

STRENGTH AND KINDNESS

Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP)



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

Newsletter 101 May 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

Australia and its refugee policies: A story of blunders

A time to rebuild, renew and reimagine

Most people who have any real understanding of what is happening to asylum seekers in Australia agree that the whole system is draconian. It's actually a euphemism to call it a system because there is a lot about it that is unpredictable, chaotic, illogical and basically stupid. We have been sold the lie that our policies are in our national interest – it could never be in our national interest to harm other human beings the way we are doing.

Policies get passed and implemented within a certain culture and every culture is built and maintained by narrative. So the strong narrative that demonizes people seeking asylum as a clique of 'cagey opportunists queue jumping' to leech off the Australian taxpayer makes it easy to get policies agreed to. The human cost of what is happening is rarely acknowledged outside of the circle of advocates and activists.

Refugee policy has been cast for the past twenty years as an issue of border security. It has certainly never been that. A picture of a tsunami of small fishing boats filled with desperate people coming to attack us should be ludicrous and yet it is still being peddled to justify what we have done to those who arrived by boat some seven or eight years ago.

Sadly, the politicisation of refugee policy since the Tampa crisis of 2001 indicates that our major political parties are incapable of the kind of honest and open decision-making that is required in this complex and vexed policy space. One sad part of this is that the existing scaffold has bipartisan political support.



We have no real debate about why we have this policy, why we continue to practice it or how we are going to stop—how to get out of this mess. Both major political parties have been complicit in the many and varied moves that have got us to where we are now and both (with a few variations) still publicly support it. Operational secrecy is a plank of the policy and debate sits very uneasily in this context. Governments seem to believe they don't have to give the Australian public any information about what is happening for this support to continue. As long as the government stubbornly insists on concealing what is happening, it will remain difficult for us to have a frank, informed and open policy debate about either our refugee policies, or border security.

“When we see others as the enemy, we risk becoming what we hate. When we oppress others, we end up oppressing ourselves. All of our humanity is dependent upon recognizing the humanity in others.”

— Desmond Tutu

Donations to the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project are tax deductible

Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) : a cynical exercise!

In December 2014 after a lot of party machinations, a Bill was submitted to the Parliament to reintroduce Temporary Protection Visas and to introduce a new Safe Haven Enterprise visas (SHEV). The Bill made appeals against initial adverse decisions more limited. It had other cruel aspects to it. There was long and furious debate—the Government needed crossbench and independent Members of Parliament to get it passed. Then it all came down to the vote of Ricky Muir from the Motoring Enthusiast Party. In return for a promise to bring children from Christmas Island to the mainland Muir cast his vote for the Bill.

The SHEV was poorly thought through—and proved to be a cynical move. Clive Palmer argued that regional areas in the grip of labour shortages would benefit if refugees were wooed away from big cities. He said he would vote for the Bill to entice asylum seekers to move to regional areas. The regions had to self nominate to be classified as ‘regional’.

A Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (**SHEV**) is one of two types of temporary protection visas available to those claiming asylum who came by boat. The other is a TPV (Temporary Protection visa). The SHEV provides protection for five years (compared to the three available under the TPV).

A person seeking asylum will meet the Safe Haven Enterprise visa (SHEV) pathway requirements if, for a total of 3-and-a-half years (42 months) while on a SHEV, they have been:

- * employed in a SHEV regional area and not received certain social security benefits, or
- * enrolled and physically attending full-time study in a SHEV regional area, or
- * a combination of the above

If an asylum seeker meets these requirements, they may be able to apply for other visas in Australia. Ongoing work in a regional area is difficult to get and to study in Australia on a Bridging visa (unless offered a scholarship) means paying overseas student fees and these are too high for asylum seekers.

There were 12,366 SHEV holders as of December 2020, according to Home Affairs figures. However, not one refugee has been able to take advantage of a loophole in the federal government’s long-held vow never to permanently settle asylum seekers who arrived in Australia by boat, new figures show.

Offered as a glimmer of hope, the strict regulations around the rare visa pathway mean they have been designed as near impossible to meet.

From the beginning the government predicted that not many SHEV holders would be able to complete the pathway.

We believe every person seeking asylum should be afforded permanent protection Telling vulnerable people who are seeking asylum in Australia that their protection is dependent on their capacity to work certain jobs in certain regions is not only deeply cynical, but contrary to international human rights law.

As for the carrot of getting children out of detention, there is still no law that prevents children being put in detention—so it can happen again. And indeed there are the two little girls from Biloela back on Christmas Island. There are many children in community detention—with no visas and no secure future. There are also thousands of children in situations in Australia with no family income, no security for the future. Indeed all that advocates feared in late 2014 has come to pass.



From The Guardian 12/8/2019



BASP Trivia fundraiser

St Mary's Hampton Annual Trivia fundraiser in support of the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project will be online for two big nights this year.

When?

Friday 16 July 7.30pm to 9.40pm

Friday 8 October 7.30pm to 9.40pm

Where?

**Create a team of up to 12 people, in your home or different locations.
Small groups are welcome.**

We suggest a minimum donation of \$30 per team member.

You will need a **tablet** (iPad, Android) or a **computer with sound** (a webcam would be nice but not essential). You will get a link for the Zoom online chat service and use your web browser to answer the trivia questions.

Please register your team asap!

To **register your team**, email Colette with your contact details and your team's name. Registering soon will help us get organised. We will be in touch with event information and updates.

More information

Check out our website at <https://cohdig.co/trivia>

Contact: Colette Foxworthy, colfoxw@gmail.com phone 03 9598 7329

Help from Foundations and Trusts and Fund raising

For many years BASP has received an annual donation from the Father Kevin Broderick Trust Account. This Trust is administered by a committee, chaired by Mr Frank O'Brien. BASP acknowledges the help given each year from this Trust. Money has been used to help individuals and families with material needs, especially when there is a one-off crisis.

Frank is also a member of Rotary club of Central Melbourne. This club has also been generous to BASP. Towards the end of last year they made a great donation of backpacks, shoes of many kinds, t-shirts and other clothes for our asylum seeker friends.

Several Foundations support our work. Many have asked not to be identified so of course we respect that. Some schools, parishes and community groups like Grandmothers for Refugees, Rural Australians for Refugees and other quite small groups send us money from fund-raising activities. BASP doesn't have the personnel or resources to raise money ourselves. So it is absolutely wonderful that these initiatives happen without any time or effort from us! The trivia nights advertised above are a shining example of this—please support this ongoing contribution to BASP.

Fund-raising is never just about the money (although that is so important) but it is always an opportunity to increase awareness of the issues and building a community to demand change from our leaders.

People facing destitution

The Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP) has spent \$1,228,390 over the twelve-month period April 2020 till March 2021 on rent assistance and emergency relief cash payments for asylum seekers. This is unsustainable.

In fact this is less than is actually provided because we have 11 properties where we don't pay rent because they have been given by donors, short or long term, to BASP to use. If we assigned a value to these, the amount of housing provided would have been at least \$1.5m over the twelve months. BASP maintained housing on average for 260 people seeking asylum per month. This is funded solely from donations from the community – individuals and groups.

In BASP we are very conscious that the financial assistance we provide is the bare minimum needed for people's survival. Much more financial assistance would be required to give ongoing security and a decent living.

Of particular significance for BASP is the Extreme Hardship Support Program (EHP). This was established in October 2020 by the Victorian Government to provide emergency financial assistance to people who are not eligible for any Commonwealth Government income support. It was designed to help with basic support during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. It has been administered by the Red Cross and the Brotherhood of St Lawrence. Each single person who qualifies can receive up to \$800 every second month. The program will finish at the end of June 2021.

The experience of BASP is that the EHP has been an essential element in keeping many individuals and families from homelessness. Without this program, we know the needs of the people approaching BASP for help will increase significantly. As examples, currently we may pay for one month's rental and the money received from the EHP may cover the next month or two. Or those recipients of EHP may be able to pay their rent and BASP pays bills for utilities.

BASP could not have sustained the levels of assistance given pre October. Once the EHP commenced, we encouraged all who approached us to try Red Cross first and return to us if unable to be assisted - often a timing issue for rental payments. From October 2020, the BASP Emergency Relief dropped by \$10,000 per month and the rental support reduced by \$20,000 pm. That is \$180,000 for 6 months for those we had previously supported plus an unknown number we referred on to Red Cross.

The real risk of homelessness and destitution

Covid and the lockdown impacted many people seeking asylum. Many who had casual work have lost it and have not been reemployed. However, as well as this impact, the Federal Government continues to stop SRSS payments to people, leaving them without income and often without any real prospect of securing work in post lockdown times. On the next page we give some examples of the situation for some.

Work continues to be a challenge for many. Some do not have work rights. Others have physical and mental health issues and /language issues impacting any ability to find work.

Ongoing financial support is essential to keep many families and individuals from homelessness and destitution. At BASP we understand that the other organisations that assist people seeking asylum with accommodation are also stretched to capacity.

We urge as many people as possible to contact your local Federal and State Member of Parliament to urge both levels of Government to assist people seeking asylum with no income. While asylum seekers are not technically a State government responsibility, homelessness is, and this will be the outcome if many people lose this support. And the Federal Government has the power to change the current system.

Examples of the people needing help to maintain a roof over their heads

- A couple who came to Australia separately as asylum seekers, met here and married. They therefore have separate applications for protection. They now have two small children. For a while the mother and one of the children had SRSS but now no-one does. The father has been rejected at the Appeals stage and he has a 2021 Federal Circuit Court date. The mother has had no interview so far. The father's BV has expired and there is little prospect it will be renewed. The rent is \$1738 per month. BASP has paid rent some months, helped with bills and essentials such as nappies and food. While anyone in the house was getting SRSS they were not eligible for The Extreme Hardship money. The father has tried to get work—fruit picking, painting, flooring but no ongoing work due to his visa situation.
- A woman who is full time carer for her husband with a chronic disease, two school aged children and an eighteen year old doing an apprenticeship.
- A single mother with two primary school age children, a brother who has chronic mental health issues whom she supports.
- A single father who has acute mental health issues and a ten year old son who can't understand what is happening.
- A young man who was falsely accused of a crime, put back into detention for over a year, cleared of any wrong doing—but still waiting for the Minister to reinstate his visa—so no right to work, Medicare or income and this has gone on for well over a year.
- Another young man who hasn't had a Bridging Visa for years. All the other people he knows who came on the same boat from his country have visas.



We could go on and on

So the demand for housing continues as ever. However, it is also pleasing to see some of those we have supported with housing, move into their own rental properties, having secured regular income to be able to do so.

One family with elderly parents were with us for three years and now two of the sons have secure work and are able to cover the family costs. Another family were with us for two years and are some of the very few continuing to receive regular government income support. They are now able to move into a rental home of choice. A single man was able to move from shared housing to a place of his own once work became regular post Covid. This is the aim for people with the permission and ability to seek work. Others are not in that position and continue to face homelessness if not assisted.

With these folks moving, we are able to offer the homes they have vacated to others in need. The family homes will accommodate people unable to work, for whom no benefits are available and whose private rental BASP paid for through Covid. We have many more requests than we have homes and continue to pay rentals for some people, but we cannot afford this for every request.

Harry Prout, a Marist brother working in West Heidelberg, has negotiated for BASP to take on 2 houses in that area, paying \$500 per month for each house. These have been greatly appreciated. A parish is considering payment of at least one of the monthly rents which will be of great assistance to the families moving in – and to BASP! One woman moving in with her brother was overcome with the house and the goodwill being offered. They are both unwell, have had to beg for help across a number of charities to make ends meet since her SRSS was stopped. Her relief was palpable.

A couple of people seeking accommodation have found a home with community hosts, who have made a room in their home available. This is not an option for every person seeking asylum but is wonderful when the right match occurs. Many thanks to all who have assisted with housing in a variety of ways.

The Budget—little joy for People seeking Asylum

- \$800 million each year for 238 people in Nauru and PNG.—virtually \$3.4 million for each person per year. In fact it may be more because there are other figures which are hidden in different expenses. Presumably most of this money goes to the Governments of the two countries (hush money?).
- Income support for vulnerable people on Bridging Visas (SRSS) has been cut from \$35 million to \$33 million (so not much room for new people to be added to the program and still more cuts for others).
- A cost blowout in onshore detention and compliance, with over \$1.279 billion spent in one year
- The continuation of the ceiling of 13,750 places for the Refugee and Humanitarian Program, with this cut from previous years to be maintained until 2024-25. This is a further blow to people waiting for family reunion.

The increased funding to address the backlog of cases within the Migration and Refugee Division of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal is welcome. As is funding to support refugee women and other migrant women's safety and social and economic inclusion if they are survivors of family violence.

Statistics that matter

Offshore processing is when Australia sends people to another country to process their refugee claims. (The Australian Government calls this 'regional processing'). Australia has been sending people who come by boat to Nauru and Manus Island, Papua New Guinea since 2001. It stopped the practice in 2008, but began again in 2012. Some people also call it 'offshore detention' because these people were detained in centres in Nauru or Manus Island.

The renewal of off-shore detention in 2012 was supposed to be a short term measure to deter people coming to Australia by boat. Almost **eight years** later, staggeringly, **1428** remain as part of our offshore detention regime. Of this group, only **425** have a possible durable solution for resettlement, mostly in the US or Canada. Our Government continues to resist the offer of New Zealand to resettle some of these refugees. That leaves **over one thousand people who have no durable solution to their circumstances**.

Of this number, **130** remain in PNG, **109** are on Nauru and around **1200** people who have been off-shore are in detention in Australia. Some of this group are in locked detention, others are in community detention and others, including people recently released from hotel detention in Melbourne, Brisbane and Darwin are in the community on Final Departure Bridging visas. This last group has been given virtually no support, expected after eight years in detention to be able to find work and look after themselves in this post-COVID world, until they can be deported or another resettlement solution can be found.

There are 10,132 people on a current Bridging Visa E living in the community (at 31 December 2020). They are barred from applying for temporary or permanent protection because they came by boat on or after 19 July 2013. 45% are in Victoria, 37% in NSW, and 7.6% in Queensland. Approximately **1,900** are children (1,017 in Victoria and 490 in NSW). Source: Department of Home Affairs.

There are **2,226 people living in the community who are waiting for their expired BVEs to be renewed**. When a visa expires a person's work and Medicare rights are suspended. Source: Department of Home Affairs.

[This is the most vulnerable group of all because they have no rights and technically could be redetained at any time].

31,189 people are seeking asylum in Australia from the 'IMA Legacy Caseload' (at Feb 2021). Of whom **4,530** are awaiting a final decision. Source: Department of Home Affairs.

Can we change our narrative to one of Truth, Justice and Mercy. These are stark reminders of the distance we have to go.

**WRONG
WAY
GO BACK**

In the last couple of weeks it was announced that around 1,100 asylum seekers will be interviewed about their refugee claims by the Department of Home Affairs before the end of next month. Most of these people came to Australia in 2012-13. They were initially not allowed to make an application for protection. Then they were given a short time in 2017 to lodge their claim. They have not had any interview since then and their cases have just been waiting for attention. Now they will be given two weeks notice to come to an interview. Some of these people don't have a migration agent or lawyer, some have no documents, some are women who have separated from their partners and have a case tied to another person and so on.

Lawyers are warning that asylum seekers in Australia could be sent back to danger because of this sudden rush to have their cases processed.

Two responses?

Recently Greg Hunt, Minister for Health, suffered from cellulitis. Mr Hunt spent the night under observation in hospital as doctors pumped him with fluid and antibiotics. Mr Hunt made a full recovery which is good. We have an extremely good health service which can cure such medical conditions.

Cellulitis is a bacterial infection of the skin and the tissues just under it. It is usually caused by staphylococcus aureus (golden staph) and group A beta-haemolytic streptococcus and can result in the infected area becoming inflamed and painful.

In 2014, twenty four year old asylum seeker Hamid Khazaei contracted a leg infection (cellulitis) in the Manus Island detention centre and was declared brain dead within a fortnight. He died after a series of clinical errors and delays, including a lack of antibiotics and a doctor's request for an urgent transfer denied by immigration officials.

A new bill was rushed through Parliament on the last sitting day for this session. This legislation enables people to be detained indefinitely. Ben Doherty in the Guardian (16/5) says indefinite detention of refugees is unlawful under international law, but Australia has quietly made it legal.

It seems certain that the law was tabled in direct response to a federal court case, AJL20, decided against the government in September last year, when the court ruled that immigration detention must be "for a purpose", essentially either considering a visa grant or removal from the country.

AJL20 was a child refugee from Syria whose visa was cancelled on character grounds because of criminal convictions as a teenager, so he was detained by the government. He could not be returned to Syria because he faced persecution there, so he faced a potentially limitless detention. The court ruled his detention was unlawful and ordered him released. He is currently free.

The government has appealed the decision to the high court, but regardless, the new law seeks to expressly allow the government to detain refugees such as AJL20 for as long as it likes, potentially for the rest of his life. AJL20 is 29 years old.

This cynical move has been repeated many times in Australia over the past few decades.

Imagine the feeling of hopelessness for the people in Melbourne MITA who have been detained already for over eight years.



One of the women we housed through Covid moved to the Bellarine area in December thanks to a woman offering a place in her home. On hearing of this, Clonard, the Kildare Ministries school in Geelong, wanted to do what it could to assist her in her new community. They made contact when a vacancy arose in the canteen and the asylum seeker is thrilled to have work and the support and understanding of the school. The process did show how much we take for granted. She was sent superannuation forms to complete but she had no idea what this was. A Clonard staff member welcomed her to come in and she assisted with explaining what this was and how to complete the documentation.



We hear so many stories of desperate need, it is always a delight to hear of success. Often these are about family reunion.



A mother of 3 boys called early this year to let us know that she and her 3 boys had received their permanent visas. This was after much heart ache along the way, rejections from Immigration initially and a mother's determination to have her family together. BASP has helped with legal and social support over several years, so we were one of the first calls she made with her news.

Another young woman who fled Pakistan five years ago also had amazing news. Her partner, also in fear of the Taliban, was able to join her here last month. This surprised us given the limited flights coming in to Australia and the much longer delays for many people seeking family reunion. However, we were delighted for their good fortune. (Hardly any partner visas are successful because the departmental regulation is: The lowest priority processing should be given [when] the applicant's sponsor entered Australia as an Illegal Maritime Arrival. - Department of Home Affairs)



Other times we get partial good news—but still agonizingly just short of happening. A man whose wife and sons are in Saudi Arabia has had an acceptance for part of his family to come—and not all! And as yet no time for when this will happen. One of the reasons for a son not being allowed to come was that originally he had opted to stay and look after his grandmother (who has since died).

Words of thanks

Brigid and Libby often receive thanks for the help people get from BASP. This of course can only be provided because of those who support us. So these thanks are for all those people.

“Hi, my landlord just informed that he received him to my rent (from BASP). And I received money to me as well from you for my medicine. ... I appreciate everything very much. This is a big helping hand for us in our time of need.”

“Hope you're doing well. I don't know if you remember me, I was the recipient of generosity of you and your institution during those terrible days last year that helped me to survive it and be able to find a part time job then I've found a full time job at Metro train which I'm starting next week that will stabilize my financial situation immensely but, as I said, this all wouldn't have been possible if you didn't extend your helping hand at the right time with such a generosity and kindness. I wanted to extend my many, many thanks to you and your institutions. Appreciate it greatly, all the best to you.”

From someone we helped in the past and is now driving Uber. We asked him to drive an older woman to an appointment for payment—“No No - I will never forget what's you're doing for me when I am in the big problem, this is not big thing to do, any time happy to help people like me on my potential.” He took her to her hospital appointment for free. From another man, who came to Australia for work but was unable to return to Ethiopia due to the unrest there and being targeted. He is in one of our houses, being assisted by a volunteer with English and work “You saved my life”.

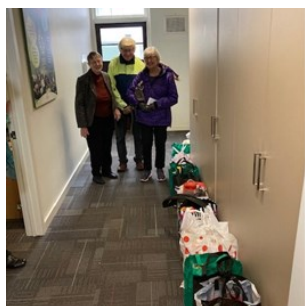
From an ASRC case worker with whom BASP has worked closely “So many people are blessed BASP exists!”



A man who was independent prior to Covid but lost work and room because of it was referred to BASP for housing. He is now with a couple in their home while he seeks to find work and re-establish himself. He also wanted a place where he could give sitar lessons to previous pupils. A call to St Brigid's church in North Fitzroy was met with a "Yes, of course - send him down!" The lessons have not as yet recommenced but the openness to help him was heart-warming.



Michael and Eleanor from St Peters by the Lake parish in Paynesville brought groceries from their small band of very generous people. (Paynesville is 300 km from Melbourne).



Palm Sunday walk 2021

This year there were more people seeking asylum walking with us. The day seemed more positive somehow even though we still face such an up-hill battle for justice.

Brigid spoke and we include one bit from her talk:

With the current emphasis on gender equity could I put a case that it is the women and children who are tending to be invisible and particularly vulnerable at this stage.

- Children often have to act as interpreters as their parents are reduced to begging for help. They are often put in situations no children or young people should be.
 - Mothers in particular do without all sorts of things to get school lunches, school books and uniforms for their kids.
 - Mothers mainly make meals out of the least expensive food they can find.
 - The stress of living in insecurity and difficulty has caused a lot of family breakdown and single parents are usually single mothers – often single mothers with no extended family support.
 - Some things we know will come back to haunt our country – one is : For years, there have been tragic accounts of rape and sexual abuse of females in Nauru, including by those paid to protect them. The accounts have come from people who lived through these experiences or who witnessed them, and have been reported in multiple official reports. At least 24 women have been flown to Australia to terminate pregnancies, many of these pregnancies a result of rape.
 - There are quite elderly women with no support – and sick, one virtually blind.
 - There are young women with babies and no support.
- So a plea for more action focused on women and children.**

When people get a place to live in (after a time of total uncertainty) they are often overwhelmed with their luck.

Recently we visited a house where three of the recently released Medivac men had moved in. They show us their house with pride. (It's a house BASP has rented but not sure how much of this they understand).

One says: It's a big house.

It's a big back yard (we think to ourselves: 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 (We have heard that before).

The joy of being able to make some decisions—where the bus goes and how to visit some friends and what to buy to cook is palpable—and we all soak up the moment.

The next time of fulfillment comes with a job. If you hear of any openings please let us know. Several are doing forklift training. This may be an avenue for jobs.

Volunteers continue to make a significant difference to the people they visit.

Robert began visiting a man in one of the houses, who has been physically and mentally unwell since injuring his back at work 2 years ago. His wellbeing was helped by having secure housing but still the days were long and boring. Robert made a real connection with him and discovered he'd like some goldfish. He facilitated this. Robert also realised how beneficial pool exercises would be for his recovery and approached the local leisure centre. It agreed to a free membership which will make a considerable difference to this man.

John continues to collect and deliver furniture to individuals and families in need. He couldn't resist picking up a swing set and taking to one of the families. The smile says it all.



Anne visited a family to help the parents with their English. Both parents are so physically unwell, they were unable to focus on the lessons. So she changed tack and has been providing weekly assistance to the two primary school children in the family, who are considerably behind their peers. Great initiative and so needed.



The Mariana community hosted 2 families at their beautiful Millgrove property in March. They have done this for a number of years now and those who go always enjoy their time.

Marie Tierney and a team of people from BRASA teamed up to build a safe play area for a family with a child with special needs. The volunteers were not daunted by a wet and blustery day and the family were so pleased to have the area for their daughter to play in.



Saige has been doing a student placement with BASP for the last few months. This has involved deliveries out to people in need, looking for jobs for people, as well as making rooms in one of our houses more attractive for those coming in. She has been a great help and wowed us all with her transformation of an old dresser, ready for the tip, into a "must have" piece in one of the rooms. She leaves us soon and we thank her for her work.

People help BASP in a great variety of ways. Bill Wigglesworth is a long time supporter and is a skilled craftsman. He made this table, sold it and gave the proceeds to BASP.



Noelle is our wonderful 'keeper of the pantry' and organizer of all household goods donated to us. She manages the bags of food and other necessities which other volunteers deliver to families and individuals. Amazingly she knows where everything is!

Recently Noelle was away for an operation on her foot. During her time of recuperation Barbara and Caroline filled in admirably. Everyone is pleased Noelle is back on deck with all the enthusiasm she brings to the job. Now we have two extra people who are on top of the sorting, packing and delivery runs.



My name is Teyra and I have the pleasure of being working with Jesuit Social Services and Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project since March as a Job Advocate. The Jobs Victoria Advocate Program is an initiative by the Victorian Government to help jobseekers access appropriate services. My role is to help our participants to solve their problems providing information and assistance. I navigate between job providers and jobseekers to make sure the latter access services that are tailored to their needs. In other words, referrals are made according to the needs of our participants.

Jesuit Social Services has diverse teams across the Metro Northern and Southern regions. If any person in the community needs support or information about employment, careers and services they can contact me or one of our Job Advocates, we are ready to help you. Go to our website using the QR code and fill out the registration form provided.



It was a cold still Thursday night and a busload of staff and Year 12 students from Emmanuel College in Altona North came to the park just opposite the Park Hotel in Swanton Street. Brigid and Ali (recently released from the hotel) joined them. Some of the men in the hotel used their mobile phone torches to wave, make hearts and other images. The students and staff below did the same. The school people chanted messages of encouragement. They made a circle with large lighted candles on the footpath. It was quiet—not much traffic and it seemed



like the world was just a small group of faithful protesters, a school contingent of people suddenly confronted by the reality of a city locking up innocent men and those in the hotel at least momentarily encouraged by this support. They wrote a message of thanks:



It's heartwarming .. Today we had students from the school who felt our pain and we appreciate it. They sent a photo of what they could see from their windows and another of themselves entitled 'peaceful protest inside park prison'.

To recap some history: 192 people were transferred to the mainland from Papua New Guinea and Nauru under the now-repealed Medevac laws, passed in February 2019. They were then left in hotels or immigration detention centres for eighteen months or so. In a month or so around January this year, about sixty of these men were released in Melbourne and another fifty or so were released from the Kangaroo Point Hotel in Brisbane. Mr Dutton said at the time this was because it was cheaper to have these men in the community than in detention. That explanation is implausible because Australia has spent billions of dollars locking them up for the past eight years! Another inexplicable part of the situation is that there are still thirty five men detained in the Park Hotel.

It is unclear why some detainees have been chosen for release, compared with the other men still detained in Melbourne's Park Hotel. (There are others still detained in Brisbane). It is a source of great pain as those left behind ask: Why me? Why did the others get out and not us?

Of course a bigger question for us is: why were they ever sent to Nauru and Manus Island? Why when they were brought to Australia for medical care did they get put into detention in Australia? Why have their medical needs (verified by doctors) not been attended to in any real way?

And while we are asking questions: Why wouldn't you just accept people from parts of the world in turmoil where most refugees come from? And in many cases where genocide is happening. Afghanistan, Rohingyas from Burma, Syrians, South Sudanese, Somalis, Tamils from several areas

Refugees originate from Syria (6.6 million), Venezuela (3.7 million), Afghanistan (2.7 million), South Sudan (2.2 million) and Myanmar (1.1 million) make up the other top 5 countries of origins for refugees in 2019.

We are grateful for any of the following food (or vouchers to buy food and household necessities).



The following are still very much appreciated:

Sugar, cooking oil, Cans of fruit and tomatoes.

Herbs and spices

Blocks or individual wrapped cheese. Eggs. Peanut butter.

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 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.



Times continue to be very challenging—indeed frightening for most people seeking asylum. At BASP we almost have a mantra: We think things can't get any worse and then they do! As we have outlined in this newsletter, the current situation is stretching our resources (financial and capacity in all ways) as never before. We are worried that the people we help—and those we can't—will have to beg from place to place to scrape out an existence IF they can remain housed. It is a daunting time to be facing us all, especially so many of the asylum seekers who have been struggling for 8 years since arrival.

However the silver lining is all these clouds is the level of support from you has increased and is amazing. We can't thank enough all those who work with us, help individuals and families and all those who contribute the money we are able to distribute. Every rent payment, electricity bill paid, MYKI card topped up, food parcels sent out and ... there has been a generous donor. We never take this for granted. Apart from a small amount used in administration (no salaries) all the money you donate goes directly to the needs of people seeking asylum.

Brigid Arthur

Libby Saunders

(BASP Coordinators)