

## **Armidale Sanctuary Humanitarian Settlement, Inc**

### **Yearly President's Report – May 2022 to May 2023**

Over the past year Sanctuary's main activities have revolved around supporting the Ezidi community in Armidale. There have been approximately 150 new arrivals, but their needs have been largely taken care of by SSI (Settlement Services International) and Ezidi families who have been living in Armidale, some since 2018. Our work has been focussed on maintaining existing contacts, especially in the Home Reading Program and Homework Centre, and in responding to various specific requests for help from SSI, Mosaic Multicultural Connections (formerly Northern Settlement Services) and STARTTS (NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors). Our fabulous Volunteer Coordinators, Kerry Dunne and Astrid Knirsch, have worked hard to meet these requests, but in some cases there are no volunteers available.

#### **Highlights of the year:**

Armidale Sanctuary received the **2022 NSW Humanitarian Award** in the Regional and Rural category. On 5 July, I went to Government House in Sydney, along with Kerry Dunne, to accept the award on behalf of all members of Armidale Sanctuary.

The **Annual Human Rights Lecture** was given by Paul Power, CEO of the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) on 6 October at the Bowling Club.

On 26 January, Khalil Adi, then a member of the Sanctuary Committee became the first Ezidi in Armidale to gain Australian citizenship, And Salam Qaro, Community Development Project Officer for STARTTS, received the ARC Australia Day Award for Community Service. (Sanctuary was one of the organisations that nominated him.)

#### **Involvement in initiatives**

Sanctuary helped plan the celebration of **Refugee Week** that took place on 26 June at the Markets on the Mall, and had an information stall there.

Sanctuary hired a bus for more than 50 people from the Ezidi community to go to **Fiesta La Peel**, a multicultural festival of food and entertainment in Tamworth on Sat 15 October.

Sanctuary (mainly through efforts by Valerie Dalton) worked with HEPPP (the Higher Education Preparation and Partnerships Program) to arrange for the Sydney Theatre Company to come to Armidale and present a **Learning English through Drama** workshop on 28-29 May at Nova. Further workshops run by HEPPP in conjunction with TAFE were held earlier this calendar year.

Last year Sanctuary applied to sponsor **3 Afghan refugee families** for Humanitarian Visas. We still have received an acknowledgement of only one of the applications.

#### **Training and outreach**

A **volunteer chat**: A session was held on 18 May for volunteers to get together to talk about their experiences. An **information session** on volunteering at the Homework Centre took place on 31 January. There were talks on cultural awareness and the code of conduct for volunteers, among other topics.

Two **Workshops on teaching English to Adult Ezidi learners** were presented by Dr Liz Ellis. The first (25 October) was a repeat of the introductory workshops held previously. The second (22 November) was an advanced workshop for people who have attended the introductory one. These workshops were funded by a Volunteers Grant from the Federal Government. Funding from this grant was also used to pay for printing of resources for teaching English to adults upon request from volunteers.

Many Sanctuary volunteers are involved in helping Ezidis get **Australian Citizenship**. A Zoom session on helping people prepare for the citizenship test was given by Dennis Archibald, a volunteer in Newcastle, on 17 May and repeated on 31 May. He has prepared a powerpoint that our volunteers can use with Ezidis here in Armidale, available upon request. Lyn Payne from Legal Aid Refugee Service provided an information session on 6 December. The Sanctuary Committee met on 24 April to familiarise themselves with filling out citizenship applications.

### **Recognition of the Ezidi language:**

Salam Qaro and I worked on a submission calling for the recognition of the Ezidi language for the purpose of training of interpreters for employment by TIS (the national Translation and Interpreting Service). We submitted it to NAATI (the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters) before Christmas.

The submission demonstrated significant linguistic differences between the language spoken by the Ezidis in Australia and Kurdish Kurmanji (which NAATI and TIS currently view as the language of the Ezidi community). It also included statements from many local service providers attesting to the communication difficulties that arise when Kurdish Kurmanji interpreters are used with Ezidi clients. Nevertheless, the submission was rejected on 3 February.

On 14 Feb I wrote to the Chair of the NAATI Board, asking them to reconsider the decision. This was done, but resulted in the same conclusion: "that Ezdiki is an alternate name and/or a dialect of Kurdish Kurmanji". "Ezdiki" is the name given to the language spoken by Ezidis in the country of Armenia, and different to the language used by Ezidis in Australia, so it is not clear why NAATI (and TIS) use it here. We are continuing to make representations and I am meeting (by zoom) with members of the Department of Home Affairs on Tues to discuss the issues.

### **Meetings**

Throughout the year, Vice President Lucinda Wright and/or I attended New England Multicultural Interagency meetings and meetings of HSPN (the Humanitarian Settlement Program Network) and MCDT (the local Multicultural Community Development Team). Along with Volunteers Coordinators Kerry and Astrid, we also had regular meetings with STARTTS and occasional meetings with SSI and Mosaic.

### **Committee**

As usual, the Committee met each month, kept Sanctuary going and provided me with fantastic support. I would like to give a huge thank you to our Vice President, Lucinda, and Volunteers Coordinators, Kerry and Astrid, who I've mentioned already. And special thanks to our Minutes Secretary, Bill Dangar, who unfortunately is retiring from the Committee after 3 years of service. Thanks also go to our Treasurer, Maurice Anker (who also looks after our database), our Correspondence Secretary, Priscilla Connor (especially for organising speakers for the Humanitarian Lecture) and our Membership Secretary, Luise Ashley. Also Valerie Dalton has done a great job as Publicity Officer and Fay Paris as coordinator of the Home Reading Program and Homework Centre. And finally, sincere thanks to the other dedicated members of the Committee: Phillip Bookallil, Patricia Marson, Helen Ware and Pam Watson, and to Elizabeth O'Hara and Khalid Adi, who left the Committee during the year, and Ishan Jarallah, who just joined.

But of course, Sanctuary could not carry out its work without the commitment of our volunteers and supporters.

Jeff Siegel  
President