



ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

World Refugee Day

22 June 2006

[Ms GRIERSON](#) (Newcastle) (12.50 p.m.)—I welcome the commitment of the previous speaker, the member for Paterson, to GP Access After Hours. I only wish they would fund it for four years as Labor promised to do, so that the member for Paterson does not stand up every year to rescue and save them. I would also like to take the opportunity to acknowledge on the record one of the members of GP Access After Hours who gives his time as a GP—Peter Arnold, my doctor of 36 years, soon to retire. I register my appreciation and that of the community for his long and dedicated service.

This week we celebrated a very special day in the UN calendar: World Refugee Day. Fortunately, we had no legislation brought forward this week to detract from its importance. The theme of this year's World Refugee Day is hope, which serves as a reminder of our responsibility to help keep hope alive amongst those who need it most—the millions of refugees displaced and who are still far from home. World Refugee Day is an opportunity to reflect and recognise the plight of refugees. The UNHCR now estimates that there are almost 21 million refugees worldwide. That is an extraordinarily large number of people fleeing civil wars, ethnic persecution and religious violence across the globe.

In the Newcastle and Hunter region we have settled more than 600 refugees since 2002, the majority of whom have come from Sudan, Liberia and Burundi. There is perhaps no better way to promote better understanding of the plight of refugees than through the telling of personal stories. Today I wish to draw the attention of the parliament to the work of some remarkably talented young storytellers in my own community of Newcastle. These are young people who are making a difference and keeping hope alive for refugees.

Last month I was privileged to attend a youth forum on racial tolerance. This forum was hosted by YNOT, a local organisation working creatively with disadvantaged youth in our region and achieving wonderful results. At this forum young Novocastrians Ashleigh Elizabeth John, Stuart Csanki and Duncan Whiteside talked about their experiences of growing up in Newcastle with friends from around the world and the benefits of multiculturalism and racial tolerance for our community. Duncan Whiteside, a University of Newcastle student who works with YNOT in its youth mentoring programs, argued for the need to promote tolerance and acceptance throughout the community, starting at the grassroots level.

Sure, it is a long-term prospect, said Duncan, but this community has a long-term future so why not start to build now. The risk is low and the rewards are infinitely high: a community of tolerance.

Students of Mayfield East Public School were also present at this youth forum, which screened a short film made by those students called *Little Leaders: The Youth of Multicultural Mayfield*. The film starred six years 5 and 6 students from different cultural backgrounds—Adrianna Gagamoe from Samoa, Apag Chinmouth from Sudan, Anna Robertson from England, Ryan Bartlett from Indonesia, Hope Anderton from Turkey and Luke Single, a young Aboriginal student. *Little Leaders* is an inspirational film with a strong message of respect and racial tolerance. The students and their teachers speak openly and honestly about matters of race and cultural differences as they recount their own friendships with other students from different backgrounds. Importantly, the film demonstrates that young people are not just the leaders of the future but also valuable members of our community now. Apag Chinmouth, who arrived in Newcastle last year as a Sudanese refugee, said:

I was happy when I finally got to Australia and I want Mayfield to be safe place.

To ensure that Mayfield is a safe and happy place to live, each of the students put forward their own ideas about the future and how to make their community better. The students nominated a skate park—which will in fact be opened in Mayfield this Sunday—a basketball court and easy access to health services as amongst the most important things to keep them safe and happy. They argued:

Happy places equals happy people.

I also want to acknowledge the outstanding work of Phil Thomson, the recipient of the 2005 Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia and SBS Student Journalism Award for his feature article, *Simon's Story*, an inspiring true story of a Sudanese refugee living in Newcastle. The award-winning piece tells the story of Simon Pabek, a refugee who fled Sudan after Arab Muslim workmates associated him with rebels. Before coming to Australia he spent time in a refugee camp in Kenya which hosts 70,000 mostly Sudanese refugees. Since 2003 Simon, who is employed as an African refugee worker at Newcastle's Migrant Resource Centre, has helped more than 400 Sudanese, around 60 Liberians and a small number of Burundians, Rwandans and Somalis to settle into Australian life. Simon has completed a law degree in Sudan's peacetime and is now studying law at the University of Newcastle so that he can practice in Australia. It is important that his story and other stories are heard. I congratulate all of the people I have mentioned. I look forward to joining Simon Pabek next week when we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Newcastle Migrant Resource Centre.