

## **Armidale Sanctuary**

### **President's Report – July 2023**

#### **Projects and activities:**

##### **Refugee week events:**

The celebration of Refugee Week at the Jockey Club on 18 June was a great success. Hundreds of people attended. Three members of the Ezidi community gave inspiring talks about their experiences settling into Australian life. There was free food prepared by members of the African, Ezidi, Nepali and Thai communities, entertainment from several communities, and plenty of activities for the kids. Sanctuary was among the organisations with an information table.

The showing of HumanKIND took place on Refugee Day, 20 June. Attendance was disappointing. but there was a good discussion of the community sponsorship of refugees (see below).

##### **An evening with Gemma Sisia:**

This event, at the Bowling Club on 16 June, was a fund-raiser for the School of St Jude in Tanzania, established by Gemma. The more than 200 people who attended were impressed by a presentation by Gemma and talks by Maddie Kelly and Enoch Ephraim. The event was sponsored by the Rotary Clubs of Armidale, with the support of Armidale Sanctuary (although the MC unfortunately forgot to mention Sanctuary).

##### **Volunteer chat/Information session:**

This session took place on Thursday afternoon, 29 June at Kent House. Madan Narayanamurthy, Regional Coordinator at Mosaic Multicultural Connections; Salam Qaro, Community Development Project Officer at STARTTS (NSW Service for the treatment and Rehabilitation for Torture and Trauma Survivors); and Fay Paris, Coordinator of the Homework Centre, gave short talks about their organisations and answered questions. There was also some discussion of issues brought up by some volunteers in attendance.

##### **Community Sponsorship of Refugees:**

A Community Supporter Group, made up of mainly of Sanctuary members, has been formed to sponsor a vulnerable refugee family under the government's new Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP) <https://refugeesponsorship.org.au/what-we-do/crisp/>. Information on the first meeting is given below.

##### **Helping people pass the Citizenship Test:**

Lyla Stephens will be running a course/workshop for people involved with trying to help Ezidis pass the abominable Citizenship Test. Lyla will share her techniques and teaching materials that have helped people actually pass the test. This first session will be on **Thursday 13 July at 4 pm at the SSI/Mosaic Offices**, on the corner of Beardy and Taylor Streets. It will continue at the same date, time and place for at least the following 2 weeks. Places are still available, so if you are interested, just turn up.

##### **Annual Human Rights Lecture**

For your diaries: This year's lecture will be given by the current **President of the Human Rights Commission, Prof Rosalind Croucher**, who replaced Gillian Triggs. The date is **14 September**. More details to follow.

## Meetings/Discussions:

**Dept of Home Affairs:** On 19 June, I had a long meeting with 2 Community Liaison Officers from the Dept of Home Affairs, who were visiting Armidale: Olivier Dreyfus and Sarjoh Bah. Salam Qaro and Mirza Hammo of STARTTS were also there. Olivier reported on the approximate numbers of Ezidis in Australia in addition to the 720 in Armidale: 600 in Coffs Harbour, 1800 in Wagga Wagga and 3000 in Toowoomba. Some of the issues we discussed:

- making the Citizenship Test available in Armidale, rather than people having to go all the way to Tamworth;
- problems of women getting travel documents for their children when the father is missing;
- recognition of the Ezidi language (as described in previous president's reports);
- lack of a decision on applications made to sponsor family members for humanitarian visas going as far back as 2019.

**Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA):** On Wed 5 July, I had a long discussion by phone with Rebecca Langton, the Manager of RCOA. She contacted me in response to an ABC article on the Ezidi language issue:

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-07-04/ezidi-refugee-healthcare-language-not-recognised/102499178>

Rebecca said that she would consult with the other Ezidi communities in NSW to see if they have similar language issues, and if so, take up the matter with TIS (the Translation and Interpreting Service). Multicultural NSW and NAATI (the national standards and certifying authority for translators and interpreters in Australia).

**Armidale Sanctuary Community Supporter Group (CSG)** for the CRISP (the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot) program: The first meeting of this group took place on Thursday 6 July at Kent House. Ten people were there (with 4 apologies). I volunteered to be coordinator of the group and Michael Walsh agreed to be deputy. (These positions were necessary for the purpose of registering an intention to apply to be a part of the program.) The group decided that it would apply to sponsor a family with school age children. Each member will organise as soon as possible for the valid background checks required for the application. The next meeting will be on 26 July at 5 pm. (If anyone would like to join the group, contact me [jsiegel@une.edu.au](mailto:jsiegel@une.edu.au).)

Thanks go to all Armidale Sanctuary members for their time and commitment.

Jeff Siegel  
President