

## **JRS: Building capacity in PNG and East Africa**

JRS will collaborate with the UNHCR to undertake a participatory assessment of West Papuan refugees to establish the scope of their challenges and needs. Wren Chadwick, JRS Australia's representative in PNG's Western Province, says the exercise will help JRS to provide assistance that is tailored to the needs of the 10,000 refugees who have lived in the border region of PNG for the past two decades.

Wren, who arrived in PNG in early December to support the work of the diocese of Daru-Kiunga with refugees, has spent the past two months researching ways in which to continue the groundwork laid by her predecessor, Mariano Griva. 'December wasn't the best time to get things going, but it was a good opportunity to slowly orientate myself to issues and the place,' she said. 'I've learnt from my previous experience that if you try to dive in too quickly you often waste time and effort. You need to gain people's trust before you can work out what's achievable.'

In response to one of the needs she has identified, Wren will hold training sessions for local priests and diocesan personnel on refugee and human rights law.

Wren plans to expand the purpose of the local JRS newsletter, which aims to share information with refugees to help them make informed decisions. 'I thought that was a good opportunity to involve them in creating that information. We've got a group who are coming on a weekly basis to create a participatory newsletter; they go out and do stories, put articles together, and analyse them. The exercise will also enable them to be critical about any information source.'

This skills transfer and giving voice to refugees are especially important in PNG, where education is often abruptly terminated on the basis of exam results. 'I went around to introduce the project, and had no idea who would turn up. I ended up with 16 very keen young people, and more have joined since the word has got out there. I might have a problem keeping the numbers manageable!'

*By Catherine Marshall*

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