

# Children at the Centre



## UPDATE

**“They did it. They got here for their children. They fight really hard these parents. They do it for their kids. And so do we as a community of support.”**

Kerry O'Neill, Health Clinic Manager, ASC

**Every day children of all ages visit the Asylum Seekers Centre (ASC) with their families. The sounds of babies and toddlers are ever-present. For older children who are new to Australia, the wait time to start school can seem like forever until their bridging visas are secured.**

Children coming to the Centre have often endured extreme and difficult experiences in their transition to a new country. Like their parents, many children are dealing with serious trauma. They may have lost or left behind family relatives, parents, brothers and sisters. Their education has been disrupted. Many are hearing and learning English for the first time.

In 2017 ASC started its Family and Children's program. Staff and volunteers work together to ensure we respond to the most immediate needs of families who are seeking protection in our community. We work closely with government and non-government education providers to ensure children's access to school.

ASC provides families with food, health care, employment assistance and a range of valuable social supports. We offer limited financial relief to families without any means of income. We have some provision to provide emergency housing and can provide some support for securing rental properties.

**220 new children**

were welcomed to the Centre  
over the last year



**942 children**

registered for support  
at our Centre



**68% increase**

in school enrolments  
in the last year



**See inside for updates from ASC's Health Clinic  
and Family and Children team.**







Photo credit: Michael Amendolia

Kerry O'Neill, ASC's Health Clinic Manager speaks about support for children in our Health Clinic.

"Often with the kids, we work around the complexity of their lived experiences and trauma. They don't talk about it, they feel it. What do they do with what they've seen? How they express it can be a challenge and children of all ages respond in very different ways. Some withdraw, some become very grown up and some will start to act out.

"Developing trust and a feeling of safety takes time. It's the reason we refer children to experts in trauma counselling and family therapy. Loneliness is a big thing and we work closely with our Family and Children team at the Centre, to make sure the kids are getting playtime and time to just be children.

"Young children are really adaptive. Older ones, particularly adolescents, face additional struggles. Activities like sport and connection to community are very important.

"Nutrition and oral health are major issues. The cavities cause children a lot of pain and discomfort. As a priority, when it comes to children's health, we refer directly to oral health services and children's hospitals so the kids can get well, eat healthy food and be happier."



ASC's Family and Children team, Felicia Paul and Antoinette Uwera (pictured above), share some insights of their work with children at ASC.

#### 0-5 year olds

Younger children at the Centre often experience attachment difficulties associated with their past trauma, and what their parents went through. The children have little to entertain them and become very attached to their mothers because they are afraid. Socialisation with other children as well as organised time away from their parents helps to build their confidence.

We introduce families to free community activities and we help parents access childcare and preschool. There, children can grow friendships and improve their English. It can be challenging in the beginning but over time the whole family benefits from it, particularly when parents need to focus on finding employment.

Depending on what visa families arrive into Australia on when they apply for protection, there is often at least a three-month wait before bridging visas are granted. It is not until this time that children can access school without the need to pay international school fees, which their parents cannot afford.

#### 6-11 year olds

9am-3pm every day, often for months, can be a really long and lonely time when there are no friends to play with, no toys and no access to computers. Children don't understand why they can't go to school and you see it in their body language. They lose their spark and vitality, they become sad. It's astonishing though how quickly primary aged kids bounce back once they start school. The energy is there again and the relief for their parents is really tangible.

While children are waiting to go to school, we organise English classes for the family at ASC and work with educators to develop school readiness resources, which help but doesn't make up for their gaps in education.

Children attend our swimming, recreation and excursion programs and we connect families to their local sporting and community groups. We assist with entry to school, help complete forms and pay for waiver application fees, school uniforms and basics to start school. We help children in high school quickly access Intensive Language programs.

#### 12-17 year olds

When a single parent family of four arrived homeless at ASC, the services worked together to find housing and provide financial assistance and food. The eldest child, as is often the case, took on adult responsibilities and it was the second child, Jabari\*, that concerned us greatly. The traumatic events he had witnessed impacted his whole being. Jabari was completely withdrawn. Our Health Clinic arranged specialist trauma counselling and when Jabari started high school, we worked closely with the school counsellor for support. It took over six months before Jabari started to interact with others and smile. It felt like the sun was starting to shine for him again. \*name changed



*I love to Swim. I enjoy eating lasagne. I live in Australia. My friend is Australia.*

**“The kids give the Centre its soul. Having children here makes ASC a better place. They represent the hope that it will get better. Because there’s optimism with children.”**

Kerry O'Neill, Health Clinic Manager, ASC

**Donate today and help the children that come through our doors each year.**

ASC recognises and welcomes people seeking asylum into our community. We work collaboratively to provide each person, child and their family with the supports they need to improve their health and well-being.

We assist parents to access community groups, sports clubs and education so children can grow friendships, build connections and enjoy their childhood.

Your donation will give people seeking asylum access to the basic supports they need to be able to live with dignity in our community.

**Please give generously so children and their families can thrive and feel a real sense of belonging in our community.**

Thank you for the drawings Samara, Zola, Jehan, Jada, Antoinette and children at ASC.



**\$50**

provides a child a backpack, school hat, stationery, lunch box and bottle



**\$110**

pays the administration cost to apply for a school fee waiver

**“That \$110 has been a life saver. ASC’s ability to pay the school administration fee has made a big difference to children. And for families... huge.”**

Felicia Paul, Family & Children Worker, ASC



**\$450**

assists a family in emergency accommodation for up to one week



**\$1,000**

contributes to financial relief for a family for one month



Asylum Seekers Centre

Becher House, 43 Bedford Street, Newtown, NSW 2042

P: (02) 9078 1900 E: [appeals@asylumseekerscentre.org.au](mailto:appeals@asylumseekerscentre.org.au)

ABN 47 164 509 475 CFN 17163

[asylumseekerscentre.org.au](http://asylumseekerscentre.org.au)