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 Staff and volunteers at our new Women's Space

## JRS in the community

The JRS community does not solely consist of the clients that we serve and our staff and volunteers. It also consists of the wider community; people in parishes, schools and other individuals who care; people like you. Right now, many people seeking asylum live in our own communities and face various forms of injustice. Recently JRS caseworkers report substantial increases in food insecurity and homelessness amongst children, women, and men seeking asylum as a result of the government cuts in Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS). Similarly JRS foodbank coordinators also noticed significant increases in people needing to access emergency food rations. Such stories indicate that basic services have been denied to people seeking asylum in Australia. In this context, it is more important than ever to join the JRS community to walk with people seeking asylum and refugees and advocate for their rights.

### **JRS's work in parishes.**

Many Catholic parishes across NSW and Australia would like to see Australia treat refugees, people seeking asylum and migrants fairly and with dignity. A few weekends ago, St Columba's Parish in North Leichhardt hosted JRS's Community Organiser, Anne Rutherford, to speak at three masses about JRS's work in the community and how to get involved. This parish will feature information in their bulletin on resources needed by JRS to feed, clothe, and help empower people with jobs. Our Community Development Officer, Joanna Brooke, worked closely with Fay and David Hair of the parish social justice group to make this possible. JRS Australia is grateful to the St Columba's parish and thankful to Fr Peter Smith (also the Promoter of Justice and Peace, Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney), the parish social justice group and the work of Fay and David for facilitating positive

change for people seeking asylum in Sydney.

JRS Australia invites other parishes across Sydney and NSW who are interested in galvanizing their parishes to help serve, accompany, and advocate for the rights of refugees and people seeking asylum to contact us.

### **JRS's work in communities.**

Last month, JRS was invited by our partners, Sydney Alliance, to participate as experts at two table talks in Springwood in the Blue Mountains. Table talks are a unique platform for refugees and people seeking asylum to share their stories. Participants are encouraged to ask experts questions on issues concerning forced migration. During the Springwood talks, JRS's Maeve Brown, Services Manager and Leonie Dyer, Employment Coordinator participated as experts. Hosted over two days, Hava Rezaie, a Hazara community leader and women's rights advocate and Kane Alkoraghooli, a young Syrian leader; gave powerful accounts of escape from

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cont from p1 persecution and family separation. Politicians from both major parties also attended the event.

The Blue Mountains table talks were particularly special because they were interfaith events co-organised by the Presbyterian, Anglican, Uniting, and Catholic churches in the area. The Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group also helped coordinate the event. In total, 180 people attended the talks over the two days. This year, JRS will be hosting table talks in Sydney communities and parishes. If interested, please get in touch.

#### **JRS's work in schools.**

This year, JRS continues to work with schools that want to empower people seeking asylum. Earlier this March, the teachers at St Columba's Catholic

School participated in a table talk organised by JRS and Sydney Alliance.

Throughout 2019, JRS will also continue our *Refugee Voices* (RV) program, which brings students face to face with leaders of lived experience, who share their stories and answer questions. The RV program is intended for students and youth groups so is popular amongst school teachers who

can raise awareness about refugee issues among students whilst meeting essential criteria for the school curriculum. Table talks and RVs are excellent programs for students and have a positive impact on the entire community. Right now, JRS's Schools Engagement Coordinator, Anne Nesbitt is organising table talks and RVs across schools in Sydney.

#### **JRS in the community. Get involved!**

JRS is eager to work with schools, parishes, individuals and community groups. Please see contact details below.

##### **Schools:**

Anne Nesbitt. E: [anne.nesbitt@jrs.org.au](mailto:anne.nesbitt@jrs.org.au)

##### **Parishes/community groups:**

Anne Rutherford. E: [anne.rutherford@jrs.org.au](mailto:anne.rutherford@jrs.org.au)

##### **Individuals:** [jrsreception@jrs.org.au](mailto:jrsreception@jrs.org.au)



## Promoting Women's empowerment with JRS' new Women's Space!

Last year, JRS Australia launched a new women's space for our "Finding Safety" programme in Parramatta. JRS also released the groundbreaking Free from Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Report.

The women's space is part of an overall programme to effectively respond to the specific challenges faced by women seeking asylum and girls who are survivors or at risk of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV).

"Women seeking asylum are incredibly resilient and are agents of change. For us, it is crucial that they are the main drivers of this project," said JRS Australia Director, Carolina Gottardo.

"Unfortunately, violence against women and girls is endemic and it affects women seeking asylum in very specific ways as a result of the multiple layers of discrimination that they face on the grounds of their gender, race and migration/asylum status," said Ms Gottardo.

Common issues for women seeking

asylum include lack of income and access to housing and community services. Additional barriers include fears of deportation and/or violent repercussions for reporting cases of domestic violence to the police. Insecure visa status often contributed to asylum-seeking women perceiving domestic and family violence (DFV) as an issue of lesser importance as compared with seeking asylum. One woman interviewed for the Report said; *"Sometimes you have this big problem... And then you have another problem, like sexual violence or...maybe you're beaten by your partner or your husband, so your mind becomes so much occupied by this asylum seeker thing, you end up thinking these other ones are just... not as serious."*

Finding Safety aims to promote the empowerment of women who have experienced or are at risk of violence, to develop prevention efforts and educational sessions on DFV against women. It also endeavours to facilitate links and referrals in between the DFV and refugee sectors and to support women seeking asylum to advocate for policy change where it is needed.

JRS Australia is committed to bringing the voices of women seeking asylum into the public arena, and supporting them to advocate for change. Finding Safety, JRS Australia's new 3-year project funded by Women NSW, is the first step in this journey.

JRS's women's space in Parramatta is a place of safety, shelter and empowerment for women seeking asylum. On International Women's Day, JRS collaborated with an organisation called "Support the Girls," which specialises in providing women with professional bra fittings. An advocate, lawyer and artist named Amani Hayder also delivered a powerful speech on resilience. The women enjoyed lunch together and participated in an art session.

Earlier this month, Finding Safety also began a weekly open day on Wednesdays. Each fortnight, the space will have a peer support group for women. On alternate fortnights, women leaders will cook food from their home countries and share a

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# The global compacts

At the end of last year, major developments occurred in the international arena on key issues surrounding refugees and migration. On the 10th and 11th December 2018, the international community met at the Marrakech United Nations (UN) Conference for the final adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). The Global Compact for Refugees (GCR) was also adopted in New York in December 2018.

The GCM is a pioneering international instrument because it provides common principles, frameworks, and specific objectives to improve cooperation and coordination in addressing the complexity of global migration. The GCR focuses on strengthening international responses to large movements of refugees and addressing protracted refugee situations.

JRS Australia is committed to advocating for refugees, people seeking asylum and migrants in vulnerable situations at national, regional and international levels. Throughout the consultations and negotiations of both Compacts, JRS Australia and the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) were committed and active participants.

Ironically, the Marrakech UN Conference almost immediately followed the Australian Liberal government's own decision not to adopt the GCM. JRS has led efforts of many civil and social justice based organisations, all critical of

the Coalition's decision and seeking it to be changed. In November, 2018, JRS facilitated the production of a public letter with 34 key peak bodies, international NGOs, and faith organisations expressing both our concern with government's non-adoption and asking it to reconsider. Australia has committed to adopting the GCR.

During the UN Conference, leaders from 164 countries chose to adopt the Compact whilst only a few countries decided not to adopt. Furthermore, there was a vote on the GCM at the UN General Assembly on 19th December and only 5 countries voted against the GCM. Australia abstained on the vote but mentioned that it won't be adopting.

JRS Australia's Director, Carolina Gottardo attended the Marrakech UN Conference for the adoption of the GCM, as part of what was named as "Migration Week." During the implementation of the GCM, Aljazeera interviewed Ms Gottardo about the GCM and its importance; *"It is beneficial for member states to adopt the GCM. It is actually a collective effort of 192 member states that have worked together to agree on a framework that is fair on human mobility. It is based on internationally agreed standards that have worked for the last 70 years. It is a concerted effort to expand the state's ability to work in a coordinated and cooperative framework that is beneficial for all of them."*

In an op-ed in Eureka Street called, "Australia misses GCM boat but it's not too late," Ms Gottardo made it clear that it *"is not too late for the Australian*



📍 Carolina Gottardo at the UN

*government to adopt the GCM. This is an instrument that they helped to shape through their active participation in the consultations and negotiations that resulted in the final text of the GCM."*

**What's next?** JRS Australia presented at a conference on the implementation of the global compacts organised by JRS Cambodia in late November 2018. The Jesuit Asia Pacific Conference (JCAP) Migration group has identified advocacy on the Global Compacts as a key priority for this year, following Pope's Francis clear commitment to these historic instruments and his 20 Action Points.

Later this year, JRS Australia will also attend the JCAP workshop on the implementation of the compacts in South Korea. JRS and APRRN are also involved with broader discussions on Compacts' implementation at the UN and civil society level to ensure that they translate into real changes to the lives of refugees and migrants on the ground. JRS will continue advocating for the adoption of the GCM in Australia and for effective implementation of both Compacts.

*cont from p2* communal meal with other women in the group. In the afternoon, different activities such as art classes, dance and cake decorating will allow women to connect with others and take their minds off some of the difficulties in their lives.

In early March, JRS also organised a Sunday trip to Taronga Zoo. Women leaders in the group raised the

possibility, indicating that they had limited time and resources to see Taronga otherwise. 30 women and their children had a day at the zoo and enjoyed themselves.

JRS Australia wishes to thank Women NSW for funding this important project. We also thank the women of the Finding Safety space for their strength and resilience.

# Save the date: 14th April 2019



## PALM SUNDAY "2019 MARCH FOR REFUGEES"

### Event details:

- 1.15pm** Meet at Eddy Avenue (near the Panda Express) at Central Station. Together, we then will go to Belmore Park for a 30 minute "Circle of Silence."
- 2.00pm** We march for refugees.

Each year, Australians stand with people seeking asylum and refugees on Palm Sunday. This year, JRS Australia will be coordinating a contingent of supporters to participate in the March for Refugees on Palm Sunday in Sydney. We invite you to march with us!

Pope Francis tells us to offer humanity to refugees and people seeking asylum. As Christians, it is our mission to welcome, protect, promote and integrate them into our communities.

"To all of you [refugees and migrants], and to those who have devoted their lives and their efforts to helping you, I give the assurance of my prayers and I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing."  
-Pope Francis



**RSVP.** Come along! All welcome. Get your community group, family, friend, parish or school involved. Ahead of the event, JRS will also be making banners, signs and posters. For more details on marching with JRS and to RSVP please email Anne Rutherford: [anne.rutherford@jrs.org.au](mailto:anne.rutherford@jrs.org.au) P: (02) 9356 3888

### social media

#### Follow JRS: Facebook or Twitter

We track and highlight the latest in policies and attitudes for people seeking asylum, not just in Australia but around the world. Let us know what you think at:

 [www.facebook.com/JRSAustralia](http://www.facebook.com/JRSAustralia)

 [@JRS\\_Aus](https://twitter.com/JRS_Aus)

### donate

#### How your donation will help

General donations will directly fund:

Emergency assistant, casework services, legal advice, employment support, foodbank, homework clubs, community kitchen and many other activities..

### link online

#### Would you like to receive Link online?

Sign up for our electronic newsletter at [www.jrs.org.au](http://www.jrs.org.au)

Jesuit Refugee Service Australia • ph: 02 9356 3888 • fax: 02 9356 3021 • email: [info@jrs.org.au](mailto:info@jrs.org.au) • web: [www.jrs.org.au](http://www.jrs.org.au)

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