



Refugee Services Newsletter - March 2009

2009 has begun with a sense of uncertainty about the future for many of the world's developed countries.

The news media continue to report on losses in the job and banking sectors, and there's a feeling that we are heading for uncharted waters.

Yet for those of us in the Auckland office at Refugee Services, there is a very real sense of growing opportunities, and excitement about what the year holds. Our rebranding last year, with its wonderful slogan: "Resettle, prosper and grow", and its cutting edge graphics, reflects the transition that we as an agency have undergone, as well as the sense of promise we feel about this next stage of our work.

Across our sector, agencies and refugee communities are engaging in strong collaborative work involving capacity building, and making the most of refugee community expertise. The growing profile of the Auckland Refugee

Community Coalition is also another sign of positive developments within the resettlement area, as service providers seek to engage increasingly with refugee communities themselves. The recent Auckland Refugee Resettlement Forum put on by Refugee Services and the Coalition as part of the work done leading up to the National Forum, was a clear example of refugee communities and service providers coming together to acknowledge and tackle some of the long-term challenges facing the communities who settle here.

There will always be challenges in the area of resettlement, and this year will be no exception. We are however expecting them to lead to change and growth, with really positive outcomes! I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter, as we give you a snapshot of some of the work of the last few months.

Janet Mathewson
Auckland Coordinator

Meet one of our recently arrived families from the Congo

The Aucklander recently published an article about one of families who arrived in November. Charles Salama is a former pastor and farmer from the Congo who recently settled in Mt Roskill with his wife and three children. They were absolutely delighted when the local Bike Barn, through the efforts of their volunteers, donated four bikes to the family. They were further donated a bike seat for their baby from a generous reader of the article.

Mr Salama has said that they have found no difference from the brochure they were given on New Zealand when they were in Uganda and the reality on arrival. They have been made very welcome by the neighbours and church, and with the volunteers' help have settled well into their home. Their volunteers were keen to get the family bikes to really help with their independence.

Mr Salama said it is really useful for him as he can now go to the market and doesn't require the use of a car. The children are now in school, and Mr Salama has started his English course. And of course, they are travelling on their bikes!



Ruth (8) on her new bike

Why would people from DRC (Democratic Republic) of Congo need protection in New Zealand?

In November a small number of families arrived from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The families are from different ethnic groups and all are followers of various Christian denominations.

DRC (formerly Zaire) gained independence from Belgium in June 1960. Laurent Kabila (assassinated in 2001) took power by force in 1996. The 'Second Congo War' that has raged since 1998 is often referred to as the 'African World War' and has claimed more lives - 5.4 million - than any other conflict since the Second World War. Reasons behind the ongoing conflict are numerous and complex, including conflicts over basic resources such as water, access and control over rich minerals as well as various political agendas.

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Refugee Services

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Refugees from a wide variety of ethnic groups, including Bambuti (Pygmy), Mushi, Nande, Banyamulenge (Congoese Tutsi), Mugere, Mundo and Barega, have been included in the 2008/2009 Refugee Quota for New Zealand. They have mostly suffered persecution on the basis of either race or gender. Whilst French is the official language of Congo, Swahili is the dominant language in the east of the country. The majority of this group fled Congo between 2002 and 2005 and ended up in either urban conditions in Kampala (Uganda) or in the refugee settlement Kyaka II some 3 hours outside Kampala. According to the UNHCR, Uganda currently hosts over 42,000 refugees from DRC.

End of Year Social Gathering at Refugee Services



Volunteer Rachel Ng teaches 7yr old Burmese refugee Siti a Kiwi game

In November 2008 Refugee Services held its third cross-cultural gathering of the year at the Wesley Community Centre. These social occasions are an opportunity for recently arrived refugees and their volunteers to catch up with friends and to celebrate the refugees new start in their new homeland.

Refugee Services Northern Regional Manager Jill Conway said that refugee community leaders expressed appreciation for the way that the gatherings brought people together in a positive way.



Map of the Democratic Republic of Congo

Open to all from the July and September intakes, this gathering was made up on Eritreans, Iraqi, Ethiopians, Burmese, Burundians, Afghanis and Sri Lankans. Leaders from established community groups also attended.

Alongside entertainment from groups within the refugee communities was a delicious – and truly multicultural – pot luck supper. Food is always a popular



Sisters Yorusalem and Bethlehem & their friend Rahwa enjoy Pass the Parcel

DRC has recently been in the news again as violence surged in the east of the country under the leadership of the rebel Tutsi leader General Nkunda, who claimed to be hunting Hutu militias that fled to Congo following the Rwandan genocide. Human Rights groups such as Amnesty International, have accused him of war crimes and other gross human rights violations. However, a recent joint operation between the governments of Congo and Rwanda resulting in Nkunda's arrest has led to a glimmer of hope that the region might be on the path to peace.

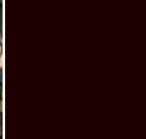


Younan Shaba, Gebrail Kolazar and Alexandria Youkhana of the Iraqi Nineveh Association perform a cultural dance

connection towards better cross cultural understanding and relationship building.

Eritrean, Burmese and Iraqi food sat alongside the more traditional Kiwi fare of pavlova and potato salad.

Kiwi music was heard in between songs and dance from Burma and Iraq and the classic Kiwi game of "Pass the Parcel" was enjoyed by all the children.



Date for your dairy

Auckland International Cultural Festival

Date: Sunday 29 March
Time: 10 am – 5 pm
Venue: Wesley Park – between Sandringham Rd and May Rd

The Auckland International Cultural Festival, organised by Auckland City Council in association with Refugee Services, celebrates Auckland's cultural diversity. People from more than 40 nations celebrate their music, dance, flavours and arts and crafts at this increasingly popular one day free global village festival. Last year an estimated 40,000 people enjoyed a truly great day of continuous cultural performances and an array of food and crafts from all over the world.

Refugee Services will also present the World Stories Tent with its theme "People Who Make a Difference", which will showcase the work of some extraordinary people who help others in need. Former refugees helping with innovative projects in their communities in Auckland or back in their own country, visionaries who create projects to support community development here or overseas, and of course our own Refugee Services volunteers.

Dawit Arshak in action

Dawit Arshak, who came to New Zealand as a UN quota refugee from Ethiopia, will be speaking about his experience of returning to Ethiopia with Habitat for Humanity, an organisation that seeks to eliminate poverty housing and homelessness from the world and to make decent shelter a matter of conscience and action.



Dawit Arshak in action

Volunteering with Refugee Services

We rely on our volunteers to really make the transition for refugees arriving in New Zealand as straightforward as it can possibly be. It isn't always easy.

However, it is generally always interesting and as we expand our services, we would love it if you would continue to support us (or join our volunteer team if you have not signed up already).

As many of you know, the refugee families arrive in New Zealand every two months to fill our agreed annual quota with United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) of 750 people. They spend six weeks in an orientation programme at the Mangere Refugee Centre before entering our community.

Our next training will be for the May quota and we encourage you to become part of our volunteer team, or pass the information on to your friends and colleagues.

Some of the ways you can volunteer with us:

- Six months assigned to a new arrived family (you are in a team)
- Re-volunteer on a short term assignment (2-3 months), or as part of our mobile team.

Training to be a volunteer is approximately 18 hours and following placement you can qualify for our NZQA Certificate in Refugee Resettlement.

Our next round of training for the families arriving in May is:

May Intake (TM60)

Wed 29 April	6.30pm – 9.00 pm
Wed 6 May	6.30pm – 9.00 pm
Wed 13 May	6.30pm – 9.00 pm
Wed 20 May	6.30pm – 9.00 pm
Sat 23 May	9.30 am – 3.30 pm
Wed 27 May	6.30pm – 9.00 pm

This comprehensive training is followed by two more meetings before departure date, and four meetings once the family are in their homes.

Other areas where volunteers are needed:

- Various roles at the Refugee Centre in Mangere, where the refugee families live for their first six weeks during orientation.
- Help the smooth running of our furniture warehouse.

Contact **Teresa Marinovich** on **09 621 1103** or email **teresa.marinovich@refugeeservices.org.nz**

Remember to tell your friends about us!