

CENTRE ASYLUM SEEKERS

Asylum Seekers Centre Annual Report 2023-2024

ABN: 47 164 509 475





“As we grappled with the hard, impossible trade-offs needed when demand far exceeded resources, Betty was our moral compass; bringing the focus back to our mission, stiffening our spines to take more risks, challenging us to look beyond service delivery to push for reform of the whole, cruel system.”

Peter Waters

Chair of the ASC Board.

For the full tribute to Betty Hounslow, former Chair and Director of the ASC Board, see page 10.

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The Asylum Seekers Centre acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and acknowledges their continuing connection to the land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to their knowledge, their survival, and elders past and present. We recognise that sovereignty was never ceded, and this land always was, always will be Aboriginal land.

Asylum Seekers Centre at-a-glance

Who we are

Established in 1993, the Asylum Seekers Centre (ASC) is the first organisation in Australia to open its doors to specifically welcome and support people seeking asylum.

We provide practical and personal support for people seeking safety in Greater Sydney, and advocate for fair and humane policies at every level.

The ASC was established 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.

We offer services and support including:



Primary health clinic



Hot community lunches



Employment assistance



Casework support



Training and job readiness



University scholarship and training



English classes



Transport support



Digital connectivity



Recreational activities



Family, school and childcare support



Medication

- @asylumseekerscentre
- @asylum-seekers-centre
- @ASC Syd
- @ascsyd.bsky.social
- @asylumseekerscentre
- @AsylumSeekersCentreSydney

Chair and CEO's Report

For people seeking asylum, the past year was one of compounding and intersecting crises. Rising living costs, housing insecurity, policy failures, and systemic exclusion converged to create hardship on nearly every front.

These challenges were not abstract – they were lived daily by people already navigating immense uncertainty and a system that too often denies them safety, dignity, and basic rights.

At the Asylum Seekers Centre (ASC), we witnessed this deepening crisis firsthand. Every day, we supported individuals and families confronting housing instability, worsening mental health, food insecurity, and barriers to essential services. These issues were rarely isolated – they overlapped and intensified, requiring intensive, tailored, and sustained support.

Our frontline response evolved in turn. We extended our reach, deepened our partnerships, and developed new service models to meet people where they were – geographically, emotionally, and practically.

Our health clinic, operating without access to Medicare for

many of the people we support, responded to a dramatic increase in complex mental health needs. Referrals to specialist counselling services more than doubled. Our nurse-led and GP clinics continued to provide essential care, while new risk assessment and suicide prevention tools were introduced to ensure a more responsive, trauma-informed approach.

Beyond clinical care, our community programs became vital spaces of connection and restoration. New initiatives such as Lunch and Learn in Newtown and Knit and Nourish in Auburn offered more than skill development - they offered welcome, healing, and belonging. Whether gathered around a stove or sewing machine, people shared culture, stories, and solidarity.

This year also saw the culmination of a significant strategic milestone. After a highly

consultative process, we launched our 2024-28 Strategic Plan, outlining bold priorities for our future - one rooted in the voices and experiences of people with lived experience. The strategy reinforces our goals: to connect people to vital support, to shift public attitudes and policy, and to place lived experience at the heart of all we do.

Advocacy continued to play a critical role in our work. From calling on the government to expand visa pathways for Palestinians fleeing Gaza, to speaking out against the proposed Deportation and Entry Ban Bill, ASC stood firmly for justice and compassion. Our team provided a submission to the Senate's Cost of Living Inquiry, contributed to state and national homelessness conferences, and coordinated lived experience inputs at parliamentary briefings, inquiries, and public forums.



This year also marked a significant milestone: the 30th anniversary of the Asylum Seekers Centre. We reflected on three decades of welcome, resilience, and solidarity – and redoubled our commitment to the future. From humble beginnings, the ASC has grown into a vital pillar of community, standing alongside thousands of people seeking asylum as they rebuild their lives.

Yet this period has not been without significant financial challenges. In the years following COVID-19, demand for our services has remained consistently high, while income has declined. The conclusion of temporary government assistance provided during the lockdowns, coupled with a reduction in donations linked to the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, has placed pressure on our financial position.

To maintain service delivery at current levels, we have drawn on our limited reserves. The Board and management remain committed to strengthening ASC's long-term sustainability and are actively pursuing strategies to diversify income, build resilience, and ensure we can continue to meet the needs of people seeking asylum into the future.

Through these challenges, we have been guided by the principles that have long defined the ASC – integrity, compassion, and a people-centred approach. These are values embodied by our former Chair and long-time Board member, Betty Hounslow AM, whom we sadly lost in July 2023. A fierce advocate for social justice, Betty's leadership shaped our organisation in profound ways. She stood firm in her belief that no

injustice should go unanswered. Her legacy – of courage, purpose, and deep humanity – will continue to guide us.

That purpose remains clear. Every day, we are led by the people we serve – by their hope, their perseverance, and their vision for a better life. We are grateful to walk beside them, and we thank our staff, volunteers, donors, and partners for making that journey possible.

Peter Waters
Chair
Asylum Seekers Centre

Frances Rush OAM
Chief Executive Officer
Asylum Seekers Centre



Thouraya's story: Strength in a ceaseless struggle

"Life is not life, if it's not hard. Hard makes your personality, makes your confidence. I'm more confident now in myself." These powerful words from Thouraya encapsulate the arduous journey for people seeking asylum in Australia.

Fleeing unimaginable persecution, she and her family arrived with nothing but the invisible scars of their past and the daunting uncertainty of their future.

"I came from a country where there may not be war, but persecution and harm seriously threaten people's freedom. We fled our home country seeking safety. We thought Australia would be our safe haven," Thouraya says.

However, in this safe haven, there is no safety net for people seeking asylum.

The initial months and years in a new land were a struggle. Thouraya and her family faced a barrage of struggles.

"When we first arrived, we were a family full of dreams and hope, fleeing a life of harm," she says.

"The threat to our lives may have gone, but the hardship simply shifted. Our dreams and hopes were worn down by the reality of life as a person seeking asylum in Australia."

The first shock was the language barrier, with none of her family speaking any English aside from a few words. This barrier had a multiplier effect, with the inability to communicate preventing her from finding work, a home, and a community.

"We were highly qualified overseas but this had no relevance here as we didn't speak English, had no Australian experience, and no Australian qualifications. We couldn't find suitable jobs."

Without stable work or a rental record, like many people

seeking asylum, Thouraya's family was locked out of the rental market.

"No real estate would accept our application, saying we had no rental history. Rent was also out of our budget without a safety net or a secure job. We were not even able to find enough money to feed ourselves."

For her children, the complexities of their new reality unfolded with a raw, often painful, clarity.

Propelled into school with a language barrier, they faced the sharp edges of exclusion, isolation, and bullying.

"All of these challenges and the sadness in my children's eyes, their questions, broke my heart. It put me under pressure and there is no respite."

Thouraya and her family wanted to contribute, to become part of their new community, but they were shut out by a system designed to do exactly that.

"Every feeling was hurt, every laugh hushed by uncertainty, every moment of happiness at risk from a letter chasing money or evicting you from somewhere you were trying to make a home."

At risk of falling between the cracks of a broken system, the warmth of the Asylum Seekers Centre became a lifeline to Thouraya and her family.

"That [the Asylum Seekers Centre] was the first place that they say, 'Welcome to Australia. We are happy to see you. We are happy to help you.'"

"Behind all of these, there are still people who have this smile on their faces. That's really very important for us, as refugees."

After five years of waiting with no feedback, Thouraya's family

received the first light in their dark journey. It was an email from the Department of Home Affairs asking for the family members to complete a medical check – the first step to a protection visa.

However the medical check cost \$3,000 for the whole family – an amount they couldn't afford.

"I called the Asylum Seekers Centre, which was always there to help us."

Amidst all trials, Thouraya has unyielding hope, a fierce determination to not just survive, but to thrive.

"I want to progress. I want to go on. I want to improve. I want to be a storyteller. I want to be a journalist. I have many plans to do."

Thouraya reflects on her journey, thinking about her past and the present, and how she has evolved in time.

"I learned how to be strong and to get through, even if there are

many issues. You have to do this in your life. You have to learn how to get through."

As she says, "life is not life, if it's not hard."

It is in navigating this very struggle, with the unexpected embrace of community, that Thouraya and her children continue their pursuit of a brighter tomorrow, proving that even in the most challenging of circumstances, a new kind of life can indeed be found.

"There are always people who can hear you, who can help you, even with a smile, with saying, 'Don't be afraid, that's okay. You want to come in? Come forward.'"

"It's [the Asylum Seekers Centre] not for me a Centre that just helps people seeking asylum to survive, it's my second house, it's my family."

Tribute to Betty Hounslow

The Asylum Seekers Centre pays tribute to the inimitable Betty Hounslow AM who died on Thursday 27 July after a short illness.

Betty was a courageous and compassionate board member of the Asylum Seekers Centre for 10 years, including three years as Chair, leading from 2018 to 2021, through the toughest times of the pandemic.

In the State Library of Queensland, there is footage of a young Betty Hounslow leading a protest against planned motorways in Brisbane. Betty is standing toe-to-toe with a towering Queensland policeman, berating him with the words:

“Don’t think you are just doing a job. You’re not. You are being used by this Government. You are being used by repressive agencies against the people.”

Betty’s methods changed over the years, but she maintained the same hot outrage at Australia’s inhumane treatment of people fleeing from oppression in their home countries and determination to make a difference.

When first elected to the ASC’s Board Betty said, “I am delighted to be able to make a practical contribution to the lives of asylum seekers when they first arrive. Everybody deserves a second chance in life...”

Alongside her deep commitment to people seeking asylum and refugees, Betty was an activist, a campaigner, and a true trail-blazer.

“Betty cared deeply for matters of social justice, acted upon these matters and always did so with humour and warmth and care,” says Frances Rush, Asylum Seekers Centre CEO.

“I came to know Betty as a fellow Board member, as Chair of ASC, but so much more importantly as a friend. Her insightfulness, her wit, her laugh, and her kindness is what she brought to all she was involved with. Her work, often behind the scenes for ASC, has made a huge difference on all fronts of advocacy, fundraising, and real change for people seeking asylum.”

Deputy Chair of the ASC Board Clare Petre remembers her immense contribution, “If you worked or volunteered in a social justice area in Sydney over decades, you were bound to come across Betty Hounslow.

“Over the years, Betty has been described as empathetic, passionate, inclusive, warm, kind, generous, humorous, principled, determined, and courageous. She acted with integrity, solidarity, and wisdom at every turn and had an incisive mind that could influence any debate with her powerful logic.”

Her board contributions also involved APHEDA – Union Aid Abroad, the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, Rape and

Domestic Violence Services Australia, and the Australian Council for International Development.

Betty’s work contributed to community legal centres, indigenous health programs and women’s refuges; she was also the Executive Director of ACOSS (Australian Council of Social Service) and the Deputy CEO of the Fred Hollows Foundation. In 2003 she was awarded the Justice Medal for her long term commitment to improving access to justice for socially and economically disadvantaged people.

The Medal also recognised her success in lobbying for changes to legislation regarding gay and lesbian immigration. Betty was a member of the 78ers, the people who marched at the first Sydney Mardi Gras.

At the 40th anniversary of that night Betty said, “We feel a tremendous sense of pride in the fact that we didn’t let the brutality of that night deter us. We went on, fighting for our rights, fighting for recognition.”

In 2013, Betty was recognised in the Queen’s Birthday Honours List for “significant service to the community through organisations promoting social justice, Indigenous health, and human rights”.

One of the last ASC events Betty attended before her death was the organisation’s annual strategy day.

Chair of the ASC Board Peter Waters recalls, “As we grappled with the hard, impossible trade-offs needed when demand far exceeded resources, Betty was our moral compass; bringing the focus back to our mission, stiffening our spines to take more risks, challenging us to look beyond service delivery to push for reform of the whole, cruel system.”

“That day, as ever, Betty demonstrated her innate sense of justice. No injustice was let go, no opportunity to express a strong opinion was missed, no moment calling for kindness was left unanswered. Her centre of gravity was fairness, from the smallest thing to the biggest. She brought to the Chair’s role humanity, insight, and a gentle but firm hand.”

The Asylum Seekers Centre is deeply honoured to have had such a fierce advocate on our team. We will forever be grateful for her deep contribution and wisdom. She will be very sadly missed by our community.



Shaping the future: Our new 2024-28 Strategic Plan

In 2023, the Asylum Seekers Centre embarked on a journey to define its direction for the next four years – guided by deep reflection, collaboration, and an unwavering commitment to a more welcoming, just future. The result is a bold and forward-looking 2024-28 Strategic Plan, shaped by the voices and experiences of those at the heart of the organisation.

From the warmth of our main hall in our Newtown centre to meeting rooms across Sydney, the development process was a deeply consultative one. Over several months, staff, clients, volunteers, and board members came together to reflect on ASC's legacy and collectively imagine what more could be achieved.

"We wanted a strategy that doesn't just live on paper," says our CEO Frances Rush, "but one that reflects the lived realities of people seeking asylum, and draws strength from the relationships and networks we've built over decades."

Building on legacy, planning for the future

Since its establishment in 1993, the Asylum Seekers Centre has stood as a place of welcome, connection, and support for people seeking asylum. With a strong foundation of service delivery, community engagement, and individual advocacy, the 2024-28 Strategic Plan was designed to build on these strengths and tackle the current and future challenges faced by the people we support.

Delivered by the ASC Board of Directors and developed in

partnership with leadership, frontline staff, volunteers, and clients, the strategy reflects ASC's enduring mission: to support people seeking asylum in rebuilding their lives in Australia, while also advocating for the systemic change needed to ensure justice and fairness.

At its core, the plan reaffirms ASC's three-long term goals:

- Connect people to supports and services so they can live with dignity while awaiting protection;
- Engage the community to foster a broader culture of welcome and participation; and
- Influence policy and legal change to help shape a more compassionate and fair asylum system in Australia.

Four strategic priorities to guide the way

To advance these goals, the 2024-28 Strategic Plan identifies four key priorities, each reflecting a critical area of focus over the coming years.

1. Advocate for a fairer, more just system and shift community sentiment

We will harness the strength of our community networks, direct service delivery, and frontline

experience to influence policy. With the voices of people seeking asylum at the forefront, we will aim to shape reforms that are not only just, but workable and grounded in real-world needs. Shifting public attitudes is also central to this goal, as we work to build greater understanding and support across the Australian community.

2. Innovate in service delivery

With needs growing and resources limited, we will continue to seek smarter, more effective ways to deliver support. This includes new service models, partnerships, and tools that allow us to reach more people and deliver impact more efficiently. Innovation in this context is not just about doing things differently, but doing them better, and always with dignity and humanity at the centre.

3. Build a sustainable organisation with the financial and human resources to be ambitious in meeting our goals

Our people – staff, volunteers, and board – are our greatest asset. Supporting them to thrive is essential to our long-term impact. This strategic priority focuses on building a strong, resilient organisation with the resources to



grow and the leadership to respond to a challenging and ever-changing environment.

4. Strengthen participation and leadership of people with lived experience within the ASC

We will formalise the role of lived experience within our strategic direction and day-to-day operations in order to best inform service delivery and advocacy, as well as empower people and communities to deliver systemic change. This approach not only enriches our work, but helps build a future where those most affected by policy decisions have a seat at the table and the power to shape the system.

From vision to action

Once finalised, the operationalisation of the 2024-28 Strategic Plan was entrusted to ASC's CEO and Executive team and relevant staff, with detailed strategies drawn up to bring the strategy to life. These strategies guide day-to-day decision-making and ensure alignment across all areas of the organisation.

Importantly, the plan is a living framework. Its implementation will be reviewed regularly and updates will be shared in future annual reports.

A collective effort, a shared vision

The development of the 2024-28 Strategic Plan was not just an organisational milestone – it was a community effort. It reflects the insights and aspirations of those who walk through ASC's doors every day, and those who walk beside them in solidarity.

As we step into this new chapter, we do so with clarity of purpose, strength in partnership, and a firm belief in a fairer, more compassionate future.

We connect people to supports and services

2023-2024 highlights and achievements

Continued cost of living pressures drove a deepening crisis in poverty, healthcare, and housing for people seeking asylum, who were often at the frontlines of broader societal challenges.

These challenges frequently overlapped, with housing insecurity impacting health, and lack of income leading to poor nutrition, missed medical appointments, and reduced mobility. These compounding factors pushed many families and individuals into complex situations requiring intensive and sustained support.

Our services, systems, and staff continued to evolve in response, adapting to meet changing needs and support those we serve. However, external barriers – policy, funding gaps, and systemic exclusion – remained major obstacles to consistent support.



 **594**
new clients

 **10,129**
calls answered

 **2,377**
support services provided by centre support volunteers

Health and wellbeing

A combination of previous trauma and challenging conditions for people seeking asylum in Australia contributed to a sharp increase in complex mental health presentations to the ASC's Health Clinic. However, pathways for people seeking asylum to access psychologists and psychiatrists without Medicare posed a great challenge.

Admission rates to both Mental Health Units and Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation programs remained high among the people we support, and with a 216 per cent increase in referrals for specialist counselling services over a six-month timeframe.

The nurse-led and GP Clinics continued to provide care and services to those with complex mental health issues. The types of care provided include nurse support counselling, mindfulness tools, and referrals to counselling services.

The GP Clinics also used the GP Psychiatry Line for advice and management when seeing clients with more complex mental health signs and symptoms.

We also continued to build partnerships with other services such as One Door Mental Health, Wellways Carers Gateway, CSLR, and Resilient Kids, and refer clients where appropriate. We continued

to advocate and liaise with Public Hospital Mental Health Units, Acute Care Teams and Mental Health Support Services.

In response to our commitment to wellbeing and a growing number of individuals presenting with acute mental health concerns

 **702**
GP appointments

and increased suicide disclosures, we developed a Self-Harm and Suicide Prevention Policy. This was accompanied by the creation of a suicide screening and risk assessment tool, along with risk screening questions across multiple domains.

 **6,727**
Nurse appointments

 **4,002**
Pharmaceuticals provided

The Incident Coordinator process was adjusted to support addressing suicide ideation incidents with tools, training and support.

Welcome and registration

The first quarter of the year saw a new trend in referrals from people who had entered Australia on temporary visas issued for the FIFA Women's World Cup. Many of these individuals were experiencing homelessness or severe financial stress upon arrival.

Our intake team collaborated closely with the Intensive Support team to prioritise these new arrivals. A shift to brief intervention and one-off payments allowed us to respond quickly to urgent needs while managing a growing waitlist.

A new self-registration process was also developed and piloted, allowing people with minor or immediate needs (like Opal card access) to receive timely support without lengthy wait times.



Employment

The year saw impressive progress made on the Employer Pathways and Tertiary Education work streams supported by the Paul Ramsay Foundation Uplift project, following its initiation in the previous year. Referrals to the University Program increased and several new volunteers joined the team.

In the Language work stream of the Uplift project, the team focused on mapping out existing supports, meeting with sector partners, and designing our program to meet the unmet needs of the people we support.

The Paul Ramsay Foundation project team were successful in working together to finalise the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning framework for the project, while also launching a new post-placement support and engagement check-in process.

We connect people to supports and services continued

2023-2024 highlights and achievements

Intensive support

Our Intensive Support team continued to deliver critical wraparound support for individuals and families experiencing the most acute vulnerability – particularly those at risk of homelessness.

This year marked the closure of Providence House, a long-standing residential facility provided in partnership with the Sisters of Charity Foundation. From 2014 to 2024, Providence House offered safe accommodation for people seeking

asylum, alongside support from the ASC in healthcare, casework, education, and pathways to employment.

Following its closure in March 2024, the Intensive Support team worked to support residents – along with families living in Berala House – to transition into new housing. With limited referral options and many families ineligible for mainstream services, this was a complex and resource-heavy process.

In collaboration with other ASC teams, Intensive Support staff led internal case conferences and leveraged community connections to ensure each family's practical needs and mental wellbeing were met. We are deeply grateful to the Sisters of Charity Foundation for a decade of partnership and look forward to the impact of their new model supporting people seeking asylum in our community.

Community engagement

We introduced Lunch and Learn, a seven-week program where a group of our clients gather in the ASC kitchen to prepare meals together. Generously supported by City of Sydney, it helps participants develop skills in basic food handling and commercial kitchen operations, as well as share traditional recipes and dishes from their culture. One of our current clients was employed to lead the program, bringing both kitchen skills and lived experience to the role.

At our Auburn centre, we launched the Knit and Nourish program through generous funding provided by Cumberland City Council. The program is tailored for women and children, providing a welcoming space for mums to develop sewing skills as well as to cook and share traditional meals.



Family support

Providing support for the whole family unit continues to be vital to the wellbeing of people seeking asylum.

This year, we helped ease financial and educational pressures by providing 150 fee waivers and facilitating 85 school enrolments

– ensuring children can access consistent education and parents are supported through reduced financial strain.

Childcare remains critical for parents engaged in or seeking employment. With the support of the Paul Ramsay Foundation, our

advocacy efforts resulted in 14 fully funded childcare places. These efforts were strengthened through partnerships with Goodstart Early Learning, Cumberland City Council, and Heritage House Childcare.

To further support family wellbeing, we hosted six Family Days throughout the year. Supported by Islamic Relief Australia, Inner West Council, Gucci, The Joy of Giving, and Ventura Games, these events provided families with toys, baby essentials, practical advice, and the opportunity to connect over a shared meal.



Everyday support

Navigating a new country and an asylum process is a significant challenge for people seeking asylum. Our Centre Support Volunteers help people navigate the challenges of everyday life, including applying for concession Opal cards, phone and Opal card top ups, help with Medicare applications, getting a tax file number, visa health checks, and many other everyday supports.



Digital connectivity

Access to technology is essential for engaging in employment, accessing services, and connecting with loved ones – yet many people seeking asylum lack access to digital devices. We collect, refurbish, and distribute donated laptops, tablets, and mobile phones to help people seeking asylum stay connected to family, education, job opportunities, and vital services.



Food support

The sense of community that accompanies a hot lunch, lovingly prepared by our volunteer groups, remains a critical form of support and connection for the people we support. This year, we continued our weekly lunch program in Auburn and expanded services in Newtown to four days a week.

We welcomed more corporate volunteer groups into the

kitchen, joining our long-standing community groups in creating warm, welcoming spaces where people seeking asylum can share a meal, make new connections, and feel a sense of belonging.



We engage community

2023-2024 highlights and achievements

Partnership with NCIE

Initiated by our RAP (Reconciliation Action Plan) Working Group, we launched a new partnership with the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence (NCIE). As part of this initiative, clients were invited on an excursion to NCIE to deepen their understanding of First Nations cultures. Following the visit, clients were offered the opportunity to access NCIE services at a discounted rate, with several taking up this offer.



LGBTQIA+ Peer Group at Mardi Gras 2024

In March, 20 members of our LGBTQIA+ Peer Support Group proudly marched in the Sydney Mardi Gras under the Amnesty International Australia banner, supported by one staff member and one volunteer. For many, it was their first opportunity to participate in such a visible celebration of pride and community – a powerful moment of visibility, solidarity, and joy.

This event was part of our broader LGBTQIA+ Support Program, which provides a safe and empowering space for LGBTQIA+ people seeking asylum.

Around the world, many LGBTQIA+ individuals are forced to flee their home countries due to criminalisation, discrimination,

and violence simply for being who they are. But the challenges don't end upon arrival in Australia. Many face isolation, fear, cultural barriers, and limited understanding of both the asylum process and LGBTQIA+ rights in a new context.

Our program supports participants through connection, community, and advocacy – ensuring they are not alone in their journey. This commitment was powerfully reflected at this year's Mardi Gras, which became more than just a parade – it was a moment of pride, healing, and resistance, embodying our shared vision of a future free from fear and full of love.

The LGBTQIA+ Support Program is generously supported by Pride Foundation Australia.

Human Rights Day

On 10 December, we hosted a family-friendly event to commemorate Human Rights Day, an annual celebration of the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The day featured art and face painting, henna, lunch, and a cultural presentation by Walangari Karntawarra, an Australian Aboriginal Artist and Aboriginal Elder from Alice Springs, highlighting the rich traditions and history of First Nations people.

Walangari generously volunteered his time to share Aboriginal Dreamtime storytelling, along with masterful didgeridoo music and traditional song, with people seeking asylum supported by ASC. Children were captivated by the deep, resonant sound of the didgeridoo, with many joining in dancing and clapping.

The event brought together families from across the community to reflect on the importance of human rights, inclusion, and cultural understanding – a meaningful way to honour Human Rights Day.



Community Iftar dinner

Hosted by the Galaxy Foundation, 90 clients attended a community Iftar dinner at Amity College in Auburn during Ramadan. The evening was a time for reflection, connection, and solidarity, providing an opportunity for community

members to come together, break bread, and celebrate the spirit of community. Guests were treated to a rich cultural program featuring Turkish drumming, a performance on the traditional Turkish Saz instrument, and insightful talks from guest speakers. This year's Iftar also acknowledged the hardships faced by many in

our community due to ongoing conflict, separation from loved ones, and humanitarian crises. We stand in solidarity with all those affected.



Volunteers

2023-2024 highlights and achievements



441 Volunteers in 2023-2024
27,150 Hours of volunteering
\$1,131,511 Volunteer contribution in \$
250 New volunteers this year

What work do volunteers at the ASC do?

- Academic English Tutoring
- Centre Support
- Community Engagement
- Community Connectors
- Family Support (School enrolments)
- Community Speakers
- Computer Tutoring
- Employment Advisors
- University Advisors
- English Teaching
- Fundraising Support
- Health Navigation
- Intake
- Intensive Support
- IT Support
- Lunch Service
- Opal Administration
- Reception
- Communication Volunteers
- Administration Volunteers

The Asylum Seekers Centre is powered by a community of dedicated, skilled, and compassionate volunteers whose contributions are at the heart of our work. Every day, volunteers help us create a place of welcome, dignity, and hope for people seeking asylum.

This year, 441 volunteers gave their time, energy, and expertise to support people rebuilding their lives in Australia. Collectively, they contributed an incredible 27,150 hours of service – a contribution valued at \$1,131,511. From weekly commitments to one-off efforts, each hour made a tangible difference.

At the core of this extraordinary volunteer community are those who have shown long-term commitment to the ASC's mission. In 2023–24, 14 volunteers reached a milestone of 10 or more years of service and 35 volunteers marked between five and ten years of consistent volunteering.

This remarkable longevity reflects the deep connections volunteers form with our mission, our people, and each other.

Volunteers are embedded across dozens of different roles, from everyday support and English teaching, to employment and university advising, health navigation, family support, and front-of-house reception. Their knowledge and presence help us deliver wraparound, personalised support every day.

Our lunch program continues to be a vital part of community connection, with 19 regular

volunteer groups preparing hot meals for people at our Newtown and Auburn centres. These meals offer more than nutrition – they create a moment of welcome, dignity, and warmth.

Education partnerships also remain a key feature of our volunteer program. This year, we hosted student volunteers and interns from UTS, the University of Sydney, St Andrew's College, and Newington College, giving students a practical, human-focused experience of social justice in action.

While we support people from more than 90 countries, our volunteers also reflect a diversity of lived experience. Many speak multiple languages and bring cultural insights that help us meet people where they are.

As we face the ongoing challenge of supporting people in an often-hostile system, our volunteers remain a steadfast source of strength. They bring compassion, skills, resilience, and joy – making the ASC a place where people are not just supported, but truly seen.

We are deeply grateful for every contribution, and look forward to another year of partnership, learning, and community.

We influence policy and legal change

2023-2024 highlights and achievements

Deportation and Entry Ban Bill

We actively campaigned against the Labor-proposed Migration Amendment Bill (aka the Deportation and Entry Ban Bill), which would compel people

to go back to countries where they face serious harm, risk deporting people who Labor admits have not had a fair review, and ban entire countries of people from entering Australia.

This included preparing a submission for the Parliamentary

inquiry, where we outlined several concerns, centred the voices of those who have been impacted, and called for the proposed laws to be abandoned in their entirety.

The Bill was ultimately delayed thanks to community pressure.



Palm Sunday rally

Every year on Palm Sunday, we march in unity with people seeking asylum and refugees. This year we walked alongside people seeking asylum, refugees, and our sector partners in a united call for justice and compassion.



Cost of living inquiry

The ASC contributed to the Australian Senate's Select Committee on the Cost of Living, using this national platform to highlight the severe impact of rising living costs on people seeking asylum.

Our submission called for urgent reforms to the safety net, healthcare access, work rights, housing, and childcare. Central to our advocacy were lived experience case studies – powerful stories that illustrated the real and often devastating effects of the cost of living crisis on the people we support.

Palestinian visas

We used our advocacy channels and media to call on the Australian government to expand visa access for Palestinian refugees fleeing Gaza. We urged the creation of a dedicated humanitarian pathway consistent with those offered to Ukrainian and Afghan nationals during previous humanitarian crises.

Federal budget

In the lead-up to the 2024–25 Federal Budget, the ASC called for urgent investment in access to a safety net and a fairer process for people seeking asylum.

Instead, the Budget delivered another year of inaction and exclusion, with financial support for people seeking asylum dropping to just \$17 million - a mere 2.8% of the \$604 million allocated to offshore detention on Nauru.

The ASC continues to advocate for policies that recognise the inherent dignity of people seeking asylum and provide the tools to rebuild their lives safely and independently in our community.



Advocacy on homelessness

Our CEO, Head of Services and Engagement, and two Intensive Support Caseworkers attended the Homelessness NSW Conference, where our caseworkers presented on the unique housing challenges facing people seeking asylum and offered practical solutions.

Their presentation sparked meaningful discussions and helped strengthen our relationship with Homelessness NSW, opening doors to future collaboration.

Building on this momentum, our CEO Frances Rush spoke at the National Housing and Homelessness Conference, amplifying our advocacy at a national level.

Project Respect

This year, our Intensive Support team joined the Advisory Committee for Prosper (Project Respect) to contribute to the development of a vital new resource: *Support for Adult Survivors of Sexual Violence from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Backgrounds*.

Through this collaboration, we helped ensure the guide reflects the unique needs and experiences of people seeking asylum who have survived sexual violence, strengthening sector-wide understanding and improving access to culturally safe, trauma-informed care.

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 2024

| | FY 2024 | FY 2023 |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|
| | \$ | \$ |
| INCOME | | |
| Grant income | 2,286,626 | 3,191,568 |
| Donations | 2,124,037 | 2,704,555 |
| Fundraising events & sales | 67,838 | 11,636 |
| Finance income | 113,059 | 49,081 |
| Other income | 478,434 | 22,295 |
| Total Income | 5,069,994 | 5,979,135 |
| (LESS) EXPENSES | | |
| Services | | |
| Employment assistance | (655,733) | (443,771) |
| Healthcare | (351,573) | (333,750) |
| Intensive support | (495,811) | (545,754) |
| Community engagement | (541,459) | (476,854) |
| Welcome and registration | (280,458) | (155,172) |
| Direct services management | (810,869) | (722,477) |
| Volunteer & HR management | (152,701) | (152,441) |
| Total Services | (3,288,604) | (2,830,219) |
| RELIEF & HOUSING | | |
| Client relief | (584,846) | (1,525,188) |
| Housing & accommodation | (31,498) | (25,494) |
| Total Relief & Housing | (616,344) | (1,550,682) |
| MANAGEMENT & SUPPORT | | |
| Management & administration | (271,750) | (220,745) |
| Building maintenance, rates & utilities | (54,801) | (107,878) |
| Communications | (271,985) | (242,697) |
| Fundraising | (483,073) | (471,577) |
| IT costs | (153,859) | (111,177) |
| Running Costs | (314,597) | (351,840) |
| Total Management & Support | (1,550,065) | (1,505,914) |
| Total Expenses | (5,455,013) | (5,886,815) |
| Net Surplus | (385,019) | 92,320 |
| OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME | | |
| Other comprehensive income for the year, net of tax | - | - |
| Total Comprehensive Surplus for the Year | (385,019) | 92,320 |

Statement of Financial Position

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

| | FY 2024 | FY 2023 |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | \$ | \$ |
| ASSETS | | |
| Current Assets | | |
| Cash & cash equivalents | 3,148,151 | 4,351,352 |
| Receivables | 55,941 | 28,945 |
| Other current assets | 12,863 | 11,580 |
| Total Current Assets | 3,216,955 | 4,391,877 |
| Non-Current Assets | | |
| Property, plant & equipment | 2,133,736 | 2,149,225 |
| Total Non-Current Assets | 2,133,736 | 2,149,225 |
| Total Assets | 5,350,691 | 6,541,102 |
| LIABILITIES | | |
| Current Liabilities | | |
| Deferred revenue | 1,022,642 | 1,334,830 |
| Payables | 126,727 | 174,421 |
| Provisions | 317,267 | 333,932 |
| Total Current Liabilities | 1,466,636 | 1,843,183 |
| Non-Current Liabilities | | |
| Provisions | 78,588 | 68,723 |
| Total Non-Current Liabilities | 78,588 | 68,723 |
| Total Liabilities | 1,545,224 | 1,911,906 |
| NET ASSETS | 3,805,467 | 4,629,196 |
| EQUITY | | |
| Reserves | - | 438,710 |
| Accumulated funds | 3,805,467 | 4,190,486 |
| Total Equity | 3,805,467 | 4,629,196 |

Financial highlights

Our Supporters

We were proud to have the support of 2,272 donors in the 2023-24 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.

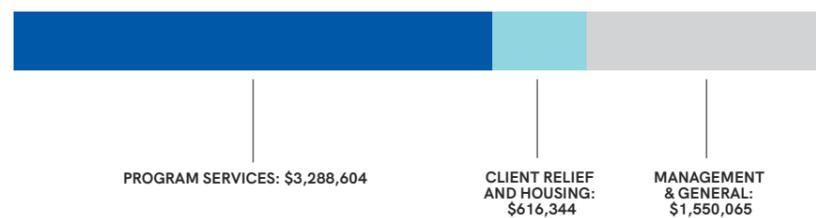
We delivered

\$3.9M of the Asylum Seekers Centre's total expenditure in 2023-24 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 \$6.46M.

2023-2024 Source of income



2023-2024 Allocation of expenses



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. Her wisdom and profound contributions will always be remembered with deep gratitude.



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.



Heather Payne

Heather Payne has had an international career in marketing, holding senior roles at global data and insights company Kantar, including Managing Director Australia, CEO Asia Pacific, CMO Asia Pacific, and Global Chief Client Officer, and served on the Global Board for 15 years. After returning to Australia, she worked with CareerSeekers, a social enterprise supporting refugees and people seeking asylum to restart their careers.

Our Board continued



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

Dr Graham Thom is the Advocacy Coordinator at the Refugee Council of Australia. He previously spent 24 years as Amnesty International Australia's Refugee Adviser, working on individual asylum cases and broader refugee human rights issues. Dr Thom has visited detention centres across Australia, including those formerly on Christmas Island, as well as refugee camps and detention centres in the Netherlands, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Kenya, Papua New Guinea, Nauru and Thailand.



Nevenka Codevelle

Nevenka Codevelle has more than 25 years' experience in the energy sector and is currently the Executive General Manager of AEMO Services. She was a founding member of the Energy Charter, served on the Rewiring the Nation Advisory Committee, and has held board roles in the technology and arts sectors. Nevenka has a longstanding commitment to the human rights of people seeking asylum.

Tributes



Michelle Champ

After nearly three years of dedicated service on the ASC Board, Michelle Champ stepped down in June 2024.

Michelle brought a sharp financial mind, strategic insight, and a clear sense of purpose to her role, shaped by more than 25 years in senior financial management and strategy. As CFO of Hireup and a Fellow of CPA Australia, Michelle's professional expertise played a vital role in strengthening the ASC's governance and financial sustainability.

She joined the Board at a critical time and was instrumental in guiding the organisation through the significant changes to our service delivery model during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Michelle's contribution was marked by clarity, pragmatism, and a deep commitment to our mission. Her legacy is one of sound leadership during a time of uncertainty, and we are grateful for the impact she has made.

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, she lives and works 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



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APS Foundation

Sarah Bassiuni

Beeren Foundation

Pru Brewer

Bryan Brown

James Christie and Sally Paton

Nanette Danks

Jean Edwards

Karen Foley

Vivienne Fries

Danny Gilbert

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Paul Ramsay Foundation

Heather Payne

Robyn Pettit

Presentation Sisters Wagga Wagga

Mary Reemst

Stephen Rush

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The Knights Family Jabula
Foundation

The Scully Fund

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The Todd Family Foundation

Susan Varga

Tony Weir

Annie Williams

Paul and Pamela Wood

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Major community fundraisers



Major material gifts

Allianz Trade



Macquarie Group Foundation

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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Design: [domicbartolodesign.com](#)





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