

Education and Advocacy Report 2017

Education

Our education work this year has focused on changing hearts and minds particularly in the edges of our own political seat and nearby electorates.

Schools

- Our partnership with ChillOut, Youth Ambassadors finished when they wound up that program.
- In partnership with The Joan Entertainment Centre in Penrith we have subsidised the cost of tickets for disadvantaged children from schools in the mountains and Western Sydney, who would otherwise not be able to go to the theatre, to attend performances, which give them an insight into how it feels to come from a very different place as a refugee. We hope to continue and extend this program in 2018.
- Schools who otherwise could not attend have been able to take whole classes. Young people from 12 Schools have been subsidized enabling more than 2,000 to attend these life-changing performances.
- Arrival –a story of someone who flees danger in their own country,
- Spoken Four a poetry slam featuring performers from refugee backgrounds and overseas activists
- Suitcase Stories –refugee kids performing their own stories.
One boy from a very disadvantaged school said to his teacher
“Ms, the day you stop inviting me to these things is the day that I die’.

General

We have:

- Worked with the Springwood Hub to Host “A Syrian Symphony for Peace” with Malek Jendali Syrian Refugee Composer and pianist
- Took part in the Winter Magic Parade and co-hosted a stall with Upper Blue Mountains Amnesty.
- Organised a vigil with Leura Uniting Church to honor the death of Hamid Shamshiripour on Manus Island which was very well attended. We also compiled a book of messages and photos from the vigil to send to Hamid’s family.
- We ran a very successful film night at Blackeath with Upper Blue Mountains Amnesty with the film “The Land Between”. We skyped the filmmaker David Fedele in Paris after the film and the audience were able to ask him questions.
- We have emailed members and supporters and posted on social media when urgent issues arise encouraging people to voice their concerns to our politicians.
- We have liased with Lithgow and Hawkesbury groups and with Grandmothers in Detention.

Advocacy

2017 has been a distressing year in Australia for those who care about and are involved with people seeking asylum.

It has felt like a horror movie on steroids. The litany of harsh and inhumane decisions have just kept coming. From the banning of phones in detention centres, unreasonable time frames for those applying for visa’s, draconian rules for people visiting detainees, complete disregard for legal process, random movement of detainees across the country with no warning and usually in the early hours of the morning, a summary cutting off of all support and housing for those in Australia for medical treatment for illness suffered on our offshore detention centres, legislation to increase the powers of the Immigration Minister, the unfolding horror of Manus and the on going lack of respect for people who have committed no crime except that of seeking a safe place to live and nurture their families.

BMRSG has responded through, writing regularly to our politicians, through our social media campaigns (one campaign had a reach of 8,00 people) and working more closely with the Asylum Seeker interagency and groups of refugee advocates such as Rural Australian's for Refugees.

We have been heartened by the courage of our MP Susan Templeman in fearlessly raising the issues of concern in parliament.

We have

- Organised a social media campaign against the banning of mobile phones and contributed to the court case which upheld the right for phones in detention
- Organised a workshop with Play fair on filling out Visa forms
- Met with the Shadow Minister for Immigration and Border Protection Shayne Neumann to voice our concerns about the treatment of asylum seekers
- Asked for a meeting with the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection
- Contributed to Refugee Councils report on the new draconian rules for visitors to detention centre's
- Organised submissions for the Senate inquiry in Dutton's changes to the Immigration Act
- Organised a face book campaign to support refugees on Manus Island being settled in Australia
- Participated in Marches and rallies both locally and in Sydney