

NORTHERN BEACHES REFUGEE SANCTUARY

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Welcome to the NBRs Summer 2017 Newsletter

I am sorry this newsletter was slow coming out this year.

It has been a busy year with us assisting 552 refugees with travel loans. Syrians were the biggest group again this year with 350. They are now our 3rd highest country of origin. It reflects the change in allocation of refugee visas. We are seeing a much smaller number of people coming from Africa these days.

We have now helped 5381 refugees from 47 countries since our first family arrived in 2003.

NBRs started as a work of the Many Freshwater Catholic Church. We have enjoyed strong support from the Parish over the last 15 years. However, we have grown and with changes to registered charities we need to change the structure of NBRs. We will become a registered charity and are also seeking tax deductibility status. We have started this process and expect it to be completed in the New Year. The Parish will still be a strong supporter of NBRs. The committee will be the same and the executive will continue unchanged. We will change the structure, but the work will remain the same. We will still be an interest free travel loan scheme to assist refugees coming to Australia. It will continue as a volunteer group with no wages or overheads except bank and repayment costs.

The repayments are working well for most of the loans. We have seen an increase in bad debts this year, which is disappointing. We are working on methods to improve repayments but sometimes loans just fail. We do work with leaders of the different community groups which helps.

The failure rate on loans is now running at about 1.5% over the last 15 years. It means that a donation of \$10,000 that we received in 2003 has helped about 60 people with travel and we still have \$8,000 of it left. If you include the transaction costs, our cost to help each refugee is about \$40. Wonderful value for money!

We have seen a big increase in requests for help in the last two months.

The International Organization for Migration has run a loan scheme since before we started. In July 2017 they stopped lending money while they wait for new funding. This has meant that we are seeing more demand for help. There was a church assisting with airfares for Assyrian families, but they have also stopped.

We haven't looked for donations for four years but we will need to raise some money in 2018. We don't have tax deduction status yet but expect that we will be granted it soon. We will keep you updated.

We have worked closely with a number of Syrian volunteers who have helped us with new contacts and setting up repayments. They have been enormously helpful. Yulia, who has assisted us with most of the Syrians arriving in Sydney, has been helping us for about two years. She has given endless hours of support to newly arrived refugees.

Sadly, she has just found out that she has cancer. It is very sad for her family. She has three children between 18-25. Our thoughts and prayers are with her and the family at a very difficult time.

We have been assisted by George in Melbourne. George is 29. He is from Syria and has been in Australia for 3 years. We didn't help him travel to Australia. He is at university studying Electrical Engineering. His marks are great while he is working fulltime. He is also about to get married. He has been helping us with many of the Syrian community in Melbourne. George gets us all the details needed to set up a loan. He then works with a travel agent to book the fares. After the family arrive I email him the details to set up the repayments and he gets the family to complete the forms. I don't know where he gets the energy or time to fit so much into his life. I really appreciate all that he is doing for us and the refugees we help.

We are helping a man bring his young son to Australia. It has been a very difficult journey. The son has been abandoned by his mother and is living with his grandparents in very difficult circumstances. The father is now an Australian citizen, so the son has received his Australia citizenship by decent. The dad has had to travel to Africa to collect the son and then take him to get an Australia passport. It isn't a safe country and the distances are huge. The father has had a child in Sydney who spent his first year in hospital undergoing a number of major operations.

We are hoping that Dad will return later this month with his son.

Dad is such an upbeat man. Life has dealt him some really difficult cards. He has suffered so much and yet manages to live a good life. He is such an inspiration to me.

The next family we will help is a family of nine orphans. They are coming to live with their Aunt. She has two children who have already married and left home. The children range from 9 to 19 with two sets of twins. What a remarkable gift to adopt so many children and give them a home. It has taken nearly four years for the visas to be granted, so she has spent a lot of time and money supporting them already. What a celebration it will be when they arrive.

We will be looking for donations this year if you are able to help. We should have the ability to offer tax receipts before June 30th. We would be very grateful if you could consider helping again.

I wish you all a Happy New Year.

David Addington