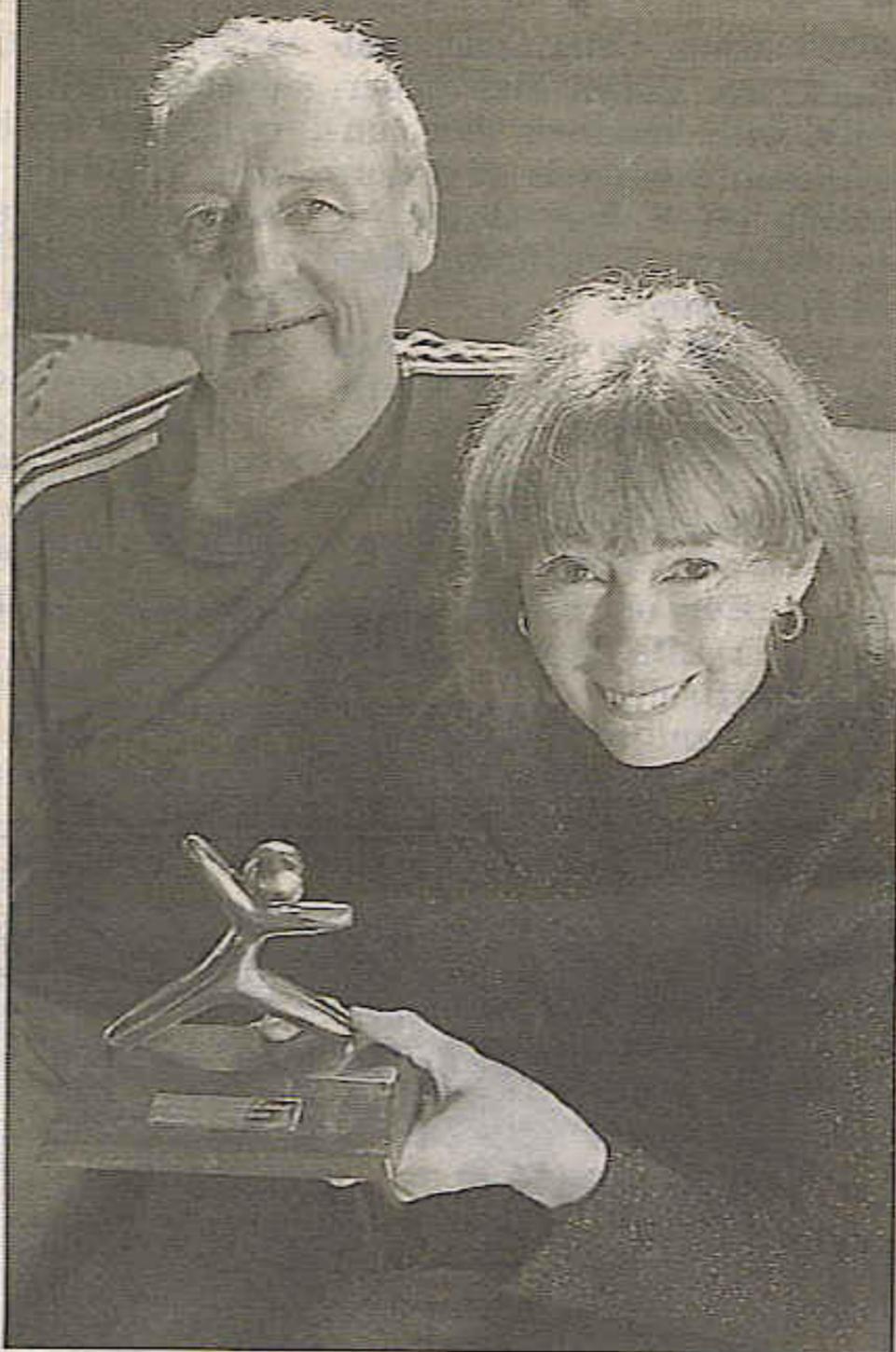


A sanctuary for refugees



Sanctuary Refugee Foundation founders Pete and Sue Hallam display the National Humanitarian Charity Award they received last week from the Australian Altruism Foundation.

Photo: TREVOR VEALE
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COFFS HARBOUR's Sanctuary Refugee Foundation has gone from strength to strength, last week receiving the National Humanitarian Charity Award.

The award was presented in Melbourne by the Australian Altruism Foundation, recognising those who have committed their lives to the long-term ideals of compassion, care and humanitarian values.

"It was a great honour for us, and we met many caring and inspiring award winners from across Australia," one of the founders, Sue Hallam said.

Sanctuary volunteers have worked quietly over the last 17 years, sponsoring, assisting and settling refugees in camps overseas, mostly children, from many war-torn countries.

Over the last three years, Sanctuary's work has become widely recognised, leading to the establishment of 11 new Sanctuary refugee support groups, all operated by volunteers, in many centres across Australia.

"Each group follows the successful Sanctuary model, fundraising in their local community to provide travel loans for refugee families who have been accepted overseas by the Australian Government, but face losing their unfunded Special Humanitarian 202 Visa, and often their lives, as

they have nothing, and no airfare to get here," Mrs Hallam said.

As one Sanctuary member said 'It is like winning the lottery, but having no bus fare to pick it up'.

The Sanctuary volunteers organise the flight, set up a home, food, clothing, and toys, meet the family at the airport, and help them with all aspects of settlement into their new local community, including schools, medical, housing, government offices, English classes, and anything else they may need.

Once settled, the family gradually repays their interest-free travel loan (over two to three years) and the money can then help another refugee family in need.

"It is not a welfare model, and repayment gives a sense of pride to recipients as they know that the repaid money will save others, and means that each donation is constantly re-used," president Pete Hallam said.

"Refugees are incredibly strong, courageous people, having survived so much suffering.

"It is amazing to see how quickly the children speak English, and are so keen to learn."

Sanctuary is a registered charity, receives no government funding, and relies completely on the community and corporate sector.

For more visit www.sanctuary-refugeefoundation.org