

## BATHURST REFUGEE SUPPORT GROUP ANNUAL REPORT 2023

1. The **PURPOSE** of the Bathurst Refugee Support Group is to uphold the right of Asylum in Australia, to mentor and assist refugees/asylum seekers in the Bathurst area, and to inform and mobilise people to challenge government policy and legislation which adds to the suffering of refugees and asylum seekers.
2. Its **AIMS** are to raise awareness about Refugee issues, assist and mentor Refugees settling into the community, host visiting Refugees and to provide financial assistance to organizations that support Refugees.
3. 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.
4. Topical issues affecting Refugees and Asylum Seekers, particularly from refugee advocates, continue to be circulated to Group members via email.
5. Letters of concern and Petitions relating to issues affecting Refugees and Asylum Seekers have been sent to Newspapers, Federal Ministers and Members of Parliament.
6. Members of the BRSBG continued to support Zaki a young Hazara man, who completed his Nursing Degree at Charles Sturt University last year. Zaki is now a Registered Nurse and has been working in Orange at Bloomfield Hospital, and from October will be working at Bathurst Community Health for 4 months. Zaki received advice of his Permanent Visa in August. Members joined with Zaki for a celebration of his birthday at the Sweet Caramel Restaurant earlier this year.
7. Members of the BRSBG are continuing to provide 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, providing significant financial support, purchasing of numerous items of need; giving of emotional support and friendship and assistance with many other varied tasks.
8. BRSBG provided pocket money for the Refugee children whom the Group supports so that they could go and enjoy the Bathurst Winter Festival along with other children.
9. BRSBG has been able to accommodate a Refugee, William and his son, Puak, in the Kath Knowles House of Welcome for a short period up to when BRSBG has to vacate the House.
10. The Group, through Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR), is sponsoring a family from Afghanistan. The family includes three women journalists. Much paperwork has taken place, with still no advice being received from the Department of Home Affairs. The Group continues to send financial assistance to this family on a regular basis.
11. BRSBG have determined Policies and Procedures for Clients and Helpers.
12. BRSBG maintains access to the free Interpreting Service from the Department of Home Affairs for a three year period until 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2024.
13. We have been able to hold two fundraising BBQ's at Bunnings this year. These BBQ's raised a profit of \$2,351-00, which was a great result with thanks to Sue and all those others who helped.

14. The Group arranged a Training Workshop, run by Gary Cachia of STARTTS, on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> May on matters relating to refugee issues. This also included a number of people from Orange attending the Workshop.
15. The Combined Christian Churches Service to mark Refugee Sunday was held on the 17<sup>th</sup> September in the Bathurst Uniting Church. Our guest speakers were Pip Waters and Anna Kovalenko, a Ukrainian Refugee living in Orange, who spoke about the situation in Ukraine and her life now in Australia.  
The Service was very well attended, and \$1,269-50 was raised for the Afghan family in Kabul whom the Group is supporting.
16. 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 now sold this Cottage.  
BRSBG had our licence extended to the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024 with both parties being able to give 6 months notice within that period. With the property now sold BRSBG were given 6 months notice from the 12<sup>th</sup> April, making the 12<sup>th</sup> October the date on which we have to vacate. The new Owner made an inspection on the 18<sup>th</sup> October and received the keys.
17. Representatives of the Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group addressed the November Meeting of our Group, providing an interesting presentation about the work of their Group.
18. A Christmas Party was held in December in Machattie Park, where everyone brought food to share, and enjoyed a great time of fellowship together.
19. The Bathurst Refugee Support Group is very pleased that a few of the Refugees who we have been supporting have received their permanent Visas.
  - Manomani, Ajith and Deva; Mahendran and Renuka; Zaki who has graduated and is working full-time as a Nurse.
20. The Bathurst Refugee Support Group received a Section 356 Grant from the Bathurst Regional Council of \$500-00.
21. The Bathurst Refugee Support Group provided donations towards numerous items for the Sri Lankan families whom it supports during the year.
22. A number of No Interest Loans have been provided to Refugees to assist them with their ongoing costs.
23. The Group continues to receive generous support from individuals and organisations, both financially and materially.
24. Media contacts have continued to be maintained through local print media, the Western Advocate, and Radio 2BS.  
Particular mention is noted of:
  - Radio Interviews on 2BS for Refugee Week; and the situation regarding women in Afghanistan.