

ARMIDALE SANCTUARY MONTHLY REPORT

NOVEMBER- DECEMBER 2024

Quarterly HSPN SSI meeting

The quarterly Humanitarian Settlement Program Network meeting convened by SSI was held on 26 November. As usual there were updates on arrivals of refugees in Armidale from SSI and general developments from a representative of the Department of Home Affairs. Refugee arrivals continue at a steady pace and there are some 100 awaiting dates for travel to Australia. Although most arrivals continue to be Ezidis a small number from Myanmar are arriving. Most of these have gone to Tamworth where there is a small Karen population but one couple have elected to stay in Armidale so we may see more joining them in the new year.

SSI reported that they have about 250 active cases. Clients are usually transferred to Mosaic after 12-18 months. They also reported that quite a lot of people start looking for work even before they can speak or study English.

A program of activities will be organized in the library for the school holidays.

The Department of Home Affairs representative gave an update on visa options being considered for Palestinians. The numbers granted visas so far for Australia are only small, about 1700. At present these are options for temporary stay visas rather than permanent residence visas.

The Department is also planning to replace the current Humanitarian Settlement program with a new Program called the Humanitarian Integration Settlement Program but there few details about the changes. One change is likely to be that there will be a new tender for settlement services and that this may mean that SSI will have to apply to continue refugee settlement in Armidale.

Another interesting agenda item was information on the campaign being launched by SSI to get refugees' and migrants' qualifications more easily recognized. Many migrants find obtaining recognitions of their qualifications and skills a slow and expensive process and this means that Australia is missing out on making proper use of their skills.

The **monthly meeting with STARTTS** was also held but unfortunately only Astrid could attend for Sanctuary. We are looking for an alternative date that might suit more people. The meetings are useful not only to exchange updates but also to discuss particular cases referred to Sanctuary by STARTTS. STARTTS are still looking for a counsellor who can be based in Armidale and the current mix of visiting counsellors and telehealth consultations is not satisfactory.

I will be meeting with the head of STARTTS Jorge Arroche when he visits Armidale on 12 December. If you have anything that you think will be useful to raise with him please let me know.

Some Sanctuary members took advantage of the workshops on recognizing the signs of Domestic Violence offered by the Womens' Shelter and Zonta. I found the workshop useful in providing information on the signs of domestic violence and what to do as a volunteer. I am hoping that Penny Lamaro, the CEO of the Armidale Womens' Shelter will be able to come and brief the Committee at a meeting next year. Domestic violence awareness can be an issue in refugee communities especially if the concept is a new one culturally.

Some members attended the lunch for Volunteers offered by Armidale Council on 4 December. Many volunteer groups were represented and those who came were presented with a Certificate of Appreciation by the Deputy Mayor.

This is the last letter for this year and the next one may not land until February. The Committee would like to thank you all for the wonderful contribution you have made to Sanctuary activities and the support you have given to so many refugees in Armidale. We always need more volunteers so if you know any one who would like to join Sanctuary please let us know. Many of you have been dedicated supporters of the same family for several years. If you are able to take on an additional person or family that would be a great help. We currently have 12 outstanding requests for a volunteer.

We look forward to seeing some of you at our end of year function to be held at my house on Sunday 15 December from 4 pm at 31 Garibaldi Street.

Wishing you a very Happy Christmas with family and friends and we look forward to seeing you in the new year.

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