

## Sanctuary newsletter June 2012

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Dear members and friends

Some of you may be aware that this week (June 17 – June 23) in Australia we celebrate and ponder on the cause of refugees. The week pivots around World Refugee Day – June 20. This day provides the platform for international focus on the plight of refugees, highlighting the legal, political, policy and humanitarian issues of refugees in the world today. On the same day, in refugee camps throughout the continents, there is a moment of light relief, a time of celebration of nations aggregated together with a common aspiration of hope for a peaceful life. A bright star in a dark night. In Lismore, we are celebrating the rich presence of those in our community who have walked the refugee journey. More on that below.

This letter provides a brief update on how the program is going locally, a few activities, and an overall perspective on Sanctuary's work. As we communicated last year – we are in a somewhat latent phase with a void in settlement activity (not through lack of demand!). Although the easing in settlement is not desired, it has provided us a chance to regain our capacities and stand in readiness for more settlement and perhaps wider work.

While quiet, there is a low level of activity that continues in support of those settled, and in efforts of advocacy. I have been asked about fundraising activities (e.g. Gala Dinner) – we will NOT be undertaking this endeavour, believing that with settlement not occurring at present – it is difficult to justify the cause and the effort. Hopefully next year it will be back on our agenda.

### Refugee week

Activities in Lismore include:

- Throughout the week, there is a static display in the foyer of the Lismore City Library – drop in and have a look!
- Wednesday 20 June: The African community will prepare a meal and song for lunch (11.30 – 2.00 pm);
- Thursday 21 June (morning) : stories of Africa: sharing with children and parents at the First Steps preschool;
- Thursday 21 June: 6.30 pm Lismore City Library: an informal discussion on refugee policy led by Sanctuary. Join us for the conversation: all welcome!
- Saturday 23 June 1200 midday – 4.00 p:m: key note celebration event, including stories, dance, cultural display and talks. A meal prepared by the African women will be shared. The event will lead into the Lismore Lantern Parade.

The event on Saturday 23 is the feature of the week, and promises to be a most inspiring and enjoyable event

## Overall program activity

- **Settlement:** it remains that it is now 22 months since any new families have arrived in Lismore. This results not from lack of request, but from the continued rejection of applications by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). Sanctuary Northern Rivers has lobbied, along with many other organisations and individuals, to enhance overall numbers of humanitarian intake, and de-link the applications of those who are offshore when applying, and those who are on-shore. The surge in asylum seekers has resulted in fewer visas available for off-shore applicants – this includes the many in the refugee camps of Africa, or in the squalid shanty towns on the fringes of African cities. There are several applications that remain in process with DIAC – including one Ethiopian family that appears to be ‘moving through the system’. Let’s hope that this family has the opportunity to open a new door on their life.
- **Consolidation:** as a result of this lull in active settlement, the Sanctuary Board has used the time to re-group. We have been able to attend to further support for settled families, continuing to provide assistance with family applications. There has been minimal need for volunteer support – although this may change at any time if we have success with the Ethiopian family mentioned above.
- **Research:** Sanctuary Northern Rivers has partnered with a team at Southern Cross University documenting the experience of settlement. The first phase of this research will be completed by the end of this year.
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR):** you will be aware that SNR has been active in promoting awareness of UDHR in the schools of the region through distribution of a large laminated banner that provides graphic description of the Rights. If you are associated with a school that does not yet have its banner, and would like to do so – please let us know.
- The Board of SNR will soon consider involvement in a program that assists in supporting individuals who are currently held in detention centres. The program seeks the link people who are willing and able to host asylum seekers in their homes, rather than a detention facility. For more information see the Homestay link <http://www.homestaynetwork.org/>
- **National policy:** for changes announced in the recent Federal Budget see: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/bud/2012-13-Budget.pdf>.

## Organisation and membership

- **Membership.** You will be aware that last year, the Board chose to rollover membership in view of this period of latency. Active recruitment of members has not been sought, nor do we feel there is justification for membership fees through this quiet period. A decision will be made shortly whether there will be another rollover for 2012/2013. If you wish to opt out, please let us know!
- **Low level of need for volunteers** – administrative tasks and occasional family support
- **AGM date:** The Annual General meeting will be held **Tuesday 6 November** (Melbourne Cup Day). There will be Board vacancies, and an opportunity to feed into discussion on directions. Please mark the date!
- **Special funds:** there are several families and individuals that we have been assisting in Africa who have come to our attention through their connectedness with families in our community in Lismore. This includes three young siblings in Nairobi, who have been supported with their education and shelter in Kenya; more recently we have been made aware of 6 orphaned children

in a nearby country. We are holding accounts for donations specifically for these causes. If you would like to make a donation to these causes – these contributions will be held in a special fund and used for this specific purpose.

**Donations (tax deductible!) remain very welcome. ALL funding is used directly for refugee support.** Since closure of the office in the neighbourhood centre, overheads remain absolute minimal (insurance, auditing fees etc).

### **Future:**

- We will continue to lead public dialogue and advocate for humane policy. We will continue to correspond with those refugees who write to us seeking assistance. We are likely to enhance the awareness programs amongst youth in the community.

Thank you to all who continue to show so much support and offer your encouragement. It is greatly appreciated!

*Michael Douglas, President*