

# Romero News



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**ROMERO CENTRE**

*2005 Romero Centre Calendar will be available early November.*

*Please avoid disappointment and order as soon as possible.*

*Contact the office for more information*

*3393 2500*

The Romero Centre is a community based organization working with refugees, predominantly those holders of 3 and 5 year temporary protection visas who currently are in transition towards permanent residency, have recently received permanent residency, and other disadvantaged refugees. The refugees visiting the Centre are predominantly from Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan as well as other Middle Eastern countries.

Reliant upon committed volunteers, the Centre targets and welcomes the most disadvantaged, those

with fewer rights and legal standing.

The Centre actively promotes multiculturalism in Queensland by advocating for the just and humane treatment of refugees, and believes this is crucial in order to have effective and harmonious community relations.

How refugees are treated is a reflection on our society, our values, and us as a people.



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**The majority of refugees visiting the Romero Centre are people who have**

- fled their homelands to escape political or religious persecution
- sought sanctuary from torture, persecution or death
- been compulsorily detained in detention centres by Australian authorities for periods varying from months to years
- met the criteria for refugee status as set out in the UN Convention on Refugees and as interpreted by the Australian Government
- been released from detention by the Australian government
- been granted temporary visas of three or five years, which gives them legal residence in Australia during that time.
- Limited or no access to government services provided to other refugees

The Romero Centre staff and Management Committee have begun serious work since December and the change of auspice.

Already a well documented Strategic Plan has been accepted by the Brisbane Sisters of Mercy, under whose auspice the Romero Centre now operates.

As all involved share a commitment to developing the services carried out at the Centre, working on this paper was both affirming and challenging.

The three main program areas are:

- Individual Client Services**
- Community Client Services**
- Community Education and Advocacy**

## Oscar Romero



*You cannot do everything,  
but you can do something.  
(Oscar Romero)*

The Romero Centre is named after Archbishop Oscar Romero from El Salvador.

He strove to establish truth in a country governed by lies, and documented the abuse of human rights where men and women simply disappeared without account.

Through his actions and by being a 'voice for the voiceless' he became a catalyst for radical moral

prophecy both within and outside the church.

When he spoke the truth clearly, fearlessly denounced atrocities, visited and accompanied the poor, he risked his own life and the name of his church in favour of radical compassion.

His love for the poor, his defence of their rights and their lives, and his solidarity with their suffering and insecurity, led to his

assassination.

On 24th March 1980 Oscar Romero was shot dead while celebrating Mass in the chapel of the hospital where he lived.

The memory of his ministry has left a legacy of light, hope, courage and consolation, not just for the people of El Salvador but for all people committed to justice.



## Fund Raising

Fundraising has always been a crucial activity for enabling the practical support offered to refugees frequenting the Centre.

Throughout 2003/04 the Romero Centre received a lot of practical support and encouragement from individuals, organisations, religious congregations, and church groups.

Many realised the issues facing the Centre and the need to secure funding options for the continuation and development of much needed services.

Fundraising (2003) for rent and running costs was organised and many contributed generously to enabling the survival of the Romero Centre.

The Centre applied in October 2003 to the Department of Multicultural Affairs Queensland for (1) community development projects, aimed at developing existing services, and (2) a part-time community worker (20 hours to be shared with Multi-Link at Woodridge) aimed at working closely with the refugee community and

networking with other agencies. This application was approved in January 2004.

*The Romero Centre is very pleased to announce that Ali Khorimi is our part-time community worker. He is a man well respected in the refugee community, as well as government departments and agencies involved in supporting refugees. He is a man of deep integrity and brings vast experience, skills and expertise to the position..*

An application was also successfully made to the Franciscan Friars through their Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Commission for a full time Centre Co-ordinator. This position is filled by Sister Janine Bliss. The Commission has continued their commitment to justice and their support of refugees by recognising the practical need for this position. The Centre looks forward to further developing the relationship with the Friars.



*Ali Khorimi  
Part-time  
community  
support worker*

*If you would like to support the work of the Romero Centre by making a donation ...*

*Cheques can be made out to the: Romero Centre*

*Donations are TAX DEDUCTABLE!!*

## Change of Auspice & Location

The Romero Centre for 2 years was located at the premises belonging to the Little King's Movement for the Handicapped (LKM) in O'Keefe Street, Buranda.

LKM generously allowed the Centre to use the facilities rent free during that period, but the arrangement was on a temporary basis.

The Romero Centre needed to find a new premises. Finally this happened in June, and by July 1st 2003 the Romero Centre had a new location at 40 O'Keefe Street, Buranda.

The new position is working out very well.

Thank you to the Little King's Movement for the generosity you offered during the two years we were able to use your facilities.



*40 O'Keefe Street, Buranda*

## NEWS! NEWS! NEWS!

There is a remarkable resurgence of refugee visitors who come to see old friends and re-establish contact.

"We never forget your kindness" is a recurring comment.

We love showing visitors around, and the snooker table downstairs has been a great hit.

The expiry of three year temporary protection visas has increased the level of fear and anxiety, and refugees come for information, practical support ranging from filling in forms, making medical or legal appointments, friendship and a listening ear.

Confusion and bewilderment is entirely understandable given the on-going situation of people facing visa/residency uncertainty.

Never has the need for practical support been greater.

The strong community education and advocacy role of the Centre gives refugees some reassurance of the support they have from many Australians.

A constant stream of callers from the "host community" want to help refugees and know more.

We find this encouraging, and believe that as people find out and understand the effects of current asylum and refugee policy, they swell the significant number of Australians who want more compassion and compliance with international law.



*Frederika Steen*

**LATE NEWS!!**  
*Freddie is representing the Australian Democrats in the current election. She is running in the seat of Moreton. Good Luck Freddie!!*

**The strong community education and advocacy role of the Centre gives refugees some reassurance of the support they have from many Australians.**

## Networking with other agencies & support groups

RASSQ

Heather den Houting

Tel: (07) 3377 9805

Fax:(07) 3377 9717

### .RASSQ

Romero Centre has remained active in the Refugee Asylum Seeker Support Queensland advocacy group which meets monthly. As well as a clearing house for ideas and information, it is a valued forum supporting activists in more than 25 organisations in SE Queensland.

### REFUGEE ACTION COLLECTIVE

Our friends in the Collective organise the public rallies, meetings and discussion groups, raise money and circulate a million leaflets to spread the message and get Australians involved in social justice. We value their work which complements our own.

### BRISBANE ACTION RC

We have benefited greatly from the website designed for all who want to know what is happening around our region. In the absence of our own site, we encourage you to tap in, and if possible, provide financial support for this excellent service.

### DEPORTATION/ CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

The terrifying prospect of forced returns is also troubling refugee supporters. What will you do when they knock on the door for Ali or Mohammad or Fatima? Some of the Christian churches have prepared their position for action. The Refugee Action Collective in Qld has an active planning sub group.

BARC

Visit the website:

[www.barc.org.au](http://www.barc.org.au) for information about the valuable work carried out by these & other organisations



## Hazara Ethnic Society in Australia

Close cooperation with Hassan Ghulam, the President of the society and its full time voluntary community worker has kept us focussed on the changing situation and issues in the community.

Despite its name, the Society is inclusive and assists all Afghan refugees.

Hassan's dedication to the cause of human rights and justice has made him a significant contributor to the national debate on asylum and refugee issues.

It is he who conveys so graphically to the Australian public through media and public speaking the anguish and torment of people still in detention, and still on Nauru.

He speaks to them in their own language and hears the full catastrophe of their disintegrating mental and physical state.

As a courageous spokesman for all refugees on Temporary Protection Visas in Australia he speaks with the authority that comes from late night phone calls for help, from hospital visits, Hazara community meetings, national and international networks of scattered Hazara people.

The support work he does is indescribable in its extent and value.

Hassan thanks all friends and supporters for the friendship, help and comfort they give to refugees on temporary visas.

In spite of the appearance of being more settled, more integrated, the fear of forced return at the end of their temporary visas is destroying refugees' lives.

Depression, stress related illness and insomnia are increasingly common.

The most frightening phase has begun. Refugees interviewed in September 2003, have received rejection letters from DIMIA, a decision determining that they no longer need Australia's protection and must go home.

Refugees have 28 days to appeal to the Refugee Review Tribunal and make their individual case, that for them it is not safe to return and that their fear of persecution has not ended.

As well as legal support, our friends will need personal support as never before.

If you would like to support the Hazara Society, please fill in the form at the back of the newsletter or contact the



LATE NEWS!!

**Hassan is a Senate candidate in the upcoming election. There will be an update in**

## Marion Le

“Marion Le is a human rights activist and high achiever like no other in Australia.

She has personally and professionally made the world of difference to the lives of thousands of refugees and asylum seekers in Australia and elsewhere.

Her current involvement representing asylum seekers held on Nauru for more than 30 months is typical.

Fiercely independent and equally fiercely committed to justice and the equal rights of people, she has taken on as pro bono clients all those who asked. Her friends and supporters are dipping into their own pockets to contribute to her costs. Most agents would charge \$2000 plus per case.

## Julian Burnside letter campaign

Julian Burnside QC, provides advocacy work for refugees in Australia.

His idea is to have thousands of Australian citizens writing to federal parliamentarians asking very simple, but hard, questions about the key aspects of refugee policy.

For more information on the letter writing campaign, please e-mail: [jb@julianburnside.com](mailto:jb@julianburnside.com) or visit the website [www.julianburnside.com](http://www.julianburnside.com)

Finding federal politicians' addresses for correspondence

House of Representatives:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/members/index.htm>

Senate:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/senators/index.htm>

For information about refugee issues generally, see:

<http://www.chilout.org/index.html>

<http://www.julianburnside.com>

## E-power and the mighty pen

An army of letter writers and e-mailers are challenging politicians and media moguls about the way Australia now treats asylum seekers and refugees.

Like the drip of a tap on stone, it is making a difference.

Opinion polls now say that 60% of Australians reject our government's labelling of asylum seekers as 'illegal' and 'queue jumpers'.

Our collective “Romero experience” is that efforts to humanise refugees are successful.

*If you would like to support Marian's advocacy work, please fill in the form at the back of the newsletter or contact the Romero Centre for more information.*

*The idea is to have thousands of Australian citizens writing to parliament members about refugee policy*



### **Late News!!**

*In July 2004, there were 15 new arrivals from Nauru. Those that have remained in Brisbane frequent the Centre regularly.*

*We will hear more of them and the situation on Nauru in the next Newsletter.*



**Ph (07) 5492  
9398**

**(07) 5491  
9655**

## **Tampa Nauru arrivals**

On 2 September 2003, 21 young refugee men arrived in Brisbane to amazing national media coverage. They included 14 survivors of the shipwreck rescued by the Tampa.

All had been granted refugee status twelve months before, and had wasted two years of their lives on Nauru.

They were warned **not** to speak to the media. Free, but not free to speak the truth!

Help poured in. Free accommodation was offered by the Uniting Church. St Vincent De Paul was there on day one with essential bedding, kitchen gear, fridge and TV.

Telephone cards and food were donated. It was a traditional Aussie response to people in need and reflected also the guilt we feel about how asylum seekers are treated.

Most of the 21 have moved interstate - the usual pattern. The eight who stayed are studying English and/or working.

## **DIMIA re-interviews refugees**

Fully adjudicated refugees - people who proved they were fleeing persecution have been required to "run the gauntlet" again.

In mid September 2003, about 70 interviews - the first batch - were conducted to "test" whether Afghan and Iranian refugees who live in Queensland still need Australia's protection.

From public statements made, it is clearly the Government's view that conditions have changed and it is safe for most to return.

The naked fear and acute anxiety of our refugee friends fundamentally challenges the

## **The Buddies**

The Buddies are an outstanding example of local community support and advocacy for asylum seekers and refugees.

They are respected for their hosting of refugees and asylum seekers in their homes, and their picnics and gatherings.

Website: [www.refugeebuddies.com](http://www.refugeebuddies.com)

Email: [buddies@satnav.com.au](mailto:buddies@satnav.com.au)



**September 2003 Nauru arrivals**

Their painful mental and emotional adjustment to 5 years of life in limbo, without family reunion, is hard to witness. It fuels our will to work towards changing this injustice - temporary protection visas need to be abolished, so that people can begin to heal.

Government view. So does the multi sourced information being gathered by lawyers and refugee advocates. The Internet is an amazing tool in the search for truth.

Our bottom line is the 1951 UN Convention. A person fleeing persecution must not be forcibly returned to the scene of their persecution if their fears remain.

IF and WHEN their own country is safe for them, many, many refugees will return **VOLUNTARILY**. This has always been true of refugees and displaced people, in all times, all places.



**Buddies' picnic at Maroochydore**

## Tiger Eleven Soccer Team

The inspiring story of a refugee soccer team – mainly Hazara boys who were under 18 when they fled their country – has attracted very positive national and international attention.

Manager Camilla Cowley and a faithful band of volunteers has maintained not only the sporting activities, trips away and endless public relations visits and games but also a social safety net under the young men.

We can be so proud of them all – players and supporters.



A friendly game of soccer is held each Friday night at the home ground next to the Chelmer railway station followed by a BBQ, snooker and friendship in Tiger House, the club house.

You are welcome!

**If you would like to support the team, or would like more information please contact Camilla Cowley 0409269091**

## 2005 CALENDAR



After the success of last year's calendar, the 2005 calendar will be available early November.

Please avoid disappointment and place your orders as soon as possible!!!

## CALENDAR ORDERS!!!

Please contact the Romero Centre for more information regarding placing an order for cal-



*You cannot do everything,  
But you can do something.*  
(Oscar Romero)

# Romero Centre

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**Co-ordinator**  
**Volunteer Staff**

**Janine Bliss**  
**Gwen Gorman**  
**Frederika Steen**  
**Sister deLourdes Jarrett**



*The Romero Centre relies upon its generous volunteers and supporters to provide services to refugees. Vacancies exist in the following volunteer areas. If you are interested in volunteering, or would like more information, please contact the Romero Centre.*

<i>Client Support</i>	English conversation classes
<i>Administration</i>	Office skills and regular time commitment
<i>Child Care</i>	Child care is needed while meetings/workshops/activities are conducted
<i>Yard Maintenance</i>	Occasional lawn mowing/yard tidying & rubbish removal
<i>Handy Man/Person</i>	Side fence and other odd jobs need to be done, as well as general maintenance
<i>Computer skills</i>	Some clients would like assistance to learn/practice/develop computer skills
<i>Fund-Raising</i>	Assist with planning and involvement in fund-raising activities
<i>Exercise Instructor</i>	Women's Group would like access to regular exercise classes

*The Romero Centre is always looking for 'Wish List' items to assist in improving client services and facilities. If you are able to assist in any way, please contact the Centre.*

### Wish List

#### Client Needs

Warm blankets  
Toiletries  
Computers/printers  
(only in working order)

#### Romero Centre Needs

Swings for children  
Yard equipment/tools  
Lawnmower  
Storage cupboards (lockable)  
Shelving  
Display boards/cupboards  
Paint, hession, art/craft materials



**The Romero Centre depends on the generosity and good will of friends and supporters. If you would like to support the services carried out through the Romero Centre or wish to make a donation towards the general running costs please fill in the form and make cheques payable to: ROMERO CENTRE. Donations are tax deductible.**

<i>General</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rent & Running costs of the Centre	\$ _____
<i>Advocacy work</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> General advocacy - raising awareness of Refugee Issues	\$ _____
	<input type="checkbox"/> Support advocacy work for refugees still on Nauru	\$ _____
<i>Client Support</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Client Emergency Relief	\$ _____
	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Support	\$ _____
	<input type="checkbox"/> Women's Group	\$ _____
	<input type="checkbox"/> Men's Group	\$ _____
<i>Special Projects</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Student Support	\$ _____
	<input type="checkbox"/> Hazara Association Support	\$ _____
	<input type="checkbox"/> Marion Le Support	\$ _____
	<input type="checkbox"/> Tiger 11 Support	\$ _____

**TOTAL \$ \_\_\_\_\_**