

Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group

A PROJECT OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICE

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Annual Report 2010-11

We have now been operating for ten years and the situation for asylum seekers and refugees remains a sad one. Both political parties continue to reject the need for a humanitarian approach to the issue of the 'boat' people and prefer those who arrive by aeroplane. The detention centres are full and the processing of these unfortunate people is taking longer and longer. Even when the matter of refugee status is decided, the checking by ASIO becomes another barrier to their release into the community. These lengthy periods of detention inevitably lead to mental health issues and unrest in the centres.

However, the continuing release into the community of families with children is no doubt the result of the ground swell of community disgust of children in detention led by the support groups such as ours and Chilout.

Direct Help

We have continued to raise money from direct appeals, raffles and a bush dance. This has enabled us to continue to support financially the House of Welcome, the Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation, the Asylum Seekers Centre and individuals in need. We contributed to the cost of the GetUp advertisement in the Blue Mountains Gazette.

Our dedicated band of visitors has continued to visit the Villawood detention centre to bring comfort and support to the detainees, especially those who have been detained for very long periods of time. Bernard Gow's art classes have been well received.

Our members have responded quickly and generously to requests for articles of clothing, bedding, school uniforms, furnishings, bicycles, toys, etc. which were needed by several families recently released from detention. One request for a Christmas tree and lights brought joy to an excited family.

Advocacy

We have continued to meet with and write to politicians of both persuasions emphasizing these issues:

- Living conditions in detention centres, especially Villawood
- Mandatory detention
- Delays in processing refugees' claims leading to mental health problems
- Contracting out of services to private enterprise.

- Release of detainees without adequate immediate assistance
- Access to post school education
- Greater access to English classes
- Review of resettlement procedures
- Review of work rights for Bridging Visa holders

The need for the Government to prepare for future climate change refugees from the Pacific.

Direct Action

Letters and articles have been published in the Blue Mountains Gazette and the Penrith Star stressing our hands-on activities.

A letter writing campaign urging the release of children from detention has proved successful.

Refugee Week activities included information stalls held in the main streets of Katoomba and Springwood, a Freedom from Fear breakfast, a church service and a choral concert. The large numbers of people involved in these activities give us hope that change is possible.

I would like to thank all our members who responded so promptly and so willingly to requests for assistance. We especially thank the Wentworth Falls TAFE students and teacher who so ably organized the cage of shoes to represent the children in detention which attracted so much attention in Katoomba and Springwood.

My sincere thanks also go to our Secretary, George Winston and members of the Committee for their continued support.

Once again we sincerely thank the Blue Mountains Family Support Service for its continued support and encouragement.

Marie Standen

Chairperson

July, 2011