

## ***STRENGTH AND KINDNESS***

### ***Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP)***



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

***Newsletter 100 February 2021***

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

There are deep questions—philosophical questions—that rarely get asked in the popular talk about refugees and people seeking protection in a land other than the one they were born in.

- What rights do people have in a country simply because they are present there?
- When does being human take precedence over being recognized as a legitimate resident?
- Is it ever right to inflict pain on another human being in order to deter that person (or others) from a particular course of action?

At BASP when we are asked what we want for people seeking asylum we often include something about a humane and kind treatment from Australia. What does the ‘humane’ involve? Maybe at bottom line it means we never choose the cruel just to achieve an outcome. Or more positively that we choose the good, the true and the beautiful over the effective, the powerful and the opulent. Having said that it is often hard in our ‘numbed’ world to choose what is right when the expedient seems very attractive.

It seems relatively easy to judge the members of Parliament, a particular political party, the Department of Home Affairs .. But then you talk to some MPs, some people working in Government departments, some people contracted to carry out certain tasks and they seem very decent individuals trying their best within major constraints to do good. So we need a direction for the country that is bigger than all these subsets and that clearly and truthfully delineates our non-negotiables as a nation. We need an inspiring vision of ourselves as a humane and kind place where we choose, whenever possible, the best for each individual—not the ‘pretty’ but the best outcome for each and for the community. This will often not be popular.

The scale of human misery meted out to innocent people in Australia by our current refugee policies is a stark reminder that we don’t have such a framework.

At BASP we often face situations where the answer is never a simple ‘black and white’ response. We have avoided establishing a ‘one size fits all’ approach but we still face many quandaries when it comes to many who, what and how questions.



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

*In many discussions people talk about the cost of Australia's refugee policies, in particular the cost of detention, particularly off-shore. We often say the human costs dwarf the economic costs. In 2018 Médecins Sans Frontières said the mental suffering on Nauru was among the worst it had seen. All the costs involved are abhorrent and we need legislation to outlaw detention of people on the grounds of seeking asylum.*

### **Who is still detained?**

- There are still 123 left on Nauru and 137 in PNG. As well there are 10 still in the Park Hotel, 22 in MITA, 4 in Villawood (Sydney), 110 in BITA (Brisbane), 9 in Adelaide in detention and 2 in Perth. Another 15 people (5 families) have been imprisoned in Darwin for over a year and prior to that, for more than 6 years on Nauru.
- While everyone was taken out of Christmas Island in early October 2018, in September 2019 a Tamil family previously living in Bileola, Queensland became the first people to be detained there. They live in the 'Alternative Place of Detention' on Christmas Island, which is in a separate part of the Christmas Island detention facility.
- In August 2020, the Australian Government announced that it would re-open the North West Point Immigration Detention Centre on Christmas Island to manage the surge in population of people in detention. The first group of people were transferred two weeks after the announcement. By 31 December 2020, around 235 people were in the Immigration Detention Centre (exact figures were not provided in the latest statistics).
- The largest places of closed detention are Villawood in Sydney with 463 people, Yongah Hill, about ninety miles north of Perth with 265 people and Melbourne 219.

### **Difficult and expensive**

Madeleine Gleeson from the Kaldor Centre in an article published in the Guardian late last year outlined some of the facts.

*The high cost of offshore processing is explained by the fact that it is incredibly difficult and expensive to establish the centres in remote places. A conservative estimate is that offshore processing of claims for protection costs Australia roughly \$1bn a year. For the financial year 2020-21, it is estimated to be above \$1bn – for 300 people.*

*Then there is the cost of contracting private companies to manage the centres and provide all the services. Holding people in detention is always far more expensive than giving them a residential alternative.*

*There are other costs. The big issue for Australia is that it has never had an exit strategy. There has never been an answer to what will happen to people once they are found to be refugees. There was an aborted attempt to enter a resettlement arrangement with Cambodia, whereby Cambodia would be paid to accept people who had been found to be refugees on Nauru. That arrangement was earmarked in the budget as costing up to \$55m, but only seven people went – of whom at least five then left Cambodia. That is up to \$55m for two people to settle in Cambodia. The costs blow out in policies that Australia has adopted.*

*Importantly the Australian government has not sent anyone offshore since 2014. This has not been a policy that even Australia has pursued for about six years. What it has been doing is trying to extricate itself, but because there was no exit strategy Australia has been mired in this policy for about seven years, which is longer than it wanted to be.*

*In fact, most people who are technically subject to this policy are in Australia right now. They have been transferred here because the conditions offshore were so inadequate that they had to be returned for health and other reasons.*

## The big news of the past month has been the release in Melbourne of about 66 men who were transferred onshore under the ‘medivac legislation’.

Most of these had been in the Mantra and Park hotels since July 2019. For all of us who have advocated for their release this seems like a chink of light in a wall of darkness. However, more than 150 of their peers remain in detention—some still in Melbourne, most in Brisbane.

The men have been ‘free’ for 4 or 5 weeks. Some say they can hardly believe that the 8 years of being locked up is over. Across the men we talk to there is the whole gamut of reactions, preparedness to move on, independence and so on. For the first three to six weeks they were housed in two locations, a set of cabins in Ardeer and a disused aged care facility in Reservoir.

One of the group went by bus to Mildura and is already working up there. Two got a bus to Shepparton for a day to look around because it was boring doing nothing in Melbourne and they just needed something to do. Others have been too frightened to get on a bus!

### Why did these men get released?

It is difficult to know why. The Minister for Home Affairs, Peter Dutton, said it was because it was cheaper to have people in the community and none of those detained were terrorists.

It does seem a pity that it took eight years to come to this realisation!



Brigid and one of the men in the Reservoir AMES centre

The stories below are about visits Brigid made and tell something of the human dimension of it all.

### Out of detention—but...

It is an extremely hot day. I was visiting the Ardeer motel/cabins where the men released from detention a week earlier are staying. It is an uninviting place and no-one is around. However, one person is just inside his cabin with the door open. I wander over and M, a Rohingya man is seated at a sewing machine seemingly mending a sheet. We chat for a while. He tells me he was a tailor in Myanmar. He also relates that his family are in Bangladesh in Cox's Bazar where a cyclone destroyed tents and make-shift housing and left people homeless. His wife and nine year old daughter are now living under a piece of tarpaulin. He showed me the picture. He shows no emotion. It is as though this is life. He tells me he is going interstate because most of his family are ‘up north’.

The new visiting arrangements in the Melbourne Detention Centre (MITA) are almost Kafkaesque. The visiting area has been divided and a number of booths established. A visitor now has to speak to the person being visited through this grill. There is no privacy between the booths and no activities possible such as sharing a cup of tea. It makes for a very intense interaction.

After the other men were released recently, I visited a young man in MITA who seems to have exactly the same story as most of those released.

He has been left behind. It feels very unconvincing to say: it won't be long and you will be out too. Who knows—it could be a day, a week, a month or years!

My friend behind the grill is alternatively sad and angry. I feel useless!

They show me their house with pride. (It's a house BASP has rented but not sure how much of this they understand).

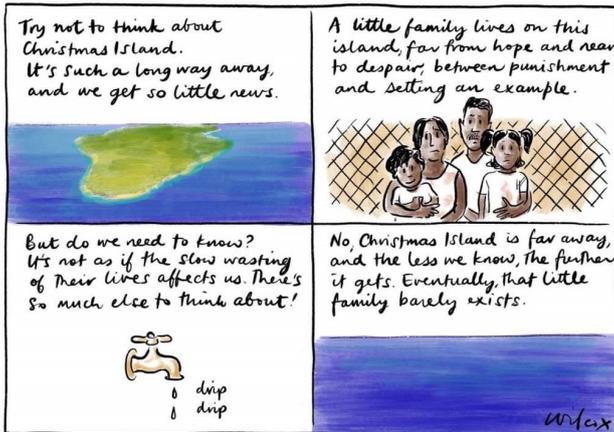
It's a big house.

It's a big back yard (I think to myself I hope you are still positive about this when the grass needs cutting!

We are cooking—breakfast. (it was noon).

We're going to grow vegetables (I have heard that before).

## Remember Ceylon? Many asylum seekers are Tamils from Sri Lanka. Why is this?



The Federal Court has stopped the deportation of a Tamil family from the Queensland town of Biloela, upholding a decision made in April 2020 which the Department of Home Affairs had sought to have overturned. They are however still detained on Christmas Island and still in a very tenuous position in terms of their future.

For those of us who have had many birthdays, we remember learning about Ceylon and its fame as a tea producing country. Or maybe as part of the British Empire. The British rule on the island lasted until 1948 when the country regained independence. In 1972 the country was renamed Sri Lanka.

The island has had a troubled history especially for the Tamil and Muslim minorities. These account for about 11% and 9% respectively. Both minorities live predominately in the east and the north of the island. The Sinhalese majority are over 75% of the population.

A civil war that lasted from 1983 till 2009 resulted in hundreds of thousands dead, large numbers displaced, a decimation of the land in the north and east in particular and thousands and thousands from the minority groups fleeing to other countries. The war may have drawn to a close, but the island's minority Tamils continue to be discriminated against severely by the majority government, which has been increasingly emboldened in its subjugation of Tamils since the rise of Gotabaya Rajapaksa to power following the country's 2019 presidential election. Rajapaksa is a man accused of war crimes against the Tamils as well as enforced disappearances of journalists and political opponents,

Sri Lanka has military and security cooperation with Australia, and other western countries. Australia has been very muted in its response to Sri Lankan human rights abuses. One result of this has been the deportation of Tamils from Australia and others who have failed in their application for protection here.

Last year Ben Doherty and Christopher Knaus in The Guardian wrote that Australian companies are selling weapons and military technology to countries around the world accused of war crimes, but the Australian government has refused to say what weapons are being sent overseas and to whom.

Nearly 100 permits were issued to export weapons and military technology to the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka and the Democratic Republic of Congo over the 2018-2019 financial year (14 to Sri Lanka).

For years many Sri Lankan Tamils were detained in Melbourne on suspicion of involvement with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE, or Tamil Tigers). This was in spite of the fact that it was impossible not to have had involvement with the LTTE because it was the de facto government of the north during the civil war. In 2013, a couple of us interviewed these men in a Maribyrnong Immigration Detention Centre—in an effort to put a human face to what was a political impasse. After years in detention, they were all released—one by one, but they still do not have permanent residence. We know where a few of these men are (one was only released last year) but most are probably still trying to make a life for themselves in the Australian community. On the next page is one of these stories.



*PK is known to us as Kuga. In Sri Lanka he was a teacher – at both primary and secondary levels. Indeed talking to him we have realized that Kuga comes from a family where education was a passion and a main occupation. His father was a school Principal, his younger brother is a teacher, another brother is studying in the UK to be a teacher; he has another brother who is a technical officer in Sri Lanka and another brother still at school. His mother is alive and he wants to spare her worry about him.*

*Kuga worked in Batticaloa town and he says this was an area controlled by the Sri Lanka Army. During the war it was sometimes bombed by the LTTE. Kuga was one of many caught between the two warring groups.*

*Kuga has maintained a good sense of humour in spite of all he has gone through. Indeed he is a polite and funny man.*

*He is a person who would love to be teaching and studying. Indeed he tells us he would love to marry, to have a normal life. Instead he feels he is just surviving. He says his brain is dying. He respects all religions and he has attended rituals in his own Hindu tradition, Mass at the local Catholic church, a mosque (when the authorities allowed).*

### **Community detention and a challenge ahead.**

As well as holding people in detention, the Australian government also uses a form of detention referred to as 'community detention', where people live in the community but in a specified place determined by the government (known as 'residence determinations'), under certain restrictions. The Community Detention (Community Residence Determination) Program places asylum seekers in community-based accommodation while waiting for an outcome on their visa application. Community detention is not a visa category: asylum seekers are still considered within immigration detention for visa purposes and are subject to certain restrictions. However for those who are eligible, it provides an alternative to closed immigration detention facilities.

A number of service providers are funded by the Home Affairs Department, through the Status Resolution Support Services program, to provide support to asylum seekers in community detention, including families with children, unaccompanied minors and individual adults. The community detention program provides access to housing, financial support and access to schooling and healthcare.

In Victoria there are about 260 people in community detention (77 women, 94 men and 89 children). Most have been in this situation for more than 4 years. Home Affairs are winding back this program and many of the 260 here will be exited from the program. This means they will get a Bridging visa but no supports. This will be another group to find accommodation and employment.

### **Employment**

As reported in the last newsletter, the 6 men who went to Yarck to pack cherries worked through the 10 weeks season and enjoyed the experience. BASP was delighted to see this initiative reported on the ABC 7.30 program and on ABC online. One of the men said he was loving it - it provided routine, a reason to get up, feeling productive, and earning money. At the end of the season, 2 moved onto to picking and packing hydroponic tomatoes in Mansfield, one was able to move to Queensland and be with a cousin and 2 returned to pre COVID jobs in Melbourne.

Since then another 2 have moved to Mansfield for work there. A further 7 went to Mildura. 2 stayed through the Christmas January period as planned and one returned because he was too slow for the work. The other 4 also returned finding it too hard and too hot. It's not for everyone but a wonderful opportunity for some. Again we thank the local support these men have received from the local community including Rural Australians for Refugees.

## Many of our newsletter recipients donate to BASP so this is how your donations help.



**BASP Housing** support doubled in 2020. Currently we assist around 255 people directly with housing and quite a lot more with paying utility and other bills when it is impossible for people to pay themselves.

BASP continues to support approximately 135 people per month in housing that we have some responsibility for eg through donated houses, rentals by BASP, community host housing. The actual cost of this housing is around \$29,000 - \$30,000 per month in rentals but would be \$18,000 more if market rent was fully paid. (BASP ceased the lease on 3 properties in the last 2-3 months as residents needed to move on.)

Some of those living in BASP houses had paid rent and utilities prior to COVID but this contribution dropped for many during the pandemic. Some of these are now returning to work and making rental payments.

As well as the 135 people per month BASP continues to support, in 2020 we assisted a further 120 people a month with paying rent on properties they were renting themselves. This rose to a peak of \$55,300 in September and was at \$41,700 in December 2020.

BASP also gives **emergency relief money** to people who have no income. This has averaged at \$30,000 a month over the past seven months.

### Transition Support

Early 2020, two women with grown families elsewhere, moved in to one of the BASP women's share house, hoping to soon secure enough work and then move into independent living. Then Covid came, jobs dried up and they stayed far longer than they or we anticipated. During that time, they continued to seek work and/ prepare for work so by early this year, one had built up enough cleaning to move into a unit and the other secured a job at Free to Feed enabling her to move into her own apartment. While their stay was longer than anticipated, it had a silver lining for a young mum and baby who moved in late 2020 - getting the wisdom of a couple of experienced mothers and grandmothers when she most needed it.

Their places have been quickly filled by a woman in her 50's with a chronic disease and insufficient funds for private rental and a young woman, needing to enhance her English before she can seek work and become self sufficient.

### Ongoing support.

Not all those we support are able to move on to independence. One family came seeking rental support in December, having had their benefits stopped, thus rendering them unable to pay rent or bills. The wife cares for her husband who has a debilitating illness and has 2 school aged children and one at TAFE. BASP is assisting with rent and some ER, while they also get assistance from Red Cross for bills and other daily expenses.

We are finding a number of individuals whose bridging visas have expired and not renewed even though the visa processing is still in train. This makes it difficult to get work or cover their costs.

Kay and Peter brought this car (from their daughter Victoria) to give to Chantelle. It was a most generous gift—coming even with the money for the Vic Roads change of ownership.

Chantelle was so excited with the car and it will make her job as a cleaner working in different places so much easier and more efficient.



Walk for

# JUSTICE & a fair go for REFUGEES

Release ALL refugees - End Offshore Processing - Bring Them Here  
Permanent Visas - Income Support - Family Reunion



**Palm Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> March**  
**2pm State Library** cnr Swanston & La Trobe Sts Melbourne

## Palm Sunday 2021

Palm Sunday walks will be held in every major city in Australia in 2021.

Posters (as pictured here) will be available very shortly. If you could distribute some of these—or help get them displayed in places—we would like to hear from you.

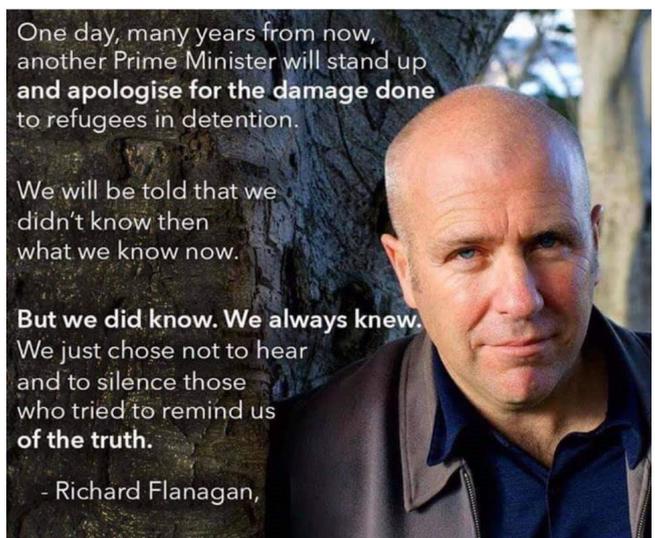
This is a chance to show solidarity with many individuals and groups who want to welcome people seeking refuge and treat all those who have arrived with dignity and care.

It is also good to have banners, signs or any visuals to make a good spectacle as we walk down Swanston street. The walk will end at the park opposite the Arts Centre.

There will be performances from artists with a refugee background from 1.30 at the library site.

### What issues still need to be kept before the community?

1. Asylum seekers in the community need **access to work rights** and ongoing **appropriate income support** throughout the whole time of their applications being processed.
2. **Temporary protection visas should be abolished.** Existing temporary protection visas should be converted into permanent visas. (Temporary visas there is no chance to have family reunion and it also means those given only temporary visas cannot really establish themselves for the future).
3. There should be **time limits** for all aspects of the process of seeking asylum. Three months detention should be a maximum and one month if a person has serious mental health issues. If the whole process takes any longer than a year the person should be given a visa to stay.
4. Bridging visas should be renewed until a final decision is made because many people are living without any visa and therefore are without any rights—including work rights, Medicare or income.





Ruby made \$100 busking (cello) and donated it all to helping asylum seekers. And as well drew this great picture. This is not the first time Ruby has helped in this way.



BASP gets offers of employment from people from time to time and it is wonderful when the right match occurs.

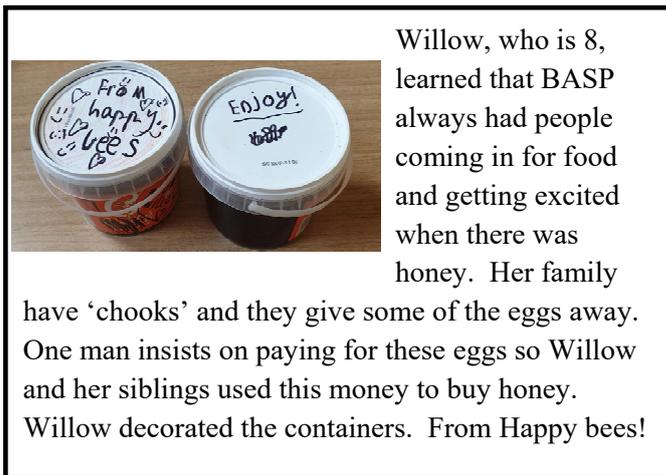
Marian, a volunteer who helps with employment received the following message from an employer—  
“I have wanted to contact you for a while now to thank you for introducing me to Farhiya! She tried out before Christmas and is now working for me 2 days a week. You were right she is reliable, trustworthy, hard working and is a breath of fresh air!! It's always difficult to find the right people but you have made it easy for me on this occasion.”

### Amazing help

John Meyer and his asylum seeker offsider, Sara, continue to work tirelessly each week, collecting donated goods and delivering them to asylum seekers houses.

We have 3 garages for storage so when these are full, we have to forego some offers but we are most appreciative of the goods we receive.

Where possible we do seek assistance from people seeking asylum to give them experience and income. Another man didn't hesitate to help clean up a paint spill recently and a husband and wife team are increasing their gardening service to BASP and others.

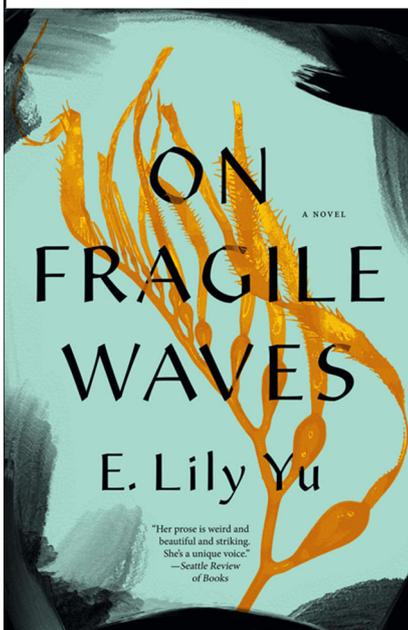


Willow, who is 8, learned that BASP always had people coming in for food and getting excited when there was honey. Her family

have 'chooks' and they give some of the eggs away. One man insists on paying for these eggs so Willow and her siblings used this money to buy honey. Willow decorated the containers. From Happy bees!

"An extraordinary achievement—original in voice, powerful in material, a book of brutal beauty and unflinching compassion. May it be noticed and read and praised and believed." Karen Joy Fowler

On Fragile Waves is published February 2021 by Erewhon



The story: Firuzeh and her brother Nour are children of fire, born in an Afghanistan fractured by war. When their parents, their Atay and Abay, decide to leave, they spin fairy tales of their destination, the mythical land and opportunities of Australia.

As the family journeys from Pakistan to Indonesia to Nauru, heading toward a hope of home, they must rely on fragile and temporary shelters, strangers both mercenary and kind, and friends who vanish as quickly as they're found.

When they arrive in Australia, what seemed like a stable shore gives way to treacherous currents. Neighbors, classmates, and the government seek their own ends, indifferent to the family's fate. For Firuzeh, her fantasy worlds provide some relief, but as her family and home splinter, she must surface from these imaginings and find a new way.

Brigid spent some time with Lily when she was in Australia researching this novel (as did some other people). Lily has donated the three payments she received for the book to BASP.

It would be great if we asked local bookstores for a copy—and then maybe they would become available here.



## Christmas Support

While Christmas seems a long time ago, we again want to acknowledge the additional generosity shown to people seeking asylum, via BASP. Despite the challenges of 2020, we again received wonderful hampers from St Finbar's in Brighton.



New handbags for Christmas

The Kildare Ministries schools in Victoria and St Augustine's school in Kyabram sent generous and creative collections for distribution.

We were thrilled to receive goods from a number of parishes including St Martin's Hawksburn with Christ Church South Yarra, who also delivered women's handbags with toiletries as a treat for the mums and young women we know. Many of these groups bring

food regularly.

These were organised at the centre by Noelle Mawdsley and then delivered across the metropolitan area by volunteers and were received with thanks



A happy family getting a hamper before heading off for a holiday in Lorne courtesy of an amazing family.

and appreciation by so many. Comments such as "Thanks a lot for my Christmas card and present as well. It means a lot to me in my life"; Merry Christmas and thank you for your wonderful help always"; Thank you for the wonderful presents- we were really surprised when we found that on the doorstep. Feel like Santa came early this year". One text of thanks read "May God blast you" We hope it meant 'bless'!

Also feedback from those delivering reflected the appreciation, such as "she was excited and so happy to receive



Some of the hampers from St Finbars



A delivery from Clonard College

At Christmas we also received the following message from someone we had helped a year earlier but had been self-sufficient since March 2020- "Last year I was homeless nearly 40 days. I came your place December 11. You organised room for me. You gave me clothes, food items and money. I never forget your help in my life. Now I am living in Dandenong." 🙏🙏🙏

In January, we saw many families who were struggling to pay for school books and uniforms. Australia prides itself on offering a free education but that is not quite true!

BASP was able to help 30 children with school requisites. This was a contribution of \$9000 from the Brigidine Education Relief fund which many staff in Brigidine schools contribute to.

Thanks to Mark and Julie here at BASP for organizing all this—not actually an easy task negotiating with different firms and families.



Brigidfest is organized each year by a committee of the Celtic Club. This year it was held on 7th February. The event was very enjoyable.

The guest speaker was The Hon. Gabrielle Williams who spoke on the unique challenges experienced by women in resistance

movements and the uniquely feminine experience of resistance itself.

The proceeds will be donated to BASP. Thanks.



Port Philip Council is a long-time supporter of BASP and contributes funds through the Meals Subsidy Program. These

funds help BASP to maintain a pantry for those who visit the Centre and fill bags that get delivered by our volunteers to those who cannot get to us.

In 2020 the Council added an extra amount of money to the fund during the worst part of the COVID pandemic. People who had lost jobs and had no other income were able to get food and other household goods.



BASP would like to acknowledge the financial support of The Department of Premier and Cabinet of the culturally and linguistically diverse [CALD] communities that were impacted during the COVID pandemic.

The pandemic was especially hard on asylum seekers and refugees who had lost their SRSS benefit or their jobs during the pandemic and were not entitled to job seeker or job keeper benefit.

With the money received, we have been able to give vouchers to buy household necessities and food for people who have been especially affected.



Thuya, originally from Burma makes contact with BASP every now and again. He lived in the

Ardeer house from 2010 till 2012. He is very grateful for the support he received. In fact he brought a large cake over on the plane when he visited a few years ago. The photo here was taken at that time.

We were very touched when Thuya sent us a donation with the message 'Thanks for all your help as well as Sister (Catherine) and Sister Martin'.

Thuya works at the Perth airport. He is employed by a catering firm to move the food and beverages on to the plane. He got a heavy duty truck licence soon after leaving our BASP house and this enabled him to get the job he now still has.

**Volunteers** continue to provide meaningful contacts for many of the people we work with and assist in ways we did not envisage in the initial introductions. One took in a young mum and her baby for a night before they could get into a supportive residential facility to assist with bonding and mothering. Another was contacted at short notice to see if he could drive a mother and adult daughter to Mansfield to work and family reunion before the recent 5 day lockdown at midnight that night. He dropped everything, collected them and got there and back in time!. Amazing effort.

We also had a long time supporter offer a self contained area of her home to an asylum seeker before Christmas. It was evident that a car would be needed for the person which co-incided with a generous offer from the Brigidine sisters of one which had become available.

Kalai is loving the opportunity that has been afforded her and the supporter and her family are also very pleased with the arrangement. Kalai is able to complete her Aged Care course in the area and will then seek work.



**John J has been a long time BASP volunteer/friend to Abere, a man from Ethiopia originally who has been granted permanent residency in Australia now. He let us know that despite an awful work injury a couple of years ago, Abere Belay has been awarded Australia's 2021 IOC Refugee Scholarship Holder. The announcement outlined his background.**

Twenty-six-year-old Belay grew up on a farm in Gondor, Ethiopia, where he would help his family before and after school. He would walk a 12-kilometre round trip to and from school every day, a long-distance for most, but not for the future marathon runner.

Belay had always loved running and at the age of 15, realised that it was a passion he could turn into a career. "Running makes me happy, I always loved the challenge of strong competition and enjoy feeling fit and strong," Belay said. "I had good endurance, so I started running the 1500 m and then the 10,000 m before I moved up to half marathon. When I was 19, I ran my first marathon."

Abere's talent was soon recognised by a local club, then he began training with the Ethiopian National Team in Addis Ababa and was selected for the national cross-country and road events teams. With each new milestone, Abere's excitement grew, because a successful athletics career meant that he could earn a good living and support his family, who largely live off the land.

In 2014, Abere set a personal best time of 2:08:18 in the 42 km Dubai Marathon, where he finished eighth. The same year, he came to Australia to participate in the Melbourne Marathon where he finished third. In 2016, he came second in the Zurich Marathon before winning the Dakar Marathon in 2017. Abere was invited to compete in the Melbourne Marathon for a second time in 2017, although this time, he pulled out of the race due to the conflict back home and was unable to return to Ethiopia.

The government at the time was targeting people of Abere's region, locking them up, torturing them and killing them. That government was replaced, but the new government is still at war with Sudan over land, with the fighting happening close to Abere's home, making it very dangerous for his family.

Fearing for his life and wanting to give himself the best chance of survival, he sought refuge in Australia and after going through the asylum-seeking process, was granted permanent residency.

When he found out he had been selected to receive the IOC Refugee Scholarship, Belay was elated. "I was very, very happy when I received the scholarship. It has changed my life completely," he said.



### **A note that warms the heart**

**In April, 2018 Bernadette and her husband Nick welcomed a young man into their home at short notice. They moved mountains to help him adjust to the Australian environment, clearly making a significant long term connection with him. Bernadette sent this message just before Christmas.**

*We had a visit a few Saturdays ago from Brian Agina. The Kenyan kid who was the young boxer from the Commonwealth Games. He stayed with us for 3 months and then went to Warrnambool where everything is going so very well for this warm happy 20 year old.*

*He has completed 2<sup>nd</sup> year of his mechanic apprenticeship and has got his car license. He has shifted out into a share house. He'd got his hair braided in Footscray and his broad smile was great to see. We convinced him to stay the night rather than drive back to Warrnambool in the one day. His manners are impeccable – he rang me to let me know that he'd got back to Warrnambool safely and he copes with my 100 questions. He rings every so often, it's always great to hear from him.*

**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, cooking oil, Cans of fruit and tomatoes.

Blocks or individual wrapped cheese. Eggs.

Long life milk, tea and coffee, cheese, **honey is a most appreciated food**, 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

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. We will send a newsletter but feel free to tell us that you don't want one.



*Thank You*

We thank all of you who assist the Project. Many send messages of encouragement and these are very encouraging. Many give help towards the material support of the asylum seekers. We recognise that this comes from wanting to give hope and a measure of well-being to those BASP supports.

It is hard to know where this will all end. The one thing we have is our voice and we can be inspired by people like Martin Luther King who said "We begin to die the day we don't act on things that matter."

BASP endorses and is part of a lot of joint actions on behalf of justice for asylum seekers. We believe we are representing those who support us in these endeavours. We encourage you to write to, ring or contact in any way your local MP and try to get him/her to become more knowledgeable and more concerned about this issue. We are convinced that this is where change will come. Just between us, it is staggering how little most MPs know! There are a few significant exceptions.

Brigid Arthur

Libby Saunders

(BASP Coordinators)