



Jumping for joy . . . members of Coffs Harbour's Sudanese community get into the spirit of things at Park Beach Reserve this week.

Photo: TREVOR VEALE 03122001A

Sudanese refugees find peace in Coffs

By CRAIG McTEAR

SOME of Coffs Harbour's newest residents have more reason than most to celebrate Christmas this year.

The city is now home to 13 refugee families from southern Sudan who have escaped the ravages of civil war and refugee camps.

Many of them joined with their new-found friends at Coffs Coast Adult Education (CCAЕ) this week for an end-of-year party on the banks of Coffs Creek at Park Beach.

Almost 20 nationalities were represented at the gathering in a celebration of multiculturalism and understanding.

The Sudanese refugees are sponsored by Coffs Harbour's Sanctuary Refugee Support Group, which has helped more than 300 people in the past 15

years.

"The Sudanese are the latest group of people they have helped," Wendy Tanner from CCAЕ said.

"Australia takes in 12,000 refugees each year, and this year 43 per cent came from The Horn of Africa, places like Ethiopia and Sudan.

"The Immigration Department expects that in 2004, this will increase to 60 per cent.

"Sudan has been embroiled in civil war for the past 20 years and there has been a huge number of displaced people in refugee camps in Ethiopia, Kenya and Egypt.

"Most of the Sudanese people have been in refugee camps in Kenya and Egypt.

"I think they view Coffs Harbour as paradise, considering what they've been through.

"Some of the boys are known as 'The Lost Boys' because they

■ To page 2

Sudan refugees' peace

■ From Page 1

have either lost their parents and other family members or don't know if they exist.

"It is the longest running civil war in the world and a lot of these boys were born into war and their schooling has been non-existent.

"In Sudan, the main conflict has been between the Arabic north and the indigenous tribes of the southern region, and most of our Sudanese belong to the Dinka tribe.

"They are getting a chance to assimilate with a lot of people by coming to our classes, and many of them have found jobs, such as fruit-picking, or are attending TAFE.

"If any members of the community are interested in helping people with their English through our volunteer home tutor pro-

gram, they can contact me on 66 52 5378."

The Sudanese have benefitted greatly from the CCAЕ's English language classes.

Many of the children are involved in special language classes at Orara High School and the older teenagers access CCAЕ services.

Andrew Reech, 18, from Yirol in Southern Sudan, arrived in Australia last month with his eldest brother and his family.

"I've enjoyed Coffs Harbour very much, and I'm enjoying the sweetness of life in Australia," Andrew said.

"Yirol was bombed while I was there, and even now I don't know where mum and dad are."

He spent seven years making his way to a refugee camp in Kenya, where he endured three years of atrocious conditions.