

ASYLUM SEEKER AND REFUGEE FORUM

The Ballarat Diocesan Social Justice Commission members have been deeply concerned regarding the number of people forcibly displaced globally. According to UNHCR, by the end of 2014, 59.5 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence or human rights violations. An increase of 51.2 million on that of 2013, making this the highest ever increase annually.

In January of this year, Pope Francis raised the problem of the world's indifference to asylum seekers at his annual meeting with members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See. In March 2015, Pope Francis highlighted the need to overcome a 'globalisation of indifference' to the most vulnerable and marginalised of the world.

In an effort to become better informed and, at the same time, raise awareness within the broader community, the Commission set about hosting a Refugee and Asylum Seeker Forum, "Sanctuary Ballarat, Welcome the Stranger." Local Ballarat Asylum Seeker and Refugee Support Groups were invited to come to a meeting to join with us in planning this event. Master of Ceremonies for the Forum was Counsellor Belinda Coates of the Ballarat City Council.

Keynote Speakers were invited to address global and national issues. They were Daniel Webb, Director of Legal Advocacy from the Human Rights Law Centre and Sr Brigid Arthur csb from the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project.



Among the many issues Daniel spoke about was the human rights challenges faced in Australia by asylum seekers and refugees with major changes to the law and policy which affects asylum seekers, this in turn, eroding their democratic freedom. The issues that surround Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs); Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEVs) and Refoulement. That is, where Australia expels a person who has the right to be recognised as a refugee (the principal of non-refoulement having first being laid out in 1954 in the UN-Convention relating to the Status of Refugees). Australia has non-refoulement obligations under both the refugee convention and the convention against torture: "No State Party shall expel, return [refouler] or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture."

The second Keynote Speaker, Sr Brigid Arthur, spoke of the work that the Brigidines supporting refugees through their project. For example visiting asylum seekers in detention centres; providing accommodation to a number of asylum seekers; supporting asylum seekers on bridging visas and lobbying the government to promote changes to policy and procedures that contradict the sisters foundational beliefs, to name a few. Sr Brigid also shared some of the experiences of her work with refugees and the many issues they face when placing their applications, the difficulties involved.

Following the keynote speakers, two refugees shared their personal journey in securing refugee status here in Australia. Although different, both in time and situation, the telling of their stories was inspirational, demonstrating amazing courage of parents wanting to secure freedom and safety for their child and another, a youth fleeing atrocities in search of living a life in safety, in freedom and with dignity.



Another aim of the Forum was to highlight the outstanding work of the many local organisations that support asylum seekers and refugees (including youth) in the Ballarat and outlying districts. The many issues and challenges they face. A panel of representatives from a few of these organisations responded to the many queries from the attendees. Each Ballarat group had representatives present with an information table providing a display of their various activities.

A list of these groups follows should you wish to follow up and learn more about the work that they do or how you can offer support if you wish to become involved.

*Sue Searls
Representative on the Ballarat Diocesan Social Justice Commission*


Sanctuary Ballarat: Welcome the Stranger

Refugee
Week
2015

What does “welcome” look like?

Ballarat Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support Groups

Group	Description	Contact / details
Amnesty International (Ballarat)	<p>Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 7 million people in over 150 countries and territories who campaign to end abuses of human rights. Through detailed research and determined campaigning, we help fight abuses of human rights worldwide. We bring torturers to justice. Change oppressive laws. And free people jailed just for voicing their opinion. Since Amnesty began in 1961, Amnesty activists have been ready to spring into action for people facing imminent danger in detention. While there have been thousands of victories, systemic change is harder to come by, and far too many people are still languishing in isolation, incommunicado, in fear.</p> <p>The Amnesty International Ballarat Group has a small group of enthusiastic members who are committed to human rights. Our particular focus for this year includes refugees and asylum seekers, ending the death penalty and aboriginal youth justice.</p>	<p>Mary Quinn amnestyballarat@gmail.com</p>
Asylum Seeker Resource Centre The	<p>The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre is Australia’s leading asylum seeker organisation. We are multi-award winning, independent and receive no federal government funding. We work in direct service delivery, assisting some of the most disadvantaged people in our community and advocate on behalf of all asylum seekers.</p> <p>How we help! We deliver services to over 1350 asylum seekers at any one time through programs such as our food and aid network, health, legal, counselling, and casework programs. Since 2001, the ASRC has assisted over 10,000 asylum seekers, providing in excess of 2.5 million hours of free assistance worth more than 200 million dollars. We deliver 25 unique programs with a team of 50 staff and over 950 volunteers.</p>	<p>David Mac Phail david@macphail.net.au M. 0419368199.</p>
Ballarat City Council	<p>A Multicultural Service Directory is available on their website. The many cultural associations are listed on pages 61 to 65.</p> <p>There is also a booklet advising of the Multicultural Ambassadors in Ballarat.</p>	<p>http://www.ballarat.vic.gov.au/</p>
Ballarat Community Health	<p>BCH provides settlement services, helps clients to become self-reliant and to participate in Australian society as soon as possible after arrival.</p> <p>Refugee health nurse assists refugees and immigrants with all health needs including refugee health assessment anytime while living in Ballarat.</p> <p>Counselling- The specialist counselling program aims to help survivors find a way forward as they strive to live with the memories and consequences of their experiences with courage and dignity.</p>	<p>Christine Reupert Settlement Services SGP and HSS. Ballarat Community Health Ph 53384578 www.bchc.org.au P.O.Box 1156, Bakery Hill 3354 E: christiner@bchc.org.au</p>
Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council	<p>BRMC was established in 1999 as the peak multicultural organisation in Ballarat and the Central highlands. Membership currently includes 25 General Member Associations from diverse cultural backgrounds and over 120 other Individual and Associate members.</p> <p>BRMC works with community, government, philanthropic and business partners to promote cultural diversity and harmony in Ballarat. Their office is located at GPLACE a community centre in Golden Point that is dedicated to learning and cultural activities.</p> <p>BRMC supports a Multicultural Seniors Hub, Multicultural Tucker, Ballarat Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support network (BRAZEN) and the Multicultural Advocacy and Events network and also provides social support services, English language tutoring and a regular homework club too. BRMC is partnering with Ballarat Community Health from 1 July to provide settlement services to new migrants to Ballarat. BRMC is also opening a Migration Advice service in July that has been developed entirely from fund raising and in-kind assistance from the Asylum Seeker.</p>	<p>102 English Street Golden Point Ph: 5332-5941 E. admin@brmc.org.au</p>

Group	Description	Contact / details
BRASSN	<p>Ballarat Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support Network (aka BRASSN pronounced BRAZEN) was established in 2013 following a public forum to inform Ballarat on refugee and asylum seekers in our community. The network participants have included volunteers, both individuals, and representatives from local community organisations. Community members, including refugees and asylum seekers, with an interest in the issues, are encouraged to become involved. New members are welcome.</p> <p>The network meets regularly on the first Monday of each month at BRMC office immediately following the 1pm meeting of the broader Multicultural Advocacy and Events Action Group. The BRASSN aims to raise awareness and resources, and promote community engagement for new refugees and asylum seekers in Ballarat. In 2015 a calendar of actions and events has been developed. Key BRASSN activities so far have included advocacy, liaison with other groups such as ASRC, fund raising and financial support provision, development of a Migration Advice Clinic and coordination of Refugee Week. New members are welcome.</p>	<p>102 English Street Golden Point Ph: 5332-5941 E. admin@brmc.org.au</p>
Centacare	<p>Centacare deliver an extensive range of social welfare and outreach services across the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat and the Western District of Victoria. We provide professional and responsive services to support individuals, families and communities. Our mission is to empower people to bring about positive change in their lives, providing them with choice and opportunity while building community capacity.</p> <p>Services offered include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment • Affordable Housing • Counselling and mediation • Family Relationship and parenting programs • Community outreach 	<p>Central Office 4-6 Peel Street, Ballarat, 3350 PO Box 2537, Bakery Hill Vic 3354</p> <p>P. 5337 8999 centacare@centacareballarat.org.au</p>
Centre for Multicultural Youth	<p>CMY is a Victorian not-for-profit organization supporting young people from migrant & refugee backgrounds to build better lives in Australia. Established in 1988, it was the first organisation in Australia to work exclusively with migrant and refugee young people. In 1988, the Victorian Government established an Ethnic Youth Issues Network (EYIN) and CMY CEO Carmel Guerra, was employed as the first EYIN Project Officer. In 2000, under the auspice of the Australian Multicultural Foundation, the EYIN re-launched itself as the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI). The new name reflected the growth of the organisation from a network to becoming a central point of referral, information and research. After 20 years of development and growth, CMYI made a decision to take the momentous step of becoming an independent organisation and officially became the Centre for Multicultural Youth on 1 July 2008. There is still much work to be done in supporting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to build better lives in Australia.</p>	<p>C/O Federation University SMB Campus, 12/107, Lydiard Street South, Ballarat, 3350 Ph: 5317 7172 E: ballarat@cmynet.au</p>
Grandmothers Against Detention of Refugee Children	<p>Grandmothers against Detention of Refugee Children (GADRC)</p> <p>This is a newly-formed advocacy group campaigning against the detention of asylum seeker children. The group was launched on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral in September last year, and has quickly gathered momentum across the state. There are already over 800 hundred members, mostly grandmothers, but also friends and relatives of Grandmothers – FROGs.</p> <p>The grandmothers are united in their horror at the heartless treatment and psychological damage inflicted on vulnerable, innocent children and are determined to take their campaign to every federal MP.</p> <p>They are calling on all Australians to join with them in demanding the release of all asylum seeker and refugee children in detention.</p> <p>With their years of wisdom, compassion and determination, these grandmothers (and their FROGs) could well become the most formidable opponents of the heartless policies of the Government.</p>	<p>GADRC: Gwenda Davey grandmothersref@gmail.com</p> <p> Find us on: facebook</p> <p>GADRC Website: http://www.grandmothersadrc.org</p> <p>GADRC – Ballarat: Cath McDonald pmcdonald1@bigpond.com</p> <p>GADRC – Grampians/Gariwerd Robyn Wood hortsoci007@gmail.com</p>

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House of Welcome	<p>House of Welcome</p> <p>The "House of Welcome" is a small, local group of family and friends that provide asylum seekers/refugees with emergency accommodation, advocacy and support and assistance in the following areas - Accessing - education, medical care, social benefits, employment and immigration processes, social connections, referrals to English classes. We provide limited financial assistance to asylum seekers/refugees and their families through a range of fundraising activities and engage in weekly visitation to Melbourne Detention Centres, providing empathy, friendship and material aid.</p>	<p>Carmel Kavanagh annekav123@yahoo.co.uk 0401175045 53322103</p>
Mercy Sisters of Ballarat	<p>The Mercy Sisters and Associate members in Ballarat are actively involved with supporting refugees in any way they can. This is a tradition begun with the East Timorese and West Papuans. Some areas of support is teaching members of refugee families that are still in Community Detention; providing a plot of land for a Community Garden; support in accessing rental accommodation through Centacare; accessing support for specific needs for children; generally supporting refugees within the Ballarat community in various ways and offering friendship.</p>	
Rural Australians for Refugees	<p>Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR)</p> <p>The aims of the organisation is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raise public awareness of the issues involving asylum seekers and refugees • Write letters to newspapers and politicians • Meets members of parliament to challenge inhumane policies • Provide practical help to local refugees • Fundraise for asylum seekers and refugees • Attend rallies and vigils <p>RAR Ballarat gives moral, practical and financial support to asylum seekers and refugees whether in a detention centre or living in the community, We take every opportunity to work for change in public attitudes and misunderstandings, so that in time, our country will treat all newcomers with the human rights to which everyone is entitled.</p>	<p>RAR – Ballarat: Kath Morton kathmorton@aussiebroadband.com.au</p> <p>Carmel Kavanagh annekav123@yahoo.co.uk 0401175045 53322103</p>
"Sorooptimists International, Ballarat branch.	<p>Sorooptimists International is an organisation for professional and business women. They are committed to a world where women and girls together achieve their individual and collective potential and raise the status of women. Sorooptimists International supports a global call for action to end violence against all women. This group has assisted refugees in various ways in Ballarat, including providing support to women for literacy through to higher education, providing scholarships and helping many to settle into our community."</p>	<p>President of Ballarat Group Susanne McKenzie 0418361995</p>
St Vincent de Paul Society	<p>The St. Vincent de Paul Society embraces the Policy on Refugees issued by the National Council in September, 2013. Locally, we help Refugees and Asylum Seekers with our usual range of assistance: food, clothing, furniture, household goods, fuel, as well as assistance with utility bills, education and medical expenses and travel costs. Issues of Advocacy we prefer to leave to specific groups or agencies with far greater expertise.</p>	<p>Allen Moloney Ph. 53326267, M. 0447 578390.</p>