

Armidale Sanctuary

President's Report – April 2024

Projects and activities:

Community Sponsorship of Refugees:

As mentioned last month, the Sanctuary Community Supporter Group (CSG) is sponsoring another vulnerable refugee family to come to Armidale. This is through the Federal government's CRISP (Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot) program. The family is a mother and daughter (who is a young adult) from the Democratic Republic of Congo, who have been refugees since 2010, living in Nairobi (Kenya). Unfortunately we have just been informed that it will take 3 to 7 months for the family to get here.

Also I forgot to report last month that the Sanctuary CSG has a new convenor and deputy: Michael Walsh and Gaynor McGrath. Congratulations and thanks to them for stepping into these important roles.

Book launch/dinner:

The book launch/dinner for Robin Jones, previously announced will be held at the Armidale Bowling Club on 23 April, 5.30 pm for 6. Robin was a founding member of Armidale Sanctuary and worked hard to get Armidale designated as a refugee settlement city. Her book is: *From Cabbages to Naan: Memoirs of a Humanitarian*. There are still spaces at the Sanctuary tables for the event. If you are interested, please contact me this week: jsiegel@une.edu.au

2024 Human Rights Lecture:

The Annual Sanctuary Human Rights Lecture will be earlier this year: Thursday, 30 May, 5.30 for 6 pm. It will also be at a new venue: The Armidale Playhouse.

We're excited to announce that the speaker will be Elijah Buol, recently appointed as CEO of Act for Peace, an organisation that for 75 years has been empowering people around the world who have been displaced by conflict and disasters. Mr Buol, from South Sudan, was a refugee himself, losing his parents to conflict when he was a child, and coming to Australia in 2002 as a humanitarian unaccompanied minor.

In Australia, Mr Buol earned university qualifications including a Bachelor of Human Services and Master of Law. He is currently completing a Juris Doctor degree at the Australian National University (ANU).



Mr Buol is currently the Chairperson of Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (ECCQ), and a member of the Queensland government's Gambling Advisory Committee and the Federal government's Settlement Advisory Council.

Meetings

Meeting with service providers, 19 March: Lucinda and I met with Monica Jebet, Team Leader in Armidale for Settlement Services International (SSI) and Madan Narayanamurthy, Regional Coordinator for Mosaic Multicultural Connections. (For new members, SSI looks after refugee arrivals for their first 18 to 24 months, after which time Mosaic takes over.) In the past, former

refugees and other immigrants were given a total of 5 years of support by the Federal Government. But the good news is that this has now been increased to 7 years.

We discussed the possibility of working together to apply for a grant for a new Digital Connections Officer. The person previously in this position, Akram Kudeedah, is now working with Mosaic 2 days a week as a Youth Work. Also employed at Mosaic as settlement workers are Cholhok Mathiang and Basim Khudeda.

Unfortunately, because of recent resignations, SSI was down to only one case worker – Farhan Almito (formerly a member of the Sanctuary Committee.) But there is a casual Bilingual Support Worker, Elias Elias, who works with SSI and the Costa tomato plant in Guyra, where 17 Ezidis are currently employed. [And I have just heard that a new SSI case worker was hired and started today.]

Both a men's group and a women's group are occasionally being run on Wednesdays – the men's group at the SSI/Mosaic offices and the women's group at Kent House. The aim is to have regular fortnightly sessions. It would be good if a few Sanctuary members could attend. I'll send out info as it becomes available.

Ezidi Men's Group, 27 March: I attended a session of this group (at very short notice, so I was unable to send out information to invite others).

Volunteer Chat, 8 April. A gathering was held this evening to give volunteers a chance to meet each other, learn more about the service providers for the Ezidi community that Sanctuary works with, and ask questions. The formal part of the program consisted of speakers from the 3 main service providers: Farhan Almito (SSI), Madan Narayanmurthy (Mosaic), and Rukia Kakie Modie (STARTTS [NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Trauma and Torture Survivors]). Fay Paris also talked about the Homework Centre and Home Reading Program, and Julie Collins about the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) at UNE. After a break for refreshments (provided by Committee members), there was an informal discussion of issues brought up by participants.

Thanks again to all Sanctuary volunteers and supporters.

Jeff Siegel
President