



Sanctuary Northern Rivers Inc.

A community based refugee support group

PO Box 1146 Lismore NSW 2480

ABN 88 782 443 934

January 2007 Newsletter

Welcome to the first Newsletter for 2007.

President's Commentary

We have recently been invited to provide input into the further shaping of Australia's humanitarian program – providing comment on issues such as, the size of the intake, in which countries is it appropriate for Australia to reach to, how to strengthen communities who host these new populations, and how best to meet the refugee needs. While at the national level we seek these directions, in providing comment, it is most evident that these same questions are constantly asked at our local level. Are we reaching the most needy? Are we as a community sufficiently resourced to meet the needs of refugees? How can we better support their needs?

Sanctuary Northern Rivers has been operational for three years, and in that time settled over 60 refugees into the local community. We continue to learn how best to support them, and the community/services continue to welcome and aspire to ensure that the best can be provided to these who have been subject to abject trauma for much of their lives.

In recent months, an additional element of our work has grown – receiving direct requests from the camps (all in Africa) for support, and working with the refugees themselves to maximise their success in gaining a visa to live in Australia. Since August 2006, we have responded to more than 300 requests – some have been unsuccessful, others appear to be moving through the stages of application reasonably successfully, and there are a number that are still in the very early stages. At this time, we continue to respond positively to each approach – supporting and hoping with those in the camps that this thin ray of light may grow to a new dawn in their lives.

The very effort in offering sponsorship to long term residents of refugee camps lights a candle for them. The following response is typical of many who feel that there is some semblance of hope for them.

I thank you for your e-mail filled with much warmth and hope. I felt so happy for your hopeful reply. I have never felt this way for a long time. God is so great for letting us have people like you. I really felt as if I achieved entering Australia. I just read your letter . . . you have saved me and I feel indebted for it. Your good seed will grow and spread. God Bless you a lot more.

Thank you for everything that you are going through to save me from this horrible life condition. God will pay you dearly on my behalf.

Sincerely yours,

For those already settled, we witness ongoing courage and remarkable ambition. For some, settlement is not without its own challenges – years of trauma and loss take a lot to heal! For others, there are new milestones. Andrew and Anna, Martin and Irene and their respective families were proudly welcomed into the community as citizens of Australia last month. Sarah has completed her marriage process and is now off to Perth to live with her husband. Tito no sooner finished school and he too has married and is now living in Canberra. Johnson also completed his Higher School Certificate, and has been offered a place in the Bachelor of Medical Science Course at

University of Queensland. Each individual and family continue to show what remarkable people that they are. We recently welcomed Hamisi and Neema and their young children – joining Mihuku as the expanding Congolese contingent. It is very likely that there will be a number of other Congolese joining us in the coming year. The success of the settlement and integration, and Lismore's community embracing of these families likely stems from

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the effort of those many involved directly or indirectly in settlement - support in advocacy, in working with the families, in undertaking the

administrative tasks, in strengthening our financial position - has been outstanding, and is, in many ways, the hallmark of Lismore's success. It was with mixed feelings that I read of the recent disquiet in Tamworth's grappling in accepting a refugee population. Such a position stands in bold contrast to the demonstrable heart that Lismore has shown, stemming from the effort and passion of the many who have been involved.

In late December/early January I had the great privilege of briefly walking the journey with a number of Burmese refugees in the west of Thailand. I had been somewhat naïve to the Burmese situation that extends to this very day. Long standing distrust between Burman and isolated ethnic farming communities has flared since independence in 1948; since 1984, the ferocity and scale of Burmese offensive has escalated, and continues to do so, burning villages to the ground, forcing hundreds of thousands to flee persecution, execution, or forced labour. Many that have fled have remained displaced inside of Burma, while others, perhaps up to a million, have crossed the border into Thailand. About 150,000 of these are residing in sanctioned refugee camps. One morning a few weeks ago, travelling down along the border in the back of a truck, we were joined by two young ladies – perhaps each 20 years of age. They had fled from Burma about 6 years ago. They were travelling down to Mae Sot, a rambling provincial centre – to study law. "our wish is to return to our land", they said, "but first we must throw the military government out!" I wondered how two bright young ladies could wrest with the might of the cruel dictatorship that had forced them from their home. "We will beat them by the law – but we can only change the law if we understand the law". Again the face of courage declared itself, the unremitting ambition to serve their people in noble manner. Their plight was underlined as we passaged through a number of military check points. Our truck harboured a young girl with suckling baby. She was removed at gunpoint. Further on, a young boy who had been sitting on my lap for some hours, ordered off with his father. As we departed the check point, his fear declared itself with a single tear that was silently wiped from his cheek. My own emotions waxed between helplessness and guilt – that I could not have done more to intervene. Our last glimpse as they, with others, sat feebly on the embankment wondering what future and what risks lay ahead yet again as they are returned to the land they once knew as their own. In subsequent days, I worked with a young Thai doctor, undertaking medical checks on a number of refugee families in their final preparation to travel to Australia. Their excitement was palpable. It drove home to me the value of the work that we do in supporting their settlement on arrival. Their yearning for new opportunity, for peace, for a level of stability and security can be fulfilled in that supported transition. We should not underestimate the powerful place that we have in bringing their harmony and hope to fulfilment.

*"We will beat them by the law - but
we can only change the law if we
understand the law"*

Michael Douglas

5 February, 2007

Humanitarian Programme 2007 - 2008

Amanda Vanstone's discussion paper on the 2007 - 2008 Humanitarian Programme may be of interest to many people and can be accessed on this site - <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/consultations>. A submission has been forwarded and can be read on our web page.

GALA DINNER

This is a reminder to all members and friends of Sanctuary Northern Rivers that our major fund raising event is being held in March. The Lismore Turf Club is a delightful venue; groups will be able to book tables for eight and listen to a fabulous guest speaker in Tim Costello. We will be holding a small auction and selling raffle tickets as additional fun, money raisers.

Friday 9 March 2007

Lismore Turf Club – 6.30 pm

Dinner Speaker Rev Tim Costello

Price \$60 per person or \$100 for a couple

Members of the committee have tickets for sale or you can phone Mary on 66252196 to purchase your tickets.

Highlights over the last twelve months within the Sanctuary refugee community of Lismore

The Northern Rivers refugee families continue to settle into the Northern Rivers area supporting their families in a range of ways. Each member of the community is working towards specific goals, and succeeding. These goals are, in the main, educational, leading to opportunities for employment. Sanctuary Northern Rivers shares some of the highlights from 2006 and early 2007:

- **Monica** and her family have blazed a trail by becoming the first of the refugee families to become Australian Citizens;
- Australia Day 2007 saw **Andrew and Anna** and their children, **Abak, Sobur and Mayen**, and Martin **and Irene and Alice** also becoming Australian Citizens;
- Six Sudanese orphans arrived in May 2006, and initially lived with Anna and Andrew. Anna and Andrew will become legal guardians, extending their family to accommodate the two younger children while the four older boys moved to their own accommodation near by;
- **Mihuku** from the Congo arrived in June 2006 and has settled into Lismore, enrolled at TAFE and is progressing well.
- The **Kuol** family, Philip and Daruka and their five children, arrived on 26 August 2006, the three older children are now attending school.
- A Congolese family, **Hamisi Lumona** with his wife Neema and three young children, arrived on 7th December 2006.
- Volunteer Paul worked independently under the Sanctuary umbrella and was successful in getting a \$2000 grant from the Lismore City Council – congratulations Paul and thanks to LCC!
- **Sarah**, Monica's daughter, has completed her passage into married life – congratulations to Sarah;
- **Tito and Johnson** complete their HSC, graduating from Woodlawn College
- A TAFE Work Placement took place with Sanctuary toward the end of 2006. The work placement student said it was interesting and very challenging. Feedback from Steve Mills, Acting Head Teacher of Community Services, indicated that he saw the experience as valuable and will be recommending it to future students.

How can I fulfil the expectations of my family?

"I do not expect grand things for my family. Just a home which is peaceful, a wooden house with a small garden, with my son, my daughter, my wife. But it is not possible. In our area it is not safe or stable. Everything, including buildings and people can disappear at any time."

Muang Muang Tinn, a refugee from Burma. He has lived in Mae Sot, Thailand, since 1995. This extract comes from a series of reflections delightfully and poignantly illustrated with his brush. (www.burmesepaintings.org)

First Gathering for 2007 – Afternoon at Brooklet

The Sanctuary group held a very happy afternoon at a beautiful property at Brooklet. A large number of community members and volunteers spent a most pleasant time chatting and catching up. The children spent joyous hours in the pool and it was good to see so many of them able to swim. Many of the adults and children took a rainforest walk and saw a possum in the tree. A good time was had by all - and many thanks to the very kind hosts, Glenys and Kevin.



Introducing the New committee for 2007.

President – Michael Douglas	michael.douglas@bigpond.com	6629 1540
Vice President – Denise Miller	miller46@bigpond.net.au	6686 7131
Treasurer – Marie Masters	masters111@bigpond.com	6686 4710
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Committee Members		
Danae Rice-Finlayson	danae_rice@yahoo.com.au	6622 3973
Paul Moretti	moretti-bros@hotmail.com	0409 494 318
Patricia Smithyman	patricias10@bigpond.com	6628 2881

If you are interested in further information regarding the group or ways in which you can assist or support - please feel free to ring any member of the committee - who will be only too happy to speak with you.

Membership Renewals

This is the time of the year when you are asked to renew your support to this very worthy work. Sanctuary has been the recipient of very generous support from a large range of community members. This support has taken many forms either directly or indirectly. Membership donations all go towards assisting the refugees - please renew your membership now.

Invited contributions

We welcome comment on this newsletter, and would also welcome contributions should anyone wish to write an article around the issues in which we are involved. Please contact or Patricia to express your interest and/or send us your article.

The next general meeting of Sanctuary Northern Rivers is

Tuesday 11 Feb 2007

AZA Hotel, Keen Street

from 5.30 - 7.30 pm.

ALL INTERESTED PERSONS ARE MOST WELCOME TO ATTEND.