

## **BATHURST REFUGEE SUPPORT GROUP ANNUAL REPORT OCTOBER 2015**

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. The Group, through Ruth Schmid, is continuing working with Mike Kesterton to develop a Website. This has involved preparing material for review, deciding on a structure and putting together a history of the Group. Also a professional photographer has taken a group photo for the Website.
4. A Grant of \$20,000-00 was received from the Mercy Action Support fund for Special Purposes use. This money has been banked in an Investment Account.
5. Representatives of the Bathurst Refugee Support Group met with representatives of Bathurst Regional Council on Wednesday 12th November 2014 as a follow up to the earlier meeting of Wednesday 14th May. At this meeting the current projects being undertaken by the Group were discussed.
6. Mr Phil Glendenning, President of the Refugee Council of Australia, spoke at a Public Lecture at Charles Sturt University on Wednesday 10th December 2014 – World Human Rights Day. This was preceded by a Mayoral Reception to which BRSG members were invited. Phil Glendenning spoke on “Human Rights and Australia’s treatment of Refugees and Asylum Seekers.” He said that as Australians we need to demonstrate decency and humanity rather than punish refugees for their vulnerability.
7. Mr Phil Glendenning, during his visit to Bathurst on Wednesday 10th December 2014, officially opened the Kath Knowles House of Welcome, which provides respite to refugees in an environment where refugees are welcomed and supported. Family members and friends of the late Kath Knowles, after whom the House is named, were present at the opening.
8. The Bathurst Refugee Support Group contributed to the Bathurst 200 Bicentenary Celebrations through the hosting of two groups of ethnic dancers who participated in the Bicentenary launch on Sunday 3rd May. The dancers and their families, totaling 47, are refugees belonging to the Karen and Kachin ethnic minority groups from Myanmar. A great weekend was enjoyed by all and the visitors thanked the BRSG for our hospitality, assistance and support over the weekend. BRSG also received a thank you letter from the Mayor for our contribution to the Bathurst200 Bicentenary together with a Certificate of Appreciation.
9. The Combined Christian Churches Service was held at the beginning of Refugee Week on Sunday 14th June, and was hosted by the Uniting Church. The address was given by the

Rev Noel Clarke, a retired Anglican Minister from Orange, who related his experiences through working in Indonesia and Kenya, particularly with people from Sudan, to how we should relate to refugees. A collection of \$650-00 was raised and donated to the Villawood Care and Comfort Ministry.

10. Anni Gallagher, Migrant support Worker at Orange and Wendy Dawson, Multicultural Service Officer with the Department of Human Services gave presentations to the Group's April meeting. Anni spoke of her work with the Sudanese Community of orange and the cultural challenges involved. Wendy briefed the Group of her work working with migrant communities.
11. Sister Sheila, a Catholic Sister of the Presentation Sisters, spoke at the Group's June meeting relating her experiences as a part of the "Care and Comfort Ministry" in Villawood Detention Centre.
12. John Burke from Carcoar attended the Group's July meeting and spoke promoting a production featuring Max Cullen and Warren Fahey as Henry Lawson and Banjo Patterson to be held at Carcoar on Saturday 8th August. Proceeds were to help support a young South Sudanese, Moug Dut.
13. The Group provided Morning Tea after morning Mass at the Catholic Cathedral on Sunday 26th July as a means of publicizing the Group and its work.
14. The Bathurst Refugee Support Group maintains the Kath Knowles House of Welcome as a place of respite for refugees.
  - a) A Licence Agreement was signed with the Institute Propert Association Limited of the Sisters of Mercy, dating from 15th December 2014.
  - b) Michelle Rowland MP, Federal Shadow Minister for Citizenship and Multiculturalism, visited the cottage on Monday 16th February. She was impressed with what is provided and the Western Advocate published a report and photo of the visit.
  - c) Councillors Monica Morse and Jess Jennings visited the cottage on Tuesday 17th February. They were impressed by the House of Welcome and how it provides for refugees. The Mayor and General Manager had previously visited and inspected the cottage at the time of the official opening in December.
  - d) Refugee groups and individuals continue to spend time at the cottage. In particular, South Sudanese William Riek and his son, Puak (Paul), have been able to utilize this facility.
15. An informal gathering, Ideas Meeting, has commenced on a Saturday afternoon once a month at the Crago Mill Café, to throw up ideas and report back to the Committee meeting.
16. BRSG is organizing a Community Event to be held on the evening of Tuesday 10th November at the Oxford Bistro – where those present will be able to hear first hand of experiences within Australia's off shore Detention Centres.

17. Eva Engleman and Barrie Stephens had a good day when they visited the Lithgow Harmony Day on Monday 23rd March.
18. Group members have provided parcels of clothes for refugees on Nauru. These have been greatly appreciated by those receiving them.
19. The Bathurst Refugee Support Group provided the following donations:
  - UNHCR – Nigerian Appeal \$500-00
  - Villawood Care and Comfort Ministry \$650-00
20. The Group continues to receive generous support from individuals and organizations, both financially and materially.
21. Media contacts have continued to be maintained through the local print media and 2BS. Favourable articles and photos have been published in the Bathurst City Life.
22. The Group congratulates two of its members, Sister Pat Linnane and Ruth Schmid, for being named as Living Legends during the Bathurst200 Celebrations.