



BUDDIES REFUGEE SUPPORT GROUP LTD
ABN 40 606 820 302

MINUTES

General Meeting – Buddies Sunshine Coast

Date: 11 am, Sunday, 26 February 2023

Venue: Connections on King, Uniting Church, BUDERIM

- Minutes taken by Lynda M UTTING, Acting Secretary (on the day).
- Chairperson – Lesley WILLCOXSON

1. Welcome and Apologies

Lesley Willcoxson opened the meeting at 11.05 am. The Traditional Owners of the land, where meeting held, acknowledged, and all members and guests welcomed.

Apologies to be noted from Beth Michon, Maree Keating, Suzanne Entner, Gaynore Stoessel, Margaret Norris, Scott Grimmett

Guest Speakers introduced

2. Guest Speaker – Andrew & Lynette MERRY

We were very happy to welcome Andrew and Lynette. They are the main organisers of a newly-formed CRISP (Community Refugee Integration & Settlement Program) group here on the Sunshine Coast. It's a new government pilot that aims to bring 1500 refugees to Australia who are waiting in refugee camps around the world.

Other countries like Canada, UK, USA and New Zealand have already been running programs like this – and over the past 40 years, in Canada alone, 350,000 refugees have been integrated.

This is a very recent government initiative in Australia, in its current form, and at the moment the refugees coming out on this program count towards our country's annual humanitarian intake of 13,750 – this will hopefully change by the middle of 2023.

The umbrella organisation, CRSA (*Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia*) sets the framework and foundations for the selection, application, settlement, and training & support. There's a lot you have to do first in preparation including: a lengthy application process, sign agreements, get police checks and Blue Cards and attend ZOOM training modules – covering topics eg. refugee health, accommodation and settlement, and employment.

The refugee participants ('mentees') are selected and identified through UNHCR channels – not government. Then CRSA matches the refugee(s) with the CRISP group (*Community Support Group*) who they think will be most suitable.

CRISP groups have to fundraise and help refugees to settle in the local area, starting with finding them somewhere affordable to live, helping them to furnish it, enrol their kids in school, find a doctor, open bank accounts, learn English and get a job – and more!

Andrew and Lynette's group calls themselves the *Sunshine Coast Refugee Friendship Group* – and a short while ago, they were allocated a family – it's a family of eight from the DR Congo. This family have been all living in a refugee camp in Kenya for ten years(!). (This camp, Kakuma, has a population of 250,000)!! The family are Pentecostal Christian – placed with Andrew & Lynette's group especially because they are also Christian (consisting of four married couples; the other three couples each have young children and are in paid employment).

The family of eight from DR Congo consist of a husband, 45years; wife, 37years; "daughter" (or maybe niece), 27years; another niece, 20years; three younger boys/sons, aged 16, 13 and 10years; and a younger daughter, 7years. Most of them speak little or no English – they mostly speak a dialect from their rural village (DR Congo) and Swahili (from Kenya, refugee camp). The family fled from their village (think small thatched roof huts, no electricity) to Kenya in 2012 – where they have been detained ever since.

This is basically all the information which Andrew & Lynette's group have received to date – CRSA operate on a four-week timeframe to release information, transport and then settle the family into their new country and group.

The main requirements for a CRISP group (once approved) are to:

- I. *Fundraise and reach a certain target* – these monies must be enough to cover all expenses at least for the first several weeks while the family is settling in, adapting to their new culture and life, and until Centrelink benefits commence
- II. Provide a support base for the first *12 months* with the eventual aim of the refugee family achieving self-sufficiency

This group has so far raised about \$13K (includes \$5K - a special grant which came to them by CRSA as they agreed to host a larger family) – which will cover rental bond, rent, food, school, phones, transport etc for the early weeks.

Andrew & Lynette spoke 45 minutes before opening it up to the members for a time of Questions & Answers.

Members were concerned about this family's immediate accommodation needs – where would they go when they first arrived? As one might imagine, in the current climate, it is nigh impossible for a single, couple or small (*Australian!*) family to find an affordable place to rent here on the Sunshine Coast, but for a refugee family of eight who have no English, no network in Australia and NO rental history...

The Merrys said that a family from their church is going to be away for five months and so they are considering offering their house for this family to rent while they're away (location: Buderim).

The *Sunshine Coast Refugee Friendship Group* have their own fundraising group which people can go and make a donation.

Tax deductible donations through this link:

<https://shoutforgood.com/fundraisers/sunshinecoastrefugeefriendshipgroup>

They have had a number of in-kind donations made already but still have need of the following: single mattress protectors, back packs, soccer balls, donations for school uniforms, household goods, bond, groceries.

Buddies will publicise Lynette's contact details in a special EXTRA notice sent out to our members and people can then contact her directly about how and where to take the items.

Nambour Community Centre – the SETS (*Settlement Engagement & Transition Support*) teams will be the main support for this newly-formed group.

How can BUDDIES help support his group?

By starting our own CRISP group – we would need to follow the strict list of criteria re: setting up a group (min. five adults), filling in the applications form, going through the selection process, opening a bank account, fundraising, etc. etc. – the idea is that Buddies could put in a request for another family from *DR Congo* – to make the transition a lot easier for both groups.

Also, to use our network to help support the practical needs of the new arrivals eg. trauma counselling, ESL skills.

We took a break here for a late morning tea before resuming.

3. **Volunteer Acknowledgement** – *Gaynore STOESSEL* – a quiet, reliable worker who, like many of our members, works behind the scenes, and just gets on with what needs to be done – she has been involved with many activities and roles over the past few years: helping out at meetings – kitchen, welcome; helping at events; carparking at Eumundi; a brief stint as Director and she was the Secretary for a couple of years; LEH program – transport. Gaynore was not present at the meeting, but Lynda had seen her the day before and presented her with a lovely pot plant.
4. **REPORTS – Refugee Update** – Lesley spoke about the letter she wrote to MP Giles, Immigration Minister re: the unresolved status of the remaining 12,000 'legacy' caseload. She spoke also about Ramesh and his family in Brisbane – how our fundraising donations (eg. Kendall & Yokki's lychees & Scott's avocados) are helping them move into a 3-bedroom house in Marooka and pay rent for the first several weeks.

5. **REPORTS – Constitutional Review** – Lynda gave an update re: this matter – led by David Hill, over the past several months, Buddies has been re-drafting our *Constitution* – it needs an overhaul, and it needs to be worded in a way to reflect the values unique to Buddies. The goal is to coordinate the various draft segments into one whole document, then get it proofed before putting it to the members for their comments. Finally, we will bring this to the AGM to be voted on – along with the proposal re: the membership structure.
6. **GENERAL BUSINESS – Volunteers needs** – Lesley and Lynda put out a call for more volunteers – to man stalls (and organise events) eg. Harmony Day/week; Refugee week; we have need for: a *Refugee Liaison Coordinator* – someone with special skills to be the first point of contact to work with refugees based on the Sunshine Coast – more with those who don't have work rights or Centrelink benefits (and no Case Manager); an *Events Coordinator* - and a *Donations Coordinator* – someone who travels down to Brisbane regularly who can take all the donations from members at meetings – eg. to Romero (NB: Andrew & Lynette said that they did not need all these non-perishable food donations at this time). A new member (Charmaine) put her hand up to take the considerable number of bags (and boxes) down to Romero this week. 😊
7. **Financial Report** – Clare gave an update on Buddies' financial health. We are in a healthy position financially. Lesley was successful in gaining a grant for \$4K (from the Small Grants Program, Community Underwriting) which must be put to the forthcoming LAPs (Learning in Australia Program). The 20th Anniversary in November had an outstanding negative balance of \$1200 – but approx. \$800 of this includes about 80 books (to be sold @\$10 each).
Our BALANCE is \$7147 less \$4K grant money = \$3147 available.
8. **Next General Meeting:** 23 April 2023 (11am, Connections on King, BUDERIM)