

## THE FACE OF MERCY

Local identity Kath Morton is committed to contributing to community through connecting with like-minded others who embrace issues pertaining to social justice. Many years ago when a resident of Charlton, Kath was encouraged to join the local 'Action for World Development' group who voiced deep concern for the marginalised, the vulnerable and the environment. Kath is very grateful to members of that group who shared their knowledge and convictions with her and encouraged her innate need to be a global citizen. Previously, Kath has actively supported Community Aid Abroad and Amnesty International, nowadays Kath mostly utilises her time, experience and wisdom to enhance the Ballarat community by channelling her energy into embracing a cause close to her heart - the plight of asylum seekers and refugees in Australia. Kath has been a refugee advocate for many years and co-ordinator of the Ballarat branch of Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR).



At eight-eight years young, Kath is an inspiration for many Ballarat people. Every day she makes time to further the cause, ready, willing and able to give voice to asylum seekers and refugees. Kath follows a 'Kath schedule' to ensure she can maximise her time to be as proactive as possible. Each Monday Kath and like-minded colleagues meet outside a local MP's office to stand in silent solidarity; each fortnight there is a trip to Melbourne to visit asylum seekers in the Broadmeadows detention centre and each fortnight Kath has a segment on local radio station Voice FM, to air issues and advances in the cause. The expression 'wearing your heart on your sleeve' is pertinent to Kath as she intentionally wears a few badges that allude to her commitment to refugees and asylum seekers. Kath is cognizant of the fact that not everyone is wanting to engage with the issues that pertain to those seeking asylum but she wears her badges as an invitation for dialogue with anyone who might be curious enough to want to start up a conversation.

Kath finds rallies energising as they are a public statement of social action and conviction and an opportunity to converse with a multitude of others. She finds watching documentaries essential as the stories talk to the heart, the research fuels the mind and the combination of both drives the action. Kath suggests that taking opportunities to attend such community events – small or large- are opportunities for

learning. Kath met my mum Ann Lawry, at a local asylum seekers and refugees support gathering back in 2012 (?) Mum had been profoundly affected by the Tampa incident of 2001 and had taken up advocacy for Iranian and Afghan asylum seekers - young men and families. Mum, recently back from visiting Baxter Detention Centre in Port August was shedding some light on the situation and the appalling treatment asylum seekers were receiving at the hands of our government. Mum's words and actions were influential and propelled Kath into seeking out ways she could assist and of course, Kath has never looked back. Likewise, retirees Doreen and Des Roache who met Kath back in her Charlton days, have been influenced by Kath's incredible commitment and are now actively involved with the Ballarat Rural Australians for Refugees.

The Ballarat RAR is a small group with many supporters who assist asylum seekers and refugees. Primarily the group offers moral, practical and financial support to asylum seekers in detention. Kath speaks of several pillars or inherent values that underpin the need to 'welcome the other': acceptance, compassion, diversity, empathy, integrity, respect and responsibility. Locally, RAR supporters are committed to actively:

- Raising public awareness through events, media, conversation and attending rallies and vigils
- Writing letters to politicians and newspapers and meeting members of parliament to raise issues on the second Tuesday of each month
- Preparing for and presenting a 10-minute info session on local radio station Voice FM (second Thursday of each month at 11.25am)
- Participating in silent demonstration every Monday for one hour outside local MP's office with other like-minded members of the community
- Visiting Melbourne Immigration Transient Accommodation (MITA) centre in Broadmeadows to listen to and support asylum seekers with motto ***"It is about them, not us"***
- Occasionally fundraising
- Providing encouragement and practical support to local refugees through offering financial assistance; giving driving lessons and social connection

RAR welcomes anyone who is interested in contributing to such a focus. You are warmly encouraged to visit the RAR website or email Kath [kathmorton@aussiebroadband.com.au](mailto:kathmorton@aussiebroadband.com.au) As Kath says, 'There but for the grace of God go I.'

*Kate Lawry*

<http://www.ruralaustraliansforrefugees.org.au/>