

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.nbrs.org.au

Des Hasler

Email address: nbrs@optusnet.com.au

Welcome to the NBRs Winter 2015 Newsletter

It has been an eventful and busy last six months. We have assisted 298 people with airfares making a total of 4,145 people we have helped. This has been our second busiest year with 502 people helped.

We have seen the number of refugees asking for help increase over the year. We are seeing a larger number of Syrians as well as Iraqi and Afghan refugees. Australia is responding to the areas of most need. It is just an overwhelming problem.

Sadly the Middle East is descending into civil war with a huge increase in the number of refugees. The destruction of Iraq and Syria has caused millions of people to leave their homes.

The number of refugees worldwide continues to increase and is now estimated at 60 million. Sadly fewer than 100,000 will be granted a visa to a Western Nation. We have seen a large increase in the numbers seeking asylum in Europe and the tragedy of many drowned in the Mediterranean. There is no easy solution but an increase in the number of refugee visas granted would be a good start. It is a very bleak time for refugees and asylum seekers. Australia has an extremely harsh policy. The camps on Manus Island and Nauru reflect very poorly on us as a nation. The restrictions on the press to report on the conditions are deeply concerning. The indefinite detention of children is disgusting. It is also extremely expensive. Sadly most rich countries are tightening their refugee policies.

We have been working with a family trying to bring five orphaned children. They are between 10 and 18. They are the nephew and nieces of the sponsor. It has been a slow and expensive process. The application fees were high and they also had to undergo some additional medical screening. The problems were overcome and the visa was recently granted.

We were able to assist with a loan for the airfares. They arrived safely to great joy. The sponsor is a wonderful man who is so grateful for his life here in Australia. He is originally from Democratic Republic of Congo. We often help many members of an extended family. In this case we also helped his brother (who I will call Peter) bring some of his family. They arrived in Coffs Harbour where Barbara, who served on the NBRs committee until she moved up north, met them. Here is what she wrote.

“Last night was very special. We had friends staying who lost their 37 year old daughter to cancer last year. I haven't seen them so animated in a long time. Sandra and I went and picked up two children from Peter's. Five child car restraints appeared from down the driveway and Peter and his wife (who appeared handier than him)

grappled with installing them in his (and my) car. He though, was at least better than I am at such mysteries!!

I was to lead him and a friend of his (in a souped up black car) to the airport. Peter drives slowly, so I sat on about 10km under the speed limit to ensure I didn't lose him in the dusk, but was overtaken by Peter's friend at a roundabout. Peter blithely followed his friend, so I arrived at the airport with just my friend, Sandra and two slightly mystified children! Fortunately the two men realised and doubled back and arrived as we were walking in to the terminal. The ticket machine at the gate spooked them and they circumnavigated the car park several times, until I flagged them down and explained the system and assured them I would pay for the parking. After Sydney airport it's negligible, but understandably another unexpected and open -ended expense for them. Quite hilarious really, but we arrived just in time for the children to see the plane land etc.

The children are gorgeous and appeared as fresh and spick and span as I never do after an international flight. The older girl immediately took Peter's three week old baby and handled her with the ease of one who has been doing it every day in the camp. Sandra's husband, Tom, still hasn't recovered from the knowledge that their one small bag contained the worldly goods of all four. I've spoken to Peter this morning and suggested he go to Centrelink and Medicare asap. Perhaps I had on my principal's voice as he assured me he was going in 15 minutes!! He probably was, as he seems onto things. I hope the short term accommodation comes through soon...like today!! We were all really moved by the reunion."

Peter and his family have returned to Brisbane to look for work. He is now working part time. He is so happy to have his family with him.

We are still self-funding and are not looking for donations. Loan repayments continue successfully but we did have to write off a number of loans again this year for various reasons. Sadly in one case of a man we had been helping for a long time. He finally got his wife and two children here after a long difficult process. They had only been here for a short time when he became ill and died. It was terribly sad.

Loan defaults are still below 1% of loans made.

If you have received this by post can you email me your contact details so we can email you future newsletters? nbrs@optusnet.com.au It is much easier and cheaper for us.

I was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) on Australia Day. Although I was the one who received the award, it was due to the success of NBRS that I was recognized. I would like to thank those who have supported NBRS over the last 13 years. I am delighted that the work has been acknowledged.

David Addington
Winter 2015