



# QSA Notes

## What we told Yearly Meeting

AI LEEN QUAH AND JACKIE PERKINS | QSA



**Above:** MSRI's education program provides respite for both refugee children and their parents. Photo: MSRI



**Right:** One girl's ideas for using solar power to pump water for crop irrigation and to provide lighting in a bullock cart when travelling at night. Photo credit QSA

During Yearly Meeting 2018, QSA reported on the progress of many of the overseas projects that have been supported by Friends and the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. A PowerPoint presentation focused on the work being undertaken by project partners on climate change and environmental restoration. Some major aspects were:

- Raising awareness about the local environment, with study classes for school students, discussions between farmers and study visits to different locations.
- Learning how to care for the environment as part of the project activities, including a school project in Tamil Nadu to design possible ways of using new technology.
- Understanding what climate change is and how it could impact on the local area
- Learning what can be done to reduce the impact on the region, on agriculture, on livelihoods and on food

and water security. Project activities included participation in regional planning and discussions; training in food processing and seed saving to help in the future; learning different ways to help with water security such as underground tanks instead of walking large distances to collect water from a tap and understanding ways to keep the water supply pure.

Climate change and environmental considerations don't only impact on the work of project partners. QSA has also been assessed this year to be sure it is acting in the most environmentally aware manner, and during Yearly Meeting, Zac Bonham from NSW RM gave a presentation on the results of his survey as part of his work for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. Zac was able to suggest some areas for improvement, but on the whole we are on track, with our carbon offsetting via reforestation projects in Tamil Nadu, use of electricity, phone and paper resources to name a few.

This Yearly Meeting also noted the

commencement of several projects to support refugees and asylum seekers in Australia through Regional Meetings and in Malaysia in collaboration with the Refugee Council of Australia. Friends heard of the provision of small neighbourhood grants to refugees and asylum seeker groups in Tasmania; support for a drop-in centre program for refugees between the ages of 12-17 years in South Australia; weekly community-based opportunities for support and mentoring for refugee university students and also a sewing circle of refugee and asylum seeker mothers of young children in Victoria; and support for 'It Takes a Village' project in West Australia. Friends' School in Hobart have also been involved in creating opportunities for school students to network with students from diverse backgrounds who are part of the Young Migrant Education Program, and QSA has already received some feedback about this project.

One student has written:



Above: In Uganda, using underground water tanks to store water. . . Photo: QSA

Right: ... or the alternative – queues at the neighbourhood tap. Photo: QSA



*We were divided into groups and provided the opportunity to work with students from all over the world, and assist with their learning .... and had the opportunity to help many individuals broaden their knowledge on a variety of topics, including future careers and the workplace. We were also fortunate to be involved in the process of 'Students Against Racism' performance, and I felt extremely lucky to be able to involve myself in the performance, and listen to all the students' emotional stories about their life (both before and after moving to Australia). A highlight of the day would be the games and activities we were able to play as a group, it*

*gave us a chance to connect with the students on a deeper level and I know I was able to find many things in common with many of the students. Lunchtime brought an immersive experience of culture, as the students prepared a range of delicious dishes from countries all over the world for us to try ...*

This is exactly the sort of interaction QSA was hoping would result from the funding opportunities, and we look forward to hearing more from other Regional Meetings about their projects.

The project in Malaysia is supporting early education and psychosocial support for refugee and asylum-

seeker children from minority backgrounds aged 0-6 years who do not otherwise have access. Malaysia does not recognise the 1951 Refugee Convention, yet has the highest number of refugees and asylum seeker populations within the Asia Pacific. The vast majority of refugee children in situ are thus likely to spend a protracted time in limbo given the precariously low levels of resettlement. Thus this project will help these children to build resilience and develop essential life skills while preparing them for primary education.

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..

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