

# Asylum Seekers Centre Annual Report 2019-2020

ABN: 47 164 509 475





“We are all humans  
in this together.”

A message of kindness from a supporter



# Contents

At a glance	04
Chair & CEO's Report	06
Anika's story	08
Bala's story	12
2019-20 Highlights	14
Elena's story	24
2019-20 Highlights	26
Financial Statements	32
Our Board	35
Our Patrons	36
Our Ambassadors	37
The people who make it possible	38
Our Major Supporters	40

# At a glance

The Asylum Seekers Centre is a place of welcome and provides practical and personal support for people living in the community who are seeking asylum.

## OUR VISION

Australia opens its heart to people seeking asylum, affirming their basic human rights to freedom from persecution, violence and fear. Recognising our shared humanity, we extend our welcome, respect and support. We are a stronger and more vibrant country as a result.

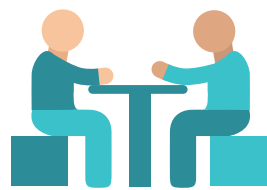
## OUR VALUES

The Asylum Seekers Centre's work is underpinned by a set of values built on our commitment to a human rights approach.

## THE ASC IS :



Compassionate and connected



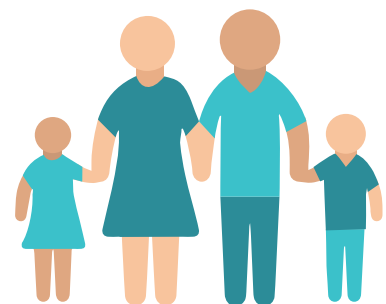
People centred



Collaborative



Innovative



**MORE THAN 4,000 PEOPLE  
SEEKING ASYLUM ASSISTED  
IN THE 2019-2020 YEAR**  
**1000+ CHILDREN**



**PEOPLE ASSISTED  
FROM 90 COUNTRIES**

## SERVICES AND SUPPORT INCLUDING :



Primary health clinic



Legal support and advice



Foodbank



Daily hot lunches



English classes



Recreational activities



Art activities



Employment assistance



Individualised support







Immunisation



Family and school support



Job readiness programs

 @asylumseekerscentre  
 @asylum-seekers-centre  
 @ASCSyd  
 @asylumseekerscentre

# Chair and CEO's Report

It is with great pleasure that we share with you the Asylum Seekers Centre 2019–2020 annual report.

This year is so clearly divided for all of us into two parts, before the Covid-19 pandemic and after. Our staff, volunteers and everyone associated with The Asylum Seekers Centre have so much to be proud of in our response to the extreme circumstances of the year.

And yet, we will look back on this year as one of the toughest for people seeking asylum. While the Federal Government developed a response to the pandemic and declared that 'we are all in this together', the door was closed to almost 100,000 people seeking asylum who were living in Australia, waiting a decision on their requests for asylum.

When borders closed around the world, the Federal Government told people on temporary visas to 'go home' and provided no financial safety net.

The cruelty of this direction to people who had left those homes in fear for their lives and families, was crushing.

As Sydney went into lockdown and the ASC was forced to change the way we provided support services, calls to our phone line tripled. People lost work, were struggling to put food on the table and pay their rent. Many people who were relying on ASC drop-in services became digitally disconnected.

The Asylum Seekers Centre community responded in the way that it always does, with energy and generosity. The staff and volunteers changed every aspect of the way we provided services and supported people and we have deep gratitude for the way the whole team pulled together and continued support for people seeking asylum.

Foodbank changed to a home delivery service because people

could not leave their homes. The ASC health clinic found innovative ways to get medications to people, introduced telehealth appointments and stayed open for vital face-to-face health checks. The device donation program ramped up to provide hundreds more laptops, phones and tablets so that people could keep in touch, children could continue learning from home and job-searching and training could continue.

Through all of this, our extraordinary volunteers adapted and dug in deeper. Many changed their jobs to respond to the new needs and 260 new volunteers joined our team, using change in their work routines to give their time and energy to people seeking asylum in our community.

Times are hard but there was also unexpected positivity. We had many more opportunities to

share our story and to support people in our community to talk safely about what's important to them. Through the kindness and generosity of many donors the ASC heads into the next year of challenge in a sound financial position.

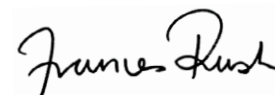
The NSW Government provided a package of assistance for multicultural communities, including people seeking asylum, to help with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Acting Minister for Multiculturalism Geoff Lee recognised the role of community organisations who have "shown immense leadership at this time." The ASC was granted a portion of this emergency relief which will provide housing, food, living and digital connection as we go into the 2020-2021 year. Covid-19 has provided us an opportunity to take what we have learned and accelerate some

changes to better deliver on our strategy. We will launch some new directions and initiatives in the next year to respond to the needs and opportunities we have seen during this unprecedented time.

We want to thank our volunteer Board, staff, volunteers, donors and supporters for your passion, dedication and most of all your kindness.



Betty Hounslow AM  
Chair  
Asylum Seekers Centre



Frances Rush OAM  
Chief Executive Officer  
Asylum Seekers Centre





# It feels like home: Anika's story

**A few tough and tumultuous years have ended in a win for aspiring neurologist Anika Reza, as she graduated from a Bachelor of Medical Sciences with strong results.**

Anika, 23, has always been a focused student, but her carefully laid plans for the future took a hit after she graduated high school.

Weeks before embarking on what she thought would be a family holiday to Australia in 2016, her mother broke the news that they would not return to Bangladesh.

Anika's father, a journalist, had been receiving death threats after reporting on political corruption, and the family was forced to flee.

She had to leave behind her graduation cap, photos, dolls, childhood treasures – and the possibility of ever returning home.

The abrupt move threw her off-kilter. "Back in Bangladesh I was quite extroverted, I had

lots of friends, I was studying and doing other stuff, I wasn't a nerd," she says. But the upheaval in her life and her family's tenuous financial situation in Australia affected Anika's stress levels and social life.

On top of everything, she was frustrated that she couldn't start university at the same time as her friends back in Bangladesh.

In Australia, people waiting for an outcome on their asylum application are required to pay international student fees upfront at university – at a cost of up to \$50,000 per year.

Anika's family had been accessing services at the Asylum Seekers Centre including foodbank, legal support, computer

access, and job interview coaching. Her dad reached out to the centre for advice on accessing university.

Volunteer Jude Stoddart helped Anika identify and apply for a scholarship at Macquarie University for people seeking asylum, that would see her fees waived.

But Anika was sceptical. "Because I was going through a bad time, I was like 'What if I don't get in?'"

"But I did get in and I also got the scholarship. I actually went out and I got notebooks and pens and stuff like that. It was like - finally it's over and I can start studying. That was a good day."

During her studies, Anika's family's asylum application

was accepted by the Australian Government and they were recognised as refugees.

The certainty of protection allowed Anika to focus on her career goals in medicine or neuroscience.

**"When I was 16 I started volunteering at an autism welfare centre, working with kids with special needs, that's what got me interested in the human brain."**

Anika has excelled academically. Last year, in a team of Macquarie students, she won prizes in an international science competition, iGEM.

With undergraduate studies at Macquarie University completed, Anika is now preparing to sit a Graduate Medical School Admissions Test in the hope of entering medical school.

As she's settled into her new life – making friends at university and working a casual retail job – things have slowly become easier.

"It was hard at the beginning, but I kept my studies in check, and things at home," she says.

"It's been so long, four years now. It feels like home."

Submitting her final exam felt like a milestone, not just for Anika, but her whole family.

"It was overwhelming, overwhelmingly good... It was like 'What now? What next?' It's been a journey."



Share the whole story at [asylumseekerscentre.org.au](https://asylumseekerscentre.org.au)





**“In my country it was not safe. I came with so many problems and ran away with the kids, and I didn’t know where to sleep, and I didn’t have any money, and not enough clothes.**

**When RACS\* lawyers told us to go to the Asylum Seekers Centre (ASC), it was one Friday afternoon... The ASC gave us some food, and they told us we have a place to live... I really cried with my tears and I was really happy.”**

**\* Refugee Advice and Casework Service**



# Bala's story: 'We were fighting by ourselves'

When Bala\* arrived at the Asylum Seekers Centre in October, he was at breaking point – financially and mentally.

Bala had been out of work three months and couldn't afford to pay rent or buy food for his wife and young daughter.

As temporary visa holders, Bala and his family was ineligible for Centrelink support. "We were fighting by ourselves," he said.

"As soon as we came to the ASC we met Sam. He comforted me with his words. When I was talking with him, I could see that at the centre there are other people like me." Bala, a Hindu, fled his Muslim-majority home country due to religious

persecution. Bala struggled to find stable work due to the temporary nature of his bridging visa.

"When I was jobless, it was hard to provide food even for my daughter. The food services that we got from the Asylum Seekers Centre was a big help," he said.

At the start of 2020, the ASC's family support team helped Bala with the costs and process of getting his daughter Devi into preschool. He said thanks to advocacy from the ASC and special attention from

the childcare centre director, he'd seen improvements in his daughter's development. "She's made friends. She's very happy in preschool, she's learning new things," he said.

Bala also made use of the Asylum Seekers Centre's employment service and health clinic. Centre staff helped him and his wife find psychological support and financial support.

Then finally this year, after years of waiting, Bala had his refugee status recognised and received a protection visa. "It felt

like a big pressure had suddenly been lifted from my chest, from my shoulders, from my head," he said. "This protection visa guarantees us that we don't have to go back to the country again, my daughter's life will be secure here.

"We can think of the future now. "All these years, we couldn't think of anything, only one thing we were thinking: What will happen if we have to go back?"

Bala is now employed again, as a security guard. But with permanent residency, he hopes

he can return to the career he's passionate about: teaching.

**"I'm not only alive, I am looking forward to doing something with my life... to helping my community and making my future here."**



Share the whole story at [asylumseekerscentre.org.au](https://asylumseekerscentre.org.au)

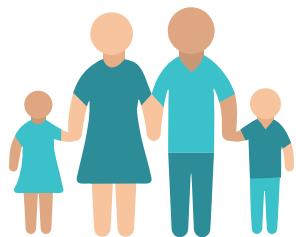
\* Bala is not his real name. He has chosen to be anonymous and use an alternative photo.



# 2019-2020 Highlights and achievements

## We connect people to supports and services

The ASC works with people seeking asylum so they have the supports and services they need to make their own life in Australia while waiting for their claim for protection to be processed and recognised.



**4,100 PEOPLE  
SEEKING ASYLUM  
ASSISTED IN THE  
2019-2020 YEAR**  
25% of these people  
were under 18

### Safe housing

By providing short-term housing in two locations, assisting with rental costs and paying for temporary accommodation the ASC provided more than 6500 nights of accommodation, for approximately 105 people this year.

Housing assistance gives people an option to live safely while they get healthcare, look for work, undertake training, work on their English skills and have stability. People in shared housing can

also make friends and share the responsibilities of a co-living space.

Our valued partners, the Sisters of Charity Foundation, launched the Asylum Seekers Housing Program in 2014, which has provided more than five years of safe and welcome accommodation through a residential building in the inner west of Sydney.

This year the residents have transformed a previously unkempt patch in the building's grounds into an abundant vegetable garden. The garden is a source of great pleasure and pride for Providence House residents, who have used the produce for cooking and teas.



**6,500+ NIGHTS OF  
ACCOMMODATION  
PROVIDED IN  
2019-2020**  
105 were assisted  
with housing



**185 NEW JOBS**

### Employment support

People seeking asylum were supported by a team of volunteers and staff to become work-ready, look for work, apply, interview and begin new work opportunities. In the 2019-2020 year, many people who had been employed lost their jobs. Often more than one job. Despite the unstable job market and limitations on training opportunities, the employment team supported 185 people to find new employment opportunities.

### Financial support

Through our partnership with Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation (Bridge), the Asylum Seekers Centre provided 269 people with \$284,402 of financial support.

This financial relief to assist people in crisis was used to pay for rent, utility bills, food and clothing. The ASC has a long-term collaboration with Bridge and we celebrate the strength of what we can achieve.

### Cooking for the community

Supported by a grant from the City of Sydney, a group of women from the community completed four modules in hospitality training provided by the catering

organisation Nuance. The group then prepared and served lunch for sixty people in the daily hot lunch program and were contracted to provide the end of year celebrations of the centre. Two men then participated in some of the modules and catered for a group of women in the centre at the International Women's Day celebrations. Many participants in the training program went on to secure work in hospitality.

### Support for families with young people

Children whose families are seeking asylum are not automatically eligible for free participation in public education. The ASC provided support for families to apply for fee waivers by assisting with forms and the costs involved in application. Support is also provided for correct school uniforms, excursions, technology fees and textbooks.

During Covid-19 lockdown in Sydney many children were unable to participate in online learning because they did not have the necessary technology. The ASC provided refurbished laptops and tablets to support families and contributed to ensure internet connectivity.

Early learning programs for children aged 3 and 4 years are critical to provide a preparation for school and socialisation for children. It also allows parents to participate in training, English language courses and work. The ASC, through partnerships with Canterbury-Bankstown

Council's Early Childhood Education and Care program and Auburn Integricare Preschool, are assisting 50 children to access early childhood education. And expansion of this program is planned for 2020-2021.

The ASC worked closely with the NSW Department of Education to facilitate children's access to public education.



**98 FAMILIES ASSISTED  
WITH SCHOOL  
ENROLMENT AND  
PARTICIPATION**  
**50 CHILDREN IN EARLY  
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**  
181 children  
provided with school  
readiness packs



# 2019-2020 Highlights and achievements

CONTINUED



## Foodbank on the road

2020 brought a massive change to the way the ASC supports people seeking asylum to access fresh and healthy nutrition.

From July 2019 to March 2020, hot lunches were provided every weekday by an incredible roster of volunteer cooks and servers. Lunches were attended by up to 90 people a day and included culturally appropriate and Halal food, vegetarian options and protein. In March, it became unsafe to host drop-in lunches and focus shifted to the provision of home delivery food.

As food rationing in supermarkets and lockdown hit Sydney, the ASC responded by ensuring that food supplies were delivered to any people seeking asylum who needed support. Volunteers packed and delivered food each day, supporting more than 1100 people each fortnight by the end of June 2020.

Donations to the foodbank increased and generous grants and donations funded emergency

relief including food insecurity. We wanted to especially acknowledge the contribution of the NSW State Government, The Berg Family Foundation, The Scully Fund, The Macquarie Foundation, Inner West Council and Citrix. Many other generous individual donors and groups provided food, toiletries and cash donations to keep this massive food mobilisation going.

I can't find words to thank you 🙏, how human you are.

Thank you so much for your support, love and care.

Come to my place, I will cook for you.

Thank you so much for your help. We are having a struggle and really appreciate your help.



**15,732 BAGS OF GROCERIES PROVIDED**  
**9,530 Visits to foodbank or home deliveries**



**SUPPORTING NUTRITION FOR MORE THAN 1,000 PEOPLE EACH MONTH.**

## Telehealth appointments and flu vaccinations

The health clinic adapted to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic in many innovative ways. As well as remaining open for appointments throughout the entire pandemic, telehealth appointments were provided where no face-to-face appointment was required and it was safer for a person to remain in their home. With the support of the Sydney Local Health District we were able to provide our health clinic staff and patients with appropriate PPE. Medications which would have ordinarily been collected from the centre were home-delivered to ensure continuity of treatment.



## Vaccinations clinic

Our health staff worked with the Sydney Local Health District to secure a vaccine fridge which enabled us to ensure as many people as possible were vaccinated against influenza. The clinic was also able to ensure people were immunised against specific diseases when required for new employment, such as hepatitis B and varicella. The team plans to be ready once a Covid-19 vaccination is available.



**406 GP APPOINTMENTS**  
**3,384 nurse appointments**



**1,895 PHARMACEUTICALS PROVIDED TO ENSURE people had their regular medications**

## Mental health first aid training

In conjunction with Sydney Local Health District's Mental Health Promotion unit the ASC presented two workshop programs to support people in the community with their mental health first aid skills. The workshops were supported by a grant from the Inner West Council and upon completion 17 participants were provided with a certificate of attending mental health first aid and eight people completed the assessments to become accredited Standard Mental Health First Aiders.

**"I like to help people, but I didn't know what to say before if someone felt down. Now I feel more confident."**

**Participant in mental health first aid training**

## Support for the primary health clinic

We are extremely grateful for the ongoing support of NSW Health which provides funding for the ASC health manager and part-time clinic nurses and subsidies for pharmaceuticals.





“I was looking to be a good citizen in Australia. And to work. I want to feel like I’m someone here, I can do something here. I want to be independent.”

Fatma\* in the Saturday Paper, interviewed by Mike Secombe (Published 20 June, 2020)



# 2019-2020 Highlights and achievements

CONTINUED

## Digital connectivity

The ASC's Donate a Device Program provides refurbished phones, laptops and tablets to enable people seeking asylum to find work, interact with services, study and keep in touch with family and communities. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, people accessed a bank of computers, free wifi and daily computer tutors within the centre. When this access had to be restricted, it became apparent how many people had limited digital connectivity. The refurbishment program was increased and people were provided with digital top-ups to allow them to remain online. Organisations including Macquarie, Lend Lease, Deloitte and Run for Good generously supported the program with donation drives or bulk donations.



## Supporting our LGBTIQ community

The peer-lead LGBTIQ group continued to meet and travelled to participate in the Queer Displacements: Sexuality, Migration & Exile conference at the Australian National University at which representatives presented. Attendance at the conference was supported by the Pride Foundation and an ANZ & Sydney Mardi Gras Community Grant. The conference developed the Canberra Statement on the access to safety and justice for LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers, refugees and other forcibly displaced persons to which the Asylum Seekers Centre is a signatory.

## Phone support

Volunteer receptionists provided daily support in the centre before March and quickly adapted to working from home when the Covid-19 began. Calls tripled in the first week of lockdown and the team responded with

professionalism and generosity to the new needs. A new member of staff was employed during this year to support volunteers in the peak hours in the middle of the day and continued to be one of the few staff who worked on-site during the pandemic.

**CALLS TRIPLED  
IN A WEEK**



**CENTRE SUPPORT  
VOLUNTEERS HELPED WITH  
APPLICATIONS FOR MORE  
THAN 2,000 OPAL CARDS  
= discount travel on trains,  
buses and ferries**

## We engage community

The ASC is building a powerful network of Australian organisations, groups and individuals who welcome people seeking asylum to this country, volunteer to assist, participate in advocacy and provide resources to support our work.

## Art Gallery of NSW partnership

The successful partnership between the Art Gallery of NSW and the Asylum Seekers Centre continued in this year, culminating in the work *By your side* that was co-created in 2019 by artist Claudia Nicholson and six young people who are seeking asylum in Australia.

*By your side* was exhibited in the foyer of the Gallery as part of the *Belonging* exhibition which also featured works from *Home: drawings by Syrian children* a project brought together by artist Ben Quilty.

During each school holiday, artists and artist educators from the Gallery would run workshops for children at the centre.

These were complemented by Gallery visits for families and meaningful ways to engage with the Gallery. When the pandemic meant that children couldn't participate in workshops in person the Art Gallery of NSW delivered craft packs for children to continue creating at home.

"I enjoyed dancing. I felt free. I felt relaxed making the art. I felt relaxed and happy."

"...the video's about belonging and we all belong to each other"

A child co-creator of the work, *By your side*

"The reality is that people whilst they wait for their claim for protection to be assessed, are living in limbo. They are between stories, which is never an easy space. This exhibition and the process has all been around building connections and expressions of joy."

Frances Rush, CEO



"We have really seen the kids growing in confidence. They arrive at the gallery feeling like rock stars, knowing that this is a place where they are special."

Jenny Tracey, Program Manager: Nutrition, Education and Social Support



# 2019-2020 Highlights and achievements

CONTINUED

## Regional engagement and support

The ASC continued to receive enormous support from groups of passionate advocates in rural NSW. Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR) Southern Highlands volunteers delivered tonnes of groceries collected in a month-long drive, worth an estimated \$16,000, to the centre's foodbank. CEO Frances Rush spoke at the group's Annual General Meeting in February 2020. Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR) Bellingen and Nambucca continue to support the ASC with many creative fundraising and awareness-raising activities. CEO Frances Rush was invited to speak to a group of advocates in Orange, in person and via Facebook Live during Refugee Week. She met with local representatives of Mums 4 Refugees, the Orange Migrant and Refugee Support Service and Orange Social Justice Group.



## Volunteer of the year awards

Volunteer Manager Oscar Musson's work has been recognised at the 2019 NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards, where he won the award for Excellence in Volunteer Management. Jessica Harrison, who joined the centre in 2018 as one of the first centre support volunteers, was a finalist in the Young Volunteer of the Year Award. The centre's employment volunteer team was a finalist in the Volunteer Team of the Year Award.

The Transdev (Light Rail) Team, which has provided interview coaching and offered employment to dozens of people seeking asylum, was a finalist in the Corporate Volunteer Team of the Year Award.

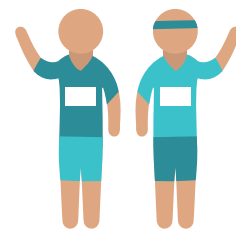
**"What I enjoy most about the role is I get to interact with volunteers from all walks of life, people who have their hearts in the right place. I'm so proud of all of the volunteers at the centre – these nominations are evidence of their passion and dedication."**

Oscar Mussons, Volunteer Manager, Asylum Seekers Centre



## Community fundraisers

Many community groups ran creative and generous activities in support of the Asylum Seekers Centre in this year. We welcomed new community fundraisers, Run for Good, whose involvement included a food drive, school supplies donations, a device drive, blankets and providing drivers for the mobile food bank.



**RUNNERS IN THE BLACKMORES SYDNEY RUNNING FESTIVAL RAISED**







# Elena's story: 'When I didn't have anywhere else to go, they helped.'

**Elena\* turned to the Asylum Seekers Centre after her abusive marriage ended, leaving her and her four kids without a safe home or community connections.**

Elena moved to Australia with the husband she'd married in her home country at 16.

In Australia, Elena's behaviour was strictly controlled – she wasn't allowed to have a mobile phone, drive a car, make friends or work.

When she left the marriage, she faced threats and had her belongings stolen.

Elena sought help from the police, who directed her to Women's & Girls' Emergency Centre (WAGEC) for emergency housing. At that point, she said:

"I had nothing and I had no money."

Elena began visiting the Asylum Seekers Centre for legal support, family assistance and health services.

She got help applying for the right to work, and accessed the ASC employment service to work on her resume and explore employment options. The application for work rights was unsuccessful.

"If I freaked out about my house or the kids' school, I could go to (ASC Family Engagement

Coordinator) Antoinette. When I didn't have anywhere else to go, they helped," she said.

If Elena returned to her home country, being divorced meant she would lose custody of her children. She also feared retribution from her ex-husband's politically powerful family, who have attacked members of her family back home.

"I would love (to return), but it's dangerous," she said.

"I talk to (my family) every day on video call, my mum asks about every detail, every day. But I've

never for example met my brothers' wives."

It took two and a half years waiting in limbo, but Elena and her children were finally granted a protection visa in August.

"I was happy, excited and scared at the same time, because there was a lot of things I had to do – finding a house, finding a job," she said. Now that she has refugee status and the permission to work, Elena hopes to work in accounting and is looking into further study or internship opportunities.

**"I don't want to be waiting on Centrelink, I want a full-time job that actually can cover me so I don't have to live day-by-day,"**

"(My kids and I) never went on holidays, even inside Australia. Camping, beach, this stuff – we've never done it, we were never allowed. I just want to go, at least one time, on holiday with the kids."



Share the whole story at [asylumseekerscentre.org.au](https://asylumseekerscentre.org.au)

\* Elena is not her real name. She has chosen to be anonymous and use an alternative photo.



# 2019-2020 Highlights and achievements

CONTINUED

## Community speakers

Our volunteer community speakers gave 15 presentations in the past year to approximately 660 audience members. Schools, workplaces and community groups were the most common hosts. Although the community speakers were unable to attend events during six months of the year, they took the time to retrain and refresh the speakers' materials ready for presentations to commence when possible.

## Kindness is Viral

One of the highlights of the past year was the kindness that began in early 2020 and has continued to buoy the spirits of us all throughout the pandemic. Before we even had to close our doors, we had seen many acts of kindness in our community. Gifts of home baking came daily, a regular visitor covered all the desks and lunch tables in flowers one day, and the shelves of our foodbank went from empty to groaning very quickly. We called this stage 'Kindness is Viral' and many people joined us sharing this message on social media and in their local communities.

## Local Government partnerships

City of Sydney and Inner West Council councillors and staff provide ongoing support for the ASC including targeted grants and opportunities to share our work with the community and other local organisations.



## Refugee Week movie night

This year's Refugee Week had to be adapted to an online event and the Refugee Week Movie Night was launched. A collaboration with the makers of new Australian film *Hearts and Bones* was developed. CEO Frances Rush interviewed writer/director Ben Lawrence and actor Andrew Luri on a video which was available on the evening of Movie Night for people to watch. A multilingual storytelling video was also produced with Forked Tongues storytellers from Lost in Books reading for children in Arabic and English.



**246 HOUSEHOLDS  
WATCHED TOGETHER  
ON REFUGEE WEEK  
MOVIE NIGHT**  
\$8,596 donations





# 2019-2020 Highlights and achievements

CONTINUED

## We influence policy and legal change

### The Saturday Paper

NEWS OPINION CULTURE LIFE FOOD PUZZLES SPORT THE BRIEFING TAM PAST EDITIONS

JUNE 20 - 26, 2020 | P 308

**ALONE**  
The precarious situation of asylum seekers in Australia has been heightened by Covid-19, as they struggle to find work, keep their children in school and put food on the table with little to no support from the government. By Mike Secombe.

#### The impact of Covid-19 on asylum seekers



Fatma and her family. CREDIT: ASYLUM SEEKERS CENTRE

The ASC works to influence policy and legislation that improve the circumstances of people seeking asylum.

The Asylum Seekers Centre continues to advocate and influence policy and legislation to support people seeking asylum in Australia.

Frances Rush, CEO, represents the ASC on state and federal committees and in delegations to Federal and State Government ministers. The year began with continuing advocacy for access to financial support. Since 2018 the number of people eligible for

support has dwindled to only the very few.

Media coverage increased in the 2019-2020 year and many people seeking asylum were supported to tell their stories and share their lived experiences in a safe way.

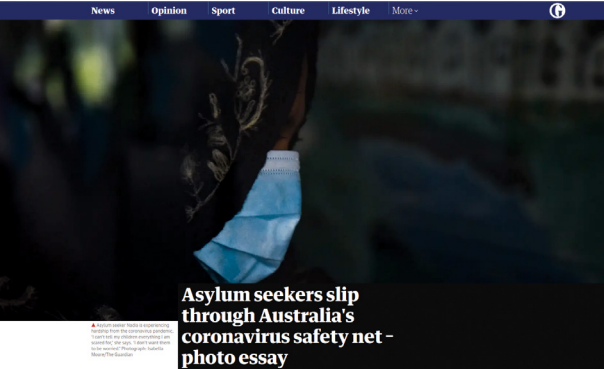
The year ended with advocacy to local, state and federal governments to ensure that people seeking asylum were not left behind during the Covid-19 pandemic.

### Nobody Left Behind & No Child Left Behind

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit Australia, the Federal Government implemented an extensive package of support for people affected by job losses, shut-downs and a health crisis. The provisions largely ignored people with temporary visas, including people seeking asylum.


The ASC joined with other organisations in the sector to participate in an extensive campaign to lobby the Federal

News Opinion Sport Culture Lifestyle More



**Asylum seekers slip through Australia's coronavirus safety net - photo essay**

**LIVE SYDNEY 08:14**



**ABC WORLD NEWS**  
**Australia asylum seekers face hardship**  
More than one million people hold temporary visas

Government to ensure that people seeking asylum were included in the Covid-19 safety net.

This campaign, called Nobody Left Behind, with a second campaign focused on the effect on children, called No Child Left Behind, sought to highlight the hardship and destitution caused by the pandemic and called on the Federal Government to include people seeking asylum in an income support payment. At the end of this year, the campaign is ongoing.

### NSW Government package for people seeking asylum

In June 2020 the NSW Government announced a package of more than \$6 million assistance for multicultural communities, including \$2.2 million for people seeking asylum, to help with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Asylum Seekers Centre is proud to be a part of the NSW Joint Partnership Working Group for Refugee Resettlement whose advocacy, amongst others, has led to this decision. Acting Minister for Multiculturalism Geoff Lee recognised in the announcement the role of community organisations who have “shown immense leadership at this time.”

### Medevac repeal

On 4 December 2019 the Federal Government voted to repeal the Medevac laws which had been providing life-saving medical care for sick refugees and people seeking asylum in offshore detention.

On the back of a seemingly secret deal with Senator Jacqui Lambie, the Government pushed through legislation which reversed the life-saving laws introduced by former independent MP Dr Kerry Phelps in March 2020.

The Medevac process of recommending sick people for medical attention did not cause an increase in boat arrivals to

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00:00 / 00:00

#### Refugee support service says helpline calls skyrocketed in Covid-19 lockdown

Share Download 12.71 MB

Posted Thu 11 Jun 2020, 12:00pm Updated Fri 12 Jun 2020, 6:26am

Ahead of a planned protest for refugee rights set to take place in Sydney, one charity says calls to its helpline tripled in the first week of Coronavirus lockdown.

The Refugee Action Coalition is planning a rally outside the city's Town Hall this weekend, with several hundred people expected to attend.

Frances Rush from the Asylum Seeker Centre in Newtown told ABC NewsRadio's Mandy Presland that the organisation has delivered food to more than one thousand people over the past fortnight - and the need continues to grow.

Australia, nor affected national security. The law, which allowed medical professionals to recommend a medical evacuation from offshore detention, did stop the steady stream of preventable deaths in PNG and on Nauru.

The Asylum Seekers Centre is proud to have been a part of the Medical Evacuation Response Group which assisted with applications to the Minister for medical evacuations. This group of partner organisations (also known as the Medevac Group) included doctors, lawyers, caseworkers and counsellors who worked with people on Nauru and in Papua New Guinea to make their applications for transfer.

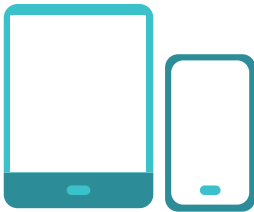
### Community action

The Asylum Seekers Centre community and supporters participated in many advocacy activities including:

- petitions
- writing letters and attending meetings with local members of parliament
- writing letters and making calls to relevant Federal and State Ministers
- sharing information and stories with their communities online.

### Social media connections

In 2019-2020 the ASC launched a Twitter account and had improved reach and engagement on Facebook and LinkedIn.



**83,000+ PEOPLE ENGAGED FROM THE COMMUNITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA**  
**1,760,000+ times content from the ASC was seen on social media**



“ASC was crucial  
for me during  
one of the worst  
periods of my life...

I am able to  
continue studying  
and secure a job  
that I could apply  
the theoretical  
knowledge I learnt  
at university.”

Nick, a student who has a  
scholarship to study at university.





# Financial Statements

## Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income

Asylum Seekers Centre Incorporated  
ABN 47 164 509 475  
For the Year Ended 30 June 2020

	2020	2019
	\$	\$
<b>INCOME</b>		
Grant income	866,529	1,232,886
Donations and bequests	4,008,151	3,348,993
Fundraising event revenue	560	74,942
Other income	250,136	172,594
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>5,125,376</b>	<b>4,829,415</b>
<b>ASYLUM SEEKER AID &amp; SERVICES</b>		
<b>Services</b>		
Casework	(406,349)	(385,690)
Legal	(69,291)	(61,858)
Advocacy & community education	(136,119)	(128,266)
Employment assistance	(342,465)	(310,443)
Healthcare	(197,280)	(185,636)
Education & social support	(433,055)	(303,049)
Volunteer Management	(108,487)	(87,335)
Direct services management	(511,101)	(520,515)
Superannuation & leave costs	(168,141)	(126,739)
<b>Total Services</b>	<b>(2,372,288)</b>	<b>(2,109,531)</b>
<b>Financial Aid</b>		
Direct emergency financial support	(310,063)	(399,823)
Accommodation	(42,662)	(66,684)
Donations in kind	(1,479,098)	(1,445,437)
<b>Total Financial Aid</b>	<b>(1,831,823)</b>	<b>(1,911,944)</b>
<b>Total Asylum Seeker Aid &amp; Services</b>	<b>(4,204,111)</b>	<b>(4,021,475)</b>
<b>ACCOUNTABILITY, FUNDRAISING &amp; RUNNING COSTS</b>		
Accountability & administration	(103,802)	(121,932)
Fundraising costs – events	(525)	(54,537)
Fundraising costs – other	(294,171)	(233,443)
Running costs	(165,229)	(134,565)
Insurance	(18,489)	(13,485)
IT costs	(130,490)	(90,455)
Building maintenance, rates & utilities	(66,064)	(55,595)
<b>Total Accountability, Fundraising &amp; Running Costs</b>	<b>(778,770)</b>	<b>(704,012)</b>
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>(4,982,881)</b>	<b>(4,725,487)</b>
<b>Surplus before income tax</b>	<b>142,495</b>	<b>103,928</b>
Income tax expense	-	-
<b>Surplus for the year</b>	<b>142,495</b>	<b>103,928</b>
Other comprehensive income for the year, net of tax	-	-
Tied donations	-	-
<b>Total Comprehensive Surplus for the Year</b>	<b>142,495</b>	<b>103,928</b>

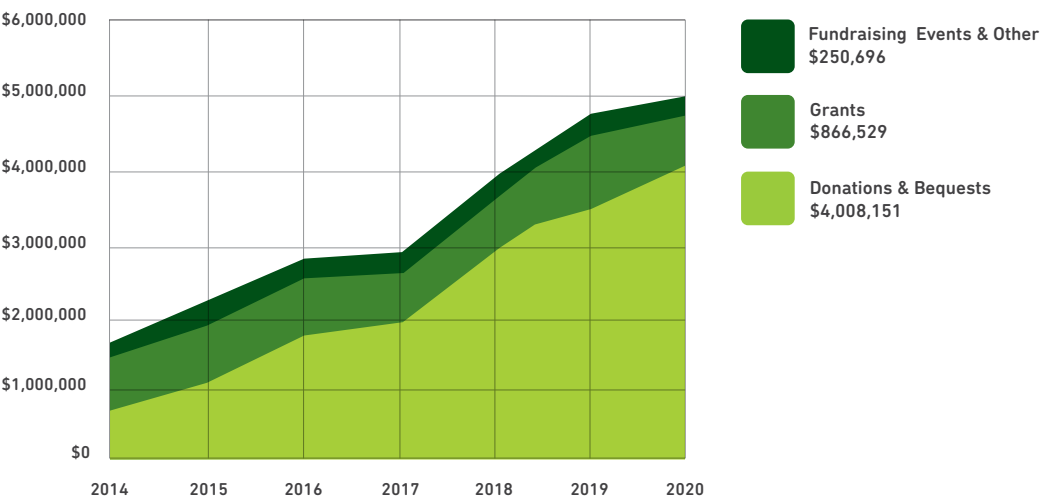
## Statement of Financial Position

Asylum Seekers Centre Incorporated  
ABN 47 164 509 475  
For the Year Ended 30 June 2020

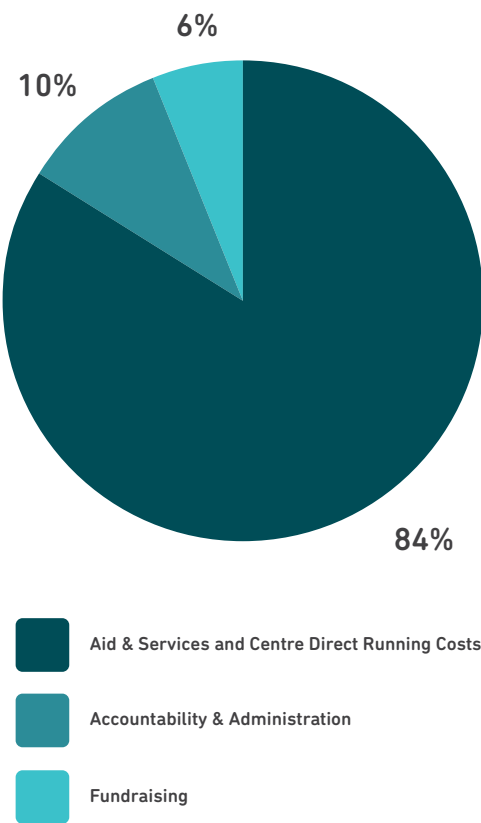
	2020	2019
	\$	\$
<b>ASSETS</b>		
<b>Current Assets</b>		
Cash & cash equivalents	5,137,628	2,410,651
Trade & other receivables	114,948	74,557
Other financial assets	-	1,166,801
Current tax receivable	-	53,423
Other assets	3,517	18,854
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>5,256,093</b>	<b>3,724,286</b>
<b>Non Current Assets</b>		
Property, plant and equipment	2,213,625	2,231,850
<b>Total Non Current Assets</b>	<b>2,213,625</b>	<b>2,231,850</b>
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>7,469,718</b>	<b>5,956,136</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
<b>Current Liabilities</b>		
Trade and other payables	182,466	82,201
Employee benefits	200,740	146,638
Other financial liabilities	3,194,236	1,970,300
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>3,577,442</b>	<b>2,199,139</b>
<b>Non Current Liabilities</b>		
Employee benefits	12,731	17,401
<b>Total Non Current Liabilities</b>	<b>12,731</b>	<b>17,401</b>
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>3,590,173</b>	<b>2,216,540</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	<b>3,879,545</b>	<b>3,739,596</b>
<b>EQUITY</b>		
Reserves	511,936	514,482
Retained earnings	3,367,609	3,225,114
<b>Total Equity</b>	<b>3,879,545</b>	<b>3,739,596</b>



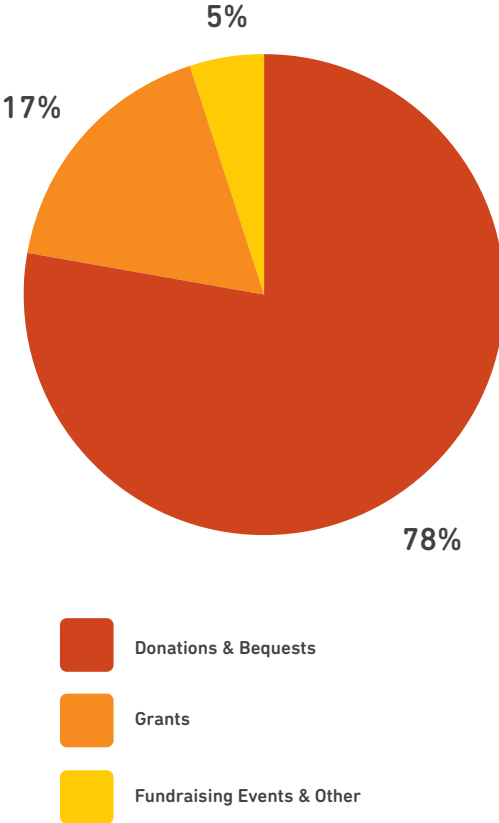
TOTAL INCOME 2014 – 2020



HOW WE USED OUR FUNDS 2019 – 2020



HOW WE WERE FUNDED 2019 – 2020



Our Board



Betty Hounslow AM  
Chair

Betty Hounslow has more than 30 years' experience in the community sector including as Executive Director of ACOSS and Deputy CEO of The Fred Hollows Foundation. She has been an active campaigner for the rights of refugees and migrants since the early 1980s.



Clare Petre  
Deputy Chair

Clare Petre has had a long career in community and government sectors and was the Energy and water Ombudsman NSW for more than 16 years. She is currently a board member of the ACT Suburban Land Agency, and Chair of The Energy Charter Independent Accountability Panel, the New Energy Tech Consumer Code, and ACFID's Code of Conduct Committee.



Marina Brizar

Marina Brizar arrived in Australia as a refugee from the former Yugoslavia. Marina was named the 2015 Young Migration Lawyer of the Year, the 2015 Woman Lawyer of the Year – Up Coming and a 'Woman of Influence' 2016. She is a Churchill Fellow and currently the UK Director of Talent Beyond Boundaries.



Om Dhungel

Om Dhungel is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and serves on different Committees and Boards. He operates as a Consultant, Trainer and a Mentor. Formerly a refugee from Bhutan, Om is a recipient of number of Awards including the 2016 Community Service Lifetime Achievement Award and 2017 UTS Sydney International Alumni Award.



Jonathan Ladd

Jonathan Ladd was the CEO and International Executive Chair of Datacom Group from where he retired in 2019. He is the Chair of Humanetix and Assistive Technology Australia, the latter a not-for-profit providing information and guidance for technologies that assist people with disabilities.



Rebecca Lowde

Rebecca Lowde is currently the Group CFO at Afterpay Limited and has extensive experience in managing finance, contracts, strategy, mergers and acquisitions, budgeting and sales. Previously Rebecca was the CEO of Salmat Limited following 3 years as the CFO. She has held senior executive positions in Australia, Europe and Asia and is a graduate member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and CPA Australia.



# Our Board continued



## Mary Reemst

Mary Reemst is the Managing Director and CEO of Macquarie Bank Limited. Mary has worked in finance for more than 30 years and is a Director of the Australian Bankers' Association, the Australian Financial Markets Association, the Financial Markets Foundation for Children and the Sisters of Charity Foundation.



## Celia Reynolds

Celia Reynolds has been with the Lendlease Group for 21 years. In her current role as Group Head of Practices, she leads an international team across Lendlease's four main offices globally.



## Peter Waters

Peter Waters has worked with law firm Gilbert+Tobin for more than 25 years, formerly as a partner and currently as a part-time consultant.

Peter has been an active supporter and participant in Gilbert+Tobin's pro bono practice and Chair of the Roberta Sykes Indigenous Education Foundation for over a decade.



## Graham Thom

Graham Thom is Refugee Coordinator at Amnesty International Australia and has previously chaired the NSW Asylum Seeker Interagency. From 2007 he has attended the UNHCR NGO Consultations and Annual Tripartite Resettlement Consultations in Geneva.

# Our Patrons



## Bruce Baird AM

As a member of the NSW Parliament, Bruce Baird was at various times Minister for Transport, Minister for Sydney's Olympic Bid, Minister for Tourism and Roads and Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party in State Parliament. He is Chair of Business Events Sydney.

# Our Patrons continued



## John Menadue AO

John Menadue has had a distinguished career in the public sector, including as Head of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet under Prime Ministers Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser. He has also worked as General Manager of News Limited, CEO of Qantas, a Director of Telstra and Chair of the Australia-Japan Foundation.



## Munjed Al Muderis Associate Professor

Munjed, formerly a refugee from Iraq, is a pioneer in developing bionic and robotic technology, restoring mobility for amputees around the world. In 2020 Munjed was NSW State Recipient of the Australian of the Year Award.



## Hugh Mackay AO

Hugh Mackay is internationally recognised for his pioneering work in social research. He is the author of nineteen books, a Fellow of the Australian Psychological Society and has been awarded honorary doctorates from five Australian universities.

# Our Ambassadors



## Wendy Sharpe

Wendy Sharpe is an Australian artist who has won many major national awards including the Archibald Prize and been awarded many international artist residencies. She has held more than 60 solo exhibitions, including Seeking Humanity, which comprised 39 portraits of people seeking asylum and refugees.



## Thomas Keneally AO

Thomas Keneally is an Australian author most famous for his Booker Prize-winning novel Schindler's Ark. He has been shortlisted three more times for the Booker, won the Miles Franklin Award, the Prime Minister's Literary Award, the New South Wales Premier's Literary Award and the Helmerich Award.



## Saba Vasefi

Saba Vasefi is an Iranian-Australian academic, feminist filmmaker, poet and human rights activist. Saba has made a number of documentaries and spoken about women's and children's issues at the UN, Amnesty International and numerous universities around the world.



# The people who make it possible



  
**37,296  
HOURS OF  
VOLUNTEERING  
THIS YEAR  
VALUED AT \$1 MILLION  
OF TIME**

## Volunteers

This year, our volunteers were even more flexible, generous and innovative in ways they never had before. For many, Covid-19 meant they had to step back from their volunteering, which was challenging in a different way. Changed working hours and community spirit also brought us many new volunteers. The resilience of all our volunteers was an inspiration and we are very grateful for their contribution.



## Active volunteers who have five or more years service to the ASC

Gail Abbott, Elizabeth Abrahams, John Balint, Susan Balint, Carolyn Benn, Anne Bennet, Emil Bolis, Liz Blyth, Dina Burnstock, Fazila Chetty, Belinda Dahan, Nanette Danks, Lisa Darke, Carolyn de Boos, Gwyn Denton, Frances De Jong, Clare Docker, Pam Drury, Morris Eskin, Ruth Eskin, Natalie Goldman, Caroline Harley, Prof. Mark Harris, Anne Holder, Gerald Holder, Karen Keall, Bernice Lee, Michael Liddle, Lee Nussbaum, Jan Macindoe, Pam Mattick, Mark Minerney, Kathy Oppermann, Ruth Osen, Vittoria Pasquini, Teresa Petrzelka, Julia Selby, John Scahill, Linh Scotter, Pru Thomas, Elizabeth Thompson, Patricia Thorne, Shane Tiernan, Karen Totaro, Mariella Totaro Genevois, Susan Trevallion,

Prof. Lyndal Trevena, Margaret Tung, Kelly Wallwork, Robyn Worland, Karen Wyatt.

## Corporate volunteering groups

Adobe  
Aesop  
Amgem  
Art Gallery of NSW  
Atlassian  
Ben & Jerry's  
Commonwealth Bank  
Deloitte  
Downer  
Google  
JobAdder  
Lush  
Médecins Sans Frontières  
NRL  
Rocket Agency  
Suncorp  
Sydney Theatre Company  
Transdev  
UNSW

## Regular volunteer groups cooking and serving hot lunches

Association of Engaged Buddhists  
Coal Loaders Gardeners  
Eucalypts (Willoughby and Roseville Uniting church)  
Glynis' & Chris' Group  
Healthy Bloggers  
Jews for Social Action (North Shore Temple Emanuel)  
Kids Giving Back  
Mitzvah (Emanuel Synagogue)  
Nanette Danks (St James Church)  
St Vincent's Private Hospital  
Valerio Daniel De Simoni Association



**620  
VOLUNTEERS  
IN 2019-2020**



**266  
NEW VOLUNTEERS  
THIS YEAR**



# Our Major Supporters

We thank our major supporters, organisational partners and community fundraisers who enable us to provide all of our services and support for people seeking asylum.

## Major supporters, grantors and foundations



Impact 100 Sydney North, a subfund of Australian Communities Foundation



The Aledal Foundation	Glow Worm Foundation	Mike Parr
Parishioners of the Anglican Parish of Christ Church St Laurence, Haymarket	Margaret Hetherton	Ann Porcino
Arcare Family Foundation	Helen Jenkins & Graham Tilly	Presentation Sisters, Wagga Wagga
Australian Philanthropic Services Foundation	Inveruglas Pty Ltd	Quaker Service Australia
Berg Family Foundation	Robin & Tom King	Mary Reemst
Roy Bishop & Manivannan Gopalakrishnan	Knights Family Jabula Foundation	David & Michele Schlosser
Peter Bowmar	Jenny Leong MP, Member for Newtown	The Scully Fund
Roslyn Burge & Cynthia Nadai	David Lacey & Marian Shapiro	The Skelley Family
Dr Amanda Cohn	The Lambert Bridge Foundation	The Skrzynski Family Sky Foundation
Cooper Tuxen Foundation	Maria Manning	State Street Fund
Hamish & Judith Flett	David Marr	Patricia Thorne
Vivienne Fries	Peter & Pam Mattick	The Todd Family Foundation
Patrick Gallagher	Mazi Mas	Susan Varga & Anne Coombs
The Garrett Riggelman Trust	Jennifer McLean	Peter Waters
	Colin Menzies	Paul & Pamela Wood
	Neutral Bay Uniting Church	
	Patricia Novikoff	

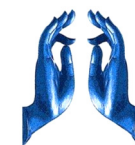


# Our Major Supporters continued

## Organisational partnerships



## Major Community Fundraisers



Association of Engaged Buddhists



THE INNER WEST MUMS



Art Space

John Bowe & Christina Holder

Chona Novarro

Newtown Erskineville Anglican Church

Parish of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Randwick



We wish to thank the generous donors, philanthropists and organisations who have chosen to remain anonymous rather than be acknowledged publicly. All our donors and supporters are highly valued.

## Acknowledgements

Images : Michael Amendolia (p35, 36, 37)  
Matthew Duchesne (cover, p8 & p9)  
Tom Keneally in the Tom Keneally Centre at the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, 2012. (p37)

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This Annual Report has been kindly printed free of charge by Konica Minolta for the Asylum Seekers Centre.





Artwork by Sahera, a young person in the ASC community.

# ASYLUM SEEKERS CENTRE

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-  @asylum-seekers-centre
-  @ASC Syd
-  @asylumseekerscentre

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