

# NORTHERN BEACHES REFUGEE SANCTUARY

A project of the Manly Catholic Social Justice Group

Patrons: Thomas Keneally and Des Hasler

NEWSLETTER CHRISTMAS 2003

## LETTER FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

Welcome to the first newsletter of the Northern Beaches Refugee Sanctuary.

### THE PROJECT'S BEGINNING

We started the project after one of our members learnt of the work of the Sanctuary Group in Coffs Harbour. The Hallam family has been helping families migrate to Australia for 17 years. We thought we would like to try and do the same.

We agreed to start a loan scheme which would raise money to lend to refugees to pay for the airfares needed to migrate to Australia. The families would need to already have valid Australian visas (Humanitarian class 202) allowing them permanent residency. They would have to agree to repay the loan, interest free after they had settled in. We discussed the idea and decided to start with a Trivia Night.

We identified the first family we would help. Their sponsor was James Koroma, their uncle, and he agreed to talk at the Trivia Night about the family's plight. He talked about the horrors of life in a refugee camp. He recounted his escape from Freetown, and spoke of the suffering of the Sierra Leone people. In particular he told us of the plight of his niece, Fatmata, whose husband was murdered and how she was violated, stabbed and beaten necessitating the family to seek refuge in Guinea and lose everything. James spoke of the danger from rebel soldiers, the shortage of food and the lack of any medical care; the daily struggle just to survive. The problems were compounded as the visa was to expire in two months and James didn't have the money for the airfare. To quote James "To be so close to freedom and yet in danger of missing out because of a lack of funds, caused much anxiety. Fatmata and her family had nothing and they had no prospect of raising the funds in a refugee camp."

James also told us that he was trying to help his nephew's family of five who were in the same camp as Fatmata. Their visa was also expiring shortly. Matters were complicated as James and his family were refugees and had only been here for 2 years and obviously had neither funds for airfares nor a borrowing capacity. Indeed it seemed certain neither Fatmata nor Peter would be able to use their visas.

### **HERE WAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE THE LIVES OF 2 FAMILIES ALL WE NEEDED WAS THE MONEY FOR AIRFARES.**

We subsequently raised \$7,500 from both the Trivia night and from local Parish and other donations. We then borrowed the balance of \$2,500 and paid the airfares.

A family from our Parish generously loaned the second family the airfare of \$10,000.

### THE FIRST FAMILY ARRIVES

Fatmata, Charles (22), Daniel (20), Lamin (15) and Melissa (8) arrived on June 27<sup>th</sup>. It was a cold wet day but the start of a new life.

Fatmata now works in a Nursing home. She has already completed one training course and is starting on a one year part time course next January.

Charles and Daniel have now obtained their security guard licences, ceased their temporary employment and found permanent work in the security field. Lamin and Melissa are at school and doing well. Their English is improving and it won't be long before they have Australian accents! Melissa is also learning to swim.

They are doing so well. They are so happy and healthy. To have suffered so much must leave permanent pain but the hope and joy they have is an inspiration to us all.

### THEN ANOTHER FAMILY

The second family from Sierra Leone Peter, Julianna and their children David, Desmond and Adel arrived on 15<sup>th</sup> October.

Peter wrote the following letter for this newsletter.

"I had to flee Sierra Leone on Jan 6, 1999 when my house was attacked by heavily armed Kamajors, who had earlier wanted to initiate me into the Kamajor society. The Kamajor society practise cannibalism, voodoo, the sacrifice of human beings and drink human blood. Initiates are forced to wear a talisman on their bodies as a means of protection so that wearer can appear or disappear at will.

Because of this behaviour, I refused to join them and started opposing them.

That explains why they attacked me the first time in 1997. In this attack, an Italian Catholic Priest, Fr Macalister, was shot and killed. I escaped and went to Freetown.

In Nov 1998, when the rebels intensified around Freetown, the then

Government airlifted 5000 Kamajors from the provinces to the capital to help protect the city from rebel infiltration. The Kamajors were the militia of the government.

It was a coincidence that some of the Kamajors that attacked me in 1997 were among the 500 who were airlifted to the city. When they were able to identify my residence, they attacked me to settle old scores. In this attack my brother in law (Julianna's brother) was shot and killed. Julianna was raped and cut in the middle of her forehead. I was severely beaten. They threatened to kill us.

Unfortunately for them they heard a big noise outside and fled in fright. This gave us the opportunity to escape and we went to Guinea.

So, I hope that the readers will understand how happy my family is to have come to Australia where we are learning to settle in. We have a flat to live in at Marrickville and our three children, David, Desmond and Adel, are all at school and looking forward to a quiet Christmas. Julianna and I have casual jobs and, while we are searching for something more permanent, we are very happy being here.”

### NRBS STARTS TO GROW

We have had terrific help from other Parishes. Our Lady of the Rosary Waitara had a collection and trivia night raising nearly \$6,000. This is being used to help two families come from Sudan. The first family (of five) arrived on November 16<sup>th</sup> and is finding their feet. The second family also from Sudan will be arriving soon.

St. John the Baptist Harbord collected \$3,000 which will bring a family of three from Uganda. We are still awaiting their arrival.

We hope to encourage other Parishes to become involved next year.

In July we had a feature story in the Manly Daily which raised a lot of interest in the plight of African refugees and in our own work.

In August we had a story in the Broken Bay News. Two different families read this item and each decided to help a family by donating \$10,000.

Such generosity will not only help one family but as the loans are repaid they will help many more.

### LOOKING FORWARD TO NEXT YEAR

We are planning for next year. We hope to increase the number of associate members. You might be able to help by telling your friends about the group. The cost is \$50 per year although many prefer to make a larger donation. We can arrange a Tax deduction if the cheque is payable to Centacare a/c NBRS.

We are looking at ways of fundraising. If you have any time or ideas we would love some help.

We are expecting a heavy demand for loans. There are 8,000 Special Humanitarian Visas granted by our Government every year. Sadly, some of these refugees miss out on their opportunity to come to Australia simply for lack of the airfare. Indeed only three times in the last thirteen years has the Special Humanitarian Visa quota being filled.

### MERRY CHRISTMAS

Each Christmas we reflect on the story of Jesus' birth; how there was no room at the Inn. In a small but growing way we are trying to say that there is room at our Inn.

We would like to thank the family who used the money normally spent on Christmas presents to make a donation to NBRS. Their gift will allow a child to have a new life in Australia.

Thank you for the help this year. Your donation has helped a family arrive. With your help we will build on the foundations next year.

We wish you a Merry Christmas and hope that the New Year brings you peace and happiness

David Addington.

32 Aitken Ave.,

Queenscliff, N.S.W. 2096

Email [davidaddington5@optushome.com.au](mailto:davidaddington5@optushome.com.au) If you are on email please email your address as it is easier and cheaper for us to be in contact.