



Newsletter June 2023

## Last Nauru detainee evacuated

A positive step for Australia's refugee policy

**In a long-awaited development, the final refugee held on Nauru was successfully evacuated on Saturday 24 June, marking the end of a decade-long detention ordeal.**

This significant move is welcomed by Grandmothers as a positive step forward, not only for the refugees directly affected but also for Australia's international reputation, which has suffered due to its handling of asylum seekers and refugees.

Over the past decade, Australia's treatment of refugees and those seeking asylum within its borders has been heavily criticised, with allegations of fostering a culture of fear and oppression. The evacuation of the last refugee from Nauru represents a crucial shift in attitude and a potential opportunity to restore Australia's international reputation as a compassionate and welcoming country.

Despite this positive development, our concerns persist as the government continues to adhere to its controversial and costly offshore detention policy. This policy has resulted in the loss of at least 14 lives, with many of these deaths being attributed to treatable illnesses. Furthermore, those held in offshore facilities have endured a decade of human rights abuses, further highlighting the urgent need for reform.

As attention turns towards Papua New Guinea, approximately 80 individuals remain in a state of abandonment and statelessness. These individuals, who have also been subjected to offshore detention, require immediate action to ensure their safety and well-being. Grandmothers urge the government to prioritise the evacuation of these individuals, providing them with the necessary support and care they desperately need.

The evacuation of the final refugee from Nauru signifies a critical turning point in Australia's approach to asylum seekers and refugees. However, there is still much work to be done to address the devastating consequences of the past policies. It is hoped that this milestone will serve as a catalyst for renewed efforts to protect the rights and dignity of those seeking asylum, ultimately leading to a more compassionate and just system in Australia and beyond.



**Betelhem Tibebu** (pictured above), human rights activist and refugee previously held on Nauru said:

***"All my friends are so happy this week. We don't have to lose any more friends, people don't have to get sick, no trauma, and no fear. Nauru, it killed us mentally, for us Nauru is hell, where we lost our lives.***

***For ten years we have been so scared. Every six months when we renew our visa we hear that we can be sent back to Nauru. I never sleep peacefully because I worry they will take us back at night, not just me but all of us. I want everyone to know this is a fear for us. I am happy no one is there now.***

***They should not have left the person alone there on the island alone by himself, from thousands of refugees to one person, can you imagine? He is a hero. I swear, I am so happy everyone is released. That place should be closed, it is where so many young people lost their future. For 10 years that place for us was fear."***

(Quote with permission from ASRC)

# Voices of Wisdom

## Parliament receives 6,556 signatures to Grandmothers' petitions

Over April and May Grandmothers worked tirelessly to gather signatures for our petition drawing attention to the several thousand refugees who still don't have a pathway to certainty.

On Monday 19 June, the first day of Refugee Week, **Susan Templeman** (pictured right), Chair of the House of Representatives Petitions Committee and member for Macquarie, presented our petition to the House.

Of the 43 petitions she presented that morning, ours was the only one to receive a special mention!! Ms Templeman pointed out that, unsurprisingly, the vast majority of petitions (more than 97% in fact) are submitted through the e-Petition system. The fact that ours was a paper petition with 6,556 approved signatures, piled high on the table in front of her, was something Ms Templeman thought worth mentioning.

It was, of course, a deliberate decision on our part. While our primary aim was to bring the plight of this group of asylum seekers to the attention of the government and the parliament, we were also aware of the role we could play in bringing their plight to the attention of our communities. As Ms Templeman said,

***“One benefit of paper petitions is that they allow petitioners to go out into their communities and engage with people face to face. The process of collecting handwritten signatures provides organisers with an opportunity to discuss the matters raised in the petition and to gauge the level of community support behind an issue. As you can see, I've presented one that has significant community support.”***

Ms Templeman gave particular mention to the Grandmothers in her own electorate of Macquarie,



to those in the electorate of Fremantle, who have had an impact on their local member, **Josh Wilson**, and those in Higgins, who had mailed in a particularly large pile of signatures.

We know of course that they were not the only ones; I saw petitions coming in from all over the country, and even one from “offshore” which a Grandmother had forgotten to post before she left on a trip!

So thank you all for a mighty effort, collecting all those signatures – to quote Ms Templeman again – ***“across Australia at community events, markets, shopping centres and coffee shops”***.

### Go Grandmothers!!!

Marg Browne,  
Chair GFR

## Grandmothers make their mark

### Resolute stand at Clare O'Neil's office



Grandmothers from several groups have made a decided impact at vigils outside Clare O'Neil's Oakleigh electorate office on the first and third Fridays of the month.

On one occasion, Clare came out to speak with us, answered our questions and offered to meet with us. The vigils have been energising and informative, with Clare's office being provided with a different refugee story, after each vigil.

**To keep our messaging ongoing and active please come and join us, at the vigils, as often as possible.**

For more details about upcoming vigils, contact Virginia Schneiders: [info@grandmothersforrefugees.org](mailto:info@grandmothersforrefugees.org)

Grandmothers with Clare O'Neil outside her electorate office in Oakleigh.



# Refugee Week 2023: Finding Freedom

**Grandmothers across the nation  
act locally, influencing community attitudes  
during Refugee Week.**

## Casey

Casey Grandmothers celebrated World Refugee Day, 2023 with an event at Japara Neighbourhood house in Kilsyth.

We organised a lunch and information session, extending a warm invitation to **Sister Brigid Arthur** from the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP) to join us.

About 40 people attended and lunch was, as usual, a sumptuous spread followed by an inspiring talk from Sister Brigid and Prue, the Coordinator of Casey GFR, presented a compelling Grandmothers Power Point presentation. All was well received by those attending, some of whom expressed considerable shock at the history and gravity of the situation for the refugee community.

The local Paper, *The Yarra Ranges Star Mail*, attended and there is an article and photos in this week's edition. Read the article [here](#).



*Casey Grandmothers with Sister Brigid Arthur.*

We also raised \$451 for BASP which will go towards the wonderful work they do for people seeking asylum and refugees.

*Prue Licht,  
Coordinator Casey GFR*

## Fremantle

In a joint effort between Fremantle GFR and Fremantle council, Refugee Week was celebrated with a display and information sessions.

The aim was to educate people about the difficulties that people seeking asylum had endured in their efforts to find safety and welcome in Australia. Grandmothers staffed the display in the civic centre foyer all week and hundreds stopped to chat.

**Betty McGeever**, a member of GFR and a long-term advocate for a fair deal for asylum seekers, delivered an informative talk about refugees and

asylum seekers, highlighting the long years they had spent in limbo and discussing their then-current situation, both onshore and offshore. 37 attended.

Following the talk, **Gillian Gallagher** showcased the amazing artwork of refugee **Naser Moradi**, who developed his talent in detention using coffee grounds and fingers.

**Gillian**, an AGWA guide and organizer of two Art Sales with a Difference, had previously organised fundraisers to support refugee resettlement. “

*Fremantle grandmothers Barbara Davidson and Sue Slavin, and Curtin grandmother Betty McGeever.*



## Curtin

**67 people attended the information evening in Subiaco on 21 June.**

During the evening we heard from people who have sought asylum in Australia as well as from those who are helping to create a support network for those seeking asylum.

Feedback indicates it was a very useful and well-organised event.

*Curtin Grandmother Anne Stephens thanking speakers Alison Xamon from CARAD, Caroline Fleay from Curtin University, Sobia Shah sharing her lived experience and Hossein Bouazar sharing his lived experience.*



## Macquarie / Blue Mountains

**Sunday 25 June saw Grandmothers for Refugees Blue Mountains members join with Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group (BMRSG) to hold a Rally at Lawson to mark the end of Refugee Week.**

People brought banners to hang along the fences beside the Great Western Highway and placards to wave at the traffic filing along the highway late on a Sunday afternoon.

Our Speakers were mainly from our BMRSG membership who told of their work within the group – Community Visiting, Detention Centre Visiting, Home Care for those newly settled or folk needing friendship, one man has had a Refugee living in his home with him for nine years.

He told of their journey together, a newer small group Mountain Mentors talked of sponsoring two young Hazara men through the CRISP programme and **Pat Drummond** a local troubadour of some fame sang two songs he has written in response to various refugees he has met.

Our local Federal MP **Susan Templeman** attended and Grandmothers presented her with the pages containing copies of the 370 signatures collected in Macquarie towards the National Petition from Grandmothers. She spoke of tabling the National Petition and reiterated her appreciation of paper petitions over e-Petitions.

She spoke of the great opportunity paper petitions gave the Grandmothers to engage with each individual signatory and to give out further literature regarding the current state of refugees and our government's policies.

She also talked of some progress being made towards resolving some of the Refugee difficulties which they inherited – removal of all refugees from Nauru, provision of ROS pathway to citizenship, processing of the “caseload” of refugees waiting on visa decisions, engagement with Community Sponsorship groups. She acknowledged there is still much to do and that groups like ours need to keep working to achieve better results.



*Grandmothers and Yasin and Khairullah with Julie Brackenreg.*

After the speeches we stood along the highway for over half an hour waving our placards at passing traffic and receiving many waves and supportive toots from cars and trucks. Two of those waving placards were **Yasin** and **Khairullah** who arrived in Australia 10 days ago after ten years in Indonesian refugee camps. We taught them a new word “demo” and they waved their placards with great delight.



*Julie Brackenreg, Coordinator Macquarie / Blue Mountains*

MDFP presents

# Freedom is Beautiful

directed by  
Angus McDonald

Showing in Melbourne  
at Cinema Nova,  
Lygon Street, Carlton  
on Saturday 29 July



**Freedom Is Beautiful** is the story of two extraordinary Kurdish refugees, **Farhad Bandesh** and **Mostafa (Moz) Azimitabar** who fled persecution in Iran and arrived separately by boat into Australia seeking asylum in 2013.

Reaching Christmas Island just days after the Rudd Government instituted Australia's new hard-line offshore processing policy in July that year, they were transferred offshore and subsequently held for almost eight years by the Federal Government.

Instead, they found tranquillity through music and art. This not only helped them survive, but also fight back, making connections to the outside world,

building networks and perpetually using their voice to fight tirelessly for the freedom of everyone held.

Despite their ordeal, they did not give into hatred or resentment. Instead, they grasped onto hope, expressed solidarity with the Australian people and preached love as the way to 'kill the monsters' and defeat the system.

Beautifully told in their own words, **Freedom Is Beautiful** is an uplifting story of the power of love and our shared humanity.

Watch the trailer [here](#)

Buy tickets from Cinema Nova [here](#)



Grandmothers have always been motivated by the plight of vulnerable refugee children, indeed the movement was originally called "Grandmothers Against the Detention of Refugee Children"

**Cruel Care** by **Dr Jordana Silverstein** is described by **Crystal McKinnon, Associate Professor in History, Law and Justice, University of Melbourne** as:

*"A powerful and damning account of the way Australian government policy, policymakers and the media have conspired to create the current conditions for the treatment of refugees and their children."*

**Professor Frank Bongiorno AM**, author of *Dreamers and Schemers* says:

*"Brilliant ... with a cut-through otherwise largely absent from Australian public discourse on refugees."*

**Arnold Zable**, author of *The Watermill* says:

*"The aptly named Cruel Care is a groundbreaking book – confronting, deeply disturbing and revelatory."*

Read **Andrew Hamilton's review** in Eureka Street [here](#).

# Freedom Canada style

## A message of hope from Jean Ker Walsh

**I arrived in Ottawa last night to visit the wonderful family rejected without being given a chance by Australia but welcomed and settling now in Canada.**

It was special to feel the warm embrace of **Elham** and **Kamal** and their friend **Gerry** at the airport, and then to surprise the children when we arrived at their home. We were all smiling through tears.

Not surprisingly after 24 hours of travel, I'm awake in the small hours of the morning and see the news that the last refugee has left Nauru. A fitting end to Refugee Week 2023. It is a moment to be recorded if not celebrated. I expect Kamal and Elham will have mixed feelings at the news as so much of their lives has been determined by the fact that they were sent to that place.



Today there is a welcome party where I get to meet the Ottawa friends who have been so, so supportive in helping Kamal and family to settle in to their freedom, Canadian style. I will tell them about the last one to leave Nauru and hope they get a sense of its significance, personal and political. They, like us, are connected in to that moment without making it a conscious choice.

Can we tick that off on the demands in our petition? Redress for the 19 July travesty must surely be next.

*Best wishes from Ottawa,  
Jean*



*Left:  
The grandchildren  
on their bikes in  
Canada.*

*Right:  
Jean with the  
grandchildren.*

## Grandmothers for Refugees Advocate for stronger human rights

**Grandmothers for Refugees is committed to protecting and supporting refugee and asylum seeker children and families, they are at the heart of our movement.**

**Judy Taylor, Jenni King, Annette Berryman and Virginia Schneiders** collaborated to write our recent submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, highlighting the breaches of internationally recognized human rights concerning refugee and asylum seeker children and families. We assert that the enactment of a Commonwealth Human Rights Act is necessary to ensure governments prioritize their international human rights obligations and provide adequate protections.

We propose that rectifying these failures requires the implementation of a Commonwealth Human Rights Act, and we endorse the Australian Human Rights Commission's "Free and Equal" position paper advocating for its adoption.

Grandmothers advocate for a stronger human rights framework in Australia. We believe that by addressing these shortcomings and enacting comprehensive legislation, we can create a more just and compassionate society that safeguards the rights and well-being of refugee and asylum seeker children and families.

A copy of the submission will be available on the parliamentary website once it is formally accepted.

***Thank you to all who contributed articles and photos. We really value the voices of our members.  
Please send any correspondence [info@grandmothersforrefugees.org](mailto:info@grandmothersforrefugees.org)***

***Enjoy!***

***Go to Grandmothers for Refugees website [here](#).***