

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 2016 Newsletter

We had a very quiet time until April but since then we have seen an increase in the numbers of visas being issued. We have seen a lot of requests for assistance for families coming from Syria and Bhutan. We have assisted 216 people in the last six months with airfares making a total of 4,464 people we have helped. They have come from 47 different countries and have settled in every State and Territory.

It is wonderful to see the visas being granted to Syrians as part of the new allocation of 12,000. We are also working with a number of Syrian families who are still waiting for visas to be issued. There is great relief that their families are able to leave the Middle East. The sponsors all say how terrible the last 5 years have been. Their country destroyed and the loss of life and security in their lives. They are very happy that their families will have a chance to live in peace.

We still have money in the bank so don't need any donations at this time. I did receive a call recently from a family we have helped, who was asking if we needed donations. I was very touched as he is not well off and has sponsored a number of orphaned children who now live with his family. I was able to tell him that we don't need donations at this stage.

The repayments continue to fund our new loans. The loan failures are running at about 1% of loans made. We have had very few who have just not repaid. Those that fail are normally due to a sickness or a family tragedy. Two of our loans have failed as the sponsor had their visas cancelled. Many refugees don't realize that a refugee visa doesn't guarantee permanent residence, only citizenship does that. Your visa can get cancelled if you have problems with the law. There are a number of young refugees who have drug convictions who have had their visas cancelled. You can also have your visa cancelled if you return to your homeland. A refugee visa is granted because you risk death in your homeland. If you return voluntarily then your visa may be cancelled. We are assisting a man who has had some minor difficulties with the courts and also returned to Iraq. When he returned to Australia his visa was cancelled and Australia wants to deport him to Iraq; An extremely harsh punishment for a minor conviction and a compassionate visit to family.

He has been in detention for nearly two years at huge cost to the Australian tax payer. He has 3 Australian children who will be deprived of their father if he is returned to Iraq. Hard to understand why Immigration is pursuing this matter. We have a donor who has offered to fund the appeal to the courts. Hopefully he will be allowed to stay.

Globally the number of refugees continues to increase with about 25 million refugees and 40 million internally displaced people. We see the constant stream of people into Europe and sadly many are drowned on the way. Over 50% of the refugees in the world are from Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia. The only solution is for peace in these lands but there doesn't appear to be any prospect in the near future. We have seen hundreds of thousands of refugees reach Europe but they are only about 4% of the world's refugees which shows how large the problem is. Australia has increased its allocation with up to 26,000 refugees granted visas this year. We welcome the increased number and look forward to their arrival in Australia.

One of the great joys of NBRS has been working with so many different people over the last 14 years. We assist with the airfares and travel arrangements and then set up the repayments. In some cases we also assist in referrals to other groups who can help with settlement issues. Often families call because they have a problem and don't know where to go for help. There are a lot of support groups and most families get on with their lives very quickly. When they need help with an airfare again they will call and it is always lovely to catch up and hear how the family is going.

The biggest family group we assisted was 18. The loan was for \$36,000. The sponsor had successfully applied for his mother, siblings and their children. They arrive in 2008. The loan was repaid and we lost touch. He called recently to see if we could help one of his friends. His story was like so many refugees. The older members were working or raising children. The younger ones were finishing school and university or working. He was so proud of them all. Clearly it had been hard work for all of them to adjust to a new culture and learn the language. What a great achievement in his life to have changed the lives of his family. They live in peace and prosperity which isn't too much to ask.

I love getting the calls and hearing about the families. It gives such optimism for the future. Mostly the news is full of bad news of death and destruction so it is really nice to have it balanced with the good news stories. I will get Sarah to write the rest of the newsletter. Sarah has taken on a lot of extra work for which I am very grateful.

Regards David Addington

Hi my name is Sarah Dinning and I have been involved with NBRS for over ten years. I have started helping David with the loan application forms and more recently I had the 'honour' of having the NBRS phone while David and his wife had a well-earned holiday in New Zealand. I can say that I was overwhelmed with how busy it was – I always thought David had done a great job but now I appreciate how he and his wife, Mary-Anne are great team who have truly made a difference. Having the phone was a wonderful opportunity to be in contact with many people who were all helping their families and friends. It is really inspiring and humbling to talk to those who have been refugees themselves. They are so very pleased to be in Australia. I was asked by many to pass on their heartfelt thanks for your continued support and interest.

My knowledge of geography and world affairs has greatly improved in recent months. For example, we are presently processing many applications for Bhutanese refugees as well as Syrians. I now know that the UNHCR has been running refugee camps for Bhutanese since the 1990s and since 2008, the IOM and UNHCR have jointly started refugee resettlement programs to many countries including Australia. There is a well-established Bhutanese community in South Australia which not only supports the incoming refugees but also provides NBRS and the IOM with information to assist with loan applications. There are fantastic individuals, volunteers and community organisations around Australia helping refugees and I am appreciative of the opportunity of being involved through NBRS.