

Armidale Sanctuary

President's Report – August 2023

News

Thursday 3 August was the 9th anniversary of the genocide inflicted on the Ezidi people in Shingal (Sinjar) in 2014. A very sad gathering was held in the Armidale Town Hall, where Ezidis commemorated the traumatic events of that day with their friends and neighbours from the wider community. It was great to see so many people there, including Sanctuary members. The MC, Salam Qaro, was gracious in thanking the people of Armidale for their support.

Projects and activities

Community Sponsorship of Refugees

Last month I reported the formation of the Armidale Sanctuary Community Supporter Group (CSG) for the CRISP (the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot) program <https://refugeesponsorship.org.au/what-we-do/crisp/>. At present the group consists of 12 members, who have now registered with Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CSRA), the organisation administering the program.

At its July meeting, the Sanctuary Committee agreed to set up a sub-bank-account for the group, and give it \$7,000. The Sanctuary website will also be set up for donations to the group.

The group itself had their second meeting on 26 July. It was decided to request a refugee family with preferably up to 4 school age children, but if needed, as many as 6 children. The meeting discussed issues such as housing and connecting people with schools and service providers and worked out a budget. On 3 August, I submitted the Settlement Plan and Group Profile. Members of the group will now go through 6 hours of training. Fundraising will begin soon.

2023 Human Rights Lecture

When Gillian Triggs gave the annual Sanctuary Human Rights Lecture in 2019, she stressed the importance of having a Human Rights Act in Australia. Her successor as President of the Human Rights Commission, Emeritus Professor Rosalind Croucher AM, has taken up this initiative, and will deliver this year's lecture on the topic:

“Making rights a reality: The need for a Human Rights Act in Australia”

It will be on Thursday, 14 September, 5.30 for 6 pm, at the Armidale Ex-Services Memorial Club. Admission is free (but donations welcome).

(Before becoming President of the Human Rights Commission, Prof Croucher spent seven and a half years as President of the Australian Law Reform Commission. In 2014 she was acknowledged for her contributions to public policy as one of Australia's '100 Women of Influence' and was awarded the Australian Women Lawyer's award.)

Please put this in your calendars and spread the word about what promises to be a very interesting and topical lecture.



Citizenship

As reported before, many people in the Ezidi community are now applying for Australian citizenship. In order for this to happen, they have to pass the Citizenship test, which is based on the booklet *Our Common Bond*. This is 48 pages long, and full of complex English and details that many Australia-born citizens would not know. Here's an example question from the test: Which arm of government has the power to interpret and apply laws: a. legislative, b. executive or c. judicial ? [Answer below at the end of this report.]

Many Sanctuary volunteers are now involved with helping Ezidi friends pass this test. Lyla Stephen has had some successes in this, and on 13 July she gave a workshop to share the methods and resources she has been using. More than 20 people attended the workshop, including Ezidis working for various agencies. Participants went away with many useful ideas and strategies, and later received copies of worksheets and other teaching materials that Lyla has produced. (If you could not attend the workshop but would like copies, contact me jsiegel@une.edu.au .) Many thanks go to Lyla for her time, effort and ingenuity.

Another problem is that currently, applicants have to travel to Tamworth to take the Citizenship test. Sanctuary is actively advocating for Armidale to be designated as a centre where the test can be administered. I brought this up when meeting with representatives from Home Affairs in June. On 19 July Lucinda and I met with Kylie Giles, Community Services Manager of the Armidale Regional Council, about the issue. The mayor has now agreed to write a letter supporting this initiative. On 25 July, Lucinda and I met with Matthew Teece, Multicultural Services Officer, Services Australia (Centrelink), who is very supportive. And on 30 July we sent a letter to Barnaby Joyce requesting his support.

Meetings/Discussions

It's been a surprisingly meeting-free month, other than those mentioned above.

One thing to report: On 3 August, I had a lengthy interview with Andi Stummer, the Australian correspondent for ARD (German Public Broadcasting). He was interested in hearing about the success of refugee settlement in Armidale. And he wanted to explore if there are any lessons that could be learned for Germany, where nearly all former refugees have settled in big cities.

Again, thanks go to all Armidale Sanctuary members for their time and commitment.

Jeff Siegel
President

[answer to Citizenship test question: c. judicial.]