



JRS Australia's 2019 Spring Link *Special Advocacy Edition*

In May 2019, Father Arturo Sosa, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, renewed the Jesuit Society's commitment to JRS. In a letter entitled "Renewed Commitment of the Jesuit Refugee Service" that was addressed "To the Whole Society of Jesus and Partners in Mission," Fr General outlined the realities of the current global refugee crisis in explaining the necessity for full support for JRS. "With such grave and urgent needs, JRS must strive to be even more effective in its programmes and advocacy."


"No one can be unaware of the many political movements that stoke resentment against refugees for electoral gain," wrote Fr General. Unfortunately, and as JRS Australia's Director, Carolina Gottardo has repeatedly outlined "Australia has one

of the most punitive policies affecting people seeking asylum in the world." On multiple occasions, the United Nations, as well as Jesuit and other Catholic leaders have condemned Australia for inhumane treatment of many people seeking protection. These are the policies that JRS Australia seeks to influence, each and every day, the policies that result in so many women, men and children suffering.

Fr General quotes Pope Francis who has called on the international community to have a shared response to refugees and migrants that can be articulated in four verbs "to welcome, to protect, to promote and to integrate." Pope Francis has also insisted that what is needed is a change in attitude "to overcome indifference and to counter fears."

In his letter, Fr General reminds us

that the "mission of JRS must be shared by all our institutions...[This] shared mission of reconciliation and justice...dedicates itself anew to the accompaniment, service, and defence of refugees around the world." We wish to thank you, our friends and collaborators, for sharing this mission with JRS and for walking with us.

 Father Arturo Sosa, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus



JRS Australia's post-election parliamentary engagement



Advocating for positive change. JRS Australia's Director, Carolina Gottardo (third from right) and Policy & Advocacy Coordinator, Nishadh Rego (second from left) come with leaders with lived experience of seeking asylum to meet with MPs, Michelle Rowland (centre) and Shayne Neumann (fourth from right); along with parishioners and Uniting Church.

In the aftermath of the 2019 federal election, JRS Australia reconvened on how we can best achieve systemic change in the coming years. We are proud to promote the leadership of people with lived experience. Communicating their stories and also systematically gathering evidence to enable policy change are top priorities for JRS. We are also part of the growing movement of Australians who are calling on our leaders to adopt a culture of welcome and protection. In late July 2019, JRS Australia joined key organisations from the sector to raise some of these issues

with the PM's office, government ministers, and members of the cross-bench. JRS Australia has also been meeting with federal government, opposition and independent MPs in Sydney, including Fiona Martin, Chris Bowen, Julie Owens, and Mehreen Faruqi about a range of specific issues impacting people seeking asylum. JRS works with parishes and schools that advocate for change. Across the Catholic Archdioceses of both Sydney and Parramatta, parishes and schools are hosting actions such as community conversations and providing funds for emergency rent, food and clothing. Catholic parishes are also organising delegations to visit their MPs, including Our Lady of the Way's proactive effort to meet Zali Steggall and Trent Zimmerman.

But what are some of the policies that need to change and their impacts on women, children and men seeking asylum?

Each month, JRS Australia is seeing 35–40 new people in poverty and at

risk of homelessness come through our doors in Western Sydney. The Australian government denies them adequate support. Prospects of finding decent work are limited. But these people -- women, children, men -- must be afforded a safety net, the chance to secure employment, and a fair hearing of their claims. Decisions about returning people to countries of origin must be truly voluntary and carried out in ethical ways.

Since the opening of JRS' "Finding Safety" women's space in Parramatta in late 2018, we have directly worked with women seeking asylum who have encountered sexual and gender based violence. Many women fear that reporting this violence will result in the loss of all support or that their families' visas could be cancelled. Reforming this system is one of JRS' priorities.

In the last two years, JRS has worked with over 60 *cont on p2*



 Pictured left are Sarah Brown (Project Officer) and Shatha Jajo (Information and Referral Officer) from the JRS "Finding Safety" women's space.

The Compacts

This year has also been busy with regional and international advocacy work. In April 2019, JRS Australia joined the Jesuit Asia Pacific Conference (JCAP) Migration Network on a Forum on the Global Compacts in Seoul, which was joined by representatives from 13 Jesuit institutions in 12 different countries. We discussed how to better welcome, protect, promote and integrate migrants and refugees and the best way to build a network and work together. In July, JRS Australia's Director joined other Country Directors at a meeting in Rome which was an important opportunity to exchange experiences and also to learn about the new JRS strategic plan and new

developments at the International Office. This was followed by our participation at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Annual Consultations in Geneva where Carolina presented as part of a panel (with UNHCR, Act Alliance, International Detention Coalition and Talent Beyond Boundaries) on the protection of rights in situations of mixed movements, which was very well attended. We were also part of the panel at the Human Rights Council on Gender Responsive Migration policies, alongside the UN Special Rapporteur on Migration, Felipe Gonzalez Morales. In September 2019, JRS Australia was one of the key organisers of the Asia

Pacific Refugee Rights Network's (APRRN) Regional Forum entitled, Towards a Whole of Society approach in the Implementation of the Global Compacts, attended by more than 80 people from the region (*pictured below is JRS Australia Director, Carolina Gottardo*). The forum was also the regional consultation with civil society for the preparations of the upcoming historic Global Refugee Forum that will take place in December 2019. APRRN's forum followed the Asia Pacific Network on Refugees second meeting in Bangkok highlighting the importance of leadership of refugees in the debates and decisions that affect their lives.



cont from p2 individuals and families transferred from Manus and Nauru. Ensuring they obtain safe, adequate treatment is crucial to closing the latest dark chapter in asylum policy in our country.

Submissions to Senate inquiries on refugee and asylum issues

Policy has a direct impact on the people that we serve. The Australian Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee recently conducted inquiries into three new Bills that have significant impacts on the lives of refugees

and people seeking asylum. JRS' submission to a government Bill proposing to repeal the Medevac legislation on medical transfers of people from Nauru and Manus to Australia recommended that Medevac is kept in place.

The National Visa Cancellations Working Group, which JRS Australia is a part of, also put in a submission to a government Bill proposing to introduce additional circumstances in which a person will mandatorily fail the so-called 'Character Test.' The Working Group made a number of

strong arguments for why this Bill should be rejected in total. Separately, the Joint Standing Committee on Migration, is conducting an Inquiry into Migration in Regional Australia. JRS put forward a submission on the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV). SHEVs attempt to facilitate refugee migration into regional areas, and if reformed, could have greater success. These activities form a core part of our policy analysis and engagement work.

Youth support JRS!

Two year 6 students, Sam and Angus, are amongst the wonderful people of St Aloysius' College Junior School in Milsons Point who have used their talents to create an exciting new SchoolAid crowdfunding website and video to support JRS. The school has done much to support JRS' work including a "food drive", a table talk, as well as plans for an upcoming disco. The entire JRS team really appreciate this kind initiative. All funds raised will contribute to enhance the living conditions of people seeking asylum, particularly children.

Recently, JRS hosted a "Table Talk" at St Aloysius' Junior School that demonstrated the multifaceted discrimination that people seeking asylum face due to Australia's punitive policies. This struck a chord with the humanity of the students who are driven by Jesuit values. We are also looking forward to hosting boys from year 6 at JRS' centre in Westmead.

JRS is deeply impressed with the mission of the school to "produce men for others" and how it is being put into practice. Special thanks to School Principal Joe El-Khoury, as well as School Teachers Julianne Little and Michelle Reay for their ongoing support. Big thanks to the young School Ambassadors, and champions for refugees.

 Sam and Angus from St Aloysius' College Junior School



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

 @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..

JRS also advocates for policies of welcome.

Jesuit Refugee Service Australia • ph: 02 9356 3888 • fax: 02 9356 3021 • email: info@jrs.org.au • web: www.jrs.org.au

If undeliverable return to:
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