

Armidale Sanctuary

President's Report – February 2023



CONGRATULATIONS to Khalid Adi, the first Ezidi of refugee background in Armidale to become an Australian citizen.

Khalid has been an active member of the Armidale Sanctuary Committee for more than two years.

Here is Khalid on 26 January, along with local MP Adam Marshall, after receiving his citizenship certificate from Mayor Sam Coupland.

CONGRATULATIONS also to Salam Qaro, who received the Armidale Regional Council Australia Day Award for Community Service. Salam is Community Development Project Officer for STARTTS Armidale (NSW Service for the treatment and Rehabilitation for Torture and Trauma Survivors).

Armidale Sanctuary was one of the organisations that nominated Salam for the award.

He is pictured here at the ceremony with his daughter.



Projects and activities:

Recognition of the Ezidi language:

Salam Qaro and I submitted our submission to NAATI (the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters) before Christmas. This called for the recognition of the Ezidi language for the purpose of training of interpreters for employment by TIS (the national Translation and Interpreting Service). The submission demonstrated significant linguistic differences between the Ezidi language and Kurdish Kurmanji (which NAATI currently views is 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. These include: two health professionals (a doctor and a dentist), the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, New England Family Support Service and STARTTS. In addition, representatives from Tressillian nurses, Settlement Services International, TAFE and Centacare (New England and Northwest) also agreed to provide statements if requested.

Nevertheless, the submission was rejected on 3 February. The reasons given were mainly because the Ezidi language is not recognised in written sources such as Encyclopaedia Britannica and Wikipedia (from which there was a long quote in the rejection letter!). This was very disappointing, to say the least, and we will be pursuing the matter further.

News:

Approximately 75 new Ezidi people have arrived in Armidale since early November last year. As mentioned in my last report, they are being well looked after by SSI (Settlement Services International) and members of the established Ezidi community, including SSI's new Bilingual Guides. Two more families are due at the end of February and about 100 more individuals before the end of June. SSI has told the Dept of Immigration that 20–25 arrivals a month would be a good number.

The new Manager of Settlement and Communities for Mosaic Multicultural Connections (formerly Northern Settlement Services) is Sonia Ford. She is based in Newcastle.

14 February will be the 5th anniversary of the arrival of the first Ezidi former refugees in Armidale. After 5 years, immigrants are no longer eligible for services such those provided by Mosaic.

Meetings attended:

MCDT (Multicultural Community Development Team), 20 January:

- Finding enough GPs for new arrivals continues to be a problem.
- Mosaic's men's group and women's groups will be starting up again, as well as the Homework Centre.
- TAFE: A new Cert III course in English for Further Study is to be offered by TAFE. It will be held at UNE. The course is aimed at Ezidis who are too old for secondary school, and who view TAFE as just for older people. (An information session was held on 25 Jan.)

Mosaic Multicultural Connections, 25 January, with Madan Narayanamurthy (Regional Coordinator) and Kerry Dunne and Astrid Knirsch (Volunteer Coordinators):

- Volunteers for the Homework Centre are still needed. An information session was planned for 31 Jan. (If anyone is interested but could not attend the session, please contact me: jsiegel@une.edu.au.)
- Mosaic is trying to help people with their citizenship applications, but they are overwhelmed. It was agreed that Mosaic will ask families who have Sanctuary volunteers to ask their volunteers for help in the first instance. If the volunteer is unable to help, then Mosaic will contact me and we'll see if any other Sanctuary volunteers can help. (If any volunteer wants to help someone apply but needs some guidance, please contact me.)
- There was also a long discussion about a particular family with special needs.

STARTTS (NSW Service for the treatment and Rehabilitation for Torture and Trauma Survivors), 31 January, with Teresa Duggan (Outreach Counsellor/Project Officer), Astrid and Kerry:

- Still no permanent office or new counsellor appointed.
- A 3-day a week position, until end of June, will be advertised for a Ezidi community member to work in connection with women's health.
- There is now a Ezidi interpreter at Centrelink 3 days a week.
- The women's group will start again, but just one day a week. (Volunteer visitors welcome; contact me if you're interested.)
- A new group for more vulnerable women will be established and meet at TAFE.
- There will be another attempt at starting a photography group at PCYC.

Again, many thanks to all Sanctuary members for your involvement and support.

Jeff Siegel
President