



link



Photo: Rushdi Anwar, Detail from *Unprotected*, reproduced by kind permission of the artist

Director's Letter:

A time to offer safe haven

Carolina Gottardo

When we offer safe haven to those who come knocking at our door in need of shelter and protection, we are seizing the chance to build a better, more peaceful world; the chance to recognise the deep connections that exist between us all, and our common dignity as human beings.

This is an important Christmas message, and in Australia it has never been more important. As I write, the Australian Government has signalled its indifference to those seeking haven by its abandonment and mistreatment of the men on Manus Island. For these men there is no sense of security or respect for their dignity, no hope of being reunited with loved ones in Australia, or of a home where families can live together and plan for their future.

At this time, which should be a time of celebration, we think of those torn

apart by conflict in their own countries or by governments like ours, punitive and unwelcoming towards refugees and people seeking asylum. We think of these people's history of fear and trauma and deprivation in detention, and of their fears for their children as draconian new laws see their support systems draining away.

At Jesuit Refugee Service Australia, we seek to offer safe haven to the best of our capacity and within the limitations of working in an unfair system. We help refugees and people seeking asylum by listening, offering a safe space, advocating for services and support, helping people to empower themselves and providing emergency relief when needed. We combine frontline work with targeted advocacy efforts to change the system. We offer professional casework, community activities, employment support, school engagement, and legal advice.

We can do this work because of our resources as an international organisation with skilled staff and the contributions of our volunteers and other organisations – and because we can count on your support. This newsletter provides heartwarming examples of what you can do, but we also need more help so we can offer people seeking asylum in Australia a greater sense of security and respect.

You can make a donation (see the insert), volunteer with us, or extend our reach through your networks. Your support will make a big difference to some of society's most vulnerable members at Christmas, one of the hardest times to struggle alone.

The photo is from Anwar's photo series 'The Notion of Place and Displacement'. Anwar photographed the daily lives of Iraqi refugees at Arbat refugee camp in Kurdistan, his homeland, and posted each image home. The photos' scars from their postal journey mirror those inflicted on refugees in their own journeys of displacement.

Learning, leading & collaborating: JRS Australia in partnership



📅 On 9 November Carolina Gottardo, JRS Australia Director (centre), met staff from JRS Indonesia and visited their education project in Cisarua, learning how they support refugees and planning joint advocacy activities

The people JRS accompany face severe challenges, including a difficult protection visa system and, recently, the loss of financial support and accommodation for people in offshore detention on Manus and Nauru who came to Australia for medical assistance. Each of the challenges that people face are further compounded by persecution and trauma, loss of loved ones, and the grinding hopelessness of detention.

At JRS we know that helping people in this situation to find respite and hope is not something we can do alone. We ensure that our staff regularly undertake training, work in collaboration with other services, and lead initiatives across the sector.

Here are some activities since September.

Learning.

JRS staff attended training on suicide prevention, focusing on supporting people seeking asylum (Red Cross); government relations and advocacy (ECDC); “Practical Skills in Responding to People who Experience Family and Domestic Violence” (NSW Health); and managing the challenges of volunteering with people seeking asylum (STARTTS).

Leading.

JRS recently:

- was part of a panel at the 6th Annual Rosalie Rendu Forum

on People Seeking Asylum in our Community, highlighting human rights contraventions by current Australian Government policies.

- attended a meeting of the UN’s Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok to do advocacy work and for an event on the nexus between the Global Compacts that we (through APRRN) are co-hosting with UN Women and with the participation of UNHCR,
- provided training in Bangkok to the urban refugee program and in Mae Hong Son for staff working on two refugee camps (on the border with Myanmar) to train JRS’ staff from those two projects on gender equality and the refugee experience and to visit the projects
- addressed 120 young students and teachers at the Sutherland Shire Youth Forum serving as the policy expert for this event and served as the policy expert for a training for new Sydney Alliance– Table Talk volunteers/ facilitators
- attended meetings with the Australian Embassy and IOM in Jakarta to plan for joint advocacy between JRS Australia and JRS Indonesia and visited JRS’ urban refugee project in Bogor
- addressed the Western Sydney

Specialist Housing Services Forum on “Life on the Margins - Seeking Asylum and Finding Accommodation in Sydney”.

Collaboration.

This included:

- A Christmas Appeal partnership with St Patrick’s Cathedral in Parramatta and other schools and parishes
- An ongoing NILS (no interest loan scheme) partnership with Good Shepherd Microfinance, the Institute Sisters of Mercy Australia and PNG, and the Islamic Council of Victoria
- Participation in the End Child Detention Coalition’s strategic planning workshop (we are an active member and our Director is an executive committee member)
- Running Homework Help with Our Lady of Mercy College, Parramatta, and the JRS and House of Welcome Employment Program
- Participation in a working group to ensure that people medically transferred from Nauru and Manus who lost government funded financial support and housing have access to support
- With the University of NSW’s Centre for Refugee Research, organised a workshop on women-at-risk in the asylum process for practitioners from the refugee, domestic violence, and community sectors.



📅 Food cooked by a JRS client for the Refugee Council of Australia Consultation with People Seeking Asylum in October, co-hosted by JRS

“We feel the pain”

Children caring for others

Year 5 students at St Angela’s Primary School in Castle Hill, NSW heard about Jesuit Refugee Service Australia and the people we accompany when their classroom teachers invited us to speak to them in October. JRS caseworker Janelle Massih, and Refugee Council of Australia speaker, Daniel, whose family escaped persecution in Iraq, spoke to the students about the work of JRS and what it’s like to come to Australia as a refugee.

Only a few weeks later, the Year 5s invited us back again – to attend their Mission Markets, a project they had designed themselves around the topic of Mission. With this project, they wanted to raise awareness about people seeking asylum in Australia, and to raise funds for JRS. As they went about designing, planning and constructing their market stalls, they began to develop an understanding of the challenges faced by refugees and people seeking asylum.

The Mission Markets were set up in the school hall in late October, offering the school community services and games



Stall items at the Markets

for an entry fee of \$5. The stalls displayed facts about the journeys of refugees on posters, cards and collages. Some groups had collected items such as books, health packs, pyjamas and food, to be donated



Year 5 students at St Angela’s Primary School in Castle Hill

to JRS. Others developed board games incorporating information about refugee life; for example, one of the games was called “Spread the word so it can be heard”. One craft stall offered cards where students could write heartfelt messages of hope to persons seeking asylum, while another offered decorated book marks and prayer cards for sale. A group wrote a book titled “We feel the pain”, and other students wrote their own poems.

Judging from the buzz in the hall and the eagerness of all the students to explain their initiatives, the Mission Markets were very successful, not only in raising funds and useful items for JRS, but also in raising awareness. As Tony Calabria, St Angela’s principal, said, “This project really focuses on mission and helps the students better understand the problems other people have to face.”

Shelter: the first step to resilience

Here is the story of Nada, who was able to use the safe space JRS provided as the entryway to independence and hope.

Nada*, 19, is from a minority religious community in Iraq. She fled to Australia by plane with her young daughter in search of safety from persecution. But then she was faced with a new threat of violence – from her husband.

Nada was determined to protect her daughter and make a life for them both. However, with little English and sole responsibility for her daughter’s care, she had little chance of finding work and a safe place to live.

Then she connected with JRS and began rebuilding her resilience. Our caseworkers helped her gain safety from the threat of violence. JRS also provided essential support through a small living allowance and regular food supplies, and free toiletries and nappies. Feeling more secure, Nada went on to negotiate with a community member for a low-rent room. Now she feels she has more control over her life and can provide a future for her daughter.



Arrupe Place Community Centre, Grose Street, Parramatta

* Name changed

JRS thanks our helping hands

We are delighted to acknowledge the generosity of our supportive community. Our more than 60 volunteers play an essential role. Through their presence, skill and hard work, our volunteers offer a warm welcome to people seeking asylum.



The photos show some recent volunteer activities. Top left, our Foodbank volunteers unload a donation of nappies in October, and bottom left is part of the JRS information stall at the Parramatta Community Services Expo in the same month. The services and events advertised at the stall would not be possible without our indispensable volunteers.

We are deeply moved by the generous response we received to our appeal for support for the people who were brought to Australia from Nauru and Manus for medical reasons, and to our North Sydney Parish Appeal. Thanks also to St Aloysius College and Loreto Kirribilli, who hosted a fundraising disco.



Please donate at Christmas

Please donate to help JRS provide a safe haven for people seeking asylum this Christmas – see the insert for details, or www.jrs.org.au/donate-now

We also welcome donations of food for our Foodbank, to support people over the Christmas period. For guidelines on what's needed most, and how you can get your friends to help, please get in touch with Joanna on 02 9098 9336 or email joanna.brooke@jrs.org.au

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](https://twitter.com/JRS_Aus)

donate

How your donation will help

General donations to Arrupe Place will directly fund:

Emergency assistance, food vouchers, casework services, home visiting services, legal advice, social support.

link online

Would you like to receive Link online?

Sign up for our electronic newsletter at www.jrs.org.au

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:
Jesuit Refugee Service Australia
PO Box 522
Kings Cross NSW 1340

PRINT
POST

PP236873/00020
PP236873/00021

POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA