

# JRS Report 2013



 A mother and her two children at their new home on a farm in Bekaa Valley, Lebanon

## Director's Letter

**It is ironic that at a time of unprecedented global displacement, we have also witnessed the rise of what Pope Francis called “globalised indifference”.**

Pope Francis visited the JRS Centro Astalli in Rome in September 2013, and thanked JRS for entering “into a relationship with asylum seekers and refugees, recognising them as people”, and for being “committed to finding concrete responses to their needs”. He also asked his listeners to ponder the following questions:

“Do I kneel down to someone in difficulty or am I afraid to soil my hands? Am I closed in on myself, focused on my things, or do I notice those in need of help? Do I just serve myself or am I able to serve others as Christ did to the point of giving his life? Do I look into the eyes of those

who seek justice or do I look the other way so as not to look into their eyes?”

The Pope’s words had a special poignancy, and posed a stirring challenge in a year when the number of forcibly displaced people in the world exceeded the 50 million mark for the first time since the end of the Second World War in 1945. Of these, 10.7 million were new refugees, displaced during the course of 2013 by persecution or conflict. The terrible escalation of the Syrian civil war, civil conflict in the Central African Republic and South Sudan, and the ongoing violence in Afghanistan, were just some of the major conflicts that

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contributed to a quantum leap of forced displacement worldwide.

It is ironic that at a time of unprecedented global displacement (the highest on record since comprehensive statistics on forced displacement have been compiled), we have also witnessed the rise of what Pope Francis, during his visit to the Italian island of Lampedusa in July 2013, called “globalised indifference”. While the vast majority of refugees flee to territories bordering their own, these countries of refuge are usually in the developing world and face major economic and social problems of their own: Pakistan, Iran, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey were the most generous host countries to refugees in the world. In fact, 86 percent of all refugees were hosted by developing countries in 2013.

Instead of showing solidarity and sharing responsibility, many of the industrialised countries of the world seem to be

retreating into their own fortresses of indifference or hostility, citing “border security” and the need to “break the people-smuggling business model”. Australia in the past had already excised offshore places such as Christmas Island from the Australian migration zone, so that any asylum seeker arriving by boat could not lodge a valid protection claim unless specifically permitted to do so by the Minister for Immigration. In 2013 the Australian Parliament passed legislation which extended this extraordinary measure to the entire Australian mainland. In doing so it essentially ditched overboard one of the key elements of the 1951 Refugee Convention, that of the lawful right of refugees to enter a country to seek asylum, regardless of their means of arrival.

2013 showed us the punitive nature of Australia’s offshore processing regimes in Nauru and Papua New Guinea; the

determination of the government to refuse Permanent Protection to refugees who arrive in Australia by boat; and the misery of asylum seekers living in the Australian community in such a state of poverty that they were described by the Red Cross as “by any measure among the most destitute people in the country, who are absolutely marginalised by every reasonable measure”.

In his speech at Centro Astalli, Pope Francis said to JRS: “Always keep hope alive! Help to recover trust! Demonstrate that with welcome and fraternity a window to the future can be opened – more than a window, a door, and even more, that it is possible to have a future!”

I am grateful to our staff, benefactors, volunteers, and friends, for your participation in this mission of hope that is the core work of JRS.

*Fr Aloysius Mowe SJ*

## Advocacy and policy

The lead up to the 2013 Australian federal election saw the toxic rhetoric against asylum seekers reach new lows. In a desperate bid to outmanoeuvre the opposition, the incumbent Labor government announced an agreement with Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Nauru that would see asylum seekers arriving in Australia by boat being sent offshore for processing and ultimately resettlement.

Despite this, the Liberal Party was elected and enthusiastically began to introduce a raft of harsh policies designed to deter asylum seekers from arriving in Australia by boat, and to punish those who had already done so.

The government also launched Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB), a military-led

border security operation designed to intercept and turn back boats carrying asylum seekers to their place of origin. The last three months of the year saw the government try, and fail, to reintroduce Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) and to cap the amount of onshore protection visas granted.

A code of behaviour was introduced for asylum seekers living in the community on bridging visas which warns against “anti-social” behaviour such as “spitting or swearing in public”. Breaches of the code may lead to the cancellation of a visa and return to closed detention.

This rapidly changing and increasingly restrictive policy environment has made it ever more urgent for JRS to advocate for

the just and humane treatment of asylum seekers who seek Australia’s assistance.

JRS Director Fr Aloysius Mowe SJ continued his work as a member of the Regional Cooperation Framework Consultative Group, established by Australia’s Department of Immigration and Border Protection, and Associate Director Dr Maryanne Loughry RSM, spent a great deal of time attending to her duties as a member of the Minister of Immigration’s Council for Asylum Seekers and Detention (MCASD). Oliver White, Head of Policy and Advocacy was engaged at many levels advocating for asylum seekers detained in detention and for improved conditions for asylum seekers living in the community.

# Shelter Project

2013 was an eventful year for the Shelter Project as we continued to provide much needed temporary accommodation, financial assistance, and casework support for asylum seekers. The Shelter Project had to adapt to increasing referrals for clients, as well as an ever changing policy landscape.

The demand for accommodation grew as waiting periods for financial assistance from the government increased, eligibility criteria tightened and employment barriers made finding affordable and sustainable housing very difficult.

While the Ashfield shelter was closed earlier in the year, JRS continued to offer temporary accommodation to single men and women, couples and families through our shelters in Manly and Elizabeth Bay.

While a number of challenges presented themselves, JRS was buoyed by several good news stories, with clients enrolling in TAFE courses, securing employment and making valuable connections with the wider community through church groups, English classes, arts, and sports programs.

We are grateful for our dedicated team of volunteers, who have continued to be a

great source of support, particularly through the relationships formed with clients. They have accompanied them to doctors' appointments and immigration hearings, and have provided a listening ear over cups of tea.

We look forward to the challenges that await the Shelter Project in 2014, with plans to expand our services to provide a space for accompaniment and hospitality, in addition to more accessible support services for asylum seekers in western Sydney.

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## Residence Determination Project

The beginning of 2013 saw many of JRS' Vulnerable Adult Male (VAM) clients enter their third year in Australia with their claims for protection still unresolved. The year also saw the arrival of a new group of families affected by the toughening of Government policies. As time progressed, it became clear that some of these families would not be granted any legal assistance in seeking protection and, further, that they would have to wait to be invited to do so.

In the context of such uncertainty, the project continued to provide accommodation and casework services for these clients, assisting them with those health and welfare matters where positive outcomes were possible. At the same time, all workers continued to listen "with the ear of the heart" to the increasing frustration and anxiety of those we served and to respect them for their resilience against all odds.

Organised activities such as swimming lessons, picnics and art workshops

brought momentary respite, while those attending English classes continued to practise their English in the hope of a positive outcome. Some clients were assisted in forging new links with members of the wider community or building on those links that they already had.

On leaving the project, one client said, "Thank you for accepting me the way I am and for treating me as a human being."

Surely that is not too much to ask!

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## Unaccompanied Minors Program

**We continued to receive telephone calls and visits from former clients who wanted to share with us their successes.**

JRS continued to provide crucial support to Unaccompanied Minors and served a total of 13 young Hazara clients from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Five of our UAM clients were granted protection visas during the first half of 2013, before significant change in immigration policy was announced.

After the election of the Coalition government, clients were informed that no

further permanent protection visas would be granted, but that they would be able to apply for certain temporary protection visas for a finite period – visas which offer them only limited protection in Australia.

Despite this dull outlook, we continued to provide housing and intensive casework support to the clients, ensuring their health and welfare needs were met. We organised a variety of meaningful

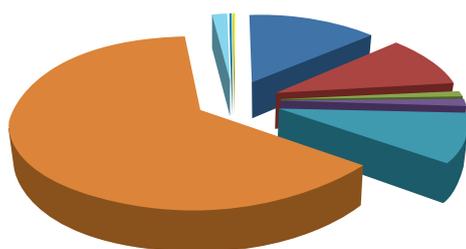
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activities including overnight trips to Canberra and camping at Jenolan Caves. A number of our clients enrolled in swimming, volleyball and cricket clubs and have excelled in these. Four youngsters graduated from intensive English school and transitioned into mainstream high schools. We built further upon our strong relationship with local clubs and organisations, and focused on developing the independent living skills of our young clients – including several who had never received an education prior to arriving to Australia and required intensive casework support.

We continued to receive telephone calls and visits from former clients who wanted to share with us their successes. One told how he had worked his way up in a hair dressing salon to become manager; he is now saving to start his own salon. Another is attending school to obtain his ATAR and works in a security business in the evenings.

Hearing such positive stories and seeing how independent, driven and successful our clients have become further confirm how much they can contribute to our community and keeps us motivated to work and ensure best outcomes for them.

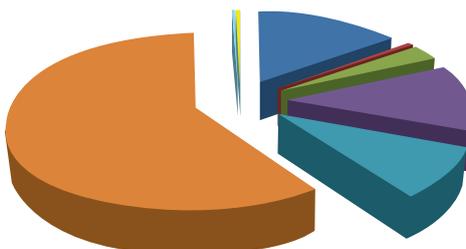
### 2013 JRS Income



General Donations	13%
Province Subsidy	10%
Fundraising for Australia	1%
Shelter Project	1%
Minors Project	10%
VAM Project	63%
Talks, Publications, Training, Consultancy	2%
Sundry Income	0%
Bank Interest	0%

**Total Income: \$2,199,074**

### 2013 JRS Expenditure



Minors Project	9%
VAM Project	59%
Research and Advocacy	0%
Fund Raising	1%
Administration	15%
Communication	1%
Detention Issues	3%
Shelter Project	12%

**Total Expenditure: \$2,259,644**



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