

Annual Report

2019 - 2020



Circle of Friends Australia Incorporated

*Supporting refugees and asylum seekers
in the community and in detention*

Who we are

Circle of Friends Australia Inc. (COFA) is a network of 28 Circles (groups), governed by a management committee. All Circles share a common commitment to welcome and assist refugees and asylum seekers with the difficult process of establishing themselves in a new country, or with the challenges of detention and asylum application process.

Member Circles choose their own activities, recruit their own members, decide their own spheres of work and raise their own funds. They relate to COFA committee by agreeing to abide by the COFA constitution and policies and using COFA financial services, including its bank account and group insurance cover for events. Each Circle has one or more Convenors who gather friends and contacts and members of the public to do the work they set themselves. This allows each Circle independence in how it operates and to start and finish when it is right for them and it gives the organisation as a whole the agility to respond quickly when there is a new situation and to meet the diverse range of needs Asylum Seekers and Refugees.

Since Circles of Friends inception in 2002, and COFA's incorporation in 2013, Circles have formed and changed in various ways:

- Geographical eg Blackwood Hills and Willunga Circles
- Attached to organisations, e.g. St Ignatius Parish, St Vincent de Paul, and Wayville Effective Living Centre
- Specific purpose such as supporting particular families, migration costs, education costs, first port of call on behalf of all circles e.g. Rapid Response for Refugees Circle
- Some Circles merge as the Blackwood and Hills Circles, and Wayville and St Mary's Circles have in the past year.
- Other Circles have disbanded after completing purpose e.g. Family Support Circle
- Sometimes inactive Circles have reactivated when a new need is perceived by members.

There are currently twenty-seven Circles in South Australia. Three interstate Circles were also set up under our auspices, one in Sydney (though recently closed after completing its work) and two in Victoria.

All members of COFA act in a voluntary capacity. We have no paid staff, and so ensure, other than unavoidable administrative fees (bank fees, insurance etc), that donations go directly to helping Asylum Seekers and Refugees.

Chairperson's Report

In the 2019-2020 financial year COFA raised approximately \$300,000, a significant increase from the \$200,000 raised last financial year.

When Covid 19 hit Adelaide, the reaction was fast and generous with Circles stepping up to support Asylum seekers and refugees without income after they lost their jobs. While many Circles responded in some way by contacting people on Bridging visas, raising money, distributing food and paying rent, many Circles are to be particularly commended for their rapid response.

After three years of development and refinement by the committee, the COFA committee has adopted our Child and Vulnerable Person Protection Policy. All members are required to read and sign the Confidentiality and Code of Conduct forms and give them to Circle Convenors for filing. As part of this members working with families with children must complete a free Working with Children check and the Vulnerable Person-related Employment check through the Department of Human Services SA.

COFA partners with many organisations to be as effective as possible in our support of asylum seekers and refugees. The Suzanne Elliott Charitable Trust in particular has assisted many Circles with funds when our fundraising wasn't able to fully cover needs. People in need are regularly referred to us by STTARS (Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service), Red Cross Australia, and the Migrant Health Service and Life without Barriers. As they are such ethical and compassionate organisations, we can trust their referrals. We back them up in their face-to-face work with our Circles providing finances, visitors, driving practice, English tutoring, furniture and household goods, accommodation, emergency assistance, food and help with many other needs.

COFA has joined in supporting nationwide actions since its inception. In 2017 COFA became a member of Refugee Council of Australia, End Child Detention Coalition, and Australian Refugee Action Network and these partnerships continue.

We have a relationship with Nina Madaad at Adelaide University Education Faculty to set up a tutoring scheme for refugee students who have been referred to us by STTARS and we have also written to the Law Society to ask it to encourage their members to do more pro bono work for JusticeNet. We also work with Justice for Refugees in their political advocacy work, as well as Rural Australians for Refugees, Fleurieu Refugee Support Group and the Vigil for refugees on Manus and Nauru.

In 2017 we began working with Adelaide University with a tutoring scheme. This relationship has now expanded, and we are supporting students who hold Adelaide University Humanitarian and Refugee Scholarships with financial support and accommodation. Blackwood Hills Circle currently supports 8 students, at times also providing accommodation in members' homes. The

process to set up the accommodation scheme continues as we have to protect both the hosts and the students as they share a home through our system. Bruce Whyatt leads this work.

The Resource Book on Support for Refugees and Asylum Seekers lists resources, networks and Associations which help Refugees and Asylum Seekers in our community. It was originally compiled by Margaret Calder of the Effective Living Centre Circle, and printed with help from Peri Colman of the Quakers. In 2019 a volunteer from Baptist Care undertook a further revision by checking and updating entries and adding new organisations. She devised a different format. This was finalised by Bryan Hughes when he worked for Baptist Care, and was entitled “*A Directory of Services for people who are settling in Adelaide SA and have a refugee or asylum seeker background, Version 1 March 2020*”. It hoped that it will be updated again early next year and be made widely available via the COFA website.

I thank the Effective Living Centre at Wayville and Christ Church for giving us the use of their meeting rooms for our monthly meetings. They are generous hosts.

The COFA committee is a hard-working group who are also active members in individual Circles. I would like to thank the members of the COFA committee for their dedication and work in maintaining the work of the Circles of Friends, developing new partnerships and exploring ways we can broaden our work. I thank Bruce Whyatt for being a fantastic, devoted and accurate Treasurer; John Shepherd our Secretary whose amazing memory leads to accurate and detailed minutes; Denise Callaghan who brings the Rapid Response for Refugees Circle reports to our meetings and sets up and authorises many payments; Lesley Walker for her work in supporting so many people in and out of detention and bringing a grounded perspective to committee work; and Margaret Calder who plays host to us here at the Effective Living Centre and also takes on other tasks as needed.

I also thank all the Circle members for all your work through the year. The Circles continue to do amazing work. The great work of the individual groups adds up to extensive support for many vulnerable asylum seekers and refugees. This is where the real work of COFA is done with visiting people personally, assisting financially, donating to Circles, fundraising and writing to Members of Parliament to protest the poor treatment of asylum seekers and refugees. I also thank all the people who have donated so generously with money, goods and volunteer hours, which enable the Circles of Friends to assist those in great need.

Monica O’Wheel

Chair

Our Circles' Work

Rapid Response for Refugees Circle 110

Covid 19 sees demand for emergency support increase

The aim of this Circle is to respond to requests for assistance within 24 hours and to take action within 48 hrs. An arm of COFA's Management Committee, we rely on the good will of our donors and other Circles for support. We apply for and occasionally win grants from other organisations. Currently we have has 3 members.

Our expenditure initially went on the traditional emergencies such as rent arrears, looming utilities accounts, monthly pharmacy invoices. Twice we covered emergency accommodation. Once it was several weeks in a motel for a small family evicted from their long held rental property. The second was a short stay in a caravan park unit for a woman and her dependent mother. Their house was rendered uninhabitable when its front was rammed by a car. Sometimes we step outside our guidelines. We've paid for fence repairs because the tenant, who wasn't responsible for the damage, was afraid it would be used as an excuse to evict her family. We've paid for the funeral of a still born baby to ease just a little, the trauma of such an unexpected event. We paid for a car overhaul to enable a woman and her small daughter to visit their husband and father finally brought to Australia but kept in detention.

Then Covid 19 happened, and the needs increased exponentially. Now, there were job losses for people already on the margin with no safety net. Our support for two families in particular became continuous, covering rent, utilities, household needs, technology and food costs, along with medical expenses as the stresses of their situation took their toll on each head of household. And so it goes on.

Approximately 45% of our income came from 59 individual donors and is an indication of the kindness and compassion of these individuals. We also received a bequest from the estate of Anne Roman and support from other Circles and STTARS. We are enormously grateful to every single one of our donors. Without each and all of you, our work simply would not happen.

Family Support Circle 1

A success story

This Circle was formed to assist particular refugee families who needed help to get established in Adelaide. We concluded the 19/20 financial year with no active clients. The last family which had been receiving help since their arrival in Adelaide was intended to become self-sufficient in October 2019, but Centrelink complications meant that this did not occur until February 2020. It was a time of rejoicing for them.

The Family Support Circle will remain in abeyance for the next financial year as a backup for the families previously supported in case they need special help. Many tell us what they are doing and particularly of family milestones. Then we will attempt to clear the debt owing to COFA in the coming financial year incurred by the extended help required by our last family.

Thank you to everyone who was part of this effort.

Blackwood - Hills Circle 7

Ongoing Family and Education Support

This Circle has direct contact with twenty-six individuals and families who received assistance from us. To some we provided items such as new shoes, soccer boots, a school jumper, household items, white goods, baby needs, metro cards, car registration, a second-hand laptop computer, utility bills and food vouchers. We made regular monthly payments to three of these families to cover medication, children's travel to school, and living expenses, and, for two other families for rent. Members keep in contact with families, mainly now by phone.

Our Circle also provides support for refugee student scholarship holders at the University of Adelaide in the form of a modest monthly living allowances to these students. These refugee students had been cut off from Centrelink payments, and were not entitled to HECS, so some had to drop out. With generous support from donors, plus a grant from the Suzanne Elliot Trust, eleven students suffering financial stress were enabled to continue full time studies. Three have now graduated.

We raised were a record \$14,155, in spite of the shutdown from March onwards. Events included three sausage sizzles, a fashion show, a "Feast of many cultures", and volunteering at Blackwood Lions Bargain Centre.

Our meetings are attended by a substantial number of committed people, contributing energy, much good will, and kindness. We are deeply grateful to the Suzanne Elliot Trust, to Mitcham City Council, and to our individual donors, who have given even more generously when the going got so tough for our clients since February. We thank Terri Finn, of the University of Adelaide Student Care Office, and Bruce Whyatt for initiating the relationship with the University. Special thanks to Alex Lockwood, who regretfully has had to drop out after years of successful direct contact work.

Willunga Circle 11

Ongoing Family Support

Our Circle was set up to raise funds to support refugee families living in our area and other areas. To support our activities we run regular fundraising activities. This year we ran a successful Quiz night as well as our weekly Shoe Shines on Saturday mornings in Willunga High Street. Unfortunately, the Shoe Shine ceased in March due to Covid 19 and we have been unable to run any other fundraising activities.

In addition to providing social support to refugee families, we delivered six donated bikes, helmets and tools to a refugee family, donated baby clothes. We also continue to keep in touch with some Afghan refugees who now have citizenship plus some others still on SHEV visas.

We have fourteen committee members and another thirty-nine supporters who either donate, attend, and/or assist at our fundraisers. We are very grateful for the support from our community.

Kensington Circle 75

Empowering women through sport

This Circle focussed on supporting the Afghan Central Volleyball Club and a family. Margaret McGregor and Gay Stock led the Circle with their friends and family to raise \$3,300 for the Afghan Central Volleyball club to pay for Afghan women and girls to play volleyball. Women's sport isn't highly valued in Afghan culture, but the Club has found that playing sport assists women and girls to increase their confidence and capacity as well as improving their health. Many are still students and others have too many pressures on the family to afford fees.

35 people from COFA's support network, attended the presentation night of the Afghan Central Volleyball club to cheer the best and fairest players and to help pay for the dinner for all the women for the night.

This Circle also supports a widow and her 5 children in Pakistan after her sister, whom we know here in Adelaide, asked for support as she was still finishing Year 12. Her sister had to escape Kabul and had no other means of support. When our friend here is able to work, she will take over the support. We have made 7 monthly payments in the 2020 – 2021 financial year.

Thank you to all those who have contributed generously to our Circle's appeals.

Circle 92

This Circle had been dormant since 'Welcome Salisbury' ceased its services several years ago. It was re-activated in March 2020 to support the Food Box Project for Asylum Seekers. Rachel Lafain started the project for SHEV visa holders who had lost jobs due to Covid 19 and are not eligible for Centrelink support. This Circle worked with Catherine's Circle 124 to co-ordinate the Food Box Project. In just four months we raised over \$25,000 from individual donations and from a grant from Morialta Trust (\$3300).

This Circle is linked to the Australian Migration Options (AMO). When the Covid 19 pandemic started our work at AMO was minimal which gave us time to assist Catherine's Circle with the Food project. We were particularly interested because a large number of our clients were affected by Covid 19 and it was a great way to be able to support them through this crisis. We ended direct involvement with the project in June, but continue to provide food vouchers to a

couple of families outside the Adelaide CBD and provide support to an asylum seeker whose young children remain in Afghanistan.

Our total income for the year to 30 June 2020 was \$22,018.03, and our total expenditure was \$16,173.17. All these expenses were related to the Food Box project, purchasing food and other supplies for distribution amongst asylum seekers and TPV/SHEV visa holders. Our Current balance is approx. \$2000. The balance will continue to be used for food vouchers and in support of the three children of an asylum seeker until monies run out.

The support from donors has been overwhelming, in particular those pensioners who gave their bonus payments to this project. Thank you so much to everyone.

We are extremely grateful for the work of the great team of volunteers who made the Food Project possible, for St John's Anglican Church who provided the space for storing and sorting, free of charge, and for Catherine Russell of Circle 124 who with others continues to co-ordinate the distribution of Food Boxes.

St Ignatius Refugee Education Support Group Circle 106

19 years of supporting Refugees gain self-sufficiency through education

Our purpose is to help students who are doing qualifications of whatever kind that will help them enter the workforce when jobs become available again. Since July 2019, we have contributed to 50 individuals: 20% on Bridging Visas; 18% Safe Haven Enterprise Visas; 62% on Permanent Humanitarian Visa (with Female 58% and Male 42%.) Their countries of origin include Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Iran, Nigeria, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Syria and Turkey.

In response to the changes brought on by Covid 19, we have bought computers, or contributed to the upkeep of a number of students, which means that they have been able to access their studies after the sudden switch to remote learning. To assist graduates, who have excellent academic qualifications, to present themselves in the best possible light we payed for students to have their CV's reviewed and presented by a professional agency. I include the following as examples of some students' results for a Semester: 1st Year Commerce/Accounting student with one High Distinction, two Distinctions; 2nd year Nursing student gaining two High Distinctions and two Distinctions; 4th Year Engineering student with two High Distinctions and two Distinctions. This pattern applies across those we have assisted.

Special thanks to our dedicated eleven regular attendees who use their very considerable skills, experience, and knowledge of people in applying their lateral thinking skills to making decisions to support our applicants. In addition to finding solutions to funding needs, they offer wise counsel and generosity in sharing their time. We also express our gratitude to the faithful parishioners at St Ignatius who support our work generously and to the priests who encourage this participation as a regular part of Parish life. Thanks are due to Bruce Whyatt, COFA Treasurer for his great work in managing our Appeal receipts. As we are moving towards the

20th year since our group started, following the Tampa incident, we look forward to helping more refugees towards self-sufficiency.

Effective Living Centre Circle 111

Creating community for Refugee families

Our fourteen members, many of whom have been involved since Inverbrackie Detention Centre closed are in constant contact with approximately 43 households.

Our annual activities for Refugee Families consist of:

- Movie Day
- Twice yearly Swimming Days during school holidays (usually Jan/Sept)
- End of year picnic
- Victor Harbor break for a couple of refugee families
- Mother's Day Function

Additionally we run a Men's Group, which due to Covid 19, is unfortunately on hold at present.

Our Circle receives valuable support by Young Mercy Links, a network of young people, passionate about social justice, advocacy and education, who celebrate community connectedness through volunteer service. This fantastic group of young people assist us in supporting our families – particularly the mums and children and support all of our events. This Mothers Day, mothers were hand-delivered a card and chocolates by the Young Mercy Links girls.

Since Covid 19, many refugee parents have lost their jobs and receive absolutely no financial assistance from Centrelink. As a result there has been a constant need for rental assistance, food, washing machines, fridges, etc. In this we are very thankful for the action of our newest member who loves searching ebay for cheap whitegoods. Several of our Justice for Refugees members recently met with Peter Malinauskas on the plight of refugees who lost their part-time employment and are not eligible for any Centrelink payments.

As the great demand for finance continues, we have set up a Special Fundraising Group – consisting of an ex-politician, retired bank manager, a land agent and teachers from Mercedes College – picking up on the whole concept of the College's involvement with refugees; also several of our Circle members and other interested people. This Group is considering many ways of fundraising. The main one looking at Direct Debit, but also including information on the why and the background reasons for donating.

Suzanne's Circle 113

Assisting Refugee and Asylum Seekers in difficult circumstances.

This Circle support 54 people, from Vietnam, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, North Sudan and Europe. Most of these people are either living in Community Detention in South Australia or still being held in Australian Immigration Detention

Centers across the country and on Manus Island, Nauru or Papua New Guinea (PNG). Their situations include:

- People who are seeking asylum, cases not yet resolved, on Bridging Visas with no income.
- People who are seeking asylum, cases not yet resolved, with no Visa and little or no income, no Medicare.
- People who have Protection Visas (three or five years or permanent protection) and have lost their jobs due to Covid 19.
- Families and single people transferred from PNG & Nauru for medical treatments, living in Community Detention - no work rights with rent, utilities & sub-contracted health care paid by Immigration. Receiving a small 'Special Benefit' from Immigration via Centrelink.
- Low paid workers, most often exploited and paid very low hourly wage rates.
- People who are asylum seekers or refugees held in immigration detention centres in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth & Northam WA.
- People held on Nauru, Manus Island and Pt Moresby for over seven years.

They are all facing uncertain futures. No one was granted protection in 2019 – 2020 and many have had their applications rejected and are appealing but it is rare for the Courts to overturn refusal decisions. Many people are facing the final steps in the judicial review process which will likely lead to their deportation. There are a number of families with children born in Australia since 2013, who will be made to leave Australia. Naturally every parent I support is fearful for the future wellbeing of their children.

This Circle provides social support, including weekly visits and transport to medical and legal appointments as well as financial support for a range of things including:

- Legal costs such as filing Court documents, affidavits and fee waivers for judicial reviews, translations of letters, documents, statements, a land title, interpreter's fees at lawyers' appointments and costs of accommodation and petrol for trip to Canberra to visit an Embassy.
- Basic necessities (food, utilities, rent)
- Medication for chronic illnesses, elderly couple.
- Warm clothes, slippers for men and women in detention (AITA) in Adelaide.
- Phone top ups (credit) for people held in detention centres or in Community Detention.

I am truly grateful for the support and assistance from the Trustees of the Suzanne Elliott Charitable Trust who have funded this Circle so generously, enabling the delivery of comfort and practical assistance to many powerless people. Thanks also to the awesome COFA committee members for initiatives and active oversight of many important issues.

Family Reunions Circle 115

Assisting asylum seekers to gain protection and refugees to reunite with their families in the safety of Australia

This Circle, consisting of 4 members, was set up to give financial support to people seeking asylum in 2015 when the government increased the costs and difficulties for Asylum Seekers and Refugees especially those who came by boat. We saw this as another instance of bureaucratic cruelty. We assist with the various costs of family reunion and seeking Protection Visas for people who are referred to us from other Circles, STTARS, trusted Migration Agents, and the Refugee Health Service.

We have had two sources of income this year:

- Wine Sales in July 2019 raised \$3100 for the Circle. Our only fundraiser in the year due to Covid 19. This generously was organised by a friend of the Circle. We thank her for the support.
- A Bequest of \$15,000 by a friend of a friend of the Circle. We are very grateful to the Executors of the estate for this gift. We also appreciate that the woman who gave this money also supported refugees and asylum seekers during her life.

With the money we have we agreed to pay for migration agents, health costs and translation of documents. We have assisted four people from African countries, one Tamil, five Afghans and 2 others. Some of the help they needed was appeals for changes of family circumstances with newly diagnosed sickness or breakdown of relationships, adverse character tests partly due to the difficulties of living under Border Force rules, and inability to pay for protection visa costs due to loss of work with Covid 19. There have also been quite a few Ministerial appeals after negative outcomes.

When a person has a chance of working and repaying the loan in the future our assistance is provided in form of a loan, with repayments going to helping other people in need. For those with disabilities or illness or no chance of repayment due to too many other debts we give gifts.

The Manresa Circle 117

Supporting a family in need

This Circle was established in late September 2019 to support a family of 7 from the Congo. This family suffered terribly both physically and psychologically from an armed attack. The grandfather and a son were murdered, their village destroyed, and they had to flee.

We have 15 members, some of whom are regular donors, and a smaller group involved in the day-to-day support of the family

We have 9 regular donors who contribute \$830.00 per calendar month. Fundraising event of a garden stall, a luncheon, a raffle and two sausage sizzles at Bunnings which collectively raised \$5,520.85. Sadly, all events now on hold. Additionally we have received financial support from the Spire Community, Red Cross, St Vincent de Paul, and the Chinese Community.

Accommodation for Refugee Scholarship student Circle 118

Supporting a student to continue with their education

This Circle was set up to support a Refugee Scholarship student in need of accommodation. The University found accommodation for the student from April 2020 and this Circle has helped the student finance the cost of accommodation.

The student was provided \$100 per week initially. Once it was clear that the University was waiving accommodation fees for a period of time, disbursements ceased. At this point \$800 had been provided to the student. Now that rent is required, we will commence payments again to subsidise the rent.

The Circle has raised \$2,170 since April, including three very generous initial donations of \$600, \$400 and \$200 from members of the public with no connection to the student.

There is currently \$1,348 in the account. Regular donations of \$50 per week and \$20 per fortnight are being made into the account. The need for assistance will be reviewed at the end November when the University semester ends. It may be that the student no longer requires assistance after this time. If this is the case, the remaining funds can be used to support another Circle.

Circle 121

Providing a support network during Covid 19

Circle of Friends 121 was established in April 2020 by Henrietta Wighton, Mary Ireland and Kevin Comber - from the Vinnies Migrant and Refugee Centre (M&RC)– but in their private capacity due to concerns over the anticipated effect of Covid 19 on Asylum Seekers living in metropolitan Adelaide.

Most of our assistance goes to Asylum Seekers who are part of the 'legacy case-load' and who still possess temporary bridging visas only: some have had their refugee claims refused; some are still waiting for a decision; some are following limited avenues for appeal, which can take years.

It is extremely hard for these people to find work, or sufficient work: they often have poor English, their qualifications are not recognised in Australia, re-training is prohibitively expensive, they lack local work experience and contacts, their age can count against them, and some have serious physical/ mental health problems. Possessing only a temporary visa is also a major obstacle.

For those who have found jobs, many are casual workers who have lost their jobs due to Covid 19. They have no back-up. All live in rental accommodation, have no savings to speak of, and lack an extended family/ network to rely on in hard times.

We provide financial support to these people by providing a modest living allowance, help with rent and utilities, and Foodland vouchers. If no support is provided, these people are at genuine risk of homelessness and destitution.

Along with other Circles, we have provided additional help to two students on SHEVs study at Adelaide University on scholarships. Both these students had their work hours reduced due to Covid 19. One, along with her brother, has to also support her two parents who possess Bridging Visas and have no jobs.

Assistance has also been given to some skilled migrants affected by Covid 19. A common story is the inability of these people to find work in their field of expertise on arrival in Australia. Losing their job due to Covid 19 puts them in an extremely vulnerable position too.

We liaise closely with other Circles of Friends and agencies helping asylum seekers in South Australia, in order to maximise our impact on the lives of those in need.

Adelaide Essentials Circle 122

This Circle opened in May 2020 and since then has had the following activities:

- Distribution of project of food, personal care items, Coles/Woolworths vouchers, warm blankets and jackets to asylum seekers, refugees and people on temporary visas.
- Support with resumes, linking with jobs, teaching how to use platforms to job search, payment of SAPOL clearances when jobs are secured.
- Referrals to external agencies.
- Small amount of fundraising for lawyer fees.

We comprise five volunteers including two social work placement students have contributed their time so far.

The food and essentials distribution project ran for eleven weeks and supported a total of 90 people. Only two adults were unemployed at the end of this and required an external referral for ongoing support. If a Covid 19 second wave was to occur in Adelaide and people again required support, I have prepared for this.

Fundraising was done through an active Facebook group titled 'Adelaide asylum seeker COVID19 food & essentials - supporter group' with 175 members. More than 30 people contributed financially to the Circle and we received crucial non-financial donations in form of loan of fridge, freezer, shelving and for distributions project and assistance with over 60 deliveries of donations of food and personal care items. In particular the Welcome Centre assisted with food distribution and Oz Harvest contributed food donations.

St Chad's Circle 123

Successfully supported a reunited family to settle in Australia

Circle 123 came together in mid-2018, to respond to the needs of a refugee family consisting of father, mother and teenage daughter who were about to be joined by 5 adult siblings all over twenty years of age as they arrived as Refugee Humanitarian Entrants with Family Reunion. The family of eight adults were sharing a one bed unit and living on one Newstart allowance. We were able to augment their income, provide necessary bedding and household goods, and furniture, food for a time, and some occasional employment. Within weeks a three bedroom Housing Commission home was found for them.

Having supported the family long enough to see them reasonably settled, this Circle considered its mission fulfilled and has now disbanded.

Catherine's Circle 124

Set up in January 2020, this Circle is run by Catherine Russell, who has been supporting people Asylum Seekers and Refugees for many years. Since starting the Circle, I have continued to support 12 people living in Community Detention and when Covid 19 restrictions came into effect in Australia, I liaised with other Circles to help find employment and provide basic necessities for people on Bridging Visas.

People on Bridging Visas who lost their jobs during Covid 19 were not eligible for Centrelink Special Benefit or the Government's Covid Job Seeker/ Job Keeper/ small business financial support. Having compiled a list of 230 Refugees and Asylum Seekers on Bridging Visas who still had work or were on reduced hours or had lost their job due to Covid, this Circle worked with David Winderlich of Hope's Café to raise awareness of these people's plight. David used the data to lobby the state government, and Justice4Refugees, Rural Australians for Refugees and the Refugee Council of Australia used my data to lobby at the Federal level.

From June, Peter Habel, Hope's Jobs, has been very helpful in sourcing job vacancies that I pass on to the food recipients via the Bridging Visa's FaceBook page I set up in March. Happily, at least two-thirds of the refugees that this Circle supports have now found part time work – either 1,2 or 3 days a week.

This Circle and Circle 92 have worked together on the Food Distribution Project. As part of this I liaised with Red Cross, Vinnies, Anglicare, Circles and other agencies who gave me names of refugee families on bridging visas in need of help. We included refugees on Safe Haven and Temporary Protection visas until their Special Benefit came through. We also included a few Skilled Visa and overseas student visa people who lost their jobs and couldn't access

Centrelink. As well as food, this circle has paid for prescriptions, mobile recharges, doctor's fees, car registrations and internet for some of the recipients.

Since mid-April, we have been generously lent the Anglican Church historical Chapel in Salisbury to use as our base. Some of the food is donated from Pathways 2nd Bite in Modbury and the rest is purchased. We delivered food to approximately sixty-three houses with 150 recipients. Since June we have been assisted in the purchasing of food by Gordana Crowe, a Vinnies volunteer - a big thank you to them.

There have been fifty-five volunteers to help this project – a few have withdrawn but more offer every week. A huge thank you is given to them for keeping this project going! Food donations have also been made by individuals and Coromandel Valley Uniting Church congregation have been very generous in their food donations every week.

Financial donations originally came from personal friends and church contacts. Now donations come from our facebook page contacts, the Uniting church, Justice 4 refugees and other groups.

We have also received grants from the Morialta Trust (\$3,700), the Grants SA (\$10,000), the Suzanne Elliot Trust (\$6000), The Day Foundation (\$4000) and the Sandy Memorial Trust (\$5000). Many individuals have given \$1000 and a big thank you is owed to all our donors. Since the beginning of July, the Red Cross has reimbursed all our food and essential expenses from their Federal Grant and this will continue until at least the end of September.

Annual Financial Statement

1 July 2019 - 30 June 2020

Receipts:

Donations	380.00		
Operational Income	2,695.86		
Bank Interest	16.64		
Investment Income	<u>265.62</u>	Total	<u>\$3,358.12</u>

Expenses:

Bank Fees	186.80		
Bendigo Merchant Charges	368.18		
GiveNow Merchant Charges	448.28		
Insurance	1,504.80		
Speaker Gifts	50.00		
Website	<u>99.00</u>	Total	<u>\$2,657.06</u>
		<u>Net Profit</u>	<u>\$ 701.06</u>

Reconciliation:

Bank Accounts at 1/7/19	
General Account	8,488.92
Investment Acct	41,505.54
GiveNow Clearing	<u>6,784.36</u>
Total	\$56,778.82

Add Receipts	3,358.12
Less Expenses	<u>2,657.06</u>
Balance	\$57,479.88

Funds Held in Trust for Circles

Add Balance 30/6/20	123,776.61
Less Balance 1/7/19	<u>56,020.26</u>
Total	\$125,236.23

Bank Accounts at 30/6/20

General Account	25,909.47
Investment Acct	66,771.16
Undeposited Funds	21,100.00
GiveNow Clearing	<u>11,455.60</u>
Total	<u>\$125,236.23</u>

Treasurer's Report

Last financial year I reported on the newly instituted collaboration with Adelaide University and the refugee scholarship holders who are supported with living costs by Blackwood-Hills Circle. That program continues and the first three of the students have now graduated, one being awarded a scholarship to undertake a Masters Degree in Health Sciences. The results of the other students have been quite remarkable, with only a few final results in subjects being less than distinctions. The program is working extremely well and currently 8 students are receiving monthly support. This support for the refugee students can only be undertaken with the wonderful generosity of the members of Blackwood-Hills Circle, and two other circles, who have raised and donated nearly \$50,000 in this last year.

But this has been typical of the support that COFA has experienced this year, especially with the advent of the Corona virus. So many refugees have lost their jobs and are not receiving any government support. Their situation has become dire and for many, their only means of survival is from charities such as COFA. As we have often found in the past, when there is a desperate need on the part of people in our community, others respond with amazing generosity. This is highlighted in the recent ABC radio and TV exposure. COFA received \$23,000 in donations through the website in the following two weeks.

Last year we saw an increase in donations from \$91,000 in 2018 increasing to \$204,000 in 2019. This last financial year we have received \$324,000 in donations and grants, a truly remarkable tribute to all the Circles and their members. We have had six new Circles who have become affiliated with COFA in this last year, mostly to respond to the crucial day to day needs of refugees and their families, including supplying food, cleaning products and toiletries. We are receiving grants from both the Federal and State Governments to meet these essential needs.

COFA has become a member of Foodbank and this greatly assists in making our dollars go so much further. Two Circles are using the voucher system and others are welcome to use it if it would be of benefit.

A most touching thing for me as treasurer is to recognise the number of \$750 donations which came in soon after the Federal Government made grants to Social Security beneficiaries. That is, pensioners deciding that refugees needed the money more than they did. I am aware of many elderly people in our membership who have been touched by the plight of refugees and have given exceptionally large donations. Even in the current environment when we have been encouraged to withdraw into the safety of our homes and our own personal space, many have looked out on the world around them, seen the difficulties of others and responded with their hearts with such generosity.

Revd Paul Turley, from Hopes Café Circle, spoke in a recent sermon at Clayton UCA church service about the butterfly and the chaos theory. "...even the flap of a butterfly wing can affect

the formation and path of a distant tornado. The butterfly effect has become a shorthand way of talking about how even the smallest and least significant of events can have consequences far larger and more significant than their size and seeming importance suggests. Everything is connected. There really is no such thing as a singular event.”

So whatever we can do is not wasted. We may never know the impact of an action of kindness, care, and love. Whether it is the support to students who may one day make great, significant contributions to Australian society, or it is the supplying of food to needy families and individuals which may break down barriers and make these people feel welcome and valued, whatever we do has the potential to change the direction of lives for good.

I count it a great privilege to serve you as treasurer of such an important and wonderful organisation, especially the Committee which is the best that I have ever served on, and I have been on very many. I admire you all for everything you do and wish you well in every endeavour.

Bruce Whyatt

Treasurer

Donors and Supporters

We would not be able to keep going without our donors and those who support us in a variety of ways. We are enormously grateful to each and every one.

Significant financial support has been received from the following organisations: Morialta Trust, Suzanne Elliott Trust, Sandy Memorial Trust, The Day Foundation, Red Cross and St Vincent de Paul. We also extend our thanks to the Spire Community, Chinese Community and Anne Roman.

The Food Box project would not have been possible without the provision of space for storing and sorting supplies and assistance with distribution made by St John's Anglican Church, the City of Mitcham and the Welcome Centre. Oz Harvest and Pathways 2nd Bite donated food.

We thank the Effective Living Centre for the use of their meeting rooms on a regular basis.

We thank all supporters who have gave their energy, their good will, their kindness, their time, and their skills as well as their ability to think laterally when problem solving. People deserving of special mention are Terri Finn at the University of Adelaide Student Care Office providing contact with students in need and Alex Lockwood who has given years of successful direct contact with refugees and asylum seekers.

Without all of our donors and supporters, the work of COFA in supporting Asylum Seekers and Refugees simply would not happen.

COFA Management

Committee Members

Monica O'Wheel - Chair
Alex Reilly - Secretary
Bruce Whyatt - Treasurer
John Shepherd
Margaret Calder
Denise Callaghan
Lesley Walker
Henrietta Wighton

Circle Convenors

- Family Support Circle (1) - Trish Dundon and Leanne Head
- Blackwood - Hills Circle (7) - Tricia Rushton
- Willunga Circle (11) - Jayne Jennifer
- Strathalbyn Southern Hills Circle (22)
- Pilgrim Circle (27) - Margaret Chittleborough
- Kensington Circle 75 - Monica O'Wheel
- St Ignatius Parish Circle (106) - Julie Dow
- Rapid Response for Refugees Circle (110) - Trish Dundon and Denise Callaghan
- Effective Living Centre Circle (111) - Margaret Calder
- Suzanne's Circle (113) - Lesley Walker
- Circle of Hope Circle (114) - Paul Turley
- Family Reunions Circle (115) - Monica O'Wheel
- The Manresa Circle (117) - Ruth Gairdon
- Accommodation for Refugee Scholarship student Circle (118)- Alex Reilly
- Circle 121 - Henrietta Wighton
- Adelaide Essentials Circle (122) - Rachel Lafain
- St Chad's Circle 123: Jane Nelson
- Circle 124: Catherine Russell

All members are volunteers, providing time and energy from our passion and dedication to supporting Asylum Seekers and Refugees.



Circle of Friends Australia Incorporated

ABN 39 367 145 336

Incorporation number: SA A41932

Registered with the ACNC as a Tax Deductible Gift Recipient

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