

A journey to Kurnell

Efforts are underway to ensure sailors who visit the Port of Kurnell can get access to Mission services, writes **Wendy King**

WHEN DID YOU LAST SPEAK TO A

family member or loved one, or use some form of social media? This question is worth a thought, when we look at the reality facing the crew of the vessels that bring to Australia more than 98% of the items that we all use every day. Due to the length of contracts and vessel schedules, seafarers do not have the privilege of talking to family members and loved ones on a daily and frequently not even on a weekly basis. This was very much emphasised on a recent visit that one of our chaplains made to vessels berthed at Kurnell.

WELFARE SERVICES AT KURNELL

As part of our ongoing initiative and desire to expand our services, the Mission to Seafarers, Sydney, recognises there are some areas where seafarers are missing out on the provision of necessary welfare services. One of these is at the Port of Kurnell, on the south side of Botany Bay. Earlier this year a death had occurred on a ship due to berth at Kurnell. One of our chaplains visited the crew on board this vessel several times, holding a service for them, providing them with SIM and top up cards to enable them to contact loved ones at home. We then provided a special bus run on two separate days to bring them in to the city from their vessel.

The services we provided for these seafarers were greatly appreciated by the crew as well as the owners and agent of the vessel making us aware of the necessity to provide service to the crews of similar vessels berthing at Kurnell.

KURNELL SERVICES

The distance between the city and the Port of Kurnell means it is impractical to run a regular bus service into the Mission to Seafarers city centre for two main reasons. The crew would have insufficient shore leave to enjoy this service and it would be too expensive to operate a return bus service to Kurnell. In the past a launch service operated, transporting the crew



Troy Hanckel, chaplain,
Mission to Seafarers, Sydney

from these vessels, across to Port Botany to link up with our regular return bus service that runs four times a day, 363 days a year. Unfortunately, this service ceased several years ago. The re-introduction of this service would be wonderful, but as this is not under our control, we need to look at other options.

One of our chaplains, Troy Hanckel recently visited the crew of vessels at Kurnell to ask them how we could assist them and what they saw as their greatest needs.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

In Mr Hanckel's observation, all seafarers enjoyed having some different company and would like a chaplain to visit on a regular basis. Many remembered the bus services that they were able to utilise in the past and wished that this was still provided. All the crew needed SIM cards to allow them to make contact with relatives and friends back home and also wanted Australian caps, hats and souvenirs.

The isolation of the seafarers was obvious and demonstrated in the fact that they wanted the chaplain to stay longer. This was particularly evident with

a Turkish crew who invited a chaplain to stay and share a traditional Turkish kebab with them. The staff at the gate were also friendly and helpful, remembering the good work that had been done earlier in the year by the Mission to Seafarers, Sydney, when they were dealing with the tragic death that occurred on board a vessel.

A FINAL VIEW

The seafarers appreciated Mr Hanckel's visit and he came away with an understanding of the needs of seafarers on board vessels at Kurnell. What came across strongly to him was the isolation of seafarers and the need for visitation. He also saw a great need for the Mission to Seafarers to provide a range of welfare services.

We ask readers to consider partnering with the Mission to Seafarers, Sydney in order to help expand our services to many people from all over the world who need our help.

We also invite you to attend our inaugural quarterly drinks on the evening of 23 July at our Millers Point base.

Contact the Mission for more information on 02 9241 3009. ■