

NORTHERN BEACHES REFUGEE SANCTUARY LTD

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Welcome to the NBRs Summer 2023 Newsletter

We have had a very busy six months with 300 airfares paid. They have arrived from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Bhutan, South Sudan, Burundi, Uganda, Ethiopia and Congo. The largest numbers were from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

The Northern Beaches Refugee Sanctuary's first family arrived in June 2003. We have now helped 8460 people from 48 different countries.

The demand for our assistance remains high, especially with the approaching Christmas season causing a surge in airfare costs. We have continued to help a lot of Afghan families coming from Pakistan, most of whom are families of interpreters who worked with the Australian Defense Forces. It is very difficult for the families as most are in Pakistan illegally. When they leave, they need an exit permit. The permits are very expensive as they must pay for each year they have been in Pakistan. We are seeing costs of \$2,000 per person. They then have the cost of the airfares as well. It has been very challenging for us and of course much more difficult for the families.

We are helping a large family from Democratic Republic of Congo. The sponsor last saw her sister twenty years ago. She applied for a visa in 2018 which was granted in 2020. Sadly, the Australian borders had just closed due to COVID. The visa is granted subject to medical clearance which lasts for a year. Covid meant that the visa had expired so the family had to get an extension. While they were waiting for the borders to open the family welcomed a baby. The baby required a visa and IMMI card. (IMMI cards are issued by Australia and are used as a travel document.) This process was slow as there were large numbers of cases needing to be updated by the Department of Immigration. The clearance was finally given. We asked The International Organization for Migration to arrange the travel. The tickets were extremely expensive but by changing dates and IOM arrangements with airlines we were able to get a more reasonable price. The flights were booked and the family were due to arrive on 8th Sept. The week before they left the Malawian Government closed the borders to refugees leaving the country. A number of Government officials were arrested. 58 non refugees were taken off a plane just before it left for the US as they stole the identity of refugees who had been granted visas. The fraud was only on refugees getting visas to USA. Our family was caught up in the blanket ban. They had to change the flight but didn't know when the borders would be reopened. They allowed two months as it costs to change a booking and we didn't know when the problem would be fixed. The family rebooked it for November. It is also difficult to get a booking for 9 people on multiple connecting flights without having too long in transit. The medicals expired before they could depart so the visa is suspended while they pass another medical. The sponsor is sad and stressed as the situation in the refugee camp is dangerous. The medical clearance was issued today so great excitement. We hope they will be able to arrive before Christmas.

It is always difficult when there are delays. The families are so happy when the visas are granted and want them to arrive ASAP. We try to find a balance with waiting time and costs as the family will need to repay the loan.

We helped an Afghan family of 9 coming from Pakistan recently. They need an exit permit to leave. The sponsor asked us if we could help. We assisted with a loan for \$25,000. She arranged the exit permit and flights. The family travelled in three groups over four weeks. The sponsor's responsibility is to meet the family at the airport and then assist them to register with Medicare, Centrelink, Tax dept and get bank accounts etc. This can be time consuming. They travelled in two groups.

The sponsor met the first group who were staying with her until they could get accommodation. She took them to the different agencies to register. She then showed them the trains and buses. She had the wife and mother of the children staying with her, so she started to teach her about the opportunities that Australia presented her. She suggested she get some qualifications so that she could look for work. The two of them went walking in the area as she showed her some of the facilities. Walking alone, getting a job and driving were not available to her in Afghanistan so she was excited about the future. Her husband then arrived. A few days later the wife was in the kitchen crying. The sponsor asked what was wrong. She said her husband was telling her she couldn't leave the house without him. She wouldn't be allowed to work or drive. She would have to cover up when they left the house.

The sponsor said she would speak to the husband and asked him to join her on a walk. She explained that life was much safer in Australia and that women worked. She wears shorts and no head covering. She asked him if he thought she was an immodest person. She had sponsored the family and worked, clearly this had been very good for his family. If he wanted to afford a house and car, they would need more than his wage. He understood the benefits for the family and could see the value of a second wage. The family is lucky to have such a strong successful sponsor who will help them understand Australia. Needless to say, the wife loves the sponsor!!

We have a waiting list of 8 weeks for airfare loans. We are looking for donations if you can help. It would help us get extra families here for Christmas.

Donations are tax deductible and reused many times.
Our bad debts were about 0.3% of loans this year which is fantastic.

If you want to help, please transfer the money to our account.

The Northern Beaches Refugee Sanctuary Ltd
Commonwealth Bank.
BSB 062197
Account 10993154

Please email me your details so that I can email you a tax receipt.

Merry Christmas and let's hope for a peaceful New Year

David Addington
28/11/23