

Summer Newsletter February 2014

ERCRS is a ministry of the Christian Brothers that provides free learning support, tuition and a range of recreational services to students of a disadvantaged or refugee background in the Brimbank area of Melbourne.

Director's update

by Br. Frank Perkins

As another new year begins, we often find ourselves refreshing our list of resolutions, with a renewed determination that we will remain faithful to them. Personally I hope that my resolve to cut down on sugary foods and drink will prove to be somewhat more successful than last year. However, along with our own personal battles to live a little more healthily, I believe that we can also challenge ourselves in a somewhat more fundamental way. In the face of examples of distrust, violence, xenophobia, and prejudice that we witness far too often on the international stage, can we challenge ourselves to be agents of positive change in our local communities, and in so doing to help create a society in which acceptance, hospitality, harmony and peace become essential aspects of our normal mode of relating.

As schools prepare to begin a new year of learning, with all the associated changes and challenges, here at Edmund Rice Community & Refugee Services, we are learning to cope with our own sense of change and handover. After almost three years as Program Coordinator at ERCRS, we regretfully farewell Dane Stammers, and wish him every success in the next phase of his career. Dane has been instrumental in revamping the programs offered by ERCRS, and in instigating many 'best practice' procedures. His energy, focus, humour and enthusiasm are contagious, and these qualities combined with a patient, understanding and empathetic approach to people, have earned Dane the trust and respect of the staff, volunteers and students involved in the various ERCRS programs.

I would like to welcome our new Program Coordinator, Mr. Biong Deng Biong, who has been previously working with the Brotherhood of St. Laurence, and wish him every success as along with the Board and Director, he continues to develop the services offered by ERCRS.

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Dane and Biong



Splash out round 2

by Frank Perkins

A fun day out at the Melbourne Swimming and Aquatic Centre has now become a traditional event for the students of the Homework Club. Eighteen students and five supervisors happily rolled up to enjoy a day of splashing around in the various different pools and waterslides at MSAC. With everyone wearing the blue “rashies” kindly lent to us by Edmund Rice Camps, it was an easy matter to identify our ERCRS group, especially those bobbing up and down in the wave-pool. The only rules were: don’t annoy other patrons and don’t

drown, and we managed to follow these magnificently. The students very quickly become more confident in the water thanks to sound education programs through their schools and local aquatic centres.

Many thanks to Asunta, Natalia and Kate for supervising, and for Br. Damien filling in at the last minute for Dane, as driver and supervisor. Grateful thanks again to St. Bernard’s College, Essendon for allowing us the use of two school vans for the day.

My experience of an Edmund Rice Camp

by Debra Gaye

From the 13th –17th January I was fortunate to enjoy one of the best experiences that I have ever had. Along with other teenage girls from around Melbourne, I went on an Edmund Rice Camp which was held over five days at the Santa Monica campsite, near Lorne. To me it seemed like the camp was out in the countryside. The weather was very hot, but fortunately the camp was close to the beach, and we had many activities there. On our second day of camp we were able to go surfing at the beach. Even though it was my first time at trying to surf on a board, I loved it, and I felt good that I was able to stand up on the board for 7 seconds.



Debra (red hat), Adut and Nyanjumma with their camp buddies

The main activity on the third day was dancing. The group created a dance performance and it was the best fun ever. The weather continued to be very hot (over 40 degrees) so at the end of day three we had to move to Doxa City camp in Melbourne for safety reasons, as there was a fire risk at Anglesea and Lorne. We were still able to enjoy different activities like a beach outing and movie watching. We really enjoyed the meals at camp, and the food was great.

On the Edmund Rice Camp I had lots of buddies and all of them were very nice to me, being caring and kind. I didn’t really know all the games that we played on camp, but I did enjoy surfing and dancing the most. This was one of the best camps ever, and I met lots of wonderful people.

A family affair

by Dane Stammers

After being a leader on the most recent African Family Camp, I now understand why the students from the Homework Club (HC) love it so much, and why they line up months in advance for the chance to attend. It was *awesome*. Really, ridiculous amounts of fun.

I am astounded by the power of camps in forging friendships in a short amount of time. Virtually overnight, my buddies became friends and I saw a completely different side to them. One young lad, I would never have thought him the singing type, was sitting in the front seat of my bus and actually *leading* the songs. He is always so quiet at HC, phenomenal.



Dane with other Family Campers

Sunshine Harvester Primary School Learning Support Program

In August 2013, ERCRS formed a partnership with Sunshine Harvester Primary School, with the goal of providing after school learning support in literacy and numeracy for students of a culturally and language diverse background, particularly those who are recent arrivals in Australia.

The learning support sessions began at Sunshine Harvester Primary School in late August, and were held on the school site from 3pm–5pm each Thursday. The EAL Coordinator at Sunshine Harvester, Chris Durbridge, organised the program from the school end, and this included the selection of students to take part (based on need), communication with families and the provision of learning materials. The ERCRS ministry at Sunshine Harvester was well supported in 2013 by a dedicated group of volunteer tutors, including the diligent and enthusiastic students from Overnewton College in Keilor. The appearance of these competent tutors each Thursday, brought joy and encouragement to the primary school students enrolled in the program.



A review of the program at the end of 2013, unanimously supported its continuation, with anecdotal evidence from the school and the tutors confirming the growth of positive learning outcomes, that the program was aspiring to promote. Learning sessions for 2014 have already begun each Thursday afternoon.

Snapshot of ERCRS Programs in 2014

Homework Club for primary students (Grades 3-6) on Monday and Wednesday afterschool at the Errington Centre in St Albans, and Thursdays at Sunshine Harvester Primary School.

Tutoring Program for secondary and tertiary students on Tuesday afternoons and Saturdays mornings at the Errington Centre and Catholic Regional College (St Albans) Library respectively.

Social activities are for students and volunteers involved in either of the above learning support programs. These include excursions and events as well as two camps with *Edmund Rice Camps Victoria*.

Thank you...

To the *Christian Brothers' Oceania Province* and the ERCRS Board for their ongoing financial and in-kind support.

To the Edmund Rice Foundation, the Stan Willis Trust, St Patrick's College and Caroline Chisholm Catholic College for their generous financial contributions.

To Mount St Joseph's College for their thoughtful donation of sporting equipment for use in our recreational programs.

To Jo Vu and Nafeesa Sharif for their help with our end of year Activity Day.

We would also like to thank the staff at *Edmund Rice Camps Victoria*, *Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service*, the *Brimbank City Council*, *Catholic Regional College St Albans* and *St Bernard's College* for their in-kind support.

As always, to the volunteers, students, schools and families who make up the ERCRS community.

News in brief

- On the 23rd October, ERCRS Staff, Board and Network members gathered together at the Treacy Centre to reflect on the past and plan for the future. The day culminating in an inspiring picture of where might be headed this year.
- The 2014 Easter Kids Camp is coming up in April (18th-21st) for students in grades 3-5.
- We are putting the word out **requesting donations** of reasonably new (0-15 years old) children's reading (picture) books to refresh our homework club library. If you have any of these lying around we'd love to take them off your hands! Please be in touch via the details below.

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To find out more about how to become a **VOLUNTEER** with ERCRS, please visit our website (ercrs.com.au) and register for an Volunteering Information session!



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