

LINK Newsletter - Autumn Edition 2024



LETTER FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Dear friends,

Greetings from Dharug country during this season of prayer, fasting and almsgiving for many people of faith worldwide. I extend best wishes for Easter and Ramadan Mubarak.

In his Holy Week letter Pope Francis writes:

“Too many parts of our world are scarred by the pointless folly of war – always and for everyone a bitter defeat.”

His Prayer:

Lord, You who proclaimed blessed the peacemakers (cf. Mt 5:9): set human hearts free from hatred, violence and the spirit of revenge. We look to your example and follow you, who are merciful, meek and humble of heart (cf. Mt 11:29)...

May we never tire of defending the dignity of every man, woman and child, without distinction of religion, ethnicity or nationality, beginning with the most vulnerable among us...

It has been a sombre start to 2024, in so many ways. It has also been a time of coming together, in solidarity, remembrance, and shared purpose. And in doing so, we jointly foster hope.

Earlier this month JRS co-issued an Interfaith call for a ceasefire and lasting peace in the Middle East, urging:

“A radical return to the core teachings of our respective religions, which exhort loving unity over division, while respecting differences, and fostering constant dignity in the life of every person”.

As with other humanitarian crises our advocacy is multi-tiered, including efforts to save lives, reunite families and urge equitable and viable responses to support humanitarian entrants, here in Australia, as elsewhere.

Some weeks ago, we also paid tribute to former JRS Australia Country Director, Fr Aloysius Mowe SJ, at a beautiful memorial mass convened by our friends at St Canice’s Parish in Rushcutters Bay.

Rest in Peace

Fr Aloysius Mowe, SJ
Former Country Director
of JRS Australia



Fr Steve Sinn SJ's Eulogy captured our hearts:

“Aloysius was vibrant, intelligent, articulate, sartorial, charismatic... We loved you, Aloysius.


It was a difficult love: you opened our horizons, you challenged us... You spent yourself visiting refugee centres and advocating on their behalf. You exercised your formidable intellect on inter-religious dialogue, especially between Muslims and Christians.”

We are grateful for the moving recollections shared with us by supporters, and for the legacy which Aloysius leaves us all.

In January, we were honoured to meet with Fr General Arturo Sosa SJ during his visit to Australia.

In a rich exchange we recalled his speech on the occasion of JRS' 40th anniversary, including his reference to our mission as the “audacity of the impossible”, urgent given the magnitude and complexity of forced migration, and realisable through deepened collaboration.



 JRS Australia staff members and community at the memorial for Fr Aloysius Mowe SJ at St Canice's Parish.

[His inspiring words resonate even more strongly 4 years on.](#)

This month we also have honoured the extraordinary contributions and resilience of the wonderful women with whom we work, through International Women's Day events amplifying the vital voices of lived expertise. Please read their stories in this newsletter.

In a world that can feel fractured by discord, JRS' newly launched Peace Artisans initiative, inspired by Pope Francis, highlights the roles we can all play in nurturing peace and hope in our communities.

Please support this endeavour in whatever way you can. Your sustained or scaled donation of funds, time, and talents is vital for the delivery of our mission at this critical time.

Pope Francis concludes his Lenten message with a citation from the poet Charles Péguy:

[F]aith and charity take hope, this small child, by the hand. They teach her to walk, and at the same time, she leads them forward.

Thank you so much for journeying with us.

Warmly,

Tamara



JOIN OUR PEACE ARTISANS CAMPAIGN

Jesuit Refugee Service has launched a global campaign to celebrate individuals who take concrete actions in their daily life to draw us all closer together.

Increasing global challenges and instability are weakening efforts toward achieving peace. When hope is hard to find, divisions provoke social conflicts, frustrations, and violence.

Women, men, and children forced to flee their homes are among those paying the highest price. Some experience incredible hardship on their journey to safety and are often met with hostility in their host countries. Others are left at the margins, with their needs neglected and their voices unheard.

These situations can be overwhelming, but there is hope. JRS accompanies forcibly displaced people in the most forgotten contexts. Every day we witness the difference that simple gestures of compassion, solidarity, and welcome can make.

Together we can create peaceful societies, and we can all contribute to creating a better future for everyone.

Like Artisans use their skills, passion, and creativity to patiently craft unique items, we too can devote our time and care to creating peaceful communities.

Each of us can carry out simple acts of kindness, fraternity, and dialogue that can draw us closer to each other. Let's join Pope Francis' call to be peace artisans and take concrete actions in our daily life to live together in peace.

You can do this by:

- making a donation;
- volunteering with us;
- attending our events;
- hosting a food or clothing drive;
- engaging one of our refugee leaders to speak at your school, community group or parish;
- contacting your local MP.

Please get in touch with us to learn how you can make your unique contribution!

COUNT HER IN: WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

International Women's Day (IWD) is observed annually on the 8th of March, and celebrates the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action, to educate, to raise awareness, and to accelerate our progress towards gender equality.

The theme this year is "Count Her In: Invest in Women. Accelerate Progress".

We would like to encourage you to **invest in the women we serve**, and invest in a more equal future for all, by supporting the important work we do at JRS Australia.

The Women We Serve

At JRS Australia, we work alongside resilient and strong women who face serious threats to their social, economic, cultural and political equality. As refugees, people seeking asylum, and women on temporary visas, they also resist violence and oppression through their own unique journeys – sometimes in ways that are invisible even to themselves.

The Work We Do

We are privileged to be able to help women uncover their strength and reclaim their dignity. We enable them to determine for themselves how and when we support them, and we regularly seek their guidance in planning our future activities.

For many women, accessing our Women's Space is the first time they have ever felt safe and heard, and this is our mission in action.



The Finding Safety Project

The Finding Safety Project operates out of the Women's Space and offers specialised and complex casework for sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), community and wellbeing programs, as well as practical assistance with access to funding for emergency accommodation, education, medical care and mental health support.



For more information, see our Women's Space webpage or contact women@jrs.org.au.

WOMEN WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE BUILD PEACEFUL COMMUNITIES

Refugee leaders gathered together for a Leadership Lunch and then formed a committee to plan an International Women's Day event for clients and staff.

At JRS Australia, we are privileged to work alongside leaders with lived experience of forced displacement. We recognise the expertise that lived experience brings, and we are guided by it in our work.


On the 31st of January, JRS Australia hosted 12 women for a Leadership lunch at the JRS Women's space in Parramatta. This lunch was planned collaboratively between the Employment team, Leadership Program, and Finding Safety Project and is an initiative of the Pathways to Empowerment Program.

During the lunch, women heard about various initiatives that they can engage in such as the Leadership Program, Community Mobilisers, and other training and professional development opportunities.

We asked the women how we could support their personal development journeys and they shared key areas of interest to them. These included leadership skills, public speaking, barista training and project management. They also identified a common interest in sharing skills amongst each other, such as recipes for cultural dishes.

Afterwards, the women shared a beautiful meal together and then engaged in a meditation activity, reflecting on the importance of rest, mindfulness and inner strength.



 *Women in the Pathway to Empowerment Program met for a Leadership Lunch to learn more about how JRS Australia can support their growth and leadership.*

A key outcome of this leadership lunch was that some women elected to join a committee to help plan an International Women's Day event, which was held on 6th March 2024.


The committee met each week in the lead up to the event to help plan and organise key aspects of the event including the theme, program and location.

This opportunity to collaboratively plan the IWD event gave the women a practical exercise where they could sharpen their skills working in a team - and to design an event that would be for themselves and other women. See more below.

CELEBRATING EACH OTHER ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

JRS Australia has the pleasure of serving, accompanying, and advocating for and with women from around the world. We are humbled by their compassion, wisdom and power and acknowledge and celebrate them this International Women's Day, and every day.



 *JRS Australia clients, volunteers and staff celebrate together at an IWD Lunch organised by participants in our Pathways to Empowerment and Refugee Leadership Programs.*

On the 6th of March, forty women gathered in international dress at the Watan Afghan Restaurant in Granville to celebrate together at JRS Australia's International Women's Day event. Clients, staff, volunteers, and sector partners came together to celebrate and eat an incredible Afghan feast.

The program included a game of trivia, a raffle, speeches from the Women's Space community, a performance by Minh from Viet Babooz on traditional Vietnamese instruments, and "dances from around the world" where women shared their cultural dances with each other.

Women from Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Malaysia, Vietnam, Lebanon, Papua New Guinea, Myanmar and Australia attended the event.

Three women also took the courageous step to deliver a short speech, reflecting on the importance of International Women's Day and why we should celebrate women.

This was the first time they had performed a speech, and they were supported to do so by the Leadership Program.

RECENT PROMOTIONS AT JRS AUSTRALIA

We want to take this opportunity to congratulate a number of our staff members on their recent promotions within JRS Australia. Please take this opportunity to learn a little more about them and the incredible work they do!



ROSE

Casework and Emergency Relief Manager

My journey with JRS Australia began in May 2019, 6 months after I arrived in Australia, as a volunteer in our Westmead office *Arrupe Place*, and at our Women's Space.

Previously, I worked at a refugee settlement in the west Nile region of Uganda, providing legal support for victim-survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)..

My passion for humanitarian work led me to search online for services working with refugees in New South Wales, and JRS came up. I then contacted the office to volunteer – and 5 years on I'm here!

I started as an intake and referral officer, a role I was in for a year before I was offered the role of complex and SGBV caseworker. I stayed in this role for a further year - and now I'm the casework and emergency relief manager. I want to develop my career in the humanitarian field and if an opportunity presents to make myself better and serve in a better capacity, I'm always up for it.

The clients I work with motivate me, inspire me and challenge me. They have gone through a lot and yet they still remain resilient and with strong spirit. I want to be able to serve and accompany them in the best way I can.

I'm very grateful to JRS Australia for giving me the platform and opportunity to serve and accompany some of the most vulnerable members of our community.



 Rose with JRS Australia staff and clients at our International Women's Day celebration.

RECENT PROMOTIONS AT JRS AUSTRALIA



SARA

Finding Safety Project Coordinator

I began working at JRS in 2020 as an SGBV Caseworker at the Women's Space. Prior to this, I have worked for over ten years in the field of refugee services.

My mother was politically active in Sudan and my family faced extreme political persecution as a result. Amnesty International was very concerned about our safety and we were asked to flee the country. My family moved to the U.S when I was young and I now call New Hampshire home.

My dream for as long as I could remember was to become a doctor following the suit of my siblings. However, after experiencing the pains of political persecution that was inflicted upon my family, I began to question politics and what it is that makes people abuse power? This question led me to change my goal of studying medicine to study Politics. I gained my undergraduate degree in Political Science from the University of New Hampshire and proceeded to do my Masters in International Relations from Norwich University in Vermont.

Throughout my career, I have worked with refugees and migrants, in particular women and girls. I have worked hard to protect young girls from the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM), seeking ways to eliminate the practice among refugee girls as well as helping women who were subjected to FGM.

Women and girls are entitled to fundamental human rights. JRS Australia has given me the opportunity to continue serving women and girls to help them feel safety and belonging as they rebuild their lives in Australia.

In 2022, Sara shifted roles from SGBV Caseworker to Project Officer for the Finding Safety Project and in 2023, Sara became the coordinator of the project. Sara leads a team of specialist sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) practitioners supporting women on temporary visas who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing violence.



RECENT PROMOTIONS AT JRS AUSTRALIA



MAGDALENE

Finding Safety Project Officer

I was fortunate enough to come across JRS Australia when I sought asylum in 2018, and I am proud to have joined their leadership and advocacy team in 2021.

I share my lived experience seeking asylum through public speaking at schools, churches, and community organisations, hoping to raise awareness and support for people seeking asylum. In 2023, I started working as a Project Support Worker in the Finding Safety Project at the Women Space, and now I am a Project Officer in the same team!

Before this, I had worked in the disability support sector, and I have also been working with the Sydney Alliance as part of my advocacy drive, advocating for the rights of people on Temporary Visas. I use my voice to talk about their homelessness situation and the struggles they face while navigating the system.

In Sierra Leone, I worked as a sportswriter, broadcaster, and photojournalist in print and electronic media. As a sports journalist, I covered major world sports competitions, such as the Olympics in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, in 2016, the Diamond League in Doha, Qatar, in 2015, and the North-West Africa Women's Cricket Tournament in 2014, as well as other sporting activities like soccer, beach volleyball, and athletics across Africa. I was also actively involved in advocating for the rights of women and girls and was a strong opponent of FGM. I am still involved in the campaign to eradicate the practice in Sierra Leone and other places where it is widely practised.

My current role at the Women's Space involves assisting in developing, delivering and coordinating community information sessions, group activities, training and workshops, leadership and advocacy training, and assisting in developing internal training for staff and volunteers by State and National Plans for the elimination of violence against women.


I also assist in coordinating and delivering specialist training for professionals in the asylum and women's sectors, forming and supporting peer-to-peer and leadership groups of women through the Community Mobilisers project and organising sector advisory groups and refugee women's reference group meetings. I attend regular inter-agency conferences relevant to the project and target group, advocating for the rights and support needs of people seeking asylum, particularly women seeking asylum.

I am passionate about working in line with the JRS Finding Safety project, which aims to support asylum-seeking and refugee women in increasing their understanding of domestic and family violence, its drivers, and their rights, providing information and referrals to assist refugee women experiencing violence or at risk of violence to access appropriate support.

If you happen to witness or notice that someone is being subjected to any form of violence due to their gender, it is essential to know that you can play a crucial role in supporting them. Start by actively listening to their experiences and offering non-judgmental support. Be empathetic and understanding towards their situation.

Additionally, it is essential to provide them with information on helplines and social support services that can offer them the necessary assistance and guidance. These support services can help them overcome the trauma and move towards a better and safer future.



 *Magdalene, Josephine (our Head of Accompaniment and Service), and Moh (our Finding Safety Intern), with women from the Sydney-Myanmar community, at our Women's Space for a lunch organised for International Women's Day*

“Let's protect our girls and women because they are the future!”

BECOME A COMMUNITY MOBILISER!

JRS Australia supports women with lived experience of forced displacement and those who have faced challenging migration pathways to become community mobilisers. Community mobilisers provide peer support, information and referrals about services to their communities and work alongside the JRS Finding Safety project team to provide platforms for asylum seeking, refugee, and migrant women to empower themselves and to access safety.

Community mobilisers help to identify and reach women at risk of SGBV in the community, and assist in providing help to those who do not utilise mainstream services. Community mobilisers access in-depth leadership training, including ongoing mentoring and skills development in specific areas such as public speaking and group facilitation.

[If you or someone you know would like to join the Community Mobiliser program, please reach out to our Finding Safety Project Coordinator Sara at Sara.muzamil@jrs.org.au](mailto:Sara.muzamil@jrs.org.au)



MOH

Finding Safety Project Intern

I am currently doing a Master of Development Studies at UNSW and I am originally from Myanmar. My career path has been a winding road that has led me to a real passion for human rights and gender equality.

I started in the corporate world, but it wasn't until I landed work with the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund at the British Embassy in Yangon that my passion became clear. Over four years, I got to learn about foreign aid, community projects, and managing funds. Working alongside experts and activists in the development sector, I witnessed the incredible resilience and dedication of grassroots women across the nation. They inspired me.

But in Myanmar, things were far from perfect. Policies didn't function effectively to protect marginalised groups. Growing up, I saw how differently boys and girls were treated. Education, for example, was unequally distributed, with girls frequently sidelined for household duties if there was limited financial capacity in the family. Gender-based and family-based violence is prevalent and exacerbated by inadequate legal protection and preventive measures.

It wasn't just the systemic injustices that troubled me; it was the everyday lack of safety. All I wanted was a community where gender no longer restricted choices and opportunities - and a world where women are treated with respect and equality. This personal commitment to equality has turned into a professional mission. As I dive into my studies, I'm driven to be a voice for those who aren't heard, an advocate for the marginalised, and to end violence against women.

During my internship with JRS, I was truly inspired by the diverse group of women who gathered at the Women's Space, all working together to support their community. Attending the International Women's Day celebration was a particularly memorable experience alongside coordinating a lunch for women from Myanmar. The resilience of women who have faced incredible odds left a lasting impression on me. I am excited to create a similar supportive space within my own community.

**JOIN US AS
A CLIMATE
INTERN!**

We are always keen to support students to complete placements at JRS Australia and we are currently looking for someone to work with us in our climate displacement work.

**Email our Refugee Leadership and Advocacy Manager to find out more:
amelia.savage@jrs.org.au.**

OUR PATHWAYS TO EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM SUPPORTS WOMEN TO FIND MEANINGFUL WORK

TIMA* SHARES HER STORY OF FINDING COMMUNITY AND BUILDING A NEW LIFE FOR HERSELF

Tima is a participant in JRS Australia's Pathways to Empowerment Program, which has initial funding through Women NSW to support women and girls seeking asylum, on temporary visas and refugees who face barriers to economic empowerment.

The program offers diverse and flexible training and education pathways that build financial independence.


Tima loves listening to music and watching movies. From gospel, to reggae, to rock – we can often find her singing along to her favourite tune, or watching the movies she used to watch with friends and family in Sierra Leone.

Tima had to leave everyone behind when she fled Sierra Leone and sought protection in Australia alone a year ago. She holds tightly to these connections to home while she builds a new life in Australia.

When Tima first arrived, she had to search for the support she needed to settle in.

"I was referred to JRS from another asylum seeker organisation because they had the services that I was looking for at the time."



 *Women in our Pathways to Empowerment Program engaged in computer classes with SEWA Australia, alongside JRS Australia's Employment Coordinator Tamana Mirzada.*

"I was very lucky to have found them because now they feel like family."

As a participant in our Pathways to Empowerment program, Tima had access to a range of resources including English classes, computer & IT courses, career training, financial literacy, driving lessons, and more.

Tima decided to take advantage of the self-empowerment, computer classes and financial literacy course.

Tima learned key computer skills, and also gained insights about how to save money from her employment so that she can feel self-reliant and provide herself with more security.

“I loved the computer course because it helped me with my job searching. After the course they gifted me a laptop with a 12 month Microsoft subscription that has been very important in applying for new roles and creating my resume. It’s been a life saver.”

Tima is one of 10 women who received a laptop donated to our Technology Bank by Aware Super, which was coordinated by one of our generous volunteers.

The Employment Team at JRS Australia was also a great support for Tima when it came to searching for a job.

The process was made easier with the team sending her job listings that suited her skills, organising driving lessons to enable her to apply for roles which required a license, and acting as referees to speak to her dedication and aptitude for the roles for which she was applying.

“The support from the JRS team has been amazing, Tamana [JRS Australia Employment Program Coordinator] is always willing to recommend me for a role which made all the difference.”

“It’s one of the reasons why I managed to get my role working in warehousing.”

A key function of the Employment Program involves creating strong partnerships with employers who are willing to invest in hiring refugees, people seeking asylum and women otherwise on temporary visas.

Tima is now employed with an organisation who has provided 11 of our clients with employment in warehousing; 7 of these being women.

Tima also had great things to say about the broader JRS Australia team: “I always know that I can call Rose [JRS Australia Casework and Emergency Relief Manager] when I’m feeling down. I let her know when things aren’t going well and she will do her best to support me in any way that she can. The Foodbank goes a long way. They support me with food and toiletries when I need the extra help.”

Tima now feels settled into her life in Australia. She has built an amazing community around her and continues to use her laptop for day-to-day administrative tasks and up-skilling, as well as to watch some of her favourite films from home!

Tima’s story identifies the importance of supporting women to find pathways to empowerment, and the effect this has for overall wellbeing, security, and contributions to the broader community.

Thanks to the generous support of our community, JRS Australia has been able to offer over 100 women the opportunity to find economic empowerment, and we have more women who need our support.

A donation to JRS Australia’s Employment Program supports us to fund training and courses and offer resources and employment casework to women like Tima.

**The individual’s name has been changed to protect their identity.*

Q&A WITH MICHAEL

Food and Material Aid Officer

Our Foodbank Program would not be possible without our incredible Food and Material Aid Officer, Michael. We'd like to introduce you all to Michael and hear what he has to tell us about the impact of your donations to JRS Australia's Foodbank!

How did you get involved with JRS?

I first got involved as a volunteer in 2018. I was looking to get more involved in the community, and as the days went by, I found myself loving the people I worked with and the value of the initiatives that JRS ran. During the pandemic, JRS was looking for someone with logistics experience to help run the Foodbank Program. I had 35 years of experience in that field and put myself forward for the role. I've been here ever since!

What do you love about Foodbank?

For me, the best part of Foodbank is seeing the joy in people's faces when we help them during times of vulnerability. Beyond immediate support, it introduces clients to all the other services JRS provides, such as the Women's Space and Employment Assistance. I often get messages from clients who say they are no longer reliant on Foodbank because they are now established, thanks to the wider support that JRS provides.

***“Your donations give hope,
and to have hope is
absolutely vital.”***



Do you have a message for our community?

Thank you so much for all your support! Our clients are often living under tough conditions, whether it be with housing or access to services. Food drives such as our Lenten Drive are incredibly impactful as we often run low on donations at this time of year, but the need for food and other materials is high. Your donations give hope, and to have hope is absolutely vital.

LENTEN FOOD DRIVE

As you may know, over the last 6 weeks of Lent, we have been running our **Lenten Appeal** and we are so grateful for all the schools, parishes and community groups that have been collecting and delivering donations.

Our Foodbank is still open to donations which can be delivered to our office at 10-12 Victoria Rd, Parramatta.

To organise the drop off of items, please email: foodbank@jrs.org.au.

VOLUNTEER WITH US AT JRS AUSTRALIA!

JOIN OUR FRIENDLY TEAM AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Our volunteers help us out in so many unique ways - playing their role in our mosaic of peace, and supporting the work we do alongside refugees and people seeking asylum. Hear from Neil about his experience volunteering in our reception.



I am Neil Quirk and I volunteer at JRS Australia's office in Parramatta every Thursday.

My work is in reception. I welcome everyone who walks in the door to find out what their needs are. Those who have come to receive support from the caseworkers or volunteers are directed to where they need to go. Most visitors come here to collect food - and sometimes clothing.

The food is ready for them to pack from the prepared boxes into their own bags. The boxes have a small range of basic food in cans or packets such as rice, pasta, beans and sugar etc., as well as some toiletries, oil, tea, or coffee. The contents of the boxes varies each fortnight depending on what has been donated.

Another aspect of my work with JRS Australia is to deliver food parcels to some families who are not able to collect them from the Parramatta office. I do this every second week on my way home from the office.

What drives me in this work, yet humbles me at the same time, is helping refugees and people seeking asylum get some of the help they need - and seeing the appreciation they have for any assistance they receive. I am also inspired by the people who work and volunteer here, and the generosity they have with their time and efforts.

If you want to get involved and make a difference for refugees and people seeking asylum in your local community, please get in touch. Call us on (02) 9098 9336 or email our Volunteers Coordinator at volunteers@jrs.org.au.

aus.jrs.net/donate

What We Do

JRS Australia accompanies, serves, and advocates for the rights of people seeking asylum, refugees, and migrants in vulnerable situations. JRS Australia advocates for policies of welcome and protection at all tiers of government and offers casework, employment, leadership and emergency assistance services.

How your donation will help

Your donation allows us to support people seeking asylum, refugees and migrants in vulnerable situations who have **nowhere else to go**. Our clients rely on us for safe, specialist casework, training and employment assistance, crisis support and payments, programs for survivors of violence, as well as food and toiletries available through our Foodbank.

Ph: 02 9356 3888 • Email: info@jrs.org.au • Web: aus.jrs.net



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