FROM THE EDITOR

- The 2002 Annual Report from the Vocational Training Centre (VTC) has been received. We are delighted that the Centre is operating well and continuing to provide services to women and children in Kabul. See excerpts this page.

- With the generous assistance of members and friends, SAWA has again been able to meet all funding requirements of the VTC, as well as provide relief funds following the devastating earthquake and floods that hit Afghanistan this year. For details, see Page 2.

- Also on Page 2 is a report from New Hope/Omid Now, a project which is enabling Afghan women to continue their University studies outside of Afghanistan. SAWA is happy to be associated with this project through an auspice agreement.

- Thank you to everyone who completed the SAWAN Survey. You’ll find a summary of the results on Page 3.

Please also note the Apologies below. We hope you will be interested to read about how SAWA began on Page 3. 

Margaret Gadd (Editor).

APOLOGIES

We sincerely apologise for two errors in the last issue of SAWAN (August 2022).

1. We incorrectly credited Matthias Tomcsak as the founder of SAWA. It was Grace McCaughey in Castlemaine, Victoria, who established the organisation. (See SAWA’s history – Page 3).

2. Pamela Rajkowski’s name was mis-spelt, resulting in an incorrect web address for ordering books. If you would like to learn more about the Afghan cameleers in Australia, please go to www.pamelarajkowski.com

Vocational Training Centre Report 2022

Here are some excerpts from the very comprehensive Report recently provided by Sara, Assistant Director of the VTC. The full Report will be posted on the website soon.

Sara reports: "We were able to restart the English language, computer, literacy, tailoring classes for adults and reinforcement courses for children a few months after the Taliban takeover.

Tailoring:

The tailoring classes are conducted in two shifts. Students in the tailoring classes are mostly women and girls who were not able to continue with their studies.

English language and computer: In English and computer classes, there are girls who are no longer able to go to school since the Taliban took power. Most of the girls suffered severe depression after the closing of the schools. One said to her teacher “After the closing of the schools, I felt that there was no more hope, but after coming here, I came to the conclusion that if one door closes, other doors of education will open.”

Literacy: All the students in the literacy classes are women who are housewives, and who have never had the opportunity to become literate. These women have hopes for the future and want to become literate and act as teachers for their young daughters.

Children’s classes:

We are now providing reinforcement classes for second and third grade children so that they can learn more, in addition to the lessons they study at school. We also teach drawing. The children enjoy these classes and like to depict their dreams with drawing.”
Funds provided by SAWA in 2022

The financial year 2021-2022 began with great worries about how our friends in Afghanistan could continue to operate when the Taliban seized control and clamped down heavily on education for women. Also, with the collapse of the Afghan banking system, SAWA was extremely concerned about how we would send money safely to enable projects to continue.

It is heart-warming to report that through hard work, good communication and the wonderful generosity of friends and supporters, SAWA has been able to meet all the costs of continuing programs in Afghanistan, as well as providing emergency assistance following the devastating earthquake and floods earlier this year.

Flood victims with aid provided by SAWA.

In total, SAWA provided $55,000 for the Vocational Training Centre, $10,000 for earthquake relief and $5000 for flood victims.

Money was sent in smaller amounts than in previous years, via a traditional form of money transfer. All funds were received safely, with receipts provided by our partners in Afghanistan.

NEW HOPE, OMID NOW
(Gali Weiss, Mursal Nazari and Barbara Kameniar)

New Hope, Omid Now, is a project that supports women in Afghanistan who have been denied the right to continue or start their tertiary education since the Taliban took control of Kabul and many other provinces in 2021. Our aim is to assist as many Afghan women as possible to continue to access higher education either within Afghanistan, Australia, or a third country, such as India, Bangladesh or Turkey. The women in Afghanistan with whom we are in contact constantly tell us that education is their one hope for the future of their country.

Working with friends and colleagues, New Hope, Omid Now has already managed to support the tuition fees and living costs of three women outside Afghanistan, and four women within Afghanistan. Our latest breakthrough came towards the end of October. Three young women, from a remote province in Afghanistan, whom we had been supporting since May, successfully entered the Asian University for Women (AUW), a university in Bangladesh. As a result of our collaboration with the AUW, the women are now in Chittagong, starting their new lives through education. They will be studying at the AUW for the next five years.

Student H on her way to AUW

Our second breakthrough last month was our agreement with SAWA(SA) to auspice the project so that all financial contributions to sponsor these other Afghan women for their tertiary education will now be tax deductible.

For more information, please visit: https://galiweiss.wixsite.com/making-marks-book/copy-of-new-hope-1

How SAWA began – A brief history

The Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan was established in Castlemaine, Victoria in October 2003 by a small group of concerned citizens. The inaugural Convenor was Grace McCaughey.

SAWA became an incorporated body in 2004 and established contacts with interested people and organisations around Australia. In its first year, SAWA raised and sent A$40,000 to Afghanistan.

The inaugural SAWA Committee in Castlemaine 2003
Convener: Grace McCaughey, Assistant Convenor: Onnie Wilson, Secretary: Ruth Barkla, Assistant Sec: Deborah Jacob Treasurer: Paul Connell; Committee: Rima Truchanas, Isobel Morley, Kirsten Begg, Helen Watters; Barry Hocking

The Castlemaine group remained the driving force in the early years, raising public awareness for the plight of Afghan women and extending its activities to several cities. But towards the end of 2004 it became apparent that SAWA could work more efficiently if its base was in a capital city. In 2005, a decision was made to elect a new Committee from members of the Adelaide group. At this time Matthias Tomcsak became the Convenor.

The SAWA Group in New South Wales continued as a separately incorporated organisation, supporting a project in Nangahar province.

SAWA-SA and SAWA-NSW have maintained a close and positive working relationship, bound by the same commitment to the women of Afghanistan.

For a more detailed history of the development of SAWA, copies of all quarterly newsletters from February 2004 are available on the website: https://sawa-australia.org/newsletters/
SAWAN Survey results
(from Committee member, Marie Christodulaki)

Thank you to everyone who completed the recent SAWAN survey! There were 41 responses and SAWA is grateful for all your feedback. It was interesting and encouraging to read all responses.

80% of respondents were female and 20% male. Just over 40% were between the age of 76-85, 27% between the age of 65-75, 17% between 56-65, and 10% under the age of 56.

Sixteen respondents reside in South Australia (13 of those in Adelaide), with nine in New South Wales, five in Victoria, three in WA, two in Tasmania, one in Queensland, and five from outside Australia. Over 50% of respondents are financial members of SAWA.

A clear majority agreed that the SAWAN is sent just often enough and enjoy reading every page. News from OPAWC and the VTC were the most read sections, with respondents saying they read to stay informed on news from Afghanistan. A majority of respondents rated overall quality, appearance, readability, relevance/timeliness of content, and ease of navigation as good or very good. Over 45% had made a donation as a result of reading the SAWAN, with some mentioning that SAWAN had prompted them to initiate conversation with others about the situation in Afghanistan and/or passed on the SAWAN to friends.

Other information readers would like to see in future issues include: how SAWA started; more news from inside Afghanistan; future potential projects the VTC; updates on Australian initiatives, relevant books/films etc, and news from local Afghan families in Australia. We will endeavour to include these topics in future issues.

(If you wish to order SAWA eco-silk shopping bags, please see the information below.)


CHRISTMAS is around the corner
Here’s a great gift idea!
SAWA eco-silk shopping bags make beautiful gifts. Gorgeous colours. Easy to wrap and post.

$12 each for pick-up in Adelaide. Add $3 for postage.

Send orders to sawacommittee@gmail.com and payment to BSB 633-000, Acct number 126035633.

** For NSW orders, contact www.nsw.sawa-australia.org

Senator Fatima Payman, WA

Australia has its first Senator with cultural roots from Afghanistan. Senator Fatima Payman was elected in May to represent Western Australia.

Fatima’s father arrived in Australia as a refugee and worked hard to provide for her, her mother and her siblings. He instilled in Fatima the values of hard work and perseverance.

In her work as an organiser at the United Workers Union, Fatima recognised her father’s experience echoed in the lives of many other refugees and working people. Fatima is passionate about breaking down barriers for women and young people, and encouraging them to voice their opinions.

More photos from the Vocational Training Centre in Kabul.

WARM WISHES TO ALL SAWA SUPPORTERS. PLEASE REMEMBER OUR FRIENDS IN AFGHANISTAN AT THIS TIME OF THE YEAR.
COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES in South Australia

On 22 September, a number of committee members and their guests attended a VIP reception at the Hawke Centre, following the August in Kabul presentation where Australian photographer, Andrew Quilty, talked with journalist Peter Greste about his experiences of life in Afghanistan, and his continuing work of documenting the country through pictures and the written word. The invitation to see Andrew’s exhibition provided an opportunity for the Committee to network with others involved in various ways with the people of Afghanistan.

The 7th Annual Ghan International Film Festival was also held in Adelaide on 29-30 October. Committee members who attended this event viewed several original Afghan films. Andrew Quilty appears as himself in the award-winning film, “When Pomegranates Howl”.

The Afghan Film Festival is held in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney annually. Watch for dates in your State.

FILM REVIEW: “When Pomegranates Howl”

Hewad, a 9-year-old boy, supports his family by selling goods from a cart on the harsh streets of Kabul after the death of his father. He and his family face many challenges, but Hewad dreams of escaping his war-torn poverty by becoming a rich and famous film star. An Australian photojournalist, Andrew Quilty, befriends Hewad and starts documenting his life in order to depict a realistic image of the children of Kabul.

Inspired by this, Hewad sets out to enlist his friends to help create an imaginary Hollywood style action film. While he and his friends are playing war games on the streets, tragedy strikes.

This film, which is based on true events, has won many international awards. Directed by Iranian director, Granaz Moussavi, and partly-funded by the Adelaide Film Festival, “When Pomegranates Howl” premiered in Adelaide in 2020.

Highly recommended. Look for it at arthouse cinemas, or on SBS.

FUNDRAISING IN 2023

Next year is already shaping up to be busier than usual. We need to start from scratch to meet our annual commitment to the Vocational Training Centre and other special projects or requests which may arise.

Potential fund-raising activities in 2023 include:
- A Quiz night
- A concert with a local orchestra
- A mid-winter guest speaker event
- Relationships with Service Clubs

We would welcome any ideas – and assistance – from members and friends!

The AGM of SAWA-Australia (SA) Inc. is to be held on Tuesday 15 November, 2022 at 6:15pm at Rumi Palace Restaurant, 303 Prospect Rd, Blair Athol.

Come at 6.15pm to share an Afghan banquet. Cost $45. BYO wine – no corkage fee - click here for more information about dinner.

Please RSVP on https://events.humanitix.com/sawa-australia-sa-annual-general-meeting or directly to sawacommittee@gmail.com

If you can't come for dinner, you are very welcome to just attend the AGM at 7pm, and stand in solidarity with the women of Afghanistan.

Nominations for positions on the Committee will be welcomed.
Our Project in the Khewa District, Nangarhar Province

In the current dangers in Afghanistan maintaining our project requires courage among members of OPAWC (Organisation Promoting Afghan Women’s Capabilities) in Kabul who plan and direct our project and in Khewa among the staff and the women and girls who attend. Always there is fear that the Taliban will swoop with unknown consequences.

To deliver our funds to the project a young OPAWC member courageously takes well-hidden cash for the four-hour road trip from Kabul. She has to be accompanied by a male relative hence a very necessary bodyguard. She has made the quite dangerous journey twice this year thus ensuring that the project continues.

The Centre is really needed and to quote the September 2022 annual report: “Women and children in this region are among the most deprived sections of the society, they could not get education for years due to insecurity and war. The presence of warlords is another reason why women are not allowed to leave their homes.”

There have been some modifications to make the Centre’s activities less obvious to the Taliban. Children’s classes have been added. The report comments:

“Learning English brings smiles to these children. Each of them, unaware of discrimination, has high dreams. They are friendly and loving.”

The well-established English Classes attract twenty young girls who know how to read and write Pashto. These are the girls whose education was interrupted in elementary school mainly due to family problems. Learning English offers the hope that they might find employment in offices or as teachers. Despite the Taliban embargo on women’s employment now they continue to want to prepare for a possible future.

The Computer Classes are now restricted to fifteen students in two small classes to make them less obvious to the Taliban. The students are mainly girls who used to go to school before the arrival of the Taliban but for whom school is currently banned. Again, they learn in hope for the future.

The Tailoring Class is one of the most popular classes in the Center. Forty-two women are split between two classes. They learn to make clothes for themselves and their children. They can also sew for others and earn money without being opposed by male relatives or the Taliban. The recent report comments:

“Women in our centre learn to sew with joy and hope. Besides learning they meet other women and are away from their problems and misfortunes for a few moments. They have time to dream. Tell each other about their problems, give each other hope and help each other overcome their pains”.

Literacy classes are offered to the same group of women. The literacy rate among women and girls in the area of the Center is very low. The forty-two women attend in split one-hour classes teaching firstly the letters of the Farsi alphabet and then reading and writing in Farsi. Elementary mathematics is also taught. The Report comments:

“For years, women in these areas were victims of insecurity and violence. They were not allowed to go to school and become literate. During the years of war, many women have lost their husbands and brothers. Now they have to earn their living expenses. By becoming literate, it helps them to learn ways of earning and to help their children’s education.”

Fundraising

• Saturday 19 November Garage Sale 9.00 am - 2.00 pm at 29 McKell Street, Birchgrove. We are joining the Inner West Council Garage Trail and hope members can donate saleable goods and join us to help on the day for a couple of hours. If you cannot manage to drop off goods on the day, please email (info.nsw@sawa-australia.org) and we will organise their collection.

• Wednesday 30 November Dinner 6.30-7.00pm
This dinner is at the Zaitoune Mezza & Grill Syrian and Lebanese restaurant at 2/225 Morrison Rd Putney (Cost $70). This is our major fundraising event for 2022. We hope as many as possible will come now Covid restrictions have been lifted. For further details email us at info.nsw@sawa-australia.org or phone Robyn 0450 247 488

• AGM
This was held on 27 October. The above Committee were re-elected. There are vacancies on the Committee and we would very much welcome any member who is willing to join. The work is not onerous. The Committee meets monthly.

Photos were taken at the centre in Nangarhar.