



LINK Newsletter - Christmas Edition 2024



LETTER FROM OUR ACTING COUNTRY DIRECTOR

Dear friends,

As 2024 draws to a close, we at JRS Australia extend our warmest wishes of peace and hope this Christmas Season and beyond.

In preparing for our brief closure over the Christmas and New Year period, I have been reflecting on our year that was, and feeling so proud of our generous, resilient, and loving community.

I also want to acknowledge the enormous grief that many of us are experiencing, as we see our world plummeted into conflict, and our loved ones displaced.

Whilst it may feel difficult to hold on to hope in the face of such turmoil, I am comforted in knowing that the miracle of Christ's birth brings with it a timeless message of hope: hope for justice, hope for peace, and hope for new beginnings.

It is this shared hope that unites us, drives us, and shows us that we can make a difference when we stand together - so I would like to share some important reasons to hope from our work in 2024.

Early in the year, we celebrated **International Women's Day** with a multicultural women's celebration, created by women from our Finding Safety Project who have survived of gender-based violence.

In March we also joined with community to stand in solidarity with victims of gender-based violence at the **Parramatta Candlelight Vigil**, and made a submission to a NSW Inquiry concerning access to childhood health and development checks. We were then asked to appear in person at the Inquiry's hearing this week.

In April, we held a joint **Eid/Easter celebration** for women in our Finding Safety Project, and received incredibly generous support from our community during our **Lenten Drive**.

We also rallied with people seeking asylum and sector allies to **oppose an amendment to the Migration Act** that sought to re-introduce new policies of indefinite detention and deportation. These amendments affect families and individuals who have been living and contributing to our community for over ten years - and **we continue to stand alongside them, demanding that the Government do better.**

During May, our hearts were full with gratitude as our office filled with blankets donated for winter!

May was also a month of celebration for the women who completed our **Pathways to Empowerment** program, who had been taking part in a program of workshops over the last 12 months, to improve their digital literacy, up-skill and build confidence, to find meaningful work in Australia.



June was then action-packed with events for **Refugee Week** right across our state. These included 17 events (including three events in regional Yass), 20 school and parish leadership speaking engagements, and over 4,150 incredible people from our community who engaged with us to **learn more about the experiences of people seeking asylum here in Australia.**

July continued the wonderful **engagement of school, parish, and community groups**, with the **St Patrick's Cathedral Social Justice Group** hosting a fabulous trivia night to raise money for a welcome luncheon for people seeking asylum later in the year. Our team members Zoe, Vin and Maggie also joined multiple events with the wonderful **St Ignatius Riverview College** students and community who have been allies to the people we serve for many years.

JRS Australia's Leadership Program also hosted our powerful Refugee Week event "Free Together" where the voices of leaders with lived experience were amplified through storytelling, art and advocacy around the heartfelt theme of Family.

In August, we launched our campaign for Homelessness Week, where we shed light on the severe risk of housing, food and financial insecurity faced by so many of the families we serve.



We also held the first **Finding Safety Project Insights Forum**, centred on the insights of women on temporary visas who have experienced gender-based violence. The Forum was an opportunity for sector partners and government to recognise how Australia has been failing the women we serve, and learn what to do about it. We echoed this message in September as Finding Safety Project Manager Sara Muzamil and I spoke at a Roundtable with **Member for Parramatta Andrew Charlton and NSW Women's Safety Commissioner Hannah Tonkin.**

During October it was all hands on deck, as our staff and sensational volunteers completed the mammoth effort of **reshuffling our office at 10-12 Victoria Rd.** We also had a helping hand from our wonderful board member and friend Fr Sacha SJ.

Our new office layout feels more open and welcoming, has easier access to our beautiful garden, and created a more usable working environment for volunteers, staff and clients.

Our friends at **Inner West for Refugees** also hosted a wonderful Australian Wildlife school holiday event for our community, which offered many clients their first opportunity to meet native Australian animals!

This November, we have been focusing on the future.

Our team, volunteers, board, supporters and Jesuit Province representatives joined together for **robust strategic planning** to set our priorities and goals for the coming year.



Part of preparing for this process was to also commence filling important vacant positions in our team, and I take this moment to welcome **Gabrielle Leafe as our Casework and Emergency Relief Manager** (covering for Rose who recently welcomed a baby boy!).

During November I also represented JRS at the **Department of Home Affairs NGO Dialogue** meeting, and this week we made a submission opposing the brutal suite of **Migration Bills** that may see protection decisions reversed, families separated, and people with unresolved applications facing deportation.

We appreciate the solidarity of our community in raising their voices alongside people seeking asylum, to oppose these Bills and ensure we safeguard the future of migrant and refugee families in Australia.

Continuing our advocacy, we begin December with the **16 Days of Activism to End Gender-Based Violence**, and the launch of our Appeal: **Home for Christmas.**

We sincerely hope you will join us in both initiatives.

I want to thank all the individuals, businesses, workplaces, schools, parishes and community groups that have contributed volunteer-hours, employment opportunities, training, IT equipment, food, vouchers and other essentials to the people we serve. These acts of kindness make our work possible and ensure families and individuals seeking asylum know they are welcome and supported in our community.

I am looking forward to 2025, where we will continue to work together to serve, advocate for and accompany refugees and people seeking asylum.

From all of us at JRS Australia, warmest wishes to all for a safe and happy Christmas and a peaceful, hopeful 2025.

In solidarity,
Josephine



“RESILIENT, HOPEFUL, AND EAGER TO CREATE A BETTER LIFE HERE IN AUSTRALIA”

Our Employment Support Officer Moh Moh Thet, reflects on her work with refugees and people seeking asylum in our Employment Program.

Moh is a women’s rights advocate and scholar who began her journey at JRS earlier this year, as a student intern in our Finding Safety Project. Moh has now been working in our Employment Program for six months, using both her education and lived experience to support people seeking asylum to be job-ready and find meaningful work in Australia. We were privileged this month to also welcome Moh as a Project Officer in our Finding Safety Project, and we are grateful for the insights and advocacy she shares below.

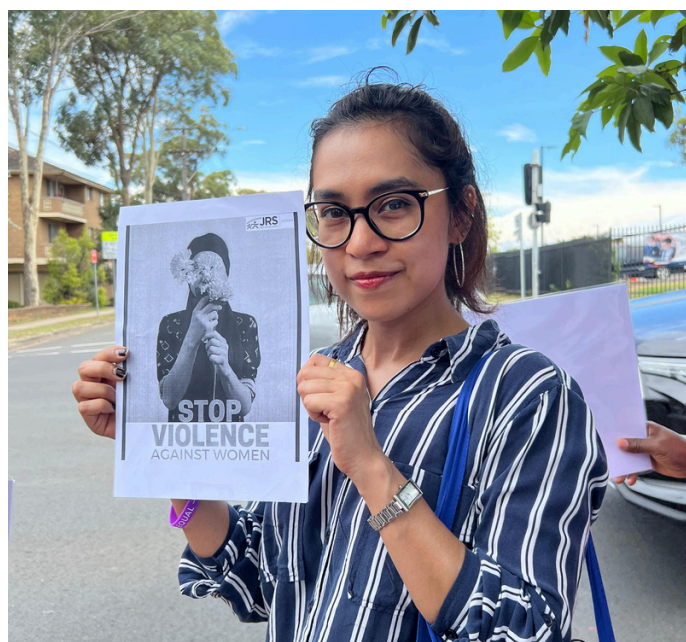
I have been working in the employment team for six months now, supporting individuals from diverse professional backgrounds: medical officers, engineers, IT technicians, finance and banking professionals, care workers, customer service providers—the list goes on. People seeking employment support from our team come with a wide range of personal experiences. Many have endured trauma both before or after arriving in Australia. Despite these challenges, the people we serve are resilient, hopeful, and eager to create a better life here in Australia.

Many of those I work with have faced displacement, war, or political persecution in their home countries.

While Australia has granted them residency, they continue to struggle with employment barriers, visa uncertainty, and credential devaluation. I have seen individuals who were high-achieving professionals in their home countries, who have arrived here only to encounter lengthy and costly processes to practice their profession in Australia. Many must make the choice to pursue different careers as a faster way to earn income.

Our team works hard to address these barriers, and to set expectations, advocate for the people we serve, and find opportunities for them to pursue meaningful employment in our community. It is so important that we empower the people we serve to find employment, as this is an essential pathway to the self-determination and security that refugees and people seeking asylum deserve to find in Australia.

We also know that refugees and people seeking asylum have so much to offer our communities – and we would like to see the people we serve reach their full potential.



That is why, in addition to training and sector advocacy, we also support the people we serve to set short, medium and long-term goals, and connect with mentors in their fields, to enable an ongoing pursuit of and return to their professional careers.

For myself, I am mostly working with women from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds, who encounter significant additional barriers to long-term employment. This is particularly the case for single mothers and women who are experiencing domestic violence, who shoulder the burden of looking after their families while also facing housing, financial and food insecurity. I find it inspiring to see how these women face tough challenges with resilience, and to watch how they thrive when they are given opportunities to rebuild and feel supported with essential services like ours.

But it should not be up to these women to be strong enough to withstand overwhelming and structural injustices.

For many of our long-term clients, in addition to the myriad issues they face, their visa status often restricts access to Centrelink support, or intermittently denies work rights, making it challenging to secure long-term employment. These barriers only increase women’s vulnerability to further abuse as they are reliant on a partner’s income to keep themselves and their children out of homelessness.

When clients do find work, they can often experience further bullying at work, or harassment by their partners and relatives.

It is not easy – but they keep thriving.

At JRS, we also have a dedicated “Women’s Space” which provides female survivors with a safe and supportive environment from which to rebuild.

Both our Employment Program and Finding Safety Project can collaborate here to find tailored and wholistic solutions for the women we serve.

But we know the missing piece is the need for expanded community services and social supports tailored to refugee and asylum-seeking women impacted by domestic and family violence.

Another major barrier I have observed in Australian workplaces is the lack of cultural and disability sensitivity. People with disabilities from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds face multifaceted challenges, including limited social support, unstable employment, visa issues, language barriers, and the complexities of settling in a new country.


In the era of virtual meetings and interviews, language barriers and hearing impairments, for example, add further obstacles.

Although many organisations and employment agencies support refugees and people seeking asylum, there is a definite need to understand the psychosocial barriers of refugee and asylum-seeking populations with greater cultural and disability sensitivity in workplaces.

Finally, another barrier we tackle in the Employment Program is digital literacy skills. Digital skills are essential for training, job-readiness, applications, and tracking job opportunities.

We are also fortunate to receive **donated laptops, software and data from generous organisations** like The Laptop Initiative, which makes job-seeking so much easier for the women I work with.



 Our wonderful colleague and Moh’s fellow Employment Support Officer Zahra, at our Parramatta Office alongside donations from The Laptop Initiative.

However, we always have a waitlist for devices and we welcome any new partners who may be interested in bridging the digital divide and helping to support refugees and people seeking asylum to find meaningful work!

Looking forward to next year, we are excited to have some funding through both the Digital Sisters Program at Good Things Australia, and Impact100 Sydney to provide digital literacy training workshops to the women in our Employment Program.

We also want to say a big thank you to our generous community. Without your support we could not do this important work! Please get in touch with us if you would like to learn more about our Employment Program!

How you can help



We are able to accept:

- Laptops up to 5 years old
- Macbooks up to 7 years old



We kindly ask you to wipe your machine and remove any passwords so we can provide it to the people we are working with even faster. Please make sure to include the charging cable and any other required accessories as necessary for the device.



Collection

Please post devices to:
10-12 Victoria Road
Parramatta NSW 2150



Contact

Tamana Mirzada
Employment Program Manager
tamana.mirzada@jrs.org.au

MONPI'S STORY:

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A NEW LIFE IN AUSTRALIA

Monpi* has overcome great tragedy and hardship to build a new life for herself, as an entrepreneur, a mother, and a survivor of domestic violence.

Monpi is from Papua New Guinea and has fond memories of her early childhood. Raised by her single dad, Monpi remembers playing games with her siblings and running around in the local village. Food and other necessities were often in short supply – but her father would always find a way to provide for them during difficult times.

However, everything changed for Monpi when her father passed away unexpectedly in a car accident. Monpi was left orphaned alongside her sister and younger brother – and, with nobody to look after them, the children had to work around the community in exchange for food.

Despite these hardships, Monpi pushed herself to graduate high school and move on to college.

Monpi became pregnant while in college and, due to the disapproval of her extended family, she was forced to move in with and marry the father of her child. Monpi considers these as some of her darkest days, feeling trapped in the house, experiencing domestic violence, and dreaming of ways to escape.

Monpi's husband did not want her to work – so she did so in secret. Monpi has an entrepreneurial spirit and found a way to buy betel nuts in bulk and sell them as singles to turn a profit. For 11 years, Monpi stashed this money away above her toilet to save for a ticket out of her situation.

Monpi's husband did not want her to work – so she did so in secret.

After a particularly dangerous encounter with her husband, Monpi was forced to book an emergency flight to Australia. **Heartbroken, Monpi had no choice but to leave her son behind with family.**

Life continued to be tough once Monpi arrived in Australia: she was sleeping on the street when a volunteer directed her to JRS.

Our partners at House of Welcome helped find Monpi a room, while the specialist caseworkers in our Finding Safety Project assisted Monpi with food, clothes and blankets at our Women's Space.

Monpi is clever. She perseveres, and her passion is evident to anyone who meets her. Our Employment Program volunteer Camille sat down with Monpi to learn more about her journey, and the role JRS has played in helping her start a new life in Australia.*

** Monpi's name has been changed to protect her privacy.*

Feeling supported with these basics, Monpi was determined to build a new life, work to find financial independence for herself, and to one day bring her son to Australia.

"I was so worried about the fact that I had no papers or experience. I had no idea where to start to look for a job in Australia."

Monpi has since been supported by JRS's Employment Program, through which she learned to drive, got her driver's license, achieved several TAFE qualifications, and completed her First Aid. **These proved essential for securing a job.**

Through our *Pathways to Employment Program*, Monpi also participated in computer classes alongside other women seeking asylum, and she received her first ever laptop which she uses for work:

"JRS have helped me a long way. It's a different thing being helped by strangers, it's not something I ever experienced in my life... but I am so grateful that I got to know the organisation."

With her qualifications, Monpi started a 6-month Work and Welcome program through House of Welcome that led to a placement in a local school. They were so impressed they offered her a permanent position. Monpi is now a full-time Events Assistant, and loves her work.

"JRS was such an amazing support for me as I set up my life in Australia. Tamana [JRS Australia Employment Program Manager] is especially such a kind and helpful person. I like the way she talks to me with respect and she always asks how I am and if I need any help."

Monpi is happy here – and now considers Australia her home.

But Monpi is still working to bring her son to Australia so they can enjoy the new life she has built for them. In her spare time, she uses her laptop to watch the cartoons her son would watch on YouTube, to feel close to him even while they're far away...

So many of the people we serve, like Monpi, are fighting to be united with their loved ones.

With your help, we can continue to join Monpi in this fight, and be a home away from home for all refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia.



Zainab is a mother, leader, advocate, soon-to-be lawyer, and a strong Hazara woman. As a hard-working person, Zainab wears many hats - and at JRS Australia we are lucky to have her as a member of the Refugee Leadership Program.

The Refugee Leadership Program connects schools and community groups with leaders like Zainab, who get paid as experts to share their stories and insights from their lived experience of forced displacement.

We first met Zainab in May this year, when she presented on an all-female panel of Hazara leaders at our event 'Freedom: Reflections from Hazara Leaders', held alongside the Alzahra Support Association, and headed by our long-term friend and advocate, Hava Rezaie.

We were thrilled to then welcome Zainab to our Leadership Program in time for our 'Free Together' event in July, which we shared about in our recent Spring LINK. Since then, Zainab has generously shared her story and raised awareness at several events, including community conversations, school engagements and parish table talks!

Recently Zainab and fellow leader Sara joined a Choir and Conversation event with our friends at Inner West for Refugees, and then answered some questions for their newsletter. Thank you to Inner West for Refugees for allowing us to reproduce the interview here, and to Zainab for your advocacy and leadership.

Q: What would you like to share about your experiences before arriving in Australia?

Z: Before arriving in Australia, I had a challenging yet meaningful journey. I grew up as an asylum seeker in Iran, and when I returned to Afghanistan in 2005, I made the decision to join the police force. I studied at the Police Academy, where I was the only girl in my class, determined to make a difference. After graduating, I spent three years working in an organisation dedicated to fighting terrorism. However, in 2013, I had to leave Afghanistan due to safety concerns, and I was pregnant at the time. My son was born in a detention centre in Indonesia, and, fortunately, in 2015, we arrived in Australia on a humanitarian visa.

STRONG. HUMBLE. HARD WORKING. LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT ON ZAINAB KHAVARY

"From that moment, Australia became my home, a place where we could start a new life, and I could build a future for myself and my son."

Q: What would you like to say about your experiences when you arrived in Australia?

Z: When I arrived in Australia in 2015 with my one-year-old son, I faced many challenges. I couldn't speak English, didn't know anyone, and had no family support. Navigating life here was incredibly difficult, especially as a single mother. I quickly realised that I wouldn't receive much support, even from some of the organisations set up to help refugees. On top of this, I felt isolated and even excluded from my community due to my status as a single mother. These experiences taught me resilience and the importance of building a support network. They also made me more determined to work toward creating inclusive support systems for others who arrive here with similar challenges. I hope that by sharing my story, I can help shed light on the gaps in services and inspire positive changes for future arrivals.

Q: What would you like people to know? And what actions would you like people to take?

Z: I love Australia. I love being Australian, and I am proud to call myself an Australian. But I am also a girl from Afghanistan, and I feel the pain of the women and girls there who are facing unimaginable hardships. I want people to understand that while I am grateful for my life here, I cannot forget those who are still struggling for basic rights and freedoms.

I want the people of the Inner West area to be leaders in standing with the women and girls of Afghanistan. On November 12, I attended the SAWA group event and was inspired to see so many people doing what they can to support Afghan women and girls in this time of crisis. Afghanistan is the only country where women and girls are banned from pursuing education—a basic human right.

By raising awareness, sharing their stories, and keeping this issue alive, we can make sure the world doesn't forget them. Together, our voices can help restore hope and dignity for women and girls of Afghanistan.

STATEMENT:

MIGRATION BILLS

"THIS IS NOT THE AUSTRALIA WE BELIEVE IN."

Late in the evening on Thursday 28 November, the Albanese government passed three new amendments to the Migration Act.

These oppressive new laws were rushed through parliament with little opportunity for public scrutiny, and will have extremely negative consequences for refugees and people seeking asylum.

Amelia Savage, our Head of Policy, Advocacy and Communications, shares the below statement condemning the Albanese government and affirming our ongoing solidarity with refugees and people seeking asylum.

"The passage of these three Bills is a devastating blow to thousands of people who already call Australia home.

Families who have lived, worked, and contributed to this country for years now face the terrifying prospect of being ripped apart and sent away with no guarantee of safety or dignity.

The Albanese government's actions are a betrayal of Australia's proud multicultural identity and our international commitments to protect those fleeing danger and persecution. Instead of offering leadership grounded in compassion and fairness, these laws enforce fear, division, and harm.

Under these laws Australia may pay off third countries to warehouse people seeking asylum.

Children may be separated from their parents, people can have their protection findings overturned, and individuals could be sent to uncertain and unsafe futures.

Those at risk are our friends, neighbours, and workmates—people who call Australia home and who deserve to live here with stability and respect.

"The passage of these three Bills is a devastating blow to thousands of people who already call Australia home."

This is not the Australia we believe in. Yet, we hold on to hope because we know that so many more Australians stand for justice, welcome, and diversity.

Together, we must fight for a future where every person who calls Australia home can live in safety, dignity, and peace."

JRS Australia calls on all communities to join us in standing with refugees, people seeking asylum and migrants.

What can you do?

- Raise your voice - let people know that you oppose these cruel and oppressive laws.
- Learn more about our Submission opposing these devastating Bills - visit our website.
- Support JRS Australia's Home for Christmas Appeal
- Follow us on Instagram or Facebook for regular updates about our advocacy, events, and opportunities to show solidarity.

**JOIN US FOR THE #16DAYSOFACTIVISM
TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS**

<https://aus.jrs.net/en/16-days-16-stories/>



Please consider donating
to JRS Australia:

donate
here



Photo Credit: Alphonsus Fok/Diocese of Parramatta

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**. The people we serve 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 • E: info@jrs.org.au • W: aus.jrs.net



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If undeliverable return to:
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Kings Cross NSW 1340

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