

BATHURST REFUGEE SUPPORT GROUP ANNUAL REPORT 2020

- 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.
- Topical issues affecting Refugees and Asylum Seekers, particularly from refugee advocates, continue to be circulated to Group members via email.
- Letters of concern and Petitions relating to issues affecting Refugees and Asylum Seekers have been sent to Newspapers, Federal Ministers and Members of Parliament.
- Members of the BRSBG have continued to support the two Hazara young men, Abbas and Zaki, who have been living in the Kath Knowles House of Welcome.
Abbas completed his Nursing Degree in 2019, received a NewGrad position with the NSW Department of Health and has been working at Sutherland Hospital this year. Abbas received a Staff Recognition Award for 2019/2020, and this was the first time that a newly graduated nurse has won such an Award in the South Eastern Sydney Local Health District. Zaki has continued his studies at Charles Sturt University including a number of Hospital Placements, as a part of his training. He has also continued with his work at St Catherine's Nursing Home.
- Members of the BRSBG are continuing providing a great deal of support to a number of refugee Sri Lankan families living in Bathurst.
This support has included assisting with the finding of work, giving driving lessons, financial support, purchasing of numerous items of need; giving of emotional support and friendship and assistance with many other varied tasks.
- The Group received a Lawn Mower as a gift, and one of our members has been using it at the homes of some of the refugees.
- A new Computer was purchased for one family to particularly assist their children with their schoolwork as well as general communication issues.
- One BRSBG member provided Mother's Day gifts (Hand Cream and Sanitiser) to the 4 Sri Lankan mothers whom the Group supports.
- Therese Inwood from the Bathurst Early Childhood Intervention Service spoke to the Group on "The Start Strong Pathways Program" at the November meeting. This program seeks to ensure that every pre-school child has access to early childhood education in some form or other.
- Jock Cheetham, a Lecturer in Journalism at CSU, gave a presentation on "Story Sharing" at the January meeting. The theme was "How I got here."
- The winner of the Multi-Cultural Storytelling Competition, promoted by Jock Cheetham, was Thamilnila Jagathan the daughter of one of our refugee families.
- Cecilia Hunt, Regional Engagement Manager (NSW), Settlement Services International (SSI) spoke at the July meeting; and outlined the services provided by SSI and her role within that organisation.
- Maria Perricone, Education Officer Multicultural Community Engagement, TAFE Digital sent a Power Point Presentation on what her Group can offer. This was noted at the August meeting and feedback was provided to Maria.
- Selina Brandy, Community Development Worker for Relationships Australia in Bathurst, and her Manager Leona Bishop, spoke to the September meeting. Her role involves engagement, networking, and supporting culturally and linguistically diverse families within community through service delivery and resources.

- The Bathurst Refugee Support Group was impacted, like everyone else, during the COVID crisis. No meetings were held during the period March to June; Planned activities were cancelled; Group members maintained contact through emails and phone contacts.
- The planned Public Event for March with Rev Tim Costello had to be cancelled. This will be considered for rescheduling sometime during 2021 to suit all those involved.
- The planned fundraising BBQ at Bunnings had to be cancelled, and will happen at a time after Bunnings restart having these BBQ's.
- The Combined Christian Churches Service to mark Refugee Sunday had to be cancelled for 2020, and we look forward to planning for the Service in 2021.
- BRSO received a Section 356 Grant from the Bathurst Regional Council of \$2,000-00. This funding was given to assist with the cost of refugee hosting, resettlement program and awareness raising.
- The Bathurst Refugee Support Group has maintained the Kath Knowles House of Welcome as a place of respite for refugees and their carers. The Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea have indicated that they are looking at selling this Cottage. BRSO has had our licence extended to 31st December 2021 with no option to renew.
- One of the Sri Lankan Asylum Seeker families were temporarily sharing the Cottage with the Hazara young men in between "rental situations."
- Due to the closing of Rahamim, the Bathurst Refugee Support Group now meets, still on the fourth Thursday of the month, at the Bathurst Uniting Church Activities Hall at 140A William Street. BRSO's Postal address is PO Box 81, Bathurst 2795.
- A very enjoyable Christmas Party was held in December in Machattie Park.
- BRSO has been pleased to receive donations from:
 - Bathurst Baptist Church \$500-00
 - Anonymous donation \$1,000-00
- The Neighbourhood Centre was successful in getting a Grant of \$5,000-00 from Multicultural NSW. This money was used to provide rental and food assistance to our Asylum Seeker families.
- The Bathurst Refugee Support Group provided the following donations during the year:
 - Donation of \$200-00 to the Refugee Council of Australia
 - Donation of \$100-00 to Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR)
 - An amount of \$200-00 for text books for Zaki
 - An amount of \$4,514-00 towards numerous items for the Sri Lankan families
 - An amount of \$1,614-00 for a new refrigerator for one family
 - A No Interest Loan of \$3,050-00 towards Lawyer's fees for one Asylum Seeker
- A total of \$5,480-00 was raised for rental assistance for one Sri Lankan family through an appeal in the Catholic Church Bulletin.
- A number of No Interest Loans have been provided to Refugees to assist them with their ongoing costs.
- The Bathurst Refugee Support Group provided a letter of support to Charles Sturt University in their proposal to the Medical Research Future Funds for a Grant to fund a project called *Designing Effective Communication Strategies to Vulnerable Groups*.
- Bathurst Refugee Support Group completed the Rural Australians for Refugees Membership Form and submitted it to RAR as they were updating their records.
- The Group continues to receive generous support from individuals and organisations, both financially and materially.

·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 mention is noted of:

- Voice Over advertisement on 2BS, recorded in January and August
- Radio Interviews on 2BS for Refugee Week in June
- A very positive article in the Western Advocate in August giving Abbas's story