

27 October 2018

Walk Together 2018

Cotton Tree, Sunshine Coast

– Report by Gillian Duffy

To celebrate National Unity Week 2018, Buddies partnered with Welcome to Maleny and Amnesty International Maroochydore, under the umbrella name of the Sunshine Coast Refugee Action Network (SCRAN), to organise “Walk Together” in Cotton Tree Park, Maroochydore on Saturday 27 October.

It was decided to aim for a bigger event than previous years and an application was made to the Sunshine Coast Council for a grant. SCRAN was successful in obtaining a grant of \$2,000 from the Mayor’s discretionary fund.

The day began very early for the organisers, setting up the stage and organising stall holders and food vendors. The program began at 10am with four short speeches. After an acknowledgement of traditional owners, Lisa McDonald as MC introduced renowned Indigenous artist Dr Jandamarra Cadd who spoke of the importance of unity. Next, Tim Buxton, founder of YouBelong, a community organisation supporting Yazidi and Kurdish refugees in Toowoomba, spoke about his experiences in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The Sweet Chilli Choir provided a beautiful musical interlude and sang about women’s place in the world, human rights and the responsibility we all have to Mother Earth and our precious children before Dr Beverly Muito, a Kenyan born Sunshine Coast resident spoke. The final speaker was David Hollinsworth, local academic, mentor and promoter of social justice. Those gathered had the pleasure of listening to wise and powerful, passionate and compassionate, inspirational and motivational speakers on themes of: inclusion, freedom, respect, diversity, celebration of difference, taking care of the planet and each other, sustainability, unity, supporting, welcoming those who seek asylum and letting them know they belong!

The “Walk” was led by Balkan Gypsy band, the Unusual Suspects and about 170 people followed with banners and placards of unity and welcome in several languages. The group included children, people with disabilities, refugees, new Australians and dogs amongst the crowd dancing through the park. Onlookers joined the walk as the parade passed others gathered in the park.

On the stage, guitarist Jevan Cole played intricate finger-picking style, traditional dance tunes from Britain, Ireland and France and Jenny Fitzgibbon sang about social justice and refugee rights. Then Simo, an Iraqi musician, took the stage and



in no time the group of Yazidis visiting from Toowoomba had half the audience up dancing. The day ended with New Zealand band One Vibe playing everyone out on a high.

“We walked, ate, played, learned, danced, sang, created and celebrated a wonderful day together!” was Lisa’s comment at the end of the event.

The day was successful in attracting media coverage, with a piece in the Nambour Weekly before the event and radio interviews on the day. The three groups coming together to share their load, pool their expertise and at the same time raise the profile of all the organisations and their causes was a positive experience.

For Buddies it was a successful day, with two stalls – one with Buddies information and the other manned by Murhaf, a friend of Buddies, displaying his artwork and his wife selling delicious Syrian pastries. It was also lovely to welcome Chanelle, a lady with disabilities who Buddies has supported in the past, to join the walk and sell copies of her book. Buddies signed up 2 new members and 11 people for the Bulletin, as well as collecting 23 signatures for the Refugee Welcome Zone petition. Four other people attended the monthly meeting the following day and joined Buddies.

Murhaf sold two of his paintings and generously donated another painting to Buddies to raffle at a later date. Well done to Diana, Carmel and the team who manned the stall and thanks to all who helped with the set up and pack down. Thanks also to Gayle who donated raffle prizes and Louise who lent the all-important Hi-Viz vests!

Many thanks to the fantastic team who spent many weeks organising the event: Angela, Len, Peter, Diana and Fergus from Buddies, Nina, Ruth, Mandula and Kathy from Amnesty International Maroochydore, with special thanks to Abby for art work, the indefatigable Lisa from Welcome to Maleny and last but by no means least, Dominique from Festuri.