

NORTHERN BEACHES REFUGEE INITIATIVE

A different approach to resettlement

August 2017



AGENDA

1. NBRI background and model
2. NBRI purpose
3. Why Northern Beaches?
4. What are the successes of the NBRI model
5. What are the challenges of the NBRI model
6. What is the future for NBRI
7. Is NBRI scaleable/ replicable?
8. Q&A



Northern Beaches Refugee Initiative - background

- In late 2015 a group of local churches (all denominations) and community groups met to discuss the feasibility of settling refugees on the Northern Beaches.
- The key issue with helping refugees settle in the Northern Beaches was identified as being the rental rates and it became apparent that if the initiative was to succeed it would require:
 - Subsidies for market rentals for a period of time (12 months); AND/OR
 - Homes/ granny flats/ apartments available for rental at below market rates
- In November 2015 the first community meeting was held at St Faiths in Narrabeen, which was well attended by the church and general community and where Settlement Services International (SSI) spoke about the opportunities and requirements.
- A committee was formed (NBRI) to be able to fundraise and respond.



Northern Beaches Refugee Initiative - background

NBRI, which is a broad based church and community initiative launched has achieved the following:

- Facilitated the settlement of **9 families** - these initial families have been mostly Syrians of Armenian ethnicity who were displaced from the cities of Aleppo and Homs in Syria
- Support has included:
 - ✓ providing **rental assistance**
 - ✓ Access to **below market rentals** in granny flat accommodation
 - ✓ making **meaningful connections** with refugee families
 - ✓ **hosting events** such as Welcome Dinner and Australia Day BBQ
 - ✓ **identifying needs and seeking solutions** such as:
 - english language requirements
 - mentoring needs
 - driving lessons and practice
 - jobs
- ✓ **linking families** into church, school and other communities



Northern Beaches Refugee Initiative - purpose



Our purpose is to empower families and new arrivals in a new life



Why the Northern Beaches?

1. Rental subsidies

- The church and wider community showed commitment to providing rental subsidies and below market rental options in granny flat accommodation to new arrivals.
- A model was determined between NBRI and SSI whereby all pledges will be paid to SSI, allowing SSI to lease properties from owners/real estate NBRI is committed to housing new arrivals in long-term accommodation from day one, as a priority.
- NBRI was set up for capacity to accommodate ~40 new arrivals (~10 families) for 1 year

2. Employment Opportunities

- The Department of Employment has stated (Dec 2015) that the Northern Beaches has the lowest level of unemployment in NSW at 2.2% and highest labour force participation rate.
- Given the higher socio economic makeup of the Northern Beaches population, there is a good proportion of business owners as well as a number of trades and services. The NBRI committee has a vast network which links into all of these areas. Offers of employment have already come from several trade business owners.



Why the Northern Beaches?

3. Community Interest & Support

- 34 churches of various denominations located in the Northern Beaches – churches have pledged money, offered accommodation and have offered to act as social and professional mentors
- Members of the Northern Beaches Public (current database stands at >100) – members of the public have offered their support as social and professional mentors, and interpreters. They have also offered accommodation, clothing, cleaning products and job opportunities
- Media, Manly Daily – keen to publish news on the initiative
- Manly Community Centre - service Provider for the Northern Beaches. Have committed support
- Multicultural Health Services (who offer mentor training) – offered support
- Real Estate agreed to work closely with NBRI & SSI
- Department of Premier & Cabinet
- Department of Planning
- Settlement Services International
- Syrian community – including Sponsor families and others in the community (eg providing subsidised driving lessons, providing translation services, cultural insight etc)



Why the Northern Beaches?

4. Diversity in the Northern Beaches

- Opening up the Northern Beaches as a new area for settlement will provide employment opportunities for Syrian Refugees while increasing support for local employers. It will also increase the cultural diversity and vitality of the Northern Beaches.
- In the 2011 census only 14.6% of the Warringah population was identified as being born in a country where English is not the first language. Introducing a more diverse culture into the Northern Beaches area will help to overcome common stereotypes, prejudice, and break down the lack of understanding of other cultures and faith groups. Introducing different ethnicities to schools will encourage more open acceptance and, in the long-run, will improve social cohesion.
- Diversity is in the Northern Beaches' best interests and speaks to fairness and inclusion. It will enhance respect and support for cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity and will help increase tolerance, and reduce ignorance, between groups.



Success

Fundraising

- Church community
- Broader community
- Donor base established

English

- Some improvements in spoken English
- Mentors and ESL teachers work very well

NBRI committee

- Strong, committed group, work well together
- As a group have started to understand the complexity of the refugee problem
- Developing working relationships with SSI and RE agents
- Building relationships between NBRI + refugees + churches/community
- Recognition of 'success' by various organisations



Success – cont ...

Infrastructure

- Donor database
- DGR status
- Website

Families

- Link Committee to Family
- Children are settling well into school
- Willingness to work, some people accepting any jobs
- Armenian focus
- Settled 9 families onto the Northern beaches
- All families in housing with appropriate partnerships with SSI
- Health care group going well ie dental, optical and hearing



Challenges

NBRI committee

- Finding common ways of working and communicating
- Communication with donors
- Establish trust – how we fit in
- Not getting too emotionally involved
- Time factor of more families vis-à-vis existing volunteers
- Developing clear expectations to communicate to refugees from start of our relationship and along the way
- Engaging non church based support
- Casework crowds out governance meeting agenda topics
- Clarity of members roles (not re family connections)
- Expectations of families (cultural, social expectations)
- Language barrier
- Cultural awareness and experience



Challenges – cont ..

Families

- Refugees reluctant /fearful to take initiatives eg language, work etc
- Cultural differences
- Lack of urgency in refugees
- Mental health support - dealing with trauma and depression

English

- Commitment to English language
- Elderly refugees
- Accelerating English – additional TAFE classes

Work

- Employment opportunities (longevity of these)
- Accessing the network of employment potential
- Qualifications not recognised
- Willingness to find work
- Poor match skill base to opportunity



The future

- Deepen relationship with current refugee group
- Double down on English and employment support
- Re-engage support base
- Broaden network – media, business, council
- Events and community integration opportunities
- Answering ‘tough love’ promise to donors as 1 year approaches
- Developing clear and realistic procedures within team and different aspects of refugee assimilation (check ups, accountability, communication)
- Defined structure of team including governance, case work, communication and events
- Socialisation building relationships 1:1 takes time (need more events to connect with team, refugees, supporters)



NBRI – is this scaleable?

- This is a model – the **rental subsidy model**– that has not been tried. In theory the rental subsidy lasts for 12 months which should be enough time for families to have work and to be able to manage the rental themselves. In practice, we have not got to the point where we have had to test if this assumption is appropriate
- NBRI **committee is entirely volunteer** and many are working full time – if we were to increase beyond 9 families, we would likely need administrative support for 3x days per week (paid) to: reconcile donations, write thank you letters, maintain the data base of needs, maintain database of offers of help (driving lessons, goods, accommodation, English support), maintain the website, social media info etc This would free up committee members to deal with fundraising, directly building relationships with refugee families and maintaining church and community connections



NBRI – is this scaleable?

- There is a lot of work that needs to be done to be more effective at **communication**. This includes:
 - Liaising with community groups (churches and NGO) that have offered services
 - Liaising with individuals who are interested to support via financial or offers of help
 - Website
 - Social and traditional media communication
- To date, **fundraising** efforts have been quite limited and notwithstanding this we have easily raised money and offers of help. NBRI will be seeking Deductible Gift Receipts (DGR)status and moving to a more organized fundraising approach, which we expect will yield quick results and which will propel us to think about whether we can expand our vision of support



Conclusions

Our purpose is to empower families and new arrivals in a new life

We have more to do, and our hope for these families is:

- Stable employment
- Long term accomodation
- Fluent English
- Support for physical and mental health
- Integration into the wider community

Notwithstanding the challenges, we have achieved a great deal:

- Built lasting connections with people who are making Australia their home
- Provided a warm welcome and practical support to newcomers
- Helped to settle 9 families



Q&A

