

Spiritual Education Group - Sub-committee Report

January to December 2021

The Spiritual Education Group had its first meeting in October 2021 and has since met on a regular basis.

Committee members include

- Ajahn Hasapanna: Dhammasara Sangha Representative
- Ajahn Brahmali: Bodhinyana Sangha Representative
- Linda McGuire: Lay Teach Coordinator
- Sandra Henville: Care Group Coordinator and SEG Chair
- Veronica Damali: Outreach Coordinator

In addition, the following people provide valuable input:

- Andrew McDougal - Acacia Prison Liaison
- Sol Hanna - Busselton, Augusta, Margaret River Buddhist Initiative (BAMBI) Coordinator
- Lee Chan - Sunday Dhamma School Manager
- Anusha Yatawara - Community Coordinator

The Spiritual Education Group (SEG) was established to:

- create appropriate criteria for the accreditation of lay teachers of the BSWA
- promote the teaching and practice of the Buddhist Eightfold Path, with a focus on the development of kindness, generosity, morality, meditation, and wisdom
- oversee teaching-outreach programs
- expand the reach of the BSWA to areas within Western Australia that have not been well served by it in the past.

The emphasis of the SEG will be upon training, accreditation, and oversight of experienced lay teachers, as well as developing courses and course materials to support lay teachers. The SEG are currently in the process of liaising with all existing the prospective teachers using a questionnaire that will assist in assessing any gaps in knowledge as the starting point in the process of accreditation.

Highlights from 2021 included:

- Andrew McDougal has been liaising with the **Acacia Prison meditation program** faced several challenges in 2021. The Department of Justice had not been actively processing clearances since October 2020, and SERCO was understaffed, meaning the Prison was not always accessible. Despite this, the meditation program was able to continue. Liz Gibbons supplied books on Buddhism to Acacia, for the prisoners to borrow or keep. The Non-Contracted Services application for all WA Prisons by BSWA written by Dennis Shepherd and Stephen Connell, was approved and a significant number of clearances for the Monastics to all WA Prisons were processed. This year, Peter Frewen has started to visit prisoners at the **Bunbury Prison** providing books, handout materials and discussion.

- Weekly Wednesday night lay-speaker talks, and meditations were held by the **Care Group** throughout 2021 and were well attended with good interaction both in person and online. 52 talks were streamed in total delivered by eight Senior Lay Teachers with up to 3,500 views per talk on You Tube. See [Care Group Playlist](#). This series has now been rebadged Dhamma Yarns and operates on the first Wednesday of each month.

- The **Care Group** continued to operate the Care Line for much of 2021 providing support to those in need. Phone lines were open to coincide with the Wednesday night talks. Calls steadily began to grow with the introduction of WhatsApp functionality. However, after 18 months of operation, resource constraints meant

that the Care Line trial was wound up in November 2021. The Group gained many valuable insights from this experience on how to connect and offer support our community of lay practitioners. A sincere thankyou is extended to everyone who participated in this project and in particular Linda McGuire and Bill Prince who took charge of the phonedlines for much of the remaining months.

- A weekend retreat themed 'Listen, Reflect and Connect' was held by the **Care Group** in December 2021 where skills in compassionate listening were taught so that people could take these back into their everyday lives. Several people become BSWA members as a result. 34 people attended. The following feedback was received:

'This was a very gentle retreat, yet the program was so inspiring. It was a great way to connect with the wonderful people of BSWA.'

'I had a wonderful retreat, I had space to meditate, be alone if I required that, engage with others and to learn skills that I could apply in my daily life and to hold space for others in difficult times. It was peaceful and a great retreat centre to reconnect and recharge.'

- The **Kalyana Friendship Community** and **Be Quiet Perth** (sub-groups of the long running **Kalyana Mitta**) ran alternating events on a weekly basis with excellent involvement from the lay community and the sangha. The groups are described as follows and are coordinated by a dedicated group of volunteers.

- **Be Quiet (BQ):** A group of young mindfulness enthusiasts aged 18-35 who meet twice a month with a monk or nun to practice, have inspiring discussions inspired by Buddhist teachings, while being inclusive of everyone's spiritual practices. Coordinators are Aurora Tait and Reynard Hodson.
- **Kalyana Friendship Community (KFC):** Kalyana Friendship Community is an inclusive community of compassionate humans from all age groups that meet twice a month with a monk or nun to ask questions, share dhamma, listen to each other & cultivate mindfulness practices inspired by the Buddhist path. Coordinator is Sandra Henville.

- **BSWA Community Coordinator** Anusha Yatawara, coordinated the very well attended Kalyana Mitta 'Open Your Heart' weekend retreat was held in May 2021 with Ven Munissara from Dhammasara. In addition, the BSWA enjoyed another excellent portfolio of speakers for the Friday night talks during Rains Retreat. Speakers included Kelsang Tara from the Kadampa Meditation Centre, Aboriginal Elders Shaun Nannup and Darryl Henry and Imam Shakeeb from the Perth Mosque.

- **BAMBI** (Busselton, Augusta, Margaret River Buddhist Initiative), under the coordination of Sol Hanna have been running weekly sessions with dhamma teachings, guided meditation and question and answer discussions at the Margaret River Community Centre and Nannup. Last year Ajahn Hasapanna visited early in the year, and Ajahn Brahm visited in November for weekend visits. In January 2022, Venerable Kassapa began a residency and has been teaching in Nannup, Margaret River and Dunsborough. Many group members have enjoyed improvement to their practice, not only through being able to hear teachings from a skilled monk who is walking the talk, but from also offering food and support. These efforts have also brought the community together to practice and do something positive together.

- The **BSWA Sunday Dhamma School** continued to be very popular throughout 2021 and offers a curriculum, dependent on age group, that develops the heart of human goodness. It incorporates kindness, universal compassion, altruism, and social connectedness using the stories of the Buddha along with a range of contemporary references. The school program is managed by Lee Chan who is assisted by several voluntary teachers. In 2021, the student numbers were as follows: Pre-primary/Junior class: 15 students; Middle class: 13 students; Secondary class: 15 students and Senior class: 16 students.

Sandra Henville
Chairperson - Spiritual Education Group
April 2022