

## Sanctuary Northern Rivers

### March 2008 update

#### Sierra Leonean welcome

Many will be aware that we welcomed 16 Sierra Leoneans ( 4 family groups) to our region on February 23. It is hard to absorb the meaning of such a welcome – both for those arriving and for those who receive. Suffice it to say that it is deep and powerful beyond our imagining – that new life opportunities dawn for these families after 8 harrowing years following their flight from Sierra Leone. Ademeyi spoke publicly last week to the Lismore West Rotarians – the echo of his passion and character and love leaves not a trace of doubt how much richer that we all are to have these remarkable people with us.

The families were hosted in local homes (David Noble/Kerry Byrne; Mary and Jack O'Brien, Denise and Reg Miller) and subsequently at 'Gunindi' retreat centre (Ballina) for about 10 – 12 days prior to settling into their own homes in Lismore. Our thanks to these hosts and the many others who have supported their passage – these include:

- Ballina Christian Church
- Andrew Gordon Elders Lismore
- Fred Williams & Staff Centrelink Ballina
- Farmer Charlies Lismore
- Medicare Staff Ballina
- Commonwealth Bank Ballina
- John Stocker Meal Centre Ballina
- Uniting Church Ballina
- Anglican Church
- Lifeline Ballina
- Bob Barnes
- St Vincent de Paul Centre Ballina

In particular, Denise and Reg Miller have been tireless in their support and compassion to see that these families have been settled. The families are now being assisted by volunteers in their ongoing settlement needs.

On Sunday 30 March, there will be a 'formal' welcome – the African community have been preparing for this – and I am sure that it will be very joyous. Please feel free to come along.

#### **Welcome to the new families from Sierra Leone**

**Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> March 12-4pm**

**Presbyterian Hall 188 Keen street Lismore**

**BYO FOOD, DRINKS, PAPER PLATES/CUPS**

**Contact Denise 66867131**

**0428228500**



## International support programs

We have provided about \$1400 to the Ethnic Family Migrant Society (EMFS) to conduct Thai language training to Shan (Burmese) refugees. This program targets young families in the north west of Thailand, who are currently considered 'stateless'. They have fled Burma, yet are not acknowledged by UNHCR as yet. Subsequently they eke out a very frugal existence in the hills and mountains of north-west Thailand – without land, and without any rights. They are often dependent upon factory and farm work (where “worker’s rights” do not prevail). The program we are sponsoring is fully covering the cost of salary and consumables to teach 22 students (of various ages) to learn Thai – this provides them with some capacity to understand their temporary environment and provide some means to negotiate a dignified existence. We are currently considering another proposal from the same organisation to construct an orphanage and health clinic.

Many will be aware that Monica Matoc had approached TAFE (Lismore) last year with a proposal to assist in constructing an education facility in South Sudan. This is now gaining traction, with TAFE energising the fundraising efforts for this program.

## Local programs

Thank you to those who have offered to support the **Homework help program**. Gini Witt has kindly undertaken the foundation work for this, establishing the current need (which is significant!). We are, however, in need of someone to coordinate this program – it is a commitment. The program has the support of the Lismore City Library and the Lismore Neighbourhood Centre, and at this stage several volunteers.

Some will be aware that we are planning to establish a “**Fair Trade cafe**” in Lismore as a means to facilitate integration of refugees (and other migrants), and provide a very visible focal point of advocacy for the principles that underpin our work. The aim is to *create a space where the local community can interact with people of all cultures and faiths to find a common humanity that is built upon respect and aspiration for a society where all people are honoured as equal in dignity and rights*. It is still in its concept stages, and may possibly be done in partnership with other interested parties – it too will need a coordinator (and subcommittee). Any interest, please let us know.

## SNR Administration

I have flagged in the past our need to strengthen the way we work as an organisation. I am constantly aware of our weaknesses – particularly in reaching those who show interest in our work, and the establishment of firm processes to ensure the integrity of the administration of the funds and goodwill entrusted to us. Charitable organisations that achieve their outcomes in a highly responsible and ethical manner must have these processes sound. To date, all has been done on a voluntary basis, and having to compete with the call on time from many other sources. I believe this cannot be sustained, and weakens our long term capacity.

I seek your thoughts on utilising existing funds to engage an employee initially on a part time basis (e.g. 10 hours/week) to strengthen the organisation, and establish a sustainable administrative environment for us to operate within, and facilitate the passage to the broader suite of programs that have been proposed over the last 6 months. It is expected that this position will be self – funding within 3 – 6 months though greater activity in grant submissions.

## Refugee Week

We will shortly be putting together a program for Refugee Week (June 16 – June 20). This should build upon the full and diverse program of last year. Our **annual dinner** will be the Saturday evening prior to this week – June 14 (to be confirmed). Please WATCH THIS SPACE as these arrangements are firmed up in the coming weeks.

In conclusion, a few reminders:

- Sierra Leonean welcome this Sunday March 30 (Lismore)
- Coordinators (and following subcommittees) needed to support – homework help; Fair Trade Cafe; international projects;
- Your feedback on funding part time administration from existing funds on a temporary basis;
- Annual dinner – June 14 – although yet to be confirmed.

“ . . . the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people”

Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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