



Sanctuary - Northern Rivers Inc.

June 2005 Newsletter

Introduction

Welcome to the new newsletter format – not as expansive as the previous prints, but hopefully better fulfils the need to keep the many interested persons of the work of Sanctuary Northern Rivers well informed. Our intention is to produce a brief monthly piece in a simpler format so that it communicates more rapidly, and can be more efficiently disseminated by electronic means. If you have received this letter in the mail and have regular access to email, we would appreciate if you could let us know. Saves paper, stamps and time! We would also welcome your contribution to the newsletter – please feel free to email inclusions, or comments to the address below.

Another effort to improve communication is the revision and regular update of the web-site. Mr Adam Paul, of Pinnacle Web Designs, has generously offered to manage the web page. Thank you Adam! Ideas for inclusions on the web page are welcome. Many have commented on the difficulty of finding the web-page – see the address below. It is a little dated – so bear with us while we bring it up to reflect current activity.

We have made some effort over the past year to facilitate contact with the Sanctuary Northern Rivers (SNR) Committee and the settled families themselves. This has included an information night, and several picnics. This sort of mix will continue on a roughly quarterly basis. **The next “Information night” will be Friday 22 July at 7.30 pm at the Worker’s Club in Lismore.** The program is not fully settled, but will include a mix of media, with speakers, video and possibly some music. We expect that the program will allow time for discussion on the settlement program in Lismore – a good chance to gain a sense of where we are heading. All are welcome.

Family settlement

Last month we settled our sixth family – all in the space of 12 months – a marvellous effort. The three families settled this year include: Michael Rong and his wife Mary. Their extended family includes: Dek (6 yo boy), Nyandor (9 yo girl), Telaar (2 yo boy), Koc (19 yo man) and Majolok (17 yo man). Monica Mayen arrived in early April with her family Abraham (19 yo man), Amokou (17 yo lady), Agum (15 yo lady), Sunday (5 yo boy), Dut (7 yo boy), Daniel (13 yo boy) and Barnaba (Daniel’s twin). Most recently, Mary Ajok arrived with her family in early June. Mary’s family includes Nathaniel (25 yo), Mawar (18 yo man), Ajok (14 yo girl), Achol (11 yo girl) and Agout (12 yo boy). I admire the great courage that each of the families demonstrates in their settling – how capable they are in accepting these new challenges of a foreign life, and showing a determination to confront these for their betterment.

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The assistance of the volunteers in this process is not lost on us. The intense support provided by the coordinators of each family settlement, assisted by many in ensuring that this early interaction can minimise the traumatic dimension of it, and provide the solid foundation that established the family with a confidence. The way each of the Sudanese families have settled can be greatly credited to the compassion and commitment that these volunteers have provided. My personal thanks to all those involved in the settlement – particularly the coordinators Dianne McManus and Jim & Kay Taylor (Michael and Mary and family), Peter John (Monica Mayen and family) and Sharon and Robert Ellison (Mary and family).

Ongoing resettlement

SNR has not as yet actively sought refugee sponsorship – each family that we have settled has been at the request of that family. Those that we have settled have since become the proposers of the next generation of refugees for settlement in Lismore. At present, there are a number of requests in the pipeline that currently having their cases considered by the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMIA). We anticipate that these will be the next arrivals for Lismore. It is likely that there will be a few months' hiatus.

Addressing the thorny issues

The matter of refugee selection by the committee has been one considered in depth. It is very clear, that shortly, the requests received will outweigh the capacity that we have to settle (both from the perspective of the ability to raise money for airfares, and the ability to support during settlement). It is likely that a level of prioritisation for settlement support will be needed – do we support family reunion? Unaccompanied minors? Young men? The brief of SNR is to reach the needs of the most vulnerable – a principle that must underpin any decisions of selection.

There are many other questions on settlement that loom having now put our 'toe in the water'. Should Lismore remain the focus and/or is it time to expand that focus to other communities? How many refugees and at what pace can they be settled in the Northern Rivers? Are services able to be expanded to encompass the growing need?

The potential for conflict and misunderstanding through cultural juxtaposition similarly casts issues for consideration.

These matters have been couched in a recent paper written to promote discussion and assist in forming a strategic and considered approach. The paper will be available through the website shortly, or can be requested via email. Your comments on these issues would be greatly valued.

World refugee day

World Refugee Day (June 20) was celebrated in Lismore by a small gathering hosted at TAFE NSW North Coast Institute, Lismore Campus. It was a very special and moving occasion, welcomed by Bundjalung Elder, Greg, and marked by the stories and gratitude expressed by Michael Rong and Anna Aring. Each of the families were presented with certificates marking the anniversary of the first Sudanese arrivals in Lismore and recent Iranian refugees in absentia. The media both promoting World Refugee Day and reporting on it has reflected the compassion that was evoked by the day. Lismore Mayor, Mr Merv King, similarly expressed his delight in Lismore serving host to settling refugees.

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Northern Rivers continuing to show leadership

The ongoing support from many in the community has been most heartening. The Sudanese have frequently commented on the welcome that they have felt by the people of Lismore. The support, however, extends beyond this. At an institutional and organisational level, we have had commitment that goes well beyond the requirements of a person's job. The passion shown by TAFE staff, Centrelink staff, Lismore Neighbourhood Centre, schools, and Lismore Council in particular has been nothing short of inspirational.

This support, however, is not confined to Lismore. The communities of Ballina and Casino have been active in their commitment to the cause, and now emerging are the efforts of Bangalow and Byron Bay. More often than not, this is driven by the efforts of several people within those respective communities who, by their very belief, are able to bring their communities with them. Those shining lights spread afar!

Fundraising efforts

The fundraising committee, headed by Annie Walton, set up a busy agenda for the latter part of the year. The Garage Sale, hosted by Anna and Andrew was a great success – raising over \$1300 at last count and coming across as a very positive community event. Watch this space for fundraising activities. At this stage: Annual Dinner (likely Lismore venue, seeking Anne Deveson as guest speaker) in late October; Cultural night hosted by St Andrew's Anglican Church (date tba), trivia night in Byron, Pot Luck Dinner in Ballina (October 8), Pot luck Dinner in Kyogle (date tba), harvest of the "missed macca nuts" (I am sure we could give this event a good title) (September), plus a flurry of other ideas.

Ideas for fundraising – small and large - are most welcome. If you have some thoughts, allow them to grow and test out what could be done locally. Please email your ideas as they sprout!

Should you hear of anyone wanting to make a donation, the best idea would be to refer them to a committee member, so that the gift can be received, and the appropriate receipt forwarded. All donations are fully tax deductible.

“Wraps for Love”

Mary Ajok was presented with a hand-knitted blanket on June 25 that was donated by the Casino group of “Wraps for Love” – an organisation that use their skills to demonstrate their measure of love for those in need.

Dates to note on your calendar:

- July 22 – Information night (Lismore)
- August 2 Information night – Ballina Masonic Lodge
- September – macca nut harvest
- October 8 – Ballina Pot Luck Dinner
- October 18 – Annual General Meeting
- Late October – Sanctuary Northern Rivers Annual Dinner

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Courage

This year's World Refugee Day held the theme of courage. The following is an extract from the UNHCR materials to promote the day:

"As ordinary people living peaceful lives, we rarely have to put our courage to the test. Refugees are ordinary people, too, except that through no fault of their own, they find themselves in extraordinary circumstances. As such, they are often required to dig deep into their own inner sources of strength in order, as another dictionary puts it, to find "the ability to overcome fear".

Initially, that fear may be the immediate one of trying to escape the horrors of war and persecution, the pain of losing homes and loved ones, and the ordeal of flight. Later comes the deeper anxiety of uncertainty – the worry of how to rebuild their lives, either in completely new circumstances, or back home where they now may not be welcome.

It takes courage to be a refugee. Courage not to give up hope and to make the most of the hand that has been dealt. Courage to start a new life against daunting odds, eventually to become contributing and enriching members of society once more."

My thanks to all involved in this story of courage.

Michael Douglas

President

26 June 2005

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