

CENTRE ASYLUM SEEKERS

Asylum Seekers Centre Annual Report 2022-2023

ABN: 47 164 509 475





“The legacy of the Asylum Seekers Centre is not only its 30-year journey and its incredible record of impact. It is carried in the hearts of everyone connected to the organisation - those who have fled unimaginable danger to start a new life, and those who have passionately committed their lives to helping them. It is a legacy that will live on, and will continue to be built.”

Felicia Paul

ASC Intensive Support Caseworker, who marked her 11-year anniversary with the ASC in 2023.

For the full story looking back at the Asylum Seekers Centre’s origins and its 30-year legacy since, see page 10.

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In the spirit of reconciliation, the Asylum Seekers Centre acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which ASC operates and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respect to their knowledge, their survival and elders both past and present.

Asylum Seekers Centre at-a-glance

Who we are

The Asylum Seekers Centre (ASC) is a place of welcome and support. We provide practical help for people seeking asylum in Greater Sydney, and advocate for fair and humane policies for refugees and people seeking asylum.

The ASC was established in 1993 by a community of people with human rights values which still underpin our work today.

We are:



Compassionate and connected



People centred



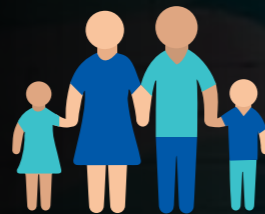
Collaborative



Innovative

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.



Almost 4,000 people supported in the 2022-23 year, including more than 1,000 children.

We offer services and support including:



Primary health clinic



Critical casework support



Training and job readiness



Transport support



Recreational activities



Medications



Community lunches



Employment assistance



English classes



Digital connectivity



Family and school support

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

Chair and CEO's Report

We are delighted to share with you the Asylum Seekers Centre 2022-2023 Annual Report.

For people seeking asylum, the end of the pandemic merely shifted the nature of the extreme challenges faced, rather than ease them.

The combination of the cost of living crisis, societal pressures and an often toxic political debate, and a system which actively excludes people from vital rights and services served to create an immensely challenging environment for people seeking asylum.

The impact of these challenges cannot be understated. The Asylum Seekers Centre (ASC) supported people facing complex and worsening physical and mental health challenges, attempting to fill an ever-widening chasm in government support at both the state and federal level.

As ever, we have been guided by our resolute commitment to support people seeking asylum, provide a place of welcome, as much support as possible, and to advocate for much-needed systemic change.

The strength, success, and enduring nature of that commitment was celebrated as the Centre marked 30 years since first opening its doors. For three decades, the ASC has grown from humble beginnings to become a pillar of community, welcoming thousands of people fleeing unimaginable danger and helping them build new lives in Australia.

Many things have changed about the ASC in 30 years, but the spirit embodied in every person and story remains consistent and uplifting.

Looking back, the stories of bravery and determination, family and community, and welcome and support shone through. Whether from people seeking asylum, staff, volunteers, or those who have played a role in our wider community, the tales to celebrate this landmark provided a reminder of the importance of our work and an inspiration for the future.

It is that future upon which we are firmly focused.

This year, the Centre increased its capacity and capability to help people secure employment through the Uplift program, in large part thanks to a major grant from the Paul Ramsay Foundation.

There are significant gaps in the system limiting the ability of those seeking asylum to secure work, support themselves, and contribute fully to the community. We need to address both the immediate crisis and the long term barriers such as lack of access to childcare, inadequate suitable English language support, minimal university and vocational training, and a lack of employer recognition of the skills and potential of people seeking asylum.

It is our goal to help people seeking asylum overcome these

barriers, while working with the sector and government to significantly reduce them.

The state of public discourse around people seeking asylum continues to be misinformed and leveraged as a political football. The dehumanising nature of this so-called 'debate' underlies much of the rhetoric.

The communications team recruited a small number of people we supported to help establish a storytelling and advocacy group. Members of this group shared their stories and helped bring lived experience and much-needed empathy to discussions, including through conferences, events, meetings with members of Parliament, a briefing for the Federal Parliamentary Friends of Refugees, a Senate inquiry and through media interviews.

In doing so, we helped others see what we are able to see every day - the incredible bravery, strength, and contribution of people seeking asylum.

Our hub in Auburn, which first opened during Covid-plagued 2022, increased its opening hours to two days a week. This increased capacity and broader geographic coverage across Sydney brought us closer to the community and provided vital services to those in Western Sydney.

Our expanding services, combined with our previous



commitment to use some of our reserves to support people through the pandemic, meant fundraising became even more important.

We launched our inaugural Giving Day in February 2023 under the theme of 'We all need somebody to lean on'. Generous donors and organisations came on board to match the funds raised throughout the campaign, so that every dollar donated was doubled. The community was equally generous in its response, giving \$242,000, well above our matched giving target of \$150,000. The success of the day means we see it becoming an annual event.

We continued our commitment to be a leading member of the broader Australian community, including recognising that we operate on lands never ceded by the First Nations people of Australia.

The ASC took a significant step in formalising its commitment to reconciliation with First Nations peoples through the development of its inaugural Reconciliation

Action Plan (RAP), demonstrating our commitment to improving our practices and exploring new ways to extend our understanding of and support for First Nations peoples.

This commitment extended to proudly declaring our support for a "Yes" vote on the Voice to Parliament referendum in 2023. We are saddened by the result, and will redouble our efforts to foster understanding, respect, and solidarity with First Nations peoples.

Rallying around this purpose is a community of dedicated staff, highly committed volunteers, donors, supporters, and advocates who drive the work we do and help bring our vision of a country that opens its heart to people seeking asylum to life.

But through everything we have done in the past year we have, as we have for three decades, been inspired, strengthened, and guided by people seeking asylum. In seeking to craft a better future for themselves, their families,

and their new communities, they demonstrate a capacity for hope that serves as our purpose.

Here's to the next 30 years.

Finally, on a more personal note, Betty Hounslow, a former chair, director, long time stalwart of the ASC and friend and inspiration to many of us, died in 2023. We will have more to say about Betty's remarkable contribution to the ASC in the next annual report, but we all miss her deeply.

Peter Waters
Chair
Asylum Seekers Centre

Frances Rush OAM
Chief Executive Officer
Asylum Seekers Centre



Natasha and Fara's story

Sitting in an interview with the Department of Immigration, Natasha hadn't expected her eyebrows to be a point of concern. The immigration officer, gesturing from behind a barrier opposite Natasha, wasn't convinced that filled-in eyebrows gave the right impression.

"When I first came to Australia," Natasha recalls, "I was told that you shouldn't put on makeup or dress in nice clothing, because then no one would believe that you were a refugee or a person seeking asylum."

Natasha hasn't worn high heels since she left Malaysia several years ago. She worked as a real estate agent there for almost two decades while raising her girls, Nina and Fara, as a single parent. By the time Fara was 15, their family situation had become precarious. Threatened with losing custody of Fara, Natasha made the impossible decision to leave their home.

"[I had] no job, no friend, nothing. I just came." Natasha says. The pair came to Australia on tourist visas, given plane tickets by their pastor. For the first few months, they lived off the kindness of their church community.

"My future [was] blank" Natsha says. "I can't even really think about what is my future. I only know that, 'oh, my girl is safe.'"

The safety provided by Australia was not lost on 15-year-old Fara, but she dreamt of more than just survival. Natsha recalls her daughter saying to her one day, "Mummy, I don't want to be stupid. When am I going to school?"

In order to enrol her daughter in school, Natasha needed money. "When I came here, I believed that Australia was a good country - they will help me" she says, "So I kept Googling until I found out where to come for help." That was when Natasha found the Asylum Seekers Centre.

The ASC connected Natasha with Parliament on King, a cafe that provides employment opportunities to refugees and people seeking asylum. Unsurprisingly, Natasha's

customer service skills were outstanding. She quickly got a promotion.

When the time came for Fara's year 12 formal, all she wanted was to fit in and dress up like the other girls. Her mum passed her the money to go and get her hair and makeup done. "It would probably [have] been really hard, like a few hours that my mom worked just so that she can provide me with the experience of going to formal," Fara says. "And my teenage mind just couldn't comprehend that. But just now thinking about that, I'm like, that is just... wow."

"I like to look good myself," Natasha says. "Makeup, that kind of thing. It's my life, actually." But people had different ideas of what a person seeking asylum should look like - from immigration officers to a woman who once told Natasha that she shouldn't wear makeup simply

because she is a refugee. "I was so humiliated," Natasha says. She was worried that it would affect her application for protection. "[I] had to look miserable".

But there was hope. "To [my mum], the ASC was a place of refuge and safety," Fara says, "it made her feel seen and heard." When artist Wendy Sharpe painted Natasha's portrait at the ASC in 2015, she opted to wear a bright dress traditional to her culture. "Being painted in this portrait so beautifully helped me gain the confidence and sense of dignity that I felt I had lost."

For Fara also, the ASC represents a place of welcome and support. Assuming university was a pipe dream given she could not afford the exorbitant international student fees, the ASC connected Fara with the Macquarie University scholarships office, and she was

able to get her entire tuition covered for her first semester.

"Because of my experience and the support we received from the Centre, I started to grow really passionate about helping refugees and people seeking asylum and it started in university," she says.

Between her first and second semester, Fara and her mum received some much-awaited news. Finally, after months of agonising stress and anxiety, they had been granted permanent protection visas.

"I remember when we got the news, we were in the lawyer's apartment. He said, 'you can't go back to Malaysia'. And we were like, 'what does that mean?' He was like, 'you can't go back. You've been approved'. And we're like, 'oh my gosh!'"

Today, 10 years after they first left Malaysia, Fara and Natasha are Australian citizens. "Everyone

we've encountered in our journey in this community, whether it's a staff member or a volunteer, genuinely cares about the work that they're doing... I can say that fully because without them we truly wouldn't be standing here today," Fara says.

"I believe the success of the ASC is [the] people: those who have been here in the past, those who are here right now, and those who are here to come," says Natasha. To my dear friends, no matter where you have come from, from all over the world, I would like to say: be brave, have courage, have faith and never give up."

"Being painted in this portrait so beautifully helped me gain the confidence and sense of dignity that I felt I had lost."



30 years of welcome

In 2023, the ASC was proud to celebrate its 30th anniversary. For three decades, the ASC has been a beacon of hope and support for people seeking asylum in Australia.

From its humble beginnings to its current status as a vital services and advocacy organisation, the ASC's journey is a testament to the power of human compassion and the enduring spirit of people who seek safety and a better life.

The early days: A foundation of care

In 1993, the ASC began its mission to support people seeking asylum with a small but dedicated team of volunteers. Among them was Valerie Hoogstad AM, whose experiences highlight the profound impact of the Centre's work.

Valerie recalls those early days with great fondness. "We had some teachers from universities that we were training to teach English, and we invited them into the Centre once a week to do

an internship." This early focus on education and skill-building laid the groundwork for the comprehensive support services the ASC offers today.

Valerie's stories paint a picture of an organisation deeply committed to individual care. She remembers counselling distressed people seeking asylum in her office, noting, "the personal connection we built was so vital in helping people overcome incredible hardship."

Building bridges and changing lives

The ASC's impact extends far beyond immediate assistance. Valerie shares touching anecdotes of long-lasting connections formed through the Centre. One particularly moving story involves Mali*, a nurse from

Congo who Valerie helped to upgrade her qualifications to Australian standards. Years later, Mali returned the kindness by caring for Valerie's father.

These personal connections highlight the ASC's role in fostering a sense of community and belonging. "We welcomed people from such a diverse range of places", Valerie notes, mentioning a doctor who later became a deputy minister in Iraq. "I still keep in touch with him," she adds, underscoring the enduring nature of these relationships.

Challenges and growth

As the ASC grew, so did its capacity to provide support. Sister Noelene White, from the Good Shepherd Sisters, remembers the early expansion: "After a while we got a little bit more money

and we could employ a couple of counsellors. I remember those people because they gave their whole beings ... they were there every week, just giving, just trying to cope with the pressure and the trauma that it brought to them in supporting people."

This growth has not been without challenges, but the organisation's resilience and commitment to its mission remain steadfast. The ASC continues to adapt and evolve, always with the wellbeing of people seeking asylum at the forefront.

Looking to the future

As we reflect on three decades of service, we are inspired by the words of our CEO, Frances Rush OAM. "Through the hardships and tears, we have seen enormous joy and warmth. This has become a

place of community, of family, of hope. And it is that spirit that will continue to define the next thirty years," she says.

This sentiment echoes through the halls of the ASC today. The Centre continues to be a place where connections are forged, lives are transformed, and hope is nurtured. From English classes and employment support to healthcare, crisis casework, and community connections, the ASC's comprehensive approach addresses the complex needs of people seeking asylum.

As we look to the future, we remain committed to our founding principles of compassion, respect, and empowerment. The stories of those who have been part of the ASC – volunteers, staff, and people seeking asylum alike – remind

us of the profound impact that kindness and support can have on individual lives and on our broader community.

The journey of the ASC over the past 30 years is a powerful reminder of what can be achieved when people come together with a shared vision of a more just and compassionate society. As we face the challenges ahead, we draw strength from our history and remain dedicated to providing a welcoming, supportive environment for all who seek our help.

The Asylum Seekers Centre's commitment to reconciliation and solidarity with First Nations peoples



The ASC took a significant step in formalising its commitment to reconciliation with First Nations peoples through the development of its inaugural Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). This initiative marked the beginning of a journey towards deeper understanding, respect, and solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

While we welcome people seeking asylum to this country, we recognise that we operate on lands never ceded by the First Nations people of Australia. We must also acknowledge that for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Australia is not a place of safety and freedom from persecution.

The Reflect RAP, which serves as the foundation for this important work, demonstrates our dedication to improving our practices and exploring new ways to extend our understanding of and support for First Nations peoples.

Formation of the RAP Working Group

Central to the implementation of the RAP is the formation of a dedicated RAP Working Group. This group, which meets fortnightly, comprises staff members, members of the Executive Leadership team, and volunteers. The inclusion of volunteers in the group reflects the importance of this group in how we operate and ensures diverse perspectives are

represented in the reconciliation process.

The RAP Working Group is tasked with learning about and understanding the RAP requirements, purpose, and framework. It plays a crucial role in implementing critical actions aimed at building meaningful relationships and promoting respect for the cultural diversity of First Nations communities. The Chair and Co-Chair of the group are responsible for coordinating meetings, acting as points of contact, holding members accountable, assigning tasks and timeframes, and responding to enquiries.

Practical steps towards reconciliation

As part of our commitment to reconciliation, we implemented several practical measures:

1. Integration of Acknowledgement of Country: This practice has been incorporated at the commencement of every meeting and event, in official staff and volunteer email signatures, and on the ASC website.

2. Engagement with Aboriginal community leaders: The ASC invited Aboriginal community leaders to provide Welcome to Country at significant events such as Refugee Week and Human Rights Day celebrations.

3. Information sharing: Staff and volunteers were regularly updated with information, events, and news regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through internal communications channels.

4. Recognition of significant dates: We actively recognised and promoted local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander events and messages during National Reconciliation Week, on January 26, and during NAIDOC Week.

These actions demonstrated our commitment to creating an environment of respect and recognition for First Nations peoples, both within the organisation and in our interactions with the wider community.

A commitment to learning and growth

This Reflect RAP is just the first step in a longer journey towards reconciliation. We recognise that we have much to learn as we engage with First Nations peoples and we are committed to approaching this process with humility and openness.

The ASC's values of being collaborative, people-centred, innovative, and compassionate will guide the team as they build relationships, promote reconciliation, create opportunities, and demonstrate respect for First Nations peoples.

Support for the Voice to Parliament

In a significant move that aligns with our commitment to reconciliation and human rights, we proudly declared our support for a "Yes" vote on the Voice to Parliament referendum in 2023.

This decision reflects the ASC's dedication to advancing the rights and representation of First Nations peoples in Australia.

Our support was grounded in our core mission as a human rights organisation. By supporting the Voice to Parliament, we acknowledged the unique position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the land and recognised the importance of their voices being heard in matters that affect their communities.

We joined the Allies for Uluru coalition, a group of civil society organisations collectively demonstrating leadership within their communities on this important issue. Through this alliance, we aimed to amplify the group's support for the Voice to Parliament and encourage our community to participate in this historic opportunity for constitutional change.

We saw the referendum as a chance to make history, taking a significant step towards reconciliation and justice for First Nations peoples, and bringing about meaningful change in the Australian constitution. We are saddened by the result, and commit to redoubling our efforts to foster understanding, respect, and solidarity with First Nations peoples.

Through practical actions, ongoing learning, and support for initiatives like the Voice to Parliament, we are demonstrating our dedication to playing a meaningful role in Australia's reconciliation journey.

As we continue to welcome and support people seeking asylum in Australia, we do so with a deep acknowledgement of the land's Traditional Custodians and a commitment to walking alongside First Nations peoples towards a more just and inclusive future.

We connect people to supports and services

2022-2023 highlights and achievements

As Australia's borders reopened to the world, we saw an increase in the number of people seeking asylum in New South Wales (NSW).



There were significant increases in referrals from people newly arrived in the country and those released from detention centres, a reasonable proportion of whom were homeless when they presented at the ASC.

The winding down of the Multicultural NSW emergency relief funding presented challenges, with many people requesting financial assistance that the Centre no longer had the capacity for.

The cost of living crisis led previously stable families and individuals to require additional support.

600
new clients

12,969
calls answered

2,851
support services
provided by centre
support volunteers

Health and wellbeing

The end of the pandemic did not lead to an easing of the extreme challenges the ASC Primary Health Clinic faced in supporting people with complex physical and mental health challenges.

Clients often experienced deterioration in their physical and mental health due to the high cost of living, social pressures, and the lack of work rights.

Access to Medicare continued to put health outcomes at risk. With the renewal of Medicare cards taking up to 12 weeks, some clients have had to either cancel or postpone medical procedures due to expired Medicare cards.

The ASC Health team continued to advocate and source mental health support services for those without Medicare. This year, the number of GP appointments and nurse appointments both increased significantly once again.

552
GP appointments

7,178
Nurse appointments

4,089
Pharmaceuticals
provided

We ran our first 'Looking After Your Health' workshop, facilitated by Diabetes NSW. This was an informative session upskilling our clients with knowledge to improve their diet, lifestyle, and reduce their cardiovascular and diabetes Type 2 risks. We also conducted the same session in Arabic, the first workshop conducted in language. Both sessions were well received.



Intensive support

The ASC Intensive Support (IS) team this year grappled with changes to Multicultural NSW (MNSW) grant funding.

The extension of MNSW funding was welcomed and enabled the IS team to reach many more clients who were in need of financial assistance. However, planning and forecasting was required to ensure the successful acquittal of the remaining funds in the MNSW grant. The IS team were required to consider each financial assistance client's needs, negotiate

an end to funding for many, and communicate about bulk advance payments to others.

Food support was absorbed into the existing financial support given to clients, via the IS program, known as "Living Assistance" payments. This payment assists with meeting basic daily needs such as food to eat, groceries, toiletries, and contribution to utility bills.

Rental rates increased drastically due to the rising cost of living, and the ASC has observed an increasing amount of people

at greater risk of eviction or presenting experiencing homelessness as they are unable to pay their rent in full.

The amount of financial relief the Asylum Seekers Centre provided to people we support was consistent from the previous financial year enabled by the Covid-19 pandemic relief package from the NSW Government, the Inner West Council, and the generosity of our valued partner Bridge for Asylum Seekers.

Response to rising homelessness

With international tourism returning to Australia, the dramatic increase in use of hotels, lodges, and hostels exacerbated the challenge of housing families experiencing homelessness or domestic violence.

We trialled a drop-in Housing Hub, supporting clients with housing enquiries, understanding tenancy rights and helping to source accommodation.



We connect people to supports and services continued

2022-2023 highlights and achievements

Sisters of Charity Foundation

The Sisters of Charity Foundation has been an incredibly generous and longstanding supporter of the ASC over more than a decade. They have previously provided properties to house people seeking asylum at no cost to the organisation or those who benefited from their kindness.

At the end of 2022, the first ASC family to live in the Sisters of Charity Foundation's Berala house moved out, after almost 18 months of calling the house their home.

When Manar*, her husband and five children moved into the house, they were in an extremely challenging

situation. They were relying on one income when Manar's husband had lost his job. It was the first few weeks of the July 2021 Sydney Covid-19 lockdown.

In the time they spent together in the Berala house they were able to turn their lives around and stabilise their situation before becoming independent again.

The family moved into a private rental home at the end of 2022, sharing with a family member to ensure they could cover the rent. Manar's husband has work in transport and her son is at TAFE and about to begin a trades

apprenticeship. The Muslim Women's Association helped them with a bond.

When Manar reflects on the opportunity the house gave her, she is very grateful for the time and space it allowed her family to get back on their feet. As it was local to their children's schools it enabled them to stay within a supportive educational community.

The children loved the space in the house to stretch out and recuperate. She says that the home came at a time when they really needed help and they were so grateful that they didn't need to compromise on their children's happiness.

Employment

The year saw the Centre increase its capacity and capability around employment services.

The ASC began work on our Uplift project, which is generously supported by the Paul Ramsay Foundation. Uplift is a multi-year program designed to tackle the four identified barriers to people seeking asylum finding work. The barriers being addressed are a lack of access to childcare; inadequate suitable English language support; minimal university and vocational training; and a lack of employer

recognition of people seeking asylum's skills and potential.

The hub in Auburn increased its opening hours to two days a week and more than 100 people went shopping for jobs and training opportunities at the hub's Job Fair, while the ASC's new jobs board, JobAdder, now helps track job applications and interviews and will be used in future to more easily provide post-placement support to clients employed with our partners.

The ASC added a new Employment Assessment Coordinator, who developed a self-serve guide for clients

enquiring about TAFE enrolment, reducing wait times and increasing efficiency.

Workshops were offered, including an Introduction to Job Seeking session for new arrivals, and the team attended several networking and training events, building stronger relationships with Glow Up Careers, CareerSeekers, Sydney East College, the Department of Education, UTS, UWS, LinkedIn, and Welcome Merchant.

The NSW Government introduced the Asylum Seeker Employment Skills Support



(ASESS) program to support people seeking asylum through access to fee-free training under Smart and Skilled and to provide employment support.

University scholarship success

As Beverley Bossman, part of the ASC volunteer-powered university support team, put it, "it's criminal. It shows a total lack of compassion. We let people seeking asylum live here but we don't support them. We expect them to fend for themselves, but won't let them get an education."

This year, the Centre intensified its efforts to overcome this issue, with the highest number of scholarships and students in history.

The University Program also hosted an information session for 40 participants interested in obtaining scholarships for university.



Hot lunches

The sense of community and familiarity that accompanies a hot lunch, prepared by one of our volunteer groups, is one of the ASC's most valued services. We continued to run a weekly lunch program at the community centre in Auburn and increased lunch services at Newtown to three days.

We welcomed more corporate groups to our lunch program, joining existing community groups in volunteering.

 More than **5,500** hot meals provided at community lunches

We connect people to supports and services continued

2022-2023 highlights and achievements



Family support

Family Days, a new initiative at the Centre, proved to be a great success. Six were held across the year, giving families the opportunity to pick up baby essentials, have fun together and get advice on school enrolment, fee waivers, health, and transport.



198
families supported with public school enrolment and fee waivers



63
children linked with childcare

Recreational activities

The ASC helps children and adults to gain new skills, make new friends, and build community.

We provide opportunities for people to connect through a range of programs and community groups, including swimming lessons, arts activities, music, sewing, mums and bubs, school holiday programs, excursions, English classes, and more.

Community Connectors volunteers

The Community Connectors program proved a great initiative, supporting clients with specific requests and identifying resources and programs within the larger community or the client's local

community to assist. This was an effective means of extending the ASC's ability to support.

LGBTQIA+ peer group

After holding a welcome back dinner at the end of 2022, the LGBTQIA+ peer group saw an increase in attendance and quality relationships, with 66 attendances to nine sessions in Q4.

Events included cooking for the group and community lunch, a self defence class, and Belvoir St Theatre performance. The group also held a meeting with the Rainbow Working Group.

The group will convene in FY24 Q1 to articulate its Charter, Terms of Reference, and recruit members with lived experience.



Digital connectivity

Many people seeking asylum lack access to resources like technology. The ASC collects device donations to bridge the digital divide, helping people seeking asylum find work, study, and connect to family, friends, services, and the community.

Through generous donations and our hard-working volunteers, hundreds of phones, laptops, and tablets were refurbished and distributed to our community members.



451
devices distributed

Everyday support

The ASC's Centre Support Volunteers help people seeking asylum navigate the challenges of everyday life, including accessing the state government's asylum seeker concession rate on public transport and providing Opal card top-ups for travel.



2,256
new Opal cards, renewals or replacements



665
people provided with Opal top-ups (27% are children)

We engage community

2022-2023 highlights and achievements

The Asylum Seekers Centre is both at the core of the Australian community, and leading in building a powerful network that seeks to support and advocate for people seeking asylum.

Community engagement

To ensure our community engagement offering was as effective as possible, the ASC ran its annual community engagement consultation, Participant Voice. Through an online survey and two focus group discussions, over 260 participants shaped ten activity requests. This was used to inform community engagement programming for 2023.

An introduction to community engagement principles and practices workshop was delivered to all staff and followed by consultations tailored to each service area and their current projects, with additional training provided for volunteers.



One arising theme was requests from clients to contribute as volunteers, a welcome reflection of their experience with the Centre.

Storytelling and advocacy group

We centre the lived experience of people seeking asylum at every opportunity, while taking incredible care to protect their safety and practise informed consent.

The ASC communications team recruited a small number of clients to participate in a storytelling group. The aims of the group are to:

- Provide more information to journalists, partners and the people we support about our approach to shared storytelling and advocacy activities.

- Find opportunities for people to build their storytelling and advocacy skills and participate in these activities with confidence.
- Provide lived experience advice and information to the communications team.

Members of the group attended conferences, events, meetings with members of parliament, a briefing for the Federal Parliamentary Friends of Refugees, appeared at a Senate inquiry and conducted media interviews.

We commenced a new Creative Writing program with the Western Sydney literacy group Sweatshop.

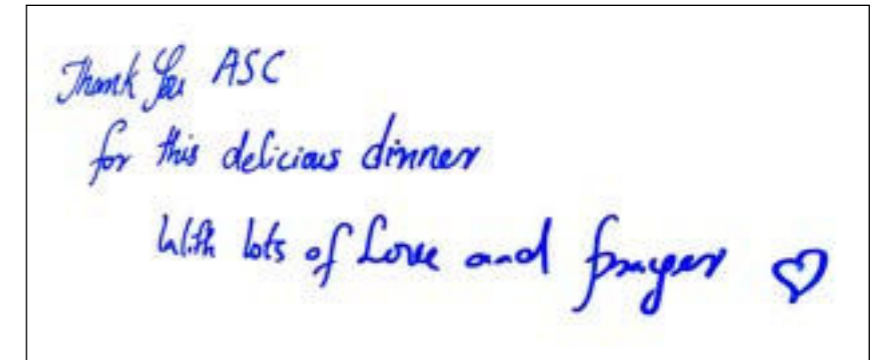


The program consisted of six monthly workshops at Auburn where a group of clients would work on writing technique.

Four participants completed the program and each will now have their work published in Sweatshop's anthology: 'Povo'.

Iftar dinner

The Asylum Seekers Centre hosted an Iftar dinner in Newtown. We were blessed with over 100 guests and a beautiful spirit of community and kindness. Ramadan Mubarak to those who joined us, and thank you to the volunteers and families who gave their time.



Inaugural Giving Day

Many years in the planning, ASC's inaugural Giving Day took place on 22 February 2023.

Under the theme of 'We all need somebody to lean on', generous donors and organisations came on board to match the funds raised throughout the campaign, so that every dollar donated was doubled.

The community was equally generous in its response, giving \$242,000, well above and beyond our matched giving target of \$150,000.

It was heartening to see new donors inspired to give to ASC and support people seeking asylum in our community.

We now plan to make Giving Day an annual event, and look forward to welcoming even more donors and supporters in the coming years.



Legacy gift

By 2013 our original home in Surry Hills was bursting at the seams and the growing employment team was working in the local library. With assistance from the Good Shepherd Sisters and a community of generous individuals led by the Becher Foundation, Susan and Anne, a new home in Newtown was purchased for the use of the Asylum Seekers Centre.

When we first moved in, we did not imagine that the needs would grow to the extent it has today, and the capacity and strength of the Centre would grow to match that need.

One of Anne and Susan's shared passions has always been

for a fairer Australia for people seeking asylum and refugees. Anne imagined a community where people would be welcomed and recognised for the rich contribution they could make to our country.

Anne and Susan's support of the ASC has always been in the belief that practical support is vital to people while they wait for their claim for protection to be processed. Getting the help that they need at the right time makes all the difference to people thriving in our community.

In 2022-23, we celebrated the life of Ann Coombes and marked the contribution Ann and her partner Susan have made in their lifetimes in active support of people seeking asylum.

Volunteers

2022-2023 highlights and achievements



363 Volunteers in 2022-2023

26,900 Hours of volunteering

\$1,163,963 Volunteer contribution in \$

252 New volunteers this year

What work do volunteers at the ASC do?

- Academic English Tutoring
- Centre Support
- Communications Support
- Community Engagement
- Community Speakers
- Computer Tutoring
- Employment
- English Teaching
- Fundraising Support
- Health Navigation
- Housing
- Intake
- Intensive Support
- IT Support
- Lunch Service
- Opal Administration
- Reception
- University Support

The Asylum Seekers Centre is a testament to the power of community engagement, with volunteers playing a vital role in our mission to support and empower people seeking asylum. We celebrate the unwavering dedication of our volunteers, whose selfless contributions have been instrumental in our continued success.

At the heart of the ASC volunteer network are the remarkable individuals who have dedicated a decade or more of their time and expertise. A staggering 13 volunteers have served the Centre for ten or more years, each bringing a wealth of experience and a deep commitment to the cause. Alongside them, 36 volunteers have between five and 10 years of service, demonstrating the remarkable longevity and loyalty of the ASC's volunteer base.

The ASC's volunteer community extends far beyond these long-serving individuals, with 93 volunteers regularly gathering to provide lunch services for our community. These vital social connections create a supportive environment for the people we support and create a sense of community that extends far beyond a meal.

From intake and front-of-house duties to academic tutoring, employment support, and health services, volunteers contribute to every aspect of the Centre's operations. In total, the ASC relies on 20 distinct volunteer roles to deliver our holistic, wraparound support.

The ASC's volunteer program has also garnered the attention of educational institutions, with students from prestigious Australian universities and colleges, including Sydney University, the University of New South Wales, and the University of Wollongong seeking out internship opportunities at the Centre.

In the 2022-23 financial year, the ASC welcomed 252 new volunteers, bringing the total number of active volunteers to 363. With a combined 26,900 hours of volunteer support, the contribution of volunteers in 2022-23 is valued at \$1,163,963.

As the ASC continues to navigate the challenges of supporting people seeking asylum in an ever-changing landscape, the role of our volunteers remains as vital as ever. Their tireless efforts, unwavering commitment, and diverse skills are the lifeblood of the organisation, ensuring that we can continue to provide a welcoming and empowering environment for people seeking asylum.

"Their tireless efforts, unwavering commitment, and diverse skills are the lifeblood of the organisation."



We influence policy and legal change

2022-2023 highlights and achievements

In addition to providing a warm welcome and vital frontline services, we advocate for changes to policy and laws at a state and federal level. By seeking to drive systemic change, we believe we can improve the lives of people seeking asylum, while over time reducing the need for our intensive services, particularly in crisis situations.



- A fairer, more timely visa determination process:
 - Increased funding for the refugee status determination process so that cases are resolved quickly and justly.
- End offshore detention:
 - Reduce offshore detention regime and reallocate funding to community support programs.

Unfortunately, as has become the norm, issues relating to people seeking asylum and refugees were relegated to the footnotes of the budget, despite the urgent need for action.

Funding for the only financial support program for people seeking asylum, the Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS), remained static at just \$37 million. It meant that spending on SRSS fell by an enormous 95 per cent from \$300 million in 2015-16.

In contrast, the government committed \$1.5 billion over the forward estimates to 2026-27 to offshore detention, including in Nauru, where there are comprehensive archives of mistreatment and violence, and hundreds of accounts of inhumane conditions.

Palm Sunday rally

This year, as we have in previous years, we marched in unity with people seeking asylum and refugees at the Palm Sunday rally. ASC volunteers and staff walked alongside people seeking asylum to 'Act for Peace' and send a message to the government.

Federal Budget

In the lead up to the Federal budget, the ASC issued a series of policy asks we were hoping to see supported. These were:

- Financial support for people seeking asylum:
 - Expand the SRSS program to cover more people and provide mainstream social support services (e.g. childcare, housing and disability support).
- Increase humanitarian intake
 - Australia's refugee intake is the lowest it's been in 45 years. Increase the Refugee and Humanitarian Program to 32,000, as promised in the election.

Parliamentary Friends Group

Prior to the Federal budget, the ASC, along with sector allies, conducted a pre-budget briefing with the Parliamentary Friends of Refugees group.

The meeting focused on why we need a safety net for people seeking protection, and included a powerful contribution from Yara*, who has been supported by the ASC. She spoke powerfully on experiencing poverty in the community, helping set the scene for the politicians present.

This group will continue to be important allies as the ASC and sector peers look to improve the policy landscape for people seeking asylum.

Poverty inquiry

Frances Rush OAM, ASC's CEO, gave evidence to the Senate Poverty Inquiry alongside a member of our community, who bravely shared her own experiences of living in poverty in Australia.

Nadia*, a person seeking asylum, talked about the stress of working and yet always being behind in her rent, and gave evidence to the inquiry about her constant worry about her children's futures.

By sharing both frontline expertise and lived experience, we sought to shine a light on the plight of the thousands of people seeking asylum we support every year and ensure the outcome of the inquiry included measures to assist those often overlooked.



Safety Net campaign

In response to the NSW state government ending emergency funding and the lack of relevant measures in consecutive Federal Budgets, the ASC supported a communications advocacy campaign focused on building support for a safety net for people seeking asylum.

Of the more than 70,000 people seeking refugee protection in Australia, fewer than 2,000 get support from SRSS (Status Resolution Support Services), which offers financial assistance for those waiting for an outcome on their claim for protection.

This work was informed by a survey of supporters which showed 97 per cent of respondents indicated that people seeking asylum "should have means-tested income support when they

are waiting for the government to process their protection application".

Asked how much they think is required for a single person to live in Sydney per week, 65 per cent of respondents said upwards of \$650. At most, SRSS payments provide individuals \$42 a day, or a maximum of \$294 per week.

Alongside sector allies, we used a number of calendar moments to build momentum around the ask. These included the end of the NSW state emergency funding, Homelessness Week, the Labor Party National Conference, and the Federal budget review.

This work will continue in the coming years and remains a priority for the ASC and the sector.

Financial Statements

Statement of Profit or Loss & Other Comprehensive Income

Asylum Seekers Centre Incorporated
ABN 47 164 509 475
For the Year Ended 30 June 2023

	FY 2023	FY 2022
	\$	\$
INCOME		
Grant income	3,191,568	2,324,859
Donations	2,704,555	3,155,996
Fundraising events & sales	11,636	16,327
Finance income	49,081	687
Other income	22,295	289,394
Total Income	5,979,135	5,787,263
(LESS) EXPENSES		
Services		
Employment assistance	(443,771)	(393,674)
Healthcare	(333,750)	(337,269)
Intensive support	(545,754)	(492,960)
Community engagement	(476,854)	(403,399)
Direct service management	(877,649)	(845,130)
Volunteer & HR management	(152,441)	(137,070)
Total Services	(2,830,219)	(2,609,502)
RELIEF & HOUSING		
Client relief	(1,525,188)	(1,694,431)
Housing & accommodation	(25,494)	(31,401)
Total Relief & Housing	(1,550,682)	(1,725,832)
MANAGEMENT & SUPPORT		
Management & administration	(220,745)	(119,740)
Building maintenance, rates & utilities	(107,878)	(68,802)
Communications	(242,697)	(275,823)
Fundraising	(471,577)	(398,015)
IT costs	(111,177)	(128,376)
Running Costs	(351,840)	(450,403)
Total Management & Support	(1,505,914)	(1,441,159)
Total Expenses	(5,886,815)	(5,776,493)
Net Surplus	92,320	10,770
OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME		
Other comprehensive income for the year, net of tax	-	-
Total Comprehensive Surplus for the Year	92,320	10,770

Statement of Financial Position

Asylum Seekers Centre Incorporated
ABN 47 164 509 475
For the Year Ended 30 June 2022

	FY 2023	FY 2022
	\$	\$
ASSETS		
Current Assets		
Cash & cash equivalents	4,351,352	4,740,148
Receivables	28,945	87,818
Other current assets	11,580	8,109
Total Current Assets	4,391,877	4,836,075
Non-Current Assets		
Property, plant & equipment	2,149,225	2,172,587
Total Non-Current Assets	2,149,225	2,172,587
Total Assets	6,541,102	7,008,662
LIABILITIES		
Current Liabilities		
Deferred revenue	1,334,830	1,778,933
Payables	174,421	292,227
Provisions	333,932	332,689
Total Current Liabilities	1,843,183	2,403,849
Non-Current Liabilities		
Provisions	68,723	67,937
Total Non-Current Liabilities	68,723	67,937
Total Liabilities	1,911,906	2,471,786
NET ASSETS	4,629,196	4,536,876
EQUITY		
Reserves	438,710	438,710
Accumulated funds	4,190,486	4,098,166
Total Equity	4,629,196	4,536,876

Financial highlights

Our Supporters

We were proud to have the support of 2,342 donors in the 2022-23 financial year. All of our donors - large and small, old and new, regular and occasional - are vital to our ability to support people seeking asylum in our community. Thank you.

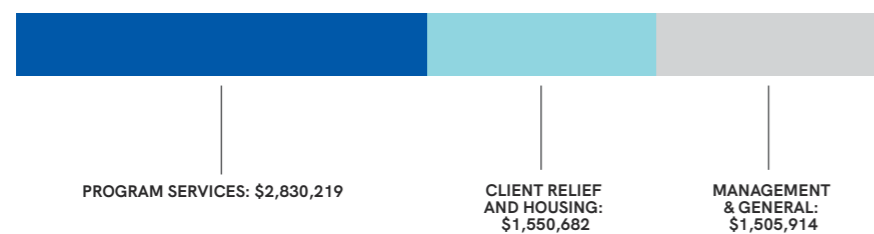
We delivered

\$4.38M of the Asylum Seekers Centre's total expenditure in 2022-23 was directed to essential support and services for people seeking asylum in our community. The total income of the Asylum Seekers Centre this year including in-kind support was \$7.28M.

2022-2023 Source of income



2022-2023 Allocation of expenses





**“To [my mum], the
ASC was a place of
refuge and safety...
it made her feel
seen and heard.”**

Fara
ASC community member



Our Board



Peter Waters
Chair

Peter Waters has worked with law firm Gilbert+Tobin for more than 25 years, formally 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 Director of the Pride Foundation.



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, Chair of the New Energy Tech Consumer Code Council, and Customer Advocate for NAB's Wealth Advice Remediation.



Betty Hounslow AM

Betty Hounslow has more than 40 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.

Betty sadly died in July 2023 and we will dedicate a deeper reflection to her remarkable contribution to the ASC in the 2023-24 annual report.



Michelle Champ

Michelle Champ has a 25-year career in senior financial management and strategy. She is currently CFO of Hireup, which is Australia's largest NDIS registered online platform which gives people with disability the power to find, hire and manage their very own support workers. Michelle also sits on the Board of Netball NSW, is a graduate member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors (GAICD), holds a Bachelor Degree in Commerce and is a Fellow of the Certified Practising Accountants.



Jonathan Ladd

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



Abang Anade Othow

Abang Anade Othow has served as an ambassador for organisations such as Red Cross and Oasis Africa. She works for a social enterprise, Enterprising World, empowering displaced individuals, refugees, and minority groups, and is a current national ambassador for the Refugee Council of Australia.

Our Board continued



Heather Payne

Heather Payne has an international career in marketing and has held senior positions with leading data & insights company Kantar, including as Managing Director Australia, CEO Asia Pacific, CMO Asia Pacific, and Global Chief Client Officer, and was a member of the Global Board for 15 years. Upon returning to Australia Heather worked for CareerSeekers which is a social enterprise helping refugees and people seeking asylum re-start their careers in Australia. Heather holds a Bachelor of Commerce (Marketing) and is a graduate of the AICD.



Mary Reemst

Mary Reemst has worked in finance for more than 30 years and was formerly the CEO of Macquarie Bank Limited from where she retired in 2021. She is a Director of the Sisters of Charity Foundation and Chair of The Hunger Project Australia.



Graham Thom

Graham Thom is Refugee Adviser 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.

Tributes: Our Board continued



Om Dhungel

After four years serving as a Director of the ASC board, Om Dhungel stepped down.

Om made a significant contribution to the Asylum Seekers Centre, first joining the board in October 2017 with lived experience as a refugee.

Om brought this experience, together with a keen intellect and a strong commitment to the cause, to challenge us to think differently. He reminded us that people seeking asylum, with the right assistance, have the will, courage, and skills to build a life for themselves and their families and to contribute to the community.

Om's passion and example means his advocacy for people seeking asylum and refugees, and more broadly for a more diverse community, will not end with his time on the ASC board.



Marina Brizar

Marina Brizar's incredible background and determination to help shape a better future made her the perfect addition to the ASC board.

From arriving in Australia as a Bosnian refugee to studying a double degree in law and international studies at the University of Technology, Sydney, through to being named Young Migration Lawyer of the Year, Marina has always been passionate about advocating for people seeking asylum.

Marina had a lifetime of lived experience to draw upon to inform the ASC's direction and contribution. From understanding the impact of an unstable legal status through to the disconcerting nature of not having a network to regaining physical and mental health after the ordeal of fleeing danger, Marina combined her unique perspective with an incredible legal mind.

As Marina heads to London in her role as Director of Talent Beyond Boundaries, we know she will continue her impressive journey and record of advocating for people seeking asylum.

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.



Rosemary Kariuki OAM

Rosemary Kariuki is a passionate advocate for migrant refugee women. She is a multicultural liaison officer for the NSW Police and was the 2021 Local Hero in the Australian of the Year Awards. In partnership with the African Women's Group, Rosemary founded the African Women's Dinner Dance. She also started the African Village Market – a program to help migrants and refugees start their own businesses – which ran for four years.



Thomas Keneally AO

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



Hugh Mackay AO

Hugh Mackay is internationally recognised for his pioneering work in social research. He is the author of 22 books including his latest, The Kindness Revolution. Hugh is a Fellow of the Australian Psychological Society and has been awarded honorary doctorates from five Australian universities.



Wendy Sharpe AO

Wendy Sharpe is one of Australia's most acclaimed artists, living and working in Sydney and Paris. She has been awarded The Sulman Prize, two Travelling Scholarships, The Portia Geach Memorial Award (twice), The Archibald Prize, and many others. She has been a finalist in The Sulman Prize twelve times, and The Archibald Prize eight times. She has held over 60 solo exhibitions around Australia and internationally.

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



Collier Charitable Fund



GOODMANORS



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APS Foundation

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Bryan Brown

Miles Collins

Jean Edwards

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Our Major Supporters continued

Major Community Fundraisers



Major material gifts



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

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



“Through the hardships and tears, we have seen enormous joy and warmth. This has become a place of community, of family, of hope. And it is that spirit that will continue to define the next thirty years.”

Frances Rush OAM
Asylum Seekers Centre CEO



CENTRE ASYLUM SEEKERS





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