



JRS Australia's 2020 Autumn Link



'Help is not just a word'

Anil, an inspiring young asylum seeker, volunteers during Bushfire Crisis.

JRS serves refugees and people seeking asylum at our Community Space in Westmead in Sydney. Anil is one of our young clients who uses his talents to help others.

During the recent Bushfire Crisis, Anil's housemate introduced him to the Australian Islamic Centre in Sydney who were organising volunteers and transporting food containers to assist in Bushfire-affected areas in NSW. Before Christmas, Anil offered to volunteer with the centre and travelled with them to Batemans Bay.

For ten days straight, Anil worked in over 40 degree heat, in severe humidity, to supply food and water to firefighters and the Bateman's Bay community. Some days he worked 14 to 15 hour-days.

In return for this help, Anil was amongst a group of volunteers that were rewarded with \$900 gift vouchers from Westfield. Always grateful, Anil

used the money to buy essential items like food and groceries that he is often not able to afford. But the reward that Anil felt was actually in the gift of helping others. "It makes me so happy to help," he said.

Anil loves cooking for people and has used his talents to volunteer at Lentil As Anything, a restaurant located in Newtown that provides delicious food to anyone who drops in, for free (if needed). When volunteering, Anil actually encouraged and brought over fifteen people sleeping at Hyde Park to enjoy a free meal at Lentil As Anything. Anil attributes his love for helping others with the help he first received from JRS.

Last November, Anil first came to JRS. At this time, Anil says he was "emotionally broke." He was sleeping in the park, in shelters, and was frightened of what would happen next. With the support of JRS' caseworker,

Shaheen (pictured below, left), Anil found accommodation, emotional support and it was also during this time, "I realised the importance of help."

Anil also spoke highly of the Bateman's Bay community. "Those people are very welcoming." During the fires, the community gave Anil a special tour around the various look-outs, and showed him the native animals.

Anil told JRS that, "Volunteering for the fires and helping out with Lentil As Anything has brought back my life."

"Now, I'm more happy than ever" says Anil. This happiness he attributes to the role of helping others. "Help is not just a word," says Anil with a glowing smile. "It is something more."

Special thanks to Anil (pictured right) for sharing this remarkable story.

We admire your resilience, compassion and humanity.



Women Seeking Asylum take Leadership



🗣️ Hava Rezaie (left) (Hazara community leader, refugee and women's rights advocate) and Najeeba Wazefadost (Deputy chair of Australian National Committee on Refugee Women and human rights advocate) speak at the women's round table.

Last year, JRS Australia celebrated the first year anniversary of our Finding Safety Project that aims to address and prevent the occurrence of sexual-and-gender-based violence (SGBV) against women seeking asylum in Australia. JRS hosts a women's only space in Parramatta. JRS Australia Director, Carolina Gottardo explains, "The Finding Safety Project was conceived to respond to women seeking asylum survivors of SGBV and their needs. Women seeking asylum drive the agenda. We want the women who use the space to feel it is **their** women's space."

Last year, Finding Safety in partnership with SSI, ACCESS Australia QLD and women community leaders hosted a women's round table *Power and Agency in Limbo: Women Seeking Asylum Round Table* where diverse and inspiring women leaders, who have been forcibly displaced, engaged in an open and safe dialogue between themselves and with a range of relevant agencies. Women with lived experience spoke about the racial discrimination that women seeking asylum often face when trying to find a job in Australia. One speaker said,

"There's a problem with discrimination [in Australia], there's a problem with colour." She spoke about how Australians often say things like asylum seekers are "taking our jobs." "It is hard to participate because the environment is not welcoming."

The struggles of being unable to secure a visa repeatedly arose. "If we don't have a visa or citizenship, we can't do anything. We can't go to TAFE, we can't get a job. We have been here for six years, but we can't do anything!" stated a passionate young woman.

The round table revealed the difficulties that women seeking asylum face when seeking help from service providers. There is a lack of clear information. Often, mixed messages and confusing information is given to women when they are seeking help.

One woman spoke of visiting multiple agencies before finally being given access to Medicare. This situation was not uncommon. Others spoke of problems in gaining housing due to no credit rating or housing history.

"Most of us come from backgrounds of war and violence, so we don't know the process," one speaker explained. Other women spoke about how they were ineligible for the NDIS and aged care support, and the limited legal

support that they receive. There is no support from immigration and people are often deferred to a website that is unhelpful to asylum seeker women who have English-language barriers.

The round table was designed to prelude the December 2019 Global Refugee Forum (GRF) to ensure that all these core issues that currently disadvantage women seeking asylum in Australia were highlighted at the highest international level.

"We need to increase the space for asylum seekers to talk about their own issues," said Hazara leader, Najeeba Wazefadost.

"NGO's must move away from a paternalistic model," said Carolina. "The women are the ones who have the way forward, and we (NGOs) are the ones who are there just to support that. We cannot be patronising. People empower themselves. We **enable** empowerment, but we do not empower people."

"The idea of Finding Safety is to support women to speak up so that they become leaders in their communities."

Special thanks to WomenNSW for your support of the Finding Safety project.

Sister Margaret Reflects on JRS' Arrupe Place

As one of JRS Australia's longest serving staff members, Sister Margaret Guy RSC, our Volunteer Coordinator, has watched JRS grow to meet demand in response to Australia's increasingly punitive policies towards people seeking asylum.

Five years ago, Sister Margaret received a phone call. Former Director of JRS Australia, Fr Aloysious Mowe S.J. invited Margaret to be part of a new JRS drop-in hospitality centre in Western Sydney to support people seeking asylum.

After much planning, Sister Margaret was part of the opening of the new JRS Australia community centre, "Arrupe Place," named after JRS founder, Fr Pedro Arrupe SJ. "At this time, we had a small team with just seven clients on the list," said Sr Margaret.

An additional community centre was rented just a few streets away. "With the changes in government policies, so many more refugees and people seeking asylum had their small incomes cut, so we had more people accessing our support and

community programs," explained Sr Margaret.

Again, more space was needed. "In late 2018, we moved to Westmead, gratefully accepting the Marist Brothers' offer of their former residence," said Sr Margaret.

Last year, JRS Australia served 3068 people. "We now have 592 clients on our foodbank list, representing about 1800 people."

In late 2019, Sr Margaret announced, "It is time for me to conclude my ministry with JRS at the end of this year."

Maeve Brown, our JRS Service Manager said, "Margaret and I have worked together very closely over the 5+ years we've both been at JRS. She and I spent the early days wandering around Southwest and Western Sydney trying to find the perfect spot for the yet-to-be-named JRS drop-in centre.

"During that time, things have really



 Sr Margaret with Maeve

only gotten worse for people seeking asylum, but it has been an honour to work alongside Margaret. Even on difficult days, Margaret shows deep compassion and solidarity with those that walk through our door. We will all miss her greatly."

For the JRS team, it has always been inspiring to listen to Sr Margaret discuss the relationship between faith and practice.

Thank you Sr Margaret for being an inspiration. We will miss you.

JRS Australia active at Global Refugee Forum and other key international gatherings

JRS continues to be active in international advocacy on the implementation of the two Global Compacts and on linking our local and national work with key priorities at the regional and global levels.

JRS Australia was present at the historic Global Refugee Forum (GRF). Hosted by the The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the GRF was the first review of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and took place in Geneva in December 2019. Over the course of three days,

around 3,000 participants attended more than 90 events.

Over 770 pledges were made at the GRF from a variety of stakeholders. Pledges ranged on commitments in areas such as education, livelihoods, protection capacity, energy and infrastructure and durable solutions. Financial pledges accounted for more than 5 billion USD that were raised on commitments to refugee programs.

Highlights included the participation of people with lived experience at the forum during many sessions and

panels. Momentum was built with the active participation of about 70 refugees, many of them based in Australia, and related pledges on refugee participation from a number of actors.

Important pledges were made towards providing legal assistance to refugees, mainly from NGOs and the legal community.

Issues relating to refugee women were also at the forefront with a number of pledges made to advance refugee women's inclusion *cont on p4*

JRS Australia active at Global Refugee Forum and other key international gatherings (cont)

and leadership, including through humanitarian action, sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response, parliamentary engagement, education and skill enhancement as well as through improved data and metrics.

Participation from the private sector was also significant with over 200 pledges on financial contributions and employment. JRS Australia Director, Carolina Gottardo, was at the GRF. She said “It was encouraging to see so many actors committed to supporting refugees at this historic forum. The most inspiring part of the GRF for me was to see leaders with lived experience

speaking for themselves on how things should change.”

JRS Australia has also attended the annual meeting of the UN Network on Migration in December 2019 and the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD).

In January 2020, Carolina Gottardo was a speaker in plenary sessions at both events. JRS Australia also participated in regional events including a roundtable on combating negative narratives on migration and asylum at the first meeting of the UN Regional Migration Network in Bangkok.

 Carolina speaking at the United Nations.



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What JRS Does

JRS Australia advocates for policies of welcome and protection at all tiers of government. At our two spaces of welcome in Westmead and Parramatta, JRS directly serves and accompanies people seeking asylum in Sydney. Each space has programs to facilitate agency, employment and to foster a sense of community.

 www.facebook.com/JRSAustralia

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donate

How your donation will help

General donations will directly fund: emergency assistance, casework services, legal advice, employment support, foodbank, homework clubs, community kitchen and many other activities for refugees and people seeking asylum. Your donation also allows JRS to advocate for policies of welcome and protection.

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