**BATHURST REFUGEE SUPPORT GROUP ANNUAL REPORT 2017**

1. The Bathurst Refugee Support Group continues to be active across the Bathurst community with many of its members being able to share their experiences in other community groups.
2. Topical issues affecting Refugees and Asylum Seekers, particularly from refugee advocates, continue to be circulated to Group members via email.
3. Letters of concern relating to issues affecting Refugees and Asylum Seekers have been sent to Newspapers, Federal Ministers and Members of Parliament.
4. A submission, on behalf of the Group, has been made to the Senate Inquiry re the proposed changes to the Citizenship Laws.
5. Members of the Group attended the Bathurst Regional Council Meeting of 14th December 2016 at which the following Resolution was agreed.

“That Council: (a) Support the NSW Government proposal to re-settle Safe Haven

Enterprise Visa Holders in Bathurst; and

(b) Convenes a Refugee Employment Forum in 2017 to engage support of

Employers to promote awareness of employment opportunities in the

Bathurst Region.”

1. The Bathurst Refugee Support Group partnered with the Bathurst Regional Council and the Bathurst Migrant Support Worker in the holding of an Employment Forum on Thursday 23rd March. A useful exchange of views took place at this event.
2. The Chairperson initiated a meeting with representatives of Multicultural NSW to discuss issues concerning the regional settlement of Refugees and Asylum Seekers. Multicultural NSW was briefed on who BRSG is and what they are doing, and Multicultural NSW advised that they are working up an approach to Regional Refugee Settlement.
3. Representatives of the Group met in March with Andrew Gee MP, Member for Calare. Mr Gee was advised of who we are and the aims of the Group and how the Group attempts to help Refugees and Asylum Seekers. Mr Gee was invited to inspect the Kath Knowles House of Welcome
4. BRSG co-sponsored the showing of the film “Constance on the Edge.” The film once again brought home the realization of how our Government’s policies on “border security” are hurting the most vulnerable.
5. Sinead Coakley of Marist 180 (Formerly Marist Youth) spoke to the Group in April of the work of her organisation. She thanked BRSG for the support being given to the two Hazara young men through the prevision of free accommodation in the House of Welcome.
6. BRSG has become a member of the Refugee Council of Australia.
7. BRSG received a Section 356 Grant from the Bathurst Regional Council of $3,000-00. This funding was given to assist with the cost of refugee hosting and awareness raising/education program.
8. The Combined Christian Churches Service was held on Migrant and Refugee Sunday 27th August, and was hosted by the Uniting Church. This was an excellent service with the Theme of “Children.” Pastor Cheryl Blackwell of Hope Bathurst Church shared from her experience of counselling children in refugee camps. The collection from this service was used to assist an asylum seeker student who is resident in Bathurst.
9. The Bathurst Refugee Support Group maintains the Kath Knowles House of Welcome as a place of respite for refugees and their carers.
10. Refugee groups and individuals continue to spend time at the cottage. In particular, South Sudanese William Riek has again been able to utilize this facility while in town for medical appointments; and Prosper Garetse and family from Burundi while in Bathurst researching the local jobs situation.
11. Two young Hazara men, Abbas and Zaki, have been granted permission to live at the cottage as long term occupants. Both of these young men have Aged Care Certificates and are studying Nursing at Charles Sturt University.
12. Alan Cattermole, Director of Community and Cultural Services Bathurst Regional Council, visited the KKHOW, with three staff during May. The young Hazaras were present during the visit, and there was a good interaction between them and the visitors.
13. A contact list proforma has been developed on which members could write their names, contact details, areas of interest and roles they are willing to undertake.
14. Minor Amendments to Clauses 35, 42 and 44 of the Constitution were agreed by the Group. These Clauses refer to “Postal or Electronic Ballots” and “Distribution on Winding Up of Association”
15. A new Group Photo has been taken and will be available for future publicity.
16. The Bathurst Refugee Support Group provided the following donations:

* Donation of $500-00 to United Nations High Commission for Refugees for the “Place to Call Home” Appeal.
* Donation of $200-00 towards “Milk for Children” in Bali.
* Two donations of $500-00 each to the Asylum Seeker Centre.
* Donation of $230-00 to William Riek towards DNA testing.
* Donations to the Hazara young men towards their living and study resources.

1. Provided a $1,000-00 Interest Free Loan to pay for DNA testing of William Riek’s son, Nuan Riek, who is resident as a refugee in Uganda.
2. The Group continues to receive generous support from individuals and organisations, both financially and materially. Particular mention is made of donations received from

Dr Robert Nicoll Veterinary Surgeon, the Bathurst Baptist Church, the Catholic Education Office and Margaret Smith.

1. Media contacts have continued to be maintained through local print media the Western Advocate and Bathurst City Life, and Radio 2BS and Central West ABC. The Chairperson and Secretary have both been interviewed by media representatives on refugee related matters. The Chairperson gave the Editor of the Western Advocate a tour of the Kath Knowles House of Welcome.
2. It was with sadness that the Group acknowledged the passing of Sister Pat Linnane, one of the foundation members and a Life Member of BRSG.