

Project Officer's Report: East Timor Support Group



An East Timor Coordination Support Group (ETCSG) was formed on 31st May, 2006 in response to the political crisis that is currently affecting the Timor region. This group was formed to coordinate assistance to the East Timor Evacuees with basic living needs and provide a central point of contact for advice on referring services that can offer help in dealing with the issues these individuals are facing. A number of family based activities were also constructed to help with social integration and an understanding of what Australia and more importantly the Northern Territory can offer as a way of life which incorporates a safe living environment and opportunity to be introduced to our beautiful country.

Project Support Specifics:

- MCNT coordinated a donation collection and distribution point for dry storage food items, baby necessities, toys and clothes. All items were kindly donated by the public following MCNT website advice calling for assistance in the matter.
- Individual assessment of sponsored evacuees and host families were carried out and needs were observed for reporting to relevant service providers/community services. Food and clothing was given to all families to help with the costs of living expenses.
- The Migration Assistance Clinic at MCNT was also offered and utilized by individuals to access advice of various immigration issues relating to visas.
- Billet type accommodation was accessed for a small group of people which included providing this service to help Centrelink with placing the medical evacuees following hospitalisation discharge. Follow-up contact was made with all billet hosts on a regular basis for feedback on living situations etc. Food items were supplied to the billet hosts to help with living expenses.
- Close contact with The Red Cross and Centrelink to establish activity interest from humanitarian groups and medical evacuee groups was also included in this project.

Project Activity Specifics:

English Classes - These classes have been running since 23rd June at MCNT Community Room. Two classes per week, partnered with The Red Cross, specifically, Joan Washington, a number of volunteers were implemented to carry out this activity including Mr. Pat Jackson - University English Lecturer, Nicole Webb and Belinda Norris – Trained Tutors that have been working in Timor and Sue-Ellen Ling – Child Care / Supervision. All of these people have excelled in their professional involvement within the classes and have gained an incredible amount of trust with the East Timorese. The classes were aimed at assisting families to develop

their English language in order for them to function in the community and to build their social networks. Attendance records show that this program has proved highly successful. Children were encouraged to attend as well as toddlers. The toddlers were supervised in the community play room whilst the parents studied. New educational toys were supplied by MCNT and the children were very comfortable in this environment. Light refreshments were supplied to the group with emphasis on nutrition. These classes will continue for those still staying in Darwin if required.

- **Ladies and Children Day at MCNT** - MCNT hosted a ladies and children's day in the Community Room on the 18th July. MCNT provided a lunch through the '*Hingston Restaurant*' which was outstanding. The aim of the day was to create a friendly atmosphere in which sharing of thoughts and ideas about any issues needing discussion. The day was also for the sorting of all donated clothes and for the women to select items of need for their families. A great day was had by all and many friendships formed from this.
- **Free Activities Around Darwin** – A timetable of events was created and distributed amongst families targeting family based events. Some of these events included The Fun Bus, Fun in the Parks and FREEPS.
- **Tye and Dye Workshop at Nungalinya** – The Tye and Dye Workshop at Nungalinya was a six week course which commenced on 16th June and ran through to 21st July. This workshop, as an ongoing activity within the Multicultural Solutions Project was offered to the Timorese women.

In summary, the overall ETCSG Project has run smoothly and efficiently from start to finish. All activities were approached with enthusiasm by the East Timorese and this is shown by high attendance records, especially with the English Classes.

I would like to extend my deepest thanks to all involved who have helped me deal with all areas of support group undertakings. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to all the East Timorese who have put their trust in my hands and MCNT's and wish them happiness and a new sense of freedom when they return to their homeland.

Tracey Lehmann