



Ecumenical Bequest to assist in the work of Refugees and Displaced Persons Stories and Ongoing Needs

In February 2017 SA Council of Churches (SACC) shared news of a bequest it had received to assist in the work of refugees and displaced persons. SACC is grateful to the donor, Yvonne Button, formerly of St Saviour's Anglican Church, Glen Osmond, and a member of SACC Refugee and Displaced Persons Task Force for many years. Yvonne was committed to working alongside people from across the churches in welcoming and supporting people who had sought refuge or were experiencing displacement.

Through Ecumenical Partners for Justice and Peace (EPJP), a standing committee of SACC, criteria for disbursement of the bequest were developed and applications invited from organisations seeking funding to continue or enhance their response with refugees and displaced persons in South Australia.

Five projects which received funding were recently completed, and each group was invited by SACC, in partnership with Morialta Uniting Church, to come along on Sunday 5 August 2018 to SACC Peace Expo, to share the story of their projects, as a way of inspiring us on paths to justice, healing and peace.

The afternoon included Stories/Presentations from:

- *Community Garden Coffee Connect*: Amazing Grace Gospel Church, Andrews Farm
- *Helping Refugees in Salisbury and Playford Local Government Areas to be linked to an Australian Friend*: Baptist Care (SA) Inc
- *Sand Play Therapy*: Circle of Friends Incorporated – Circle 111
- *Asylum Seekers – understanding their lives and their contribution to our community*: Justice for Refugees SA
- *Affordable Rental Accommodation Project and Asylum Seeker Assist*: Migrant & Refugee Centre, St Vincent de Paul Society SA Inc

Resources were also available from NCCA Act for Peace and Peace in the Middle East.

SACC thanks all who participated in these projects, and notes that many of them have a need to continue, yet are without the necessary funds to do so. SACC invites the Church network – individuals, congregations, councils, families - to contact any of the organisations listed to find out more, with a view to offering any financial or practical support, for the sake of those who have already experienced great trauma and grief, and yet continue to have their human dignity diminished or denied. *Please see page 2 for brief extracts of some of the stories.*

I also give thanks to the EPJP Bequest Committee - Colin Cargill, Ngaire Llewellyn and Kathy McEvoy – who oversaw the process, considered applications, made recommendations for approval of SACC EPJP and Executive Committee, and kept in touch with each organisation.

Geraldine Hawkes, Ecumenical Facilitator

13 August 2018

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Extracts from some of the stories:

For ten of the children the boat journey to Australia was a significant traumatic event where they were exposed to the fear of their parents and others. One four year old child saw another boat go down with all lives lost. She asked her mother why 'everyone was crying' and continuously vomited over her mother for three days. Her mother had no change of clothes. Another family of four children saw their parents handcuffed as Australian Navy personnel tried to get their boat started again in order to turn it back. One child in this family drifted in and out of consciousness.

In detention, a large proportion of the children had had confronting traumatic experiences including exposure to riots, witnessing detainees in extreme distress and in one case the attempted suicide of one of their parents.

Despite all this past trauma, I am pleased to report that I have observed positive changes in all the children I have worked with through Sandplay. One child who came from a refugee camp in India when aged four has no known relatives apart from her mother. Despite having to become a carer for her mother who has PTSD and a range of health issues she has made significant progress. When I started working with her she would constantly ask me if I was tired or bored, did I need a drink, was it alright if she placed a figure in the sand, would it matter if the figure got sandy and was always apologising. Over time there have been significant changes in her external world due to a change of address, school and so on but also inner changes. This child is now more confident and assertive, not as compliant and more aware of her own needs rather than a sole focus on the needs of others.

The project involved extensive promotion of the Friendship Program via a wide range of avenues and media. 55 volunteers from the Northern Adelaide Region were trained in 2 courses, in Oct/Nov 2017 and May 2018. 17 of the 25 people who part of the course in 2017 have been matched with people with refugee backgrounds from Afghanistan, Bhutan, Congo, Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, South Sudan and Syria. The volunteers from the training course in May 2018 are in the process of being matched.

Some develop a strong friendship, others have a more functional relationship based around learning English, and some have various challenges which means that they do not keep meeting together. However, each volunteer in the program does learn and grow in their understanding of the challenges for refugees and asylum seekers to settle in to Adelaide, and the links formed through the program do contribute to creating a more compassionate and welcoming society.

Please keep us updated if there are other funding opportunities which we can use to support more our vulnerable refugees Community.