



VALERIO DANIEL DE SIMONI
ASSOCIATION *open fearless positive*



Newsletter

December 2022

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.

Letter from the President

Vittoria Pasquini

Dear All,

Another year is almost gone by and almost twelve years have passed since VDSA was created and we still feel positive



and passionate about our purpose of working with refugees, asylum seekers and Indigenous youth.

As usual we look at “the sunny side of the street” trying to enjoy our achievements, trying also to understand difficulties in order to learn from them and improve the quality of our work.

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2022 News:

- Refugee Soccer Match
- Announcing the VDSA prize
- VDSA Italia
- VDSA in Malawi

Reflecting on what happened around us and to us in 2022, we can say that Covid came, then went and then, like a Phoenix, is now back again, this time hopefully lighter than before. As for the previous years, refugees and asylum seekers living in community detention or with temporary visas were the most affected, directly or indirectly, by the virus. They did not receive Government support nor were they able to find jobs easily if at all. They had to rely on Not for Profit Associations and so VDSA, among others, was able to help.



In particular VDSA was able to:

- assist a Pakistani woman (classified by Salvation Army as a case of 'modern slavery') with rent and purchase of groceries
- assist part of the payment for a transcript of a case of a Tamil woman and her son to determine if they were eligible for a visa;
- assist a recently widowed Tamil woman with a 6 years old son with rent, because due to the trauma of the sudden loss of her young husband, the woman is not yet able to work;
- help two single mothers (one Somali, the other Tibetan) and their young children with food and clothes who are on a Community Detention Immigration visa and therefore can't work nor study;
- help a Tamil family of 4 (parents and two children) who are living on the father's small part time cleaning salary with groceries;
- assist a Malaysian single mother with two very young children with part of a payment for electricity and rent
- assist a Tamil family of three, (parents and a very young daughter) with purchase of groceries since the mother had to go to hospital for major surgery and the father had to look after their young daughter and couldn't work for that time.
- assist a Rohingya family living in Canberra, still finding it difficult to survive with the part time salary of the father's gardening job, with clothes for their two children
- assist an Indian family (parents and two young children) with grocery

purchases. The son was medivac from Nauru because he developed TB. The family is in community detention so the parents can't work nor study.

- sponsor a soccer team of young newly arrived Afghani refugees knowing that sport is very useful in helping with traumas.
(For more information see Refugees Coordinator Report)

Celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, the VDSA Lunch Project Group is continuing its remarkable work in tandem with the Asylum Seeker Centre. A group of around 20+ volunteers in rotation (some since the beginning of our adventure) have provided gourmet lunches once a month to the many refugees and asylum seekers visiting the Asylum Seeker Centre. To all of them goes my heartfelt thank you!
(For more information see the Lunch Project Group Coordinator Report)

VDSA's work with Indigenous youth has unfortunately been impacted by Covid restrictions. We couldn't for instance donate, as we did before Covid, canvas and oil paints to young Indigenous art exhibitions, nor provide teachers for drama programs for Indigenous students. We could only deliver organic vegetables to Redfern Community Centre, the Jarjum College in Redfern and more recently to Our Big Kitchen (catering among others for The Asylum Seeker Centre). Hopefully next year there will be more opportunities to start new programs with Indigenous youth.

As mentioned above, the organic vegetable garden, created in memory of Valerio Daniel De Simoni, funded in part by VDSA, has been providing, thanks to the generous effort of a few people, vegetables to Redfern Community Centre, the Jarjum College and Our Big Kitchen. Also VDSA members have been regularly delivering vegetables to the refugees they visit who can't afford organic vegetables because they are too costly. (For more information see Garden Coordinator Report)

In Rome The Italian Valerio De Simoni is in its 11th year and is doing very well. It has built (and is still looking after) three beautiful vegetable gardens providing vegetables for young refugees. It also runs workshops for primary school teachers and students learning how to look after a vegetable garden. (For more information see the Italian VDSA President Report)

Also the Gamba School in Malawi, thanks to generous Australian donors, was able to build an organic vegetable garden, a bore hole (for clean water) and electricity from solar panels for the classrooms so that students could study also in the afternoons and evenings. (For more information see report from the Gamba School Coordinator Report).

Finally VDSA was able to offer Central Sydney Intensive English High School (the school has provided high school English preparation and support programs to newly arrived students for more than 40 years) a prize for asylum seekers and refugee students writing or making short films related to their

journey from their country to Australia. This project will start First Term next year.

In conclusion, I feel that, while we still haven't resumed 100% of our activity due to Covid, VDSA was nevertheless able to help large groups of people in need, financially and morally.

A big THANK YOU goes to all the people who generously volunteered in different programs and to the people who donated and helped us to make our work possible. We couldn't have done it without your help!

Have a peaceful and joyful Festive Season!!!

love V.

VDSA's Refugees & Asylum Seekers Program

Charity Haynes

This year visiting refugees in their homes has continued but we no longer visit the Villawood Detention Centre. Families have been helped in many ways, including rent assistance, paying for doctors' bills and electricity accounts. Highlights of visits include delicious lunches, seeing the progress of the children, several starting school for the first time and proudly showing us their school uniform and even reading us a story.

For the families who moved recently to better accommodation, developments include setting up an online business to sell clothes imported from India and for another family a flourishing veggie garden, which shows how a better environment enables a more productive life. For another family, where both parents work, one of their sons has enrolled in an IT course at Macquarie University.

By contrast, those without visas cannot attend TAFE and have no work rights. Even their children, who have attended High School here, and in one case gained an arts degree, are not allowed to work. The frustration caused by lack of visas leads to anxiety and many health problems. The change of government had been a source of hope, but though there was the well-publicised case of the Biloela family, the situation has worsened for others. Only last month a family was sent an

ultimatum: accept an offer to go to New Zealand by 4 October or return to your home country, in this case Iran, only to be contacted a month later, after suffering a great deal of distress, to be told that the letter had been sent in error and has since been withdrawn by the Immigration Dept.

Refugees who have been in the community for over 10 years need safety and stability instead of living in fear. They really appreciate any support that we can give them. VDSA has an invaluable role supporting refugees not just financially but also emotionally, such as when a mother was recently widowed, when her husband died of a heart attack, leaving her with a six-year-old son. It is a privilege to be able to assist them, especially at such difficult times.

For more information visit:
valeriodesimoni.org/en/causes/refugees-asylum-seekers-program/

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

Mariella Totaro-Genevois

VDSA Lunch Project Group - 2022 Report

This year the VDSA Lunch Project Group, nicknamed The Foodies, celebrates its 10th birthday. The team includes approximately twenty people, and while there are members who had to leave because of life circumstances, the core of the group has remained untouched in time. Equally untouched has remained their generosity, enthusiasm, and steady collaboration in providing our monthly lunches for the clients of the Asylum Seekers Centre in Newtown.

Notwithstanding that in 2022 COVID's ongoing spectre has caused anxiety and has required recurrent revision of our schedule and some adjustments, we have managed to keep our commitment without cancelling any lunch.

Only on two occasions was there a variation in our usual routine of preparing food at home and then working at the ASC to organise the meal. In one case we prepared and delivered the full lunch menu but had to leave it at the desk for the ASC staff to take charge, and on another the VDSA offered \$250 to the Centre to cover our scheduled lunch as we were unable to serve it in person.

In conclusion, and once more,

the VDSA Lunch Group has been able to overcome obstacles, cope with the volatile situation created by the pandemic and fulfill our pledge, thus maintaining our successful cooperation with the ASC.

As mentioned, ten years have gone by since the Foodies began working on behalf of VDSA, and I feel deeply grateful to its members, past and present, for what we have managed to achieve together.

To The Foodies: a heartfelt thank you!

Mariella Totaro-Genevois
Coordinator, VDSA Lunch Project ASC

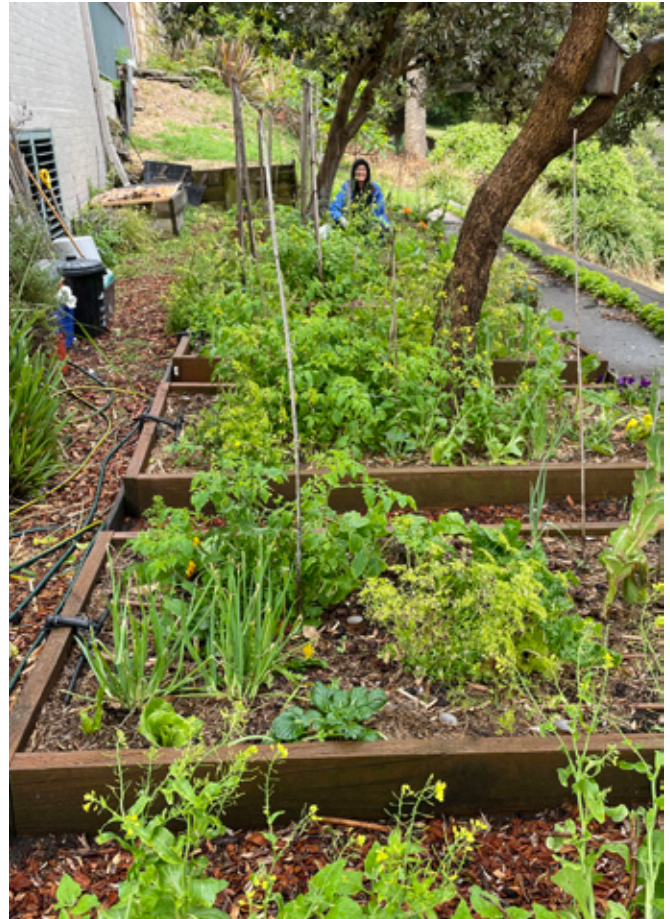
For more information visit:
valeriodesimoni.org/en/causes/hot-lunches-for-refugees/



A Garden with a View: VDSA Veggie Garden Report

Anne Rutherford

2022 has been a year of change and refocus for the orto team. In the first half of the year we supplied weekly veggies to a new charity, Our Big Kitchen, that provides over 120,000 meals a people in need of food support, including asylum seekers, Indigenous people and the homeless. Over winter we let the garden lie fallow while our members made the annual pilgrimage to Italy and we took advantage of the break to rebuild our soil with green manure topped up with compost. We are reaping the benefit of our replenished soil with newly productive garden beds and in 2023 we will be going back to our previous charity, Jarjum College, a primary school for Indigenous kids in Redfern, that makes lunches for the kids. We have a new supplier of quality organic seedlings, QPS, who donated 50 seedlings to us when they learnt of the charity work we do. Thanks Jye!



In 2022, a number of long-term members of our group moved away or had other commitments, leaving a nucleus of four committed workers. This change led us to restructure the garden so that we can bring in more people from outside. We've divided the garden into four beds for a communal garden and the other five for the charity garden. This has proved a great success so far, as the communal garden has been providing a fabulous harvest for our willing workers and we have now welcomed Zorana, the treasurer of the association, as a new member.

We all sorely miss our dear friend Rosi, who has moved back to Italy to live close to her sister. Rosi has been a committed member of our group since the beginning of the garden and we



wish her well. We also thank Jill, Mimi, Pia, Marisa and Ann for the years of work they put into building up our orto.



VDSA Italia

Massimo Pasquini

During 2022, the activities of VDS (Valerio De Simoni) Association focused mainly on urban gardens set up in three different locations in Rome.

While in the two gardens created in Reception Centres for refugee minors the soil was given a rest for the season, the garden next to the Auditorium Parco della Musica produced excellent results following the two seasonal plantings. The two plantings (spring and winter) were occasions for festive gatherings for VDS members, followed by weekly plant care and harvesting of produce (part of which went to the two refugees Reception Centres).

As for maintenance work, at the beginning of the year we restored the wooden tubs in the vegetable garden at the Venafro Reception Centre and the wooden fence in the Auditorium's vegetable garden was completely rebuilt, in this case with the collaboration of the Fondazione Musica per Roma, which manages the Parco della Musica.

The Association then participated throughout the year in various initiatives (meetings, seminars, workshops) organized by entities and institutions in the city of Rome on the topic of coordination and regulation of urban community gardens.

Some initiatives involved the participation of young people and children in play and educational activities. These included a horticulture course for young refugees and, in November, a meeting with practical exercises with elementary school pupils from the Villaggio Olimpico neighbourhood.

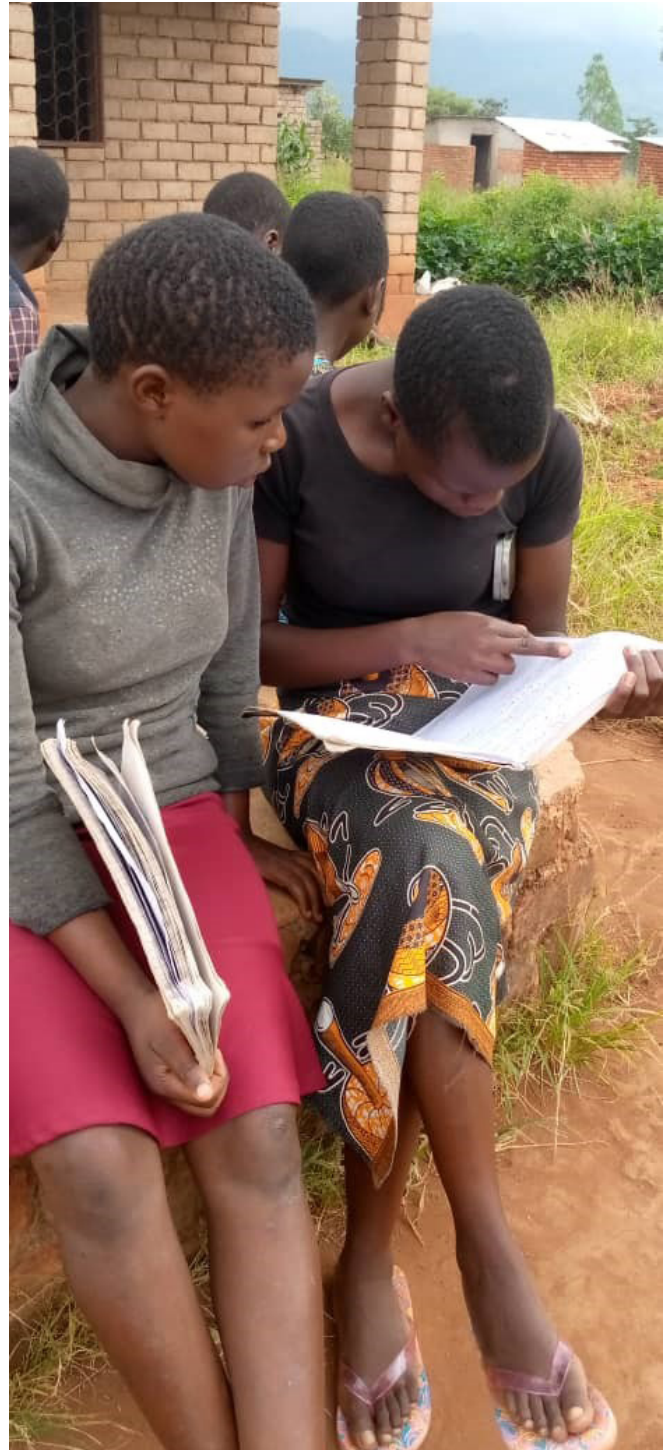
Finally, thanks to donations, the Association organized an initiative aimed at high school children on the theme of travel together with the National Diary Archive of Pieve Santo Stefano (where Valerio's diaries are kept). It is planned to award in the coming year a scholarship, or a contribution to educational expenses, earmarked for the production of a work (written or filmed) on this theme.

News from Gamba School, Malawi

Manvester

Greetings from Gamba school. The good news is that the school has performed wonderfully in the just released standard 8 exams. 14 out of 15 students who wrote the national exams have passed, only one failed. They thank you and your team for the solar system which has contributed to the success as students learn and do studies during the evening.

For more information or to support the Gamba school email Vittoria at: vittipasquini@valeriodesimoni.org



Refugee soccer match

On October 16 at the Wanderers Football Park in Sydney a friendly soccer match between newly arrived young Afghani refugees and an Italian Australian soccer team was played.

VDSA sponsored the game together with the Massoud Foundation, Amnesty International, Filef, Comites, NSW Government and Grandmothers for Refugees.

It is the second match VDSA has sponsored to provide support for the Afghani refugees and their community and promote multiculturalism.

Sport plays an important role in helping to overcome traumas, and the spirited match demonstrated how positive energy and healthy competition can emerge from even a friendly match.



VDSA end of year picnic

This year we were finally able to have our end of year picnic! After a number of years where it had been cancelled due to Covid it was enormously satisfying to gather once again in Bronte park, to catch up and celebrate the association's accomplishments. As always, food was plentiful and delicious, and the numerous small children suggest that association members seem to have spent the Covid years productively expanding their families!

