

NORTHERN BEACHES REFUGEE SANCTUARY LTD

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Welcome to the NBRs Summer 2021 Newsletter

We were very quiet until the borders opened to refugees on December 1st. The cost of airfares fell quickly so we started paying for them. We had 77 people arriving between December 2nd and 15th. The border was closed again for two weeks and reopened on 15th December. The airlines were very helpful and we managed to move all the flights for very little cost.

It has been a very busy month. We have paid for 287 airfares in total. Most of the families have already arrived making for a very happy Christmas for the families.

The families were all Iraqi or Syrian and they were living in Jordan or Beirut.

It brings our total number of arrivals to 7351 since we started.

There are still a lot of families, who have visas, waiting to travel to Australia. It will keep us busy for the next couple of months.

I received a call from a sponsor who was looking to bring her sister and family. She was very sad. She had been saving for the airfares, but she had struggled during COVID, and had lost her job. She didn't have the money for the flight and couldn't borrow from the bank as she didn't have enough income. She was desperate to get her family here. She was worried at the time it would take to approve the loan. I was able to approve it on the phone and suggested she make the booking the next morning. Her family will arrive in January and she is delighted. I asked how she had heard about NBRs and she told me that her sister had heard about us in Beirut. It is good to know that among the refugee community they share contact details of people who can help them.

COVID has had a huge effect on Australia. In Lebanon it has been catastrophic. 25% of the population was living in poverty before COVID and now it is 75%.

It has been very difficult for refugees living there. The lucky ones have family overseas who are supporting them. This isn't easy for those who have found refugee status in new countries. They will be looking to establish themselves in their new country and they may also still be looking for work and struggling themselves.

We had almost \$900,000 in the bank in November. We have spent just over half of it on airfares. We expect to spend most of the balance in the next month or two. Our only lending criteria is that the family has a valid refugee visa, needs help and agrees to repay us. We haven't rejected any application. We expect the traveling family to get the cheapest airfare even if that means waiting for a month. December is an expensive time and the demand for airfares was high once the borders opened. Airfares from Beirut to Australia increased from about \$1,500 to \$2,900 if you wanted to fly in the next week or two. If you could wait 5 weeks, then the fares dropped to \$1500. We understand the desperation to come as quickly as possible, but it would reduce the amount of people we could help if we paid the higher airfares. We are limiting our assistance to \$1,500 per person.

We help as many as we can and they are always so grateful for our assistance.

We work with many different community groups. We also work with several travel agents who have close contacts with their local community. Australia is blessed with many different communities from across the whole world. Most have community leaders who try to build groups to help new arrivals. They are often our contact point. It makes it much easier for me as I only speak English. We do have access to translation services which helps. If I have a community worker to act as a contact person, it makes life so much easier.

The loans are repaid within two years. I love talking to the families at the end of the loan. Their English skills have significantly improved, and the families are so grateful for their new lives. Many already have jobs and their children are at school.

One family recently said that Australia gave them a chance to have a life again and they can't believe how safe it is here. These are always happy phone calls.

It is hard to predict the next six months, but we aren't looking for donations at this time. We hope with the money we still have in the bank and the starting of the loan repayments will keep us self-funding.

I wish you all a very Happy New Year.

Keep safe.
David Addington
31/12/2021