

Christmas edition 2022



 Image credit: EU/ECHO Pierre Prakash.

Director's address: *Tamara Domicelj*

Dear friends of JRS Australia and of all whom we serve, I extend warmest greetings and hope that you and your loved ones, wherever they may be, are faring well after another big year.

As we approach the close of 2022, I look back with gratitude and pride at our collective achievements, amidst challenges that have at times seemed overwhelming. And I look forward to 2023 with a sense of urgency and hope: urgency due to the sheer scale and complexity of the challenges we face and the associated human suffering; and hope because we are slowly making inroads and there are so very many amongst us now – in our communities, schools, universities, parliaments, places of worship, and elsewhere – who are

working tirelessly to secure a more welcoming, self-aware, just and compassionate Australia.

We recently marked International Human Rights Day, with its reminders that everyone has the right to seek asylum from persecution, and that human rights are owed to us all whomever and wherever we are. And I write on International Migrants Day, which recognises not only that rights are owed whether migration is forced, voluntary or formally authorised, but also the immense contributions made by migrants and refugees to global prosperity, peace and development. Where receiving and transit countries create conditions for such contributions, the benefits flow for all.

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cont from p1 No-one chooses to be forced to leave their home, but we all (individuals and countries) choose how we respond to surging global displacement and to all amongst us with living experience of it.

In our related policies and practices, Australia can now harness the strong momentum to pivot away from cruelty, in full. We must comply with international law. Protection for those owed it should be permanent and accompanied by clear and accessible pathways to family reunification, and full access to education and livelihoods. Dedicated safety nets should be available to people seeking asylum facing hardship and without income.

JRS Australia's levels of service have increased again this year, in response to compounding pressures faced by the people we serve, including spiralling costs of living and protracted uncertainty about their futures. And along with partners, we have increased our direct advocacy with parliamentarians and other influencers to seek hastened systemic reforms and urgent outcomes for individuals. Amidst slow progress and ongoing heartache, we have also had cause for celebration.

Over recent years there has commenced a long-overdue acknowledgement of the extraordinary enduring leadership of people with living and lived experience in tackling displacement-related challenges and driving solutions – here in Australia and everywhere.

One such leader, our Board member Muzafar Ali, a Hazara former refugee, was recently honoured with the Fred

Hollows Foundation Humanitarian of the Year Award for his establishment and support of refugee-led schools in Indonesia, amongst other life-changing initiatives. Muzafar notes that for his family, five generations of displacement has now ended, but he will not feel whole or cease his efforts until his community at large finds safety.

It is a profound privilege to work with so many leaders with lived and living experience of displacement amongst our staff, Board, volunteers, and extended network of colleagues, supporters and service participants. And I thank the entire wonderful JRS Australia team, Board and network of supporters for the wise and generous heads, hearts and hands which you bring to our shared work. Your contributions propel us forwards.

We anticipate many challenges ahead but stand strong and unwavering in our mission to accompany, serve and advocate for the rights of people seeking asylum, refugees and migrants experiencing vulnerability. We also see a brighter future and look forward to journeying with you in 2023.

Sincerest thanks again for your continued, vital support.



For all who celebrate it, I wish you abundant joy this Christmas; and to all – a very happy, healthy and peaceful new year.

Warmly,
Tamara



📷 Assistant Country Director Maeve Brown and Finding Safety Project Coordinator Shatha Jajo meet NSW Minister for Multiculturalism Mark Coure to advocate for the needs of refugees and people seeking asylum.

📷 The Employment Program organised a visit to Woolworths as part of its efforts to help refugees and people seeking asylum find meaningful employment. The program has helped dozens of people find jobs in the last few months.



Individualised support helps refugees put their skills to work

JRS Australia has a long history of working with people seeking asylum, refugees, and migrants in situations of great vulnerability to assist them to find meaningful employment and training pathways. In the last few years, we have witnessed a number of significant changes that have affected people's ability to work. This includes prolonged periods of time where large numbers of people seeking asylum were held in Community Detention without work rights and were forced to depend on government and charity support, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic period which saw many of the people we serve lose the jobs they had worked so hard to secure.

One of the keys to the success of the JRS Employment Program has always been flexibility, both in being able to adapt to new challenges and contexts, and in meeting people where they are at in their employment journey and providing individualised, tailored support. The path to employment is unique for each individual and is not always linear.

"The Ignatian value of cura personalis is also at the heart of our ways of working at JRS Australia, in that we see and care for the whole person," said Maeve Brown, Assistant Country Director.

"For someone seeking employment, this means seeing their transferable skills and qualifications, but also their strength and resilience, and recognising the anguish that many people feel after having full,

productive working lives in their home countries only for that experience to be discounted in Australia," said Brown.

Unfortunately, many employers still find employing people seeking asylum 'too difficult' and may not take the time to understand what it means to be on a bridging visa and more importantly, to see the wealth of knowledge and experience that people could contribute. Thus, working in partnership with employers is important.

"Finding employers who are willing to learn and to explore more inclusive hiring practices has meant that we have been able to facilitate opportunities for employers to meet with people looking for work in much more informal settings," said Employment Support Officer, Noora Jasim. JRS Australia has been able to hold 'meet and greets,' 'taster sessions,' and job fairs which have so far led to the employment of dozens of people just in the last few months.


Most recently, a job fair in Auburn jointly organised by JRS Australia, House of Welcome, and the Asylum

Seekers Centre attracted over 100 registrants and led to over 40 people receiving job offers from Harris Farm, Woolworths, Australia Post, Kmart, and more.

One of the job fair attendees was Dina (not her real name), a high school student, who first encountered JRS Australia through a services expo at her school.

While she was interested in finding work and training pathways for herself, she also referred her siblings and her parents for support. After the Job Fair, the entire family enrolled in a security training course and are looking forward to starting their first jobs in Australia.

JRS Australia's Employment Program provides tailored employment support to help refugees and people seeking asylum live dignified lives through productive and meaningful work. Our support not only helps people put food on the table but also regain their confidence and rebuild the lives that they want in Australia.

 Our Employment Program took refugees and people seeking asylum on a visit to Harris Farms. Our ongoing relationship means that Harris Farms has hired a number of refugees and people seeking asylum.



JRS Australia Foodbank: food security in uncertain times

JRS Australia's Foodbank program supports almost 120 households every week with deliveries of non-perishable food, nappies, toiletries, and washing detergent. That is, every item that they, like you, need to maintain themselves and their homes. This is about 200 adults and 140 children who need this help (excluding those getting financial aid from JRS Australia).

It is through your donations of these items that refugees and people seeking asylum experiencing difficulties can live with dignity and cope with the stress of how they will provide for themselves, their children and dependents.

Many of the families that receive JRS Australia Foodbank support are awaiting the outcome of their asylum application in Australia. For some of these families, the asylum process can involve appealing the outcome of their application in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal and in the courts, which can take years. Whilst most people can and do work to support themselves, there are some who cannot due to a disability, language barriers, family support obligations or other reasons such as leaving an abusive domestic situation, being in-between jobs, or working to get a driver's licence. These people do not qualify for Centrelink or other social support services.

A specialised government scheme, the Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS), which provides financial assistance to people awaiting the outcome of their asylum



📷 Students from St Paul the Apostle organised a donation drive for JRS Australia Foodbank

application, has tightened its eligibility rules. As a result, the support it provides to people seeking asylum has declined by 85%, leaving thousands of vulnerable people unable to afford food, shelter and basic medicines.

JRS Australia steps into this space to support families at risk of destitution and hunger to maintain dignified lives. Through grants and financial as well as in-kind donations, JRS Australia has maintained these services during the worst of the pandemic, a period when demand for our services soared because people could not go elsewhere.

The number of families receiving support in this way is likely to increase in mid-2023. This is because JRS Australia will transition a number of people that we have been supporting with monetary payments to food deliveries because specific grant funding will cease in June 2023. This will put an added strain on our ability to provide JRS Foodbank assistance.

The community's response to support JRS' work when COVID hit us was inspiring, but this hasn't been maintained. It has been through the support of parishes, schools and individuals like you that JRS Australia can continue to support those who need this food and other items. It is no understatement that every donation of a can of tomatoes, bag of rice, bottle of oil and all the other items needed has a real impact on the life of somebody who is thankful and lifted.

If you want to help and want to know what is needed please email foodbank@jrs.org.au and we will reply promptly.

📷 Large donation to our Foodbank from St Declan's Parish. It's donations like these that enable JRS Australia to help those experiencing food insecurity get through it.



Women's Space helps women get back on their feet

When Petra (not her real name) arrived in Australia on a partner visa, she did not know many people in the new country. The relationship with her husband, which she had hoped would be nurturing and loving, deteriorated rapidly. Her partner became violent and started using coercive control.

"I was isolated and had nowhere to go," Petra said of that period of her life. Petra did not know her rights or any support services that she could use. Her husband threatened that she would end up all alone because she brought shame to her family.

"I was in a bad situation, and I had no one to help me," Petra remembered. Her situation became more difficult when her own family and her in-laws started to pressure her from overseas to stay in the relationship.

Petra feared for her life and knew she had to leave the relationship because of the escalating violence. She had made some friends in the months that she had been in Australia but had to leave all those relationships behind when she fled the abusive relationship.

Luckily, she had a friend in New South Wales who was able to provide her support and shelter. But Petra needed other assistance, including a long-term solution. On the one

hand, she needed a source of income to support herself; on the other, she needed legal help because her status in Australia was uncertain now that her relationship was on the rocks. Unfortunately for Petra, pandemic-related lockdowns and social restrictions made it harder to access support.

"I was sent away and I felt uncomfortable," Petra recalls of her attempts to access help.

Someone eventually referred her to the Women's Space in Parramatta, which is a part of JRS Australia's Finding Safety Project that supports women refugees experiencing sexual and gender-based violence.

Petra received specialised, trauma-informed one-on-one support to identify her strengths and to ensure her safety and physical and emotional well-being. The Finding Safety team immediately provided her dignity kits and emergency relief to make sure her essential needs were met. She was also linked to legal assistance to address concerns about her visa situation. Petra was referred to counseling and provided information about her rights, including protection against intimate partner violence.

Over the following weeks, Petra joined online information sessions relating to COVID-19 to enable her to *cont on p7*

 JRS Australia's Finding Safety team organised a workshop for local police and community leaders on culturally safe practice.



JRS Australia advocacy reflects and amplifies refugee voices

JRS Australia has been meeting with State and federal MPs to advocate on a number of issues for refugees, migrants, and people seeking asylum. In some of these meetings, we've jointly advocated alongside like-minded organisations like the Refugee Council of Australia, the Asylum Seekers Centre and CAPSA, which JRS Australia co-chairs. We focused our advocacy efforts on these key priorities, which are informed by what we learn from the people whom we serve:

- Swift transition for those on TPV and SHEV visas to permanent visas
- Ensuring that Australia issues humanitarian visas swiftly to at-risk Afghans
- Restoration of the educational rights of young people who were relocated to Australia from offshore processing facilities but whose rights to education were curtailed by ministerial discretion after they turned 18
- Changing the eligibility rules of the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) to ensure that people seeking asylum who need financial assistance can access it. This financial support was cut by 85% over the last few years, leaving many vulnerable to destitution, hunger and homelessness.
- Expansion of Australia's humanitarian program to make up for cuts in the program over successive years.

JRS Australia's advocacy in New South Wales complemented efforts by other organisations in the sector and led to an announcement by the NSW Government to extend crucial financial support for people seeking asylum by a further six months.


Alongside this high-level government advocacy, we have continued our grassroots efforts of raising awareness

of refugee issues in the community. In all of these endeavours, JRS Australia is committed to centring the wisdom, experience and expertise of the people we serve as a guide post to our work both in service delivery and advocacy. One area where this work is actively flourishing is our Leadership Program.

The JRS Leadership Program is an embodiment of our mission to accompany, serve, and advocate. The program aims to amplify the voices of people from a refugee background, empowering and supporting people with lived experience to advocate for positive change despite the challenges they may face in pursuing this work. At times it has been difficult for people with lived experience, particularly those seeking asylum, to feel able to speak out, sharing their story and adding their thoughts and expertise to the public conversation around refugee policy in Australia. Our approach through the Leadership Program is to provide individualised and holistic support, helping leaders to engage in ways that suit their interests and skills. For example, some leaders may wish to share their story through speaking at public events, others might prefer to meet with decision makers, others may want to be interviewed for or write a media piece. Each of these activities requires preparation and support, without which some individuals feel unable or unwilling to speak out and engage in this way, despite their contribution being so crucial and important.

Some reasons why people with lived experience may be unwilling or unable to engage in advocacy are that they fear repercussions from the Australian government, they are unsure of the legal implications of speaking publicly, or they fear repercussions for their family in their country of origin. JRS Australia is committed to ensuring that the involvement of people with lived experience is collaborative and empowering, that we mitigate risks where possible and that we ensure conditions are met so that individuals who would otherwise feel unable to speak out can contribute (writing a media piece with anonymity is one example).


This work goes beyond just getting the voices of those with lived experience out there; it also paves the way for healing and connection. At a recent school event, a leader shared their story and afterwards teachers from the school were so impacted that they asked, 'how can we help you and others like you?' The leader told them,

 JRS Australia Country Director Tamara Domicelj (right) and Assistant Country Director Maeve Brown (left) meeting with Dr Andrew Charlton MP for Parramatta, to raise issues for refugees and asylum seekers living in our community in Parramatta.



‘we need to connect with each other – we could go out for dinner!’ The teachers loved this idea and ended up taking the leader and one of their friends out for dinner. This was an example of the connection and community building that has come out of the Leadership Program, as well as the awareness raising that was achieved.

There is great possibility for positive change in Australia and the Leadership Program aims to walk alongside those with lived experience on this journey towards hope.

 JRS Australia Country Director Tamara Domicelj and Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards meet with Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs Andrew Giles to advocate for more humane policies toward refugees and people seeking asylum. JRS Australia and JSS co-chair the Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA), which is an alliance of individuals, organisations, schools and parishes from across the Catholic community who advocate for fair and humane treatment for people seeking asylum in Australia.



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continue to learn and navigate the domestic and family violence system. As pandemic-related restrictions have eased, Petra has been attending social occasions at the Women’s Space, which is a community space for women refugees and asylum seekers experiencing or at risk of experiencing family violence and social isolation.

Petra is among the hundreds of women that JRS Australia has served since the Finding Safety Project started the Women’s Space in 2018.

The Finding Safety Project continues to see an increase in demand for our wide range of services. The services sought most often are financial and housing assistance, especially for women who have fled various forms of gender-based violence including domestic and family violence, and as a result have no access or means to secure their financial independence.

For women on temporary visas or women seeking asylum who experience sexual or gender-based violence, creating safety requires a holistic response that acknowledges their unique needs and situation. Housing stability and financial independence remain the two most crucial needs that enable a woman on a temporary visa experiencing violence to create safety for themselves and their children.

Next is building confidence and social connection to fight isolation. These women come to the Women’s Space for community meals and other occasions such as International Women’s Day, Mother’s Day and the Eid festival. Here, they share meals and connect with other women, volunteers and staff to build social relationships and restore their confidence through social connections and knowledge sharing.

Petra has built a network by meeting other women in similar situations. As a result, she now feels that she is a part of the “family environment” at the Women’s Space.

“This place made me feel welcomed. A friendly and comfortable environment, amazed with this service,” Petra said, adding, “At first I wanted material help, but the help I received was holistic help.”

Demand for Finding Safety Project’s services has increased dramatically. Between December 2021 and February 2022, the Finding Safety Project provided 620 instances of phone support, face-to-face meetings and emails to women. That number was 2230 between March and May, and 1200 between June and August 2022.

The Finding Safety Project team was nominated for ZEST awards for ‘Exceptional Project’ award in June 2022.



JRS Australia Country Director Tamara Domicelj meets Allegra Spender MP and her team, along with Frances Rush of the Asylum Seekers Centre, Angela Argent of St Francis Social Services, Arif Hussein of RACS and Annie Harvey of the Red Cross, to discuss shared sector concerns and priorities for people seeking asylum and refugees. Thank you to ASC for hosting lunch at your beautiful premises.

accompany.serve.advocate

What JRS Does

JRS Australia advocates for policies of welcome and protection at all tiers of government. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, JRS Australia continues to provide emergency assistance, a foodbank, professional casework support, an employment support program, facilitates free legal advice, as well as conducting targeted advocacy work, and a project to empower women.

www.facebook.com/JRSAustralia

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

donate

How your donation will help

Your support allows us to continue to advocate for policies of welcome and protection and to provide people seeking asylum, refugees and migrants in vulnerable situations with COVID-19 safe specialist casework support, employment support, emergency payments and assisting women who are experiencing violence as well as providing food via our JRS Refugee Foodbank to people who have been otherwise left behind.

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