



ROMERO NEWS

Romero Centre Newsletter November 2008

PO Box 6115, Buranda
Qld 4102
Tel (07) 3846 3250
Fax (07)3846 3910
admin@romerocentre.org.au
20 Dutton St
Dutton Park

Christmas Hours:
Close 12noon 24th December
Re-open Monday 5th January
2009

Inside this Issue

Farewell to Sister de Lourdes

Temporary Protection visas to
Resolution of Status visa

Human Rights Overboard - book
review

A National tragedy, bearing
witness

Farewell Gwen!

Thank you, thank you, thank
you!

A tribute to Chris Christensen.

Eid Celebrations

Romero Centre volunteers

New Staff - Huassan Ghulam and
Sabah Al Ansari



Sister de Lourdes and Towfiq,
the artist of the painting.

Farewell to Sister de Lourdes Jarrett

For those who have not had the pleasure of meeting the Centre's longest serving volunteer, for years the 'heart' of the Romero Centre, Sister de Lourdes Jarrett is a Brisbane Sister of Mercy who epitomises the high values of her order in the service of the poor and particularly of newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees.

Sr de Lourdes was the original Coordinator of the Romero Centre, and its establishment in 2000 and naming was in part driven by her, following in the example of Archbishop Oscar Romero, the voice of the persecuted and voiceless people in San Salvador.

Now in her eighties, she has been professionally and personally involved with the settlement of migrants and refugees in Queensland for about 60 years, in particular looking after every significant flow of refugees from the Vietnamese boat people onwards through the years. There is a huge community of Vietnamese, El Salvadorian, and Afghani Queenslanders who have been touched by Sister de Lourdes' work and remain connected with her as a surrogate 'mother' or 'grandmother'.

For eight years, Sister de Lourdes has been dedicated to her volunteer role at the Romero Centre. In that time she has offered exemplary pastoral care, providing the welcome, friendship and listening ear to refugees who miss their family and extended family. She has built strong relationships with dozens of refugees, maintaining phone contact with people who have since moved away. Our clients still return from years interstate to say hello and say "I never forget you. You helped me". Her commitment is legendary. During a four month period when the Romero Centre was without a physical address, Sister de Lourdes drove to visit approximately 65 women in their own homes to keep in touch with the client group.

To other staff and volunteers, refugees and the general community, Sr de Lourdes remains a model of pure, wholehearted, and humble compassion. She is loved and respected for her genuine personal interest in every man, woman and child she meets. She will be sadly missed by many as a shining presence at the Romero Centre, and her legacy is the Centre's reputation for a strong, abiding spirit and welcome. Sr de Lourdes - we thank you, and hope that we can see you here for a visit very soon!

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter." Martin Luther King Jr.

Temporary Protection visas to Resolution of Status visa

Changes - At last!

On 9 August 2008 Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) were abolished. This means that all initial applicants for a Protection Visa who are found to engage Australia's protection obligations now receive a Permanent Protection visa, a Resolution of Status (RoS) (subclass 851) Visa.

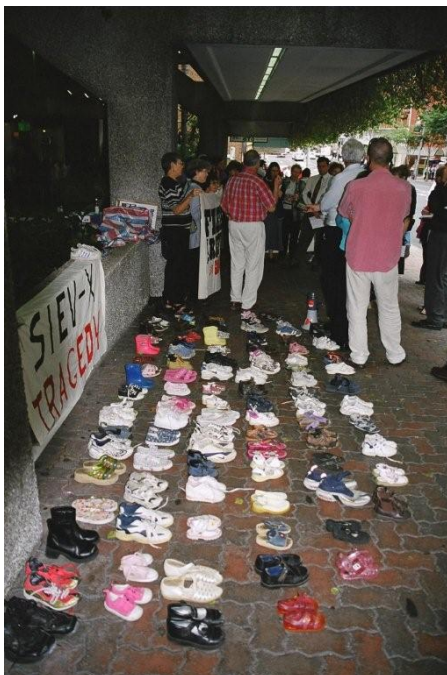
All current TPV and some THV applicants for a Protection Visa in Australia will have their status resolved through the RoS provided the health, character and security requirements are met.

Why the new visa? - a means to permanency

TPV and Temporary Humanitarian Visa holders have already had their refugee status determined, but have been living in uncertainty. The holders of these visas deserve to have their status resolved quickly and without need to have their protection claims reassessed to gain permanent residency.

The new visa - equal access to services

Holders of the RoS will be eligible to access the same services as permanent Protection Visa holders, including AMEP, disability support, family tax benefit and childcare benefit as well as travel rights. They will also be able to sponsor their families through the Offshore Humanitarian Programme.



Human Rights overboard – a review

This wonderfully compiled book is the compelling evidence presented to the Peoples' Inquiry into Detention. The 450pp are an account of what ordinary Australians saw, heard and felt, and very importantly, what happened in our immigration detention centres to the men, women and children who sought Australia's protection as asylum seekers and were incarcerated, tormented and in many cases, driven into deep despair and mental ill health.

This is not for the faint hearted. It is however essential reading for all who must or want to understand this dark chapter in our history. It must be required reading for all Parliamentarians, because unless they get the messages and repeal the legislation which allowed this to happen, we remain in danger of a repeat sometime down the track. Available for purchase through the Romero Centre.

A National tragedy, Bearing witness

"Boat people" started arriving in increasing numbers during 1999. It was always a fearful and dangerous journey from Indonesia to Australia in unseaworthy small boats. Some were shipwrecked, others simply disappeared. On 19 October 2001 one such small boat referred to as SIEVX, the length of a tennis court and overloaded with about 400 people broke up in heavy seas about 60 nautical miles south of Indonesia in international waters.

The 353 victims were mainly children (146) and women (142) wanting to be reunited with fathers and husbands who were given refugee status by Australia but only temporary protection visas which denied them travel rights and family reunion sponsorship.

Forty five asylum seekers survived 20 hours in the water and were rescued by Indonesian fishermen and taken to Jakarta. Some were quickly dispersed and resettled in Sweden, Finland and other countries. The seven who had relatives in Australia waited another nine months before being allowed to come. The names of all who drowned remain unknown. Neither Indonesian Police, Australian Federal Police, the UNHCR nor the International Organisation for Migration has made public the passenger list. The Australian Government strenuously denied that its surveillance planes and Navy boats knew of the seriously overcrowded unseaworthy boat setting out for Christmas Island, or of its sinking. Only a full judicial enquiry will get to the truth according to refugee advocates and SIEV X survivors and the family of those who drowned or remain unaccounted for.

The seventh commemoration of this tragedy was marked by the Refugee Action Collectives' multifaith vigil. Visit <http://www.sievx.com> for more information.

Farewell Gwen!

In August 2008, we bid a fond farewell to one of Romero Centre's core staff, Gwen Gorman, who has retired from her duties as volunteer refugee support caseworker. A gathering was held at the Romero Centre to recognise and celebrate Gwen's significant contribution to the Centre over the past six years, during some of the most challenging periods in the Centre's history. It was a happy occasion as we wished her a wonderful and well-deserved second retirement - enjoy the rest and leisure time, Gwen!

A nurse, social worker and senior public servant during her working life, Gwen has been a volunteer at the Romero Centre since 2002, helping Afghan, Iraqi and Iranian refugee clients. For most of this time, the Centre's clients were all on the Temporary Protection Visa (TPV), and so were not eligible for many government services or able to be supported by funded caseworkers. Because of this, Gwen worked almost full-time hours doing volunteer casework support and advocacy.

Gwen spent the majority of her time with the Centre supporting individuals and families through a range of issues related to people's experience of detention centres, the limitations of their visas, and general settlement problems. Over the last couple of years she has focused on supporting people through the immigration process for family reunion. Throughout her time with us, her refugee case work knowledge has informed the Romero Centre's broader advocacy work, greatly enhanced the reputation of the Romero Centre, and has contributed constructively to policy and program changes. Gwen was one of many voices that influenced the recent abolishment of the TPV.

Gwen's commitment to 'doing the work that needed to be done' has demonstrated an almost superhuman commitment to the people she has worked with, and to social justice. Her deep seated sense of fairness and justice, her tenacity and dedication has been outstanding.



Thank you, thank you, thank you!

In July 2008 the Romero Centre was successful in receiving a Settlement Grant Programme from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

We have also been extremely fortunate the last few months to have received grants from the Ross Divett Foundation, Catholic Religious Australia QLD, Australian Ethical Investments and an anonymous donation of \$25,000 for the express purpose of covering wages - a generous and most appreciated gift. We have also continued to receive generous support from the Soroptimist International Brisbane South, in the form of time and energy (some of wonderful volunteers are also Soroptimist members) and sewing machines.

Yvette Dempsey from the Gold Coast Refugee Group organised a showing of the film *Hope* on Nov 6 - all donations went to the Centre and with book sales, totalled over \$600.

Last but not least, thank you to Bluewire Media for our fantastic website which they have created for us pro-bono. Take a look at their handiwork, www.romerocentre.org.au.



Chris Christensen 18 February 1930 – 26 December 2007



Sister de Lourdes and Chris Christensen

Our dear friend and long time volunteer died peacefully on Boxing Day, 2007 after a feisty battle with cancer and volunteering for every available new treatment, because it might help others. Always direct and pragmatic, she confronted the disease and shared her remarkable last journey in and out of hospital with email bulletins to friends that demonstrated her quiet courage and faith. We were so privileged to have her visit us with faithful friend Marg Hounslow at our new Centre for a last lunch in November (see photo) and will remember with gratitude how she modelled for us, with great dignity, how to die.

Chris was one of our English teachers when I joined the team in June 2001 and made memorable contributions to staff meetings and training sessions and whenever we had visiting politicians. Chris was particularly

interested in the religion and culture of Muslim refugees and in the role of women. The academic interest resulted in an information brochure she prepared on Afghan women and the practical interest in personally tutoring refugee women and informing and persuading her ZONTA International friends to financially support good refugee causes - the student struggling with fees, the sewing machines for regular classes.

I will never forget her theological argument (backed by a Masters in Theology) that God was gender neutral, and references to God the Father were therefore unacceptable, or her letters to the Editor which just flowed from her keyboard. I hear her correcting my grammar as I type, and smile. She lives on in the memories of her Romero friends.

A tribute
Freddie Steen

Eid Celebrations

Afghan Eid Celebrations October 3rd 2008

Eid, the religious celebration at the end of Ramadan, a month of fasting and focusing on God, is always a joyous family affair with new clothes, good will and large community gatherings. Because they have no community space big enough to hold the entire community, the hall at Mary Mac on Ipswich Road is hired for each occasion. About 700 Afghan Australians, their friends and many children celebrated on 3 October.

About 150 people attended the Iraqi community Eid celebration on 1 October. The celebration started at the Community Hall in Kuraby for prayers and breakfast and continued later in the Rockriver Park in Oxley for activities and a BBQ.



"O believers, be securers of justice, witness for God. Let not detestation for a people move you not to be equitable; be equitable --- that is nearer to God-fearing" (Qur'an 5:8)



Romero Centre Volunteers – raising your hands

Comings and goings

The past few months have seen a number of comings and goings for the Romero Centre. We were sad to say goodbye to a few of our volunteers who are moving on to other activities. In particular, we want to mention the long term volunteer staff who have left us: Gwen Gorman (Caseworker), Sr de Lourdes Jarrett (Hospitality), Pam Boag (Admin & Tutor), Madeline Deveraux (Sewing Group), and Lisa Carter (Housekeeping). Pam has headed to China with her husband Alistair to teach English. Lisa is committing more time to her new family. Gwen and Sr de Lourdes are retiring from their long-term, full time commitment to volunteering with the Romero Centre.

We also welcome several new additions to the volunteer team: Welcome to Julie Upton (tutor), Denise Proud (childminding), Sr Gerry Fitzgerald (Sewing Group), Roger Atkins (tutor), Sr Thuy (Caseworker), Julie Stark (Women's Group project), Boyd Craig (tutor), Joanne Hamilton (tutor), and Chela Goji (events) and there are more volunteers waiting in the wings to take on roles at the Centre!

Citizenship Tutoring Resource

Special thanks goes to Isabel Trifaro and Julie Upton for the excellent Citizenship Tutoring workbook they have created. It's a great resource for tutors; copies are now available for use with your students. Well done on a great achievement!

New staff – Hassan Ghulam and Sabah Al Ansari

We welcome the appointment of part time paid workers Hassan Ghulam (20 hours a week) and Sabah Al Ansari (11.5 hours a week).

Hassan has been our volunteer Afghan support worker since our establishment in 2000 and it is a relief that he can now be paid in part for what he does so generously and has done for eight years. His leadership and service has been critical to the settlement of refugees formerly on TPVs.

Sabah came to Brisbane as a refugee in 2003 and has a background in electrical engineering, journalism and community support worker with the Multicultural Development Association (MDA). He is a poet who at this year's Brisbane Writers' Festival launched his first collection of poems in English. We share an extract of one of his poems and his dream for all Australians and especially for those who came as refugees.

And finally...

On behalf of staff at the Romero Centre, I want to thank each and every one of our volunteers for providing us with those invaluable gifts - time, energy, skills, and passion - without which we would not be able to operate.

In particular, we would like to acknowledge all Romero Centre volunteers for your patience over the last 18 months, through all of the transitions the Centre has experienced: changes in location, changes in staffing, changes in our clients' immigration status, changes in funding, changes to how we do things. We have all weathered these transitions as best we can, and volunteers have shown so much grace and understanding during these times.

For those who will be continuing your commitment into 2009, we look forward to our ongoing work together!

Volunteer roles

Just a reminder for our current volunteers that cleaning, general tidying, and keeping your eyes open for things that need doing is part of everyone's role at the Centre! Please contact Emma if you or anyone you know is interested in the following volunteer job opportunities:

- *Refugee Week Film Festival Coordinator.*
- *Supervision & support - Sewing Group.*
- *Admin assistant - data entry.*
- *Accommodation support workers.*
- *Tutors*

Extract from Towards the Sun

Living here on this land
Peacefully
Safely
Hopefully
Living here on this land
Shoulder to shoulder
Hand in hand
Working together to build this land
Shoulder to shoulder
Hand in hand
Walking together on this land
Towards the sun
Where the future
Is clear and bright
On our land...our land
Our land... our land

Fundraising:

Besides specific projects, the Romero Centre also needs donations for more general refugee relief. This is used for a wide variety of needs – families whose limited budgets leave no room for extra health costs, unexpected school expenses, fees for an employment-related training course, driving lessons. When a member of the family is working, these things are usually not a problem. But for families or individuals on minimal government benefits, they can be insurmountable.

We also need to raise funds for the day-to-day expenses of running the Centre – upkeep, wages and provide hospitality to visitors.

Any donation you can make will make a difference and you may wish to nominate the purpose of the donation you are making. Donations over \$2.00 are tax deductible. Cheques should be made payable to the Romero Centre.

The Romero Centre acknowledges the generous ongoing support of the Sisters of Mercy as our legal sponsor, and the administration support of Mercy Family Services as well as various individuals who have generously donated to the centre.

Wish List!

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.

Client Needs

Sewing machines

Computers/printers (only in working order)

Exceptional circumstances fund (loans and payments)

Craft material for our women's group eg: scrap booking items, needles, threads, cottons for crochet, ribbon, beads, knitting needles, crochet hooks, beading tools, cuttings boards, Stanley knife, craft glue...

Electronic donations

We are now able to provide donations by electronic transfer. If you prefer to donate in this way, please follow the steps below.

1. In the lodgement reference please include your initial, surname and 'Romero'.
2. Complete and send in the name and address slip below.

On receipt of this information will be able to ensure that your donation is correctly identified and issue a receipt to you.

Our bank details are:

Sisters of Mercy, Mercy Family Services

ANZ, Virginia

014 275 775237628

Book Sales

Remember that we have a number of books for sale. Call the office or come and visit.

<i>Freeing Ali: The Human Face of the Pacific Solution</i> by Michael Gordon	\$15
<i>Rescuing Afghanistan</i> by William Maley	\$20
<i>Acting from the Heart: Australian advocates for Asylum Seekers tell their stories</i>	\$22
<i>The Rugmaker of Mazar-E-Sharif</i> by Najaf Mazari and Robert Hillman	\$25
<i>Human Rights Overboard</i> by Linda Briskman, Susie Latham, Chris Goddard	\$35
<i>Blind Conscience</i> by Margot O'Neill	\$33

Cut this slip and send in with your donation or to advise of a deposit into our account:

Romero Centre
P O Box 6115
Buranda
QLD 4102



Name _____

Address _____

Post Code _____ Amount \$ _____

Electronic transfer?

Many thanks for your continuing support of our work.