

Armidale Sanctuary

President's Report – September 2023

News:

Volunteer Coordinators, Kerry Dunne and Astrid Knirsch, attended the Regional Volunteer Awards Ceremony on 7 September and received the Volunteer Team award on behalf of Sanctuary. They also won the 2023 top award for Volunteer Team of the year! That means they will be invited to the state awards ceremony on 7th December in Sydney. (Thanks go to Lucinda Wright for nominating them.)
<https://www.volunteering.com.au/awards/2023-regional-awards-ceremonies/2023-new-england-volunteer-award-ceremony/>.

The photo shows Astrid and Kerry with Youth Volunteer, Wylie Wright; Senior Volunteer, Cecily Wicks; and Adult Volunteer, Juliet Kaberry.



Projects and activities:

2023 Human Rights Lecture

As previously announced, the annual Sanctuary Human Rights Lecture will be this Thursday, 14 September, 5.30 for 6 pm at the Armidale Ex-Services Memorial Club. The President of the Human Rights Commission, Emeritus Professor Rosalind Croucher AM, will speak on “Making rights a reality: The need for a Human Rights Act in Australia” (The poster accompanies this report.)

Please come along to hear this informative and topical lecture and to support Armidale Sanctuary.

Community Sponsorship of Refugees

Members of the Armidale Sanctuary Community Supporter Group (CSG) have completed their training for the CRISP (the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot) program <https://refugeesponsorship.org.au/what-we-do/crisp/>. The group will now be matched with a vulnerable refugee family selected by UNHCR. Fundraising will begin soon. But one event has already been planned: showing of Captains of Za’atari on 31 October at the Armidale Playhouse.
<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/nov/29/captains-of-zaatari-review-endearing-refugee-camp-football-doc>. More details to follow.

Citizenship Test:

As reported last month, Ezidis applying for citizenship currently have to travel to Tamworth to take the citizenship test, and we are advocating for the test to be administered in Armidale. We received a positive letter of support from Barnaby Joyce, saying he would make representations to the Minister of Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, Andres Giles. We also obtained a letter of support from the General Manager of the Armidale Regional Council (ARC), James Roncon. On 1st September I wrote directly to the Minister about the matter, attaching the letter from the ARC. Lucinda and I also met again with Matt Teece (see below).

Meetings/Discussions:

Services Australia (formerly Centrelink), 22 August (with Matthew Teece, Multicultural Services Officer, and Lucinda): Some progress has been towards having the citizenship test administered at Services Australia in Armidale (2 days a week). Matt will be contacting the Department of Home Affairs. He also reported some good news regarding medical services: 7 more GPs will be coming to Armidale.

MCDT (Multicultural Community Development Team), 1 September:

- New arrivals: About 100 Ezidis have arrived in the last 3 months; 44 are due in September (on 5 or 6 different dates); they are a mixture of people from camps in Turkey and direct from Iraq.
- Driver's licenses: In response to the existence of some fake licenses from overseas, Service NSW no longer accepts a license from Iraq without verification from the Iraqi embassy that it is legitimate.
- SSI (Settlement Services International) news: Tim Gray has been promoted to a state-level position, but he will work from Armidale and still have some local involvement; Monica Jebet will most likely replace him as Team Leader. Two new case workers have been hired. One of them is Farhan Almito from the Ezidi community, and a former member of the Sanctuary Committee. Congratulations Farhan!
- Kristy O'Neill reported on the success of the weekly women's swimming lessons at UNE, with both Ezidi and Iranian women attending. About 25 women attend each week. Funding will continue for Term 4, and is being sought for 2024.
- STARTTS: Still advertising for a counsellor, now more widely and offering relocation costs
- PCYC: Brigitta Velbri reported that new Ezidi arrivals are now attending the free youth session on Mondays. PCYC is also running a "Youth Boot Camp" on Wednesday evenings, and school-based programs on well-being and mindfulness. A Youth Action Group has also held a meeting.
- HEPPP: Henry Faithful reported that 17-18 Ezidi students are still at UNE, and there could be as many as 20 new students next year. HEPPP is running a workshop at TAFE about university study. They are also taking 4 students to Newcastle for the IELTS exam.

SSI, 7 September (with Tim Gray):

Discussed the possibility of Sanctuary getting more involved with new arrivals – e.g. by organising outings like we did in 2019-20. Also, he said it would be good for volunteers to work with the men's and women's groups, in addition to one-on-one, or one to a family. Tim also mentioned that new arrivals now have a session at the Aboriginal Cultural Centre and Keeping Place.

Thanks again to the Armidale Sanctuary membership. Hope to see you all on Thursday at the Human Rights Lecture.

Jeff Siegel
President