

BATHURST REFUGEE SUPPORT GROUP ANNUAL REPORT 2016

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. BRSR launched their Website at its April Meeting with Linda Leseberg as Administrator. The Group acknowledges with gratitude the work by Sr Anne-Marie O'Beirne, Sr Bernie Evens Ruth Schmid and Linda Leseberg in setting up this Website.
4. BRSR is also very appreciative for Erin Hogg in setting up a Facebook page. This page is interactive, useful for communicating events, creates energy for refugee issues and can be linked with other organizations such as GetUp.
5. Four members of BRSR were invited to attend the November meeting of the Bathurst Branch of the ALP. The purpose of this invitation was to inform the ALP members of the work of BRSR and to find out the current thinking of the ALP on Asylum Seeker and Refugee issues.
6. A group of All Saints College students were provided with help for a Presentation Assignment that involves refugees.
7. The Group organized a Public Forum at the Oxford Bistro with two Speakers entitled "From the Coalface" on Tuesday 10th November 2015. This was an outstanding event, very successful and inspiring where those present were able to hear first hand of experiences within Australia's Off Shore Detention Centres.
8. Through its members the Group has been active in arranging for parcels to be sent directly to inmates on Nauru.
9. Members of the NSW Multicultural Advisory Board were in Bathurst 25th/26th November. BRSR was represented at the Mayoral Reception and a Forum held at BINC, which was to make the Board aware of what was happening in Bathurst re Multicultural matters, by the Chairperson.
10. BRSR organized a Peaceful Call for Compassion Rally on Thursday 18th February 2016 which was very successful. Sr Pat Linnane had conducted three radio interviews prior to the event. There was a positive energy and peaceful calm at the event.
11. A Fund Raising Committee has been formed and they organized a very successful Charity Auction at which \$746-00 was raised. This was a great result considering the wet weather on the day.
12. The Combined Christian Churches Service was held at the beginning of Refugee Week on Sunday 19th June, and was hosted by the Baptist Church. This was an excellent service with Anni Gallagher from Orange together with a group of Nubian Sudanese as our guests. Their contributions, particularly a report about the current situation of Nubians in Sudan, was of interest to all present. A collection of \$286-45 was raised and used to assist a Sri Lankan family in Bathurst.
13. BRSR 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.

14. The Bathurst Refugee Support Group Strategic plan has been reviewed with the main aims of the Group being listed under the four headings of: Settle; Awareness; Visiting; and Administration.
15. A Bathurst Public Conversation about Refugees was held on Friday 24th June. This Forum was held to hear and think about the ways we have come to think and feel as we do. The meeting opened with the Mayor Gary Rush clearly demonstrating his view that Bathurst could work towards being a centre for refugee resettlement as part of building a future for the city rich in cultural diversity. From this time it was suggested that a focus could be “10 Families for Bathurst”.
16. Further to the Public Conversation a further meeting held by two of our members with the Mayor went really well. Discussions are now taking place regarding a Forum of business leaders, with a focus on the providing of employment to refugees settling in Bathurst, to be run by Council.
17. BRSG registered an interest in assisting with Refugee Resettlement with the “I can Help” Website. A response has been received from Peter Shergold, NSW Coordinator-General for Refugee Resettlement, and the contacts suggested in that letter are being followed up.
18. The Bathurst Refugee Support Group maintains the Kath Knowles House of Welcome as a place of respite for refugees and their carers.
 - * Refugee groups and individuals continue to spend time at the cottage. In particular, a South Sudanese has been able to utilize this facility, particularly during the period of recuperation after a knee operation.
 - * Guidelines with Protocols and Proformas have been developed relating to the use of the cottage.
 - * The lease of the cottage has been renewed by the Sisters of Mercy Institute Property Association Limited with the Bathurst Refugee Support Group Inc.
19. BRSG adopted a Child Protection Policy for Volunteers for the Kath Knowles House of Welcome.
20. A number of BRSG members attended a Training Session run by Monique van Toor at BINC on Tuesday 24th May. This was an information session on visa types and their varying conditions. The presentation was excellent and made more interesting by discussing real situations. The powerpoint information was emailed to all BRSG members.
21. STARTTS visited Bathurst 21st/22nd October 2016 and conducted a Training Session on “Core Concepts working with Refugees” including an ‘Update on the present situation relating to Refugees and Asylum Seekers.’ This was a very successful day, and included people from Lithgow and Orange.
22. A contact list proforma is being developed by Christine Hardwick on which members could write their names, contact details, areas of interest and roles that could possibly be undertaken.
23. The Film “Chasing Asylum” had been purchased and was shown on Friday 21st October at McKillop College to senior High School students and other interested persons. This was a very moving film which provided discussion after the showing, facilitated by STARTTS staff.

24. The Bathurst Refugee Support Group provided the following donations:
- * Payment for Laptop for children of refugees, and payment for clothes for another refugee family. Funds for these items came from the Special Purposes Grant previously received from the Mercy Action Support Fund.
 - * Received \$500-00 from the Orange Social Justice Group, of which \$450-00 went towards the purchase of phone cards, and \$50-00 for parcels for Nauru.
 - * Donation of \$200-00 towards the Refugee Support Project of Susan Meyer.
 - * Donation of \$117-25 towards Specialist Fees for a deaf customer of Wendy Dawson, Multicultural Service Officer from the Australia Government Department of Human Services.
 - * \$650 donation to ministry to refugees/asylum seekers of Sr Patricia Mary Bell.
25. The Group continues to receive generous support from individuals and organizations, both financially and materially.
26. Media contacts have continued to be maintained through local print media and 2BS. Favourable articles and photos have been published in the Bathurst City Life. Appreciation is expressed to both Margaret Shearer and Christine Hardwick for their work in this area. Also appreciation to those members who have been interviewed by media representatives looking for an opinion on a particular current issue