



Initiatives of Change  
Australia

# June Newsbrief

JUNE 2023 ISSUE

HEARTBEATS OF CHANGE:  
EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES,  
IGNITING LIVES

Photo credit: Mike Lowe

## A Word from Our EO

**Margaret Hepworth**  
**Executive Officer – IofCA**

Welcome to our April-May-June Quarterly Newsbrief.

As we move through some chilly months, we can remain warmed by the IofC spirit: Heartbeats of Change; Empowering Communities; Igniting lives. Looking back over these months, I wish to thank you all for your participation in these 'heartbeats', for continuing to find your way to build positive communities and to light up lives. Much of it done with hugs and laughter.

I find myself reflecting on the word faith. Faith comes in many forms. Mike Lowe and I recently facilitated an Interfaith workshop for the Boroondara Council. We all found ourselves opening to new understandings of faith, new possibilities for spiritual growth. Faith moves well beyond the religious domain; it walks hand in hand, in our daily lives, with trust. And hope.

Let's take these with us as we walk the steps to the referendum - A Voice to be heard, in Parliament. A moment in history for the maturation of our country.

I take this moment to send all best wishes to those travelling to Caux. Safe travels and we look forward to hearing your stories on your return - and thanks to our technological world - whilst you are there!

We love hearing all your stories. Please continue to send them in. Thoughts, reflections, poems, songs, stories of what you are doing; who you are being. We welcome them all.

Cheery blessings,  
Marg

[View Our Work: March - May 2023](#)

“

When we live to empower others, we empower everyone, including ourselves! We empower our community, country and our world and the result is healing, peace and transformation. ”

*- Barbara Lawler*





# Community

## **It's a gift to one another**

*Nivanka Bhagvandas*

Deep in the human psyche - and in the Imagination - is a whole world of unexplored terrain, of myths and even fears from way back; connections both past and present, new understanding and realisations; mystical stirrings that make one stop in their tracks...

Community in general - and perhaps in lofc in particular - there's room to roam in this sometimes yet unexplored terrain, to discover and to KNOW from within that there's so much yet to know.... Being in community makes it both fun as well as challenging sometimes to discover these 'new' ingredients in ourselves and through our connections in community. Community getting together makes possible this gift to ourselves and each other.



## What community means

*Jean Brown*

There are many ways to describe the structure of Initiatives of Change. This is one...as a community of communities.

For 55 years I have been committed to IofC or big 'C' - Community, while engaging fully with various IofC small 'c's - communities, made up of few or many diverse characters. Currently IofC Australia, Creators of Peace, Action for Life alumni; in the past communities in London, India, the USA, South Sudan; some residential, some regional, some issue or project oriented, some programme based, some time bound. Like all communities whether IofC or not, all hold in common 3 things - a shared story, a shared purpose, and a shared practice.

Our IofC shared story is well over 100 years old. One young man entrapped in blame finds enlightenment in the revelation that 'change starts with me'. I would just like to draw attention to the word 'starts'. Radical in itself, but it doesn't end there.

We are constantly revisiting our shared purpose. So many ways to say it; healing history, changing people for a changed world, a moral and spiritual revolution, a transformed society, Giving Voice to Values, building trust across the world's divides; Getting Movement into people, not people into a movement, as Buchman used to say.

In our deconstructive mechanistic world view we have no doubt been responsible for some amazing things, but have missed out on the primacy of relationship, the intricate web of respectful relationship of all of life forms, animal, vegetable and mineral. We have substituted with digital webs, and webs of corruption and intrigue. We want to Remake a living Relational world. A shared Humanity in respectful relationship with all of life.

So we share in practices that we think will help. Personal moral integrity and change where needed, sharing and real care for one another. Humble leadership and curious listening. And a practice of Inner Listening, deeply reflective, making space in silence for that spiritual wisdom beyond the ego to be heard, quietly correcting and directing. Nurturing the prime relationship of our being. Prompting initiatives for transformation.

Of course all these practices can become ritualistic when we cease to be fully, authentically conscious of their true meaning and value.

Our ideas of change need to be backed up by practice. There is no experience, no empirical evidence without the experimentation of practice. Without that we are in danger of becoming a band of just impressive theorists!

Our communities must always live in a global context, aware of the needs of the world around us. We want our communities to be porous, inclusive, joyful, not silos of safety. We want our communities to be the heart beats of this world, remaking empowerment hubs. Places of belonging and outreach, where individuality and the collective are treasured but where individualism and herd mentalities are called out. Honesty and unselfishness are key tools of effective communities. We all have this 'change or bust' message to deliver, so it is just the 'how' we need to continue to work on. Remembering that fundamentally, as Gandhi said 'My life is my message',

Our challenge now is how our communities relate to each other. We need to link arms like Olympic rings, share with each other, be interested in each other, encourage each other. Therein lies our strength and the humble space for the emergence of our global engagement. Perhaps the restoration of practice is where we need to start?





## IFTAR DINNER ARMAGH 16 APRIL 2023

It was a wonderful night at Armagh on Sunday 16 April at the Iftar dinner hosted by the Afghan Australia Initiative and IofCA. Afghan, Iranian, Indian, Chinese, Sri Lankan, Jewish communities and more came together to celebrate and support our Muslim friends. Speeches from Dr Michelle Ananda-Rajah MP, Cassandra Fernando MP, Bwe Thay VIC Multicultural Commission, Jason Wood MP, Shabnam Safa RAAG, Nazer Nazir AAI and Abe Schwarz, Interfaith dialogue were heartfelt and inspiring.



Saheem Wani, a participant at the dinner, writes:

*"A memorable Iftar dinner organised by Initiatives of Change Australia and the Afghan Australian Initiative. It's said that Australia is world's most successful multicultural country. Listening to a Jewish man read from the holy book of Islam to an audience of Afghans, Australians, Iranians, Indians, Chinese, Turkish community, Sri Lankans and more, brought this to life for me. Thank you Initiatives of Change Australia. As the next step, I'm looking forward to your talks on the Voice Referendum. Sure enough, we've come a long way and have a long way to go. If this Iftar is anything to go by, I think we'll get there sooner rather than later. Ramadan Mubarak everyone."*

# ARMAGH COMMUNITY DINNER

## MAY 11 2023

The Armagh ballroom was a very lively scene indeed on the evening of 11 May for the first in a series of Community Dinners. Tables had been set for the forty eight we expected but another table had to be quickly found to cater for the overflow. The multi-cultural mix of people was a real feature of the occasion as was the amazing range of different foods that were on offer at this pot luck meal. Among those attending were people who are refugees from some of the world's areas of humanitarian crisis including Afghanistan, Myanmar and South Sudan - a valuable opportunity to hear their perspectives on the current situations facing their homelands. For quite a few it was their first experience of Armagh and friendships seemed to quickly develop between them and those who are regulars at the home.

The theme of the evening was, 'In an age of individualism, how do we move towards connection and belonging?' Mike Lowe, lead facilitator, Ethical Leadership, IOFCA, engaged the audience in a thoughtful discussion on how this transition might be achieved. He spoke of the importance of people finding a sense of need of each other even when we seem divided. The message seemed timely with the challenge that Australia faces in this referendum year to build relationships that work and last because they are based on truth telling and trust building. Another striking feature of the event was the rhythmic West African drumming and dancing presented by an international group at the conclusion of the program. It included the host of the night, Azain Raban, an Australian of Sri Lankan background. He encouraged everyone to join the next Community Dinner on 13 July which will be on the theme of 'Developing a culture of appreciation - actioning our gratitude'.

- Rob Wood





## A DAY FOR ARMAGH 27 MAY 2023

Over 20 people came to help "give back" to Armagh, the IOFC centre in Melbourne on 27 May by repairing, restoring, polishing furniture and silverware, cleaning walls and floors, and outdoors in the gardens raking and bagging dead leaves, cutting back overgrowth and weeding garden beds. There was a beautiful community feel to the morning as people caught up with old and new friends, working alongside them and then over a simple shared lunch of soup, bread and sausages.

- Mike Lowe



TUESDAY 30 MAY, 2023

# The Autumn Peace Concert

On Tuesday 20 May, a truly unique cultural collaboration, featuring a maiden trip to Australia by Sumatran songbird Vanny Vabiola, Chinese musicians, and Warren Wills and the Young World Choir took place at the Armagh ballroom.

*"It was so nice amidst a very challenging backdrop to present an evening bringing people of all faiths, abilities, ages, nationalities, together for a musical evening celebrating peace. It was a thrill having Vanny over from Sumatra and we are thrilled to establish an Indonesian connection along with our Chinese, blind, homeless, Arab, Jewish, IofC and Cultural Infusion connections.*

*Being able to highlight forthcoming NIGHT OF BROKEN GLASS, which commemorates the 85th anniversary of the events of Kristalnacht featuring William Cooper and the amazing tale, was a positive as the Young World Choir performed so admirably.*

*I felt elated with the collective goodwill of not only our large diverse cast but the totally inclusive makeup of a generous and appreciative audience. Thx to all those who participated and IofC for hosting".*

- Warren Wills



# Our Programs

## FIRST PEOPLES PATHWAY



Week 1, Tuesday 9 May - *For the Voice*

The fourth round of Turruk workshops, joining First Peoples led yarning circles with an army of allies, commenced on Tuesday 9 May with in-person and online participation.

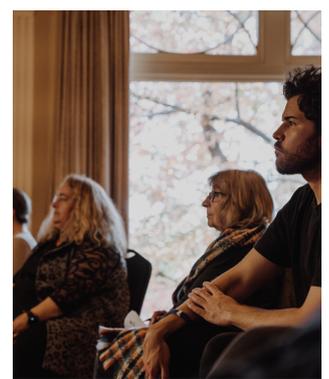
*Photo credits: Max Roux*





## WEEK 2 – TUESDAY 16 MAY – TREATY – INCLUSIVE DIALOGUES

A powerful Turruk yarning circle and masterclass unpacking Treaty was held on Tuesday 16 May, the second workshop in this series of Turruk. Commissioner Maggie Walter shared impactful insights explaining the role of the Yoorrook Truth Commission, it's role in collecting truth hearings and making recommendations that will guide the trail blazing Treaty process in Victoria.





## WEEK 3 – 23 MAY – TRUTH – HEALING HISTORICAL WOUNDS

Week three of Turruk on Tuesday 23 May, included a heartfelt Acknowledgement of Country made by Yugembah Nation man Jai Allen Wright, amidst the last of the autumn leaves at Armagh.

Uncle Shane Charles led the tone of the yarning circle with Healing Historical Wounds of Yorta Yorta Country and Mike Brown, IofCA member, spoke of healing his colonial ancestry and screened the short of ABC's *Close to the Bone*.





## WEEK 4 – TUESDAY 30 MAY – MAKARATTA – DIVERSE COLLABORATION

Turruk participants on Tuesday 30 May sensed a deepening in the fourth yarning circle held coming around the theme of Makarrata in Reconciliation week.

We witnessed courageous and generous story sharing of Elders Uncle Glen Loughrey and Aunty Melissa Brickell. It was an honour to witness the power in their vulnerability and see this ripple effect creating waves to change hearts and minds.





## WEEK 5 – TUESDAY 6 JUNE – HEALING AND JUSTICE – TRUSTBUILDING FUTURES

Another extraordinary Turruk series came to end on Tuesday 6 June. The final sessions included guest speakers Jai Allen-Wright, Leigh Saunders, Dr Michelle Ananda-Rajah MP and Uncle Trevor Pearce, taking participants into deep and powerful places.

Jai's bravery in his story telling was both emotional for everyone, whilst broadening a perspective on the need for the Voice. Uncle Michael McDonogh's reading of his poem, Lost Son, was heartfelt and moving beyond words. The session was beautifully framed by Maddy and Reuben, both young people committed to the growth of this transformational work through lofC.

Thank you to the growing team who support and build this work, and above all to the First Nations speakers who have opened their hearts and voices in sharing their truth-telling with us all. As Uncle Glenn said, 'Important work is being done here.'







## THE VOICE CAMPAIGN STEPS TO THE REFERENDUM

### Senator Penny Wong speaks on the Voice in Higgins

What an honour indeed to have IofCA represented alongside Senator Penny Wong, at Higgins' Voice to Parliament update, hosted by Dr Michelle Ananda-Rajah on Thursday 13 April. Dr Michelle has visited Armagh several times, and attended our 'Steps to the Referendum' forum in January this year. Being well aware of not only our work, yet the spirit and purity of intent behind it, in speaking to both individuals and our national conscience, she invited IofCA to play an active role in Senator Penny Wong's visit to Higgins.

Senator Wong put everyone at ease with her calm and welcoming demeanor. Gentle yet firm, and with clear messaging, Senator Wong outlined the need for First Nations recognition and to be heard, in the Constitution, so that it cannot be replaced at the whim of subsequent governments.

Uncle Shane Charles began the event with a stirring Welcome to Country, and Uncle Glenn Loughrey's powerful speech, and explanation of 'persona nullius' left no room for questioning the 'Why' of the Voice. He also let Senator Wong know that his wife is a big fan and he would be in trouble if he did not come home with a photo. Ha!

My role was to share 'How to have conversations on the Voice.' 'IofC builds bridges of trust, not defensive walls. We sat together, asking this question, How do we wish to take out our thoughts on the Voice. The answer was relatively simple - to remain curious, to listen and to always maintain respect. To allow my conscience to speak to your conscience.'

Noel Pearson's profound words, 'We're going to meet hate with love; we're going to meet fear with understanding' was shared. 'Most interestingly, Julian Leeser has just voted and walked with his conscience,' saying he wants his children to know he stood up for what he believes is right.

Everyone in the room was reminded that the Voice isn't about politics. Uncle Glenn explains it is about Justice. He asks what else would you place at the centre of the call to Voice, Treaty, Truth and Makaratta - Spirit? Healing? What would you place at the centre?

Senator Wong also shared with us the news of the appointment of Australia's inaugural Ambassador for First Nations People, a role that will develop a First Nations Foreign Policy Strategy, enhance Australia's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region and progress First Nation's rights and interests globally. IofCA looks to the potential of engaging again with Senator Wong, and with the Ambassador, Mr Justin Mohamed, to share our work in the region and news of the Global Indigenous Dialogue at Caux.

I wish to sincerely thank Dr Michelle Ananda-Rajah for this opportunity to meet, hear from and share with Senator Penny Wong. A privilege indeed.

- Marg Hepworth





## A CONVERSATION AROUND THE VOICE COORDINATED AND MODERATED BY TANYA FOX – JUNE 2023

Moderating a panel of three distinguished people with different perspectives on The Voice, proved to be very enlightening and helpful to the audience of 46 people who came to enquire, learn and share their concerns. The audience was a mix of ages with a passion for social justice which greatly impacted the meeting. At the beginning there was an energy of fear and confusion, and many were still un-sure and a few were obvious no-sayers, hence a healthy mix of different opinions resulted.

Throughout the two-hour meeting, we effectively shed light on some questions: 'Why vote Yes?' and 'How will it change the Constitution?' The no-sayers asked difficult questions: 'Billions of dollars have been ploughed into helping them already, how will this help anymore?', 'Why are some indigenous against the vote?', 'How many Indigenous representatives will make up the Voice and how will they be elected to represent Indigenous peoples?'

Margaret Weiss M.A., retired government lawyer shared from a legal perspective on the Constitution, and Aboriginal land rights policy and legislation. Rabbi Alon Meltzer, Director of Programs at Shalom, and spokesperson for the StandUp Kol Halev Jewish Community campaign supporting the Voice to Parliament, shared from a Jewish perspective.

Dr Ben-Zion Weiss, a scholar in Cultural & Social Ecology and community educator in cross-cultural conflict, anti-racism, and non-violence training shared from a Social Ecology perspective, and having participated in Jewish Aboriginal dialogue, espoused that 'to make peace with the earth requires of us to make peace with our First Nations people who see the Earth as their Mother traditionally committed to her.'

We were able to answer some of the more difficult questions by referring to the 'The Voice to Parliament' Handbook, by Thomas Mayo & Kerry O'Brien. The fact that someone asked where to get a copy of the book, and one person said he came un-sure to the meeting and had now made up his mind on how to vote, were both indicators of the effectiveness of the conversation.

The meeting closed with: 'It's been a long struggle for recognition, and for the past 250 years, the parliaments of Australia, have denied Indigenous Australians their rights, and sought to control every aspect of their lives – and this hasn't worked. If we understand this, we can understand the call for an Indigenous advisory body to parliament -which will only come if we vote YES.'

By the end there was a real buzz and change of energy in the room, and a lot of gratitude for the clarity that we'd shared.



## A Conversation toward Yes' with MP Sheena Watt

On Tuesday 11 April, IofCA staff Marg Hepworth and Kathryn Farrell attended A Conversation toward Yes at Philhellene Greek Restaurant in Moonee Ponds. The key speaker at the event was First Nations State MP Sheena Watt. Sheena spoke brilliantly and her words inspire us all, 'we, as a nation, must be called to something bigger.'

### STEPS TO THE REFERENDUM ONLINE FORUMS

'Steps to the Referendum' online forums hosted by Uncle Shane Charles, Uncle Glenn Loughrey, Marg Hepworth and Kathryn Farrell were held on Monday 1 May and Tuesday 27 June

The forums have had a great turnout with a strong yearning to understand how individually we can act from our hearts in raising awareness around the Voice to Parliament.

The common feeling has been that we need to move beyond fear in this vote and come together for a better future. IofC International President Gerald Pillay has said, 'not all the darkness in the world can put out our candle' - May we remember these words as we move forward with compassion toward this generational historic moment.

For many, the most memorable parts of the Forum was hearing Uncle Glenn Loughrey's brief timeline on how we've arrived at this important Referendum, as well as Uncle Shane Charles dispelling the myths of the No Vote.

The online forums will continue to be held in July and August.

Next forum dates:

- Monday 31 July 7:30 - 9:30 pm
- Tuesday 29 August 2 - 4 pm

# Healing and Reconciliation



## CREATORS OF PEACE

CoP Speaker Series - An Afternoon in Conversation.

The speakers and topics for the quarter were:

April: Philip Feinstein - OAM, Founder of Music for Refugees - *A man on a selfless life journey*



[Watch Recording](#)



May: Warren Roberts, a proud Thunghutti and Bundjalung man, Community Organiser extraordinaire, and Founder of YARN Australia.

[Watch Recording](#)



## MECA REFUGEE WEEK 2023 – STORY SHARING

We were thrilled to be invited back for a third year to facilitate the Story Sharing event at the annual Mount Druitt Ethnic Communities Agency (MECA) Refugee Week program. The 2023 theme was "Finding Freedom" - a theme aimed to highlight some positive aspects of the refugee experience and help the broader community to understand what it is like to be a refugee.

There were more than 50 people in attendance from more than 20 different countries, each joined a circle of nine, including a Facilitator. Participants were asked these two questions:

- "What comes to mind when you hear the word freedom?"
- "What sort of freedom have you experienced in Australia?"

It was a huge privilege for us facilitators to hear their stories. It was so humbling to notice the eyes of the people in my circle light up as they expressed comments like: 'I'm not sad anymore'; 'I can now educate my children'; 'I've been trapped and now I'm free'; 'I'm free from religious persecution'; 'I can have a monogamous marriage now'; 'I love hearing stories of others'; 'It was a little confronting, though a lovely and safe opportunity to reflect on my freedom and what freedom means for other people'.

Regardless of where they were from, this event offered refugees the opportunity to share their story and feel validated having been heard, and to learn that they've all shared common challenges settling into a new environment after experiencing the perils of their refugee journey, and that they can also find Freedom and Hope.

The audience really appreciated a profound message shared at the end by Zohra into the difference between 'assimilation' and 'integration':



*Assimilation involves identification with the host country's culture at the cost of leaving one's own cultural identity behind.*

*However, when 'integration' happens, migrants can keep parts of their culture while adopting parts of the host country's culture too.*



- Tanya Fox



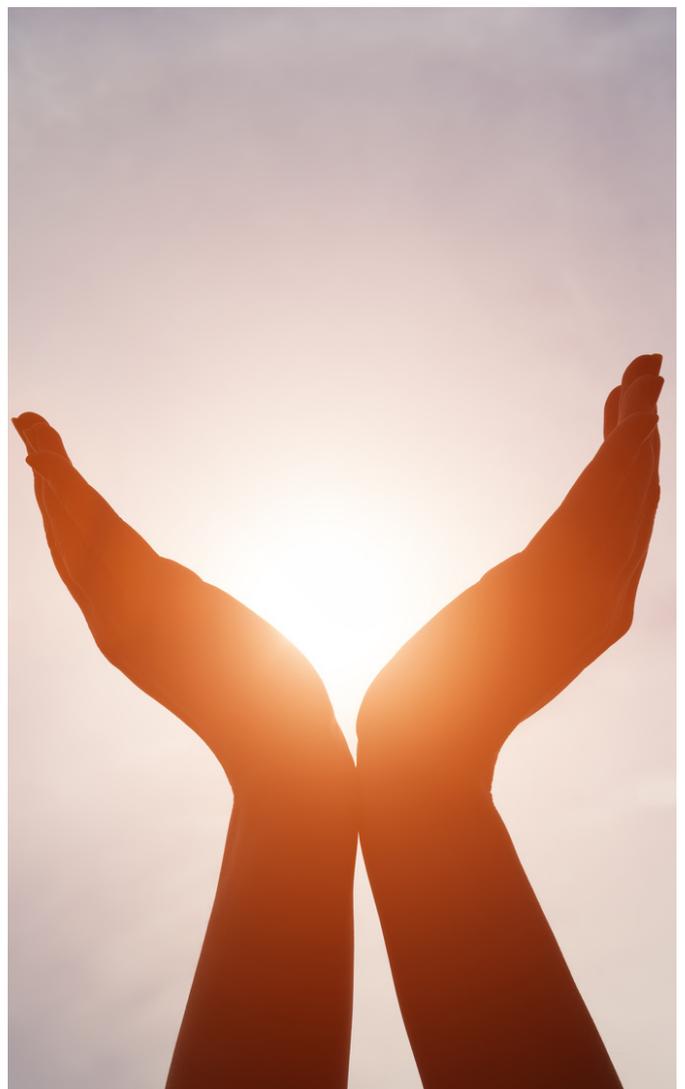


## 2023 RAISING PEACE FESTIVAL

IofC facilitators led small discussion groups at this year's Raising Peace Festival. The theme was 'Building for Peace', and the objective was to motivate people to take non-violent action against the current trajectory of war mongering. It was a one-day hybrid event held on Saturday 22nd April, honoring Anzac Day Remembrance.

The audience were motivated by inspiring guest speakers: Pastor Ray Minniecon Anglican Aboriginal Pastor and life-long supporter of the Stolen Generations of Aboriginal people; Eddie Synot First Nations public lawyer and researcher; Dr Keith Suter AM strategic planner and futurist; and Professor Wunning Sun professor of media & communications.

IofC facilitators each led a discussion group/breakout room on one of the four topics: Political Outreach - Public Outreach - Personal Outreach - Creative Action.



## CREATORS OF PEACE CIRCLE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

12 women aged between 17-77, shared in a Creators of Peace Circle next to a river in South Australia in early June, facilitated by Jean Brown and Kirsty Argento.

Just as a healthy river is never static, so is Peace. We affirmed together that it is a dynamic process, meeting all the needs of people and that we each have a part in that as we learn to 'live peace'. The safe space and the brave space that the Circle provides, allowed for a remarkable degree of trust among strangers willing to be vulnerable with their stories, and the challenges to find freedom through forgiveness and inner listening. 'A powerful experience', said one participant. Most touching was the conversation about finding compassion for the back-story of the perpetrator and the unresolved pain they live out of.

As one participant summed up 'Understanding peace as active was powerful, and I'm coming to understand my role in that, particularly in relation to forgiveness and inner listening.'

- Jean Brown

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*It never ceases to amaze me what can happen when a group of women get together. It is so important to remember to create spaces for women to do this.*

- Creators of Peace Circle Participant

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“

Understanding peace as active was powerful, and I'm coming to understand my role in that particularly in relation to forgiveness and inner listening.

- Creators of Peace Circle Participant

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# STORIES OF TRANSFORMATION



'In the depths of self-discovery, I have turned towards a transformative path. With each step taken and every challenge embraced, I have witnessed the profound growth that resides within. Through healing trauma and generational wounds, I have nurtured my inner essence, shedding layers of doubt and fear. Through adversity, I am learning to rise above, finding strength where weakness once dwelled. It is in these moments of reflection that I realize the immense power of growth, the beauty that emerges from the depths of change. With open arms, I am still learning to welcome the unknown, knowing that transformation is the gateway to becoming the best version of myself.'

A big question that still navigates a lot of my life journey and focusses my constant curiosity on peacemaking is why we as humans struggle with the concept, and too easily turn towards violent means to resolving conflict. More importantly, how does one become a peacemaker? After years of reading through academic journals in my studies, interacting with multicultural community leaders, faith leaders, politicians and current ongoing dialogue, I have come to learn peacemakers embrace the true meaning of humanity and forgiveness. When individuals begin reconciliation through the lens of humanity, the outcome is often different to that of hostility. Peacemakers have a vision, one that encompasses unity, selflessness, love and respect.

Upon finding my inner sense of direction and need for positive change, I seek regular guidance spiritually and from my mentors for clarity to remain on the path of becoming an instrument of peace. I hope to empower a respect for differences by creating unity across barriers that have previously divided them. For these reasons, I look forward to sharing both Caux Scholars this year and Life Matters experience with the Brisbane community in 2024.'

**Naome Rusera, BA in Peace and Conflict Studies and in Social Sciences, University of Queensland, is Executive Officer with the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland. Naome, with Rwandan background, works to empower young people and communities in their journey, and is currently en route to join the Caux Scholars Program.**



# Our Initiatives

## Creating Space

Creating space is an opportunity for the community to gather each month to deepen their own spiritual practice and renew their sense of purpose in the world. It is a joyful, fresh and loving space for reflection, inner listening and sharing. Creating Space is held the first Monday of every month on Zoom.

## Soul Care

Soul Care runs every second and fourth Wednesday of each month 7.30 - 9 pm at Armagh.

Each session has some inspiring "soul food" on a prepared theme, followed by discussion and then a time of inner searching and connecting to the inner voice of wisdom within each one of us, followed by a sharing of what we learned.

## Films for Change

A film night is held at Armagh on the first Thursday of each month. A carefully selected film is screened to prompt thought and discussion.

Films shown so far are:

- For the Love of Tomorrow
- Judgement at Nuremberg
- Gran Torino