

REPORT ON LOOK-SEE VISIT

Rohingya visit to Armidale, 19 – 21 July 2017

Background re visit

- This visit was arranged on the basis of anticipated success re applications for SHEVs and with the hope that they would later choose to settle in Armidale.
- Fourteen people (representatives of 5 families totalling 25 people) from Lakemba
- Armidale Sanctuary Humanitarian Settlement Inc has widely circulated its keenness in settling SHEV holders and its intention to finance such visits.
- Catherine Wood (SSI) advised the above potential SHEV holders and assisted by organising the train trip and accompaniment.
- Sanctuary organised all other aspects i.e. payment of travel, welcome, allocation of visitors to host families (1 – 4 visitors per home), all meals and activities
- Local and regional media aware of visit and arrangements made for interviews and filming of visitors dependent on their permission. Several local and regional interviews prior to the event - ABC radio, Channel 7, Armidale Express.

Program of visit

Wednesday 19 July

- Train arrival 5.40pm. Visitors met at train station by host families and taken to their individual homes.
- Welcome dinner for all visitors and hosts at one home. Food donated by hosts and helpers. First name tags worn by all to ensure friendliness etc. These tags continued to be worn throughout visit.

Thursday 20 July

- Breakfast with host family
- 10am – 12.15 pre-arranged bus tour included Sanctuary ‘tour’ guide with hosts
 - driving past hospital, some schools, town look-out, various scenic sites and points of interest
 - visit to mosque with Muslim host
 - brief introductory university walk
 - visit to TAFE including meeting AMEP teacher and ESL area, catering teaching area and other sections, provision of basic information
 - Children interviewed by Channel 7.
- With individual hosts walk around major shopping area and lunch in restaurant (paid by hosts)
- 2pm - In small groups taken to various prearranged rental properties in order to get idea of availability and costs
- 3.30 – 5pm – Welcome afternoon tea in the Armidale Regional Council Chambers. Catered for and hosted by Council. Administrator (we are in the process of amalgamation and so do not currently have a mayor) gave a friendly low-key talk saying how much Armidale would like to welcome our visitors permanently etc. He had spent prior time researching their lives in Myanmar. Four service providers then spoke briefly (TAFE English, refugee nurse, STARTTS, Homework Centre leader). Three Rohingya visitors interpreted. Media filming and interview of some visitors. Some local Muslim leaders attended.
As children becoming restless a Sanctuary member took them to a nearby country property to see kangaroos up close. Great success – children’s highlight.
- 6pm - 8.30 – Dinner for all at a community centre. Food donated by hosts and friends. Very informal and friendly.

Friday 21 July

- Breakfast with host family
- Train departure at 8.15 am

Lessons learnt

The general feeling was that it was a great success and could not have been organised any better. On later reflection there were some individual Sanctuary comments:

- Perhaps two full days would have been better as the program was tight and tiring – at least for the hosts
- The purchase of the train tickets was complicated with several emails and phone calls back and forth between Sanctuary and SSI. Perhaps it would have been better for the visitors to buy their own tickets and Sanctuary refund on arrival.
- If possible it would have been easier if each host house accommodated at least one person who spoke some English. It is realised that this may not be possible for keeping family members together would have priority.
- The visitors did not eat much for breakfast and so some hosts were a little anxious that they did not provide the right choices. Lunch and dinner meals appeared to be fine. All food of course was halal.
- Despite our anxiety the extra cold spell in Armidale's winter did not seem to be of concern – they had all been advised to dress re this.

It should be noted that Armidale Sanctuary is a long-experienced committee re settling refugees and our town is very welcoming. This made the organisation and experience easier than, perhaps, it would be for some less experienced towns. Any queries could be emailed to Robin Jones –robin.jones@westnet.com.au or phone 6771 1835; 0432 095 802.