FROM THE EDITOR  Greetings for 2021

How lucky we are to be nearly free from Covid in Australia – and we can get together in groups in our communities. This means we can focus on fundraising for SAWA again. This issue of SAWAN has some ideas for gatherings and events which we hope may inspire you to organise a fundraiser - large or small - wherever you are in Australia.

SAWA (SA) has been able to send approximately US$50,000 to the Vocational Training Centre every year. SAWA (NSW) raises additional funds for the projects they support in other provinces. If YOU are able to host a morning tea, dinner, market stall, film screening, art show or other event to raise funds, we’d love to hear from you.

SAWA will help you to promote your event through this newsletter or special e-News mail-outs. We’ll also publish your photos and stories to inspire others!

Margaret Gadd  Editor

MORE FUNDRAISING IDEAS ....

Remember that every dollar raised helps women and girls in Afghanistan.

- Invite friends to a morning or afternoon tea. You provide your home or garden, plus tea / coffee in pretty cups – and ask guests to bring a small plate of cake or biscuits to share. Cost $10 – or just ask for a donation.
- If you have crafty friends and family, invite them to contribute their home-made goods and set up a table at the local shopping centre, school or market.
- If you own a business – or know someone who does – perhaps you could put a collection box for donation on the counter? SAWA can provide photos and information for a small display.
- Your school, University, church or other community group could arrange a guest speaker and photos about Afghanistan?
- If you can source a movie - not necessarily an Afghan one – holding a movie night at a local cinema or community hall will raise valuable funds.
- For Facebook users … when it’s your birthday, Facebook offers you the opportunity to ask your FB Friends to donate to a charity of your choice. Choose SAWA!

Funds and donations can be paid directly into SAWA’s bank account:

- SAWA-Australia (SA) Inc
- BSB 633-000
- Account number 12603563

www.sawa-australia.org

We are greatly indebted to Peter Miller of www.pmwebsites.com.au for his expert assistance and endless patience in working with us on our new website. With information in English and Dari (the language of Afghanistan) you can read the latest news, find reports and history, buy books and bags, join SAWA or renew your membership. CHECK IT OUT!

**NEW POSTAL ADDRESS FOR SAWA-SA
We have opened a PO Box for mail
PO Box 44, Dernancourt SA 5075
Mursal has resigned

We have all been sad to learn that Mursal, the wonderful and dedicated Director of OPAWC, has resigned. Mursal has returned to her home province to care for her mother who has been unwell. Our thoughts, love and gratitude go to Mursal for all she has done to support the women and girls in OPAWC’s programs. She will be missed by everyone. The OPAWC Board is meeting to appoint a new Director as soon as possible.

Sally Sara: Foreign Correspondent, writer and playwright “Stop Girl”

Most SAWA members will know Sally Sara as one of the ABC’s most respected foreign correspondents. Among many speaking engagements on her return from Afghanistan, Sally addressed a packed audience at a SAWA event in Adelaide in 2012. More recently, she has written a play about her experiences in Afghanistan, and the traumatising effect that her 3 years in this war-torn country had on her. The play “Stop Girl” was performed at Sydney’s Belvoir Theatre in March, hopefully to be repeated in other cities over time.

An overview of Sally Sara’s CV provides an insight into her skills, experience and professionalism. In 2000, after a three-month stint in Jakarta, she became the ABC’s Africa correspondent. She has since reported from 40 countries, including Iraq, Sierra Leone, South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Sally is an eight-time Walkley Award finalist, as well as a winner, in 2017, for her reporting on the famine in Somaliland. She’s achieved four UN Media Awards, and at least a dozen international honours, including for TV and radio reporting. In 2011, she became a Member of the Order of Australia for service to journalism.

Sally worked in Afghanistan from 2009 to 2012. Like all war correspondents, she frequently witnessed traumatising sights and events including the horrific injuries and deaths of women and children. But one incident in particular - filming a critically injured 11-year-old boy in Kandahar - stayed with her. This, and the cumulation of other events, had a shattering impact on her. On returning to Australia, it was impossible to just pick up the pieces and calmly return to life as a rural reporter. The memories of “seeing kids getting hurt, kids going hungry when there is plenty in the world, and often just observing, not being able to stop it” stayed with her, until in November 2012, she suffered a breakdown.

Coming to terms with her condition was a gradual process involving several years of psychotherapy. Writing the play in 2015 “wasn’t so much therapy as a way of reclaiming the events, turning an awful experience into something positive,” Sally says.

(Thanks to Barbara James (NSW) and Carol Shamsabadi (SA) for sending news about Sally Sara’s recent play “Stop Girl” which was performed in Sydney in March)

“Making Marks” Exhibition

I was very fortunate to be in Melbourne in March while the beautiful Making Marks exhibition was being shown at the Counihan Gallery in Brunswick. It was such a pleasure to meet Gali Weiss (pictured), the artist who facilitated the project between Australian women artists and the women at the Vocational Training Centre.

It was also an absolute joy to see the exquisite painting and embroidery on the handkerchiefs which had been returned from Afghanistan. I hope many other SAWA members and supporters were able to share in viewing this special exhibition.

Margaret Gadd (Editor)


Durkhani Ayubi is a writer and scholar who lives in Adelaide and is involved with the responsibilities of her family’s restaurants. She also writes freelance opinion-editorial pieces for a range of newspapers and websites, and is an Atlantic Fellow of the Atlantic Institute which is based at the Rhodes Trust in Oxford, England.
Durkhani spoke recently at Adelaide Writers Week about her new book ‘Parwana’ which tells the story of her family’s migration to Australia, their love of creating and sharing food. The book contains mouth-watering recipes and photos of traditional Afghan dishes. ‘Parwana’ is published by Murdoch Books.

Women with Torches – a focus on positivity from Afghanistan

(Summary of an article in the online journal “Counterpunch” February 2021)

Recently an education centre at Kabul University was ripped apart by a huge suicide bomb that killed 20 and injured a further 70 people, mostly teenaged students. Seeking to discuss any positivity coming out of Afghan institutions of higher education, chief correspondent Ahmad Soheil Ahmadi spoke to Ms. Fatemeh Khavari, an award-winning author.

ASA: In what ways have you explored the theme of Afghan women’s rights in your writing?

We live in a society where women’s rights are not respected. As a result, women cannot reach the positions they deserve. In my story, ‘Why Should I Go Back’ I dealt with the darkness of the lives of women who live in patriarchal families.

ASA: Are stories that have a feminist atmosphere appealing to Afghan and cultured audiences?

Storytelling has been marginalised in Afghanistan, and cultural activists are not supported as they should be. Therefore, these stories are not readily available to citizens. Sometimes the authors themselves do not have the ability to explain their work. But when such stories are read by the audience, they encourage the writers. I have often encountered girls who enjoyed reading such stories and asked how we could express and write our problems through stories.

ASA: Why is it important to address the issues of Afghan women in literature?

There is no question that if we go to remote villages and districts in Afghanistan, women do not have equal rights with men, and they are also deprived of basic human rights. Most of Afghan society is traditional and lives in villages. It is very rare for women in this kind of society to be able to exercise their rights.

ASA: When you compare the academics and writers who were educated before the civil wars with those emerging through the educational system now, what are the differences and can today’s writers read the heights achieved by such figures as Rahnaward Zaryab [note: Zaryab died of Covid-19 on December 11 last year]

These two periods in our history faced crises of differing sorts. Since the civil war, we have faced crises such as deprivation and migration. Today’s writers have different stories. Young writers write well and reflect the pain of society. It is certainly not an easy task for a young writer to reach the heights of his or her calling. However, I can say that the current crop of writers, who also happen to have written beautiful stories, certainly have the capabilities to reach the position of masters like Rahnaward Zaryab.

ASA: As a political science student, what are your hopes for the future of women’s political activity?

When we celebrate International Women’s Day on March 8, it is essentially a reminder of the efforts that women in the West have made to assert their rights. Today, in Afghanistan, we are the West of yesterday. Today, our women are deprived of their rights. Western women struggled, and in less than a hundred years gained basic rights such as the right to vote. I am confident that if Afghan women strive for their basic rights, then they will achieve their basic rights. Once we have achieved this, we’ll ensure that no one rips away these fundamental rights.

https://www.counterpunch.org/2021/02/04/women-with-torches/

Thank you to SAWA member Jenny Hughes (Qld) for the link to Counterpunch.

The world waits to see what will happen in Afghanistan when the US, British and Australian troops leave later in the year. News from Afghanistan will be included in the next issue of SAWAN: August 2021.

The world waits to see what will happen in Afghanistan when the US, British and Australian troops leave later in the year. News from Afghanistan will be included in the next issue of SAWAN: August 2021.

Some analysts are already predicting that a return by the Taliban will revoke all progress made in the fight for women’s rights.
DIARY DATES FOR SA MEMBERS

May 20: 6.30pm
Afghan Dinner and Silent Auction at Rumi Palace, 330 Prospect Rd, Blair Athol. Tickets at: www.trybooking.com/BQLOW

June 24: 6.30pm
Mark Isaacs, author of “The Kabul Peace House” will be speaking about his book. This event is being held at the Welcoming Centre, Bowden, in partnership with Amnesty International and the Women’s International League of Peace and Freedom. Gold coin donation. Details will be emailed to SAWA members and supporters.

Farewell to Mursal
SAWA-SA Committee was sad to learn of Mursal Rahimi’s resignation. We wrote to Mursal, extending our sincere and heartfelt appreciation for her dedication to the work she has done through OPAWC to support the women and girls of the Vocational Training Centre. Members of the Committee have developed a warm affection for Mursal and we wish her and her family well both now and into the future.

Website news: www.sawa-australia.org

Guided expertly by Peter Miller, the website sub-Committee worked for months to update the website and give it a more professional look. Our web administrator is Committee member, Fahranaz Haidari (SA) with backup support provided by Michele Dunn (NSW).

Please have a look at the website – we’d love your review if you’d like to add one. Click on https://g.page/sawa-australia-sa-inc?gm to go straight to the Reviews section.

Email: sawacommittee@gmail.com if you have additional comments or ideas for the website.

MUSIC, PRIZES, FOOD AND FUN

If you haven’t yet booked for the Afghan Dinner on May 20 at Rumi Palace, here’s some more news about this event. Think what you’ll miss!

Welcoming music will be provided by the String Ensemble of the Tea Tree Gully Orchestra, with more musical entertainment during the evening by Trio Montagne. There will also be Persian poetry read by Shaheen and Carol Shamsabadi,

Some of our wonderful business donors for the Silent Auction include:
Rumi Palace Restaurant, Murratti Cakes and Gateaux, Snazzi Boutique, Woolworths Blackwood, PhoneSmiths, Deb Smith Photography, Terry White Pharmacy, Banner Hardware, Purple Maiden Bath & Body and Oxfam Books.

We also appreciate generous donations from Malcolm Bartsch, Jan Coveney, Brian Arnott, Julie Irwin and Margaret Gadd. A full list of donors and sponsors will be available at the Dinner. They will also be acknowledged in the next SAWAN.

Photo: Jan Coveney with her donation of a beautiful Hanji piece which she created. Hanji is the name of traditional handmade paper from Korea.

SAWA silk shopping bags are still available. Purchase online through the website or email SAWA at sawacommittee@gmail.com

Bags will also be for sale at the Afghan Dinner on 20 May at Rumi Palace. Buy direct! Save on postage!

Many thanks once again to Marie Christodulaki (Vic) for assistance in proof-reading SAWAN before it is emailed to all SAWA members and supporters around Australia.
A SPECIAL TRIBUTE WITH GRATITUDE TO DAWN ATKINSON

A formal memorial for Dawn has been delayed by her family because of difficulty with COVID-19 restrictions particularly limiting her sons gathering in Sydney. However, having informed SAWA Members of her death in January we felt we could not delay further in recording our gratitude for all Dawn so passionately did for SAWA NSW.

Her leadership goes back to 2005. At that time SAWA had grown from an informal group of Australian supporters of Afghan women led from 2003 by Grace McCaughey in Castlemaine Vic, to a fully incorporated Association. The Association, SAWA AUSTRALIA was led by Matthias Tomczak and was incorporated in his home state, South Australia, but had Members in other parts of Australia. Dawn accepted leadership of the NSW Group. This group became a separate incorporated Association in NSW within SAWA AUSTRALIA in 2010. Dawn remained its Convenor until 2015 when her increasing difficulty with Rheumatoid Arthritis caused her to retire.

Dawn worked very hard and tirelessly to establish a base of local supporters, to raise awareness of the situation faced by the women of war-torn Afghanistan, and to raise money to help. She established links with the local Afghan community and especially had a long-term close relationship with the owners of the Bamiyan Restaurant, Malia and Haseeb Miazad (Michael) and their family. They gathered at special times to enjoy Afghan food at Dawn’s home in Balmain.

Dawn worked tirelessly to gain media cover for SAWA events and organised numerous fundraising activities as well as film nights and talks to spread information about the conditions of women under Taliban control. Back then a great deal of this work was done in time consuming old-fashioned ways with ring-arounds and post-outs.

Dawn was a well-known identity and long-term resident of Balmain from 1960. From her origins in far Western NSW in Trundle and Bogan Gate, she earned an Education Department scholarship from her results at Parkes High School and qualified as a teacher at Sydney Teachers College. She taught at Balmain Public School for many years, initiating and organising many community events such as the annual Art Show. In later years it was rare for her to walk down Darling St without meeting numerous ex-students or their parents. Everybody seemed to know “Mrs Roach”. Later she taught at Annandale North Public School, where she was much loved, until her retirement.

SAWA NSW is enormously grateful for her dedicated work to build our association and for her energy and enthusiasm for its cause. In recent years she has been ill and in residential aged care but the fruits of her work live on.

OUR PROJECT IN NANGARHAR PROVINCE

Thanks to the generosity of donors, we were able to send funds to cover all the second half of the budget for the project. USS10,000 was sent in mid-April and we have received confirmation and thanks for its safe arrival. The next annual budget begins in October. We have a lot of fundraising to do to meet it!

The project continues despite the very difficult situation in Afghanistan with fears of a possible Taliban revival of attacks on women’s independence as the US and Australian armed forces retire. Many in Afghanistan are very worried about the immediate future although some are hopeful that the end of the “foreign invasion” will allow the Taliban to mature to a less doctrinaire force.

We also received news in April that Mursal the Director of OPAWC, the organisation responsible for our project, has had to resign and move back to her province to care for her mother. The OPAWC board will meet to select a new Director soon.

STALL AT ROZELLE MARKETS

SAWA-NSW made $671 on Saturday, 1st May on a beautiful Autumn day in Sydney. There was interest in our fundraising project which resulted in over $70 in donations including from some other stall-holders.

PLANNED FUNDRAISING FUNCTION

Tuesday June 8 Lunch at the Bamiyan Afghan Restaurant
12.00 for 12.30pm $65.00 Level 1/147-149 Great North Rd, Five Dock NSW 2046.

We are delighted to have as the speaker, Maryam Popal Zahid - the Founder of the 3000 strong Afghan Women on the Move. You may like to see further details at: https://www.thenewcomerblog.net/maryam-zahid-afghan-woman-move. Members will soon receive an email with details for booking and nearby parking etc.