

Armidale Sanctuary

President's Report – June 2023

News

Two more Ezidis became Australian citizens on 17 May: brother and sister Salwan Muhi and Samra Muhi. Congratulations!

Projects and activities:

Refugee week events:

Sanctuary has been involved in the planning of 2 events for Refugee Week (18-24 June)

(1) Celebration of this year's theme "**Finding Freedom**": **Sunday, 18 June, 12 noon to 3 pm** at the Armidale Jockey Club (gates open at 11.30 am). There will be music, dancing and free food from Armidale's multicultural community, plus activities for kids and youth.

(2) Free showing: **Humankind: Tuesday, 20 June (World Refugee Day), 5.30** at Nova 122 Faulkner St (the former town library). This a heart-warming short film (30 minutes) about the arrival of a refugee family from Syria in a rural community in Victoria. The family was sponsored under the government's new community sponsorship of refugee program. An information session about the program will follow.

An evening with Gemma Sisia, Friday 16 June 5.30 for 6 pm, Armidale Bowling Club. Over 20 years ago, Gemma, who is from Guyra, started the School of St Jude for needy children in Tanzania. There are now 3 schools and over 300 students supported in tertiary education. Gemma will be joined by Maddie Kelly (author) and Enoch Ephraim (alumnus and current employee of the school) to talk about her new book *The School that Hope Built*. This is a fund-raiser for the schools, sponsored by the Rotary Clubs of Armidale, with the support of Armidale Sanctuary. Admission is \$10.

Community Sponsorship of Refugees

From 2003 to 2009, Armidale Sanctuary sponsored over 60 refugees to come to Australia and helped them settle into the community here in Armidale. They came from South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and Eritrea. We made many more applications after 2009, but none were successful. Now there is another way: the federal government's new Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP) <https://refugeesponsorship.org.au/what-we-do/crisp/>. We are trying to form a subgroup of Sanctuary members and others to sponsor a vulnerable refugee family under this program. Please contact me if you are interested or come to the film showing on 20 June (see above).

Volunteer chat

It's been quite a while since we've held an information session for our members, But one is finally being planned for **Thursday 29 June 5 pm to 6.30 pm** in the Activities Room at Kent House (141 Faulkner St). We'll be inviting people from the Ezidi community and the main service providers (SSI, Mosaic and STARTTS) to answer your questions, and you'll have the chance to meet and share experiences with other Sanctuary members. I'll send out more info closer to the date.

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 attended:

Consultation with Raja El Tabor, Department of Home Affairs, 15 May (with Vice President Lucinda Wright), about the Ezidi community in Armidale and issues of finance, transport and justice.

MCDT (Multicultural Community Development Team) [organisations working with the Ezidis and other migrants], 26 May and 2 June: planning for Refugee Week activity

Representatives of Rotary Clubs, 26 May: planning for the Gemma Sissia evening (see above)

Mosaic, 1 June (with Madan Narayanamurthy, Regional Coordinator, and Lucinda):

- Scott Martin, who formerly worked for STARTTS in Armidale, is the new head of Mosaic, based in Newcastle.
- Information has come to light that the local mayor can request that the citizenship test be made available in their town. Madan and Lucinda will follow this up so that Ezidis and others will be able to take the test in Armidale instead of having to travel to Tamworth.
- Madan will set up office hours at Mosaic for people to come for help in filling out citizenship applications.
- Madan will also follow up on possible grants for reviving the Digital Connections Officer
- A men's multicultural group has been started (for men under 45).

STARTTS (NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors), 2 June (with Salam Qaro and Mirza Hammo): When Paul Powers, CEO of the Refugee Council of Australia, was here to give the Human Rights Lecture last year, he met with the men's group. They told him about various concerns regarding people's applications to sponsor family members in Iraq for humanitarian visas for Australia. These included time taken for applications to be processed and officials' lack of awareness of the dire situation still facing Ezidis in Sinjar. Paul asked for more detailed information. Mirza (with Salam's help) has been busy compiling this information

It includes details of 40 applications going back to as far as 2019 for which no decision has been made. And dozens of reports from various websites are provided demonstrating that Ezidi people in the Sinjar district are in danger from: (1) kidnapping by the PKK (a Kurdish militant political organisation); (2) Turkish air strikes targeting the PKK (in Sinjar city and nearby refugee camps; and (3) burning of tents in refugee camps, such as the one the Kabarto Camp in Duhok. Many people are fleeing by going through Turkey and illegally entering into Greece.

Humanitarian Settlement Program Network (HSPN), 31 May: I was down at the coast and able to attend this meeting by zoom for only a short time,. Lucinda was there in person and has kindly written up a report, which is included on the following page,

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

Jeff Siegel
President

Report of the quarterly Humanitarian Settlement Program Network meeting on 31 May.

The Meeting, chaired by SSI Sydney, is attended by a large group of agencies who give updates on their services to refugees in Armidale. SSI provided arrival of new refugees data for the quarter. The rate of arrival has been fairly steady at about 25 a month but 47 had arrived March, 43 in May and another 50 were expected in June. The larger groups (and larger families) placed pressure on the settlement services. SSI had leases on 16 houses for people arriving. Most took about 10 weeks to find their own long term accommodation. Children were generally enrolled in school within a week but the wait time for TAFE was several weeks. All but 2 of the arrivals were Ezidi, the others were from Myanmar and went to Tamworth.

Jeff gave an update on efforts to get the Ezidi language recognised as a separate language for interpretation purposes. So far NAATI has been unwilling to put it in a category separate from Kurdish Kurmanji. Trish Owen of Hunter New England Health said that they were trying to recruit local Ezidi interpreters to support Ezidis in the health sector.

The main focus of the meeting was on early childhood education services with presentations from the NSW Department of Education and an introduction to the services of Armidale Family Day Care by Pat Marson, a member of the Sanctuary Committee. The Department of Education is looking to increase pre school access and to issue a Blue Book for each child to record their developmental progress. There were also presentations on NDIS services available and the services of advocates who can assist clients to navigate the sector to obtain the care they need.

Alison Ryan from the Refugee and Advisory Casework Service provided a briefing on recent changes to Immigration law that allows people on various kinds of temporary Protection visas to become permanent residents, which would give them access to the full range of social services, permit them to travel overseas and to bring their families to Australia, They will also be able to apply for citizenship after one year. This important change affects about 19,000 people who have been living on temporary visas in Australia.