

# **Armidale Sanctuary**

## **President's Report – March 2024**

### **Projects and activities:**

#### **Lifesaver Day:**

Sanctuary participated in “Lifesaver Day” at UNE on 22 February. This is part of O Week (orientation week for new students), where community groups and clubs provide information about their activities and services. Thanks go to Valerie Dalton for organising the Sanctuary stall and other members of the Committee for being on hand to talk to the students.

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

Another vulnerable refugee family is coming to Armidale through the CRISP program (Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot). The Sanctuary Community Supporter Group has just agreed to support a mother and daughter (who is a young adult) from the Democratic Republic of Congo. They have been refugees since 2010, living in Nairobi (Kenya). (Sanctuary's last successful sponsorship for humanitarian visas, the Simba family, are also Congolese, and have been living in Armidale since 2009.) We are waiting to find out when the family will arrive, but have been informed that it may take months.

#### **Sponsorship of Afghan refugees:**

Last month I mentioned the plight of the Afghan family of 6 that Sanctuary proposed for Humanitarian Visas in 2022. On 20 February I wrote to our MP, Barnaby Joyce, seeking his help. On 23 February he replied saying that he had emailed a letter to the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, Andrew Giles. He requested that urgent consideration be given to Sanctuary's request that the family be granted Humanitarian Visas to resettle in Armidale.

#### **Book launch/dinner:**

Last month I announced the book launch/dinner for Robin Jones, to 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. (I also said incorrectly that she had been Sanctuary President. My apologies for the error.) Her book is: *From Cabbages to Naan: Memoirs of a Humanitarian*. There are still spaces at the Sanctuary table for the event. If you are interested, please contact me [jsiegel@une.edu.au](mailto:jsiegel@une.edu.au)

### **Meetings**

**Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia**, Online Peer Forum, 14 Feb. There were 2 speakers talking about the CRISP program: The first was Emily Chipman, Senior Durable Solutions Officer at UNHCR, Canberra. She gave the dire figures that 2.4 million refugees are in need of resettlement, and last year only approx. 60,000 were resettled. UNHCR's principles for resettlement can be seen in their handbook at <https://www.unhcr.org/resettlement-handbook/>.

The second speaker was Victoria Stevenson, from the Department of Home Affairs, whose main job involves the selection of families and individuals for the CRISP program. Her colleague, Omar Ahmadzada, also spoke.

**STARTTS** (NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors), 15 Feb, with Rukia Kakie Modi and Kerry Dunne: Ongoing cooperation between Sanctuary and STARTTS was discussed. Rukia also confirmed that sadly both Mirza Hamo (youth worker) and Arjwan Hasan (women's health worker) have resigned from STARTTS. (Mirza has moved to Newcastle.)

**HSPN** (Humanitarian Settlement Program Network), 29 Feb: Reports were heard from various agencies working with the Ezidi community:

**SSI** (Settlement Services International): Monica Jebet (HSP Team Leader) reported on the latest figures for Ezidi arrivals: 3 families (totalling 16 individuals) in November; 1 family of 7 in December; none in January; 2 families (18 individuals) in February. Expected arrivals: 2 families (15 individuals) with confirmed travel and 21 families (117 individuals) with no confirmed travel yet.

Farham Almito (SSI caseworker) reported that the Costa Tomato Farm is being very supportive to workers from the Ezidi community. Also, SSI is running orientation sessions for new arrivals at Centrelink and at the Aboriginal Cultural Centre and Keeping Place.

**Focus on education:** Speakers were David Partridge **EAL/D** (English as an Additional Language/Dialect) Education Leader (Rural North) and Head Teacher of Teaching and Learning at **ASC** (Armidale Secondary College), and Carol McKinney, Head Teacher of the **IEC** (Intensive English Centre) at ASC. There are over 250 former refugee students in Armidale, 150 of them at ASC. (Last year 40 finished year 12.) All schools have bilingual/bicultural workers (5 at ASC). Students at the IEC are 11–17 years old, and there is a maximum of 12 in each class. There are also special parallel classes for students learning English.

[Note: some Sanctuary volunteers have expressed concern about the poor level of English of Ezidi students who finished at ASC, and have blamed these parallel classes for not giving these students the opportunity to interact with native English speakers in mainstream classes. I asked about this in question time. David and Carol clarified that these classes are

- Only for students normally in the first two phases of English language learning (beginning and emerging English);
- Only occur for English and HSIE (Human Society and its Environment), which have language-dense curricula;
- Equate to only approximately 14 hours a fortnight of teaching time;
- Are fluid in nature (when students reach a proficiency level where they can more confidently and independently engage with the curriculum, they leave the class);
- Are taught by TESOL specialist teachers and are supported by bilingual SLSOs (School Learning Support Officers);
- Have proven to support student to make impressive gains in a short period of time (as reported in a published article: [https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/professional-learning/scan/media/documents/vol-42/Scan\\_42-4\\_Term4\\_2023.pdf](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/professional-learning/scan/media/documents/vol-42/Scan_42-4_Term4_2023.pdf)).

Rachel Hennessey, Refugee Student Advisor for NSW, who attended online, reported that research shows that because of trauma, refugee students take longer than other learners to acquire academic English – i.e. up to 10 years as opposed to 3–4 years.

The IEC has also been promoting interaction between English learners and mainstream students – e.g. by subsidising IEC students to go to school camps.]

The IEC also promotes understanding of the Australian education system to non-English-speaking parents by holding a “language hour” 4 days a week, when a Ezidi language speaker is available to talk to parents at the school. The bilingual/bicultural workers also produce videos for parents, explaining various school matters in the Ezidi language.

**Mosaic** Multicultural Connections: Madan Narayanamurthy (Regional Coordinator – Settlement and Communities) spoke about the establishment of a multicultural Youth Action Group. This will focus on youth employment and connections with other agencies, such as Armidale Regional Council, PCYC and TAFE.

**New England Multicultural Interagency meeting, 6 Mar:**

Olivier Dreyfus (Community Liaison Officer, NSW/ACT Community Engagement, Dept of Home Affairs) spoke online about the Federal Government's new Migration Strategy. One of the 5 objectives is: "Building stronger Australian communities by better planning the migration intake, and giving migrants the opportunity to invest in their lives in Australia through permanent residence and citizenship." Key actions include improving the visa system by shortening waiting times and reducing the number of visa types (currently between 75–95!). The full plan and a brief overview can be accessed at <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/what-we-do/migration-strategy>.

Delilah Shindo (Community Liaison Officer, Multicultural Policy and Engagement, Dept of Communities and Justice) spoke online about planning for a Multicultural Youth Forum with a focus on Crime Prevention and Safety.

Anthony Wright (Project, Leader, Mosaic) spoke in person about REAP (Regional Employment Agricultural Program). This started in 2020, with Ezidis being given the opportunity to grow their own vegetables on 2 blocks of rural land, donated by Bruce McCarthy and Andrew Spinks, and get basic training in skills such as fencing. Stage 2 began in 2021 with additional training, such as using of farm machinery and vehicles. In 2023, training was extended to the use of heavy equipment such as excavators. This year, there is a course to acquire a white card (general construction induction card), required for workers in the construction industry.

There were also brief reports from various service providers:

The **Guyra Neighbourhood Centre** runs projects and has facilities for migrants, including a community garden.

**Helping Children and Families** visits families with children under 6 years old.

**Carer Gateway** provides support for people looking after those with chronic health issues, disability or addiction.

**Armidale Health** has formed a Youth Action Group.

The **Volunteer Centre** needs more young volunteers.

**New England Family Support** is holding a conference on "Social and Emotional Well Being of Children", 21-22 March at the Bowlo.

**Services Australia** (Centrelink) is now offering booked appointments at times suitable for clients.

**TAFE** is offering 11 AMEP (Adult Migrant English Program) classes, 1 short class on citizenship and 2 classes in the SEE (Skills for Education and Employment) program – 1 automotive (Cert I) and one women's class. Classes are 90% Ezidis, but there are other nationalities, including Vietnamese and Sri Lankan.

**Mosaic** got a grant from the Dept of Communities and Justice, focussing on Ezidi women. A new men's group will also be organised for this year. Mosaic will also organise an employment forum (information session for the Ezidi community).

**Heathwise** helps GPs and other health professionals with their Ezidi clients.

Once again, thanks go to all Sanctuary supporters and volunteers.

*Jeff Siegel*  
*President*