



# QSA Notes

## Refugees at home and abroad

JACKIE PERKINS | QSA ADMINISTRATOR



The finished quilt showing the botanical theme to the embroidery.

Friends may recall that QSA received a bequest enabling support of refugees and asylum seekers, both here in Australia and overseas. In this edition of QSA Notes, we thought we would share some of the projects supported from the bequest.

From Tasmania Regional Meeting and Jen Newton, we have heard of their project. It provides small payments to individuals and groups, including contributing to the wages for a child carer, a young Somali woman, and for a

Waste to Wonderful Project. This group functions in a supportive and social way, and a woollen quilt has been made from blanket squares, dyed in indigo and then embroidered with a botanical theme. It has already been exhibited at the Art from Trash Exhibition. Looks great everyone!

All the women interact with the children and it is so lovely to see some of our older women stepping into Grandmotherly roles so that these children have a sense of an extended

family. The Waste to Wonderful project is a great example of a community development project that works! It brings together women from a range of Australian backgrounds and women from the new refugee-initiated communities in a project that circles around creativity, fellowship, shared meals, and the laughter of little children, sharing our lives, cultures and yummy food throughout the year as well as our camping trips and picnics. Sometimes the conversations are about

craft, but often they are about things like how to negotiate repayments on a Telstra bill. The project supports single mothers with small children who would otherwise be isolated, by opening doors to friendship with other women. The other women also benefit from the friendships, from their increased understanding and knowledge of other cultures and by their increased skills in supporting women from minority communities to negotiate their lives here. Advocacy is a role that we step into often with our women and their families, with Government providers, charitable organisations, landlords, Telstra, power, etc. and interpreting notices and letters which can appear official and threatening.

From Jo Flanagan CEO Women's Health Tasmania, which held a consultation with the women who use the services – here is some of the feedback from the women who have participated in Waste to Wonderful:

*When I came here I didn't have many friends or people that I knew in Hobart. When I came to the group they helped me. I had twins and they just turned one when I joined the group, so I had help from these women and now we're like family. We learnt a lot of sewing and craft from the ladies here. We go camping together, we go to picnics together, we eat together, we share our cultural food together, so we do a lot of stuff! It's just like my family here in Tasmania really.*

*I found it has just broadened my horizon tremendously to understand what the refugee problems are. What these women, who were on their own, with children, went through, trying to settle in a new country and make new lives – that's broadened my horizon. They're a wonderful group of women. I love them. We've done a lot of great things together and built wonderful friendships.*

Sounds fantastic, and so very supportive of people needing additional help at such a vulnerable time in their lives.

In West Australia, Henry Esbenshade has sent a report from the 'It takes a Village' project, which is being run by Save the Children. Funding was provided to support their work and it has enabled them to increase their capacity to provide one on one practical support to mothers and families on humanitarian and spousal visas; and to provide additional mentoring, guidance and professional support to bicultural staff so that they can increase their knowledge and skills in a range of settlement and well-being areas. Long term support has been given to four mothers originally from Afghanistan and one from Myanmar. Four were supported with antenatal and perinatal care, and one was supported with family issues relating to domestic violence, alcohol abuse, intergenerational conflict and school attendance. In addition, two were experiencing significant issues

relating to their mental health and wellbeing.

Permaculture training in Bangladesh with new project partner, Bangladesh Association for Sustainable Development, began at the start of the year. Two courses have been provided, and now on-going mentoring and support of the trainees will help them to develop their food gardens and work together for support to achieve greater food security. Currently food supplies for the refugees in camps is provided by UNHCR, and due to the huge numbers in the camps, it is subsistence food only. There are limited opportunities for fresh vegetables except those now being grown by the trainees. The chance to provide extra food for the family is a great motivator. More information about this particular project can be found in the latest edition of the QSA Newsletter, available from the QSA office at [administration@qsa.org.au](mailto:administration@qsa.org.au).

We are soon approaching the end of the financial year. When you consider where to give your end-of-financial-year donations, please spare a thought for making a tax deductible donation to QSA to help us continue our projects and the support of project partners in India, Cambodia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Malaysia, Bangladesh and Australia. On behalf of the community groups we support, thank you Friends.

QSA is a member of the Australian Council for International Development and is a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct. The purpose of QSA is to express in a practical way the concern of Australian Quakers for the building of a more peaceful, equitable, just and compassionate world. To this end QSA works with communities in need to improve their quality of life with projects which are culturally sensitive, as well as being economically and environmentally appropriate and sustainable.

Find us on Facebook for more photos and stories: [facebook.com/quakerserviceaustralia](https://facebook.com/quakerserviceaustralia).

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