

## **ARMIDALE SANCTUARY**

### **MONTHLY REPORT AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2024**

We held one of our regular (if not frequent) Volunteer Chat evenings at Kent House on the evening of 28 August. Representatives of SSI, Mosaic and STARTTS attended together with committee members, new and experienced volunteers. After some initial serving of refreshments and allowing time to mingle we sat in a circle and introduced ourselves. Three experienced volunteers, Ron Bradbury, Lyn Mallise and Gaynor McGrath spoke about the highlights of their experience and offered advice on what to do and not do as volunteers. This allowed attendees to ask questions and compare their experiences.

On 29 August, Lucinda attended the quarterly Humanitarian Settlement Program Network meeting hosted by SSI. These regular meetings are an opportunity for SSI to provide updates on new and projected refugee arrivals in Armidale and for agencies attending to provide their own updates. They are also usually attended by senior SSI Managers from Sydney. During the quarter, Ezidi refugee families continued to arrive at a steady rate, some 40 people in May-July. Next month however there are likely to be arrivals from Chin state, Myanmar. Arrivals from Democratic Republic of Congo and Ethiopia are also expected in the future. During the period SSI handed 69 people from its intensive settlement program over to the longer term settlement program provided by Mosaic.

One problem with arrivals that was highlighted once again was the lack of advance notice from the Department of Immigration and that families arriving often wanted to transfer elsewhere straight away as they had families or friends in places. It is an issue to get adequate information about their preferences before they arrive so that they can be sent there directly.

While housing is not an issue in Armidale access to medical and GP services is. The refugee nurse team now has the services of a GP for a clinic but for only 4 hours a week. The clinic will not be open to all comers but those wanting to access the GP will be triaged by the nurses first. Hunter New England Health are hoping to run a campaign against smoking as a high proportion of Ezidi men smoke. A breast feeding information program is also planned.

As well as the updates the meeting focused on mental health issues and ran through a case scenario of the processes and services provided in the event of SSI being notified in advance of particular mental health issues affecting a new arrival.

Sanctuary has been invited to be on the panel of a forum on Ezdi settlement in Armidale organized by Maria Hitchcock for New England Visions. The aim of the forum is to provide an account of how settlement has progressed, what have been the impediments, and what problems need to be addressed going forward. The forum will be held on 2 October in the Bowling Club at 5.30. Sanctuary will be asked to speak about its role in refugee settlement in Armidale.

This month we have placed a number of volunteers with families but we still have 14 outstanding requests. We are looking at other ways we can help with English practice (one of our most frequent requests) such as encouraging people to take advantage of a generous offer from My Tutor for English classes. We are prepared to offer some subsidies to these classes to encourage people. There is also English practice available for those at TAFE who wish to participate in sessions being run in the TAFE library.

Looking to the future, we are looking for ways of increasing our number of volunteers as demand always outstrips our supply. We are also looking for people interested in the organization of

Sanctuary who would be available to be on the Committee with a view to taking up executive positions in due course. Any suggestions you have would be very welcome.

Lucinda Wright

September 2024