

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, that are often thoughtlessly left behind all over the car parks and beyond. Their wages are low, their hours are uncertain and the work is hard.

Many of these men are recent arrivals who have fled persecution seeking asylum and struggling to survive. One, lets call him Hermes, is well know 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.

The House Of Welcome a project of the New South Wales Ecumenical Council continues to support this family and twenty other refugees and asylum seekers who would otherwise be homeless in three houses and four units we rent in a very tight and increasingly expensive rental market. We are totally dependent on charitable donations to survive and to continue to provide the many services, over and above accommodation, that we offer. We estimate that it costs us about \$2000.00 per person per year to provide shelter. Any assistance to help those who like Hermes have fled persecution seeking safe haven here and are initially denied access to public services would be gratefully appreciated.

(Fr) Jim Carty sm
Coordinator

16.08.07