

**WORLD REFUGEE DAY      20 June 2009*****A Story from the House of Welcome (HOW)...The Trolley Collector***

Next time you are shopping at your local Supermarket, spare a thought for those anonymous men seen collecting the trolleys made available for your convenience. Many of these men are recent arrivals who have fled persecution seeking asylum and struggling to survive. One, lets call him Hermes, is well known to us here at the House of Welcome.

Hermes, a Chaldean Christian from Iraq, arrived in Australia in May 1999 and requested refugee status under the 1951 UN Convention for refugees. He was immediately placed in Villawood detention centre. For the next four years he remained locked up as he was moved from Villawood to the desert camps in Woomera, South Australia, Curtin, Western Australia and eventually back to Villawood.

The High Court ordered his release in April 2003. However he was denied any access to Centrelink, Medicare, work rights or study. Even though he had no money he was ordered to present himself to an Immigration office two days a week and phone in on three days.

In desperation, he came to the House Of Welcome for help. We were able to provide a room in the only house we had at the time and a small living allowance. His greatest concern was his family. He fled with them to Jordan and left them there making his way Australia, in the belief that as a Christian at risk of persecution in Iraq he would be quickly given asylum and then be able to arrange safe passage for his wife and four children. How wrong he was. Friends with similar stories were quickly granted protection visas, but for reasons unknown, he was denied one. Such is the apparent capricious nature of selection in some cases.

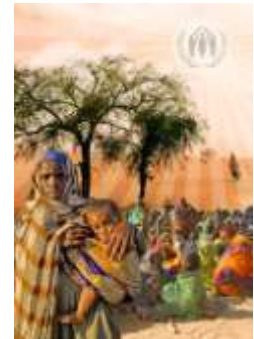
Eventually, six years after he arrived he was granted permanent residency, but had to wait yet another year to be reunited with his family. The family is now living in our house where Hermes had lived with three other asylum seekers. The mother's touch has transformed what was a very modest and blokey fibro house into a pleasant homely dwelling. The children aged from 15 to 21 are eagerly attending school the youngest boy is a very talented soccer player who may very well play for Australia one day. What an irony that would be.

The only employment Hermes has found since given permission to work is returning trolleys in Supermarkets three or four days a week at about \$8.00 an hour. Hardly enough to survive on.

*Adapted from a Newsletter written by Fr. Jim Carty sm (HOW Coordinator – 16.08.07)*

The ***House of Welcome***, a project of the New South Wales Ecumenical Council, was initially established in 2001 to provide assistance to asylum Seekers who were released from detention on Temporary Protection Visas. The OFMs have offered ongoing support to this project since its inception, by continuing the rent-free provision of the Carramar property (the ‘Drop-In’ Centre) and management support. The HOW continues to support refugee and asylum seeker families who would otherwise be homeless. It is totally dependent on charitable donations to survive and to continue to provide the many services, over and above accommodation, that are offered.

On ***World Refugee Day***, our attention is turned to the millions of refugees who live without material, social and legal protection. Since its foundation in 1951, UNHCR has protected tens of millions of refugees. For us, protection consists of tangible improvements in the lives of forcibly displaced people – from the provision of food and shelter to support for those lacking legal status or those wishing to return to their home countries. On World Refugee Day, we give thanks for this vital commitment.



Protection is also about raising awareness. We cannot protect refugees if their plight remains invisible. On World Refugee Day, we highlight the universal nature of protection. Not only are refugees protected all around the globe, but the responsibility for protection is equally global.

Ultimately, protection is a challenge that knows no borders. Neither can it be left to a single agency to provide. We need to promote engagement at a grassroots level, in local communities, workplaces and online. Only through a global network of supporters can we meet the manifold needs of protection.

*May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace. Amen.*

Sources: <http://www.houseofwelcome.com.au/index.php>  
<http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/refugee/>