

Project SafeCom Inc. - Information Sheet 5

December 2002: WHY THE FIRES ?

Three things we need in life to stay sane and not become desperate:

Someone to love

Something to hope for

Something worthwhile to do

**Asylum seekers have none of these.
They have lost their loved ones.
They have nothing to hope for.
They have nothing to do.**

Most have seen family members killed, tortured or starved to death. Some saw their children drown from the Siev X disaster. Many are in deep grief. All are traumatized.

Many were rejected in their own countries and now Australia has rejected them. If they are deported many face possible death, persecution, war, devastation, watching their children die of starvation or lack of medical help.

Some have asked to go home because they cannot survive in Australian detention conditions any longer. There is no answer for them except endless years in detention- **they cannot be returned-** Iran and Iraq will not take them. Afghanistan is not safe. **And Australia will not let them be free.**

Others wait months for answers to their appeals. An eleven-year-old girl writes: "This is my third Christmas in detention. My mother just cries now. My dad became too upset and now he is not living here with us".

"**It's the waiting that gets to you.**" another detainee wrote. "My appeal was heard in June and now I am still waiting for a reply. No-one tells me what is happening. I sit around all day and wait and wait. I am a computer technician and I would like to do some work- maybe teach people here the computer. There is no difference between night and day- it is all the same. Then they

give some little light like one day they took us to the town, the first time I have been out, to practice at the cricket nets and they told us we would play a game against a local team. Then we never heard anything about it again."

They have nothing to do all day.

Nothing to do all day for three years!

Imagine young men in their twenties, confined now for over three years with nothing to do. No job. Nowhere to go. Having to fill out a form and wait to be escorted when they want to visit a friend in the next compound or get a new tube of toothpaste. Body searches every time you go to the gym and no instructors there to help get you onto a program or show you have to use things. No TV (yes, that's true in Baxter, no TV just the same old videos they have watched now for three years). Occasional house jobs rostered out at \$1 an hour.

Computer access? Available in Baxter on roster so that you would have access about once every two months. No access to the Internet and no recording facilities allowed to tape music or radio.

Then the lies printed in the newspapers about the luxury five star accommodation! This article stirred much resentment among those living the reality! "Why do they tell so many lies about us?"

"Why is Australia so deaf to so many Human Rights Reports from people who have visited and know how we live?"

How many ordinary Australians would survive this existence for one, two, three years now and no end in sight ?

Yet the majority of asylum seekers are bravely coping day to day in these circumstances. Others cope bravely for 364 days of the year and then break out on the next day and attempt suicide or try to break something. It is the gradual build up of 1001 little and not so little indignities and then one day someone breaks.

If they get sick they wait often over a week to see the doctor. If they get toothache it may be months before they can see a dentist.

Two panadol and "drink water" is the standard remedy given. If they shout out or look as if they are losing it they can be put in isolation for days and so can become increasingly worse.

Recently a woman was very sick & her stomach become extended and still she was not able to see a doctor. Her friend finally yelled and screamed & they wanted to put him in isolation for his outburst- but still no help. Next day she collapsed and had to be taken to hospital for a few days for treatment.

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This paper was prepared by Jane Keogh, Canberra Refugee Action Committee. Received January 23 2003

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Project mandate and direction

NARROGIN WA, OCTOBER 2003 - While Project SafeCom is set up as a community development project, aimed at establishing a generic open sustainable technology training and learning farm community - and as such an educational institution - its steering committee determines and endorses its active and operational directions (for example, focusing on social justice issues relating to refugees and asylum seekers) at the start of every financial year.

FROM THE CONSTITUTION: - The vision of Project SafeCom is laid out in the constitution as "*'a safe community' for people of any for people of any race, gender, creed or nationality, who are displaced as a result of Wars or Political, Social, Climatological, Ecological and Geological upheaval and/or Disaster; and for other users as and when appropriate.*"

This structure enables Project SafeCom to operate and develop also beyond refugee issues if appropriate and if directed to do so by the steering committee. Project SafeCom was incorporated in December 2001 as a response to the Howard policies and shift in direction in government treatment of refugees. It has its own Australian Business Number and it is currently seeking tax-free status and tax-deductibility from the ATO for donations and gifts as an educational institution.

WEBSITE - The Project SafeCom website is a popular resource for information about refugee issues since the "Tampa election". More than 105 new and returning visitors use the website each day - grown from about 65 per day in the last 5 months. There are about 150 pages on the website, most of them in the refugee section.

The Library and Information Service of Western Australia has listed the Project SafeCom website as "a website of cultural and historical significance in Western Australia" and Project SafeCom is listed

in the Western Australian Multicultural Services Directory.

Networking around Australia

There are about 70 lists, either at Yahoo!Groups or at topica.com, established by Australian refugee groups. Project SafeCom is the only group in Australia who posts messages and contributes to debate and discussion on all these groups and lists.

Using a specially designed program by refugee activists - originally designed to exert email pressure on MP's and Senators, it's called "Senator Slapper" - Project SafeCom's occasional notifications and news alerts reach an estimated 12,000 people who subscribe to all these groups.

NEWSLETTER - The (usually daily) Refugee News and Updates newsletter at <http://www.topica.com/lists/safecom/read/> is read by about 335 subscribers (October 2003). Journalists from Australia as well as Malaysia, Singapore, students and staff from Universities, activists, friends of refugees, NGO's and government department representatives subscribe to this free service.

SUPPORTERS - There are about 4000 people in the Project SafeCom database, that is, people who have written to Project SafeCom, who have sent a comment via the website form or asked a question, asked for contacts so they could write to detainees, have purchased a product from the shop at <http://www.safecom.org/products.htm> or who have financially supported Project SafeCom.

MEMBERS - In October 2003 Project SafeCom's association had about 70 registered members in many places - in Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia, the Northern Territory, Victoria and New South Wales - but also in Sweden and Dallas, USA. Project SafeCom employs its full-time volunteer coordinator - working from its WA based operations office - on a full-time basis.

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