has reported that the fund had enabled her to leave living with her boyfriend which had become a toxic relationship and to continue her studies.

### Touching messages of thanks

"Would like to thanks you guys for the support you provide my family in this critical period even i can't explain in words how you support my young kids to stay under safe roof, only good wishes & prayers we can offer from whole family as well once again stage 4 period increase for month of September that's terrible & it's put me in stress again because can't start my work please pray for every one facing this situation."

.....

Hi how are u Libby  
I applied for special benefit  
I filled all the forms 3 weeks ago  
But reject me  
I don't know what to do  
I'm really tired of life  
You can help me  
Thanks

.....

Thanks , I appreciate your kind very much. Today received some frozen meals and some foods to us  
This is a big helping hand for us in our time of need.

.....

Thanks for the money for food. Now I can use money to buy nappies.

.....

Thanks you for money. I now have some work killing (cleaning) our shopping centre three days a week.

## *St Mary of the Cross Parish Mordialloc & Aspendale Justice Action Group (JAG) - Online Silent Auction Commences 5pm Friday 16 October, concludes 5pm Sunday 18 October*

ALL PROCEEDS TO THE BRIGIDINE ASYLUM SEEKERS PROJECT



OVER 50 FABULOUS  
ITEMS



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ONLY 75 SLEEPS TILL  
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<https://airauctioneer.com/basp-online-auction>  
or direct link from parish website [www.cam.org.au/mordiallocaspendale](http://www.cam.org.au/mordiallocaspendale)

## Amazing volunteers

Many volunteers have continued to support the individuals and families they knew prior to Covid.

Some of the feedback shows just how important these relationships are. In many cases they have developed into enduring friendships.



Feedback from one volunteer about the contact she and a fellow volunteer have had with a family from Myanmar. "We went for about 3 years helping Mum and mainly the older girl with English. At the end of 2019, we ceased going regularly for English teaching as, at now 82, I found driving to Noble Park at night a little onerous and also their language had improved greatly. The eldest girl who was the most needy of the children improved and is now a leader in her year 6 grade.

This year we have kept in touch, we go about every 6 to 8 weeks, make sure they're O K, and take both a food drop and some cash, which some friends and family help to donate. Also taking masks and hand sanitizer etc. to help in Covid times, it is hard for them being home and trying to do home schooling.

They are a beautiful family. " JJ

Another volunteer "I'm video calling with Zeynab once or twice a week, and she has set up a WhatsApp group for herself, Sue and me. She's struggling a bit (like all asylum seekers, no doubt) with all the additional uncertainty but continuing to do a wonderful job with the kids and the house." These 2 volunteers have been involved with this family for 5 years+. PP

A couple 'adopted' a women's share house earlier in the year and they have been amazing supports to the women living there. One of the women sent David a Father's Day card .in appreciation.



Another man, living alone and his isolation heightened with Covid restrictions has been supported and encouraged by his long time volunteer to create a vegie garden. The volunteer, unable to visit, has had Bunnings deliver necessities and the pride and joy of the garden has kept the man going.

Another man, physically unwell and limited in life skills lives near the office in a boarding house. His SRSS benefits were stopped during the pandemic, leaving him with no money, no case worker and no contacts. BASP now pays his rent and he visits the office weekly for food and ER. A volunteer who lives locally agreed to meet him once a week to go for a walk in the one hour per day exercise allowed. He has been thrilled to have a friend and she has now offered to accompany him to his hospital appointment next week.

Just as the lockdown occurred, BASP had referrals to house 2 single Ethiopian men. They did not know each other, but had no income, no English, no work options. BASP was able to house them together in a house with a very large garden, rapidly becoming overgrown. We have connected them to Cabrini Hub for health management and provided a laptop to help with online learning of English. When visited recently, they were excited to show us how well the house was maintained and what an amazing job they had done in cleaning up the garden. They were so pleased with their effort, seeing it as one way of showing their appreciation to BASP. It must be so hard for people to be on the receiving end always, wanting to give back but limited in how to do this.

We have also been delighted to work with Temple Beth Israel's Dignity Program, providing frozen home cooked foods to people in need. They deliver directly to people in their homes as well as leaving meals at the office for those who come in for help.

Gardening is a total chore to some people and this includes some asylum seekers! But others find peace and comfort in activity that produces new life. Indeed sometimes with fresh food (lettuce from one of the 'gardens')



**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 [contact@basp.org.au](mailto:contact@basp.org.au) after making a donation so we can send you a tax deductible receipt.



Again we thank you all for your support.



It is amazing how many big and small ways people help BASP to help others. Pope Francis recently wrote a letter—it is really a letter to everyone—not just Catholics. In it he writes about the need to build bridges – bridges of dialogue and bridges of encounter. And to break down walls – to try to find common humanity between people.

As we watch the USA almost self destruct and often enough our own country struggle to maintain civility between different groups, we certainly feel the need for less populist rhetoric and more emphasis on the common good.

BASP's logo "I was a stranger and you welcomed me .." focusses on being open to the other who comes as a stranger. We believe that all of us involved in BASP, directly or indirectly, are doing something about today's divisive world in terms of people seeking safety from persecution.

Maybe Covid will awaken in our community a new consciousness of what it is like to lack freedom of movement and to face a very uncertain future.

Thank you again for your part in helping 'the stranger'.

Brigid Arthur

Libby Saunders

(BASP Coordinators)