

## Buddies Monthly Meeting, 24 July 2016

Chair: Fergus FitzGerald

Notes: Scott Grimmett

The meeting opened at 11:15AM

Apologies: Dee Williams, Kayla Szumer, Helen Smith, Shona Kenrick, Joachim Rother, Penny Rivlin.

### Guest speaker

Davinia Nieper spoke to the meeting about growing up in Malta and travelling the world as a young woman, including experiencing discrimination herself in Australia.

Davinia joined Amnesty International in Malta and learned the power of collective action, lobbying, and the laws affecting refugees and migrants attempting to enter the EU.

The "Lisbon" and "Dublin" treaties are used by EU countries like Malta to criminalise migrants who move beyond the country they land in. Refugees who establish a life for themselves in Europe remain at risk of being returned to Malta if their identity is discovered by the authorities. Malta implements 12 months mandatory detention of all boat arrivals regardless of circumstances. People known to be associated with Amnesty International are refused permission to visit the Malta camps. As a result, refugees have been seen to swim away from the Malta coast guard. Malta processes roughly 7,000 refugee applications each year. This must be compared to more than 65 million people estimated to be displaced from their homes around the world.

There is evidence that Italy and Malta paid Libya under Gaddafi to "disappear" sub-Saharan migrants. It is believed these people are in the mass graves that can be found in the Libyan desert.

Davinia's current project is Multicultural Conversations for the Sunshine Coast Regional Council, now nearing completion of its second stage. This stage is using interviews and surveys to quantify the experience of refugees coming to live on the Sunshine Coast. The next stage will be a multicultural forum and community showcase. Fergus, Zanette and Margaret Landbeck will ensure Buddies is properly represented at this forum.

### Reports

Zanette Perioni reported on the recent MDA Women's Picnic at the Spit. 52 women attended from the MDA in Brisbane and had "a day of absolute excitement."

Bob Cullen reported on recent developments for the Bangladesh young men living in Kilcoy and seeking asylum in Australia. 140 members of the Kilcoy community joined the Bangladesh men to celebrate the end of Ramadan in a striking contradiction of the racism displayed by others in our community. A local doctor is providing the men with free health-care and QPASTT is providing trauma counseling. 10 of the 16 have had their claims for protection rejected and are being told they have to return to Bangladesh. The local church has organized for a solicitor and barrister to assist in legal challenges to their refused claim in the Supreme Court pro bono.

Margaret Norman and Rada Van Der Werff reported on recent visits to BITA and the increasing restrictions faced by both inmates and visitors. Buddies is now one of only a few organisations SERCO allows to visit asylum seekers detained at BITA. They described a number of very disturbing examples of the increasingly harsh and restrictive procedures that mirror appalling conditions on Nauru and Manus.

Fergus FitzGerald noted highlights from the monthly financial report. The detailed financial report will be available through a URL in the next issue of the Bulletin.

Fergus reported on subsequent meetings with councillors following their rejection of our proposal for a Sunshine Coast Refugee Welcome Zone. Astoundingly, it seems only one councillor is now unequivocally supportive. More than one councillor has explained in meetings with our members that a RWZ could result in terrorists coming to the Sunshine Coast. They assert that their Multicultural Conversations Project adequately demonstrates Council's commitment migrants and refugees.

### Upcoming events

Nambour Together, 31 July: Zanette is coordinating a Buddies stall at this community event and looking for more volunteers to help between 11-3 at Quota Park, Nambour.

University of Sunshine Coast Diversity Week, 22-28 August: Zanette is also coordinating a Buddies stall at this on Tuesday 23 August. Zanette also mentioned the monthly market stall at the university, which is a fundraising opportunity for Buddies to sell donated produce.

### Other business

**Fundraising group:** Zanette and Fergus advised that a new fundraising is being established and new members are welcome. The first goal of the group is to work out what strategy and principles should guide our fundraising choices.

**Membership:** Fergus reminded members to renew their membership. An on-line membership database is being established to enable members to join or renew through our website and pay on-line. We are also seeking information about

particular skills or experience members may wish to share via the membership form.

Audrey Raymond informed the meeting of recently published book *The Bone Sparrow* by Zana Fraillon and available from Books on Buderim and Big W stores. The fictional story is set in Australia's Manus and Nauru detention centres based around actual events that asylum seekers have experienced.

### **Next meeting**

Sunday, 26 August 2016.

Chair: Zanette Perioni

Notes: Audrey Raymond

The meeting closed at 12:25PM.