

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 Summer 2013 Newsletter

It has been a busy and successful last six months. We have helped 276 people with airfares bringing the total to 3,444 since we started 11 years ago.

When we started we wanted to help anyone with a Special Humanitarian Visa (SHV) who needed help with their airfares. We broadened our assistance as we received a number of different types of requests for help. The essence of NBRs was assisting refugees, who have been granted a visa, help in coming to Australia. We expanded the criteria to include more visa categories. We have helped orphan children and family visas. The requirement is the families are from a refugee background and the sponsors have arrived in Australia in the last 5 years. However the first priority is to help those with SHV.

We have also helped with DNA testing when requested from Immigration to confirm family connection. We have also helped with visa application fees. We will continue with DNA fees but have stopped lending for visa applications. The amounts are too large and it is impossible to have a fair system of selecting those we help. It has caused problems with those who have missed out.

We see ourselves as a charity not a business so that we don't want to expand just because we can. We want to help refugees who otherwise may miss out on utilizing their visa.

We help those who are unable to pay for the family travel or are unable to borrow elsewhere. We have asked you our donors to support our work with donations and you have been incredibly generous.

It isn't easy working out who needs help. Those with SHV's were easy to identify but family visas and spousal visas are more difficult. We don't have the ability to evaluate need. We give people the benefit of the doubt.

Recently we have had a waiting list for loans of about 4-5 weeks. We have found that many of the families asking for help, and saying they don't have the money for the fares or the ability to borrow it, are able to arrange the family travel before they get to the top of our waiting list. This happens only with family visas.

We will keep SHV our first priority but we will keep a waiting list for help with other types of visa.

Most of the families are coming from the Middle East but we are starting to see more visas granted to families in Africa. The Government has said that they will be reducing the number of refugee visas granted this year to 13,750 from 20,000. We expect to see more Special Humanitarian Visas granted as no one seeking asylum who has arrived by boat will be granted refugee status.

The refugee quota has been split into three areas. Category 200 who are offshore and recommended by the UNHCR. Australia then processes the proposals and those that qualify are granted visas. There are 6,000 of these visas.

The second category is the protection visa category 866. This is the visa granted to those applying for asylum in Australia.

The third category is the Special Humanitarian Visa (SHV) category 202. It is the remaining visas available after the protection visas are granted. The combined total for protection and SHV is 7,750.

The Government stated last October that anyone seeking asylum who has arrived by boat would never be granted a protection visa. This means we should see more SHV's being granted.

Refugees with a SHV qualify for a loan of up to 75% from The International Organization for Migration. We will lend the balance if needed.

The changes mean we will see an increase in the numbers of people we help and also a reduced cost to us. We should be able to help all those looking for loans.

We have been able to provide a tax receipt for donations via CatholicCare. There has been a change in the reporting process of charities and so we are no longer able to use this facility with CatholicCare. CatholicCare have offered a solution but it wouldn't work for us. We are very grateful for the support they have provided us over the last 11 years. We couldn't have achieved what we have without their help.

We can apply to the Tax Department to get our own status but it requires a change of structure and will increase our costs. As you are aware we currently have no overhead except Centrelink deduction costs and bad debt. These changes have given us the opportunity to review NBRs.

When we started NBRs we wanted to get to a point where we were self funding through repayments of loan. We feel we are there now.

We are no longer looking for donations. We feel we are able to support the travel costs of those who meet our criteria. It isn't an exact science and if we run out of money we will start fundraising again. If we receive donations we won't be able to provide tax receipts.

We don't want to seem ungrateful to the wonderful donors who have supported us so generously. We just don't want to ask for your money unless we need it.

I will finish with some feedback from a caseworker of someone we helped.

David, for feedback to NBRs: I commented to "Mary" that she looks much happier these days. She is rising to the challenges for a single refugee woman, re-united with teenage kids after years of absence. The challenges are enormous. Learning about education and employment options for the kids is hard; trying to not miss a day's work, despite kids sickness and injuries is all challenging. I commented to "Mary" that she has her mother role back again and she looks happier for it. Her face softened and she said "I am so happy". Thank you NBRs.

David Addington

Christmas 2013