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People are NOT for sale

ACRATH News

Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans

June 2019

A letter from ACRATH President and Executive Officer

People are NOT for sale

Dear Friends

Thank you for supporting ACRATH (Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans) in our fight against human trafficking, forced marriage and forced labour. We are asking you again this year to help us raise \$400,000 to continue our work.

As you may know ACRATH's Government funding was cut last year and we continue to rely on your donations to keep working for those who are trafficked and enslaved.

Modern slavery exists in Australia today in various forms. Workers, from developing countries, are brought into Australia to work for very low wages, often in appalling conditions; girls and young women are being forced to marry; people, including children, in developing countries are working for little money, or are enslaved, to produce goods we use every day.

ACRATH is working with the community and government, health, education and civic leaders to bring about systemic change and prevent human trafficking and slavery.

Your support has made significant achievements possible in the past 18 months. Three stories are included in this newsletter that highlight the achievements.

Last year leading up to 30th July, the UN World Day Against Trafficking in Humans, you helped us raise the \$400,000 to keep operating for another year.

Many of you, or your congregations, diocese, parishes or communities, already donate to ACRATH. That is a remarkable contribution that has helped ACRATH do what it does. But we need your support now so we can continue our programs.

One ACRATH donor, Francis Sullivan, former CEO of the Catholic Church in Australia's Truth, Justice and Healing Council, has encouraged others to give to the campaign.

"ACRATH seeks to advocate and educate to raise awareness of the structures and interests that abuse and dehumanise people. Striving to eradicate this evil is non-negotiable. This is a crucial and profoundly important mission that goes to the heart of human decency and compassion. From those of us with the resources, this work deserves our attention and support," Francis said of the ACRATH campaign.

We are asking you to join Francis and many others and help protect thousands of trafficked people, and women and girls at risk of forced marriage.

Please support ACRATH and the victims and survivors of human trafficking today. Please, can you:

1. Make a donation today (donation details are on page 4 of this newsletter).
2. Go to ACRATH's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/ACRATH> and like it. You will then receive the regular posts about our fundraising appeal. To help spread the word please share these posts on your timeline.

Our achievements over the last 12 months in protecting many victims of modern slavery were made possible only through the generosity of supporters like you. We need your help again. Please donate to our appeal and help us bring an end to human trafficking, forced marriage and forced labour.

Thank you for your unwavering support.

Regards

Sr Noelene Simmons SM, President and Christine Carolan, Executive Officer

For more appeal information contact Rosie Hoban on 0431 471046 or rap@acrath.org.au.



Sr Noelene Simmons SM

Trafficked women builds new life with ACRATH support

Maureen Ham is calm in the midst of the chaos endured by some women who are trafficked into Australia, often for sex work. As an ACRATH Companion Maureen offers emotional, spiritual and practical support to women who have been trafficked. Since she began her voluntary work as a Companion five years ago she has supported three women. At the moment she is a Companion to Tina, a 39-year-old woman from Vietnam. (details altered to protect Tina's identity).

ACRATH's Companions, like Maureen, are all volunteers, but it costs \$30,000 a year to maintain the program. The Companionship Program is funded by donations. ACRATH launched its national fund-raising appeal this month in a bid to raise \$400,000 to continue its work fighting human trafficking and modern slavery.



“One of the challenges of being a Companion is accepting that some of the women have very chaotic lives and you will never know the whole story of what they have endured. There are gaps in what we know about their lives and I have to accept that Tina doesn't have to share some parts of her life with me or anyone else,” Maureen said.

While the demands of being a Companion might deter some, Maureen considers herself privileged. “At 78 I am blessed to be a part of this program and have the opportunity to be a Companion to Tina.”

ACRATH has seventeen volunteers across Australia serving as Companions to 28 women and their 24 children. Some have been a Companion to the same woman for more than a decade. Others support women who have had children since they were trafficked into Australia and provide support to the whole family.

Maureen, an ACRATH volunteer from Melbourne, began as a Companion five years ago because it made sense of the anti-trafficking advocacy work she had been involved in for more than a decade. Advocating for better services and resources and policy changes around visas wasn't enough, though Maureen is still very involved in that work. After years of street work with young people in Honolulu in Hawaii, Maureen was familiar with the trauma people face when their dream of a new life turns into a tragedy.

Tina came to Australia for employment in the hospitality industry. When she arrived, as a teenager, she discovered the person who had offered her the 'new life' ran a brothel and forced Tina to work in it for many years.

With the support of services she left the brothel and began training as a hairdresser, but with limited English and a teenage daughter to support, Tina abandoned her training.

“In the end, with rent and lots of other bills to pay Tina went back to sex work, the only world she had ever really known, and she remains in that work today. But as she gets older and younger women come into the brothel to work, she can go one or two nights without a client, so her life is always a little insecure,” Maureen said.

“One of Tina's great struggles is trying to be the best mother she can be under such difficult circumstances,” Maureen said.

Maureen makes no judgments about Tina's work choices, but supports her as a woman and as a parent. That means different things, depending on what is happening in Tina's life at any given time. She accompanies her to appointments, assists with Medicare and other phone queries, helps with the paying of bills if English speaking is required, meets her regularly for lunch and exchanges texts often. Limited English remains one of the barriers to most of Tina's relationships in Australia.

“I feel that I sometimes let Tina down because I can't communicate well enough with her. But we have been together long enough that she knows that I will support her in any way I can” Maureen said.

“I am in awe of Tina and how she transcends the world she has been forced to live in and rise above it. It makes me humble when I see how she is still able to be joyful despite all she has gone through. These women somehow manage to see the light instead of just cursing the darkness.”

ACRATH combats forced marriage in Australia

Samin was 20 when she discovered her parents intended sending her out of Australia to marry in another country. She had been promised to a relative. Samin did not want to leave Australia to marry a stranger. She made contact with an agency and disclosed the imminent marriage. The person she spoke to had participated in an extended training session, presented by ACRATH in the past year.

Samin was supported as the worker followed the referral pathway. The marriage was stopped. Samin continues to receive support.

Today, the marriage of an Australian girl, or woman, is being planned. She might be a schoolgirl, or a woman over 18, but either way she won't know about the marriage until it is imminent. She will not have a say in the marriage.

Each year in Australia girls are forced to marry. The exact numbers are unknown because very few girls report a forced marriage. But Australian Federal Police (AFP) has investigated 174 cases of forced marriage since forced marriage was made illegal in Australia in 2013.

That's the chilling reality of forced marriage in Australia and around the world. ACRATH is working to combat all forms of human trafficking, including forced marriage.

ACRATH is working to stop forced marriage

- In the past 18 months ACRATH has presented at 19 training sessions around the country. These sessions have trained 956 front-line responders.
- ACRATH works with staff and students from Catholic, Independent and Government schools to ensure young women at risk of forced marriage know they have an option and teachers know where to go for help.
- The prevention education is based on the ACRATH resource kit, *My Rights – My Future forced marriage*. The learning material has been developed with nine pilot schools, and numerous government and non-government organisations as part of an Australian forced marriage pilot project in 2015, funded by the Australian Attorney-General's Department.
- ACRATH has helped secure federal funding for support for young women escaping a forced marriage.
- ACRATH is working with the federal government to ensure young people, especially young women like Samin, can access their right to marry if, whom and when they choose.
- ACRATH is training priests and marriage celebrants across Australia to help them recognise a forced marriage.

ACRATH's forced marriage work across Australia costs about \$86,000 a year. While the grants and donations to date have made it possible to cover more schools and communities, we need your support to ensure this program can continue to expand. ACRATH launched its national fund-raising appeal this month (June) in a bid to raise \$400,000 to continue its work fighting human trafficking and modern slavery.

ACRATH's work to combat forced marriage is not done in isolation. We work closely with other agencies, including Australian Federal Police and Anti-Slavery Australia to run training workshops. One example is in Perth where this year key organisations including ACRATH, worked towards developing a statewide network and collaborative approach to combating forced marriage.

The 19 forced marriage training sessions around the country involved working with front-line responders including, police, family violence agencies, schools, child protection workers community groups, clergy and forced marriage experts - the people most likely to hear of a forced marriage or receive a 'disclosure' by a woman who is at risk of forced marriage or who has been forced to marry. These people are now trained in the correct referral pathway if they receive a disclosure relating to a forced marriage.

Major organisations support ACRATH

ACRATH is fortunate to have some key funding partners in the area of forced marriage. A three-year grant from Mary Ward International Australia (MWIA) in 2019 to ACRATH will facilitate the implementation of a forced marriage education program in at least 40 schools and vulnerable CALD communities across Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia.

Mercy Foundation and Highways and Byways (formerly John Wallis Foundation) have also contributed to the forced marriage program.

This Wedding Dress of Tears was created by a group of Year 12 students at a workshop with forced marriage worker Liz Payne. The making of the dress reflected the students' learning about the impacts of forced marriage on girls and young women. The Dress was created from tissues - representing the tears shed by those in, or at risk of, forced marriage. The locks and wire rings adorning the bodice represents the slavery-like practice that is forced marriage.



No end yet to a dark tale of modern slavery in Queensland

Charles Dickens might have written this grim and sad tale in the 1820s. It's about 22 men who were hired to work on farms and promised a good wage. The men were, in most cases, paid nothing and fed little, often relying on the food they picked. Their families in Vanuatu waited for the money to be sent home. Nothing was paid and it must have seemed to the men that few people cared about their plight. But ACRATH, in partnership with other organisations, is pursuing justice for the men.

This abuse didn't happen in 1820, it happened in July 2014 when labour contractor Mr Emmanuel Bani, under the Australian Government's low-skilled Seasonal Worker Program, hired 22 men from Vanuatu, to come and work on fruit farms in Queensland. They were promised legal wages, accommodation and meals. Some of the men took loans for the fares to Australia believing it would make a huge difference to their lives.

In September 2014 the men were 'rescued' by members of the South Sea Islander Association. Thirteen of the 22 men had not received any money in the two months they had been working, and others were paid \$50 to \$150 each. The men are still owed around \$77,000. Some returned to Vanuatu in debt, having borrowed the money to come to Australia for work.

ACRATH needs your support to continue its work to combat forced labour across Australia. ACRATH launched its national fund-raising appeal this month in a bid to raise \$400,000 to continue its work fighting human trafficking and modern slavery.

A story published in the Sydney Morning Herald in 2017, written by Nick McKenzie, said that: *Federal Circuit Court Justice Michael Jarratt struggled to imagine a "more egregious" case of worker exploitation.*

"Most received no wages and while in Australia they had to endure appalling treatment by Mr Bani, who had received payment for the labour undertaken by the employees and payment from the Australian government pursuant to [the SWP]," Justice Jarrett found.

Justice Jarrett has ordered Bani and his firm pay Aru and his fellow workers almost \$80,000 in outstanding wages, although it's unlikely they will ever see the money. The \$227,300 fine issued to Bani by the Federal Court is also unlikely to ever be paid.

ACRATH's Sr Janine Bliss fmm and Columban priest Fr Peter O'Neill were not content to let the matter rest or to accept that the men will go unpaid. They have doggedly pursued the case, lobbying Government and the Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) to push for the men's compensation.

On 29 April 2019, Fr Peter received an email from the Fair Work Ombudsman informing him that the FWO has made an application for an enforcement hearing to be conducted in respect to Mr Bani (employer/contractor). This application has been made in the Federal Circuit Court, Brisbane registry. On 13 May 2019, Mr Bani was served with an enforcement summons.

ACRATH, along with organisations like the South Sea Islander Association, will continue to fight for the mens' stolen wages.

"This is modern day slavery and we can't let it go without fighting right to the end for the wages that these men have earned," Fr Peter said.



Donate Now

Cheques payable to ACRATH Public Fund and posted to:
ACRATH National Office, 54 Beaconsfield Parade, Albert Park, 3206.

Direct Deposit

Commonwealth Bank of Australia
ACRATH Public Fund

BSB 063 111 Account number 10802141

(Please send an email to treasurer@acrath.org.au if you make a donation by direct deposit giving name and contact details so that a receipt can be sent).

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