

Newsletter

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Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group <http://bmrsg.org.au>

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Education Direct Help Direct Action Fundraising

*Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to
all our members and friends*

Overcoming Adversity: The Australian Refugee Story Forum

Almost 140 people attended the recent Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group's forum where speakers spoke of the significant contribution refugees have made to Australia and some of the hindrances they encountered.

All the speakers emphasized how important it is for all Australians to acknowledge this contribution. This is especially relevant now as the Federal Government is releasing more asylum seekers into the community. Otherwise unfounded community hostility will make the lives of these asylum seekers needlessly miserable.

A key message was the need for the Federal Government to avoid the use inflammatory or derogatory language. Although often severely scarred by their experiences most asylum seekers go on to have happy and productive Australian

lives. The history of Australia shows a consistent pattern of resistance to new waves of migration only for people to be eventually embraced into the community. Many more refugees languishing in UNHCR camps need to be rescued from their incredibly harsh lives beset by lack of space, food and medicine. Adam Searle MLC opening the Forum Photo M. Standen



The organizer, Ilan Salbe sends a big thank you to all those who contributed to the forum's success including the speakers, MC Adam Searle, the Mudlarks performers, the Gazette for its coverage, those who ran the sound and PowerPoint, and all those who made and served the lovely food consumed at the end of the day.

Visit to Year 10 students at Blue Mountains Grammar School

Blue Mountains Grammar School's teacher Ms Trish Stevenson asked us to bring a refugee to talk to the year 10 students. With so much negative reporting Ms Trish Stevenson wanted to present the positive contribution refugees that refugees make to our community. Noeline Nagle accompanied Sifa Hickson, a refugee from Cambodia. Her story is one of courage and determination. The students were in awe of her breathtaking account of her pathway from desperation to successful business woman. She spoke of the despair and hardship she encountered when fleeing while pregnant and with her small child through the jungles of Cambodia and eventually to the Thai Refugee camp where she stayed many years.

At the end of her chilling account many of the students rushed to show their support and meet this wonderful refugee, now a successful Australian citizen who had touched their lives.

Hosting Weekend

John Hockney thanks to all the people who helped so generously donating picnic items, driving and entertaining our Family from Egypt.

'Special thanks go to our accommodation hosts Janet and Robert Fraser in Springwood and Scenic World who provided complimentary tickets for the family to enjoy the thrill of the railway, the rain forest walk, the Scenic-sender and Skyway. Our picnic at Wentworth Falls Lake had to be abandoned because of a real chill in the air. The family moved to our home in Leura. These last minute changes did not spoil the day. Sunday was less favourable, but I am sure those of you who met the family know how much enjoyment and friendship the family got out of the weekend despite the miserable weather.

The highlight for our visitors was when they went to Glenbrook National Park and the rain stopped and they were able to get out of the car. Just 10 m away was a herd of kangaroos munching on the grass. They were so excited.

Refugee Picnic

We were lucky on Saturday, 3 December for the conditions were perfect in Lawson with plenty of sunshine and gentle warmth. It was a truly idyllic experience. We met people from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Iraq with whom we shared food and good conversation. The children played ball games, adults sang and did an hilarious tug of war. John Hockney told stories and had the kids in stitches. As always the pool attracted some kids and some adults as well.

Sincere thanks to all those who organised transport, drove the bus and cars, brought and organised games, and contributed treats. A special thank you to Craig and Robyn who arranged it all, especially the weather.



Fun in the Lawson pool Photo C.Beifus

Is This Really Happening in Australia?

A Sri Lankan refugee mother (Mirna) and her four year old son (Sharthy) recently stayed with Ailson and Wayne for a weekend. They visited the Three Sisters and various other Blue Mountains attractions and did a little shopping. The highlight of the weekend was a visit to Wentworth Falls Lake where the adults enjoyed watching the little boy (Sharthy) feed the ducks play on the swings and ride his bike. Usually confined to a small play area, he loved having so much space to run and play in and the freedom of riding his bike on the path around the lake.



Mirna and Sharthy have Residency to live in Australia. Sharthy's father is still in detention in Villawood. He has been granted refugee status but has been refused a security clearance by ASIO so must find a third country that will accept him. Alas, he is not an isolated case.

Alison is one of a band of members who regularly visit detainees in Villawood and now those released into Community Detention.

Sharthy at Wentworth Falls Lake Photo A. Sloan

FUNDRAISING

Bush Dance

On 5 November Wentworth Falls School of arts resounded to the lively beat of the *Ambush* bush band of Kerry and James Coombes & friends - yet another successful fundraising event. Organiser George Winston thanks all those who helped especially Alison Sloan and the raffle ticket sellers. The money raised will enable us to continue to support *The House of Welcome and Bridges for Asylum Seekers* for some months

Federal Government Volunteers Grant

Our application was successful! In total we received \$3,499 to be used towards:-

Petrol for trips to Villawood \$780

Postage of 4 Newsletter \$480

Respite weekends for refugees \$260

Outdoor vinyl banner \$219

Outdoor marquee \$1760

If you send your email to bmrsg@aapt.net.au you will help us to save postage. If you prefer a hard copy we will continue to send the Newsletter by post.

Donations Treasurer, BMRSG, P O Box 197, KATOOMBA NSW 2780.
Further information can be found on our website