



## newsletter

December 2010 – issue # 25

### Central Australia, India, Palestine and Afghanistan think-pieces, and more...

**indigo foundation** is an independent, volunteer run, Australian community development organisation. We work with marginalised communities around the world providing innovative assistance to improve health, education, and human rights.

**indigo foundation** seeks to empower local communities to access resources and have control over the decisions that determine their basic needs and human rights. We do this by providing financial and technical support to local 'not for profit' and community-based organisations, with a particular focus on capacity building.

We currently support community development projects in: Indonesia, Afghanistan, Solomon Islands, Congo, Uganda, Palestine, India and Australia.

#### A great beginning...

##### ...the first indigo foundation Nyirripi camp

**Bianca Turner and Jodi Hunt** – *project administrators*

When staff of The Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation (WYDAC) heard of the indigo foundation's interest in working in Nyirripi, they were over the moon.

The youth workers in Nyirripi were honoured to share this possibility with the community. As Sally Stevenson had worked in Nyirripi previously and knew some of the community members, a foundation for a strong partnership was established from the beginning. This personal connection was extended during the community meeting attended by Sally and Libby from indigo foundation.

Preparation for the project began with numerous community meetings involving Kathleen Turner (the community representative and liaison worker), important elders, traditional owners and members of all ages. The focus for the meetings was to establish what the community felt they needed the most to stay strong and how that would be supported by a project. Nyirripi stated that they wanted more opportunities to bond together on country and pass traditional knowledge on, it was decided that the best way to achieve this was with regular camping trips out on significant land; the decision was unanimous.

After the project was established time was given for the community to decide amongst themselves, and with

Kathleen, the country we would visit and the knowledge we would focus on.



*Covered in ochre, preparing for ceremony*

During another meeting, it was agreed the camp would occur in old Nyirripi. 'Old Nyirripi' is a beautiful soakage with overhanging giant gum trees where many families of Nyirripi lived before the current Nyirripi became an outstation and then a community. We gained authorisation from the owners of that area to carry out the project there. Molly is a very old gorgeous Nyirripi woman from whom we sought approval and who had the final say in the decision; she is a Traditional Owner of 'Old Nyirripi' and lived there as a young girl and into her adult life. Molly has a fountain of unique knowledge to share about her culture and the area; she even remembers clearly her first encounter with Kardiya (European person).

As we have had two camping trips with women this year, particularly with the focus of ceremonial dance, it was decided that the main focus for this camp would be for young boys to learn and practice ceremony for their skin and for 'Old Nyirripi'. Other aspects discussed were hunting, collecting bush tucker, digging for fresh water from the soakage and learning old Warlpiri songs and stories from the old women.



*Climbing to the ancient ochre mine, near Nyirripi*

We worked with Kathleen and other community members to write up the plan and decide on dates, demographic (who needs the experience and knowledge the most), how to spend the budget, what resources we need from Alice Springs, what food we should bring, what resources we need for cultural events, what we need for the old men and women, which bus we can ask to borrow etc.

The day before we left we bought the perishable food items (we'd already bought the non-perishables) and divided everything into boxes of meals and days for each meal. We packed the car and trailer with all the food, resources and swags and left quite early on the Friday to collect the school bus, fuel it up and collect the adults. The church had offered their bus so when the first bus filled up and many more people wanted to come we fuelled up the church bus. At 3pm when the children finished school we collected more children and adults.

We drove to 'Old Nyirripi', everyone set up their swags strategically and we started on the dinner. Everyone was excited and there was lots of play and laughter, some men played some cricket and football and some women worked on their acrobatic and photography skills. After dinner many of the ladies and girls sat around the fire with the old women and listened to their beautiful songs while watching the stars, it was a magical atmosphere. Meanwhile men were planning the following day's cultural activities and ceremony.

The next morning we woke up early to giggles and the making of breakfast and billy tea. Some men went quite early to Karrku to collect ochre for the evening's ceremony while the other bus went out hunting and swimming in the old Nyirripi dam. Some children went on foot to find goanna and collect bush tucker while others dug in the soakage and bathed with babies in the

cool water they found. Micah covered a lot of ground filming everything that was going on.

Everyone returned to camp in the afternoon, some people cooked up and shared their catch and some of us worked on wood collection, fire making and preparations for more dinner. The boys were painted up with the ochre they had collected and dressed in their traditional attire while the old women sang their beautiful chanting songs. Ben Gallagher (one of the T.O's) taught the dance to the boys then the ceremony began while women kept singing and everyone watched in awe. The atmosphere was very joyous, there was a real sense of pride, kinship and solidarity.



*Young boys learning culture*

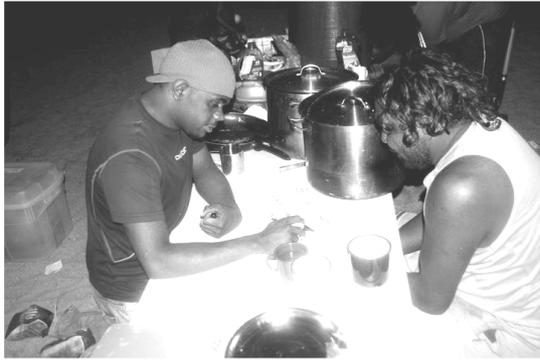
When the ceremony finished we all had a big serving of spaghetti bolognese and sat together to talk story. This second evening was much quieter than the first, there were many circles of people talking story and enjoying each others' company, many of us were exhausted from the big day and had quite an early night.



*Women talking story*

The next day consisted of more hunting, swimming in the dam, packing everything up, and heading back to 'new Nyirripi'.

All in all the camp was a huge success and on behalf of Nyirripi we would like to thank the indigo foundation for making it possible.



*One of the aims of the camp was to document, using audio visual media, country and story. Nyirripi youth will produce a DVD of the camp and the photo shows the process of 'story boarding' the narrative. We'll let you know when it's available!*

Nyirripi residents have given very positive feedback about the benefits the camp had on the community: the rapport and happiness of the community seemed to have improved since the camp and Kathleen said that the original aims were definitely achieved! We had an ideal environment and mob of people for the passing on of precious cultural knowledge; also the fact that the camp was so popular means that that knowledge was passed onto about 60 people!

Partner:	Mt Theo Program
Liaison Officer:	Kathleen Turner
indigo foundation Project Manager:	Sally Stevenson

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### **The future of our Tamil Nadu education project shaping up nicely!**

**Nicole & Cameron Moore - Project Managers**

Having taken over as project managers for the Tamil Nadu project, we were excited and nervous about our first trip to the project site. The project was entering a crucial stage with the next phase looming and important decisions about the future of the project to be discussed. Before arriving, we could not have imagined just how much we would discover about the people of Tamil Nadu, in particular, the families of Madhuranthakam and the surrounding colonies (suburbs).

It must be said that our arrival in Mudhuranthakam was somewhat overwhelming. The project team had arranged a celebration of the achievements of the Year 10 coaching students over the previous years and we were the guests of honour. It was difficult to express that the honour was all ours as the many young children excitedly shook our hands, politely asking 'what is your name?'

The next day began the real work, visiting the colonies, talking to students, parents, and tutors. Everywhere we went, all agreed that the tuition provided within the colonies had contributed to real improvements in educational outcomes for students and had prevented

students from dropping out when things felt too hard. One student from Kathricheri colony explained 'without tuition, I would have nobody to help me with my school work and it would be very difficult'. As first generation learners, tuition provides valuable support that families simply could not provide on their own.

It was clear from the enthusiasm of students that the tuition centres provide an enjoyable learning experience that encourage far more than academic success. Through the tuition centres, children of the colonies have a place to gather where they can focus on their own achievements and share in the achievements of their peers. Tutors encourage creativity through dance and drawing and the children learn the value of education for transforming their lives and the lives of their communities.

While the successes were clear, so too were the challenges. The introduction of activity based learning for younger grades in many government schools means that tutors must adapt their programs to accommodate different learning styles between younger and older students. With tuition provided to all students from years 1 through to 9 (in some cases years 10-12 also receive tuition in the colonies), the workload on tutors is high. Despite this, all tutors spoke positively about their experience as tutors and had developed genuine relationships with the students in their programs.

Many of the tuition centres also operate without appropriate buildings, some with no building at all. During the rainy season, one of the colonies we visited is completely cut off from the main village. Students cannot go to school and the tuition centre is the only opportunity that children have to continue with their education during those months. In another colony, the tuition is held in an open space in front of the tutors house. When it rains, the ground is muddy and the children only have a small tarp to sit on and no shelter at all.



*Nicole meeting students who attend the tuition centres.*

In meeting with the tutors, it was clear that appropriate infrastructure was a priority in order to ensure the sustainability of the program. Further priorities related to adequate resourcing in terms of workbooks, pencils, and pens, as well as the need to provide a nutritious snack to the children to prevent fatigue. It was clear from the meeting that the tutors had fantastic ideas and were

dedicated to the long term sustainability of the tuition centres. Many of the tutors agreed they felt very proud to be able to support the children of their colonies, one tutor Miss Saranya stating 'the children treat me with respect and I feel very proud to help them'.

Following our time with the tuition centres and tutors, we were also given the opportunity to meet with the Year 10 coaching students and the families of students who had successfully completed the program the previous year. While the Year 10 coaching centre is too far away from the most remote colonies, many children travelled over an hour each way to benefit from the high quality coaching available at the centre. It was clear that a further coaching centre was needed if the program was to meet the needs of those students who simply could not reach the main village to attend.

A highlight of the trip was visiting the homes of previous students to discuss the outcomes achieved and the challenges they faced into the future. One high achieving student named David told how as a first generation learner, tuition was important. David's father is a rice mill worker who supports David's drive for learning. 'If I am injured at work there is no support for my family' David's father explained. Without education, David too would become a rice mill worker like many of the men from his village.

A recurring theme was that the families supported the role of education and attributed much of their children's successes to coaching they received through the project. Despite great success in the Year 10 state board exams, many students expressed difficulty in years 11 and 12, particularly in the areas of maths and English.

A further challenge related to career counselling with one girl explaining that after successfully completing year 12, she did not know where to go for further education. It was clear that appropriate support is needed to direct students through higher secondary studies and into the tertiary education sector.

On our last day in Madhuranthakam, we had the amazing experience of visiting a local government school. The school was well resourced and a model to other schools in the region. Even more amazing was that 90% of students attending were from Dalit families who a generation ago were not in schooling at all. It was clear that our project leader Chezhiyan was highly respected by the school children and teaching staff who clapped vigorously in his honour. The school visit also gave us the opportunity to speak to teachers who taught some of the students who received tuition in our village tuition centres. English teacher Ms Javalakshmi noted 'I have seen much improvement in those students attending the tuition centres. Since attending tuition they can even write whole sentences!'

The positive feedback by independent education professionals affirmed what was a growing trend among all those we spoke to. The tuition provided through the Tamil Nadu project is making real improvements in the

educational outcomes of those first generation learners and their families. Remarkably, our project leader Chezhiyan was also able to secure the support of the school headmaster Mr Aranganathan to operate a second 10th coaching centre from the school premises with four teachers volunteering their time to teach after hours should the coaching centre be established.



*Cameron, Libby, Semmalar, Nicole, and Chezhiyan*

This breakthrough would allow more students to attend Year 10 coaching, reaching more colonies that otherwise could not access the program at the current site. While further investigation is to be conducted to determine the viability of a second 10th coaching centre in the new project phase, one thing is for sure, the program is achieving recognition and support from more and more people as time goes on, a testimony to the great work and dedication of the project team.

As we gathered in Chennai with the project team to reflect on the visit, it was clear that the program was far more than an education project. The program was transforming lives and changing entire communities perspectives on the future. The colony based tuition centres provide ground level awareness about the role education can play in the development of individuals, families and communities, while the Year 10 coaching centre provides the achievement focused support necessary to make it through to higher education opportunities.

As we move into the new phase in 2011, we are excited by the enthusiasm and energy of the new indigo foundation Representative on the ground, Ms Semmalar Jebaraj and the new connections that she brings to the role. Semmalar, a Dalit woman currently completing her PHD on higher education for Dalit students, provides a fresh set of eyes to the project at a time when fresh ideas are needed to guide the future phase. Along with the tireless efforts of project leader Chezhiyan, the incredible tutors and all of the teachers that volunteer their time to support the program, it is clear that the future phase really is shaping up nicely!

Partner:

The Pravaham Trust

Liaison Officer:

Annie Namala

indigo foundation Project Managers:

Nicole & Cameron Moore

MC Representative:

Stefan Knollmayer

***A courageous project – an outstanding start...  
a report on the Family Welfare Project***

**West Bank Palestine**

**Cecily Michaels - Project Manager**

The Family Welfare Project with Iskaka Women's Charitable Society (IWCS) started in March 2010.

One of the project's objectives was to select five families from three villages (Iskaka, Yusuf and Farha) and train them as champion advocates for family rights against gender based violence. To begin, the Project Manager and President of IWCS undertook a needs assessment of the selected families and started collecting baseline data on gender based violence.

During this process it became apparent that the targetted families themselves required capacity building to overcome their internal problems before they could be trained as champions for their communities on this highly sensitive issue. At this point, the project was modified so that intensive work could be done with the families to support them in overcoming their personal problems within the family.

From May workshops began in each of the three villages targeting mothers, fathers, daughters and sons separately using age specific messages and approaches. The workshops covered four topics, which reflected the findings of the needs assessment: sexual harassment (child abuse), family violence including rape in marriage, reproductive health and positive parenting.

I am writing this after spending three weeks visiting the project to monitor and evaluate the progress of the project, six months into its initial twelve month timeframe. I used three approaches to gather and verify information:

1. In-depth interviews with key staff involved with the project and key staff from organisations and the Ministry of Social Affairs working on sexual abuse and incest in Palestine, the participants in the project, IWCS Board members and key community members;
2. Participation in project activities; observations of workshops and children activities; and
3. Visual documentation of project activities.

For example, at a Children's Activity night the mothers, children and youth were invited for fun games and a puppet show on the problems of violence in the family. Everyone had a wonderful time. After the puppet show the Project Manager quizzed the children on the messages they learnt. They were all very quick to respond. Then all the males were sent home (so that there would be no problems later if the girls and boys walked home together) and the mothers and daughters stayed to discuss more specific issues around sexual harassment and incest.

I was very impressed by the changes I witnessed in the lives of the participants in this project.



*Using Braveheart educational resources in the Family Welfare Project Workshop*

Findings from my visit show that:

- There is a great need for this project in this community but also in all of Palestine. There is also a great need for this project to continue in order to extend the benefits to a much wider audience within this community and make good use of the champions already trained in order to get maximum benefit from the investment already made by indigo foundation.
- Working through a local community based organisation such as IWCS provides a solid foundation in the community which is based on credibility, trust and organisational capacity and reputation.
- Child abuse/incest, family violence is an extremely sensitive issue within the Palestinian context whereby anonymity and confidentiality is critical.
- The Project Manager/Trainer has demonstrated a best practice both in her research/preparation, counselling and training on this topic applying a participatory approach to learning.
- The participants both in observation and verbal interviews have expressed a high level of appreciation for what they have learnt and have gained new skills to improve their personal situations both individually and within their families.
- The IWCS and Manager/Trainer have maintained a high standard of professionalism and confidentiality throughout this project.

We will be undertaking a review of the project after its first year, in January. The review will inform our decision to continue with the second year of this sensitive and valuable project. I look forward to reporting on its developments!

Partner:  
indigo foundation Project Manager:

Iskaka Women's Charitable Society  
Cecily Michaels

## The Borjegai School Project: Destined to Enrich and Empower a Community

*Salman Jan – Project Advisor*

Hello all in indigo foundation. The year 2010 is nearly ending and I hope it was a rewarding year for each and every one of you. Certainly, 2010 marked the highlight of the Borjegai School Project in Ghazni Province in Afghanistan. Before adding anything on this note, let me take this opportunity to congratulate the Afghan Project Team; indigo foundation; the Rotary Club of Ryde (RCR); and, the Borjegai people, their schools and in particular their children for the successful conclusion of this year. The year 2010 will be celebrated and remembered as a historic year in Borjegai's future and in their increasingly futuristic calendar.

I am back to Sydney and delighted to inform you that the construction of the new school building, funded by RCR and implemented by indigo foundation, is now complete. On its completion, the project did surpass all expectations and the building turned out to be a marvel with no match in its surrounding areas. The Project was highly recognized and well received by the District government authorities; the people of Borjegai; and, the neighbouring villages. In late October, the village held an opening ceremony in which over one thousand people had attended and on the same day around seven hundred students, both boys and girls, were transferred from the tents to their newly built classrooms.



*Salman on the new school's balcony*

I spent nearly five months in Afghanistan and travelled twice to the village each time staying for weeks overseeing the building project and visiting the nine schools that we are working with. In my second trip to the village, I also made a one hour documentary in Dari (Persian) language documenting indigo foundation, RCR and the Borjegai village's partnership. It is titled "awakening" and the Afghan Project Team is working on finding a way to develop it into an English sub-titled version.

Here, I would like note some of the highlights of my trip.



*Under construction – the third school in Borjegai built with indigo foundation support*

There are currently nine schools operating in Borjegai which are all registered with the central government's Ministry of Education and over the years the Borjegai School Project has built the buildings for three of them and furnished the fourth one. One of the three buildings, as some of the readers are aware, was funded to build a separate Girls' High School and is duly serving that purpose. There appeared to be a big upsurge in the number of students from 3800 students two years ago to over 4500 students today. The three school buildings funded and built by the Borjegai School Project have the capacity to accommodate some 2200 students and the buildings will be educating generations of the village's kids. The impacts of indigo foundation's continued funding for professional teachers' salaries were also evident in the improved quality of the education in Borjegai schools, as well as, in the number of students who have passed the national examination for university entry. To date, over 200 students have either graduated from universities or are studying in universities throughout the country.

Development, as a project and as a process, is first and foremost peoples' business. Thus the ownership, the sustainability and the growth of developmental projects are best ensured when the projects are people-centered and community-oriented. The Borjegai School Project is one such project which is not only backed by the people but also continues to change the peoples' lives. During the construction of the building, the men and women of the village contributed more than their share by employing up to fifteen men every day, seven days a week to ensure the timely completion of the project. Despite the endemic poverty of the village, the local community also contributed large sums in cash as the total cost of the building was just over \$80,000. The community's contributions were vital in ensuring the overall efficiency and cost effectiveness of the project. For instance, a similar project would have cost the government anything between US\$200-300,000.

### **Borjegai School Project and the Ongoing Challenges**

The Borjegai School, despite all its successes and achievements, has also had its fair share of challenges. The lack of security, harsh geographic conditions and extreme travel routes are some of the ongoing challenges for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project. Local tribal customs and cultural beliefs such as some of the community's views toward the girls' education, if not best negotiated and managed, could potentially exacerbate any ongoing challenges.



*The old and the new...*

Country-wide too there are multiple challenges that could hamper existing and potential micro and macro development projects. From my observation, general knowledge, and interviews with a large group of politicians and civil society, media and human rights activists, I can identify at least three major challenges for the country at large: Taliban and their affiliated groups; institutional corruption and a failing administration; and, drug production and trade. The trio feeds each other with each being the parts and parcels of a flourishing black economy benefiting the terrorists, warlords, drug traffickers, and corrupt government officials. Unless and until there are drastic strategic shifts both from within and outside the country, the country's macro development endeavors will continue to experience setbacks and the country will remain a hotbed of extremism, terrorism, drug trafficking, corruption and etcetera.

### **Borjegai School Project and its Future Prospects:**

Challenges aside, I am personally very optimistic about the future prospects of the Borjegai School Project. The Project is a hard earned and successful micro development achievement with eight years of positive experience. With the hard works of a dedicated team both in Australia and in Afghanistan, as well as, a great deal of cooperation and coordination, the Project has not only survived but also expanded manifold. The non-material impacts of the Project are increasingly felt on peoples' lives with the community experiencing a level of harmony and cooperation – especially during the

construction of the third building – that has not been experienced previously. Furthermore, any investment in education is a lasting investment which is in line with the Afghans and the international community's goals of achieving peace, democracy, gender equity, human rights and the rights of children.



*School assembly in front of the new school*

And last but not least, the Project is assisting the development and empowerment of the poorest, the most persecuted and the most vulnerable community which is not only making history but is also providing the history with a humane face. For all that is mentioned and for much more that is not, the Borjegai School Project is destined to enrich, change and empower the lives of countless individuals in a very deserving community.



*A 1.5km welcome party for Salman – what can we say?*

The Borjegai School Project Team wishes you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and looks forward to working with you all in 2011 and beyond.

Partner:	Borjegai School
Australian partner:	Rotary Club Ryde
Project Advisors:	Salman Jan and Ali Reza Yunespoor
indigo foundation Project Managers:	Helen Reynolds
MC Representative:	Stefan Knollmayer

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## **Hazara, refugees in Australia, and playing politics with those who seek asylum**

indigo foundation first starting working with Salman, when during the Tampa crisis of 2001, we sought a way to support refugees when they arrived in Australia. At the time, Salman wanted to establish Sheerin Community Organisation, a community development not for profit organisation that would assist newly arrived refugees in Australia. This assistance included liaising with governmental and non-governmental organisations, providing support to Temporary Protection Visa holders (TPVs) in getting access to health, education, and housing and offering free English language classes to about 60 refugees of Afghan and Persian origin. We supported Sheerin, and grew to know and respect Salman. In 2004 with Salman identifying the project in Borjagai, we started our support to the Hazara in central Afghanistan.

In 2002 we joined *A Just Australia*, a national lobby group campaigning for just policies and programs for refugees and asylum seekers. The coalition includes 11,500 individual supporters and 120 non-governmental organisations.

Our concern for refugees continues. By reproducing the two articles below we hope to highlight the ongoing struggle for many who come to our shores as well as provide some clear and factual information about refugees and their legal status within Australia.

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### **One man's struggle to find a safe place to live**

*An article written by Steven Glass, a partner of Gilbert + Tobin Lawyers, printed in the Sydney Morning Herald, December 29, 2010.*

It is obvious, when I first meet Reza\*, that his life has been difficult. You can see it in his eyes, in his furrowed brow, in the lines deeply etched in his face. He is not yet 40, but he appears perhaps two decades older. Still, he holds himself erect and smiles as he shakes my hand when I meet him in the interview rooms at the Curtin Immigration Detention Centre in Western Australia's far north.

The rooms are small and bare, but they are air-conditioned, so they provide welcome relief from the oppressive 42-degree heat outside, where the sun is unrelenting.

Both Reza's smile and the sense of respite are short-lived, as we get down to the business of preparing his application for an Australian protection visa. Reza is a Hazara, a member of a small and distinct ethnic and religious minority in Afghanistan, who many in that country accuse of being "foreigners" and "infidels". They have been persecuted for generations. Reza tells me about his family's farm, a modest patch of ground. He tells me of the nomadic Pashtun people, the Kuchi, who enter the village every few years and graze their

cattle on his farm, leaving the family penniless. Sometimes they burn down houses in the village. I hear about the threats and extortion inflicted by the Taliban. His eyes mist up as he tells me of the courage of his brother who, a few years ago, refused to pay bribes to the Taliban. His brother was not seen for the next three weeks; his corpse simply appeared one day near the local bazaar.

Tears flow as Reza recounts the death of his father after a Taliban rocket attack on his family home.

There is nothing left for him in Afghanistan. His home is destroyed, half his family murdered, and the local Taliban leadership continues to seek revenge against his family for his brother's defiance. Reza flees his village, taking his wife and children with him. But there is nowhere to go.

The family smuggle themselves across the border into western Pakistan, where he joins hundreds of thousands of fellow Hazaras living illegally in Quetta. There, they are at the mercy of the Pakistan Federal Immigration Agency, which sends many back to Afghanistan.

And in the past couple of years they have come under increasing attack from the Taliban, al-Qaeda, the Balochistan Liberation Army, Sepa-e-Sahaba, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and others - an array of Islamic militants who have all sorts of religious and political agendas, but who share a passionate hatred of Hazaras and a belief that it is God's will they be expelled from Pakistan or exterminated. Countless hundreds of Hazaras have been massacred in recent months in suicide attacks carried out by these groups in Hazara-dominated markets and places of worship.

Reza, needing to escape once again, can find nowhere to go. There is no queue in Quetta. There are no refugee camps, there is no UNHCR, there is virtually no effective government. There is just poverty and violence. Desperate to save his family, and having run out of options, Reza sells his remaining possessions and submits to a people smuggler.

He tells his family to keep their heads down, to leave the house as little as possible until he can arrange for them to join him in Australia. But he almost doesn't make it here. The fishing boat the people-smuggler has arranged in Indonesia breaks down. It drifts for a week, and the 30 asylum seekers on board have no food. It then develops a leak. Just as Reza and his fellow passengers give up hope of survival, the boat is spotted by the Australian navy and taken to Christmas Island.

Reza never raises his voice as he recounts all of this to me in the interview room at Curtin. "Thank you," he says, "for listening to my story." No one has listened to him before.

I don't know if Reza, or the other Hazaras I recently assisted with visa applications in Curtin, will be permitted to stay. But I do know they are not exploiting

our refugee policy. All their lives, they have been victims of exploitation. Nor are they unfairly taking places from other needy people. There is no queue in Quetta.

\* Reza is a pseudonym

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### Myths about asylum seekers

*An excerpt from The Refugee Council of Australia, the national umbrella body for more than 130 organisations working with refugees and asylum seekers, the Council is actively involved in new research, policy development, information and representation on refugee issues. For further information, SEE <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/>*

#### 'Boat people are illegal immigrants'

Asylum seekers who arrive in Australia by boat are neither engaging in illegal activity, nor are they immigrants. The UN Refugee Convention (to which Australia is a signatory) recognises that refugees have a lawful right to enter a country for the purposes of seeking asylum, regardless of how they arrive or whether they hold valid travel or identity documents.

The Convention stipulates that what would usually be considered as illegal actions (e.g. entering a country without a visa) should not be treated as illegal if a person is seeking asylum. This means that it is incorrect to refer to asylum seekers who arrive without authorisation as 'illegal', as they in fact have a lawful right to enter Australia to seek asylum.

In line with our obligations under the Convention, **Australian law** also permits unauthorised entry into Australia for the purposes of seeking asylum. Asylum seekers do not break any Australian laws simply by arriving on boats or without authorisation. Australian and international law make these allowances because it is not always safe or practicable for asylum seekers to obtain travel documents or travel through authorised channels.

Refugees are, by definition, persons fleeing persecution and in most cases are being persecuted by their own government. It is often too dangerous for refugees to apply for a passport or exit visa or approach an Australian Embassy for a visa, as such actions could put their lives, and the lives of their families, at risk. Refugees may also be forced to flee with little notice due to rapidly deteriorating situations and do not have time to apply for travel documents or arrange travel through authorised channels. Permitting asylum seekers to enter a country without travel documents is similar to allowing ambulance drivers to exceed the speed limit in an emergency – the action would be ordinarily be considered illegal, but the circumstances warrant an exception.

It is also incorrect to refer to asylum seekers as migrants. A migrant is someone who chooses to leave their country to seek a better life. They decide where they migrate to and they can return whenever they like. Refugees are forced to leave their country and cannot return unless

the situation that forced them to leave improves. Some are forced to flee with no warning; significant numbers of them have suffered torture and trauma. The concerns of refugees are human rights and safety, not economic advantage.

#### 'Boat people are queue jumpers'

The idea that boat people are "queue jumpers" is based on misconceptions about how Australia's Refugee Program and the international refugee resettlement system actually work. Australia's Refugee Program has two components. The onshore component is for people who apply for refugee status after arriving in Australia. Most enter as visitors or students; some arrive without authorisation. The onshore component is a legal obligation which is part of Australia's responsibilities as a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention. Applying for protection onshore is not a means of 'jumping the queue' or bypassing the 'correct' process of applying for protection. In fact, applying onshore is the *standard procedure* for seeking protection.

According to the definition in the UN Refugee Convention, refugees are persons who are outside their country of origin. This means that you cannot apply for refugee status if you are inside your own country. In order to be recognised as a refugee, you must leave your country and apply for refugee status onshore in another country. Every refugee in the world has, at some point, entered another country to seek asylum. Because Australia receives so few onshore asylum applications, we can easily admit all of those who reach Australia who are found to be in need of protection. Dozens of poorer countries, however, receive a much larger number of refugees and require assistance from other countries to fulfil their protection obligations. Australia provides this assistance through the offshore component of our refugee program. This is a voluntary scheme under which Australia resettles recognised refugees who have been referred by the UN. The offshore component also includes a special visa category for people who might not meet the UN criteria for refugee status but who are nonetheless subject to serious human rights abuses overseas.

The UN resettlement system does not work like a queue. The term 'queue' implies that if you join the end, you are guaranteed to reach the front within a certain amount of time. This is not the case. Refugees are prioritised for resettlement according to need, not according to how long they have been waiting. These needs fluctuate and are continuously reassessed. For example, conditions in a refugee producing country may improve, allowing refugees from that country to return home if they wish; or conditions in a refugee-hosting country may deteriorate, placing the refugees in that country in greater need of resettlement. A person who has been in a refugee camp for one year may be prioritised for resettlement ahead of a person who has been in a camp for 10 years, if the former's need for resettlement is greater. In 2008, just 88,800 of the world's 15.2 million refugees were resettled – well under 1%. If the mythical resettlement 'queue' did

exist and all of the world's refugees were in it, a newly recognised refugee would, on current trends, have to wait 170 years for resettlement.

### **'Asylum seekers who arrive on boats take places away from genuine refugees in overseas camps'**

Refugees who seek protection onshore are no less 'genuine' than refugees who are resettled from offshore. Refugees who are resettled in Australia, regardless of whether they apply onshore or offshore, must meet the criteria for refugee status outlined in the UN Refugee Convention. These criteria do not make any distinction between those refugees who arrive with authorisation and those who don't. The myth that onshore applicants take places away from offshore applicants does have some basis in truth. However, this is *not* because onshore asylum seekers are trying to rort the system or 'jump the queue' – they have a right to seek asylum onshore and Australia has a legal and moral obligation to protect them. Rather, it is the direct result of Australian Government policy. The onshore and offshore components of Australia's refugee program are numerically linked, which means that every time an onshore applicant is granted a protection visa, a place is deducted from the offshore program. The linking policy blurs the distinction between Australia's obligations as a signatory to the Refugee Convention (addressed through the onshore component) and our voluntary contribution to the sharing of international responsibility for refugees for whom no other durable solution is available (addressed through the offshore component). The perception that there is a 'queue' which onshore applicants are trying to evade is created by a policy choice which could easily be changed. No other country in the world links its onshore and offshore programs in this way.

### **'Mandatory detention of unlawful asylum seekers is essential to maintaining Australia's border security'**

Australia is one of few nations in the world which imposes mandatory detention on asylum seekers. In the Western world, this policy is largely viewed as abhorrent, especially as the individual has not committed a crime by seeking asylum and detaining them for this reason breaches international law. In many European nations, only those individuals deemed to be a high security risk are detained. There is no research to suggest that individuals are likely to abscond when being processed in the community. This is because they have a vested interest in cooperating in order to gain full protection rights. Treating people with dignity and presuming innocence rather than guilt helps to reinforce their trust in the system.<sup>3</sup> In 2005, Australia introduced a community-based detention system which allowed a small number of asylum seekers to live unsupervised in the community, supported by the Red Cross.

Of the 244 people placed in this program between July 2005 and May 2009, the Department of Immigration and

Citizenship reports that only two (less than 1%) have absconded.

### **'Tightening our borders will stop people smugglers and prevent asylum seekers from making risky journeys'**

Asylum seeker flows are primarily affected by war, unrest, violence and human rights abuse, not domestic policies in refugee-hosting countries. Most people do not wish to leave their homes, families, friends and everything they know and hold dear. They do so as a last resort, because of a need to escape persecution. Asylum seekers are running away, not running to. Their desire for safety for themselves and their families is paramount and they will do whatever it takes to achieve that. Everyone agrees that we should stop people smuggling ventures that exploit asylum seekers and place them in danger. No one wishes to see asylum seekers board unreliable vessels and make risky journeys to Australia. However, penalising desperate and vulnerable people – who have committed no crime and are in need of protection and support – is not the answer. For refugees fleeing persecution, torture and the threat of death, even the most punitive methods of deterrence employed by Australia will be preferable to the conditions they have left behind. A policy of deterrence also fails to take into account the conditions which force refugees to flee their homes and undertake risky journeys in the first place. Unless human rights issues in refugee-producing nations are addressed, and regional cooperation on refugee protection is enhanced, asylum seekers will be driven to seek out people smugglers and undertake risky journeys.

### **'If someone can afford to pay a people smuggler thousands of dollars to travel to Australia, they cannot be a 'genuine' refugee'**

Economic status has no bearing on refugee status. A refugee is someone who has a well founded fear of being persecuted because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. It makes no difference whether a refugee is rich or poor – the point is that they are at risk of, or have experienced, persecution. Many refugees who come to Australia are educated middle class people, whose education, profession or political opinions have drawn them to the attention of the authorities and resulted in their persecution.

### **'Refugees don't contribute to Australian society in any meaningful way'**

By definition, refugees are survivors. They have survived because they have the courage, ingenuity and creativity to have done so. These are qualities which we value in Australia. The challenge for Australia is to assist newly arrived refugees to process the experiences of their past and rebuild their lives in Australia. If we do this we will reap the benefits of the qualities and experiences they bring to Australia. Research carried out by the Refugee Council of Australia has shown that refugees make important economic, civil and social contributions to Australian society. Australia's refugees and humanitarian

entrants have found success in every field of endeavour, including the arts, sports, media, science, research, business and civic and community life.

Just some of the many Australian high achievers who once were refugees include scientists Sir Gustav Nossal, 2009 Victorian of the Year Dr Berhan Ahmed, painter Judy Cassab, comedian Anh Do, filmmaker Khoa Do, author Nam Le, academic Associate Professor My-Van Tran, poet Juan Garrido-Salgado, and architect Harry Seidler.

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#### And some of our own....

On his return to Australia and in late November the Rotary Club of Ryde invited Salman, indigo foundation (represented by Alice Davies) and Ali to speak about the Borjagai project at their weekly dinner. James Brown from the Lowy Institute also presented his views on Afghanistan.

The night was wonderful and culminated in Salman being awarded the Rotary International Paul Harris Fellow award in recognition of his work in Afghanistan. This award is highly prestigious and presented to those 'in appreciation of tangible and significant assistance given for the furtherance of better understanding and friendly relationship amongst the people of the world'.



*Ali Yunespoor, Alice Davies (indigo foundation), James Brown (Lowy Institute), Rotary President, Salman with his award, Rob Mitchell (Ryde Rotary) and John Alexander*

And then....a little later in the week Ali was awarded NSW Volunteer of the Year (Western Sydney) for his work with Rotary and indigo foundation.

Our warmest congratulations to them both!

#### **Afghan – Australian picnic: please come along!**

Every year for the past seven we have met up with Salman, Ali and their family on the 26<sup>th</sup> January to celebrate Australia Day. This year we will meet at Parramatta Park at 11am, and we'd love to see you there! If you would like more information, please contact us on [indigo.foundation@bigpond.com](mailto:indigo.foundation@bigpond.com).

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#### **It's the beginning of a New Year**

**We'd appreciate your support!**

**Donations to indigo foundation are tax-deductible.**

Pls to [www.indigofoundation.org](http://www.indigofoundation.org) homepage and click on the bright red 'donate now' icon. This will transfer you to ourcommunity.com.au. This is a secure site, supported by Westpac, for not-for-profit donations. Receipts are issued at the beginning of the following month.

#### **Marketing & fundraising – the latest events!**

*Lucinda Wilson - Marketing & fundraising, Management Committee*

We have had some great events in the last couple of months, starting with.....

**the indigo foundation 2010 annual dinner** – a huge thank you to all those who came along to the second annual indigo foundation dinner in October, and a reminder to get in early for next year! We went from pleading with people to attend the inaugural dinner last year to being completely sold out this year and turning people away! We had Flacco and the Sandman entertain us, a lovely Sydney restaurant feed us, and a whole range of fabulous prizes on offer, auctioned by Michal McCaffery, a professional auctioneer who is always fun. We are now hunting for a venue for our 2011 Sydney dinner which can fit 100 guests but also keep costs very low. Besides having a great night making new friends and re-connecting with old ones, we raised almost \$10,000 which is a great effort. See you there next year!

...and many thanks to:

- ⇒ **Elizabeth Hammond, Athena Karberis, Loretta and Cecily Michaels** who organised a wonderfully fun clothes, accessories and/or book swap to support our Palestine project. Complete with belly dancers for entertainment that afternoon raised almost \$1,500.
- ⇒ **Kate Castine who** made just over \$600 for the Afghanistan project at her inspiring morning tea, with flowers by Helen and Grantley Gill and a hamper on silent auction contributed by Helen Reilly. The morning tea created a real 'buzz' about indigo foundation, which must be the sign of a successful event!
- ⇒ Last but not least, **Siobhan Bourke and Lea Trafford** organised an 'indigo foundation evening' for the Victorian Sexual and Reproductive Health Society's Christmas /end of year celebrations. It was a great night with lots of interest about indigo foundation amazing (Leas word!) work. The evening had the additional touch of indigo

foundation bottles of wine on the tables during the night!

Other good news is that the University of Wollongong Library has chosen us as its charity of choice for 2011. With over 400,000 people passing through the library each year, this is an incredible awareness raising opportunity for us.

We would love your fundraising support in the new year, so for **more information on holding events – pls contact Lucinda ([indigo.foundation@bigpond.com](mailto:indigo.foundation@bigpond.com))**.

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### Our social networks

**Alice Davies** – *Marketing Advisor, Management Committee*

Some of you may have noticed some changes across the indigo foundation website during 2010. With more images, new fonts and some layout changes, we hope you enjoy using it. The update is a long-term and ongoing process, and next year the objective is to make each project page more interactive. Of course it remains critical that the information and our images are current, relevant and up to date if we want to keep people interested and engaged with indigo foundation. So make sure you take a moment over the Christmas break to check the website out (if you haven't already), and keep logging on for more developments in 2011.

And for those of you amongst the ten million Australians who now have a facebook account; or have been thinking about joining up: make sure you check us out in there too. It's incredible how fast facebook continues to grow, and we have around 250 supporters attached to the indigo foundation Australia page. Many of our supporters are internationally-based, one of the massive benefits of facebook being that it takes our messages to people outside of our usual geographic networks and allows people to interact with us who may not ever come across indigo foundation in 'real' life. Again of course the most important thing is that we generate relevant, interesting and up to date information for our friends and supporters, so log on and comment, like, post, tag yourself and your friends and upload photos this summer too.

For all this web-based activity, we love to hear your thoughts, comments and ideas. Email me on [alicewinifreddavies@gmail.com](mailto:alicewinifreddavies@gmail.com) if you have a brain wave or two about ways we can make any of this better.

Thanks to all of you who have contributed to these forums over the past year, keep it up and I look forward to hearing from you in 2011.

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### indigo foundation people



**Lucinda Wilson** -  
Management  
Committee member,  
Project Manager  
Solomon Islands

I met Sally Stevenson about ten years ago when she was the indigo foundation's chair, as she is now. At the time I was running a small non-government organisation at university, and we needed someone to speak about community owned projects and how to assist them when asked. Sally was just the ticket. She presented and I was instantly impressed with her integrity, knowledge and compassion. She had recently set up the indigo foundation and I was equally impressed with the vision for that organisation.

From time to time over the years I kept in touch with the indigo foundation, but it wasn't until Sally met me for lunch that I started becoming properly engaged with the organisation.

In the meantime I had graduated from uni, wound up the uni based NGO, and moved to Tasmania to volunteer for the Wilderness Society and represent environmental activists who were arrested during protests in the forests (I am a lawyer). My experience with the uni based NGO had worn me out so I needed some time out from being closely involved with a small, hands on organisation. When Sally met me for lunch in mid 2009 I was still apprehensive about signing up on a permanent basis, as I did not want to commit if I couldn't follow through. Instead I organised the first annual dinner in Sydney which was great fun, and then, after thinking it through for about 6 months, decided I would like to join the indigo foundation's management committee (MC).

I am so glad I did. Being on the MC has allowed me to meet the most wonderful people; dedicated, skilled, diverse and a lot of fun! I am learning all the time as well as being encouraged to take the lead and try things myself. I have nothing but respect for the people of indigo, past and present, who run an organisation with utter integrity. What I like most about the indigo foundation is that it gets stuff done; less talk, more action.

I also love the fact that I am able to work on the Solomon Islands project. My interest has been the pacific islands for some time, and I am delighted to be connected with this particular project there (training centre for youths on the Weathercoast). I am heading over on a monitoring and evaluation trip in April and am enjoying learning more about the region and the project in preparation for that trip.

Other than my involvement with the indigo foundation, I am also on the board of the central coast community legal centre (where I live with my fiancée, chooks and dogs) and the Floor of barristers I belong to. From next year I will be mentoring high school students at my local high school (Umina / Woy Woy) and I am still involved with the activists from Tasmania.



### Management Committee Update

**Sally Stevenson** – *Chairperson*

As our tenth year comes to a close, I think I can safely say it has been a full and satisfying one for indigo foundation. The communities we support, our volunteers, our supporters - together we go from strength to strength. And now, we face 2011 with much to do – all of it consolidating or building on the positive achievements of this year. We face it, I think, with a healthy level of optimism and confidence. I hope you do too.

We've had some great new people join us over the last few months. I would like to welcome **Nicole & Cameron Moore** as the new joint project managers for our India project. Nicole has had contact with indigo foundation over the last few years – and her enthusiasm to be part of our team has been inspiring. For the last four months she has been working with the Council of Australian Governments Coordinator at the ACT Department of Education on the National Education Reforms, in particular the low socio-economic communities and Indigenous education programs. Her husband, Cameron, is a social worker and worked for many years with disadvantaged youth within group homes in the Illawarra region. He is currently working with disadvantaged students at the University of Canberra.

And at the same time, we farewell **Pat Duggan** in the position. Pat has been involved with indigo foundation since its formation, and in addition to establishing and managing the India project over the last four years, has also spent time on the Management Committee. Pat will continue to be involved with us on an ad hoc basis, and will be available provide advice and guidance to Nicole and Cameron, which is wonderful.

I would also like to welcome Cressida Hall to the Management Committee. Cressida has an arts administration and fundraising background and will be the MC representative for fundraising – something we are very excited about. Welcome!

At the last Management Committee meeting in November we agreed to establish a Development Advisory Committee, to provide our development program with technical guidance and support. It is also a mechanism for us to retain and use the skills, knowledge and experience of some of our exceptional development people who no longer work in a formal

capacity for indigo foundation. As such, I am very pleased that **Zoe Mander-Jones, Jenny Noble, Pat Duggan** and **Sue Cunningham** have agreed to be on the Committee. We look forward to working with them and drawing on their wisdom!

And to complete the year I am very happy to announce that indigo foundation has recruited its first general manager, and as such warmly welcome **Jenny Dixon** to the position.

Jenny lives in Wollongong and is the current President of the Illawarra Children Services (ICS), having spent six years on its board, five of it as Chair. She has led the organisation through a significant growth process, establishing it as a leader of children services in the region, with a growing national reputation, and a budget of \$30m. Jenny also works part time as the Assistant to Executive Officer of The Housing Trust (Illawarra), a not-for-profit community housing organisation. Jenny will work 1.5 days a week, starting in February.

Jenny has a challenging task ahead of her: a volunteer based, virtually run, international development organisation that has a limited budget – *and* is in a growth phase! I do so wish her well, very much look forward to working with her, and knowing she is backed by exceptional people fully trust she'll take indigo foundation to new and exciting places.

In early February we will be having our annual project manager's workshop. This year we will also use the weekend to develop our strategic plan for the next five year. We have been extremely fortunate that Carolynne Wilson has offered to facilitate this process. Carolynne is the Principal Consultant for Stakeholder Engagement and Change Management at Clear Horizon Consulting, a highly regarded firm specialising in participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation. Carolynne has rich and extensive management experience including management of business enhancement and organisation development at General Motors for 5½ years. We are thrilled she is supporting us through our own growth and change period. If you would like to contribute to our strategic planning process, or attend the workshop, please do not hesitate to contact me, we welcome your input.

And to conclude, on behalf of indigo foundation and its Management Committee – Susan Engel, Alice Davies, Alice Martin. Lucinda Wilson, Philip Strickland, Cressida Hall and Stefan Knollmayer - I'd like to thank you for your support both financial and moral throughout 2010, and wish you a very happy and prosperous new year!



the first thing we offer is **respect** 

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