

NORTHERN BEACHES REFUGEE SANCTUARY

A Project of the MANLY CATHOLIC SOCIAL JUSTICE GROUP

Mary Immaculate and St Athanasius Church

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Welcome to the Spring newsletter of The Northern Beaches Refugee Sanctuary.

The last four months have brought much success, happiness and joy.

So much has happened that it is time for a new newsletter.

There have been 57 people arrive from Sierra Leone, Somalia and Sudan.

This brings to 88 the number of people we have helped with airfares.

We have received wonderful support from so many places. There have been groups as well as individuals who have helped. It has allowed many people to start a new life in Australia.

We have reunited many families, including three wives and their children, with their husbands/fathers. They had all been apart for about three years. The smiles at the airport were pretty special.

We are helping another person bring his wife from Sierra Leone and she will arrive on September 10th. The cost of the airfare will be raised by the students of Loreto, Kirribilli. We thank them for their generosity and help.

We have received two donations of \$10,000. One is from The Sisters of Charity Foundation and the other from Federazione Cattolica Italiana, the Catholic Club of Dee Why. Each donation will be used to pay for the airfare of a family.

The airfares will be repaid so many other people will benefit. We thank them both for their generosity.

Some of the new arrivals include a family of eight from Somalia. They had left their home land in 1977. They have spent the last 13 years in a refugee camp in Kenya. The family is mum and dad and their 6 children. Mum and Dad will need to learn English. The oldest son (20) speaks very good English and will be a big help for them all. He is attending Gosford TAFE with his 18 year old sister. The three younger boys go to school in Chatswood. The journey takes about two hours but with the confidence of youth they see this as no drama. It seems very brave to me given their limited English.

All the boys are very keen on soccer and hope to join local teams. They seem to know all the Australians playing in England. Information travels all around the world so easily, even to refugee camps.

They have moved to the central coast of NSW. Their sponsor invited us to a BBQ to meet them. What a terrific family. There are four families from Somalia living on the Central Coast. The new arrivals have good support which will really help the settling in process. They are in community housing which is a real bonus.

We helped a young Sudanese man who had sponsored six families. The approvals all came through at the same time leaving him needing over \$30,000 and no money. We were able to help with two families and he borrowed the rest from many other places. All six families are here now and rebuilding their lives. He was very keen to make the arrangements for repayments so that we might be able to help another family in the future. He is just a young man who is literally saving the lives of his family.

He lives in a one bedroom flat which has been very crowded for the last six weeks! As soon as he settles one family and gets them into a flat the next one arrived! He has incredible energy.

We welcomed another family in Perth and are expecting a family in Cairns. We hope to help Sierra Leonean families in other areas where there is a need.

We welcomed a family with two sets of twins, girls of 19 and boys of 17. They are at school and studying hard. I am a twin and there is also another set of twins in my family. We are also two years apart so it makes it very personal. The last time we visited they were doing their English homework on a Saturday afternoon, something that didn't happen very often when I was at school! The girls are stunningly beautiful and no doubt will make friends quickly!

We have had two babies born. One only three days after Mum arrived in Sydney. He is called Sidney as he waited to be born here. He has just had a bout of chicken pox and was badly affected. He had a few days in hospital including some time in intensive care. It's wonderful that he was able to get excellent medical attention. Thankfully he has fully recovered.

The earlier arrivals are really doing well. The first family arrived 27th June 2003 and they are all in good work. Fatmata is working in a nursing home and doing a certificate 3 course. She hopes to be a registered nurse and I am sure she will be.

Fatmata's daughter Melissa (9) won the 100m and came second in the 200m race at school. She also won the interschool 100M and 200M. It didn't take long for little athletics to call and get her in the system. Sport will be a really good way for her to meet many new people. It is good to see how well she is doing. Fatmata's son Lamin (16) is off to a general high school after completing intensive English language study.

ABC TV's 7.30 report had a story on NBRIS. They interviewed Sarjoh Bah, who had sponsored his brother and family, about how difficult it was when you had family in a refugee camp. They were also at the airport to film the arrival of his family as well as Saibartu's family. The airport was full of very happy faces and lots of tears of joy.

Saibartu, who met her family of 12, told us “The time for tears is over. There have been too many tears now is the time for happiness.” That summed up the day perfectly.

The TV program also featured Peter and Juliana Jusu who told the story of their journey to Australia. The program was extremely well done. We have had wonderful feed back.

Australian Catholics, in the Spring edition, had a story about the Bah family who we helped. Alpha Mohamed is at TAFE doing a bridging course so that he can get his teaching qualifications recognized. He hopes to start teaching next year. He was a teacher in Sierra Leone for many years. To get stable well paid work is a real bonus. His son Chernor is a very good soccer player and is making an impact in the local competition.

We have two new groups starting, Lower North Shore Sanctuary Group and Sunshine State Refugee Sanctuary. There are a number of groups also looking at helping refugees. It would be truly wonderful if we could see all those issued with visas able to use them.

There has been good news from the Government. In the budget in May the Government agreed to provide \$2.5 million for a loan scheme. There is no news yet how or when it will be allocated but it will be a really big help to all communities. They also announced that they would cover the costs of the medicals. This coupled with the increased number of visas issued is very positive.

Last year the Manly Catholic Social Justice Group sponsored a family of 7 from Rwanda. Their story is one full of unbelievable horror. The genocide almost completely destroyed their extended family. They are the only survivors. They were granted a visa and we eagerly await them in the next month. It has taken a year but the waiting is almost over. When they arrive at Sydney airport it will be very moving and emotional.

We have had terrific support from old friends who have continued their help. Many people have renewed their NBRs membership and we welcome all our new members.

There have been some large personal donations for which we are very grateful. We received a very generous donation from the Rotary Club of Turrumurra as well as support from Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic School in Waitara. The children had a rice day focusing on the poor of the world and the money raised was donated to NBRs. Young people have great compassion for those who have suffered.

One of our members, Ian Byrne, completed a fundraising swim for the group. He swam around Jersey Island. It is about 70 kms and it took 10 hours and 37 mins;

the fastest time this year. He is the only Australian and the 34th person to complete the swim. He raised enough money for two family's airfares. It was an incredible effort and we are all in awe of him. A big thank you to Ian and his wife Pat who supported him all the way. Thanks also to all who sponsored him.

The Sanctuary Groups are getting together in October. There are now eight groups helping refugees settling in Australia. We hope to have representatives of each group meet to see how we can help more people and also to exchange ideas. It will be a chance to make some new friends and hear about the good work of other groups and how we can support each other.

We have a web page. www.northernbeachesrefugees.org. There are lots of photos and information on the group. If you are on the internet look it up.

Everyone we help is so grateful. They are always asking us to thank those who have helped them. On their behalf a heartfelt thank you.

We are proud to say that in the last year our only expenses were \$17 for bank charges. All other donations are been used for airfares. If you receive this newsletter by mail and you have an email address can you send it to the above email address as it is cheaper and quicker.

David Addington
Chairman.