

# **NORTHERN BEACHES REFUGEE SANCTUARY**

A Project of the MANLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

Mary Immaculate and St Athanasius Church

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## **Welcome to the NBRS Summer 2010 Newsletter**

We have now paid 2478 airfares since we started including 140 in the last six months. We were able to assist everyone who applied for a loan this year. We received very generous support from our donors. Thank you very much to everyone who helped.

There are 13,750 Refugee Visas granted each year. They are split into two groups. The refugee category (subclass 200) who are recommended by the UNHCR and the Special Humanitarian Visa (subclass 202) who are sponsored by people in Australia.

We assist mostly refugees travelling on a Special Humanitarian Visa. There are 7,750 visas granted each year in this category. They are split into onshore and offshore visas.

The number of offshore Special Humanitarian Visas granted in the last year has been greatly reduced. In the year 2009/10 there were 3,200 visas granted to offshore applicants. The remaining 4550 were granted to onshore applicants. Some of these were asylum seekers who came by boat to Christmas Island but many were refugees who came by airplane. When you are granted a onshore protection visa you have the right to apply for your spouse and dependent children. These applications get first priority of the quota of visas as Australia wants to reunite families.

This will mean that we will see more refugees arriving from Afghanistan over the next couple of years. We are starting to see a number of these families asking for assistance. We have been contacted by community groups and we will be working with them to assist the new arrivals.

The situation in Afghanistan is very dangerous and so there are large numbers of refugees seeking help.

There has also been a lot of difficulty getting to Guinea to interview applicants. The political situation is very unstable after a coup. There haven't been interviews in Conakry since last year. Clearly Australia needs to ensure the safety of its staff. There are a number of cases we are waiting on that are affected. We are hoping that the situation will improve and the interviews will be able to proceed.

All refugees have to be interviewed by the Department of Immigration. The interviews are to verify the stories and ensure there isn't fraud. Immigration officials travel all over Africa to conduct interviews. It is not possible for refugees to travel to the Australian Embassies as they don't have the money.

## **Arranging Travel**

When a visa is granted there is great joy in the family. The sponsor gets ready to meet the family and start the process of settlement. We pay and help arrange the travel.

All refugees need to undergo a pre-flight medical to make sure they are safe to fly. This procedure was introduced after 4 women went into labour on the way to Australia. One lady we helped had a baby three days after she arrived!

We are expecting a family next week who were delayed by the birth of a baby. The new baby must have travel papers so this delays the travel.

Most people we help travel with the International Organization for Migration. (IOM) They arrange for the refugees to travel to the airport and get on the flight with their correct papers. They also have people at transit stops to ensure the refugees continue on the right flight.

When they arrive they are met by their family with scenes of great jubilation.

## **John's Family**

John and his wife are now Australian citizens, having arrived from Sierra Leone as refugees. They have three children of their own, and are also caring for a fourth, three of the children are under 5 years of age. However, in Sierra Leone their uncle died after years of struggle with injuries from the civil war, and his wife also died from breast cancer - leaving behind six children. After their death, these children were cared for by their 17 and 16 year old siblings in Conakry, Guinea.

John's wife is their young cousin, and while the parents were alive she had assisted them. When they died, she saw that it was her responsibility to support these children to migrate to Australia where they would be safe and have access to quality education and to be reunited with other cousins.

The children arrived in Australia at the end of August, 2010. John's family had grown instantly to 8 children and could no longer fit in the small car they had. Now they had to find a house spacious enough to accommodate these kids, and they needed more beds too. As both John and his wife are studying and also working part time, it is a struggle with both money and time.

However, they are overwhelmed with joy to welcome these children and see it as a privilege to care for their extended family. They see this huge responsibility as an obligation to provide support to these children. This is how they described it; "It is all about honouring our cultural beliefs and practices to care for children of deceased relatives, without our support, without the support of NBRIS, these children could have been mistreated, enslaved and exploited, they wouldn't have had any brighter future. But they are very happy out here as they have commenced schooling which is one of the things they have missed all these years. We are therefore very grateful and proud of the assistance being rendered by the NBRIS towards refugees. Without their help with the airfare loan, we would not have been able to buy the air tickets."

## **The Children**

Most refugee families have children. They adapt very quickly when they arrive. The language and Australian customs are quickly learnt. School is a wonderful place to learn both academically as well as socially. The children work hard because their parents value education. It is the one item that can't be taken away from you. When you flee your country you normally lose everything. Education is always with you.

They also love sport. Soccer is very popular and many of the younger children are very good players. There are a number who are playing at representative level. It is a

great way for the children to make friends and integrate. I know of two boys who have been offered scholarships overseas to play soccer. I doubt if either will accept the offer as they are very happy in Australia.

Running is also very popular with many a refugee child winning the school carnival. However the phone calls I get from the parents are always about education. How proud they are of their children's progress.

This week I heard from a family we helped four years ago. Their son is sitting the HSC and they are hoping that he will get over 99. A wonderful effort considering he spoke no English when he arrived.

Another family told me their son had been offered a basketball scholarship but had turned it down as he wanted to concentrate on his studies.

### **Album launching.**

There is an album launching on 11/12/10 in Granville, Sydney. There are a number of acts on the evening. Terror-D is one of the acts. One of the band members arrived with our first family in 2003. Some of the supporting acts also feature people we have assisted. If you are interested in listening to African music, dancing and watching wonderful dancers come along. Bring a group of friends and have an enjoyable night. It will be VERY LOUD and colourful with many of the young Sierra Leonean community there.

It will be a terrific night. It is scheduled to start at 7pm but African events can be late starting!

It costs \$30.

If you are interested in coming or would like more information you can call Daniel on 0402 620 186.

### **KANGA SCHOOLS**

There has been a lot happening with this project in recent months. In early October, Rotary organised for the collection & packing and paid for the shipment of three containers of classroom furniture for the primary schools in this program - approximately 30 classrooms of desks, chairs, shelving, teacher desk and more. This is an amazing contribution, and a great assistance from Rotary.

Kanga Schools has now sent 8 containers of books and computers. The 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> containers are scheduled to leave in January. The number of schools has now grown past 40. In fact 3 of the schools at Dandabu have formed a unit which is providing support to yet another 12 schools - sharing the resources, library facilities and books. So the demand here means Kanga is being asked to assist with the building of 3 more classrooms to accommodate the increased population.

Because of the high consumption of power by the old CRT monitors originally sent, we have now purchased 100 second hand LCD monitors for some of the schools. We are now looking for funding to update many of the other old monitors in these schools. As an example, when LCD monitors are used one generator can power 8 rather than 5 computers.

And to provide assistance with adult literacy classes at night, the schools need light - but they have been unable to afford the additional cost of petrol for the generators for light at night. In searching for a solution, Kanga Schools has located solar lanterns. These are powered by the sun, and will provide fluorescent light for 6 hours at night. 120 of these are now en route to the schools. When packing the latest shipment, a sample lantern sent to Australia was used to light the inside of the container at night.

What is really encouraging is the support provided by so many schools with the provision of books and computers. Some of the schools like St Kieran's school at Manly Vale have also realised more assistance was needed - they raised an amazing \$2100 for this project which was enough to purchase solar lanterns for 7 schools. This is amazing! On Monday, November 8, members of the Kanga team were invited to the school assembly, - and dressed in Sierra Leone costume they sang the Sierra Leone "thank you" song.

Have a look at the website <http://www.kangaschools.org>  
There are lots of photos and more of the work.

### **Finances**

Thank you to all who have made donations in the last six months. Your support is wonderful.

The repayments are working very well. We still don't have any expenses except the Centrelink fees on repayments. Those we have helped are very responsible in repaying their loans.

Last year we really struggled to assist all those who applied. This financial year we have seen a dramatic improvement in our cash flow. We have had fewer people asking for help. It is very hard to predict the demand as each community group is different. We are confident that we will have enough money already in hand or through the repayments to assist all those who apply. We don't need new donations for the loan scheme at this stage. If this changes we will let you know!

We would love your continued support of the Kanga School project and all new donations will be used to support it. The project has been very successful and has had a big impact in Sierra Leone. We hope to continue and expand the work.

David Addington  
Chairman.  
16/11/10