**BATHURST REFUGEE SUPPORT GROUP ANNUAL REPORT 2018**

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. Councillors Jacqui Rudge and Ian North visited the Kath Knowles House of Welcome on 13th November. This was a very positive visit and the Councillors were able to meet with Zaki, one of the Hazara young men.
5. Representatives from the Group took part in the Bathurst Manus protest on Sunday 26th November, at Raglan.
6. A busload of 22 prospective holders of Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEV) visited Bathurst on the 12th December as part of a program of informing such prospective holders about regional centres of possible settlement. This visit was organised by Settlement Services International. BRSG provided Morning Tea and Lunch, arranged for a tour of “relevant sites” in Bathurst; and arranged for information talks on Health Services, Rental situation and TAFE English Classes.
7. Members of BRSG continue to support and assist the two Hazara young men, Abbas and Zaki, who are living in the Kath Knowles House of Welcome. They are now in their second year of Nursing at Charles Sturt University, and also working at St. Catherine’s Nursing Home.

BRSG helped both of these young men celebrate their 21st birthdays.

It was a great joy that they were granted their SHEV Visas during the past year.

1. Support is being provided to two Sri Lankan families who are now living in Bathurst:

* The purchasing of a Refrigerator and Washing Machine for each family.
* Other items of furniture being provided and/or donated.
* Friendship and assistance with many tasks, including driving lessons.
* Assistance in looking for work.

1. Representatives of BRSG and two of the Sri Lankan refugees met with the Mayor, Councillor Graeme Hanger, and Council’s Director of Community and Cultural Services, Alan Cattermole re employment issues facing refugees and asylum seekers who settle in Bathurst.
2. The Chairperson spoke to students of Bathurst Public on Refugees.
3. The Chairperson met with Frances Rush, CEO of the Asylum Seekers Centre in May. She was briefed on the work of BRSG and indicated the importance of maintaining a working relationship.
4. BRSG will be involved in a partnership between the Catholic Diocese of Bathurst and the Asylum Seekers Centre Sydney. This partnership would centre on the “old” St. Catherine’s as an accommodation facility for asylum seekers. Discussion is still to take place to work through all the issues which impact on this proposed project.
5. Members of the Group together with some of the Sri Lankan refugees visited ‘Shalom’ at Carcoar on 4th August, at which discussions were held concerning the organising of retreats for refugees.
6. BRSG co- sponsored the film “Hope Road” with Charles Sturt University as a part of their Explorations Series. This was an excellent film and the Director, Tom Zubrycki, attended and took part in a Q. and A. session at the end of the film.
7. BRSG hosted a Dinner with Rachael Jacobs from Sydney as Guest Speaker. Racael is a lecturer in Creative Arts Education at Western Sydney University, a Consultant at the Asylum Seekers Centre and on the organising Committee of Teachers for Refugees. She gave a very passionate and challenging talk.
8. 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 programs.
9. The Combined Christian Churches Service was held on Migrant and Refugee Sunday 26th August, and was hosted by the Catholic Parish. Rev John Jegasothy, a Uniting Church Tamil Minister and a refugee himself, shared from his own experiences of trauma in his homeland, Sri Lanka, and of coming to Australia as a refugee. The collection offering from this service will go towards supporting refugees living in Bathurst.
10. The Bathurst Refugee Support Group continues to maintain the Kath Knowles House of Welcome as a place of respite for refugees and their carers.
11. BRSG has been very pleased to receive donations:

* Of Toiletries and an amount of $195-10 from St. Philomena’s School.
* Of Text books and Tapes for the teaching of English from Ms Ruth Moore of Sydney.

1. The Bathurst Refugee Support Group provided the following donations during the past year:

* 2 donations of $500-00 each to the Asylum Seekers Centre.
* Donation of $1,000-00 to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees for the Rohingya Emergency Appeal.
* An amount of $4,031-34 towards costs for the Sri Lankan families.
* An amount of$692-40 towards costs for a Sri Lankan young woman.
* An amount of $2,000-00 to each of the two Hazara young men to help meet expenses during exam time and while in placements.

1. The Group continues to receive generous support from individuals and organisations, both financially and materially. Particular mention is made of a donation received from the Bathurst Baptist Church.
2. Media contacts have continued to be maintained through local print media, the Western Advocate and Bathurst City Life, and Radio 2BS, 2MCE FM and Central West ABC. Particular instances include:

* The Chair was interviewed by Regional ABC Radio three times
* The Chair and Elfie Reen were interviewed by Prime 7 TV
* The Chair, Sr Bernie Evens and Elfie Reen were interviewed by Councillor Monica Morse for her program on 2MCE FM.
* One of the Sri Lankan families, the Chair and Sr Bernie Evens were interviewed by the Sydney Morning Herald re employment prospects. This article appeared in the SMH News Review of 1st September and the Western Advocate, including an Editorial of 5th September.

1. Offers of employment for refugees have been received following this article.