

SAWA -AUSTRALIA (NSW) Inc.

CONVENOR'S REPORT to AGM 18 NOVEMBER 2020

I need hardly say that this past year has been most unusual, although it did begin in the usual way with the AGM held on 16 October 2019 in the Balmain Uniting Church meeting room at which the current committee was re-elected.

A very enjoyable Annual Lunch was celebrated at the Bamiyan Restaurant in Five Dock. The fine weather allowed us to use some of the outdoor area in Haseeb Miazad's very attractive new Afghan restaurant on Great North Road. Haseeb's wife, Malia, spoke of her education opportunities and expressed ongoing support for our efforts in raising funds for women in Afghanistan. She put on display some beautiful examples of Afghan craft work and offered to give some for auction in the future. Ruth Shatford from St Albans Church, Epping sold Christmas puddings as usual and early in 2020 we received a generous share of the profits from this enterprise, \$4,500. This was especially welcome as we had made a smaller profit than usual from the lunch with only 50 attending.

A successful street stall was held in Balmain in early December from which we made over \$900 thanks to generous donations from several members.

As flagged last year, we purchased only 600 birthing kits to pack this year as the price had risen to \$5 per kit. We decided to try to raise only the same amount of \$3,000 as in recent years, mindful that although donating birthing kits is a very worthwhile project, it does not serve SAWA's core purpose. A street stall was held in early February to help raise these funds and an appeal sent to supporters. Our offer to pack extra kits was accepted and on 2nd March, 800 kits were packed at the usual venue, Leichhardt Rowing Club. It was a very hot day, but the 60-odd volunteers managed the job in their usual cheerful way, enjoying scones with plum jam and cream from Bronwyn Monro at the morning tea break. The cost of the kits was met through the street stalls, from donations from the volunteers on the day and support from many others. It was so fortunate that this important task was completed in early March because by the end of the month, restrictions on all activities were imposed and we were thereafter unable to hold any more meetings or any fund-raising functions. A dinner on 12th May at Bamiyan for which planning was well under way, had to be cancelled.

The SAWA committee continued to meet each month, via Zoom from April to August and more recently in Robyn Longhurst's large living room. Zoom and email have allowed us to keep in touch as a committee and also with SAWA -South Australia and with OPAWC, Organisation of Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities, in Kabul and in Nangarhar Province where our major project continues.

A letter was sent to members on 31st July which resulted in some donations and sales of SAWA shopping bags and the remainder of Bronwyn's much loved wild plum jam. It was important to try to keep in touch when it was clear we would not be able to hold any fund-raising functions and also to encourage our supporters who would be feeling very anxious themselves.

In May, SAWA-Australia received an urgent appeal from OPAWC for financial support to make face masks for road workers in Kabul. As a by-product of the Vocational Training Centre in Kabul which has been funded by SAWA -SA since 2008, a small clothing factory had been set up with 50 sewing machines. This was being used by women who had been taught tailoring and sewing at the VTC to make clothes for sale. OPAWC had organised 100 volunteers to make the face masks, but they needed funds to buy the materials and to bring the volunteers safely to the venue. They sent a budget of US\$25,000 which was a big ask for a relatively small organisation like SAWA, but we agreed to help as much as possible.

SAWA -SA set up a GoFundMe website and both associations made an appeal to members and supporters to contribute.

The SAWA-NSW committee decided to send US\$5,000 immediately from our project funds as we had already met the budget for the current year for the Centre in Nangarhar. A major problem emerged when we found the broker we had been using to send funds to Afghanistan had changed banks and the new bank in Singapore refused to transfer money to an account in Afghanistan. After investigating possibilities, the Treasurer found that ANZ bank would do it, so she transferred from her account and was reimbursed by SAWA as we did not want to move our account from the Bendigo Bank. The response to the appeal was very good, with some donating through GoFundMe, but most came directly to our Bendigo Bank account. Special thanks to Maria Manning for her contribution of \$5,000 to each of the state associations. SAWA-NSW sent a further US\$5,000 in mid -July which amounted to almost A\$15,000 in total. South Australia sent \$A10,000 and some funds also came from an Italian group in Kabul. A special thank-you to Margaret Bailey for her very efficient solution to a recurring problem sending money to a bank in Afghanistan.

The reports from OPAWC on the production and distribution of Face Masks have been enthusiastic and impressive. They have produced thousands of masks which were distributed on the streets of Kabul, in Farah Province to workers and to university students through the Hamoon Health Centre which is also run by OPAWC and to students and workers in Khewa district of Nangarhar Province through the education centre we fund there. Some of the many photos they sent were included in a special Thank You issue of SAWAN sent to members and supporters in July.

OPAWC was enterprising in initiating and carrying out with great efficiency, something they could do to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus, well aware that many men would be forced to continue to work as starvation was the only alternative. The education centres in Kabul and in Nangarhar Province were forced to close in late March, but reopened in mid -July. While the centre was closed, the teachers continued to be paid. They kept in touch with students as best they could through mail and visits. They also provided information about the virus and how to keep safe. Rent and other expenses also continued throughout the year, so the money sent for 2019-2020 has been spent as budgeted.

The budget for the Nangarhar centre for the current school year, October 2020 - September 2021 is only slightly higher than last year, at US\$19,198. After sending about A\$15,000 for face mask production, we were unable to meet the full year's funding now, so we have sent half the amount and hope that supporters will donate the remainder even without the pleasure of meeting for a function. A letter of appeal has been sent and that, as well as some profiles of students, will appear in the November issue of SAWAN. Donations sent online through GiveNow to the rural centre for women are tax deductible, otherwise donations should be sent as usual to the Bendigo Bank account.

In mid-year, we were contacted by the artists who had produced the book "Two Trees" some years ago with notice of a new book "Making Marks" now published. It too was a collaboration between a group of artists, mainly from Melbourne, and women at the Vocational Training Centre in Kabul. In this case, a set of handkerchiefs, decorated in various ways, were taken to Kabul where Afghan women embroidered on them with their name, or their goal in life. They were returned and photographed to produce a very beautiful book. At this difficult time, they expect sales to be fairly slow, though it will make a lovely Christmas gift. They have also been able to have an official launch of the book in Hobart where one of the artists lives. At this stage, SAWA-NSW has a box of 20 books to sell as does SAWA-SA and it is being sold on line as well. All the costs of the book have been covered by the artists and through a special fundraising campaign, so the \$39.95 cost of each book will be profit. The authors want the money to go to OPAWC as a lump sum for them to use for some special purpose of their choice. SAWA-NSW has so far sold 11 copies and we will keep that money aside to send to OPAWC when required.

The two state associations of SAWA-Australia continue to work well together. After some initial difficulties following the death of the SA convenor, Matthias Tomczak, the South Australian group is now working well and have found an excellent editor for the SAWAN in Margaret Gadd, so NSW has this year produced one page as in the past, after producing the whole August and November issues last year.

Problems have continued with the website www.sawa-australia.org which was set up and managed by Matthias Tomczak. The NSW sub-domain has been updated and well managed by Michele Dunn, but when South Australia could not find anyone to manage the main site, they asked Michele who also found it very complex. It has not been updated since Matthias died. SAWA-SA have now engaged a firm in Adelaide to build a new site using WordPress and the NSW site will follow once the main one is completed.

This is my last year in the position of Convenor which I began 7 years ago feeling very uncertain, but have grown to enjoy. This is for two main reasons: the first is that although SAWA is a relatively small organisation I feel we do make a difference to the lives of women and girls in Afghanistan through the education centre we fund in Nangarhar Province and by our support of the impressive and courageous women of OPAWC; the second is I have had a wonderful committee to do all the work involved in keeping SAWA -NSW going. I thank them all and would like to especially mention Joan Long who has decided not to nominate again. I stand down confident that SAWA-NSW will continue to contribute in the spirit in which it was founded in 2003.