



Date: 4 February 2014

'MY CULTURE IS AFRICAN, MY CHILD IS AUSTRALIAN'
Weekend camp for African Refugee Dads and Kids
7 – 9 November

CatholicCare is holding their African Dads and Kids Camp from 7- 9 February to help refugee families strengthen their family bonds as they adjust to their new lives in Australia. The camp at Anglesea will involve 26 African men and 26 of their teenage children. Most participants are from Sudan and Eritrea and have escaped situations of terrible conflict.

Children have the best outcomes when they have great relationships with their dads and the camps give fathers the opportunity to feel empowered and know they can have a significant and positive impact in their children's lives. They allow fathers to become more attuned to the challenges their children face in being 'Australian', and how to address their own challenges in adapting to a new culture and new roles, while still balancing respect for their traditional culture.

Men explore and discuss topics such as respecting traditional cultures and a new way of life; parenting in Africa compared with parenting in Australia; bonding with their children; understanding each other strengths; and working together as a team to meet new challenges.

Using research based relationship education theory combined with fun indoor/outdoor challenges, Dads and Kids work together to find solutions to problems they have never encountered before. It shows fathers how "*little things often*" build the strongest relationships. Discussions focus on how our families teach us to show love, have fun, work, resolve conflict and celebrate.

Away from everyday distractions of life fathers can focus and enjoy quality one on one time with their child. Sharing their story about their family of origin, in specifically designed activities, is powerful and moving for them and the child. The child has insight into why their Father is who he is, what events in life happened and just as importantly the Fathers see the incredible difference of cultures between them and their children.

Many of the Dads on these camps lost their traditional way of life when their villages were destroyed and their families torn apart.

Previous camp participant Godjok was forced to leave his home in South Sudan with his family in 1983 when the war started and the violence spread everywhere. Life in North Sudan was hard and when Godjok had almost finished school, he left in fear of being forced into the North Sudanese Army.

As Godjok said, "They forced so many young boys to fight when they finished school. So many never got their school certificate because they died before they got the chance. If you made it back alive, you might be able to get your certificate and go to university. I would have been forced to fight against my own people – and maybe supposed to attack my own family and friends in South Sudan. I couldn't do it."

For many like Godjok, life can become very dangerous, especially if you have a wife or children. The only way to ensure your family's safety from militia is to flee your homeland and hope for a better life in a new country. Godjok, his wife and three young children fled to Egypt in 2004. Thankfully they were accepted into Australia as refugees and arrived here in 2005.

For those who grow up or raise children in refugee camps, the experience of family is very different. Traditionally in Africa, mothers are the primary care-givers. After coming to Australia, African Dads have to adjust their roles within the family and this camp is an opportunity for fathers to strengthen the father-child bond through fun activities including beach games, surfing, rope challenges and campfires.

Godjok has attended previous camps and says *"This was a chance to share our ideas and make new friends. I have seven children - three girls and four boys from 17 to five months of age. I would need much more money to take all my children on holidays because there is always food to buy and school fees to pay. But these camps are a chance for me to take my children away on holiday and enjoy time with them."*

His seven year old son Baak attended the Phillip Island 2012 camp and was thrilled to be away with his dad. *"I loved playing in the water. This was my first time ever at the beach and my Dad helped me learn to surf. The waves kept coming up but I just kept saying to Dad. 'Let's do it again!'"*

For the families attending this will be a true adventure, and for some it will be the first time they have ever seen sand or the ocean.

While initially African fathers were resistant to attend a weekend that encouraged them to take on the non-traditional role of looking after children, as well as discuss issues normally kept within the family/village and managed by tribal leaders, the camps are now in their fourth year having been embraced by the African Community through word of mouth and positive feedback from prior participants.

If you would like to donate to the next African Dads and Kids Camp, please contact CatholicCare on 9287 5516 or go to www.ccam.org.au

Visual & Interview Opportunities:

CatholicCare African Dads and Kids Camp Facilitator Kate McKernin Ph 0418 446 692

CatholicCare CEO Fr Joe Caddy Ph 0407 261 863

African refugee fathers and their children

Volunteers: Marita Wyatt, Coles Supermarket Head Office

Michael Harpar

When & Where:

- 10.00am - 7 February - African refugees gathering for bus departure from CatholicCare Dandenong, 224 Thomas Street, Dandenong
- 11.30am – 7 February - African refugees gathering for bus departure from opposite Footscray Police Station, Cnr Hyde & Napier Streets, Footscray
- 3.00pm - 7 February – Surfing Anglesea Beach
- 8 – 9 Feb - Camp Wilkin, 57 Noble Street Anglesea

For further media information, please contact Kate McKernin on 0418 446 692