



Participants at the bush camp

## East Timorese and Kosovar youth forge friendships in Australian bush

BY DIANA SULENTIC

Late last year Kosovar and East Timorese refugees found themselves living side by side in a 'Safe Haven' at East Hills, Sydney. Many of the refugees had never before left their country of origin and probably never anticipated that they would come to Australia and end up living with another group of refugees from the opposite side of the world.

When a proposal came for a recreational bush camp for both Kosovar and East Timorese youth from the Safe Haven it was met with some skepticism. There were concerns about the potential conflict that could arise between two groups of traumatised young people from such different cultural backgrounds.

However, on 20 December last year, 20 Kosovars and 35 East Timorese between the ages of six and 24 headed out of Sydney on two coaches for the *Great Aussie Bush Camp*. Located at Tea Gardens, a three-hour drive north of Sydney, the *Great Aussie Bush Camp* provides recreational activities such as rock climbing, canoeing, swimming and archery, in a bush setting.

The beginning of the camp was tense with the two groups of young people remaining separate. Later that evening, three of the East Timorese produced guitars and began a sing along and dance in the campsite. The tension

heightened when some of the Kosovar youths began criticising their dancing but was quickly averted when staff and volunteers intervened.

That night a disco was held which became the highlight of the camp. Earlier feelings of apprehension disappeared as both groups of young people danced together to Albanian and East Timorese music. Some attempts were made to learn songs in the other group's language, much to the amusement of the onlookers, and the fun continued well into the night.

The buses headed back to Sydney the next morning with pleas for more camps in the future. One group of Kosovars, who had not voiced their opinions, were asked if they would like to attend a future camp to which they replied: "Of course, but only if the East Timorese attend as well". ■

**The camp for Kosovar and East Timorese youth was organised by staff from the Australian Centre for Languages and STARTTS. Volunteers also provided invaluable assistance.**