

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 NBRs Winter 2013 Newsletter

It has been a challenging six months. With the changes in the access to the Special Humanitarian Visa (SHV) in August 2012 we have seen a big increase in the requests for help. The Government has restricted access to the SHV. It is extremely slow and many asylum seekers and refugees are now using spousal and family visas instead. Spousal visas have an application fee of \$2,680 and also incur medical costs. You also have to pay the travels costs. However they are much quicker to get a visa.

Most new arrivals are coming from Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. The majority are going to Victoria. There are still a number of families from Africa but the number has decreased significantly over the last two years.

We have been able to help with all the requests for help with airfares but have almost stopped lending for application fees as we don't have the money.

We have now assisted 3168 refugees with airfares and more than 200 with visa applications fees. They have come from 40 different countries. We have helped 153 refugees with airfare loans in the last six months.

They are all delighted that we can help as they have no other way of paying the airfare.

We assisted a lady with an application fee recently who has been in Australia for three years. She came by boat leaving behind her family. She was quickly recognized as a refugee and applied for her family to join her. At that stage the expected delay for the visa was about two years. The Special Humanitarian Visa, which was the category they qualified for, was effectively closed last year. She needed to start again and apply under the spousal visa. It required a fee of \$2,680 money she didn't have. When I spoke to her she was desperate as she had already been separated from her husband and children for the last three years. She was very sad that she would have had to start again. She was concerned that it would take another three years. We lent her the money and hopefully it will be less than a year until they are reunited. When she first approached us we didn't have the money available so put her on a waiting list. What is really sad is that she had to wait for five months before we had the funds available. When I contacted her again she still needed the money. I don't know of other groups like us who lend funds for application fees. Banks won't lend the money as most applicants are still on Centrelink payments or in casual work. The loan schemes for refugees are for furniture and white goods.

We also assisted a man who has been in Australia for 13 years without his family. Sadly for much of the time he wasn't allowed to work. It was a very slow and stressful process for him to get his visa. He became unwell and is now recovering. He applied for the family under the Special Humanitarian program. The application was very slow and after two years he was told that he should apply for the spousal visa. He approached us looking for a loan for the application fee of \$2,680. He also had to wait for some time before we could help. When I told him that we had the money available he was overcome with emotion. We have now helped him with the application fee for the spousal program. The application has been lodged and hopefully he will be reunited with the family in the next year. We will also help with the airfare when the visa is granted. He is overjoyed that he will be reunited with the family but no doubt is very sad about the lost 13 years.

We hope to help more people with application fees in the next six months. We are seeking more donations. We are also applying for grants.

Fundraising is never easy but many people would like to help but are unsure if their donation will help. We are also a small group and reaching donors isn't easy. We don't spend money on fundraising or advertising. We would really appreciate your assistance in getting donations. If anyone has friends or connections that could help us with donations we would be delighted to hear from you. My number is 0434029384.

We have a very good track record of helping people. We are all volunteers so all the donations are used for loans. The only costs we have are Centrelink deduction fees which are less than \$3,000 per year. Our loan default rate is still under 1% The funds are reused many times so we really make the funds work hard. Donations made ten years ago have been reused at least five times. The benefits are huge for the refugees. We are able to reunite families which is the biggest problem facing most newly arrived refugees.

If you are able help with a donation we would be very grateful.

Checks payable to

CatholicCare -NBR

6 Raglan St

Manly

NSW 2095

For credit cards we need name on card, type of card, number and expiry date. The amount of the donation.

Donations are tax deductible.

Many thanks to all those who have donated funds in the last year. We really appreciate the support.

David Addington

Chairman