



Buddies Refugee Support Group

Annual Report **2023-24**



Introduction

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the first people of Australia. We acknowledge the language and cultural diversity and traditions that existed in this land for tens of thousands of years before the arrival of the first settlers' fleet. We acknowledge Kabi Kabi and Jinibara Peoples of the hinterland and coast of the Sunshine Coast where Buddies members walk today.



ABOUT BUDDIES

Buddies Refugee Support Group Ltd is registered in Queensland as a non-listed public company limited by guarantee. Lesley Willcoxson, Paul McKinlay and Scott Grimmett were elected to serve as directors at the AGM on 27 August 2023.

As I'm sure has been noted in previous years, if it wasn't for the many volunteers across all the Buddies programs, the Directors would not have anything to report. I hope you will join us in gratitude and admiration!

BUDDIES MISSION

We advocate for the just and compassionate treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, consistent with the international human rights standards that Australia helped develop and has endorsed.

We support policies towards refugees and asylum seekers that reflect respect, decency and traditional Australian generosity to those in need while advancing Australia's international standing and national interest.

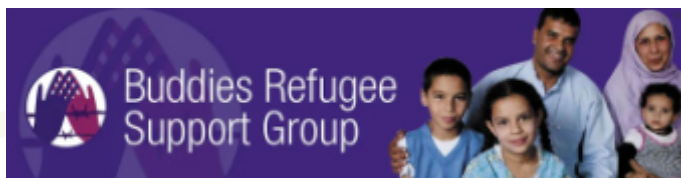
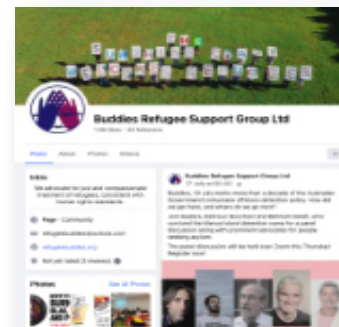
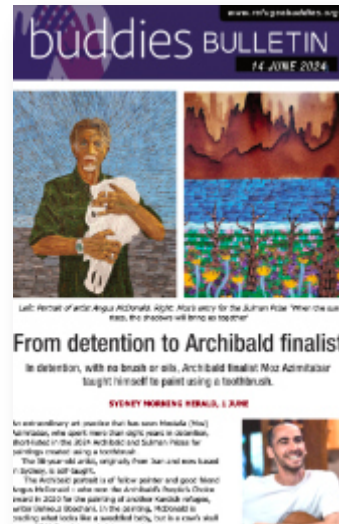


Community engagement

THE BULLETIN, WEBSITE AND FACEBOOK

We thank Wendy Oakley who continues to ensure our members and supporters get monthly issues of “the Bulletin” distributed by email. The Bulletin covers not just Buddies activities but refugee and asylum seeker news from Australia and around the world. The Bulletin gives us an “institutional memory” that would be the envy of much larger organisations.

Wendy also maintains our website at refugeebuddies.org/ while our Facebook page [facebook.com/buddiesrefugeesupportgroup](https://www.facebook.com/buddiesrefugeesupportgroup) is being expertly maintained by Akemi Shih-Evans.



MEMBERSHIP / MEETINGS

Public meetings for members and supporters were held every second month in the year. We particularly thank the following guest speakers:

- Walters Nkemfack from Queensland Community Alliance at our meeting in October 2023
- Faval Copedo, from our own CRISP group at our meeting in February 2024
- Kim Price from Sunshine Coast Council at our meeting in April 2024,
- Kamero Abubakar and Fadi Jarboub, who discussed the Refugee Week theme of ‘Finding freedom: family’ and detailed their experiences as refugees, in June 2024

Programs

COMMUNITY REFUGEE INTEGRATION AND SETTLEMENT PILOT (CRISP)

Report by Faval Copedo Michel, Buddies CRISP Team Leader

The Buddies CRISP group formed mid-2023 and started work towards settling a refugee family onto the Sunshine Coast. CRISP is directed and supported by the national organising group Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA), formed from five Australian charities and non-profit organisations.

A family match was made through CRSA's screening of CRISP group members and since Buddies CRISP team had an Arabic speaker, it was a perfect match with the Al Ibrahim family who come from Damascus, Syria and had been living in refugee camps in Lebanon for about 10 years. The family comprises Ibrahim (father) Noura (mother) and four girls – Kawkab, 15 Mariam, 13, Ariam, 11 and Retaj, 3.



From left: Noura, Ibrahim, Retaj, Ariam, Mariam and Kawkab at the September 2023 Living in Australia Program

PROGRAMS: CRISP program (continued)

On 28 February 2024, the family was welcomed to the Sunshine Coast after a lot of effort by CRISP members and Buddies volunteers to fundraise, find a home, furnish a home, and have everything needed to settle in. Additionally, the team arranged schooling, bank accounts, Centrelink appointments, and other local connections in the community, such as with the local mosque. The family have settled in Coes Creek Nambour, and the home was sourced through Buddies connections.

Three of the girls started school the week after arriving and are enjoying and doing well at Nambour State College. Wonderful donations of two new laptops were provided for the high school girls from local community members. Ibrahim and Noura have commenced TAFE lessons for their English with the youngest daughter enrolled in daycare on these days.

Another significant amount of support was provided by Luke and Kellie at Battery Hill Dental who offered free and heavily reduced dental care for Ibrahim and Noura.

Within weeks of arriving the family participated in the April 2024 Buddies LAP program and thoroughly enjoyed meeting other refugees from Brisbane, especially the Syrian families. They also enjoyed seeing more of the Sunshine Coast. They will participate in the September LAP program as well. The family have also participated in community events at Nambour Community Centre and Ramadan events at the mosque and with other families from the mosque.

There has been fantastic support from Buddies members who have helped with transport for the family as well as calling in to say hello and welcome. The Sunshine Coast Council chose the Al Ibrahim family to be the recipients of the funds raised this year for Harmony Week – many thanks to Subbu for his culinary efforts to raise the funds.



The family celebrate Noura's birthday at South Bank.

PROGRAMS: CRISP program (continued)

The CRISP team and the family have celebrated three birthdays since the family's arrival, including a BBQ at the beach for Kawkab, a Sunday visit to Brisbane City for Noura and a presentation of a cake for Retaj at the Middle Eastern Dinner fundraiser.

There has been a great effort towards translating documents and medical records for the family. This includes Ibrahim's Syrian licence; he is currently working towards his Australian licence requirements. The family are managing all the changes that come with moving cultures and language learning very well.



Sunshine Coast Council representatives present the family with a cheque for the monies raised during Harmony week

However one aspect that the CRISP team felt was vital to support the family with, was fundraising for a car. Since arriving, the CRISP team and other Buddies members have been transporting the family to appointments and other outings. As a result the CRISP team created the Middle Eastern Dinner fundraiser that was held on 13 July 2024. The dinner was catered by local Lebanese restaurant Via Mina who provided a beautiful array of Middle Eastern food for the guests. The dinner was held at St Marks church hall in Buderim.

CRISP was able to raise approximately \$10,000 including a \$2,000 contribution from the Al Ibrahim family. There were also significant donations from community members towards the car funding. As a result of the CRISP team members' efforts, a suitable car was found

PROGRAMS: CRISP program (continued)



and a professional inspection was conducted, so that now the family owns their own car which is perfectly suited to the needs of their growing family.

Moving forward, Ibrahim will complete his Prep L training for drivers' licence and then have some lessons before going on to complete his practical test. Another exciting development is that Ibrahim and Noura will welcome their fifth child in January 2025. Recently, the family celebrated with a gender reveal party and after 4 girls, the family will welcome a little boy!

Finally, Buddies CRISP would like to extend heartfelt gratitude to all Buddies members for their ongoing support in the background or on the ground through helping with transport or other activities.

As the leader of the CRISP team, I express my gratitude to all members of the team who have contributed to the success of this endeavour. We have had the best group of CRISP members, with a wide range of talents and experiences that have made this journey extremely satisfying. Buddies should be extremely proud to have settled their own local refugee family.

PROGRAMS: (continued)

LIVING IN AUSTRALIA PROGRAM (LAP)

Report by Lesley Willcoxson, LAP Coordinator

The September 2023 Living in Australia Program involved 35 participants from, variously, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Syria, Guatemala, Afghanistan, Myanmar and Ukraine. A distinctive feature of this program was the presence of 21 people aged between 12 and 31, including an energetic soccer-loving all-male group of 6 teenagers.

Contrasting with the large youth presence was the involvement of 7 people over the age of 60, including a livewire couple aged 70 and 77! Almost all participants had been in Australia for only 2-3 months and, while some spoke good English, we also had a group of older participants who spoke almost no English.

One of the striking things about this group was the cross-cultural friendships they made. Comments from participants included:

- I learnt to like all the people from other countrys.
- I enjoyed learning new things and making friends.
- Everything is beautiful. The party was very good.
- Thank you so much for everything. You are all amazing people.
- Great program, very helpful, and informative lessons! Thank you so much.
- Thank you for everyone, from the children to all the rest.



PROGRAMS: LAP (continued)

The April 2024 program was a little unusual in that the number of participants was larger than normal (43) and the range of countries represented was smaller than normal – Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Syria, and one Afghani.

Thirty two of the participants came from Brisbane and were referred by Multicultural Australia and a further eleven came from Sunshine Coast, being members of the Syrian family that Buddies has settled through the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Program (CRISP) and members of the Congolese family also settled (by another group) as part of the CRISP program.



In total 13 of the participants in April 2024 were under the age of 15, and most of the adult participants had almost no or beginner English so the challenges for Homestay hosts and volunteers were more linguistic than they have been in the recent past.

The Living in Australia Program could never run without the generosity and support of our Homestay hosts



PROGRAMS: LAP (continued)

who invite our guests into their homes, laugh, and share stories and their lives with them, even when effective communication requires more gestures than spoken words. Similarly, our classroom volunteers are critical to our capacity to run the LAP. Every time we run the LAP, between 30 to 40 classroom volunteers work with small groups or (for those with almost no English) one to one, helping them to engage with the learning activities.

We are also greatly helped in the classroom by students from our partner schools, particularly Immanuel College and Matthew Flinders College, and also students from St John's Nambour, Nambour State College, Nambour Christian College, Montessori International College and Siena College. The teachers and students who help provide water safety during our beach day and show our guests how to ride boogie boards bring great joy to all! We particularly want to thank our partner schools – Matthew Flinders College and Immanuel College, who share their wonderful classroom facilities with us, and St John's College, who lend us their bus.

We are also very grateful to Wildlife HQ and Fisheries on the Spit, whose generous discounts make possible our visit to the zoo and fish and chips on the beach, and to Surf Safety Australia who generously gave us yellow caps and pink vests so that we could identify and keep our group safe at the beach.

In 2023 we also greatly benefited from a \$4000 grant from Community Underwriting, which provides Buddies' public liability insurance. This meant that our LAP costs were covered and the funds obtained through the tireless work of our Eumundi carparking, fruit picking, and jam making fundraisers could be directed to our involvement in the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Program (CRISP). Thank you, Community Underwriting! And thank you Kendall Snowden and Yokki Rother and all car parkers – you give so much, so often!



PROGRAMS: (continued)

SCHOOLS PROGRAM

Report by Lesley Willcoxson, Program Coordinator

Over the last few years Buddies has had the opportunity to be part of a fantastic program developed by Year 6 teachers at Matthew Flinders Anglican College, with the goal of helping their students to make the world a better place. The young students in the i-impact program research the concept 'refugee' – with input from Buddies and from past participants in the Living in Australia Program, who describe why and how they became refugees, as well as the process and consequences of their journey to Australia.



From one week to the next the learning is visible, and by the end of the program the students have developed a 'product' which explains what it means to be a refugee. Their creativity is remarkable - encompassing variously virtual reality, board games, sculptures, paintings, videos, poetry, amongst other things - and this is on display at the exhibition at the end of the program to which parents and others are invited. The creative works this year were sold, and Buddies is very grateful to Matthew Flinders Year 6 students and their teachers for the donation of \$425 which resulted.

Financial support for refugee services

THE ROMERO CENTRE

The Romero Centre in Dutton Park, Brisbane, provides critical services to hundreds of families and individuals seeking asylum, such as help with food and shelter, English language and employment skills, and support in accessing legal services.

Financial support from Buddies was interrupted in the last third of the year as Romero experienced its own organisational difficulties. From 1 July 2024, the Romero Centre is now part of the Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane and is continuing its work supporting families and individuals seeking asylum. We plan to resume our regular monthly donations to Romero in 2024-25.



INDOOROOPILLY UNITING CHURCH ASYLUM SEEKER & REFUGEE SUPPORT HUB

Financial support from Buddies helps the IUC provide emergency food relief and welfare, and referral to legal, housing, health and employment services.

BRISBANE ON ARRIVAL REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKER SUPPORT GROUP

Financial support from Buddies has helped BOARASS support the immediate needs of refugees and asylum seekers arriving on the mainland from Australia's overseas detention regimes. These needs include such things as SIM cards and phones, finding short-term accommodation, and sourcing medication and medical care.

Fundraising

FRUIT PICKING

The general avocado glut this year meant picking was not as lucrative as it has been in past years. With fruit shops not buying from us we relied on the residents of Hibiscus & Bellflower resorts, members of the Oriana Choir, and the Yandina Markets. These sales were supplemented by a slightly better custard apple season, Yoki Rother's jams and preserves, and Brenda & Nick Dryburgh's honey crop, which they have donated for the third year in a row and which alone raised \$300.

There is room for younger pickers next season as there is a good chance our regulars Kendall Snowden and Yoki Rother are retiring north to be close to their grandchildren. Please contact Scott Grimmett <home@scottgrimmett.id.au> in April 2025!

We thank Kendall & Yoki, Thene Bell, Vinoth Nesarasa and Len Mangan, as well as Scott's great uncle Herbert Francis Fielding who originally planted the orchard.

CAR PARKING

Buddies is lucky to have another fundraising activity that allows us to sell something the public wants (a parking spot) rather than, say, raffle tickets! Eumundi Markets are open Wednesday and Saturday mornings all year, and we staff the gates and direct cars in the field four times a month (two Wednesdays and two Saturdays).



There are currently 11 volunteers who turn up whatever the weather and who have ensured that in the last year over \$10,000 has been raised. As a consequence, Buddies can support refugees/asylum seekers directly, or indirectly through entities in Brisbane such as Romero etc.

It also helps fund the two highly successful Living in Australia programs run each April and September school holidays at Immanuel Lutheran College and Matthew Flinders Anglican College, both in Buderim.

Fundraising (continued)

Car parking is often fun, with the chance to meet visitors from around Australia and overseas. It's also a good way to keep in touch with Buddies members. You only need to be under 80 to volunteer, and can either use the 'tap and go' payment system (not very difficult, and we're given help and back-up from the regular friendly staff) or stand in the field with a flag, and a radio, directing vehicles.

If anyone wants a trial go, please contact Penny Rivlin <penny_rivlin@hotmail.com> for more details. An extra one or two folk helping for 3 hours a month would help us take a break, look after family or whatever. We earn \$25 each per hour from the Eumundi Combined Community Organisation running the car park, which is a brilliant rate for a volunteer activity.

Thank you Thorsten Kels, Len Mangan, Lesley Willcoxson, Gaynore Stoessel, Florence Teillet, Claire Corrigan, Kerry Page, Paul MacKinlay, Norall Mulder, Maree Keating, Florence Teillet, Janet Dearden and Tricia Reade.

CONTAINERS FOR CHANGE

When recycling eligible containers at a container refund point, 10 cents per eligible container is credited to Buddies bank account if the Buddies ID number C10181760 is used. Acceptable items include cans, plastic and glass drinks bottles, kid's fruit juice cartons and wine and spirit bottles



Finance

We are very grateful to Clare Arico who has completed another year as our Treasurer. The knowledge she has built up of our operations and the advice she gives the Board is invaluable.

Annual Financial Statement

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024

Account Balance on 1 July 2024 **\$6,902.71**

INCOME

Membership fees

Membership fees of Buddies Ltd **\$425.15**

Sub-total **\$425.15**

Donations

Donations *ad hoc* **\$628.79**

Regular monthly donations – direct to bank account **\$3,532.00**

Matthew Flinders – bursary for guest speakers **\$400.00**

Sub-total **\$4,560.79**

Fundraising

Container recycling – "Cash for cans" **\$559.70**

Eumundi Car Parking **\$17,016.00**

Goodwill Wine commissions **\$12.00**

Avocado sales **\$1,400.00**

Sale of jam, lychees and honey **\$1,430.00**

Sale of books **\$0.00**

Sub-total **\$20,417.70**

TOTAL INCOME **\$25,403.64**

Finance (continued)

OUTLAYS

Operating expenses

Public liability and volunteer insurance	\$1,650.00
Meeting room hire	\$430.00
Website annual fee	\$261.38
Annual Fee for PO Box 367	\$174.00
Sub-total	\$2,515.38

Community Awareness

Buddies CRISP	\$8,590.00
Guest speakers at Matthew Flinders	\$200.00
Guest speakers at Buddies meetings	\$400.00
Living in Australia Program	\$4,154.62
Sub-total	\$13,344.62

Direct support for asylum seekers & refugees

Ongoing support for local asylum seeker with no income support	\$6,212.00
Sub-total	\$6,212.00

Donations to refugee support & advocacy groups

The Romero Centre	\$2,500.00
Indooroopilly Uniting Church (Asylum Seeker assistance)	\$3,500.00
BOARASSG (Brisbane on Arrival support group)	\$400.00
Sub-total	\$6,900.00

TOTAL OUTLAYS **\$28,972.00**

Buddies CRISP

Opening Balance at Bank	\$0.00
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INCOME

Donation from Buddies	\$8,590.00
Interest	\$61.33
Fundraising	\$5,165.59
TOTAL INCOME	\$13,816.92

OUTLAYS

CRISP family	\$13,778.24
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TOTAL OUTLAYS **\$13,778.24**