

The Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group (BMRSG) is a project of Blue Mountains Family Support Service

Annual Report 2006/7

My greatest wish would be that the Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group no longer needed to exist. Alas, this is not the case.

Since July 2006 to 30 June 2007 our membership has reached 520. As the news about refugees is now low key and other issues have seized the headlines there is even more need to keep alive the plight of refugees. The Committee has continued to meet regularly, now bimonthly, and co-ordinate our activities.

Direct Help

- The dedicated band of visitors has continued to visit Villawood Detention Centre and provide friendship and some of the necessities of life. Sometimes, it has been difficult to take clothes into the Centre. Our visitors have negotiated with the guards to set up a store from which the detainees can access the winter clothes.
- There was some relaxation of the rules, and detainees, in the custody of a couple of guards, have been allowed to leave the Centre to attend the Christmas Picnic and another outing. However, since the last outbreak the rules have been tightened.
- We have continued to support refugees, especially those on Bridging E visas, providing financial assistance, emotional support, medical care, DNA tests for visa, fares, legal assistance and even some small assistance to set up a business
- We have continued provide regular financial support the House of Welcome and Bridges for Asylum Seekers.
- We have paid for school attendance for a refugee child.
- We have held a delightful Christmas picnic which was attended by the Sudanese refugees from Mamre Homestead.

Education

There is still a great deal of ignorance and misunderstanding among some members of the community. To rectify this we have

- spoken to community groups and distributed our redesigned brochure.
- maintained our web site www.bluemountainsrefugeesupport.net
- published newsletters
- advertised our functions in the BM Gazette; with banners along the highway ; posters and hand bills.
- held our main function, the *Hypothetical - Advance Australia Where?* in the Wentworth Falls School of Arts on 24 June 2007. This successful event, packed to the rafters, stimulated a great deal of interest and discussion. Our

grateful thanks go to Fr. Frank Brennan and the members of the panel who donated their time and expertise.

- encouraged our members to write to and lobby politicians of all political persuasions to speak out against the present injustices in the system.
- liaised with local churches and other like minded groups.
- supported the Summer Series lectures on the environment, health and Australia/ US relations.

Fund-raising

To pay for these activities we have

- held three Bush Dances and raffles
- held a Monster Book Sale in Faulconbridge Public School which was a great financial success.
- held a Dinner

George Winston , who has co-ordinated our fund-raising efforts all these years has stepped back from the role to concentrate of his other community activities. We cannot thank George enough, as without the funds, we would not have been able to assist so many needy refugees.

The Future

We shall continue to function as long as our assistance is needed and finances are available.

I must thank all the members of the Committee for their hard work and support.

We sincerely thank the Blue Mountains Family Support Service for its continued support and encouragement.

Marie Standen

Chairperson

July 2007