



VALERIO DANIEL DE SIMONI  
ASSOCIATION INC. *open fearless positive*

# Newsletter

## December 2020

*In the spirit of reconciliation the Valerio Daniel De Simoni Association Inc. acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.*

### **Editor's introduction**

*Lorenzo Logi*

Welcome to the inaugural VDSA newsletter! We're very excited to launch a newsletter, as we hope it will be a great way to keep the VDSA community informed about all the great work done by VDSA and its affiliated programs. As it's the first edition, we've taken the opportunity to look back on the association's activities since we launched back in 2011. But in the future we'll be updating you more frequently, hopefully once or twice a year!

I would also like to take this opportunity to remind our community that VDSA Inc. is a charity registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission and that all donations made to VDSA are tax



deductible (special thanks to our Secretary and Treasurer Robynanne Woolf in achieving this!). So especially this year, when we have not been able to organize a fundraiser, and when so many of our clients face even greater challenges, I encourage you to hop over to our website and [make a donation!](#)

### **In this edition:**

Looking back on VDSA's core programs:

- Refugees & Asylum Seekers
- Indigenous Youth
- Asylum Seekers Centre Lunches
- VDSA Vegetable Garden

Projects in memory of Valerio around the world:

- Italy's urban gardens
- Valerio's Diaries
- Sand Roads: the story of Valerio, Ted & Jamie's Africa expedition
- Gamba primary school project, Malawi

## Letter from the President

*Vittoria Pasquini*

I hope you are well, looking after each other, and trying to stay positive during this very difficult time. What an ordeal 2020 has been so far!

Along with the tragic death toll, and the tremendous suffering people have experienced worldwide, COVID-19 has also highlighted our fragility as human beings, the impermanence of our lives, the greed of societies where the weakest, the poorest, and the eldest are often ignored.

Due to COVID, VDSA has been unable to organise its annual event which always provides not only delicious food and lively entertainment but also important information regarding activities and projects VDSA has done/ will be doing during the year. Because of this, I thought it useful to restart publishing our periodic newsletter. As you will see, this first edition includes not only the good work VDSA is doing in Australia but also what is happening in Italy and in Malawi in memory of Valerio, my beloved son.

During 2020 our focus has been primarily on helping refugees, one of the groups that has been completely left behind by the government's COVID assistance scheme. We are currently assisting some of our refugee friends who have lost their jobs and who have only been able to rely on VDSA's support and/or other charities.

Many of you have generously donated to make VDSA projects possible. I want to thank each and every one of you for it and remind our readers

that the money donated goes to help the two groups of disadvantaged people we are focusing on, namely asylum seekers and First Nations youth.



Since the foundation of VDSA in 2011, many of you have been working as volunteers in one or more of our projects. I thank you all again from the bottom of my heart. In particular I would like to recognise the work of our program coordinators, Alison Raco, Mariella Totaro-Genevois and Marisa Minelle-Katis, and of our board members, Jamie Kenyon, Kristopher (Ted) Davant, Robynanne Woolf, Nicoletta Zanardi, Mariella Totaro-Genevois, Sandra Carvajal Ortiz de Rosas and Lorenzo Logi. Your generous involvement has made it possible for our Association to grow. For all the others who are reading this newsletter, and who are interested in our projects but not involved yet, please know VDSA's doors are always open. There is always a lot to do on a small or big scale and we allow people to be as creative as they like with volunteering their help.

For those of us currently active as VDSA members, donating time has meant the possibility to interact with people very different from ourselves – from the colour of their skin, to the language they speak, to the country they come from – and has meant knowing that we live in one and the same world, breathe the same air and

therefore are all interconnected.

Getting to know people seeking asylum and young Indigenous people trying to navigate urban life which is often hostile to all them has been and often still is confronting for us, but in the end always rewarding. A profoundly meaningful experience.

I call this experience 'Sharity', a mixture of Charity and Sharing. The word was created by Marence Bart-Williams, a young multifaceted entrepreneur from Sierra Leone who decided a few years ago to share her house and time with a bunch of street kids. Her caring environment allowed these kids to blossom and express their inner talents and creativity in a multitude of productive ways. The ultimate aim of Sharity is to promote self-sufficient individuals who are not dependent on charity.

I can confidently say that in its work with refugees and Indigenous youth, VDSA promotes Sharity and in this way is very different from other charity organisations. This aligns with our status as a Public Benevolent Institution for the direct relief suffering.

We share, with people we work with, our experience, our values, our ideas, our efforts and likewise we receive back in terms of satisfaction and gratitude and I believe we are better people for it.

## Valerio & VDSA

*Jamie Kenyon*

The VDSA association's central core has always been Vittoria, Valerio's mother. Her sense of positivity under harrowing circumstances is nothing short of incredible. Vittoria and I have shared the loss of Valerio and the association has allowed us to transition this loss into a deep friendship driven by the need to bring positivity from a tragedy and to create a legacy. I watched Valerio grow from a fun-loving young boy into an intelligent and deep-thinking man who was curious and intent on being a positive force in the world. We travelled through more than 20 countries together with Kristopher Davant, fulfilling a dream that had taken years to plan. Three young men who were determined to prove to themselves that they could achieve any goal that they set. Together and as one team we reached those goals. Kristopher and I were with him at the scene of his accident on the day he passed away. Valerio's passing has taken years for me to fully comprehend and has given me a deeper appreciation for the life I lead, which is a life he can now never lead.

Valerio was a deeply proud man who would have been grateful of what the association, his family and his friends have been able to achieve in his name. His own passion for refugees, indigenous people and the environment



are mirrored in the central values and focus of the association. With the ten-year anniversary of his passing arriving next year it is time to celebrate the good that has come from the efforts of so many within the VDSA community.

## **VDSA's Refugees & Asylum Seekers Program**

*Charity Haynes for Alison Raco*

Much of this year has been dominated by the Coronavirus and its impact on vulnerable people like asylum seekers highlights the importance of VDSA in their lives. All those asylum seekers and refugees living without visa or on welfare are not eligible for the government's special benefits like JobSeeker. So, if they lost their job they were without support, and even for those that might have been eligible the process of applying was very complex. In addition, many do not have Medicare, which leaves them very vulnerable during a pandemic.

The support from VDSA to this group has taken many forms and often had unexpected benefits, such as providing Day Care support to their children. This enables the child to learn English, and so become more integrated and able to respond to visitors, and for the parent(s) it enables them to spend time on other activities, such as going to classes at TAFE (English, sewing etc.), driving lessons or taking part time work, or being able to focus on the new baby – thus a win/win for everyone. Such generosity is life changing.

Some refugees have needed ongoing support for many years while they look

for work, but when they do finally get employment and are able to cope on their own, their gratefulness for having been believed in and helped to survive those difficult years is wonderful and very rewarding.

For many refugees with ill health, Coronavirus has been especially frightening, since often they do not have Medicare, so the fear of getting Covid is exacerbated. Sensible advice like not taking public transport means that essential activities like going to the Foodbank at ASRC (Newtown) or to LWB (Parramatta) becomes an added burden, if advised not to travel.

One of the big changes this year has been that visiting Villawood Detention Centre was banned since March, for fear that Covid could be spread there. This has meant that the only contact is by mobile phone. The government tried to introduce a bill banning mobile phones in detention centres. Luckily the campaign against this bill was successful, with a deciding vote from Jacqui Lambie defeating it. Many people in detention have been there several years, have partners and children in the community or back in their country of origin. So this potential cruelty to already deprived people was extremely distressing and puts our Lock Down experience in perspective.

There are however highlights even in this area, with one of the refugees in detention for 10 years being released and now living with his brother, who was more fortunate and had only stayed in detention about 5 years. It is lovely to see them reunited and able to share a couple of rooms in a rented house.

The appreciation of VDSA by the

refugees is enormous but it is a two-way process, since the members of VDSA benefit and are enriched by having the opportunity of friendship with them. Celebrations of weddings, birth of babies, birthdays, picnics, and casual meetings have enabled members of VDSA to get to know them and we have benefited enormously from this.

For more information visit:

[valeriodesimoni.org/en/causes/refugees-asylum-seekers-program/](http://valeriodesimoni.org/en/causes/refugees-asylum-seekers-program/)

## **Letter from Nathan, Asylum Seeker**

My name is Nathan from Sri Lanka. I came Australia to seek asylum by the brutal war against Tamils.

I was incarcerated at Sydney immigration residential housing between 2011 to 2016 by the reason of adverse security from ASIO. Those period of my life was limbo. I was suffering by depression, insomnia and lots of medical issues.

That time Victoria Paola, Nicoletta Alison and Megan from VDSA started to visit me. They are very kind and always encourage me to come over from those mental illness and they tried to make my spirits up.

They sent students to entertain me and others in the housing. And also they usually bring foods & fruits for us each visits and mingle with us as one of us.

Their visits made me relieving from the depression.

I have been released on 2016 to the community by ASIO, who made the decision as I am not security threat to the community.

Even though I have been released, they're still visit and support me and keep the relationship with us as a mentor. We are impressed by Valerio's thoughts too.

My family and I are thanking everyone who visited us and your continuous support for us.

Cheers,  
Nathan & Family

## Looking back on VDSA's Indigenous Youth Program

*Vittoria Pasquini*

Since its foundation almost 10 years ago, VDSA has been committed to the improvement of the lives and wellbeing of Indigenous youth. We know that there is still a lot to do in Australia to close the gap between non-Indigenous population and First People and that the reconciliation process is slow. We are a small Association with limited resources and volunteer members but we strongly believe that every act of kindness and every opportunity contribute to the well-being of Indigenous youth. Each small donation counts towards closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth and we believe we all have a responsibility to reduce it. In the course of the years The Valerio Daniel De Simoni Association has had the opportunity to show support to Indigenous youth by way of providing:

- Drama workshops to assist youth at risk of leaving school and becoming alienated from their culture, and video courses at Alexandria Park Community School
- Offering free psychotherapy sessions
- Facilitating inspirational workshops for WEAVE's Culture and Personal Development Camp attended by Aboriginal youth
- Partnering with WEAVE on the introduction to Permaculture & Rooftop Garden, a course which is part of WEAVE's Step Up Learning Program, which aims to assist young Indigenous people to re-enter mainstream education, training or employ-

ment

- Partnering with Marrickville Youth Resource Centre on Aboriginal Art & Outreach
- Partnering with Marrickville Youth Resource Centre and Connect Marrickville on Yarn N'Arts & Aboriginal Art & Outreach offering facilitated art workshops for indigenous youth and families
- Collaborated with Jarjum College in the provision of a soccer training program for students (Research has found that sport helps reduce violence, keeps Indigenous youth out of serious trouble and is essential to counter the moral despair of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people)
- Donating organic fresh vegetables from VDSA organic vegetable garden in Bronte weekly to the to The Jarjum College, Redfern and to the Redfern Community Centre.

VDSA is acting locally but we members of the Association are thinking globally. We know for example that Australia is the only nation in the whole world without a Treaty with its First People who are still not recognised in the Australian Constitution.

We hope that the Yolngu word of *Makarrata* (coming together after a struggle, facing the facts of wrongs and living in peace again) which is embedded in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, will have an impact in the recognition of Aboriginal peoples' rightful place in Australia.

For more information visit:

<http://www.valeriodesimoni.org/en/causes/indigenous-youth/>

## VDSA Lunch Group for the Asylum Seekers' Centre or, The Foodies

*Mariella Totaro-Genevois*



### **Who are we?**

We are a group of about twenty people working in teams of three to provide monthly lunches for the Clients of the Asylum Seekers Centre (ASC) in Newtown. Our work began soon after the creation of the VDSA and steadily continued to operate until COVID-19 invaded our lives\*.

The group is made up of individuals from a great variety of backgrounds – academic, law, business, journalism, PR, the arts and so on, all sharing an interest in food and the desire to offer moments of relaxation and culinary enjoyment to the ASC's Clients.



### **Who(m) do we work for?**

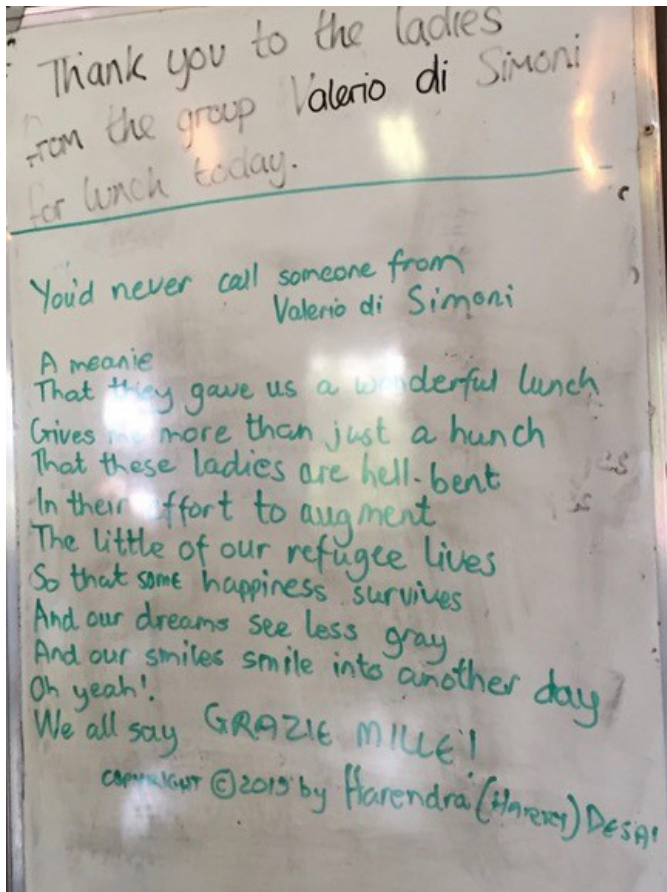
We work for the Clients of the Newtown ASC, people coming from a wide range of countries, and thus reflecting diverse cultures, languages and, most importantly, unidentified hardships and traumas. We are never sure of their precise number on each occasion, but we are asked to cater for 35-40 people.

### **How do we operate?**

The dates of our monthly lunches are negotiated between myself as VDSA Group Coordinator and the ASC Volunteer Coordinator, and a yearly calendar is prepared so that each team knows when they will be on duty.



Prior to each lunch the team members decide on the menu, divide tasks and prepare at home the food to be taken to the Centre. Expenses



are generously covered by Group's members, but a refund of \$100 per lunch is available from VDSA.

There is an unspoken agreement that we are free to cook according to different traditions, provided the meals are healthy and nourishing. The meat or chicken used is Halaal, and a vegetarian dish is always included. We always offer fresh bread, salads, and plenty of fruit in season as well, and add a dessert for... a sweet ending.

## Action Days

Team members meet at the ASC at least one hour prior to lunch. Tables are set, last minute chores completed (e.g. cooking rice, dressing salads etc). At 12.30 the clients begin forming a queue and we – the Foodies, standing at the serving tables – dish up the lunch, trying to match their wishes with what

is on our menu and making sure we can cover the unpredictable number of people with our guessed food quantities.

Miraculously we DO manage every time. After lunch the VDSA lunch teams clean up conscientiously. Waste? None: any leftovers are carefully packed and taken home by the clients.



## Note

Speaking for myself but consistently with the comments of members of the VDSA Lunch Group, I can say that our modest initiative for the Newtown ASC has a magical side: while our teams contribute nourishment, they are more than generously compensated by the heartfelt thanks and overjoyed smiles of the Centre's Clients.

\*Since September 2020 the VDSA Lunch Group, being unable to continue its usual work, has started a monthly delivery of food items and other essential goods suggested on the list of the Centre website.

For more information visit:

[valeriodesimoni.org/en/causes/hot-lunches-for-refugees/](http://valeriodesimoni.org/en/causes/hot-lunches-for-refugees/)

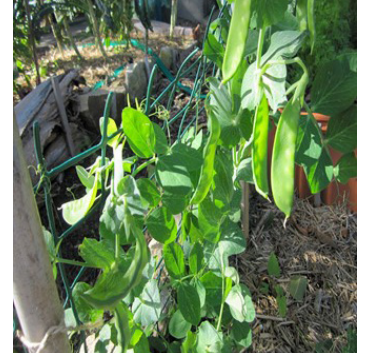


## The Blossoming VDSA Veggie Garden

### Coordinator Report

*Marisa Minelle-Katis*

Our garden volunteer team consists of 7 to 10 people. With so many hands on board, in 2020 we have managed to keep the garden productive with vegetables and flowers following Covid-19 restrictions.



Our garden is 100% organic thanks to Rosa and Vince, our providers at Austral Seedlings. We are growing a selection of seasonal vegetables including native and indigenous plants to suit the taste of our recipients.

Following are short reports from the members of our garden team – an excellent bunch of people full of expertise and enthusiasm.

Thank you!

### Delivery of our Produce

*Pia Ottavian*

One of the aims of our vegetable garden is to produce fresh, organic vegetables to distribute to needy or at risk groups, particularly in the indigenous and refugee communities, as determined by the rules of our association.



We deliver to the Redfern Community Centre – a drop in centre that supports both indigenous and others in need. We recently began deliveries at Jurjum College of indigenous students.



## Compost and Soil Management

*Ann Game*

In October 2019, Murray Cox built a wooden compost box consisting of two compartments in the garden. We are now self-sufficient in compost and have a good system going. During winter, we planted green manure in a number of the beds for soil improvement. The soil is very healthy with lots of worms.

## Finances

*Jill Romuld*

The VDSA budget allocates a regular donation to the garden and the sale of pesto provides an additional income. We also receive some donations of money or product from generous individuals who support the philosophy and principles of our charity garden.

These finances allow purchase of organic seedlings, garden equipment, mulch and anything to maintain the



continual workings of the garden.

## Fundraising Activities - Pesto Making

*Cristina Mauceri*

I am the only one of the garden team from Liguria, the region where pesto originated, and so it's up to me to describe our annual pesto-making ritual. It is a moment full of joy and laughter, which brings us together every year at Vittoria's house.



## Our Recipients

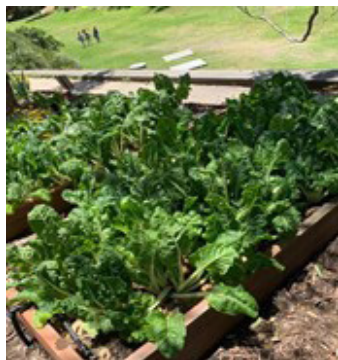
*Jill Romuld*

The recipients of the amazing fresh organic salad and vegetables we cultivate are:

- Redfern Community Centre – a drop-in centre that supports both indigenous and others in need in the Redfern area. Our vegetables form a major part of their menu. Recently due to Covid-19, the produce we deliver has been offered for pick up

by families in the area.

- Jarjum College, also located in Redfern, is a college for Indigenous students age 4 to 13. We began taking our produce to the college in 2019 to be used in the lunches for the students who might not always have fresh vegetables ready to cook. Gayl Hardaker and her volunteers have stated that, “the children’s physical wellbeing is demonstrably improved by the nutritious and varied diet they are offered at Jarjum.” The smiling faces of the young students as we bring the vegetables and salad is truly delightful.



and dandelions, a flowering of friendship and exchange. It’s a bilingual, bicultural space – as green as the organic pesto we make, as energetic as the sun that feeds it. A lot more grows in our orto than just veggies.



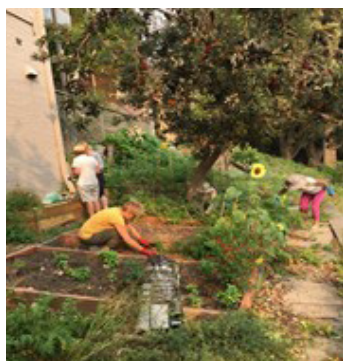
### *Mimi Carolyn Parfitt*

The main reasons I enjoy working in the garden include the sense of camaraderie in working together with lovely friends, to hear Italian language being spoken and to put my hands in the soil. I love planting. I get much more from working in the garden than I give to it, and I am very sorry I cannot attend more often as I do not live in Sydney any more.

### **Volunteers’ Feedback**

#### *Camilla Bettoni*

A garden with a view: not only healthy vegetables, good for the body, but also meaningful company, good for the soul. I love especially, in late summer, the ritual of harvesting, washing, chopping, dressing and bottling the sweet basil into gourmet pesto.



#### *Anne Rutherford*

The orto is an expanding Italian vocabulary of snails, worms and ladybirds, a food culture of kale, leeks

### **Record-keeping**

#### *Rosalba Paris*

Photo taking is my chosen task as I have self-nominated as record-keeper for the garden activities and events. I am also a keen gardener and love to spend time in the garden.



For more information visit: [valeriodesimoni.org/en/causes/growing-food-for-the-disadvantaged/](http://valeriodesimoni.org/en/causes/growing-food-for-the-disadvantaged/)

## **Valerio De Simoni Association, Italy**

*Massimo Pasquini*

To share the message and the vitality of Valerio, a young explorer of the soul, the Italian Valerio De Simoni Association started from the earth, creating organic gardens in Rome that provide vegetables for underage refugees, involving institutions, schools, reception centres and people of good will.

It then developed into education, by offering an important shared experience, and also imparting basic notions of the Italian language to young foreigners. Then came the publication and promotion of Valerio's diary-books, *Real Love for the turning World* and *Travel diaries* (September 2014, Sossella Editore).

The presentation of the books and the funding campaigns of the Association over the years developed into a series of cultural events and meetings, with participation and performances of musicians, actors, writers, journalists, members of Oxfam and Greenpeace, public administrators and cultural operators.

Among them, Natalia Cangj – Director of the National Diary Archive of Pieve Santo Stefano, the Centre that houses Valerio's Diaries, which were among the eight finalists of the Prize awarded by the Archive.

Among the many other initiatives, participation in the Festival of Green and Landscape at the Auditorium in Rome, readings of the diaries at the Turin Auto Museum, participation in the shared Network of Urban Gardens

and organization of film screenings on issues concerning refugees in Italy.

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## **Associazione Valerio de Simoni, Urban Gardens**

*Assunta Giorgio, Angelo Pasquini*

The creation and development of organic urban gardens has been the heart of the Valerio De Simoni Association's activity since 2013.

- The vegetable garden at the Auditorium Parco della Musica in Rome has been a reference point for years for school children, for visitors to the Auditorium and for all those interested in urban farming.
- The vegetable garden of the primary school in the former Olympic Village, adjacent to the Auditorium, is a small educational garden and an open-air classroom, where children learn about local products, seasonal cycles and biodiversity.





- The organic urban garden in the Reception Centre for unaccompanied underage refugees in via di Porta Ardeatina is entrusted to the care of young refugees, coordinated on a weekly basis by agronomist Cristiano Fedi and by a group of gardeners from our Association.



- The activity of the other organic urban garden, located in the other Reception Centre in via Venafro, in the Tiburtina area, is coordinated by agronomist Corinna Geroldi. In this centre, a laboratory of graphic communication of the garden activity was inaugurated in 2019, in collaboration with two classes of the nearby arts high school, where students produced posters, maps of the garden, brochures, videos and photographs.

In autumn 2019, the winter cultivation cycle was conducted regularly in all gardens of the Association. During spring 2020, due to the generalized lockdown, we were only able to reactivate the gardens between May and June, delaying by a few weeks the planting of summer plants. Digging and planting activities, which traditionally involved most members of the Association, this year due to Covid were carried out by a limited number of gardeners and agronomists.

The operators of the two Reception Centres (Ardeatina and Venafro) told us that, during the period of the lockdown, the activity of the garden, to which the young refugees dedicated themselves with enthusiasm, had a kind of “therapeutic” function for them, who were forced, like everyone else, to a long period of frustrating isolation.



The vegetable harvest was however abundant in all gardens managed by the Association, and as usual the produce was made available to the young people of the Reception Centres, except for part of the vegetables grown at the Auditorium, used by the members of the Association. Unfortunately, the

participation of school children in garden activities has also been suspended due to the restrictions imposed by the Covid emergency.



For three years, the Association has also participated, with the two agronomists Corinna Geroldi and Cristiano Fedi, and with the coordinator of the garden activities Susi Giorgio, in the European project “Ru: rban” – an initiative for the exchange and transfer of experiences among the various European cities – in which the city of Rome has been chosen as a laboratory for urban regeneration and “good practice”, in the redevelopment of abandoned and uncultivated green areas, which are now managed and valued as urban vegetable gardens, by associations or ordinary citizens.



In 2020, as part of the program “Orti in comune” in Rome, a form of free exchange between community urban gardens, the agronomist Cristiano Fedi, representing our Association, joined the commission of the Municipality of Rome, dealing with developing a new regulation of the urban gardens of the Capital.



## Valerio's Diaries

*Gino Moliterno, Curator*

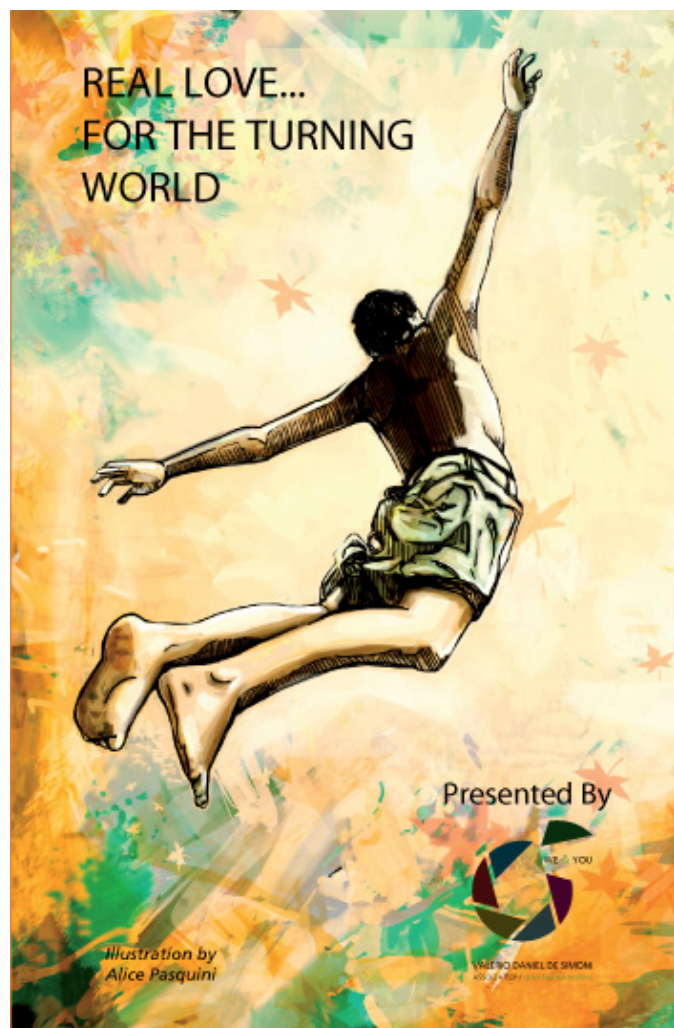
Valerio had always hoped that one of the many outcomes of the Quad Squad Expedition would be a book, and as his adopted uncle and, as he sometimes referred to me, his “consigliere”, I had advised him to keep a journal to record what the Squad saw and did as they moved through the 30 countries on their itinerary. The journal that he did in fact keep somehow survived the horrific crash that killed him but when his mother, Vittoria, and I examined it with possible publication in mind, we were disappointed. Many of the annotations were of day-to-day to-do business while many of the longer and more thoughtful entries had been rendered illegible by water damage.

Having shelved the idea of publication for a time, we were delighted when Valerio's cousin from Rome, Arianna, discovered, tucked away in Valerio's old room, two writing books in which Vale had effectively been keeping a diary since he had turned twenty. In those pages we discovered not only the Valerio we knew and loved, but also a Valerio we had hardly suspected, a budding writer already adept at using words to express his natural joie de vivre and his wonderment at the mystery of life and the world in general. This then, we agreed, could stand as Valerio's literary legacy. In the meantime Vittoria had succeeded in founding the Valerio Daniel De Simoni Association and under its aegis, and with only a minimum of editorial intervention, we were able to publish the diaries in facing

parallel English and Italian text, titled *Real Love ... For the Turning World*. Launched in Sydney in 2012, the book elicited a very warm reception locally, and an even warmer response in Italy when presented in Rome by the Italian branch of the VDSA, where it attracted more than a modicum of media attention.

The success of the first volume spurred us on to find a way of also publishing the travel journal. Having already fully embraced digital culture, Valerio had also been regularly reporting the Expedition's progress through Europe and Africa in the Squad's dedicated online blog, on its Facebook page, in clusters of SMS, in emails to family and friends, and even in letters, postcards and press releases. With her characteristic organizational prowess, Vittoria managed to draw together a team of Association members who, in a Herculean labour of love, undertook to collect, transcribe and where necessary translate, this mass of material which Vittoria and I were then able to thread together into something of a post-modern and multifaceted travel narrative. Feeling confident that in this way we had managed to reconstruct Valerio's travel journal and made it simultaneously available in both English and Italian, Vittoria elected to enter the volume in the annual competition for the Saverio Tutino Prize held by the Italian National Diary Archive at Pieve Santo Stefano. To everyone's great delight, Valerio's *Diari di viaggio/Travel Journals* was short-listed as one of the eight finalists and, although it did not win the first prize, it created a great deal of media interest. A few months later the

independent publisher, Luca Sossella, decided to publish the book and give it a national release in Italy while the VDSA undertook its distribution in Australia. Thus, within three years, Valerio's hopes for a book, recording the great adventure of the Quad Squad Expedition, had been fulfilled.



But much more than a mere history of a real-life boy's own adventure and a literary collection of a young man's musings, the real achievement of Valerio's two published diaries has been, for almost a decade, to continue to inspire and motivate all the philanthropic activities of the Valerio De Simoni Association, which, thanks to his mother Vittoria, remains his greatest legacy, and what he himself would

regard as his real love for the turning world.

Valerio's diaries can be purchase on the VDSA website: <http://www.valeriodesimoni.org/en/buy-valerios-diaries/>

## **Sand Roads: the story of Valerio, Ted & Jamie's Africa expedition**

*Authors and directors Lorenzo Conte and Gabriele Gianni tell us of the progress of their documentary film project entitled Sand Roads, produced by La Sarraz Pictures Italia, in co-production with Emeraldfilms Australia.*

*The project obtained a first development fund from the "Piemonte Film Fund" in Italy and in November will apply in the funding bid "Lazio International". In Australia it obtained its first development funding from "Screen Australia".*

*Pending the reopening of the borders, closed due to Covid-19, a first visit to Sydney by the directors is expected in March 2021.*

Making a film is like going on a journey. An idea that grows from inside, a desire, with many changes of programs along the way. And then the feeling of reaching your destination and probably finding something beyond your initial intentions. It is always like this.

Making a film (in this case a documentary film) on Valerio, Ted and Jamie's 2010 expedition to Africa is a journey within a journey. Again here, it takes tenacity, time, attention.

And this is what has been happening for about six years now, around the "Sand Roads" project. A long approach,

with hard preparation, false starts, sudden stops, but above all the great desire to make it happen, to make the journey.

We want to acknowledge the continuous support and inspiration of Vittoria, who has been the 'engine' of everything, of Martina and her daughter Elena who are giving us fundamental help. In Italy we want to thank Flavia and the Pasquini Clan and the De Simoni family for their help. And then Alessandro Borrelli, the Italian producer who agreed to let himself be dragged into this adventure, Sally Browning the Australian co-producer who is making it all possible, and finally Ted and Jamie, who have opened their hearts with all their trust in us.

These different worlds, so far and so close, have met and are traveling together, all in search of something personal, something secretly profound. And with the desire to leave a mark, to make a film that speaks of something that concerns everyone. Always.

The search for oneself. The transition to adulthood. And then the values of friendship, of solidarity. And the passing of time, life and death. Sand Roads wants to talk about all this. Or at least try. A long journey began this time also. We are only at the beginning, but we are on the way.

We hope to see you in Sydney in 2021 to make another stretch of road together.

## **Gamba Primary School Project - October 2020 Report**

*Manvester Ackson Khoza (Slow Food Coordinator), in collaboration with the school Principal*



### **School history**

Gamba primary school is located on the outskirts of Lura hills under Lura Zone in Rumphi district, northern Malawi. The school started as a junior primary by the Village Development Committee, local chiefs (L.E.A) in 1991 to serve young learners from walking long distances to access education. Initially pupils used to go to Lura or Kasonkhwe primary schools which are located at 7.5km. The school has three blocks with only five rooms, while there are 380 learners from grade 1-8, there are five qualified teachers, two teachers' houses. The school is located in the suburb North of Rumphi District and 32km away from the main road. The school has been privileged to receive financial support from the Associazione Italiana Valerio De Simoni to help in the school garden initiative, the borehole and solar power electricity which were lacking at the school. Below is the detailed report of the projects which

have been implemented at the school through Slow Food in Malawi.

### **School garden project, supported by International Grammar School and Rotary club.**

The school learnt of the Slow Food school garden initiative in December 2013 which promotes the production of indigenous agricultural practices in the schools and community, hence Gamba was also incorporated in the project. This meant partnering the School with The Associazione Italiana Valerio De Simoni.



It was welcome news when the slow food coordinators told the school that Vittoria Pasquini from Australia would like to adopt the school in memory of her son who was involved in a road accident in Malawi, students, teachers and the community are pleased with the initiative and look forward to the success of the adoption. Through the Associazione Valerio De Simoni in Italy and the Rotary club, Sydney, Gamba school received funds to procure garden tools to enhance its effort in the production of Good, Clean and Fair food as advocated by Slow Food. The garden tools included; water cans,

wheelbarrows, mesh wires, rakes, shovels and garden forks. The garden was then established measuring 0.2 ha and the following crops are grown; local spinach (*Kamuganje*), maize (*ngoma*), amaranthus (*berekete*), peas (*mbangi*), beans (*ntchunga*) etc. The crop's nutrition is enhanced by using bokashi manure and compost which the club membership makes. The garden produce is prepared as meal for the learners.



### **The school borehole**

Since the establishment of the school in 1991, the school had had no water supply for use by students and teachers for almost 18 years. Learners and staff depended on waters from the rivers which is located about 3km from this school. This meant that learners would go thirsty throughout the class sessions as the distance for them to access water was far.

Besides that the school garden work would be interrupted during off seasons as learners could not manage to draw water for the crops sufficiently due to the long distance. Worse still is that

the teachers would deny the school because there was no clean water, instead they would opt for schools that had stable water source. Thanks to Associazione Italiana Valerio De Simoni, the International Grammar School, Sydney and private donors in Rome and in Sydney, in 2019 the school got a borehole and now learners can access clean water. The boreholes serve even the communities around. Village Chief Mgalama was quoted “Gamba school community thanks all the generous institutions and people who gave us these precious gifts to our school, we were in a very difficult situation especially that the school had been running over 18 years without stable water...we sincerely thank her and all who helped in contributing towards this effort”.



### The solar power system

Once more Gamba school has been privileged to receive a solar power project in 2019. The school being located in a remote area it was very difficult for the school to have power from the utility companies. The solar power will help boost learners access to studies as most of them used kerosene lamps in their homes for their studies.

Now learners are able to have evening classes and studies due to the solar power which has been donated to the school from the Associazione Italiana Valerio De Simoni and private donors from Sydney. Four classroom blocks have been supplied with the solar power and a teacher’s house. It is a great relief for the school.



### Conclusion

The school and the community are grateful for these projects donated to Gamba school. Of course there is still other needful things which the school is in dire need such as learners desks which the school does not have. If it pleases our generous donors in future to consider us with school desks as 90% of the learners sit on the floor.

