

# **NORTHERN BEACHES REFUGEE SANCTUARY**

A Project of the MANLY FRESHWATER CATHOLIC CHURCH

Mary Immaculate and St Athanasius Church

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## **Welcome to the NBR Summer 2012 Newsletter**

It has been a busy and difficult last six months. The whole asylum seeker/refugee debate has become very harsh and political. The Government's new policy sees the Nauru camp reopening and the moving of refugees to offshore processing. There is no plan for how long they will be held in detention before being granted visas. The idea is to have a "no advantage policy". If asylum seekers are truly to have no advantage then they will need to be on Nauru for many years. It is very sad that this policy is being spun as somehow for the benefit of refugees. We have supposedly introduced the policy to stop them risking their lives in leaky boats. This of course suggests that their lives are safer in the refugee camps they come from. However the reason that most asylum seekers (well over 90%) are granted visas is because they can convince the Immigration Department that their lives are in danger in their homeland.

We will also have asylum seekers released on bridging visas. They will continue on these visas even if they are found to be refugees. They will have no right to work and no idea of how long they will have to wait for a permanent visa. It will cause mental health problems.

Australia has also made it much more difficult for families to be reunited. Until the changes, asylum seekers granted protection visas could apply for their spouse and children under the split family provision of the Special Humanitarian Visa. The application was free and when the family arrived they qualified for Centrelink support. The new regulations don't allow refugees who arrive by boat to apply for their families under the split family provision. They now have to apply under the family visa. It costs \$2,060 currently and will increase to \$2,700 on January 1<sup>st</sup>. The other drawback is that the family don't qualify for Centrelink support for two years.

If you come from a non-English speaking background it is very difficult to get work until you can communicate. If you don't get Centrelink support it will make life extremely hard to feed and house your family. The changes are cruel and will cause great harm to families. It is punishing asylum seekers for being successful. It will make a successful settlement much more difficult. Many families are already suffering stress related illness. These changes will increase mental health problems.

It is very sad that our Immigration policy is so punitive. It is a sad reflection on us as a nation.

We have paid 130 airfares in the last 6 months and also assisted with 42 loans for visa applications. We have also assisted with DNA tests for a number of refugees as part of their visa process. We have now paid 3,015 airfares and made over 1,000 loans. The repayments are still performing well. The refugees we have assisted are remarkably faithful in their repayments. However because of the changes made by the Government we are running short of funds again. We have stopped lending money for application fees. We won't be able to help with the application fees in future except in rare cases as there are too many cases. It is difficult to see who will help refugees with loans. I don't know of any other group who makes loans for applications fees.

It means that families will be apart longer and at higher risk. It also makes the settlement process more difficult. The longer families are apart the more likely there will be problems when they are reunited. It may slow the numbers but if you can still get a visa at the end of the process then people will still come as the alternative is refugee camps where there is no hope and no future.

Over the next year we will see bigger demand for loans. Those travelling on family visas don't qualify for loans from The International Organization for Migration who have a loan scheme to assist with airfares but only for a Special Humanitarian Visa. This means that we will now need to lend the full amount of the airfares for all loans. As family visa arrivals don't qualify for Centrelink support our repayments will need to be slower. Most of the loans we make are from repayments of current loans.

We need donations to continue with our work. Our money is running out. We have been able to help everyone who has asked for an airfare but we are very short of cash.

If you can help with a donation we would be very grateful. Donations are tax deductible. Please make cheques payable to CatholicCare-NBRS and post to NBRS

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I will finish with a letter we received recently from a family of seven orphan children who we helped to come and live with their uncle and aunt.

To the people that have helped us

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Throughout our lives we have met many angels, who have shed light in our lives and you are one of them. Words cannot describe our gratitude towards what you have done for us. But I hope this letter gives you an idea.

We have a saying in our culture 'a stick has two ends', so I 'am definitely sure that God will hear our prayers and shed some light in your life as well.

To finish off, we would just like to say this world needs more people like you and that way it would be a better place to live in.

Thank you very much.

David Addington  
Chairman.