FROM THE EDITOR

- The devastating earthquake that struck Khost Province of Afghanistan in June has shocked and saddened us all. So many SAWA members and friends sent donations in response to our special Earthquake Appeal. Your money has now been sent to OPAWC and is already helping many families who lost everything. Heartfelt thanks to all donors.
- On a much brighter note, we are thrilled to share exciting news from Gali Weiss, the artist responsible for the "Making Marks" project and publication of the book of the same name. The beautiful collection of handkerchiefs created by Australian and Afghan women has now been acquired by the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. SEE BELOW FOR THE STORY.
- If you are in the process of making, or changing, your Will, you may be interested in reading about SAWA's Bequest program on PAGE 2.
- We invite you to tell us your thoughts about the SAWAN Newsletter by completing the Survey Form which will be sent out soon. We’d love to know what you like - or don't like - and any suggestions for future articles. Your feedback will be welcomed! DETAILS ON PAGE 3.

Margaret Gadd (Editor).

Australian War Memorial Acquisition

Gali Weiss is the artist who created the Handkerchief Project, a collaboration between Australian and Afghan women who embroidered images and messages on white handkerchiefs. The book "Making Marks" (co-edited by Gali Weiss and Barbara Kameniar) details the project in words and photographs.

** Gali has now announced, with “great pleasure and honour” that the Australian War Memorial in Canberra has acquired the Handkerchief Project artworks for its Afghanistan collection.

The Australian War Memorial (AWM) has historically been a museum restricted to memorialising military personnel through artefacts and experiences related to the armed forces. It has sought to commemorate the sacrifice of Australians who served or died in war.

The AWM's current approach, however, is to exhibit and archive narratives and artworks that will “assist Australians to remember, interpret and understand the Australian experience of war and its enduring impact on Australian society”.

As a country whose military was significantly involved in Afghanistan over the past 20 years, it is important for the public to reflect on the repercussions of that involvement - on both Australian military personnel and Afghan civilians.

The Handkerchief Project is a breakthrough addition to the AWM as it presents such a large collection of women’s (non-military) perspectives. It reflects a shared cry for peace. The artworks are a living testament to the connections made between civilian women in Australia and Afghanistan, and the humanity of each.

With the funds raised through the sale of the art collection, Gali is now working with Barbara Kameniar, Mursal Rahimi and Carol Shamsabadi to develop a scholarship program for Afghan women who are unable to complete their studies in Afghanistan. [SAWAN will report on this project when it is fully operational.]

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REMINDER: Gali continues to post stories and letters on her website from women in Afghanistan. Their letters give a stark account of what they are contending with as they seek to further their education.
*** UPDATE ON VISA APPLICATIONS and a Pilot Program for skilled refugees

With the election of the Australian Labour Government, SAWA has written to the two new Ministers (for Home Affairs, and Immigration), two local Members of the House of Representatives and all South Australian Senators seeking information regarding the visa applications which we submitted last year on behalf of former OPACW staff. Replies indicate that progress continues to be slow on account of the overwhelming numbers of applications received.

However, there may be a glimmer of hope for some of these applicants with the Talent Beyond Boundaries pilot program. This program requires an Australian employer to sponsor (and pay for) a refugee who has recognised skills and functional English. We are exploring this option further and will provide additional information as we learn more.

If you know of a business or company that may be interested in sponsoring an Afghan refugee, please contact SAWA. At present we have visa applicants with the following skills and qualifications: All are former employees of OPACW or their family members.

- Civil Engineering (with experience in international organisations);
- Dentistry;
- Medical student – surgery;
- University lecturer (multi-lingual);
- School teacher (degree in Biology);
- Software engineer (IT degree);
- Mechanical engineering;
- English & Physics teacher (BA Bus Admin);
- Accountancy/Finance;
- Embroidery/Sewing teaching;
- Women’s Hairdressing.

A post from OPACW’s Facebook page:

Malalai is from Laghman province. When her husband died a few years ago, her father gave her to another man who already had a wife. Her husband is much older and unable to work, so Malalai is responsible for finding food for him and seven children. Along with her eldest children, she has been begging on the streets, while also taking care of a newborn baby. With the help of Unley Rotary Club (SA), the family received a food package which will provide nutrition for a month. Malalai thanked Rotary for their support.

We commemorate the 3rd anniversary of the death of SAWA’s founder, Matthias Tomczak. Matthias is still remembered fondly by his friends in Afghanistan.

WILLS AND BEQUESTS

In Australia, making a Will and leaving an inheritance to family or others is a privilege, both in terms of having assets to leave and in choosing how to share them.

It’s a subject we don’t talk about often, but it’s an important one if we want to ensure our remaining assets are distributed as we’d like them to be.

If you would like to remember SAWA in your Will, there is some helpful advice on the SAWA website, www.sawa-australia.org. This includes some suggested wording which can be taken to your solicitor, or directly written into your Will if you are managing it by yourself.

It is important to note that if you choose to leave any bequest to SAWA, it is essential that you use the official name SAWA-Australia (SA) Inc, and our ABN 73 162 914 759.

Our promise to you

If you choose to leave a gift in your Will to support the women and girls of Afghanistan, SAWA promises to:

- Honour your wishes
- Honour your privacy – we would like to acknowledge your generosity but will only give you the recognition you are comfortable with
- Ensure your gift is used in the most effective way

Thank you for your consideration.

REMINDER: HAVE YOU RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP FOR 2022-23?

Go to the website: www.sawa-australia.org OR transfer your payment online to SAWA’s bank.

BSB 633-000 Account 126035633
Reference: Membership

Your ongoing support will be appreciated by the women and girls of Afghanistan.
AN AFTERNOON WITH CAMEL

On a mid-winter Sunday afternoon in June, 40 South Australian members and supporters enjoyed a fascinating presentation by Pamela Rajowski OAM on the contributions made by the Afghan cameleers, from 1860-1930, in opening up the Australian outback for the new Australian colonies. Camels could survive and travel where bullocks, horses and donkeys could not. Hundreds of these animals, and the Afghan, Turkish and Iranian men who cared for them, were responsible for taking supplies to remote properties, and transporting wool and other goods over vast distances to railheads, ports and cities.

Pamela’s talk, illustrated with many old photographs and maps, gave us a wonderful insight into the story of the early Afghan pioneers, their relationships with indigenous people, and their legacy to this country.

Pamela offered SAWA a generous donation from the sale of her books on the day, which added to donations made by those who attended.

For more information see: www.pamelarajowski.com

THE BOOKSELLER OF KABUL

Have you read “The Bookseller of Kabul”, published in 2002? Written by Norwegian journalist, Åsne Seierstad, the book became a huge international success and thrust Shah Mohammad Rais and his shop into the spotlight.

You may not know that the shop in Kabul is still open, despite the Taliban takeover. However, Rais, the bookseller, is now living in London, having fled Afghanistan to claim asylum in the UK. Rais is unsure how long the shop, established in 1974, can withstand the current challenges in his home country. Since the Taliban takeover, there has been a mass exodus of intellectuals and others who were part of the Afghan book-buying public.

He plans to keep it open as long as possible, along with an online bookstore.

Do you read the SAWAN?

If you’ve reached this page, then presumably you do! The SAWA Committee is keen to know how many of our loyal members and supporters read this quarterly newsletter – and, more importantly, what you like or don’t like about it.

Soon after you receive this SAWAN (August 2022 edition), you will receive a link to an online Survey about the content and format of the newsletter. We hope you’ll take a few minutes to complete the survey, so that we can look for ways to improve our communication with you.

You will have the opportunity to make comments and suggestions for future newsletters.

And if you have any news about Afghanistan, or perhaps activities of the Afghan community in your local area, you are very welcome to send in an article or letter for publication.

We hope we’ll be swamped with responses!

THE BOOKSELLER OF KABUL

(Diane Taylor, The Guardian 5 Jul 2022)

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ZAFIRA IN HOBART

Zafira Restaurant/Café is located at 35 Gormanston Rd, Moonah in Hobart. It serves a range of traditional and modern Afghan dishes. Open from Tuesday to Saturday, staff look forward to welcoming guests in the main restaurant area or in a private room for catered events.

Margaret Gadd (ed SAWAN) and Barbara Kameniar (ed ‘Making Marks’) met at Zafira recently.

If you live in Hobart or are visiting on holiday, why not call in for coffee, lunch or dinner? Check the website for a menu and opening hours. www.zafirafoods.com.au

Women students at the VTC.
WINTER ACTIVITIES

With the situation changing so significantly in Afghanistan 12 months ago, SAWA has had some extremely busy months. In light of the changes in Afghanistan, the Committee took the opportunity to review the goals and activities listed in our Strategic Plan 2021-2025. **A special Planning meeting was convened in May.**

We were pleased (though not surprised!) to find that our key goals and planned actions are still relevant and will continue to guide our work over the next two years. The Strategic Plan can be found on the website.

Our primary focus continues to be raising money to support the Vocational Training Centre and, with this in mind, SAWA-SA has arranged, shared and participated in a number of events during winter.

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**Morning tea with the Muslim Women’s Association of South Australia**

Members of the SAWA Committee were delighted to accept an invitation to share morning tea with the Muslim Women’s Association, an organisation which provides language, literacy and computing skills training to Muslim women, and a range of other services to assist refugee women through their early years settling into Australia. The meeting provided a wonderful opportunity for all of us to meet, learn and network with women from a number of organisations. We look forward to collaborating and supporting one another in the future.

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**A SOUP-er Fundraiser!**

The lovely community at Christie Walk Eco-village recently raised $1000 for the Afghan Earthquake Appeal. With hot soup, crusty bread, and a warm welcome to residents and friends who came along, this was a fun way to spend a chilly winter evening. Thank you to everyone at Christie Walk!

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**HANDMADE: 23 July – 29 January** This exhibition promises to be a beautiful display of traditional crafts made by Afghan women. Embroidery and all forms of needlework have long been a way that women express themselves and their culture. Note the dates and visit the Migration Museum in Kintore Avenue to see this work.

[It’s no surprise that among the activities offered by the Muslim Women’s Association is a weekly sewing group where women can share time together in a culturally welcoming environment while creating items for themselves and their families.]

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**Art and Photographic exhibition: A Mixed Blend**

The work of Afghan photographer, **Muzafar Ali**, is included in the exhibition.

Opening hours: Wed-Fri 10am -5pm  
Or by appointment  Ph. 0431 187 558

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AFGHANISTAN AND SAWA PROJECTS

Following the takeover of government by the Taliban in August 2021, the rights of women to education and work, freedom of movement and other basic rights have been taken away, just as happened under previous Taliban rule. However, 20 years of progress have resulted in many women becoming educated and independent. Some have fled the country fearing reprisals, but others remain, including a core in OPAWC, Organization of Promoting Afghan Women’s Capabilities, through whom SAWA funds projects.

After a brief closure, the Vocational Training centres in Kabul and the one in Nangarhar Province which is funded by SAWA-NSW, are now open with programs adjusted to avoid drawing attention, especially in the teaching of English and computer skills. Classes in tailoring, dressmaking and basic literacy continue.

With government organisation in chaos, severe shortage of money and banking services, inflation and extreme food shortages, many Afghans are close to starvation and in need of very basic welfare. The earthquake in June 2022 has added to the extreme poverty and hunger being experienced in Afghanistan as the Taliban are ill-equipped to help.

SAWA-NSW has recently sent a further US$10,000 (almost A$14,500) for our school project in Nangarhar Province having been assured that OPAWC in Kabul has no problem in getting the funds to Nangarhar. We have indicated that apart from the teaching project, we are happy for our funds to help alleviate hunger in families connected to the project.

RECENT EVENTS

BIRTHING KIT ASSEMBLY 7 March 2022

About 50 volunteers gathered to help assemble 500 kits at the Leichhardt Rowing Club – a very special venue on the shores of Iron Cove Bay. Our feedback always from these events is that people welcome the opportunity to directly help women in need. While the Birthing Kit Foundation, which manages the system, does not promise that kits go to Afghanistan, we know that in the past some have done so. Always they are delivered to pregnant women who are forced to give birth isolated from medical services and often in unhygienic, dirt floored houses.

The content of the kits is designed to help create a clean and sterile situation to guard against infections which can arise is dirty situations with deaths to mothers and babies which can be up to 20% of births. The kits include a large heavy plastic sheet, sterile gloves for anyone assisting, sterile razor blade and ties for dealing with the birth cord. These contents cost $5.00 which means that we needed to raise $2,500 for the 500 kits we assembled this year. We have found people very generous in contributing to this cost. We raised $1,635 towards the kits at a street stall in February and a further $1,850 in donations mainly at the assembly day. We thus now have surplus to put to kits in coming years when we hope to return to packing more than 500 kits.

Morning tea was provided by our very generous supporter Bronwyn Monro with her homemade scones with locally foraged wild plum jam and cream.

LUNCH AT THE BAMIYAN RESTAURANT IN FIVE DOCK on 28th June 2022

We were delighted that 68 people came to this lunch with a number of those not able to come also donating. Everyone the Committee spoke to thought it was a splendid lunch and a very special sampling of Afghan food. A profit of $3,793 was made from the lunch, raffle and sale of bags, books, jam and fruit.

Our speaker, Maryam Popal Zahid from Afghan Women on the Move (AWOTM) gave a wonderful talk about the journey of migrants and refugees and her organisation’s work, initially to reduce the isolation of Afghan women in Sydney but now expanded in other ways. Maryam brought paintings along with her from a recent exhibition by Afghan artists. The $1,000 raised from the raffle was presented to Maryam to send to earthquake victims in Afghanistan as the Taliban are ill-equipped to help.

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To the left: One of the many groups at the birthing kit assembly day.
Photo courtesy Jenny Templin,
Jenny Templin Photography:
jennytemplin@bigpond.com