

# **NORTHERN BEACHES REFUGEE SANCTUARY**

A Project of the MANLY FRESHWATER CATHOLIC CHURCH

Mary Immaculate and St Athanasius Church

Patrons: Bishop David Walker

6 Raglan St, Manly, NSW, 2095

Tom Keneally

Website: [www.northernbeachesrefugeesanctuary.co.cc](http://www.northernbeachesrefugeesanctuary.co.cc)

Des Hasler

Email address: [nbrs@optusnet.com.au](mailto:nbrs@optusnet.com.au)

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## **Welcome to the NBRS Winter 2012 Newsletter**

We have now paid 2889 airfares since we started including 284 in the last twelve months. We have now helped people from 36 different countries. The numbers of refugees offshore, being granted visas has slowed dramatically in the last year.

We started ten years ago. We had modest aims to assist a few families. We have achieved a lot due to the generosity of our donors and repayments from the refugees. I am constantly amazed at the honesty and integrity of the refugees in repaying the loans. We assist most people without meeting them. It is a phone call asking for assistance. We get the details of those travelling and the name and phone number of the sponsor. We pay the fares and try to meet the newly arrived at the airport. However we only meet those in Sydney. When the family has arrived we call and arrange the repayments. We discuss with the family what they can afford and then they set up a fortnightly payment. Most repayments take about two years. We have a extremely low failure rate of less than ½ %. We have lent over \$4 million. In the last year we have made new loans of over \$450,000.

There are fewer refugees coming from the sponsorship program as most of the allocation is being used for successful applicants granted protection visas while applying onshore. If you are granted an onshore protection visa it is counted as part of the annual refugee program. They also get first allocation of the offshore quota for their spouse and children. These visas are part of the Special Humanitarian quota. The total per year is currently 7,750. With the numbers of asylum seekers being granted visas onshore it means that there are very few granted to offshore applicants. We understand that there will only be 750 granted to offshore applicants in the next year. If you are applying for your spouse and children to join you the current wait is estimated at 7-9 years.

This also means that it is now almost impossible to get a visa for anyone other than your spouse or children. It makes it impossible to assist your siblings or extended family. Sadly there is huge demand and not many positions available. This will be the situation for the foreseeable future. It would be a very good time for Australia to increase the number of refugees we accept each year.

The recent move by the High Court has meant that asylum seekers will be processed onshore. It is a welcomed decision which stops the processing on Christmas Island. It will be much cheaper and less stressful for everyone involved.

We are continuing to assist families with loans for DNA tests which are sometimes required by the Dept of Immigration.

Some time ago I received an email from a group that assists refugees asking if we could lend the money to a lady who wanted to bring her daughter. She was told that she might need to undergo a DNA test to confirm the family relationship. The mother didn't have the money and had no way of earning it. We of course agreed to help if required.

I have just received a beautiful email thanking us for our offer but letting us know that the daughter has been granted a visa and so the DNA test wasn't required. They wanted to thank us as without the offer of the loan the application wouldn't have been able to proceed. A very happy result without us providing any money.

We are also helping with a wider range of issues. We will lend money for application fees for family visas as well as DNA testing. As there are fewer demands on our cash we have been able to ease the restrictions on the type of loan we can make. It still has to be a loan to assist a refugee in coming to Australia or in a special case to ease the suffering of someone who has been granted a visa. We recently assisted a man to return to Indonesia to farewell his wife and children who were drowned when the boat they were coming to Australia on sank. His loss was terrible and we were in a small way able to assist him.

With the decrease in people requiring our help we now are self funding. The repayments cover all our demand. Our costs are still only transaction fees and these are less than \$3,000 per year. We have money in the bank and are confident that we can meet all the requests for assistance. We wanted to get to the point where we were self funding and now are. We don't need donations at this stage. It is always difficult to predict the future but we don't want to ask for funds that we can't use. If we need more donations we will let you know! I want to thank everyone who has been so generous. It has made our work so much easier. We have enough money to continue the Kanga School Project for the next year. We will be reviewing the funding needs at the end of this financial year.

I would like to thank everyone who has been so supportive of us in the previous years. We are in the wonderful position of being able to assist everyone who has applied for a loan for travel. We expect that we will be able to continue to assist all applicants for travel loans over the next year.

I would like to thank the committee for their work and support over the last year. It is a small group that achieves a lot.

We continue to support the Kanga School project. I have attached their newsletter. We have enough money to continue the support for another year and will look at the funding needs after that.

David Addington  
Chairman.