

# Annual Report 2014



 A young Rohingya asylum seeker rests after being rescued off the coast of East Aceh, Indonesia. Photographer Hotli Simanjuntak

## Director's Letter:

# Solidarity: a graceful dance

*Aloysious Mowe SJ*

This past week I have been looking at photograph after photograph of Rohingya and Bangladeshi boat people, most of them looking desperate, emaciated, ill. Some have made it to shore in Malaysia and been taken to detention centres. Thousands more remain at sea, abandoned by the smugglers who were crewing the ships, and refused permission to disembark by the three countries within immediate proximity: Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has accused these countries of playing “maritime ping-pong with human beings”.

Meanwhile, Australia has admitted to turning boats back to Indonesia, and has placed itself at risk of violating international norms by recently returning Vietnamese and Sri Lankan asylum seekers to the countries where they claim to be suffering persecution, without giving these people due process. Asylum seekers who made it here before turn-backs began continue to languish in offshore processing centres, with no hope of being settled in Australia.

Australia has played maritime billiards with these human beings, potting them into holes

*cont on p2*

where, the government hopes, they will be out of Australia's sight, and out of Australia's mind.

JRS is prone to saying that our key way of working with asylum seekers and refugees is that of accompaniment. What this expresses is solidarity, that central idea of Catholic Social Teaching that is rooted in the belief that God so loved humanity that the Divine became one of us in the person of Jesus Christ. The least, the last, and the littlest in the reckoning of society are nevertheless bound to God by this irrevocable act of

solidarity. If we refuse to regard asylum seekers as our brothers and sisters, we refuse also to be part of God's family. Pope Francis repeatedly laments "the profound lack of fraternity" and "the absence of a culture of solidarity" in the world today. Our selfishness condemns others to death; but it also condemns us to a more devastating annihilation, from which there may be no return. Our supporters and volunteers were extraordinarily generous in 2014, partly I think because you wanted to say unambiguously that the Australian

government's cruel and inhumane policies do not represent how you feel about asylum seekers.

As the year ended, and JRS prepared to find better ways to accompany a greater number of asylum seekers through our new centre in Parramatta, Arrupe Place, I could not help thinking that our solidarity with asylum seekers was a kind of graceful dance, hand holding hand, step matching step, leading us into closer fraternity with one another, and with the God who is the Lord of the Dance.

## Advocacy and Communications

The toxic rhetoric against asylum seekers in the national debate, coupled with policies aimed at stripping them of protection, made it ever more urgent for JRS to advocate for the just and humane treatment of asylum seekers who look to Australia for assistance.

JRS's commitment to high-level lobbying for the delivery of humane refugee policies was consistent and ongoing in 2014. Staff met regularly with senior representative of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIPB) to raise issues related to both asylum

seekers in detention and those in the community.

JRS made a submission to the National Human Rights Commission's National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention 2014. In its report, JRS said that the facilities in which children were being held in detention on Christmas Island and the Australian mainland were inappropriate and that all children in held detention should be immediately released. JRS's Head of Policy and Advocacy attended a high-level roundtable at Parliament House to discuss a long-term framework for Australia's asylum seeker policy.

Following the event, JRS released a statement calling for regional cooperation and published a paper titled *A Regional Response to Forced Migration*.

JRS launched its new website [www.jrs.org.au](http://www.jrs.org.au), which aims to use stories and images to publicise the work it does and to advocate on behalf of the refugees and asylum seekers with whom it works.

It finally joined the social media revolution on Twitter at @JRS\_Aus, highlighting developments around Australian asylum seeker and refugee policy, raising awareness of the plight of refugees seeking asylum in this country, and continuing to advocate on behalf of these vulnerable people in the powerful social media sphere.

## Youth engagement

Australia's future refugee landscape will be determined by the youth of today.

For this reason, JRS Australia engages with young people on a broad range of platforms, helping them to understand the complex issues that give impetus to forced migration and displacement, illustrating the ways in which global events impact on Australia and clarifying the importance of humane refugee advocacy and policy development.

JRS reaches out to school and university students by delivering talks and workshops, promoting awareness-raising events and encouraging involvement in refugee advocacy.

JRS nurtures young people who wish to engage with refugee issues in a meaningful way: several schools have incorporated its refugee approach into their own social justice programs, with students organising BBQs and sports events and assisting in refugee residents' meetings.

At the beginning of 2014 JRS Australia launched the JRS Youth Ambassador Program. The program engages young people in advocating on behalf of refugees and asylum seekers, most notably within their own peer groups. Activities for Youth Ambassadors include addressing peers and others in the community on asylum and refugee issues; assisting in the development of resources for young people; and speaking at JRS fundraising events. JRS Youth Ambassador Daniel Crowley delivered a speech on behalf of JRS at the 2014 Xavier Social Justice Network's JRS Dinner in Melbourne.

# Shelter Project

The past year was marked by significant change and growth for the Shelter Project. While JRS has continued to provide assistance for clients in the key areas of casework support, financial assistance and temporary accommodation, it has also worked to establish a new drop-in service in Parramatta. After extensive consultation and planning throughout 2014, Arrupe Place – named in honour of the founder of JRS, Fr Pedro Arrupe – opened its doors to clients in January 2015. Its role is to provide asylum seekers living in Western Sydney with a wide range of comprehensive and accessible services, as well as offering a safe and welcoming space.

*... the challenges faced by asylum seekers did not ease in 2014 and are likely to worsen in 2015*

Arrupe Place is open Monday to Friday from 10am to 4pm, with Fridays reserved for free legal services provided by RACS (Refugee Advice and Casework Service). Clients can access casework services, general information and referrals, advocacy support, a foodbank, home visiting services, free legal assistance provided by RACS, financial and material assistance and social support activities.

donate

## How will Arrupe Place spend your money?

- \$50 could provide a vulnerable family with a supermarket voucher, enabling them to buy essentials such as rice, flour, tea, and fresh vegetables for the week.
- \$150 would provide a fortnightly allowance for the food, travel, and medical needs of asylum seekers living in the JRS Blaiket Shelter in Elizabeth Bay.
- \$450 would assist a family seeking asylum with their basic fortnightly living expenses including food, travel and medical needs.
- \$40 would pay for an Opal Card, providing weekly train and bus transport to ferry asylum seekers to and from important appointments with lawyers, doctors and potential employers.

Arrupe Place is open to anyone seeking asylum, but the level of support provided is based on an assessment of an individual's needs, vulnerabilities, existing links to support services, and JRS's capacity to assist at that time.

While JRS is encouraged by the hope and possibilities of Arrupe Place, it is also aware that the challenges faced by asylum seekers did not ease in 2014 and are likely to worsen in 2015. The number of clients in need of accommodation and financial support in 2014 continued to increase and securing ongoing employment remained a struggle for most. Harsher and more complex legislation, tightening restrictions on who can receive government assistance and the introduction of TPVs are likely to present new challenges in the coming year.

*... volunteers continued to be a source of strength and an invaluable resource for JRS's clients.*

Though there were many challenges for the Shelter Project in 2014, there were also great strengths, and volunteers continued to be a source of strength and an invaluable resource for JRS's clients.

Volunteers were essential to the management and maintenance of the Blaiket Shelter, as well as the much-needed casework support and accompaniment of Shelter Project clients. Volunteers will again be called upon to assist with the day-to-day operations of Arrupe Place in 2015, and will provide support with reception, accompaniment and hospitality, casework and home visiting.

We look forward to the coming year and continuing to serve and support asylum seekers living in the community and we look forward to welcoming asylum seekers to Arrupe Place.

Staff and volunteers met some of the detainees' basic practical needs, took them on excursions when permitted, conducted weekly religious services, ensured that their psychosocial needs were met and were available should asylum seekers simply need to talk. This care exemplified JRS's ethos of accompaniment: a reminder and a witness to asylum seekers that they have not been forgotten, despite being held behind electric fences, often in remote parts of Australia.

## Pastoral Accompaniment

In 2014, JRS partnered with the Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of Charity to offer pastoral care to asylum seekers detained in immigration detention centres on the Australian mainland and on Christmas Island.

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# Community Detention

Throughout 2014, families and single males in the JRS Residence Determination Project had still not had their asylum claims processed by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP). Some had been waiting in community and held detention for almost four years, while others had not had their initial interview conducted a year after arriving in Australia.

This, along with the increasingly toxic government rhetoric and policy toward asylum seekers generally, made the closing of the project at the end of the year a bittersweet moment.

While the government began to restructure its model of services for asylum seekers, JRS continued to provide accommodation and casework support to its clients.

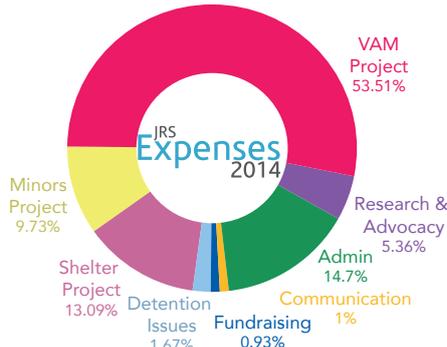
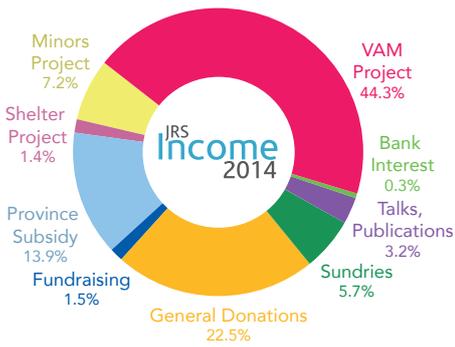
This included working with men and families to address their health and welfare needs, liaising with the department to help communicate updates to clients, and organising a range of group activities.

Through the generous support of a number of volunteers, a weekly activities hub was established and outings such as trips to the zoo, picnics and football matches were organised.

In these spaces, clients were able to provide support and accompaniment to each other, as well as be encouraged in their own capacity to contribute and live meaningful lives in Australia. The idea and practice of accompaniment, a foundational aspect of JRS's work, became increasingly important as staff looked for new ways to provide companionship and help individuals and families establish support networks.

As the project closed in late November, JRS was able to celebrate the project's achievements and also recognise the increasing need for advocacy for the fairer treatment and care of asylum seekers who arrive in Australia.

## 2014 Financial Report



Income	
Revenue	1,995,433
Bank Interest	5,208
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>2,000,641</b>

Total	
Income	2,000,641
Expenses	1,767,387
<b>Balance</b>	<b>233,254</b>

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