



VALERIO DANIEL DE SIMONI
ASSOCIATION *open fearless positive*



Newsletter

January 2024

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.

In this edition:

Looking back on VDSA's programs:

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

2023 News:

- VDSA prize
- VDSA fundraiser success!
- VDSA end-of-year picnic

Letter from the President

Vittoria Pasquini

Ciao a Tutti and welcome to the 2024 VDSA newsletter!



First, I would like to acknowledge the Bidjigal and Gadigal Clan, the traditional custodians of the Sydney Coast and pay my respect to Elders past and present.

It has been more than 12 years since the Association in memory of Valerio

Daniel De Simoni was created. A Community of Good Intentions, I called it then. A melting pot of people of different ages, languages, nationalities, expertise and beliefs. United by the desire to get to know and try to help people very different from us, people facing challenges within the context of Australian society.

We decided to work for and with Indigenous Youth and with people seeking asylum. We wanted to give, and, in exchange, we received a lot. It has been a profound, fulfilling experience.

Did the Community of Good Intentions, that I envisaged 12 years ago, grow into a Community of Good Actions? I will let you judge for yourself after I briefly summarise most of what we have done.

To start with, many projects for and with Indigenous Youth have been completed. Among them:

- Liaising with WEAVE, a non-



profit organisation supporting mainly Indigenous youth. Anna Kruse and Margareth Davis provided drama workshops and video courses to Alexandria Park Community School and I thank them for that. We also ran inspirational workshops on Culture and personal Development;

- Offering an Introduction to Permaculture and creating a Rooftop Garden at the WEAVE Youth and Community Services in Waterloo which was made possible thanks to the invaluable expertise of Kerry Dwyer;
- Liaising with Marrickville Youth Resource Centre, thanks to the excellent coordination of Lizzie Kruse. VDSA supported the Marrickville Youth Resource and Connect Marrickville's Aboriginal Art and Outreach Program which offered facilitated art workshops for Indigenous Youth (2017-2018);
- Liaising with the Jarjum College in Redfern. VDSA sponsored a soccer training program and has been delivering delicious fresh veggies from VDSA organic vegetable garden in Bronte weekly to the same college. This beautiful garden has been looked after by a series of very generous volunteer gardeners, coordinated first by Marisa Katis with Ann Game and Jill Romuld and more recently by Anne Rutherford with Cristina Mauceri.

Moreover, VDSA is now sponsoring an exciting project for Indigenous students, in liaison with Young Mob, World Vision.

The other very important VDSA focus has been, and still is, the continued contact, help, and friendship we have established with a number of refugees

and asylum seekers. For over seven years the VDSA Refugee Program volunteers visited The Villawood Detention Centre on a weekly basis, coordinated by Alison Raco and Nicoletta Zanardi, who we shall never forget. The feedback I have received is that it has been a formative experience for all volunteers who participated, an experience that has shaped us.

After the release of most of the refugees into the community, VDSA volunteers continue to regularly visit our refugee friends, trying to ease their introduction to Australian society. Picnics are regularly held, the "End of the Year Picnic" in Bronte is an annual event attended and enjoyed by many.

Special thanks to Charity Haynes, Paola Marmini and Gerri Minshall for the great work they are still doing for refugees!

Furthermore, VDSA volunteers have been providing one lunch a month to the Asylum Seeker Centre in Newtown for 11 years. They buy, cook, deliver and serve delicious meals at the Centre, offering both the food and their service free of charge. It has been a fulfilling experience for the people doing it, and it is an experience I highly recommend!

During Covid, when it wasn't possible to provide lunches at the ASC, VDSA launched an Appeal to get donations for food vouchers for refugees and asylum seekers in urgent need. The response to our plea was extremely generous and we ended up being able to support more people than we originally thought we could!

All of this has been made possible thanks to the teams involved in the Lunch Group but especially to the relentless, generous coordination facilitated by Mariella Totaro Genevois!

Not only has VDSA been carrying the projects just mentioned with refugees throughout the years, it has also sponsored, whenever possible, interesting initiatives aiming at making refugees feel welcomed in the wider community, strengthening social cohesion, and promoting their integration into a different community.

One of these projects has been to sponsor friendly soccer matches, together with Amnesty International, (Thank You to Silvia Greco for her excellent coordination!), with Comites, Filef, Grandmothers for Refugees and most importantly with the Massoud Foundation Australia.

Another very successful project has been to sponsor an Art Competition, for newly arrived young refugees (mostly from Ukraine), similar to the one we are doing now for Indigenous Youth.

Thanks to the determination of Kathie Power, the amazing Vice -Principal of Central Sydney High School, a very successful “Creative Expression Competition” was launched among refugee students from that school.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all the people who have helped VDSA since Valerio left us 12 years ago, to build a Community of Good Intentions which is now, I would say with pride, also a Community of Good Actions,

doing 100% volunteer work.

I repeat “100% volunteer work” because this is something we are very proud of and not many Associations are able to achieve or want to proceed this way.

For this reason, people trust us.

VDSA's Refugees & Asylum Seekers Program

Charity Haynes

VDSA's work with refugees continues as usual in 2022-23 despite a reduced number of volunteers due to ill health.

Nevertheless, a lot of good work has been done with the following individuals/families:

- VDSA helped a Pakistani woman, who receives counselling from the Salvation Army's Modern Slavery group; she has a working visa but she can't read or write in English and is too traumatised to be able to keep a job at present;
- VDSA helped a Somali single mum who is in community detention and can't work or study;
- VDSA helped a Tamil single mother who, having suddenly lost her young husband to heart failure, is still unable to work;
- VDSA helped a Tamil single mother still traumatised by the killing of her husband in Sri Lanka, followed by subsequent violence to herself and her son. She is unable to work;
- VDSA helped a family of persecuted Kurds still unable to obtain a temporary visa;

- VDSA helped a Tamil family whose landlord has increased the rent enormously. They can't afford it and they presently cannot find cheaper accommodation;
- VDSA helped a Malay stay at home mother of two very young children whose husband cannot presently find work;
- VDSA helped a Tamil family of three. The husband is working very hard as a panel beater to make a living but it is still difficult for them to make ends meet;

During the year VDSA volunteers organised several successful picnics with refugee families, around Coogee. Kids swam and delicious food was prepared and enjoyed.

The End of The Year Picnic in Bronte was attended by many refugees and volunteers. It is a VDSA tradition to hold the picnic in December before Christmas on the little hill behind the playground in Bronte Park. People now know the special place, bring family and friends, there is always good food and it is a pleasure to catch up. It is a great way to make refugees feel welcome and for volunteers to feel at home with people from a different culture and background.

Since February 2023, some of the people we visit obtained their permanent visa. Others are still waiting. Others still, know that they are not going to get it. We have been focussing our material help towards the last group of refugees, knowing that psychologically and practically it is a real challenge for

them.

Lastly, we initiated a competition at Central Sydney High School with refugee youth which was successful and we intend to replicate it in the same school and in other schools including with Aboriginal students. It brings together Valerio, his writing, young refugees or Indigenous Youth, VDSA and its purpose as an Association.

Overall VDSA has really contributed to “the relief of poverty, sickness, distress or helplessness of refugees and asylum seekers”, as our Constitution sets out.

For more information visit:

valeriodesimoni.org/en/causes/refugees-asylu

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

Mariella Totaro-Genevois

Our group is now eleven years old. While most of its members have been active since the beginning of our project, not only have other people joined as needed, but somebody new has popped up offering help to the team when required. In other words, the group is healthy and flexible and thriving. The VDSA Lunch Group is also financed entirely by members providing the food on the day.

At the Asylum Seekers Centre (ASC) where our activity takes place, there have been some changes, for example when our lunches are scheduled one of their volunteers is assigned to us to



They always thank our teams in way that makes us feel like valued support.

In addition to the regular enthusiastic letters of thanks received from the ASC after our lunches, I wish to thank all of the group's members warmly and strongly for their amazing contribution to our Association.

A Garden with a View: VDSA Veggie Garden Report

Anne Rutherford

This year, a small group of 4-5 dedicated volunteers, with a little help from our friends, has worked in the veggie garden and delivered organic veggies on a weekly basis to Jarjum College in Redfern. Jarjum is a school for urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are not participating or coping in mainstream primary schools as a result of their domestic circumstances. They cook lunches for the kids and our veggies contribute to a healthy weekly community lunch for kids and parents. We've been providing silverbeet, lettuce, mountains of cherry tomatoes, leeks, bok choy, kale, heaps of fresh

provide a bit of help in the kitchen, and most importantly useful information regarding the equipment and/or other practical things. Another change is that the allocation of the dates for our group is not given to me at the beginning of the year but in two six months lots, which complicates the planning.

As always how many people will participate in each lunch is a guess; this year the average number has been 25-30, but any left-overs get carefully packed and eagerly taken home by the ASC's clients, so no food is ever wasted.

In summary, especially if compared to the COVID years, in 2023 the VDSA Group has worked smoothly and successfully, leaving ASC clients looking contented and smiling after each lunch.



herbs and other delicious veggies when as available. Every week's delivery is a little different and the college is very happy with our offering.

We're constantly learning more about what we can grow well in our location. We've tried germinating our own seed but have not had a lot of success. We're also planning to invest in nets for a couple of the garden beds to help us get ahead of the voracious aphids and caterpillars. We started the year with funds from our previous sales of our much sought-after pesto but we haven't had the resources this year to make pesto – it's very labour-intensive.

In the coming year we will purchase seedlings, manure, netting, etc. to continue with our efforts.



VDSA Italia

VDSA Italy has collaborated with the Università Tre in Rome on a project involving Valerio's travel diaries. As part of a course in radio operations conducted by Professore Mauro Pescio in the Department of Philosophy, Communication and Entertainment, for the academic year 2023 - 2024, around 30 young students read, discuss and comment on Valerio's travel diary, also recording interviews. The result will be an audio podcast that will be recorded and broadcast on Radio Sapienza. National broadcast on Rai - Radio Tre is also planned.



(Some of VDSA's refugee friends and their children celebrating the Tamil Pongal festival for the sun good and harvest)



VDSA fundraiser

The 2023 VDSA fundraiser was held on Saturday 18 November at the home of VDSA executive committee members Sandra and Lorenzo. Vittoria gave a moving speech about the association's activities over the previous year, also announcing the beginning of a collaboration with World Vision's Young Mob Indigenous Youth program, whereby VDSA will sponsor prizes for young indigenous writers. As always, food and drink were excellent and plentiful, and Cesare Popoli, Ben Warburton and Agostino Marcello entertained with fabulous music. Most importantly, however, the evening was a huge success, with many generous donations received! The VDSA committee and volunteers are deeply grateful for members' and friends' generosity, that will allow us to continue the important work we do.





VDSA end of year picnic

The 2023 picnic saw an excellent turnout of local and refugee friends. A breeze took the edge off the heat, the catering was abundant, and a relaxed and convivial mood made it the perfect setting to reconnect with friends at the end of a busy year.

