

# Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group Newsletter December, 2013

A Project of the Blue Mountains Family Support Service Inc.  
PO Box 197 Katoomba 2780 ph.4782 7866 [www.bmrsg.org.au](http://www.bmrsg.org.au)



## **New Chairperson Elected**

At the Annual General Meeting held in the new Cultural Centre in Katoomba on 14 September, 2013 the well know solicitor Hal Ginges was elected as Chairperson replacing Wayne Buckman, who retired. The Secretary, George Winston, Treasurer, Michael Morley and the Committee members, Marie Standen, Noeline Nagle, Craig Beifus, Grant Medaris, and Tony Sharpe were elected unopposed.

Wayne thanked the outgoing Committee for their hard work and support over the previous busy year. He thanked Suzie van Opdorp for the ongoing support of the BMFSS and also for acting as Returning officer. In reply, Suzie van Opdorp commended the BMRSG on the extent of the support it is now providing for asylum seekers and refugees still in detention and also for those now living within the community on bridging visas with and without work rights. She wished the BMRSG well for the coming year.

## **Annual Report for 2012-13**

The Blue Mountains Family Support Service is proud to have auspiced the Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group since 2003.

The aims of the BMRSG are to:

- Provide financial support to asylum seekers and refugees in the community;
- Provide practical assistance to those released from detention;
- Provide support to asylum seekers in detention; and
- Raise public awareness of refugee and asylum seeker issues.

The Group's hard work has ensured that these aims have been met throughout the year by strategies, including:

- Assisting those in need, with clothing, electricity, food, gas etc..and by making financial donations to the House of Welcome and Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation;
- Working with the Tamil Refugee Assistance Network;
- Providing interest free loans for refugees to pay for the cost of employment training;
- Home visiting;
- Transport;
- Provision of furniture and household items;
- Employment and further education;
- Assistance with document preparation and research;
- Providing support to asylum seekers in detention;
- Raising public awareness of refugee and asylum seeker issues;
- Working with other groups and organizations, and
- Public events, such as screening the documentary *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* , Springwood Foundation Day, Bunnings BBQ and Blue Mountains Gazette features.

A detailed account of our retiring Chairperson Wayne Buckman's Annual Report can be accessed by going to <http://bmrsg.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Annual-Report-2013.pdf>

# Annual Financial Report

## INCOME & EXPENDITURE STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30<sup>TH</sup> June 2013

INCOME	
Donations Received	30,053.64
Fundraising Income	10,679.70
Membership Fees	1,965.41
	-----
42,698.75	
<b>LESS: EXPENDITURE</b>	
Refugee Support	15,695.45
Administrative and Fundraising Expenses	3,085.69
	-----
18,781.14	
<b>EARNINGS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2013</b>	<b>\$23,917.61</b>
<b>Bank Reconciliation for the year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June 2013 -</b>	
Retained Funds - 1/7/2012	11,792.30
Earnings for the year ended 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2013	23,917.61
	-----
<b>Total Retained Funds</b>	<b>35,709.91</b>
<b>Represented by:</b>	
Balance in Bank 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2013	35,443.04
<b>Add:</b> GST credits attributable to the Group for the year	266.87
<b>35,709.91</b>	

**C. Williams**  
**Bookkeeper**  
**25/7/2013**

At the meeting Wayne Buckman expressed the gratitude of the Group to Ms Williams and the BMFSS for their assistance and to our diligent Treasurer, Michael Morley for his continued good work

## Vale Judy Gaskin.

Judy was one of our original Villawood visitors. she continued to visit her refugee friends in Villawood almost until she entered the nursing home. She spent her life in serving others as a nun, a nurse and a wife. She left us forever on 15 October, 2013. All who knew her will cherish her sunny quirky personality forever.



## **News of our Visitors to Villawood Detention Centre**

Compiled from information supplied by Jackie Mayers & Robyne Reichel

### **Visiting stage 2 & 3**

We usually go down together, arriving about 2.p.m and stay until 5.30 or 6 p.m.

When we have six, or seven visitors we are able to invite into the visitors' area a larger group of men, which helps to create a more convivial atmosphere. If someone wants to talk one to one, they can be given more individual attention.

We take a variety of food and games with us. Afghan bread, dips, sunflower seeds, homemade cakes and fresh fruit are particularly welcome. Games such as 'Jenga, UNO and Connect Four not only provide respite from daily worries but have proved a great way for the detainees to learn English and for us to learn a few words of their languages.

A few detainees were released earlier in the year, mainly on bridging visas. However, with the new political era releases have come to a halt. The men feel they are living in a waiting zone. With little to occupy them there is too much time to dwell on the difficulties of their individual situations. The most common complaint is boredom, a breeding ground for anxiety and depression. One of the men we see has been able to start working towards a catering certificate but little else has been offered in the way of activities. One ASIO negative man is currently entering his fifth year in detention. Despite so many hardships there is still humour, camaraderie and a keen interest in the outside world. Wednesdays are a humbling testament to the survival of the human spirit.

### **Visiting The Housing Section**

The BMRSG Housing visitors visit 14 adults and 23 children fortnightly in Residential Housing, a section of Villawood Detention Centre. Five men and women have been accepted by Australia as genuine refugees, but have been assessed by ASIO as national security risks. The review of one woman's case has resulted in ASIO's assessment being confirmed. The rest are still awaiting the outcomes of their case reviews. As the present Government's policy is to halt the review process the outlook is bleak. Some are entering their fifth year in detention with no certainty of release.

There are two large families; a mother and six children, and a mother and four children including a baby who are detained in Housing. Their fathers remain detained in higher security sections of Villawood. The mothers may take the children to see their fathers, but must be accompanied by guards during these visits.

School age children are required to attend school traveling to and from in a special van accompanied by their mothers and SERCO staff. A couple of the children say that they are called "terrorists" and "bad people". However, most parents are very satisfied with the schooling their children are receiving.

The Housing Visitors continue to liaise with the management Serco to find 'suitable' activities for the detainees. The vegetable garden and a writing group started with BMRSG members' assistance is the best we have been allowed.

## **Visiting Asylum Seekers Living in the Community**

Other members visit some families and single men who are living in the community on Bridging visas some with and some without work rights. The accommodation provided for them is often inadequate lacking essential items such as bedding. The BMRSG members and the churches have been especially generous donating furniture, bedding, kitchen items, clothing and food in large quantities. Delivery of these items has been a tremendous task for those of our members who have trailers or utes. We have had to ask the donors to ensure the goods are in good working order as we do not have any means of repairing them. This applies particularly to white goods.

## **Tackling the Boredom and the Crushing Idleness Ocean 12 Cricket Team**

Noeline Nagle, a dedicated cricket buff has persuaded Wenty Leagues Club to sponsor a team in the '*Last Man Stands*' competition. With the help of an article in the Herald and the generosity of people as far afield as Brisbane, the team is now kitted out with whites and all the gear needed. The ABC Lateline will scene an item on 10 December.

Melanie Norris from the Powerhouse Museum has donated two free entrance tickets to be used by refugees. Many thanks Melanie.

## **Finding Employment for those with Work Rights**

Mike Howorth and Grant Medaris continue their efforts to prepare refugees for work and to place them with employers. Thus far about 30 men and women have been placed in either full-time, part-time or casual positions.

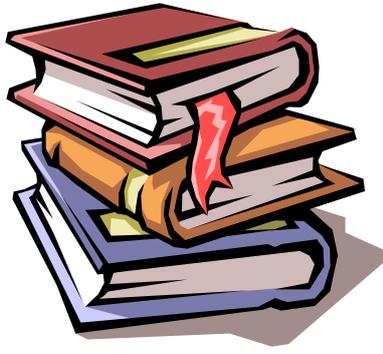
Grant reports that it has been harder to place people recently as the employment scene has tightened considerably. A number of people have been for interviews and though no job resulted, it is still good practice with interview skills.

Training efforts are ongoing using our Interest Free Loan Program set up by our Management Committee to provide the costs of training programs. At present forklift training for six men is being negotiated. This is to occur in Parramatta before Christmas. Having a tangible skill is seen as critical to entering the work force.

Negotiations are still on-going with a few interested employers. Toolijooa Environmental Restoration Company is considering men we have referred for a Special Projects team. The Sofitel Hotel has three resumes under consideration. Mike has had extensive contact with Bright Employment because they offer opportunities to employ Hazara and Tamil refugees and other migrants in agriculture. If you know of a likely employment placement for one of these people please call Grant Medaris on 4739 5290.

Tony Sharpe is pursuing his initiative to set up a restaurant as a training and employment venture. It is an enormous task. We have applied for a grant so we can expand this vital work in 2014 - fingers crossed!

**Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year**



Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group & Megalong Books  
Present

***Tom Keneally & Rosie Scott***

***Introducing***

**A COUNTRY TOO FAR**

Writings on asylum seekers by Australia's foremost authors

**2.00 pm**

**Sunday 23 March 2014**

**Wentworth Falls School of Arts**

**Cnr. Great Western Highway & Adele St**

**Afternoon Tea**

**Admission: \$15 (concession \$10)**

**Tickets available Megalong Books, Leura Mall, Leura**

**And Brendan 4757 2157 or Nick 4784 2656**

**The BMRSG is a Project of Blue Mountains Family Support Service Inc.**

