

## Thanksgiving Fund Committee

### PART A: REPORT

#### Achievements/Activities

##### The general coverage of our activities

The Thanksgiving Fund Committee has been busy. We try to meet monthly by ZOOM on the third Thursday evening of each month. We are very conscious of our responsibility to use Friends' funds with care, and to enable applicants to the Fund to use them in ways in accord with Friends' understandings.

We really appreciate the diligence of some of the Meetings which have ensured that reports on the activities supported are forwarded to us. We hope that this becomes more general, to give applicants the support they need to carry out their project, and to the committee to ensure proper use of Friends' funds.

Since the beginning of this financial year the following applications have been approved for payment (up to March 2023).

1. The Blue Mountains Local Meeting approved an application by Rowe Morrow and Dale Hess for an Afghan Resettlement program to enable 8 Afghan people to resettle in Portugal **\$70,000**
2. Victoria Regional Meeting supported an application for Anne Brown to be part of the Food for the Soul course at Silver Wattle **\$1,845**
3. Melbourne City Local Meeting supported the Hope Cooperative to support a family of 15, some of whom are still in Afghanistan **\$11,000**
4. Queensland Regional Meeting on behalf of Friends Peace Teams to support their peace work in West Papua **\$10,000**
5. West Australia Regional Meeting for Lesli Grant's provision of emergency support for a Burundian pastor **\$750**
6. NSW Regional Meeting supported an application for Gabby Den Holland to be part of the Food for the Soul course at Silver Wattle **\$500**
7. Australia Yearly Meeting requested administrative support for the AYM Secretary **\$31,690**
8. Friends Online Meeting on behalf of Justin Simpson to assist in the publication of a book of poems *Journey Companions* **\$3,000**
9. Victoria Regional Meeting supported the application for a further phase of the Afghan Refugee Resettlement in Portugal **\$100,000**
10. Melbourne City Local Meeting supported the Hope Cooperative to assist a family member of the family (see 3) to escape Afghanistan **\$16,328**

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| 11. Victoria Regional Meeting supported an application to conduct Seeds of Peace training workshops in Somalia  | <b>\$14,470</b> |
| 12. Wahroonga Meeting supported an application from Lisa Wriley on behalf of the Wellspring Community to support travel of a group of four, including Ruth Harvey, an Aboriginal leader, and Lisa to engage in dialogue with First Nations people and other Australians around the theme of Care for Creation. They plan to travel in September/October this year | <b>\$6,000</b>  |
| 13. SANTRM supported an application from Faith Coleman for her to complete her PhD on the environmental state and steps in the restoration of the Coorong   | <b>\$2,500</b>  |

## **Issues/Analysis**

### The Review of the Thanksgiving Fund

In July 2022 Standing Committee asked the AYM Finance Committee to undertake a Review of the Thanksgiving Fund. This Review was produced without consultation with the current Thanksgiving Fund Committee, which had been in operation since mid-2021.

This Review was presented to the specially convened meeting of Standing Committee on 26th November 2022. It confined itself to the financial aspects of the work of the Thanksgiving Fund Committee, and recommended 8 items, 6 of which were agreed by the Thanksgiving Fund Committee. Two items were not agreed by the Thanksgiving Fund Committee. They are:

- A levy of 5% of any Bequest in excess of \$100,000 should be given to the AYM Finance Committee, with no indication whether or not this would be retrospective
- A cap of \$50,000 in expenditure above which agreement of Standing Committee would be required.

Both of these proposals would need significant changes to the Fund's entry in the Handbook, which at present provides that all Bequests/Donations which are not made for a specific purpose, should be placed in the Thanksgiving Fund. There is no mention of a cap on payments from the Fund.

In response, the Thanksgiving Fund Committee believes that the work done by both committees is voluntary so there are virtually no administration costs involved in receiving large bequests or donations. If the purpose of the levy is to cover general costs of the Yearly Meeting, that these should be borne by the Members through the Quota system. If it is to provide funds for a temporary situation in the administration of the Society, it should be presented to the Fund Committee as has happened in the past (see the list of payments agreed in Part A).

The second proposal to limit payments by the Thanksgiving Fund Committee to \$50,000 unless an application is made to Standing Committee could have prevented two major projects in the past year. Together they were involved in the successful escape of 30 refugees from Afghanistan to Portugal. The time frame involved in the first instance was very short - a matter of days and it is unlikely that Standing Committee's agreement and the resultant arrangements could have been achieved in time.

We have heard no suggestion that we have responded to applications irresponsibly.

We are conscious that the mobilisation of large sums at short notice can be difficult for the Finance Committee particularly since the unfortunate resignation of the Treasurer and we are

grateful that they were able to provide the funds needed for these projects. We have always advised the Treasurer when funds are needed and tried to cooperate in such matters.

The Thanksgiving Fund Committee has suggested that the two unagreed items should 'lie fallow' for 24 months to enable time for a reasoned decision to be made.

#### Aftermath of the Review Process

The Review process has caused significant stress to the Members of both Committees. Several members have felt personally attacked and unable to continue to serve. The Presiding Clerk appointed two Friends independent of both Committees to find a way forward. They interviewed the members of both Committees individually and it was acknowledged that the whole Review process and resultant actions had not been carried out with sensitivity and in accordance with the usual practices of Friends.

We ask that given the unfortunate nature of some of the material generated in this whole process, and the likelihood that if circulated in its present form it could inflame the situation, that it not be circulated.

In these 24 months we expect that the Friends involved will be able to find an effective way forward.

#### **PART B: ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION**

1. The Committee asks for approval of our policy of asking the Meeting/group which has supported the Friend's concern to ensure that a report outlining the results of the project reaches the Committee. This should include an acquittal of the funds provided."
2. We ask Yearly Meeting to agree that the two unagreed items in the AYM Finance Committee's Review of the Thanksgiving Fund be set aside for 24 months during which time they can be further considered by both Committees

**Committee members:** *Convener: David Barry; Kate Alessia, Topsy Evans, Lee Harradine*

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