

Newsletter

No. 12

May, 2003

Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group

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A PROJECT OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS FAMILY
SUPPORT SERVICE ABN 48 765 203 957

Ph 4751 2120 or 47827866

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter" Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr

Fundraising Sunday August 10

Concert of Peace, Freedom and Protest.
with Café of the Gate of Salvation and the
Blue Mountains Trade Union Choir
2pm Springwood Civic Centre.

We need lots of HELP:

•selling raffle tickets - almost half of the proceeds from our last concert came from the raffle; **Ticket books available from George. Tickets \$2 each**

Prizes

FIRST:a midweek luxury 2 night accommodation package at Booleroo Retreat near the Valley of the Waters at Wentworth Falls for 1- 2 couples. It includes a breakfast basket for the first morning and a 1-hour massage by a highly qualified massage therapist.

Donated by Carol Hampshire.

SECOND:a midweek luxury 1 night/2 days accommodation for 2 at Wollangambe Cottage, Mt Wilson.

Donated by Wendy Holland.

THIRD: a distinctive piece of jewellery handcrafted by mountains silversmith Meredith Rutter.

FOURTH:bottles of wine

Last year we had 22 people selling tickets. We need about 30 this year.

Ticket books available from George.

We also need people to

- distribute flyers and posters
- do front of the house duty;
- prepare the hall;
- serve afternoon tea;
- clean up etc

Contact Liz Wong 47515785

Marie Standen 47512120,

George Winston 47827866

This is our major fundraiser and we have continuing good uses for our funds.

Direct Help

On 17 April after spending 4 years in detention Ali was released from Villawood Detention on court orders but no visa at all. He is at present staying with Alan and Anne Thomas of Blackheath. Ali is a young man of 27 years, who was born in Iraq of ethnic Afghan parents. He fled with his parents to Syria when Saddam Hussein came to power. There, his family was given a protection visa. When Ali turned 15 he was given a visa which allowed him to study. On completing his education he was expelled from Syria and eventually reached Australia. The court order classes him as an illegal non-citizen and requires him to be in almost daily contact with DIMIA or the police in Katoomba. He has passable English. Our group is providing financial assistance to Ali and to Alan. Ali is not allowed to work and has no access to Centrelink support. Recently the court order was extended until December.

Alan and Anne are happy to continue hosting him but need respite for, say, five days per month. We are looking for someone, preferably in the twenties age group. He likes cycling and plays very good chess. He does not smoke. We think he would enjoy people of his own age - alas most of us are just too old to be appropriate company.

Anyone who can help please contact Marie 47512120, George 47827866

Alan Thomas has been working very hard on his behalf and after a meeting with Kerry Bartlett has urged that we send letters of support:

Please write urgently in your own words and **MAIL**

The Hon. Phillip Ruddock

Minister for Immigration and Aboriginal Affairs

Parliament House

Canberra, ACT, 2600

The facts about Mohummad Ali Hasan Salihi are:

- He has recently been released from the Villawood Detention Centre.
- He was detained for four years.
- He is stateless.
- He is now staying with one of our members.
- Mr. Kerry Bartlett, M.P. has written to you on Mr. Salihi's behalf, asking for your help under Section 417 of the Immigration Act.
- Strongly support Mr. Bartlett's submission.
- He needs a protection visa.

Direct Help

All contact with **The House of Welcome** will now go through Therese Wachter, our newest committee member. 47592065.

We need immediate **short and long term accommodation** for anyone released from detention. When we are asked by the House of Welcome for help we need to move very quickly. If you can provide such accommodation please contact Therese 47592065.

Virginia Smith of Lawson visits people in the Villawood Detention Centre each week. If you could help her with toys and other items please contact Leonie Hubbard 47518979.

Direct Action

Activities of the Blue Mts People for Peace (BMP4P) and the Women for Peace: More information at the website www.bmp4p.org

Australian Refugee Rights Alliance Workshop Monday May 26th, St Pauls Anglican Church Hall. 11 Crown St. Harris Park. By attending you have the opportunity to raise concerns arising from your experience as a refugee service provider.

Join Refugee Rally on Sunday June 22nd. Contact Denise Hennessey 47396121

Committee

- Marie Standen 31 Wigram Road, Faulconbridge 2776. Ph 47512120 mstanden@pnc.com.au
- George Winston: 7 Mission St, Katoomba, 2780. Ph 47827866 geow@bigpond.com
- Fr. Eugene Stockton, 22 Somers St, Lawson. 2783. Ph 47591818
- Peggy Goldsmith, Jim Tulip, Woodford, 2778. Ph 47588104 peggygoldsmith@bigpond.com
- Michael Farrell -Whelan 7 Govett St, Katoomba, 2780. Ph 47823880 cartman@pnc.com.au
- Liz Wong Springwood. Ph 47515785
- John Clarke, Annette Minchin. Woodford, 2780. Ph 47588153 mountaincolours@mis.net.au
- Therese Wachter Lawson. Ph 47592065(H)

New committee members welcome

**It costs \$10 to send out ten of these newsletters to you by mail each year. We would appreciate it if you could help in one of these ways : -
Donate \$10 - Receive the newsletter by email**

Public Education

We sponsored the Blue Mountains Schools' Public Speaking Challenge: Asylum Seekers

Marie Standen, Peggy Goldsmith and Eugene Stockton worked hard with the principals of St Columba's High and St Thomas Aquinas Public Schools to encourage Blue Mountains schools to participate. There were three categories: Years 5-6 "A day in the life of an asylum seeker." Years 7-9 "Why do people become asylum seekers?" Years 10-12 "What should Australia's policy be on asylum seekers?"

The aim was to encourage and assist students to undertake information gathering, discussion and development of opinions about this issue. St Thomas Aquinas School and St Columba's High School organised and hosted the event on Tuesday May 6th. About 230 students, teachers, parents and supporters listened to moving and articulate presentations by Emma McGirr and Anthony Silverstrine from St Columba's High, Elizabeth Smith from St Thomas Aquinas Primary, Tom Liehr from Winmalee Public, Luke O'Hehir from St Finbars Primary, Gavin Butler, Broke Jeal and Tim Sloan from Lapstone Primary and Alex Mosher of Hazelbrook Primary. Fr Eugene Stockton presented the students with certificates and each school with a certificate and a \$40 book voucher.

A new brochure is available for distribution:

Download from the website in PDF format or contact Marie Standen.

We attended the Harmony Concert April 12. John Clarke and Michael and Wendy Farrell-Whelan flew our flag on the night with an information stall and a few books and homemade jams. It was a very successful networking exercise and we raised about \$65, including the sale of copies of **Copies of 'The Truth Hurts'** which exposes the myths about asylum seekers. **These are available \$3 each. Available from George.)**

Congratulations to Marie Standen, Chair of our group who was awarded the Federal Government's Centenary Medal for her work with asylum seekers. The irony of this is not lost on us, but neither is the real recognition of a woman who will never be silent. (Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter" Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr)

Although the war is over misery still remains and horror stories abound, not just in other countries but here in Australia. We need to feel positive so we asked other people how they dealt with knowing about despair yet still remaining positive:

- Find a peaceful place outdoors to reflect on simple beauty of the sky and trees.
- Speak with other people of like mind.
- Turn off TV and go for a walk and say hello to other walkers, their dogs or their children.