

# 2023 annual report



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## 2 acknowledgement of country

JRS Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live and work. We pay our deep respect to Elders, past and present.

Our offices are located on Dharug Country, and we work remotely from other locations.

We recognise that we live and work on Country that always was and always will be Aboriginal and that Sovereignty has not been ceded.

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JRS Australia is committed to adopting environmentally sustainable practices. As part of this, we are prioritising the development of online resources and reducing our printing and mail-outs. Following consultation with our supporters we continue to send print versions of our Annual Report and LINK Newsletter to all who have indicated that preference. If you would like to be added to our distribution list for hard copies of our publications please let us know via [info@jrs.org.au](mailto:info@jrs.org.au) or +61 2 9356 3888.

Thank you! JRS Australia is committed to taking action to care for our common home, in line with the Australian Jesuit Province Apostolic Plan 2019-24 priority “Heal humanity and our world” and Pope Francis’ Laudato Si’ plea that we: “hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor”.

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*Front cover: Refugee leaders at the 2023 Refugee Week event ‘Finding Freedom: Raising Our Voices’. Left to right: Thanush Selvarasa, Magdalene Konneh, Idrissa Dumbuya, Amelia Savage (Refugee Leadership and Advocacy Manager), Hava Rezaie, Din, Helen Guilianna, Tamara Domicelj (Country Director), Yamema Esber (volunteer)*

## Board of Directors

Dr Eve Lester – Chair

Catherine Verschuer – Acting Secretary

Edwina MacArthur – Treasurer  
(non-Directorial)

Muzafar Ali

Dr Elizabeth Biok

Hon. Reba Meagher

Fr Sacha Bermudez-Goldman SJ

Fr Gregory Jacobs, SJ

## Staff and Interns

Tamara Domicelj – Country Director

Maeve Brown – Assistant Country Director (until November 2023)

Alma Gatica – Philanthropy and Development Coordinator (until May 2023)

Amelia Savage – Refugee Leadership and Advocacy Manager

Charlotte Evans – Student intern

Chloe Tremblay-Goyette – SGBV Specialist Caseworker (until January 2023)

Craig Harris – Finance Assistant (until April 2023)

Georgia-Rae Cobon – Complex Casework & Emergency Relief Manager

Hedra Abdo – Finance Assistant

Holla David – Schools Engagement Officer (until August 2023)

Jenny Cao – Digital Media & Communications Coordinator (until February 2023)

Josephine Rechichi – Coordinator, Finding Safety; Head of Accompaniment & Service

Kevser Pirbudak – Complex Caseworker

Kim Mandelik – Office Manager

Magdalene Konneh – Project Support Worker, Finding Safety

May Hadaya – Volunteer Program Manager

Michael Melville – Foodbank & Material Aid Officer

Molly Jackson – Digital Media and Communications Coordinator (from August 2023)

Noora Jasim – Employment Support Officer (until November 2023)

Rachael Hansen – Student intern; Adviser, Operational Transitions

Rana Romanous – Student intern

Rigzin Yuthok – Complex Caseworker

Rose Maninyitia – Intake & Referral Officer

Sara Muzamil – SGBV Specialist Caseworker; Finding Safety Project Coordinator

Shatha Jajo – Project Coordinator, Finding Safety (until February 2023)

Shuja Jamal – Head of Policy, Advocacy & Communications (until November 2023)

Tamana Mirzada – Employment Project Coordinator

Vinuri Gajanayake – Schools Engagement Officer (from September 2023)

Will Martin – Digital Media & Communications Coordinator (April to July 2023)

Zahra Hashemabadi Barat – Foodbank & Material Aid Officer

Zoe Grant – Community & Schools Engagement Coordinator

## Volunteers

We are immensely grateful to the more than 230 volunteers who donated over 6,100 hours to support our work in 2023. While too numerous to name here individually, your contributions are critical to the delivery of our mission.

# 4 message from our chair



2023 was another challenging year for all those within the JRS Australia family. We continued to draw inspiration from the JRS mission of accompanying, serving and advocating for and with refugees, people seeking asylum, and other migrants in a vulnerable situation. We

also drew inspiration from those whom we serve and with whom we work, who are equally part of the JRS Australia family. As the Chair of the JRS Australia Board, I can say on my own account and my fellow Board members that we are constantly in awe of the extraordinary amount and quality of service that JRS Australia is able to deliver, and the ability of the staff and volunteers to do so with such warmth and generosity of spirit. We are also in awe of the strength and resilience of those we serve.

I see the mission of JRS — of accompaniment, service, and advocacy — as an act of resistance.

The theme I have chosen to focus on this year is the theme of resistance. I see the mission of JRS — of accompaniment, service, and advocacy — as an act of resistance. It is an act of resistance that is not just non-violent. As an act of resistance, it profoundly and effectively represents our collective refusal to accept or tolerate laws, policies and practices that seek to unpick the fabric of the bond of our common humanity. In a global context, we continue to bear witness to the cruel and devastating human effects of conflict and other human degradations. Notably, but not only, the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza have resulted in an unforeseen cohort of vulnerable

‘temporary residents’ needing JRS support. Within this context, the staff at JRS Australia continue — day in day out — to witness, and feel, the weight of the human privations that have for too long underpinned Australian refugee policies, whether through the prolonged deprivation of liberty or denial of the basic necessities and opportunities of life. Policies that seek to undermine, compromise or erase that shared bond. Policies that are (too often wilfully) blind to the living realities of people whose lives have been uprooted and that remain enduringly and unnecessarily precarious. We know and bear daily witness to the harms these policies do. And it is our mission that provides us with a framework for resisting them.

Under the impressive and dedicated leadership of Tamara Domicelj, our extraordinarily talented staff and volunteers have embraced and harnessed our mission to powerful effect. They resist with the generous gift of both their professionalism and the kindness of their human touch, giving dedicated and unflinching service whether through complex casework, our Employment and Finding Safety programs, or our advocacy and outreach.

We are deeply grateful for the support of Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen and the Diocese of Parramatta, as well as the Sisters of Mercy, Parramatta, for their continued support in providing us with the premises from which we work. They graciously provide us with spaces that are vital for us to offer our services, and for ensuring that we can provide a safe space for people leading otherwise extremely precarious lives. We also extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to the many Jesuit and Ignatian institutions (particularly schools and parishes) that support our work with such good energy and generosity.





The financial challenges for organisations working across this sector are legion, and they run deep. JRS Australia is certainly not immune from these challenges, a story that our accounts at year end tell undeniably. However, as an organisation we have grown significantly over the last 10 years, and through careful financial budgeting and stewardship we continue to retain healthy reserves and therefore remain well placed to navigate and weather the ups and downs of those challenges. In 2024, with the support of the JRS International Office, we remain confident that our next strategic planning process, scheduled to conclude by the end of 2024, will provide us with a strong blueprint and roadmap for accompaniment, service, and advocacy over the next five years.

In terms of the policy landscape, an early optimism that the change of government would see some of the worst policy excesses and effects of previous governments took another hit at year end following a High Court decision in which the Court held that it was unlawful to hold a person in immigration indefinitely, where there was no real prospect of their removal from Australia in the reasonably foreseeable future. Although the result was a win for those opposed to indefinite detention, the toxic and highly racialised discourses that shaped knee-jerk and ill-considered responses in both the media and the Parliament reminded us that the unseemly underbelly of refugee and migration policy debates in Australia, whether in parliament or the public square, is too easily surfaced and the human realities dangerously distortable. This too we must continue to resist by enabling and inspiring all within the JRS Australia family and wider network to harness, support and share the compassion and love embedded in the JRS mission.

To our Country Director, Tamara Domicelj, and her team of paid staff and volunteers, and on behalf of the Board, my warmest and heartfelt thanks to each and every one of you for your extraordinary dedication, and for embracing the JRS mission and its message of resistance with your whole selves. In particular I acknowledge Maeve Brown, who left the organisation after nine years of dedicated service. To the members of the JRS Australia Board, thank you also for generously giving JRS your time and support.

We continue to be deeply grateful to you, our faithful supporters, who also embrace our mission through your generous tied and untied donations and grants. These are vitally important expressions of support for our mission. You are all part of an extraordinary pool of individual and philanthropic donors who refuse to turn their backs on the living realities of the people in our community who we serve. We express our sincere gratitude to you all.

Through our collective and individual efforts — through accompaniment, service and advocacy — it is vital that we continue to work together; to hold together, thread by precious thread, the bond of our common humanity. You, our supporters, are not just integral to enabling this. You are part of the doing. And your support is not only essential and meaningful in practical ways. It is also uplifting. We thank you all from the bottom of our hearts.

**Dr Eve Lester**  
**Chair of the Board, JRS Australia**

It is vital that we continue to work together; to hold together, thread by precious thread, the bond of our common humanity.

# 6 message from our country director



**A**s I write, the United Nations estimates that over 120 million people are now displaced world-wide due to persecution, conflict, human rights abuses and other forms of violence, amounting to one in every 69 people.

Half remain in conflict-affected countries, and three in four live in countries with high-to-extreme exposure to climate-related hazards. Following twelve successive years of escalation, this global displacement figure has more than doubled and the refugee population has more than tripled.

We are resolutely drawing upon our strengths to do all that we can to uphold rights, strengthen resilience, alleviate suffering, and foster collaboration for impact.

New, recurrent and protracted conflicts have proliferated. Civilian deaths have soared, in conflict

settings and along flight paths. Pushbacks abound, along with deaths at sea. Re-opened borders are closing, and Australia's abhorrent deterrence policies and practices have inspired comparable models elsewhere. Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and more intense. And climate change and disasters are exacerbating protection needs and contributing to new and onward displacement.

Amidst such volatility it is normal to feel overwhelmed, but together we can and must resist the paralysis it can bring.

Through 2023 and the intervening months we witnessed, aghast, and responded as feasible to a cascade of devastating crises and developments globally and here in Australia. We have seen ineffectual responses, and a stoking of tensions and fears, from some who hold power and responsibilities to avert these trends - to provide international protection where it is owed and to foster social cohesion, reconciliation and climate justice.

In the face of it we have engaged in swift, quiet, niche advocacy alongside our other work. And our efforts and those of others have saved many lives and reunited families.

The urgency of this time can be galvanising when we see ourselves as part of a purposeful, networked community, even when we know that we do not have answers to all the challenges we confront.



*Members of the JRS Australia community attended marches around Australia in support of Constitutional recognition and a First Nations Voice to Parliament. JRS Australia voiced its support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the Yes Campaign for the Referendum and was proud of the work undertaken by Board member Muzafar Ali and staff member Shuja Jamal in contributing to the launch and profile of Hazaras for Yes.*



*JRS International Director, Br Michael Schöpf SJ (centre, back) with JRS Australia staff, volunteers and supporters in our courtyard during his visit to Australia.*

It is also our privilege at JRS to serve and work alongside people who display extraordinary courage and resilience, and a fierce determination to contribute what they can with what they have from where they are, towards a safer, more peaceful future. These are the many and diverse people we serve, our colleagues, and supporters. They are you, dear reader. And every contribution of funds, time, talent, human warmth, safe story sharing, advocacy and informed conversations, helps to build that future and helps now.

JRS Australia is not alone in facing the heart-wrenching truth that we can no longer scale our services, sustainably, to meet current and foreseeable demand. This realisation is rippling across much of the humanitarian sector, here in Australia and globally.

And yet, we are not flagging in our efforts or achievements, as shown within this report. We are resolutely drawing upon our strengths to do all that we can to uphold rights, strengthen resilience, alleviate suffering, and foster collaboration for impact.

We are deeply mission-driven, with a three-pillar methodology which guides our approach: we accompany, serve and advocate for and with people seeking asylum, refugees and migrants in situations of vulnerability. Journeying with people through joys and despair, tragedies and triumphs, inspires our work and enriches us all. How we live our service is value-laden and holistic, with head, heart and hands at its core. We know that our advocacy is most strategic and impactful when collaborative and driven by lived expertise.

A highlight of 2023 was the mid-year visit of our then incoming International Director, Br Michael Schöpf SJ, as part of a familiarisation tour of JRS' work across the sub-region. This was followed by visits from other international colleagues and opportunities to explore deepened global-country level partnerships. We are excited by the prospect of working ever more closely with our JRS colleagues worldwide, including through alignment of our 5-year strategic planning framework, and direct engagement in the development of our joint regional and global advocacy priorities.

I extend warmest thanks to the incredible JRS Australia staff, Board, volunteers, consultants and all other supporters for engaging with head, heart and hands as you made your myriad contributions to the delivery of our mission in 2023. Special thanks to student interns, family and staff, Rachael Hansen, Rana Romanous, and Rose Maninyitia, for running a combined 80kms to resource our work! Special thanks to our indomitable Chair, Eve Lester, for her continued exceptional leadership of our dedicated Board and for rounding off the year with a 7.5km open ocean swim fundraiser! Warm congratulations to Shuja Jamal on his appointments to the inaugural Australian Refugee Advisory Panel and the Advisory Committee of the Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law. And special thanks to Maeve Brown and other former staff for your service, rich legacy and ongoing support. To all of you, and to all whom we serve, thank you for journeying with us.

**Tamara Domicelj**



# 8 our achievements

## Programs and Services

### In 2023, JRS Australia...

- served over **3,100** people seeking asylum, refugees and migrants in vulnerable situations
- provided over **25,000** instances of service



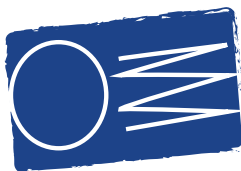
- provided over **8,000** food parcels and/or food payments to an average of **100** households per week

- provided **1,010** people with over **7,200** instances of specialist casework support, including support to address housing needs or homelessness, physical health, mental health crises, emergency financial relief and more

- supported over **330** women at risk of or who have experienced SGBV, through the JRS Finding Safety Project and Women's Space, including over **7,300** instances of service



- delivered **90** English classes to over **30** people
- assisted **170** people through the Employment Program across **1,210** instances of service, and **62** opportunities for training, leading to **78** finding paid employment
- up-skilled **32** women engaged in our Pathways to Empowerment who attended 16 empowerment sessions
- connected **26** Employment Program participants with a digital device



- assisted **993** people to complete NSW Opal Card concession applications, ensuring access to discounted transport

### And...

- **233** dedicated volunteers donated over **6,100** hours of service.

## Advocacy and community engagement

### In 2023, JRS Australia...



- delivered **58** workshops and awareness raising events, reaching **9,927** people from schools, parishes and the broader community

- supported **9,807** students to take action by running food drives, writing to their MPs, volunteering with JRS and organising fundraising events



- provided **39** opportunities at community events and schools for refugee leaders to engage in direct advocacy and awareness raising



- participated in **expert roundtables, dialogues, advisory groups and delegations**, made **2** submissions to parliamentary inquiries and contributed to joint policy recommendations and campaigns advocating for fair, inclusive and timely

State and Commonwealth Government processes, policies and laws affecting people seeking asylum, refugees and migrants in situations of vulnerability

- collaborated and consulted with colleagues across all regions of the world to recommend priorities and methodologies for JRS' global strategic advocacy, including our engagement with the Global Refugee Forum, as a member of the inaugural **JRS advocacy working group**.





## Complex Casework & Emergency Relief

The JRS Casework and Emergency Relief team responded to a large number of requests for assistance in 2023, providing support to 1,010 individuals through close to 7,200 instances of service, including 1,353 emergency relief payments.

The increased cost of living generated higher rates of primary and secondary homelessness amongst the people we serve, triggering significant requests for assistance with large rental arrears and utility bills, as well as emergency financial relief and food and material aid, including nappies, clothing, blankets, school supplies and furniture.

We also worked with a large number of people with complex medical needs, making increased referrals for urgent medical diagnoses and treatment, including facilitating access to general practitioners for referrals for mental health and psychiatric care. We continued to assist people to purchase essential medications with funding from the Good Samaritan Sisters, and to access free dental services through Filling the Gap, and free optometry tests and glasses through OneSight.

The casework team worked very closely with the employment team to support job readiness and safe employment, and with Goodstart early learning centre to support parents whose lack of access to affordable childcare posed a barrier to employment. These referrals and collaborations enabled people we serve to find suitable employment and be able to afford safe housing, pay for utilities and meet medical requirements.

As many families are still struggling to maintain tenancies due to the increased cost of living, and many children are still on or awaiting placement on waiting lists for childcare, we continue working to strengthen our partnerships in this area.

## Foodbank

As a result of the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising cost of living, the JRS Foodbank continued to provide food assistance and essential household items to individuals and families through 2023.

The JRS Foodbank team, managed by two part-time food and material aid officers and a team of dedicated volunteers, supported a total of 100 households with a bag of staple items each week. Most service users now collect their food and staples from our Head Office in North Parramatta, with 25 clients who have no means of transportation receiving deliveries. Additional food and staples were supplied to clients being supported by the Casework and Finding Safety Teams on an irregular or once-off basis, and this was supplemented with food vouchers for Coles and Woolworths.

This resulted in over 8,000 instances of service to JRS clients in 2023. The JRS pantry is stocked by generous donations from supporters in the community, including local parishes, schools, community members and small businesses.

Our hard-working team of volunteers receive the donations, pack and store them in our Foodbank pantry, assemble bags tailored to each household's needs and dietary requirements, and welcome and serve clients with warmth and generosity - truly Accompaniment in Action.

Without access to welfare support, people seeking asylum continue to face daily challenges trying to keep themselves and their families safe, housed, healthy and fed. The demand for Foodbank and the provision of nutritious staples and essential items remains constant for our service.



*A day in the life of our Foodbank: JRS volunteers arranged items donated to our Foodbank to showcase the essential items we distribute to families in need every week.*

# 10 programs and services

## Employment

In 2023, the Employment Program expanded its operations to serve more newly arrived refugee and asylum seeker communities seeking economic and livelihood opportunities, with a special focus upon engaging young people and exploring opportunities for innovation. In response to the increasing needs of its participants, various initiatives focusing on up-skilling and transferring skills and experience were developed. In total, 112 new participants accessed essential work readiness assistance through the program.

Through ongoing one-on-one work readiness sessions supported by the recruitment of three additional employment volunteers, the program continued to meet with participants throughout the year. Many challenges were identified by participants as barriers to accessing workforce participation. Amongst them, participants emphasised employers' attitudes to temporary visas, their lack of local experience and networks, and limited English proficiency. The lack of access to resources such as a computer exacerbated these barriers, constraining participation in training and preparation of job applications. Women who lead single-headed households identified even greater challenges in engaging in employment because they lack access to childcare, livelihood support, and resources.

Despite the significant demand the service faced in 2023, a number of initiatives and collaborations were



*JRS Australia Employment Program participants with CEO Tahera Nassrat from the Afghan Peace Foundation and Tamana Mirzada, Employment Coordinator, following an information session for people seeking asylum, refugees and people on bridging visas, about financial strategy, money management and budgeting.*

developed to support participants with training and opportunities based on their self-identified needs. A significant achievement for the program was providing access to fee-free training for participants through its partnership with City East Community College. Last year a total of 50 participants gained their first aid qualifications through these collaborations. Accessibility and resource linkage is an integral part of enabling equity for newly arrived communities in the Australian employment market.

The Employment Program launched the Employers Guide to Working with Asylum Seekers and Refugees developed to assist employers to understand the how the circumstances of people seeking asylum and recognised refugees might differ, including their visa status and conditions, demographics, and challenges that may be faced during their transition to work. The guide has been provided to all existing and new employment partners as a means of strengthening ongoing collaboration. One of the new partnerships we established in 2023 was with COS. Through this new partnership the employment program succeeded in placing 10 program participants in warehousing roles.

Another initiative, the Pathways to Empowerment project, supports women seeking asylum and with temporary visas to participate in economic capacity building activities. Since its commencement in July 2023, a total of 32 women participated in the project. Moreover, 13 workshops were delivered focusing on English language, Computer training, Financial Literacy, Work readiness, and self-employment.

As access to income and resources remain limited for participants the program funds police checks, working with children checks, travel expenses (opal card fares), driving lessons, forklift, white card and traffic control licences. All expenses covered through the program enabled clients to increase their capacity and employability. This also contributed to further engagement with the work readiness process as confidence grew significantly. This was made possible by the generous donations from the Knights of the Southern Cross (Branch 90 Caboolture) and The Cath Leary Foundation.

In the new year, the program will continue to collaborate with partners to develop access to fee-free training for participants and aim towards increasing equity and resources for employment capacity building.



*Women in our Pathways to Empowerment Project receive computers after participating in a computer-skills workshop with our partner SEWA Australia, facilitated through our Employment Program.*

### Employment in numbers

- **112** people seeking asylum, refugees, and temporary visa holders registered for employment support.
- **32** Women participated in the Pathways to Empowerment Project
- **294** work readiness sessions delivered including face-to-face and remote sessions.
- **78** gained a form of paid employment (across Casual, Part- and Full-Time work)
- **62** participated in accredited training including Security, White Card, Traffic Control, First Aid and Forklift courses.
- **9** completed approx. 6 hours of driving lessons.
- **21** received a laptop donation.
- **3** received a mobile phone.
- **2** received an iPad.

*\*Since 2021 a total of 399 participants have engaged in the JRS Employment Program.*

### Finding Safety Project

In 2023 the women we served through the Finding Safety Project (FSP) continued to face challenges in accessing safety nets and financial assistance, with safe housing remaining a pressing issue. Securing refuges, temporary accommodation, and private housing proved extremely difficult. Additionally, many faced obstacles in accessing and navigating Medicare services.

Registering children in school remains a significant challenge for newly arrived refugees from Sudan.

Through needs assessments, the FSP understood the specific challenges and goals of the women we serve. This step ensured that the support provided to them was relevant and effective.

Accordingly, the FSP developed customised programs targeting areas such as education, job training, mental health, legal assistance, isolation, and emotional support. The FSP designed these programs to address the diverse needs of our clients and provide them with the necessary tools and resources to succeed.

In addition to structured programs, the FSP offered holistic support services encompassing counselling, advocacy, and referrals to external resources. This holistic approach ensured that our clients received comprehensive support addressing not only their immediate needs but also their long-term well-being.

Empowering women with knowledge and skills is a key focus of the FSP. We offered workshops and training sessions on topics such as women's and children's safety, women's rights, leadership development, and mental health. By equipping women with information and skills, the FSP was able to help our clients make informed decisions and take control of their lives amidst the many challenges they face.

The FSP fostered a sense of community among our clients through support groups, networking events, and community outreach initiatives including 16 Days of Activism.



# 12 programs and services



*JRS Australia staff walked in the Western Sydney 16 Days of Activism March on 29 November 2023 to highlight the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls.*

The FSP made progress in supporting our clients through various initiatives. We celebrated major events like Easter/Eid, Mother's Day, Refugee Day, and hosted an end-of-year gathering, fostering a sense of community and belonging. Furthermore, we provided English and art classes, as well as "I Matter" sessions, to educate women about how to take care of themselves, one step at a time. These sessions offered opportunities for personal growth and connection.

In addition, the Women's Space continued to be an essential safe place where our clients could relax, enjoy a cup of tea, share meals, and connect with both staff and fellow women. Many formed strong bonds and friendships, breaking through feelings of isolation thanks to the supportive environment provided.

Continuous monitoring and evaluation of program outcomes are crucial to ensuring effectiveness and making necessary adjustments. The FSP tracks client progress, gathers feedback, and evaluates the impact of its programs to better its approach and achieve better outcomes over time.

By implementing these strategies and approaches, the FSP was able to effectively support our clients and help them achieve their desired outcomes, whether that was gaining economic independence, overcoming trauma, accessing healthcare, or advocating for their rights.

Moving forward, our focus remains on empowering our clients through community mobilisation efforts and leadership development programs. We plan to expand

our English classes and introduce computer literacy courses to enhance their skill sets. Additionally, we aim to have a member of the JRS Employment team present at the Women Space weekly to address the employment needs of women experiencing SGBV.

By continuing to provide holistic support and fostering a sense of community, we strive to empower our clients and create lasting positive change in their lives.

## Volunteers

Over the past year, we've seen a notable increase in students and groups volunteering with JRS, particularly in roles that involve direct interaction with clients, such as teaching English conversation classes and engaging in events. The growing number of schools and groups volunteering has not only supported our services but also heightened awareness of our clients' needs, expanding our reach and impact.



*Teaching staff from a local school volunteer in JRS Australia's Foodbank.*

The engagement of volunteers has been instrumental in enhancing our services. Our volunteers have generously donated over 6,000 hours this year, significantly reducing the operational costs of our services. We have also provided necessary training and support through induction, debriefing, role training, and general trainings. Additionally, our volunteers enjoyed participation in various organisational events, including the successful Volunteer Week Event 2023.

Looking forward, we aim to deepen volunteer involvement by encouraging more clients to volunteer, fostering a community that serves through shared lived experiences. This approach is intended to enhance community cohesion and extend our impact further.

## Overview

During 2023 JRS Australia pursued a range of advocacy priorities informed by evidence arising from our accompaniment and service provision and the experiences and expertise of the people we serve and colleagues with lived experience of displacement.

In the Australian context these continued to include calls for reform of policies, laws and practices relating to Australia's deterrence framework and barriers to accessing welfare and other support for most people seeking asylum and awaiting status resolution. Tackling homelessness, and specifically barriers to accessing crisis accommodation for women and children fleeing domestic and family violence, as well as increased access to the Status Resolution Support Services for people with whom we work all remained high priority advocacy concerns across 2023.

From early in the year, we advocated for expedited processing of Resolution of Status Visa applications and grants of permanent residency for 19,000 refugees holding Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEVs), following a long-awaited announcement that this reform would be implemented in line with the ALP national policy platform. We also urged, without success, that an additional allocation of family reunion visas be made available for this group, along with arrangements for expedited processing of their applications, given that most had been denied capacity to sponsor or visit relatives for over a decade. Continued delays and uncertainty caused significant distress for affected people, including in the context of threatened mass forced returns to Afghanistan of people without visas to remain in Pakistan, towards the end of the year.

We welcomed the opportunity, however, to celebrate with joy the transition to permanent residency and some instances of family reunification for affected colleagues and friends who had endured the anguish and trauma of Australia's deterrence policy settings for so long. We continue to maintain that TPVs should be abolished and we continue to urge fair treatment and priority consideration for the more than 12,000 people who have been waiting up to a decade or more to have their claims for protection assessed, or may have been denied a fair process and outcome

under fast-track assessment, or were medivac-ed to Australia from Nauru or PNG and remain excluded from accessing pathways to permanent residency and associated rights and benefits.

We made submissions to the Senate Inquiry into the worsening rental crisis in Australia and to the Inquiry into the Migration Amendment (Evacuation to Safety) Bill 2023 .

We also collaborated extensively with our co-convenor and advisory group of the Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA) to make numerous joint submissions, statements and deliver webinars.

And we worked closely with sector colleagues to advocate with the Federal Government for non-discriminatory issuance of visas, at scale, for people fleeing diverse humanitarian emergencies, with due regard for the need to ensure that new arrivals and receiving communities from emergency humanitarian contexts have access to essential services, permission to work, and pathways to protection.

## Key advocacy developments in 2023:

- **February** – Government announces 19,000 refugees on TP and SHE visas will be able to transition to a Resolution of Status visa, receiving permanent residency and access to supports they were ineligible for on temporary visas. This was a long-awaited announcement and was the result of years of advocacy from the sector, including JRS Australia.
- **September to November** – A series of actions take place from people seeking asylum demanding an outcome for themselves, and others like them, who are still living in limbo, and were not included in the TPV/SHEV announcement. Neil Para walks from Ballarat to Marrickville, a group of 22 Tamil and Iranian women walk from Melbourne to Canberra, Thienushan Chandrasekaram cycles from Brisbane to Canberra, and a group of 15 Tamil and Iranian women walked from Sydney to Canberra.
- **November** - High Court rules that indefinite immigration detention is unlawful and calls on the government to release people from detention immediately.

# 14 advocacy in action

## Expert Roundtable

JRS Australia participated in an expert roundtable at Parliament House, alongside colleagues from the sector to discuss:

- the pressing issues faced by refugees and people seeking asylum in our communities; and
- urgent action the Government could take to ensure that they are able to live in dignity.

We advocated jointly with the sector for the Federal Government to reverse punitive policies leaving people seeking asylum and some refugees without permanent visas unable to afford food, medical care and shelter. We also urged that access to work rights and a financial safety net be provided for people seeking asylum for the duration of their protection visa application process.



*Shuja Jamal, Head of Policy, Advocacy and Communications at JRS Australia presents at an expert roundtable at Parliament House in Canberra.*

## Homelessness Week 2023

JRS Australia Assistant Director Maeve Brown, and Refugee Leader Magdalene Konneh visited Canberra during Homelessness Week, along with colleagues from partner organisations, as part of our joint advocacy campaign for a safety net for refugees and people seeking asylum to combat housing insecurity.

While there, Magdalene gave a powerful speech to Senators and MPs about her own struggles with homelessness, calling on the elected officials to have courage and compassion in finding a solution for the homelessness increasingly faced by people seeking asylum and others with temporary visa status. Her speech is reproduced on our website.

## Inquiry into Consent Laws

In order to advocate for the women and girls who visit our Women's Space, and who are so often left behind in conversations about their own safety and protection, Josephine Rechichi, Finding Safety Project Coordinator, joined with professionals across the New South Wales women's services sector to present to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the current and proposed sexual consent laws in Australia.

"Social isolation, communication barriers, lack of access to support or information about their rights under the law, and cultural differences often create further risk of sexual and gender-based violence, and limit pathways to justice," Josephine said.

JRS Australia has since welcomed the proposed changes to consent laws that centre the experiences of victim-survivors and see a focus on informed and affirmative consent.



*Josephine Rechichi, then-Finding Safety Project Coordinator and now Head of Accompaniment and Service, provided expert evidence to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Proposed Sexual Consent Laws.*

## Global engagement

### Developing priorities and modalities for global and joint advocacy

The engagement of our Country Director, Tamara Domicelj, as a member of JRS' inaugural Advocacy Working Group, has generated significant opportunities to collaborate with technical experts and colleagues across all regions of the world to consider priority themes, modalities and partnerships for a deepened investment in global and joint advocacy as a key driver of impact over JRS' 2025-9 global strategic framework. This has involved monthly meetings, in-person retreats in Portugal and Kenya, participation



in technical sub-groups and involvement with the identification of multi-stakeholder pledges for signing by JRS as four-year commitments in the context of the 2023 Global Refugee Forum. Amongst these critical commitments was the decision to sign the pioneering and widely subscribed Global Refugee-Led Network's refugee participation pledge.

## Climate Related Displacement: Caring for Our Common Home

In 2023 JRS Australia continued our commitment to upskilling and building our network and expertise in Climate Related Displacement.

From February to April 2023 JRS Australia hosted Charlotte Evans in the role of Climate-Related Displacement Intern as part of her International Scholarship from St Andrews University, Scotland. During her time with JRS Australia Charlotte conducted a consultation process with key climate activists from the Pacific, academics and experts and conducted research to update our policy platform.



Charlotte with climate activist Rae Bainteti with at the 2023 conference 'To Hell With Drowning' at The Australian National University in Canberra.

JRS Australia has contributed insights from our body of work and relationships in this area to JRS' global advocacy working group discussions, informing the decision to sign up to the Global Refugee Forum multistakeholder pledge on climate action and to deepen our engagement and capacitation in this area across the organisation ongoing.

## Refugee Leadership Program

2023 was a year with a key focus on storytelling within the Leadership Program. We had a year packed full of paid speaking engagements for our participants, offering amazing opportunities for our leaders to continue to hone their skills in public speaking and changemaking and for their incredible voices to be

heard. We are so thankful to our amazing supporter community who hosted paid speaking engagements to hear from our leaders this year.

One key achievement was our Refugee Week event on the 16th of June 2023 titled *Finding Freedom: Raising Our Voices*, where we had a showcase of 7 incredible leaders with lived experience sharing what 'freedom' means to them through speeches, poetry, and film. This event was attended by approximately 120 supporters, including 3 politicians.

Through consultation with program participants, JRS Australia has continued to finesse our expertise in working with leaders with lived experience as we developed our Lived Experience Leadership Guidelines and offered training to staff across the organisation.

We are looking forward to supporting new leaders to raise their voices and create positive change in 2024 and to share our expertise in this area more widely.



Refugee Leadership and Advocacy Manager Amelia Savage, addresses the audience at our 2023 Refugee Week event, *Finding Freedom: Raising our Voices*

## Leadership Program by the Numbers

**39** Events where the voices of leaders with lived experience were heard at school and community events or speaking to decision makers.

**52** Paid speaking opportunities representing **\$13,000** income for leaders.

## Spotlight on Magdalene:

Magdalene, a Leader in the program, had a fantastic year of achievements in 2023. The year began with us celebrating her award of a Diploma of Community Services for which she completed 100 hours of student placement with our Finding Safety Project. In February she was one of a group of lived experience storytellers at the Sydney Alliance Election Assembly who spoke to State politicians and an audience of over

# 16 advocacy in action

1000 people. She then joined our staff team in March as the Finding Safety Project Support Worker.

In June Magdalene was nominated for Western Sydney Community Forum's Annual ZEST Awards in the category of 'Outstanding Voluntary Leader.' In August Magdalene went to Canberra, representing JRS alongside key partner organisations from NSW and Victoria to present to the Parliamentary Friends of Refugees which was attended by Minister Giles and a separate meeting with Senator Lydia Thorpe. She attended these meetings only two days after a hearing for her case.

Then in September, after five years of living on a bridging visa and navigating the asylum process, Magdalene received the amazing news that she had been recognised as a refugee and would be granted a permanent visa.

Throughout the year Magdalene spoke at 16 events organised through the Leadership Program and received training in Ethical Storytelling. In December, Magdalene was the successful applicant of the Finding Safety Project Officer role with JRS, representing a promotion for her and a fantastic bookend to an incredible year of achievements. Magdalene we are so proud of you, and we are honoured to work with you!

Magdalene is an amazing example of why JRS



*Magdalene Konneh*

Australia is committed to offering individualised and holistic support to leaders with lived experience, helping them to find new opportunities and raise their voices as we journey to create positive change together.

## Schools and Community Engagement

In 2023, the JRS Australia Schools and Community Engagement program ran 82 workshops and events, engaging 12,427 individuals from schools, parishes, and the community. We deeply appreciate our ongoing partnerships in advocating for and supporting people seeking asylum. Through our community and school initiatives, we generated \$12,500 in income for our

speakers with lived experience, while also organising 83 food drives, aiding 150 families weekly. To all our partners, thank you for your invaluable support in 2023—we couldn't do it without you!

This year, the JRS Australia Schools Program saw significant impact through excursions to JRS Australia's office, where school communities experienced firsthand the support provided to people we serve and got to be part of our team for a day.



*Students from St Mary's Primary School, Rydalmere, gathered with donations for our Foodbank.*

St Mary's Primary School, Rydalmere, actively participated by organising a winter appeal as well as sending staff and students to volunteer at the Foodbank over the year. Amelia, a sixth-grader, expressed her desire to have more kids visit the centre to better understand who they are helping when they donate to foodbank. Natalie Coghlan, the Religious Education Coordinator, found the experience rewarding and plans to integrate these stories into their Religious Education programs.

Continuing to collaborate with St Patrick's Cathedral this year has been a joy. Their ongoing dedication to hosting Food Drives for JRS Australia expanded by running their first Community Conversation. Maggie and Maryam shared their stories of seeking asylum in Australia, the event spurred thoughtful discussions and prompted 12 new members to join the social justice group. This group is now organising a Community Lunch to strengthen connections with JRS Australia clients, showcasing their commitment to community support.

The Schools Program is set to expand further in 2024 with the addition of a new Legal Studies workshop. In our Community Engagement initiatives, we look forward to forging connections with new communities while also strengthening collaborations with existing partners.



**We are immensely grateful for the tremendous support provided by our major donors and partners. Your wonderful generosity enabled us to continue our critical work of accompanying, serving and advocating for and with refugees, people seeking asylum and migrants in situations of vulnerability during 2023. Please receive our heartfelt thanks in abundance.**

- Addison (Addi) Road Community Organisation
- Affinity Intercultural Foundation
- Afghan Peace Foundation
- All Saints Catholic College, Liverpool
- All Saints Parish, Liverpool
- Amnesty International Australia
- Andrew and Renata Kaldor Centre of International Refugee Law, UNSW
- Anote Tong
- Arndell Anglican College, Oakville
- Arts and Cultural Exchange Parramatta
- Asia Pacific Network on Refugees (APNOR)
- Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN)
- Asylum Seeker Resource Centre
- Asylum Seekers Centre
- Australian Dental Association - Filling the Gap
- Australia Post
- Australian Red Cross
- Australian Services Union (NSW/ACT)
- Australian Women against Violence Alliance (AWAVA)
- Aware Super
- Baker & McKenzie
- Bankstown Senior College
- Bridge for Asylum Seekers
- Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project (BASP)
- Brigidine College, St Ives
- Brotherhood of St Laurence
- Cages Foundation
- Care for our Common Home Committee
- Career Seekers
- Carroll & O'Dea
- Caritas Australia
- Catherine McAuley, Westmead
- Cath Leary Social Justice Foundation
- Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney and Melbourne
- Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum- CAPSA
- Catholic Care Western Sydney
- Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta
- Catholic Religious Australia
- CatholicCare
- Catholic Social Justice Council
- Catholic Social Services Australia
- Child Abuse Prevention Service (CAPS)
- Christ the King Parish, North Rocks
- City East College – Refugee Mentoring Program
- City of Parramatta Council
- Councillor Sameer Pandey
- Club Ashfield
- Collective Leisure
- Colombo Social
- Community Corporate
- Community Migrant Resource Centre
- Core Community Services
- COS Office Australia Cumberland City Council
- Cumberland Domestic and Family Violence Community of Practise
- Cumberland Women's Health Centre
- Dandelion
- Delany College, Granville
- Democracy in Colour
- Denbigh Philanthropic Fund
- Diocese of Parramatta
- Dooley's Catholic Club
- Dress for Success
- Dress for Work
- DVNSW
- Edmund Rice Centre
- Era Institute
- Family Planning NSW
- FindMe
- Foodbank NSW/ACT
- Fr John Therry Catholic Primary School, Balmain
- GGH Recruitment/Dragonfly Network
- Gilroy Catholic College, Castle Hill
- GLAPD
- Glow Up Careers
- Good 360
- Grant Thornton Australia
- Harris Farm
- Hawthorn Catholic Parish, Hawthorn
- Hogan Family Foundation
- Holy Cross Primary School
- Holy Family Church, Maroubra Parish
- Holy Spirit Parish, St Clair
- House of Welcome
- Humans Like Us
- Ian Watson Family Foundation
- Immigration Advice and Rights Centre
- Inner West for Refugees/Jesuit Asia Pacific Conference (JCAP)
- Jesuit Communications
- Jesuit Education Australia
- Jesuit Mission
- Jesuit Social Services
- JRS Asia Pacific
- JRS International
- Kate Chaney MP
- Knights of the Southern Cross
- Knitting and Crochet Guild of NSW
- KPMG
- Kylea Tink MP
- License4Work
- Limb Family Foundation
- Life Without Barriers
- Lions Club, Hornsby
- Loreto Normanhurst, Pennant Hills
- Lyone Foundation
- Mami Watta Collections
- Magnolia Foundation
- Manly Refugee Support Network
- Marist Catholic College, North Sydney
- Marist Catholic College, Penshurst
- Mary Immaculate Parish, Quakers Hill
- Mary's House
- Maryanne Loughry
- Mercy Catholic College, Chatswood
- Monte Sant' Angelo Mercy College, North Sydney



# 18 our gratitude

- Mother Teresa Primary School, Westmead
- Mummies Paying it Forward
- Mums4Refugees
- Nappy Collective
- NSW Department of Communities and Justice - Social Sector Support Fund
- NSW Legal Aid
- NSW Refugee Health Service
- OneSight
- Our Lady Help of Christians Catholic Parish Church Social Justice Team
- Our Lady of Dolours Catholic Parish Chatswood
- Our Lady of Dolours, Chatswood
- Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Seven Hills
- Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School, Seven Hills
- Our Lady of The Rosary Primary School I St Marys
- Our Lady of the Rosary, St Marys
- Our Lady of the Way Parish Charities Trust Committee
- Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Church, Greystanes
- Our Lady, Star of the Sea Church, Kirribilli
- Our Race
- OzHarvest
- Pacific Conference of Churches
- Parramatta Women's Shelter
- Parramatta Mission
- PAYCE Foundation
- Pivotal Management
- Planet Wheeler Foundation
- Polaron
- Primo Foods
- Queensford College
- Refugee Advocacy and Casework Service (RACS)
- Rae Bainteiti
- Refugee Health Service NSW
- Reloved
- Rentokil
- Richmond Uniting Church
- Rosebank College, Five Dock
- Rosey Ravelston Books
- Sage Community Service
- Saint Ignatius' College Riverview
- Saint Ignatius' College, Adelaide
- Saint Michael's Primary School, Baulkham Hills
- Salvation Army
- Santa Sabina College, Chatswood
- Senator David Pocock
- Settlement Services International
- Seven Hills Lions Club
- SEWA Australia
- Share the Dignity
- Sisters of Charity Foundation
- Sisters of Mercy Parramatta
- Sisters of Mercy St Michael's Fund
- Sisters of the Good Samaritan Foundation
- Sisters of St John of God
- Sisters of St Joseph
- St Aloysius Junior School, Kirribilli
- St Aloysius of Gonzaga, Cronulla
- St Alphonsa Syro Malabar Catholic Church, Blacktown
- St Ambrose Parish, Concord West
- St Andrew the Apostle Catholic Parish, Marayong
- St Angelas Primary School, Castle Hill
- St Cecilia's Catholic Primary School
- St Columba's Catholic Church, Leichhardt North
- St Columba's Parish, North Leichhardt
- St Declans Parish, Penthurst
- St Francis Xavier Church, Lavender Bay
- St Ignatius' Parish, Richmond
- St James Catholic Primary School, Glebe
- St John XXIII Catholic College, Stanhope Gardens
- St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Kingswood
- St Kieran's Catholic Church
- St Leo's Catholic College, Wahroonga
- St Mary MacKillop Primary School, Penrith
- St Mary Magdalene Parish, Rose Bay
- St Mary's Primary School, Rydalmere
- St Michael's Parish, Stanmore
- St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta
- St Patrick's Marist College, Dundas
- St Patrick's Primary School, Parramatta
- St Paul the Apostle, Winston Hills
- St Vincent De Paul Society NSW
- St Vincent's Hospital Homeless Health Service
- St Vincent's College, Potts Point
- St. Bernadette's Primary School, Dundas Valley
- St. Columba's Catholic Primary School, Leichhardt North
- St. Mary's Parish Concord
- St. Thomas Aquinas Springwood
- Stella Maris College, Manly
- Summit driving School
- Sydney Alliance
- TalentRise
- The Australian Province of the Society of Jesus
- The Bower Reuse and Repair Centre
- The Cardoner Project
- The Catholic Parish of Epping and Carlingford
- The Catholic Parish of Frenchs Forest
- The Holy Name of Mary, Hunters Hill Parish
- The Institute Sisters of Mercy Australia and PNG
- The Laptop Initiative
- The Parish of Our Lady of the Way, North Sydney
- The Social Outfit
- Thread Together
- TuCAN (Tuvalu Climate Action Network)
- University of New South Wales
- University of Sydney Refugee language program
- Vigil Training
- VivCourt
- Waverley College
- Waverley College Ecology Team
- Welcome Merchant
- Western Sydney Community Forum
- Western Sydney University
- Woodville Alliance
- Woolworths
- Xavier Catholic College, QLD
- Xavier Social Justice Network

**Statement of Comprehensive Income for the year ended 31 December 2023**

		<b>\$</b>
<b>Revenue</b>		<b>1,872,608</b>
Donations	844,275	
Grants	956,955	
Other income	71,378	
<b>Expenses</b>		<b>2,296,367</b>
Staffing expenses	808,089	
Administrative & fundraising expenses	154,125	
Depreciation expenses	159	
Travel expenses	10,102	
Direct projects costs	578,968	
Grant expenses	744,924	
<b>Results from operating activities</b>		<b>-423,759</b>
Financial income		58,041
Financial costs		-116
<b>Net financial income</b>		<b>57,925</b>
<b>Deficit for the period</b>		<b>-365,834</b>
Other comprehensive income		-
<b>Total comprehensive deficit</b>		<b>-365,834</b>



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