



## Refugee fathers get into the swim

By **MARY-ANNE TOY**

**GOOFING** about at Smiths Beach on Phillip Island yesterday, the 15 African fathers and their children were learning not only how to surf, but how to negotiate the treacherous rips of life as a refugee family in Australia.

Surfing lessons were the finale of an innovative weekend camp organised by Centacare Catholic Family Services and Victoria Police for the African dads and 15 of their children.

Police multicultural liaison officer Richard Dove, one of the organisers, said it was a common mistake to believe that once a refugee family left behind the risk of murder, rape, death and disease, that all would be well.

"Many find that the greatest battle facing them now is keeping their family together and adjusting to a foreign culture," Leading Constable Dove says.

For Masud Majur, a full-time teacher's aid who works weekends and several week nights as a driving instructor while studying electronic engineering, it was a chance to spend time with his son Paul. He was astonished to learn that Paul, 13, was not just a good soccer player, but also skilled at Aussie Rules.

He was less surprised that both he and Paul were not very good surfers, yet.

Duku Wolkare, a Sudanese community leader, said Australian parents did not have all the answers either but what he and other African dads were realising was that it was okay to be honest and admit it to your child, and to be positive that together the family, with help from the wider community, can work out any problem.

"Parenting is not automatic," Mr Wolkare says. "Sometimes it can be so tedious, saying the same thing seven or eight times and your child won't listen and grows aggressive. But the message gets lost when we are always negative."

"I really like how Australians say 'perhaps that's not such a good idea' rather than just saying something is bad."

Centacare program leader Kate McKernin said the group explored the differences and the similarities in being a father in Australia and being a father in Africa.

"Many of the African dads feel they don't have any credibility any more, are not relevant," she said. "To hear someone say to them that their role is vital to the family is really important." Centacare is keen to run more camps if it can get funding.

Masud Majur, his son Paul, and (top) Abuk, 9, learn to surf at Phillip Island.

PICTURES: REBECCA HALLAS