

# Freedom after years in a camp

By Rosita Gallsch

AFTER 14 years of living in refugee camps, all Ajang Biar wanted for his family was the opportunity of a better future.

They found that opportunity in Australia and Mr Biar and his children are testament to the contribution that refugees can make to this country.

As the South Sudanese Community Association chairman, Mr Biar, of Engadine, is organising activities for Refugee Week (June 20-26).

Before Mr Biar arrived in Australia, the only thing he knew about the country was what he had learnt at his Sudanese school in the 1970s.

Mr Biar, the one-time mayor of Bor, capital of Jonglei state in southern Sudan, was forced to flee with his wife Aduk and eldest child Deng in 1983 amid the threat of political persecution.

His mainly Christian province was overtaken by the Muslim north Sudanese government forces and the family fled first to a refugee camp in Ethiopia and then Kenya.

The had two more children, Biar and Ajak, while living in the Ethiopian camp. Two more, Alakir and Apajok, were born in Kenya.

Deng now works as a computer engineer programmer for a bank, Biar is studying a double degree in communications and psychology, and Ajak is studying business and economics.

Alakir is completing year 12 while studying to be a nurse part-time at St George IAFE.

His youngest children, Apajok, 14, and "Aussie-borr" Yaa, 10, are at school.

## Survey out

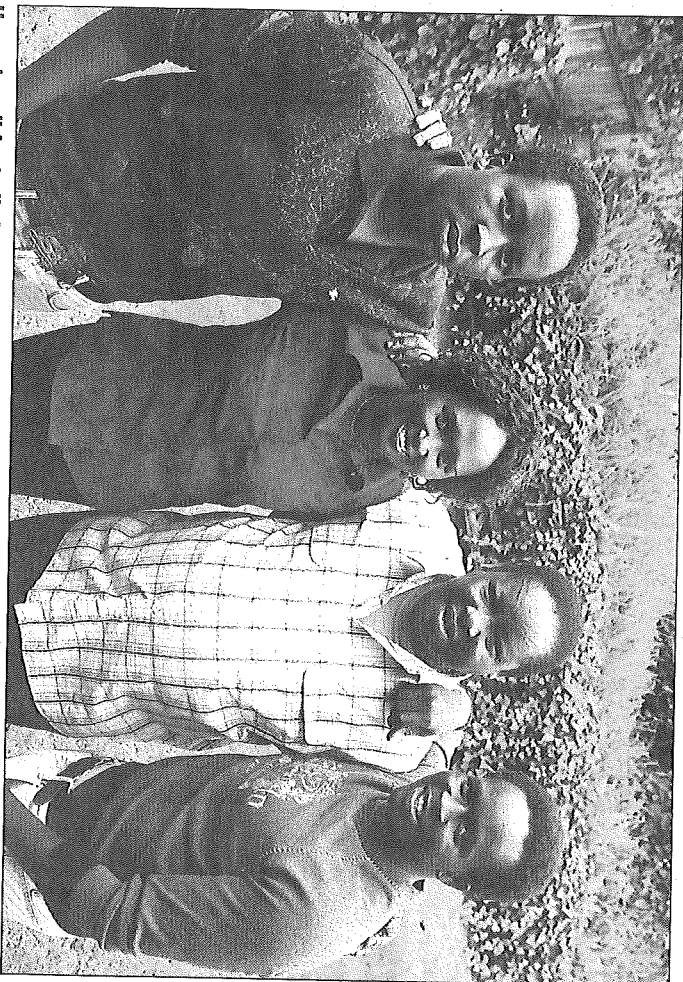
A Red Cross survey of 1000 Australians, which has been released to coincide with Refugee Week, has found that most people are sympathetic to refugees. It found that eight out of 10 people would help a refugee resettle in their community and 67 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that refugees had made a positive contribution to society. It also found that 94 per cent of respondents would use all their money to flee conflict or threat to travel to a safe country.

## REFUGEE WEEK

Arriving in Australia meant so much to Mr Biar that he can recall the exact time (11pm), date (February 11, 1997) and weather conditions (light rain) when he first set foot in Sydney.

"It was a fantastic day for us, coming from a situation of a refugee camp to here," Mr Biar said.

"It was exciting, a joy and we were also a bit uncertain of what to expect." With the help of St Vincent de Paul,



Happy to call Australia home: Sudanese refugee Ajang Biar (second from right) with his wife Aduk and sons, Ajak and Biar.

the family finally settled in Sutherland Shire because of the sense of family and community it offered.

His role as South Sudanese Community Association chairman sees Mr Biar help new refugees settle in Australia by teaching them about general day-to-day life such as how to open a bank account or enrol to study.

Although some people refer to asylum seekers arriving by boat as queue-jumpers, Mr Biar said he believed many were legitimately fleeing danger and persecution.

"No one would leave their own country or family behind if they did not have to," Mr Biar said.

"Australia is a lovely country and one of the signatories to the United Nations refugee policy and that is why people try and come here.

"These issues need to be addressed in order to help those who really need it."

To mark Refugee Week, Gynea Community Aid & Information Services is hosting a boat cruise on the Georges River on Saturday for former refugees living in the shire. Details: 9524 9559.

## IN BRIEF

### Boot camp fee

BOOT camp fitness operators will come under a new management plan to regulate the use of public space, manage and reduce their impact and ensure equity for the entire community. Sutherland Shire Council voted to implement the Use of Public Open Space by Commercial Fitness Groups and Personal Trainers policy recently. The council will also charge a one-off annual fee of about \$55 and a further \$20 to replace the ID arm band if required.

### SMS warning

THE Australian Communications and Media Authority is warning people to beware of those trying to cash in on World Cup fever. A number of scammers claiming to have links to the 2010 FIFA World Cup are offering large cash prizes. But when recipients attempt to claim their prize they are asked to give bank details and personal information. If people receive a text message forward it to Spam SMS. Details: 0429 999 888.

### Apprentice day

ENERGYAUSTRALIA will stage an apprentice open day at Silverwater this Saturday ahead of its 2011 recruitment drive. The utility will next month take on about 160 new apprentices, including line workers, electrical mechanics, cable joiners and motor mechanics. Details: energy.com.au/apprenticeships.