

Minutes Buddies Meeting, Sunday 20 March 2016

Chairperson: Denis White, note-taker: Margaret Landbeck

Apologies: Scott Grimmett, Bob Cullen, Diana Woolley, Carolyn Bates, Stephanie Akers, Grant Allen

Guest Speakers

Lisa McDonald and Gabby Sutherland, former Save the Children teachers on Nauru, related their work and experiences working at the Nauru detention centre between October 2011 and November 2015 when Save the Children Fund was withdrawn from Nauru and Transfield took over. They described the appalling conditions in which the detainees have to live and the slow erosion of dignity and meaningful activities.

They also mentioned the fact that workers have been 'gagged' from speaking out about conditions in these camps (although some have risked prosecution to do so). Life outside the camp for those who have been released from detention is no better in terms of services and opportunities. They illustrated the harsh conditions by describing the harsh and punitive water supply and management regime. There are increasing 'militarised' conditions prevailing in the camp.

Lisa and Gabby gave us links to organisations and groups who are seeking to challenge or address these appalling conditions. These have been posted in the Bulletin 25 March.

General Meeting

LEH

The next Learn English Holiday (3 - 8 April) will for the first time include asylum seeker families, as Buddies members are able and willing to host family groups. This exciting new development will necessitate doing more courses during the school holidays to accommodate families with school age children. For the first time the course is to be led by Buddies members who are TESOL trained and language teachers. Participants include people from Sri Lanka, India, Iran, Sudan, Burma and Afghanistan.

Concert

A fundraising concert has been booked for Saturday 28 May 2pm at the Caloundra Uniting Church. The musicians will play predominantly Celtic, medieval and folk music. They have performed at the Maleny folk festival.

'Fall out' from last meeting

Fergus acknowledged the great courage shown by Lisa and Gabby in sharing the graphic details of horrors being perpetrated by the Australian government at Nauru. This inhumane treatment of asylum seekers, including women and children is why Fr Rod Bower provocatively suggested Australia is the most depraved nation, a statement presented by Fergus to the federal candidates at the last meeting for a response. The Safe Communities group has provocatively reported that Buddies stated Australia is the most depraved nation in the local media and on their Facebook page. Fergus has written a rebuttal to this claim, to the Sunshine Coast Daily in the hope that it will be published. He congratulated Garry on his publicity in the Daily associated with the Refugee Welcome Zone.

Harmony Day

Buddies had an information stall at Harmony Day festival at Cotton Tree. This unfortunately clashed with our meeting but seven Buddies members had offered to work at the stall and were acknowledged.

Colourfest film festival

Part of the Harmony Day program on Monday 21 March at Caloundra. Kendall and others are providing a fund raising afternoon tea.

Multi-cultural conversations

This is a new 6-month project being run by the Sunshine Coast Council. A project officer has been appointed (Davinia Nieper, Buddies member), who has met with Diana Woolley and Fergus to discuss the aims and proposed process. Volunteers were sought to attend an initial workshop in April (date tba). Margaret Landbeck expressed an interest.

Finance Report

Fergus gave a brief summary of the financial situation: \$6821 available (full report in the Bulletin). He acknowledged the substantial fundraising effort by the River and Maleny primary school children, who raised \$430 at their Harmony Day event to be donated to Buddies (c/o Lou Walsh). He also mentioned that our resources were adequate but falling because of the many demands (particularly immigration support costs) and proposed that we initiate a Fund Raising Group with the possibility, now we are incorporated, of applying for grants. Margaret Norman and Gabby Sutherland/Lisa McDonald volunteered to be on this group. Davinia Nieper has expertise in fundraising for community groups and has offered to help. Kendall noted that Bunnings sausage sizzle is a good fundraising activity. The meeting approved of this initiative.

IGM

Fergus explained the need to hold an Inaugural General Meeting for Buddies Ltd within the next 2-3 months to elect a governance group. This follows completion of an MOU with MDA, under which MDA has become a corporate member of Buddies Ltd and is eligible to be elected as director. This would significantly strengthen the already close relationship between our two organizations. He reiterated that the governance group is a requirement of being incorporated, but does not impact on Buddies normal activities and meetings. Nominations for positions will be sought shortly.

Other Business

David Walters spoke about his campaign to target Wilson's security and car parking company (a subsidiary of Broad-spectrum (formerly Transfield) who are profiting from the misery on Nauru and Manus Island (graphically illustrated by Lisa and Gabby). He has been placing notices on windscreens of cars at the Wilsons managed car park at Nambour hospital, alerting patrons that the company is involved in the incarceration of children asylum seekers, such as car parking at Nambour Hospital. He is seeking other Buddies to join him in this campaign of 'naming and shaming' this company. David has prepared flyers and posters.

The meeting closed at 12.35pm.

Next meeting

Sunday 17 April, chairperson: Patrick Buick, note-taker: D'arcy Buick