



Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation

UnitingCare NSW.ACT

Newsletter
May 2008

Honorary Chairperson:
Virginia Walker

PO Box 829, Five Dock NSW 2046
Phone: 0418 261 160
(02) 9712 7784

Email: asylumseekersfoundation@bigpond.com
Website: www.asylumseekersfoundation.com

ABN 78 722 539 923



Happy 5th Birthday BASF!

During Refugee Week (14 to 22 June), we will be celebrating our 5th birthday by holding an art show and having a birthday celebration at the Circle Café and Balmain Uniting Church in Balmain.

The art show will feature work by asylum seekers and refugees, as well as contributions from supporters who have provided works and paintings they wish us to sell in aid of BASF. All asylum seekers and refugees who give us works for sale will receive the monies raised and, of course, we don't take a commission.

The art show will commence on Saturday, 14 June and finish on the afternoon of Sunday, 22 June.

Our birthday celebration will be held on Sunday, 22 June from 2.00 to 5.00pm at the Balmain Uniting Church. The Mayor of Leichhardt, Councillor Carolyn Allen, will officially launch our birthday at 3.00pm and the Hon Tanya Plibersek, Federal Member for Sydney and Minister for Housing will speak.

The Circle Café and Balmain Uniting Church are both located at 344 Darling Street, Balmain. The café is open from 7.30am until 3.00pm Monday to Saturday.

Balmain Uniting Church will be holding a special Refugee Week Service on Sunday, 15 June at 9.30am. It will address the current situation facing asylum seekers.

There will be no charge for our birthday function as there has been generous assistance from Leichhardt Council and the City of Sydney. Donation baskets will be at the entrance for people who wish to make a donation.

Copies of *Acting from the Heart*,

stories written by asylum seeker and refugee supporters, edited by Dr Sara Mares and Professor Louise Newman (one of our patrons) and short-listed for the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission non-fiction award in 2007, will be on sale. Also some DVDs and CDs will be available for purchase.

You are all warmly invited to attend our birthday celebration. Please advise Kate Maclurcan on 9810 5826 or by email to katemaclurcan@hotmail.com by 12 June to assist with catering arrangements.

Paintings and artwork are needed for the Art Show. To donate a painting or work of art for sale. Call Kate 9810 5826 or katemaclurcan@hotmail.com

People we are Assisting

As we go to print our recipients number in excess of 120 people. They include many Chinese (some of whom are Falun Gong practitioners while others are underground Christians and dissidents), African nationals (including Algerians and Moroccans), Middle-Eastern nationals, Burmese, Nepalese, sub-continental Indians and Sri Lankans.

Many of our recipients are awaiting court and Refugee Review Tribunal decisions, while others are awaiting decisions from the Hon Chris Evans, Minister for Immigration. The latter group may be awaiting humanitarian visas.

The number of people we are helping at any one time rises and falls depending on the number of new applicants requiring assistance at our monthly meetings and the number of refugees we support who have received work rights, are able to work, and no longer require our assistance.

Kate's Important Contribution

Kate Maclurcan is the part-time Coordinator assisting BASF to raise funds. Leichhardt Council provides half the funding for her position with smaller grants from some 10 other Councils including a \$5,000 grant from City of Sydney for community awareness seminars.

Leichhardt Council's approval at its 22 April Meeting to provide triennial funding to keep Kate Maclurcan's position going was a wonderful endorsement of BASF's work and the importance of Kate's contribution.

Apart from assisting with fund raising events like the raffle at the Acoustica Festival, Kate applied to 18 local councils for community development grants which boosted BASF funds last year by \$87,800.

You are all invited to celebrate 5 years of BASF

Sunday, 22 June 2pm-5pm, Balmain Uniting Church, 344 Darling St Balmain.

Special guests Tanya Plibersek & Leichhardt Mayor Carolyn Allen. RSVP by 12 June to katemaclurcan@hotmail.com or 9810 5826.

Our Funds

Our funds are drying up but the Management Committee anticipates that we can continue until November of this year. Many of the refugees we are currently assisting are likely to obtain work rights within the next few months. But it is hard to know how many more people will be placed on Bridging Visa Es without work rights and will need our assistance in future.

No more Temporary Protection Visas

While the Federal Government has met its commitment to give Permanent Protection Visas to those who are refugees i.e. those who meet one of 5 narrow definitions, we are shocked to find that those recognized as deserving of a visa on humanitarian grounds have not been included. We are also concerned that the Minister will remove his power to grant a visa while the Refugee Review Tribunal consists of only one member who makes a decision which may result in the person being deported to imprisonment, torture, "disappear" or being constantly on the run to avoid such outcomes.

Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Migration

Early in May, three members of our Committee - Fr Jim Carty from House of Welcome, Tamara Domicej from the Asylum Seeker Centre, and ex-officio member Debby Nicholls, representing Balmain for Refugees and Bridge for Asylum Seekers attended roundtable briefings on Villawood Immigration Detention Centre held by the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Migration. The briefings were chaired by Michael Danby MP. Other members of the Joint Committee participating

were Senators Andrew Bartlett and Anne McEwen, and MPs Danna Vale and Tony Zappia.

As well as matters relating to detention, the Roundtable also addressed conditions faced by asylum seekers on release from Villawood and in the community, which gave us an opportunity to raise a number of our concerns. The matter of work rights for all holders of Bridging Visa E's was, of course, raised as of particular importance, and our members were able to stress the benefits both to the asylum seekers and the community of allowing more participation in the work force.

The associated problem of access to medical care and other community facilities was also discussed, as well as the severe financial hardship caused to sponsors when a bond has been required for the Bridging Visa. All of those who took part felt it was a very useful session.

Call for volunteers

If you would like to become a volunteer Villawood visitor, please contact Virginia Walker on 9712 7784 or 0418 261 160 or email asylumseekersfoundation@bigpond.com. We have a need for pro bono lawyers with a knowledge of Migration Law and interpreters and translators who can handle Mandarin, Dari, Farsi and

Arabic. Sometimes asylum seekers have documents that need examination to determine if the cases come within our strict guidelines; on other occasions some may need NAATI registered interpreters and translators to examine their documentation more fully. Please contact Virginia Walker at the numbers or email provided above if you can help. If you are a doctor, dentist or psychologist who could provide a pro bono service to an asylum seeker, please contact Kate Maclurcan at 9810 5826 or kate-maclurcan@hotmail.com.

Fourth Annual Acoustica Concert at Birchgrove Oval

The fourth Acoustica Concert was blessed with a warm, sunny day on Sunday, 27 April. Once again, Leichhardt Council, with special help from Councillor Damien Copley-Finch, organised a great event which provided the opportunity for BASF to hold a stall with items for sale and to participate in the festival. Our raffle raised just over \$1,000 and we thank Hunt Leather, Circle Café, Indian Palace restaurant, La Boheme Czech restaurant, Emile's Fruit & Vegetables, Curry Mild, Brays Books and TJs Quality Meats who contributed to the raffle. We especially thank our volunteers who helped throughout the day.

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I would like to help the Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation provide direct support for Visa "E" and special category refugees. Please send me:

- () more information about Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation
- () information about direct bank or credit card debits for regular donations

Name

Address

Postcode

Phone

Email

Herewith by cheque/credit card - Visa/Mastercard \$

Card number

Exp date

Signature

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