

Buddies Refugee Support Group

Annual Report 2025-26



Buddies
Supporting refugees

Acknowledgment of Country



We acknowledge the Gubbi Gubbi and Jinibara people who are the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live and work.

We extend our respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and recognise their traditions, language and cultural diversity which have existed for tens of thousands of years.

We pay our respects to Elders, past, present and emerging.

Buddies Mission



Buddies is an independent Sunshine Coast community group that advocates for the just and compassionate treatment of refugees and people seeking asylum, consistent with the international human rights standards that Australia helped develop and has endorsed.

We support policies towards refugees and people seeking asylum that reflect respect, fairness, and generosity to those in need, while advancing Australia's international standing and societal interests.



2025–2026: An overview

Buddies Refugee Support Group Ltd is registered in Queensland as a non-listed public company, limited by guarantee. Lesley Willcoxson, Glyni Cumming and Bronwyn Jackson were elected as Directors at the AGM on 24th of August, 2025.

Clare Arico resigned from her role of Treasurer at the AGM, and Scott Grimmett kindly agreed to stand as Acting Treasurer. The role was advertised and in February 2026, Omar Hammam was appointed at a Board meeting, as both Treasurer and Director. Delphinia Tam-Lower was appointed as Secretary at the same meeting. We thank all outgoing officers. Your work and commitment over many years is greatly appreciated. Welcome to our new officers. Your energy and skills are proving invaluable.

We wish to acknowledge the many years of service of the Finance Committee members – Penny Rivlin, Dee Williams and Tricia Reade. They have recently decided to disband. Their advocacy, commitment and funding requests have been important in the distribution of Buddies funds.

The Board is in the final stages of reviewing the Funding Guidelines and will communicate the updated guidelines when they are finalised.

We thank Wendy Oakley who has continued to issue our regular Bulletins and has also maintained the website. These are vital in keeping people informed of matters specific to Buddies, as well as other events and issues important to refugees and people seeking asylum.

Bronwyn Jackson is the administrator of the Buddies Facebook profile.

Buddies thank the Directors, Treasurer, Secretary, fundraisers, advocates, educators and all others who have contributed to the aims of Buddies, for their tremendous work, skills, passion and knowledge.

Directors 2025–2026



Lesley Willcoxson

Start date in role: 27 August 2023 (retiring at 2026 AGM)

Lesley completed a PhD in Education and subsequently worked with senior executives to develop their cross-cultural competence. She then worked in an academic staff development role at Sydney University before moving to Murdoch University to establish its academic staff development and organisational change program. She has also worked at the University of Southern Queensland and the University of the Sunshine Coast, where she designed and led a nationally-funded, six-university collaborative project on factors associated with university attrition and strategies underpinning retention. Apart from her involvement in the Living in Australia Program, she is also a volunteer surf lifesaver.



Bronwyn Jackson

Start date in role : 25th August 2024

Bronwyn is a retired Primary School teacher who spent the majority of her career with Education Queensland. Her background includes eight years as a Literacy Consultant working across New York City public schools from Pre-K to adult education. Active in community service, she currently volunteers with Meals on Wheels and the Coolum Residents' Association, and serves as Chairperson of her Body Corporate Committee.

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Directors (continued)



Glynis Cumming

Start date in role : 24th August 2025

Glynis is a retired Secondary English teacher holding a Bachelor of Arts and a Diploma of Education. A dedicated community leader, she has served as President of both the Maroochydore Toastmasters Club and U3A Sunshine Coast. Her extensive background in community governance includes roles as President of the Y.S.P.S. & Y.S.H.S. P&C, President of the Yeppoon Little Theatre, State Member of the QCPCA, Chairman of the Adelaide Park Road Rural Fire Brigade, and Welfare Officer for the Livingstone S.E.S. She is also a recipient of the Queensland Medal for 25 years of service.



Omar Hammam, Director and Treasurer

Start date in role : 12th March 2026

Omar brings over 20 years of experience in corporate and financial management across the private sector, along with a strong background as a Director for small to medium-sized businesses. He holds a Bachelor of Business in Accountancy from RMIT, is a Certified Practising Accountant (CPA), and is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors (GAICD).

Buddies' tribute to Kayla Szumer

Buddies' members are pleased and proud that our long-term member, Kayla Szumer, has been awarded the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) in the 2026 Australia Day Honours List.



Kayla, aged 89, was the founder of Buddies' Learn English Holiday program, which she envisioned, set up and steered for many years. It is now known as the Living in Australia Program (LAP).

She is also known for her work with other community programs such as the Graduate Women Queensland, Sunshine Coast, and for establishing Courage to Care in Queensland.

This award is a wonderfully appropriate public acknowledgment of how much Kayla has given

to so many. Her extraordinary energy, empathy and insight have made an incalculable difference to the lives of many people, especially refugees. Members and volunteers of Buddies honour Kayla by continuing with her vision to make a real and profound impact on the lives of refugees, at the twice yearly Living in Australia Program.

Kayla's affinity with people who come to Australia as refugees started at an early age. Born to Jewish parents who came here as refugees in the 1920s, Kayla first completed a BA degree at the University of Sydney, then continued her studies once her youngest son had started school, completing a Graduate Diploma in Social Work which enabled her to focus on her interest in human rights. Kayla and husband Adam joined the fledgling Buddies' group in 2003, supporting Barbara Brewster and other founding members at meetings held at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Buderim. Their purpose? To help dispel the fear and hostility towards Muslim asylum seekers after the destruction of the New York Twin Towers in 2001, and to make them feel welcome in their new home.

LAP continues to grow as it develops interesting, versatile and highly interactive activities, specifically designed to inspire and enthuse new arrivals to Australia.



*Above: Preparing a dish for the multicultural dinner
at the Learn English Holiday*



Right: relaxing at home

Details of the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the General Division, awarded to Mrs Kayla Szumer, for service to the community through social welfare organisations.

Buddies Refugee Support Group

2012 -Learn English Program (now Buddies Living in Australia Program - LAP)

2003- Creator and Coordinator, BUDDIES Learn English Holiday

Courage to Care

2007-2022 Director, Board of Management, New South Wales. 2015 Creator and Coordinator, Queensland Schools Program.

2013 - Supervisor and Developer, Queensland Police Program.

2007 - Exhibition and program organiser.

2006- Exhibition organiser, Sunshine Coast.

2007- Queensland Multicultural Award for Community Service.

Social Work - Other

2005-2024 - Developer, Refugee Education Program, Graduate Women Queensland, Sunshine Coast.

1990-2003 - Organiser, Community Fundraising Concerts, Mt Vincent (NSW).

1978-1982 - Founder and Leader, Shalom Group for Jewish Senior Citizens, North Shore Temple Emanuel (Sydney).

Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Program (CRISP)

As reported in our last Annual Report, Buddies had the privilege in 2024-2025 of helping a wonderful Syrian family – Noura al Weis and Ibrahim al Ibrahim and their family of four children, which became a family of five children – settle on the Sunshine Coast. The girls thrived at school and interactions with the family were warm and happy for all of us involved. We were therefore a little sad to say goodbye when they moved to a bigger house in Toowoomba but, as the photo below indicates, saying goodbye has only meant the chance to continue contact with them in a new environment.

After such a good experience with the al-Ibrahim family, Buddies is now ready to welcome another refugee family and to help them settle in the area. We have a team of Buddies members who have expressed a wish to be involved in the CRISP2 project, half of whom were involved in our first settlement experience. We are about to begin the application process to have a family allocated to us through CRSA (Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia) and we have raised sufficient funds – primarily through our Eumundi carparking work - to begin the process of locating accommodation and setting up a house for a refugee family. Once we have identified the family we are to settle, we will let you know through the Bulletin a bit about the family we will be welcoming to the Coast and the ways in which Buddies members may be able to support the settlement process.



Community engagement: schools

During this past year Buddies was invited to contribute again to the excellent program through which Year 6 students from Matthew Flinders Anglican College learn about refugees. The i-Impact program, designed by the school's teachers, requires students to research the number and location of refugees in the world and what causes people to become refugees, and then design a project of their own choosing – game, sculpture, book, poetry, painting, virtual reality activity – to express what they have learnt about refugees.

Once again, the students were captivated by the story of Kamero Abubakar from Burundi, whom Buddies first met when he took part in the Learn English Holiday, now Living in Australia Program, and who has regularly shared with Year 6 students, the story of his journey and subsequent life in Australia.

Year 9 at Matthew Flinders also invited Lesley Willcoxson, from the Buddies Board of Directors, to take part in a panel discussion that raised some very interesting questions and challenges that all of us who are engaged in community work might contemplate.



**MATTHEW
FLINDERS**
Anglican College

Our other Living in Australia Program school partner – Immanuel Lutheran College – invited Buddies to join in two assemblies focussing on compassion and caring for those seen as 'outsiders'. This provided us with an opportunity to talk with students and staff about refugees and about the Living in Australia Program in particular. We invited students to engage with the program as volunteers, which resulted in seven Immanuel students volunteering and five of them helping on every day of the program. This provided our refugee guests with continuity and the chance to really get to know and make friends with the students.



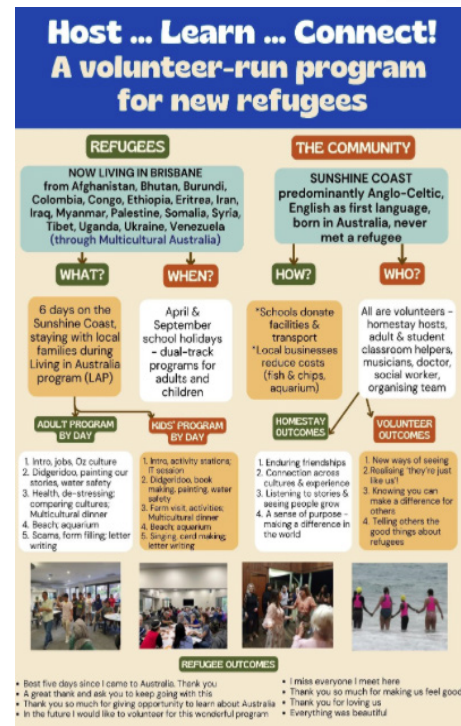
**Immanuel
Lutheran
College**

From Immanuel College also came an invitation to take part in a Year 10 curriculum segment dedicated to exploring issues faced by refugees. The UNHCR video 'What they took with them' provided an eye-opening overview of the displacement and suffering experienced by refugees, and formed the basis of students' reflection on how refugee experiences of life related to their own and what they could do to support refugees.

Community engagement – meetings and other activities

Settlement Council of Australia presentation

In November 2025, Buddies was invited to present a poster to the approximately 500 delegates at the National Conference of the Settlement Council of Australia, held on the Sunshine Coast. This poster (at right) presented us with an opportunity not only to showcase nationally the Living in Australia Program but also to summarise its activities and outcomes:



Sippy Downs Community Group

In June 2026, Buddies was invited to set up a table by the Sippy Downs Community Group, which was 'working together with the local school to organise a gathering where the community can connect, celebrate the strengths of our community and engage in a meaningful dialogue about positive change and a spirit of volunteering'. Susan Feez talked with participants about Buddies' activities, providing us with the opportunity to familiarise more people with issues affecting refugees and encourage involvement with Buddies' Living in Australia Program and CRISP.

Regular meetings

Our other form of community engagement – bi-monthly meetings – has paused in recent times owing to small attendances, even when guest speakers were invited. A meeting in November 2025, attended by Buddies' regulars, indicated continuing interest in Buddies' activities such as CRISP and the LAP but less availability for, or interest in, Sunday morning meetings. Over the coming year Buddies will undoubtedly reflect on the form and desirability of the various activities we have been involved in previously and possibilities for the future.

Living In Australia Program (LAP)

Report by Delphinia Tam (on behalf of the LAP Organising Committee - Mandy Daws, Susan Feez, Norall Mulder, Samantha Champion, Natalie Wight, Cathy Hemmings, Glyni Cumming, Robin Dobson, Lesley Willcoxson and Margaret Norris)

Twice a year, Buddies Refugee Support Group brings together newly arrived refugees and migrants, host families, and community volunteers for the Living in Australia Program (LAP) — a week of activities designed to ease the transition into Australian life. In the last two years we have hosted 106 participants from Afghanistan, Somalia, Colombia, Myanmar, Democratic Republic of Congo, Venezuela, Iran, Syria, Eritrea, Uganda, Ethiopia and Palestine.



How the Program has evolved

Now in its sixteenth year, LAP started out as the Learn English Holiday program and shifted away from focusing solely on language learning to incorporating learning about Australian culture. This took place under two leading organisers, Lesley Willcoxson and





Margaret Norris, whose dedicated leadership shaped a program which gave participants the opportunity not just to practise English but to learn about different aspects of Australian culture. Of particular success were the cultural roleplays session and the learning about scams session.

The most recent April 2026 program introduced new activities such as a learning about dogs session (in response to the high number of participants who often report a 'serious fear of dogs,' which are hard to avoid in their new country!) as well as tai-chi and dancing sessions. Many participants and volunteers particularly enjoyed having a physical activity integrated into each day of the program, not just on beach day.

It truly takes an entire community to run each LAP program and Buddies would not be able to do so without the wholehearted commitment of local partners such as our school venues Immanuel Lutheran College and Matthew Flinders Anglican College, bus transport from St John's College Nambour as well as teachers, students and staff from these schools and all the classroom volunteers and drivers around the Coast who help throughout the week.



We were also the very fortunate beneficiaries of donations from the CM Musgrave Trust and the Coolum Beach Lions Club which helped cover much of the outgoing costs of the program (transport, food, attractions tickets, classroom supplies).

We are also very grateful to Sea Life Mooloolaba HQ and Fisheries on the Spit, whose generous discounts make possible our visit to the aquarium and fish and chips on the beach (a highlight of every program!) and to Surf Safety Australia who generously gave us yellow caps and pink vests so that we can identify and keep our group safe at the beach.

Then there are the host families up and down the Coast who host our families and participants at each program, providing not just food and board and driving but warmth, generosity and friendship. Time and again, participants walk away from each program citing the openness and kindness of their host families as the single most life-changing aspect of the entire week. We cannot thank our host families enough.

Thanks Lesley and Margaret!

Finally, at the April 2026 LAP, we said goodbye to our retiring lead organisers, Lesley Willcoxson and Margaret Norris, who have guided this program from its infancy into its current inspiring, nuanced, multi-faceted form. The program's current depth, responsiveness and success is a result of their dedicated and energetic leadership. We wholeheartedly thank them and look forward to seeing them in future programs as visiting teachers or hosts!

The LAP organising committee has taken up the challenge of stepping into the very big shoes left behind and would like to invite any who would like to join the committee to get in touch at buddieslap1@gmail.com.



Raising money at Eumundi carparks

By Penny Rivlin, Carpark Organiser



Buddies is fortunate to be amongst the teams volunteering regularly as carparking attendants at Eumundi Market, which is open every Wednesday and Saturday. We turn up 3-4 times a month and raise a regular amount of money (from \$650-\$1000 per month), used to support people seeking asylum and refugees.

We regularly send donations to the Romero Centre, Indooroopilly Uniting Church Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support and to Refugee and Immigration Legal Service (RAILS). We also assist individuals with specific needs eg educational costs. A significant amount is being put aside for a new CRISP team to ease a refugee family into settling in Australia, possibly towards the end of this year, or in 2027.

Currently there are 12 amazing volunteers – Andrew, Thorsten, Paul, Tricia, Maree, Vin, Rose, Peter, Norall, Penny and Janet. We man the gate with 'tap-n-go' or direct traffic in the field for about 3 hours. Some have been coming for 10 years (!) and others for a year or so. It's actually quite fun meeting the customers, the staff are helpful and friendly. It's also a good way to keep in touch with other Buddies.

Anyone is welcome to have a trial go, with our assistance. You get decked out in a snazzy hi-viz jacket with radio, BYO hat and closed-in shoes. Happy to give more info :

penny_rivlin@hotmail.com



Finance

Omar Hammam started as Treasurer and Director in February 2026. Omar is a CPA and Graduate of Australian institute of Company Directors. The Board is moving towards updating governance standards around payment processes and financial records.

Below is a Summary of Accounts for the year ended 30 June 2026 compared to the previous year. The current balance of the CRISP savings account is currently at \$15,932.51. Our goal to reach by October is \$20,000; we will then be able to welcome a new family to the Sunshine Coast. \$20,000 is the amount recommended by the CRISP oversight body Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA).

The closing balance of the Everyday account includes savings of \$2,400 set aside for Website and Insurance costs for the 2027 financial year. A special thank you to all the regular donors to Buddies.

ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2025-2026

ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS	2025-2026	2024-2025
INCOME		
Membership fees	\$ 440.00	\$ 429.98
Regular monthly donors	\$ 4,043.87	\$ 2,794.00
Ad hoc donations	\$ 4,650.00	\$ 4,479.55
Trust fund donation to Living in Australia Program	\$ 7,526.66	\$ 5,000.00
Container recycling	\$ 195.30	\$ 532.50
Eumundi car parking	\$ 11,700.00	\$ 11,811.00
Sale of avocados / jams / honey	\$ 2,050.00	\$ 4,110.00
Interest earned on CRISP bank account	\$ 151.46	\$ 63.80
Funds raised by CRISP fundraising		\$ 8,379.57
	\$ 30,757.29	\$ 37,600.40
OUTLAYS		
Insurance	\$ 1,790.00	\$ 1,710.00
Meeting room hire / PO box / website fees	\$ 430.43	\$ 819.74
Living in Australia Program	\$ 7,526.66	\$ 7,213.75
Bursaries for guest speakers		\$ 200.00
Direct support for asylum seekers	\$ 3,300.00	\$ 2,162.18
Donations to refugee support & advocacy groups	\$ 8,600.00	\$ 9,050.00
Expenditure on CRISP family		\$ 8,301.00
	\$ 21,647.09	\$ 29,456.67
	\$ 9,110.20	\$ 8,143.73
	Opening Balance	Plus net change
CRISP Savings	\$ 6,981.05	\$ 15,932.51
Everyday plus Accruals	\$ 5,045.71	\$ 5,204.45
	\$ 12,026.76	\$ 9,110.20
	\$ 21,136.96	

Our partners

Buddies would like to thank the following businesses, schools and community partners. Your generosity has helped turn strangers into friends, and a new country into a home. Thank you for contributing to making a difference.



CM Musgrave
Community Trust



Buddies Refugee Support Group

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