

MINUTES OF MEETING 28 FEBRUARY 2016

Meet the candidates Q&A

The meeting was opened by Garry Bates (chairperson) who opened with an acknowledgement of the Indigenous elders past and present (the Gubbi Gubbi people) who are the forbears of the land on which we met and then offered a welcome to all, especially visitors.

The first part of the meeting was a forum with local Federal candidates and Garry reminded people to respect the location in which we met and respect each other in the opinions that might be aired.

Present were four of the candidates contesting the seats of Fairfax, Fisher and Wide Bay in this year's federal election.. They were Scott Anderson (ALP Fairfax), Bill Gissane (ALP Fisher), Ted O'Brien (LNP Fairfax) and Lucy Stanton (ALP Wide Bay).

The format was a Q&A session. All questions had been submitted to the panel ahead of time and were the only questions taken. Alan Spierings who was facilitator for this session introduced the candidates and described the format of the questions and asked that there be no interjections from the floor. Nettie Knox was the time keeper.

Some of the candidates responded to questions with party line statements and arguments, others were more open to finding other ways round the problem of refugees and asylum seekers. Overall, not many creative, alternative and compassionate solutions were suggested.

There was a large body of visitors, who were clearly on the side of the more hard line approach of current policies.

This part of the meeting closed at 12pm. Most of the visitors left at that point but some of the candidates stayed on for our general meeting.

GENERAL MEETING

Apologies: Rada Van der Werff, Lou Walsh

Learn English Holiday

Kayla Szumer explained the purpose and format of the LEH for the benefit of visitors. LEH is on in the second week of school holidays, 3-8 April. Buddies wanting to host should contact Kayla kaylaszumer@gmail.com

Finance

Fergus FitzGerald gave a brief outline of the financial position. Fergus also mentioned (in the light of informing the candidates who were still present) that a significant amount of last month's expenditure went to providing legal aid to our asylum seeker friends, since the LNP government last year stripped the right to government funded legal aid that all previous asylum seekers had access to. Fergus also mentioned there was now a vacancy on the finance group and John Ennis volunteered to fill that spot.

Buddies Immigration Support

Terry Boyce explained a little of what this group is trying to do in supporting asylum seekers and refugees through the legal processes of their claims. He explained the many intricacies and challenges of this process and sited a few cases particularly the tortuous road Nadir has had to endure. Nadir's Bridging Visa expired on 22/02/16 and he has been told by the Dept it won't be immediately renewed as the Minister is overseas. His Medicare card also expired. He is to contact MDA if he needs medical treatment.

Ranjan's application for a SHEV Visa has been lodged. He is awaiting his interview.

Trajani had his interview for a SHEV Visa but because of the severity of his PTSD the interview had to be adjourned a couple of times, and in the end, terminated. Additional questions will be sent to his lawyer.

Refugee Welcome Zone

Garry reported on the progress being made and the support gathered for the Refugee Welcome Zone. On 18 February Buddies, supported by six community representatives, presented the Refugee Welcome Zone (RWZ) proposal to the full Sunshine Coast Council workshop. The direct linkages to the council Social Strategy 2015 objectives were identified and Buddies sought to work with council on implementation of the program.

The RWZ proposal (now on our website) was well received and councillors expressed their gratitude for being informed on this social issue. A copy of the presentation outline can also be accessed via the website.

Since this event Mayor Jamieson and two other mayoral candidates have publically expressed their support for the proposal. If it is accepted by the incoming council then it is hoped that the Declaration of the RWZ will be made by the Mayor during Refugee Week in June.

Upcoming events

- Get Her to the Greek, Saturday 12 March – fund raising event at Noosa, organized by Eliza Minto, some proceeds to Buddies (since cancelled).
 - A Buddies display at the Maleny library during March, organized by Zanette Perinoni
 - Harmony Day, Cotton Tree, Sunday 20 March, organized by Shine Jang, Multicultural community Worker at Nambour. Buddies is to run a stall – volunteers needed to do shifts although this does clash with a Buddies meeting. Please contact Carmel Dobson cmaryd@hotmail.com if you can volunteer for this.
- 1• 9-25 June 2016: Refugee Week

Other business

Bronwyn Bell suggested we invite a speaker to present an alternative to the current asylum seeker policy. This was endorsed and will be planned.

John spoke of the continued appalling and heartbreaking conditions on Manus with which he is constantly in touch.

Next meeting

Sunday 20 March (note this is the third Sunday as the fourth would clash with Easter). Chairperson: Denis White. The guest speakers will be Lisa McDonald and Gabby Sutherland who have worked with children on Nauru.

The April meeting is also to be held on the third Sunday (17 April) as the fourth clashes with the ANZAC weekend.

The meeting closed at 1pm.