

## CONVENOR'S REPORT TO SAWA AGM 2019

I am pleased to report that SAWA-Australia (NSW) has again had a very successful year financially which has allowed the expansion of our major project, an Education Centre for women and girls in Qalatak village of Nangarhar Province of Afghanistan.

The Centre, run by OPAWC, Organization Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities, opened in 2016 as a vocational training project to help women gain some life skills. Widows and others who needed to support families were the initial focus for classes in English and computer skills. However, reports in 2017 showed that of the 60 successful applicants (from 500) many were teenagers who had not finished school or who were eager to learn English and computer skills which had not been available to them at school. Once these classes were operating well, OPAWC proposed to add literacy, tailoring and handicrafts to cater for the needs of the initial target group.

In September 2018, SAWA-NSW sent US\$ 16,500 (which cost A\$ 23,470) for the purchase of sewing machines and materials in addition to the continued funding of teachers, rooms etc for English and computers.

We received a report from the Centre in April this year that 30 women had been enrolled for the tailoring course all of whom are illiterate. The women come from different parts of the district as this is the only course available. They are taught measuring, cutting and sewing and the basic literacy needed for the course. Once a week they are shown educational videos on social, cultural and health issues with special attention to pregnancy and childbirth.

Just two days ago, we received the annual report from the Centre which shows how much has been achieved. Over 50 are now enrolled to learn tailoring; they quickly learn to make dresses and can easily set up a shop from home.

30 women are enrolled in literacy classes, in a 9 month course, using a government curriculum. It comprises Dari or Pashto language, mathematics and social studies at a basic level. English and computer classes continue for young women who are already literate. The report includes several student profiles which tell us how the Centre has changed their lives.

In the April report they noted that many girls schools have closed, but that Qalatak village though traditionally conservative, is "quite open minded given that it has had a history of women getting education in the past".

Activities for SAWA-NSW have been similar to those of previous years.

The AGM for 2018 was held in September at this same venue with light refreshments prior to the meeting. There were no constitutional amendments, nor was there a speaker, so it was short and simple much as tonight's is expected to be. The Office Bearers and committee members were all reelected.

The Annual Lunch was held at The Apprentice TAFE restaurant in Ultimo. Unfortunately this time they were unable to cater for more than 60, so we had to refuse some late bookings. The Apprentice is an attractive venue, the food was good and the price allows us to make a good profit. However, the restriction on numbers has led us to find a bigger venue for 2019. Haseeb Miazad has opened a new Bamiyan restaurant in Five Dock and we hope to have the Annual Lunch there in late November.

At last year's lunch, Ruth Shatford from St. Alban's Anglican Church in Epping, sold a good number of Christmas puddings and the Christmas hamper raffle was well supported. The profit from the day was over \$3,000 and early in the new year, we received a donation from Ruth's church of \$ 4,500 which was one third of the total profit from pudding sales. Ruth and St Albans continue to be amongst our strongest supporters and we are very thankful for their efforts.

A pre-Christmas stall was held outside Woolworths, Balmain on 8th December, selling SAWA shopping bags, Bronwyn Monro's home-made plum jam, and some baked goods, resulting in a profit of \$384 plus bag sales. In looking for further ways to promote SAWA, we decided to purchase a banner suitable for use outdoors. These are inexpensive to buy as they are so popular, and we now have a very smart one which was first used for our table at Petersham Town Hall for International Women's Day in March this year.

Another stall was held in February 2019 to publicise and raise funds for the annual birthing kit packing. A raffle was on display and tickets sold for drawing on the packing day, the first Monday in March.

This year the 1,000 birthing kits were fully paid for after a very successful fundraising drive and generous donations from participants on the packing day. With all the plastic sheets being folded beforehand by committee members, the process went quite smoothly. About 50 women gathered at the Leichhardt Rowing Club which once again generously donated the use of their spacious "room with a view". Deanna Fekete led the committee in guiding the packing to ensure kits were complete and tightly packed for boxing. Bronwyn Monro provided a delicious morning tea with some help from her friends.

The Birthing Kit Foundation has now announced a price increase for the kit components, freight and delivery from \$3 to \$5 each. Although the packing of birthing kits remains a very worthwhile and enjoyable annual event for SAWA, it is not a core part of our objectives especially as the kits we pack do not necessarily go to Afghanistan. So, with the rise in price, we have decided to purchase and pack 600 kits in March 2020 with participating volunteers folding the plastic as well as packing the kits, so there will still be plenty to do and we will still need to raise \$3,000.

The major fund-raising event for the year was a dinner with silent auction at the Kazbah in Balmain. There was a wonderful response to the call for auction items resulting in a wide variety ranging from local business vouchers to massages and holiday houses. Generous offers from amongst the 76 attendees brought in more than the item's stated value in many cases. With a good profit on the food as well, we made over \$7,000.

In late May, SAWA received the very sad news of the death of Matthias Tomczak who had been a founder of SAWA-Australia and was the Convenor of the South Australian group. He had been ill for about 2 years, but continued to work for SAWA until the day he died. His loss to SAWA is considerable. He set up and managed the website, including the sub-domain for us in NSW, compiled and edited the quarterly newsletter, SAWAN, and organised all the fundraising for South Australia's projects, the major one being the Vocational Training School in Kabul which has been operating since 2008 and is much bigger than the rural one that we in NSW support. The South Australian group is still looking for someone to take on his work, though it will be hard to find anyone with his degree of dedication. They have an active committee, including a Secretary and Treasurer, but do not have a Convenor or anyone managing the website.

In August, SAWA-NSW prepared a limited version of SAWAN, dedicated to tributes to Matthias, with some news of state activities. We have agreed to continue to compile SAWAN at present, with June Lunsmann from our committee offering to format the material, as she has been doing for our state page for many years.

In June, a documentary, The Judge, the story of the first woman to be appointed a judge in a Sharia court, was shown at the Hannaford Centre in Rozelle. It was very unfortunate that with no prior warning, the projection equipment failed and we had to view the film on a TV set in a small room where many of the audience could not read the subtitles on the small screen. The audience

were mostly very understanding and we made a good profit on the night with refreshments beforehand being offered by the SAWA committee. As we still have a copy of this film on USB, it could be borrowed or we could show it again next year if we feel there is enough interest.

We continue to rely heavily on individual donations which generally amount to about half, if not more, of our annual income. In particular, I would like to thank Ruth Shatford and St Alban's Anglican Church in Epping, Maria Manning, Hans Knutzelius, Margaret Hetheron and an anonymous donor for substantial donations during the past year. Support for fundraising functions is of course also vital. Getting together socially to spread knowledge of the continued needs of women in Afghanistan are important aspects of SAWA's role.

To help with that part of our work, the committee produced a power point presentation about SAWA and support for women in Afghanistan. This was completed in time to send to Inner Circle of Cowra in March this year where they had nominated support of SAWA-NSW for their district groups' fundraising in 2020/21. Unfortunately, our project was not chosen, but the presentation has been since shown to Hunters Hill Rotary and we hope other groups may be interested in its presentation.

I reported last year that SAWA -South Australia had offered to add the NSW project to theirs on GiveNow, so we could get tax deductibility through them. This has now been set up with the NSW project under the title of Education Centre for Women in Rural Afghanistan. Receipts are issued by SAWA(SA) and the money sent to our account when we request it. Donations can still be made directly to our bank account with Bendigo, but to be tax deductible they must be made through GiveNow.

At the end of this financial year, it was decided to send to OPAWC the full amount requested for their budget for the 2019-20 school year which began in September. US\$ 20, 550 was sent which cost A\$30,417. As the value of the Australian dollar has fallen considerably since then, it appears to have been a wise move.

To conclude my report, I want to thank the committee members who have continued to work so hard and effectively, as you can see from the account of activities I have presented. I want to acknowledge their efforts including time, financial contributions and continued dedication. Thanks too to Maryellen Galbally who has served on the committee for many years but is not standing for election this time. I also thank all our supporters who have contributed this year, especially Bronwyn Monro whose plum jam has been a real winner, and to Michele Dunn who continues to update our website whenever asked. This is greatly appreciated as we do not have the expertise needed on the committee.

I acknowledge with great admiration, OPAWC (Organization Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities) who run the project in Nangarhar, the Vocational School in Kabul and other similar projects in Afghanistan. They work tirelessly and bravely in the face of clerical opposition and in dangerous conditions to promote women's rights, to educate women and girls so they may lead productive and independent lives. We hope our continued support will help them achieve their goals.

Shirley Allen  
Convenor, SAWA-Australia (NSW) Inc.

16th October 2019