



Refugee Resettlement - March 2010
by Tony Pietropiccolo

The recent announcement by the Federal government that it would freeze visas for those people seeking refuge from Sri Lanka and Afghanistan and the reopening of the Curtin detention centre has once more placed a great deal of focus on refugees.

Centrecare has been significantly involved in the resettlement of refugees since 2005, when it was successful in tendering for the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) range of services. Since then we have welcomed 2700 people through the program. One thousand have been from Africa, 575 from the Middle East, including Afghanistan and 1100 from Burma and the remainder from Europe. Clients have spoken over 120 different languages and dialects, originated from 33 different countries in conflict with the youngest being 4 months old on arrival and the oldest 82.

We have provided trauma counselling to hundreds of individuals and families who have suffered immense distress in their lives. Some of the stories are too horrific to recount and impossible to comprehend. These stories give us an insight into the dreadful experiences and conditions that refugees are seeking to escape.

It has been wonderful seeing clients reunited with family members they thought dead or that they would never see again. It has been a privilege helping refugees settle and make a big contribution to our community. Seeing people gradually gain the confidence and the opportunities to maximise on their skills and knowledge is inspirational.

Centrecare has always had a dedicated and tenacious IHSS team that has worked hard at finding solutions to problems, such as accommodation, that threatened the service. Our organisation has in the last four years or more spent over \$400,000 from its own resources to ensure that the resettlement experience was a positive one for those seeking asylum.

It is, therefore, quite disheartening to see the ongoing negative manner in which refugees are represented in the Australian media and in political circles. Refugees are generally people fleeing impossible situations. They do so in desperation and in the hope of creating a more secure and better future for themselves and their families. They are due our respect and our welcome not our resentment. They are seeking our understanding and support not our disparagement. Centrecare will continue to assist its refugee families and individuals. It will provide whatever supports it can to make their arrival in Australia as positive and as meaningful as possible.