



## Christchurch Newsletter June 2009

It has been a pleasure to welcome another six families into Christchurch from the March intake. This is a total of 14 Bhutanese families we have settled in 2009 and the Bhutanese refugee community now numbers 126. The Community has started meeting on a regular basis at the Refugee and Migrant Centre. They are well organised and have set up a communication 'phone tree' on their own initiative.

The Community were invited to send up to 30 people to St. Thomas of Canterbury College to celebrate the Enterprise Product Launch of four of the students; Hayden Vincent, Sam Moffett, Tom Scott and David Dalzell. The four students developed a product which will monitor and report on noise level in industrial, residential and road environments. This product is unique and is solar powered, and has a recycled dimension. Mr. Keith Yardley, Chartered Accountant and technology partner Dynamic Controls Ltd of Christchurch mentored them.

To quote the students, "We will invite members of the Bhutanese Refugee Community who we are also sharing a journey of learning and discovery with. We are walking in the footprints of the College's guiding spirit, Blessed Edmund Rice, a successful businessman who engaged with those on the margins of society not by rhetoric but by deeds."

The students had fundraised and presented the Community with gifts last December. They gave them wonderful Christmas food parcels and also four new soccer balls.

Vida Hazrati and Marita Perini attended the Product Launch with 20 members of the Community. I think the highlight for the Community was the presence of the Prime Minister, John Key. Vida spoke on my behalf and after the function ended John Key went to the Community and spoke to each one and also posed for photos with them. They stated that they would never get the opportunity to get up close to a leader in their own country.

Restructuring of the management of Refugee Services has resulted in our Manager of External Relations, and former CEO, Peter Cotton accepting redundancy and finishing work with us on the 1<sup>st</sup> May. Two management roles have been 'dis-established' with just one position of CEO created to cover both positions. Heather Hayden has been appointed to this role and will begin work with us on the 2<sup>nd</sup> June. Brett Denham, National Manager Operations will also leave Refugee Services.

Peter had worked with Refugee Services since 1989 and will be missed by us all. I attended a farewell party for him on the 5<sup>th</sup> May and many people came to honour him. He was greatly respected by all who worked with and alongside him, and there is a lot of sadness to see him leave. We all wish him well for the future.

Anne-Marie Reynolds - South Island Regional Co-ordinator.

***Congratulations to volunteer, Elizabeth Carr who ran the Antarctic half marathon and was placed third in the woman's event! What a great achievement!***

### **Past events**

#### **Volunteer dessert evening**

About a dozen volunteers attended a dessert evening at the Refugee and Migrant centre. We had a lovely evening of socialising and catching up.



Sula, Asha and Mike at the dessert evening

### **Upcoming events/ meetings**

Lyttelton Harbour Festival of Lights 2009

**Friday 5th-Sunday 14th June 2009**

- Venue: Lyttelton

- Official Website: [www.lyttelton.net.nz/winter](http://www.lyttelton.net.nz/winter)
- **This is a free event** Lyttelton Festival of lights is a mid-winter light spectacular transforming Lyttelton Harbour into a twinkling jewel. A masquerade party brings the festival to life on opening night. This is followed by a series of events featuring local food, music and performances at restaurants, clubs and other local venues in and around the harbour. The famous street festival in Lyttelton has a spectacular mask parade, circus variety performers, music and dance, short films, an outdoor street market with winter warmers, quality art and craft and a brilliant firework display. There is something for every age group.

**Kidsfest** - This runs through the July school holidays. There are a number of free events, just be aware that you often need to book in for these. Brochures are in Libraries now.

### **VOLUNTEER WEEK 14<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> JUNE**

Volunteer week is a week in which we acknowledge the wonderful work that volunteers do to keep our country running. It is also a time to encourage people to get involved with a volunteer role.

The following free events have been organised by Volunteering Canterbury (of which Refugee Services is a member).

If you would like to take part in any of these events, **please collect a Refugee Services card** from the office, so that you can be admitted.

#### **Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> June**

Christchurch Personal Guiding Service offers a free, guided walk around the central city. Meet at the red and black kiosk in Cathedral Square (by the BNZ) at 10.45am. The walk will start at 11am and last two hours. Wear comfortable walking shoes and a warm jacket.

#### **Friday 19<sup>th</sup> June**

Air Force Museum in Wigram offers any tour free (there is no charge for entry to the museum). Bookings are essential phone 343 9504 or 343 9544

#### **Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> June**

Ferrymead Heritage Park offers free entry to the park, the township, exhibitions and museums, as well as unlimited tram rides. This offer includes the volunteers partner and up to four children.

*A big thank you to all our wonderful volunteers!*

**Curtain bank volunteer**

If anyone would be interested in assisting Catherine with getting curtains from the curtain bank when new intakes arrive, could you please contact her on 366 0497. Any help would be much appreciated.

**NEW FAMILIES ARRIVING 19<sup>th</sup> JUNE**

We have four new Bhutanese families arriving on the 19<sup>th</sup> June. Three of these families will have high health needs. As we are not training new volunteers at present, the new teams will be made up of experienced volunteers. If you are interested in working with one of these families, could you please contact the office on 366 0497. Your assistance is very much appreciated.

**A reminder that experienced volunteers have the option of doing a 6 week placement, if they feel that they can not commit to a 6 month period.**

**We also now have a number of mobile volunteers who are doing a fabulous job. Mobile volunteers do not work within a team, but will pick up appointments for teams when none of the team members are available. Let us know if you are interested in this.**



If anyone has plants, bulbs or cuttings that they would like to donate to refugee families, they would be gratefully received. Please contact the office on 366 0497



## **My Agony in Bhutan**

Nestled between India and China, the tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan seems an unlikely starting point for large-scale ethnic displacement. But since the early 1990s more than 110,000 members of the **Nepalese-speaking Bhutanese** population have been living in refugee camps in eastern Nepal, evicted from Bhutan for their **pro-democratic activities**. More than 5,000 Bhutanese refugees have been resettled in the US in 2008, according to a report by the UNHCR and they have promised to take 60,000 to 70,000 Bhutanese in USA. Also, there are more than seven different countries helping with the resettlement of Bhutanese refugees.

It was in 1989, while I was in high school, that I first felt discriminated against because of my ethnicity. I was a **Lhotshampa**, which meant I was from the south of the country and spoke Nepalese. My other ethnic Nepalese friends and I wanted to celebrate **Dashain**, the biggest **Hindu festival**, so we bunked class. When the school principal berated us for our behaviour we apologised to him - little did I know that far greater repression was yet to come.

After that we all (Lhotshampa) requested the government to give importance to our **culture**, the atmosphere became tense. **Bhutan** introduced stringent rules that were intended to repress our minority Nepali-speaking community and closed down our Nepali Literary Association, which organised recitals of Nepali poems. We were required to wear the national dress, (called **Gho**, a knee-length robe tightened at the waist by a belt), instead of our ethnic **Daura Suruwal**, a long double-breasted garment flowing below the waist, worn with trousers.

Then in 1989 the government issued an order that prohibited **Lhotshampa** students from celebrating **Dashain**. We saw this as discrimination and decided to celebrate anyway. A debate ensued and the security forces were summoned. Our photos or the identity card (citizenship card) were taken and some of our friends were arrested.

Moreover, I heard that **Lhotshampa** people were being arrested and tortured, in my hometown in **southern Bhutan** and the area had already become a hotbed of peaceful pro-democratic protest. Even then, I continued my study in panic mode thinking of my parents in the

south as I was studying in the north. On the other hand, they continued arresting including innocent people in the south and many of them had moved to West Bengal, India. As the crackdown continued in Bhutan, the number of Bhutanese refugees grew here.

In the **Indian** border town of Garganda, refugees were being relocated to temporary camps. **Various refugee forums** were established there. In 1990 they formed the **People's Forum for Human Rights**. Some of the refugee leaders went to eastern Nepal looking for a place to shelter the refugees. **Nepal**, which doesn't share a border with Bhutan, was generous and provided Bhutanese with land on the bank of the Mai River, in the southeast of the country. Some of them shuttled between India and Nepal, transporting the refugees - mostly children, elderly people and women.

In 1991 I was given a letter from the education department of Bhutan to bring a **No Objection Certificate (NOC)** from my district. So, I approached them for the certificate but that was only the way to terminate me from the school as they provided for no one. After that I looked for a temporary job for a year expecting a good situation in the future in Bhutan. Luckily, I got admission in the capital city of Bhutan through some source the next year. But when I spent only two months in class X (year 12), I received a message from my parents stating that they had been told to leave the country soon by the government of Bhutan, even though our parents were innocent. Thus, the agony of my parents made me leave the country where I needed to wipe my eyes to find the way to the refugee camp in Nepal.

We were able to draw the attention of **non-profit organisations and donor agencies**. **Caritas Nepal, Oxfam and Lutheran World Service** were the first to help us. Then, towards the end of 1991, the **United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** started to manage the camps. To this day, my parents and fellow countrymen still live in these seven sprawling camps.

I was registered in one of the camps, but my desire to learn and explore kept leading me to the outside world. Remaining in the camp, I did supplementary studies for two years in the science faculty, just getting support from my side job as a teacher in the refugee camp where I was paid a little money as incentive. In 1994, I married my long-time sweetheart, who was also a refugee. However, my life became harder as I needed to help my parents and my family as well at the same time. Fortunately, I won a scholarship to an institute at Calcutta, West Bengal State in India where I studied **Electronics (radio/TV)** and completed **two years Diploma** from **May 1996 to May 1998**. It felt like my dream had come true when I was accepted to do this, as my aim was to become an engineer. In 2003, I did *Diploma in Computer- Software Application Programming* and made my life easier.

In 2005 I left for Kathmandu, where I taught in the **Computer Institute** as **an Instructor**. I wanted to teach because I didn't like depending on the limited rations provided by the **World Food Programme**. Also, my aspect was that I was interested in learning **Computer Hardware** and was able to complete a **Diploma** in it. In this way my life became really challenging and I struggled a lot for a better future.

In the beginning of **2007**, I got a call from my wife, who was still in the refugee camp, stating that my second daughter of two was found with heart problem, I rushed to the camp. I feared for her treatment because of homelessness, lack of identity and the bitter past. Again, I tried to find all my courage and approached many organisations to get support for her.

In the month of **July 2007 UNHCR** called my family to interview us for resettlement in **New Zealand** . Fortunately, we got this golden opportunity to go to such a peaceful country- **New Zealand** in **March 2008**. I am happy that the New Zealand government has offered to resettle more Bhutanese refugees from 2008 onwards. Many of them are still trickling into the cities and communities of the US. About 70,000 Bhutanese refugees have been accepted in the US, 5000 in Canada and a few hundreds in other parts of the world like Australia, Denmark, Norway and some other parts of Europe.

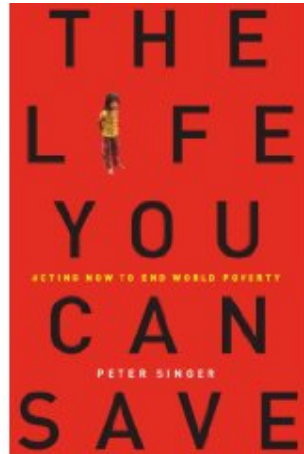
I just hope that we all will be granted the right to stay wherever we settle. I hope that eventually we will have a place to call home.

By Tularam Chhetri

Human Rights Commission newsletter on refugee issues that you may find interesting:

[http://www.hrc.co.nz/hrc\\_new/hrc/cms/files/documents/03-Mar-2009\\_11-14-36\\_Te\\_PunangaFeb09.html](http://www.hrc.co.nz/hrc_new/hrc/cms/files/documents/03-Mar-2009_11-14-36_Te_PunangaFeb09.html)

**BOOK REVIEW**



### The Life you can save, by Peter Singer

Most of us are absolutely certain that we wouldn't hesitate to save a drowning child, and that we would do so at considerable cost to ourselves. Yet while thousands of children die each day, we spend money on things we take for granted, and would hardly miss if they were not there. Is that wrong? If so, how far does our obligation to the poor go?"

Peter Singer is a philosopher who in 2005 was named by Time magazine as one of the world's 100 most influential people. He has written this book with the aim of challenging us about our obligations to those who live in extreme poverty and to convince us to choose to give more of our income to the poor. In it he explores the reasons why we give and the arguments we use to convince ourselves that we do not need to give. He discusses the facts about aid and how it can be improved and puts forward a new standard for giving. The book is very readable and Singer is remarkably persuasive. He presents clear and logical arguments, and supports his views with a lot of evidence.

He presents the reader with examples of ethical dilemmas and discusses common responses.

I encourage you to read this book and reflect on what each of us can do now to save a life. Be prepared to be challenged!

Reviewed by Lorna Johnson- Palmerston North training co-ordinator

*He aha te mea nui? He aha te mea nui o te ao?  
Maku e ki atu. He tangata he tangata, he tangata.*

*What is the most important thing? What is the most important thing in  
the world?  
I will say to you. It is people, it is people, it is people.*

If you would like to contribute to the newsletter, or if you have any comments or suggestions please contact Monique  
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