

CENTRE ASYLUM SEEKERS

Asylum Seekers Centre Annual Report 2024-2025

ABN: 47 164 509 475





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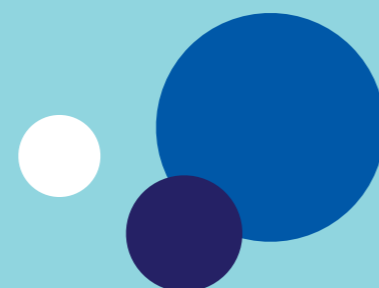
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“It is the people who make this community.”

Frances Rush OAM
Asylum Seekers Centre CEO

A decade of leadership and a lifetime of support.

For the full story about Frances Rush's legacy at the Asylum Seekers Centre, see pages 12-15.



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) was 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.



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

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.

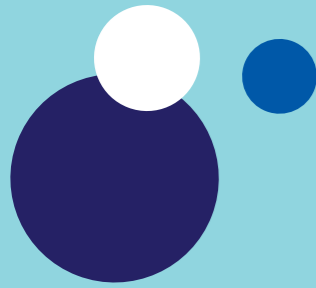
We offer services and support including:

 Primary health clinic	 Hot community lunches	 Casework support	 Employment assistance	 Training and job readiness	 English classes
 Transport support	 Digital connectivity	 Recreational activities	 Family, school and childcare support	 Medication	 LGBTQIA+ support

Our impact at a glance

From July 2024 to June 2025

4,600+ people seeking asylum have been helped by the Asylum Seekers Centre 	
915 GP and nurse appointments (combined) 	133 people supported through our LGBTQIA+ support program 
824 people supported with job-seeking activities 	9,870 hot meals served 
341 people supported by crisis and complex casework 	805 Opal card top ups 
363 children supported with school enrolments & fee waivers 	405 devices distributed 
49 children supported with childcare/preschool placements 	2,388 attendees to community, social, and recreational activities 



Letter from our Chair

Across the past year, the ground has continued to feel unstable for many people seeking asylum. Visa delays stretching into years, housing insecurity, rising living costs, and restricted access to essential services continue to compound vulnerability for individuals and families seeking safety in Australia.



At the Asylum Seekers Centre, we see these realities every day.

This year, the ASC supported more than 4,600 people across Greater Sydney – the highest number in our history. We provided essential healthcare through our on-site clinic, supported families with school enrolments and childcare, connected clients to employment opportunities, and fostered community through social, recreational, and cultural programs.

Across all services, we strengthened pathways to independence and empowerment, including through LGBTQIA+ peer support, digital inclusion

programs, and innovative programs such as our seven-week work experience and food security initiative, Lunch and Learn.

Alongside frontline support, we strengthened our focus on systemic change. With the appointment of our first full-time Advocacy Lead, the ASC expanded its capacity to influence policy and amplify lived experience. Throughout the year, we contributed to national debate, challenged legislation that risked harm, and advocated for a fairer safety net for people seeking asylum. Our advocacy is grounded in the belief that dignity and justice must underpin public policy.

This year also marks a significant moment in the life of our organisation.

After 10 years as CEO – and more than 30 years of involvement since ASC’s earliest days – Frances Rush announced she will step down in August 2025.

Under Frances’ leadership, ASC has grown significantly in both scale and impact. She has strengthened our service model, embedded lived experience at the heart of our strategy, and led through some of the most complex and challenging periods our sector has faced.

Everyone involved with the ASC – clients, staff, volunteers, supporters, and board members,

including myself – has been incredibly fortunate to benefit from Frances’ leadership and her lifelong commitment to people seeking asylum. Her contribution has shaped not only the growth of the organisation, but its character – one grounded in welcome, integrity, and community.

Importantly, this transition comes at a time of strength. We have a clear strategic direction under our 2024-28 Strategic Plan, a capable leadership team and staff, strong governance, and an extraordinary community of volunteers and supporters.

We have appointed a new CEO. When I became Chair five years ago, I asked Frances what her goals

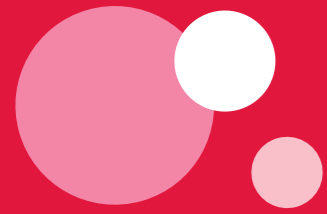
as CEO were. She replied with that inimitable Frances certainty, “be succeeded as CEO by a person with lived experience”. We met that goal in the appointment of Elijah Buol, a South Sudanese refugee who came to Australia from a refugee camp as an unaccompanied minor. Elijah brings passion, commitment, nous, and strength to the role of CEO.

Yet we also face steep challenges. We are witnessing deepening mental health issues amongst our clients as they struggle to endure the endless uncertainty from being trapped for years in a broken visa system. This increases demand for our crisis intervention services, placing added stress on our

services team. Demand for our services continues at high levels post-COVID but our income, mainly raised through donations from individuals, cannot keep up, creating a material structural shortfall which incrementally eats into our reserves.

As the need for our work remains urgent, we remain unwavering in our belief that dignity is not optional, that justice matters, and that people seeking asylum deserve welcome, safety, and opportunity.

Peter Waters
Chair
Asylum Seekers Centre



Letter from our CEO

This will be my final annual report letter as CEO of the Asylum Seekers Centre.



After 10 years in the role – and more than three decades connected to this organisation as a volunteer, supporter, board member, and CEO – I have made the difficult decision to step down in August 2025 and hand over leadership for the next chapter.

It has been the greatest privilege of my professional life to serve this community.

The past decade has been marked by profound change: multiple federal governments, a global pandemic, a cost of living crisis, devastating conflicts

abroad, and increasingly complex and at times hostile policy settings here at home. Through it all, the ASC has remained a place of welcome and practical support.

This year, we strengthened early support for new arrivals, expanded health and employment programs, and continued to foster community through social, recreational, and cultural initiatives. Programs such as Lunch and Learn, our LGBTQIA+ peer support, and Kids in the Kitchen have created opportunities for people seeking

asylum to gain skills, build confidence, and form lasting connections. Our community events, wellbeing sessions, and family programs have reinforced the importance of belonging, while everyday support ensures people can access essential services with dignity.

Behind every service is a person living with prolonged uncertainty. Many wait years – sometimes more than a decade – for resolution of their status. The toll of living in limbo is profound. And yet, what continues to inspire

me is the strength, generosity and determination of the people seeking asylum themselves.

When I first became involved in the early 1990s, we were a small volunteer-led service operating from a suburban house in Surry Hills. Today, ASC is a larger, more sophisticated organisation. But it has never lost its soul. It remains grounded in dignity, belonging, and the simple act of welcome.

I believe now is the right time to pass leadership to someone able to bring fresh energy to the next phase of this work. We have a clear

strategy, a strong team, and a committed community to carry it forward.

I am particularly heartened that the organisation will be led by Elijah Buol, whose lived experience, insight, and deep commitment to people seeking asylum reflect the values that have always defined the ASC. I have every confidence in his leadership and in the strength of this community to support him in the years ahead.

To everyone who has walked alongside ASC – directors, staff,

volunteers, supporters and, most importantly, the people seeking asylum who have trusted us – thank you. It has been an honour beyond words.

The welcome continues. The work continues. And this community endures.

Frances Rush OAM
Chief Executive Officer
Asylum Seekers Centre

Roslyn's story: A place to feel safe again

"I have four children. They were young when we ran away from danger." For Roslyn, the decision to flee was not a choice – it was survival. The threat she left behind was immediate and terrifying.



"If I go back, they will kill me," she says. When she arrived in Australia, Roslyn carried that fear with her, along with the enormous responsibility of protecting her children in a country where she had no connections.

"We had no one here – no relatives, no friends, nobody."

The early days were marked by uncertainty and exhaustion. Without income, stable housing, or support networks, even the most basic needs felt out of reach.

Then someone told Roslyn about the Asylum Seekers Centre.

What happened next is something she still remembers with clarity.

"We went, and a lady there said, 'Roslyn, welcome.' When she said, 'Welcome', I felt at home. I felt peace." It was a small moment, but it meant everything. After

everything she'd been holding in, it was enough to break through.

"I broke down in tears. There was someone there for me."

Before that moment, life had been unrelenting. "I was living in some painful life, day and night," Roslyn says.

At the start, the focus was on helping Roslyn and her children out of immediate crisis – making sure they were safe, fed, and had somewhere to stay.

"There was food there. They gave us food. I was really happy... I cried too."

Through emergency relief, the family received meals, clothing, and essential supplies. Financial assistance helped ease the pressure of those first critical

weeks, giving Roslyn space to breathe. "After two weeks, they gave us some financial support. I cried tears of joy and relief."

Alongside this, Roslyn was connected with a dedicated caseworker who provided one-to-one, personalised support, helping her navigate complex systems and begin planning for the future.

Safe housing was another crucial first step. The Centre first supported the family into crisis accommodation, giving them immediate safety. From there, they moved into longer-term temporary accommodation where they could begin to recover.

"We didn't have a place to sleep, they gave us somewhere to stay... The unit they provided had everything I needed."

For Roslyn's children, support extended beyond meeting basic

needs. The ASC helped enrol them in school and connected them with activities that gave them a sense of normalcy and joy.

Through school enrolments, recreational programs, and community outings – including visits to the Art Gallery of NSW and even a trip to the Opera House – her children were given the chance to feel like children again.

"My kids need school, they gave them school... They bought uniforms and school bags for my kids... They gave my kids activities." For Roslyn, the impact went far beyond practical support.

"After the life that I went through, I come here and I feel at complete peace. The trauma I came with ran away."

"I used to never sleep. Now I sleep with peace."

Step by step, the support helped the family move from crisis toward stability, and from survival toward healing.

In time, Roslyn and her children were able to move into their own home, making space for another family in need.

And today, their lives look very different. Three of Roslyn's children have finished school, with her youngest daughter still finishing her studies. Her daughter has dreams of giving back.

"My daughter now wants to study social work." Roslyn herself is building a future.

"At the moment, I am doing, an aged care certificate at TAFE. I hope to get a job and work in aged care." The family now has something that once felt impossible – stability, belonging, and a sense of home.

"We are now citizens and are happy now."

Looking back, Roslyn reflects on just how far they've come.

"My kids and I never used to sleep in peace. Now I sleep with peace."

"This is the place that makes me sleep at peace."

From arriving with nothing – no money, no clothes, no place to sleep – to building a future filled with hope, Roslyn's journey is one of extraordinary resilience.

And it all began with a simple but powerful act: "Welcome."

A decade of leadership and a lifetime of commitment

Hope and heartbreak have always existed side by side at the Asylum Seekers Centre. Over the past decade, no one has held that tension more steadily than Frances Rush.



In June 2025, Frances announced she would step down as CEO after 10 years in the role and more than 30 years of involvement with the organisation. Her leadership has shaped not only the scale and strength of the ASC, but its soul: a place of welcome, community, and quiet determination in the face of systemic injustice.

Trying to chart Frances' time at the ASC as a neat timeline misses the point. The work has never

been linear. It has been defined instead by people – their resilience, courage, grief, and joy – and by a belief that dignity and belonging are not optional extras, but fundamental rights.

Frances' journey with the ASC began long before her appointment as CEO. In the early 1990s, working as a social worker in Kings Cross with people living a street-based lifestyle, she saw firsthand how many people seeking asylum relied

on homelessness and food services, and how poorly the system met their needs.

From those early observations grew a collective effort, shared by many individuals and organisations, to establish what would become the Asylum Seekers Centre in 1993.

In those early years, resources were limited but the vision was clear. Claims for asylum were once processed within 12 to 18

months. Today, people can wait a decade or more, living in prolonged uncertainty that erodes mental and physical health. Across Frances' tenure, the ASC has borne daily witness to the human cost of this policy failure and has never looked away.

Frances' first role at the ASC focused on employment support, but it quickly became clear that work alone was not enough. People needed connection. Weekends

were long and lonely. So a simple idea took shape: a monthly catch-up in the Botanic Gardens, sharing lunch and kicking a soccer ball around. That small act captured something essential – the ASC would not only provide services, but foster community. That idea has endured.

“It is the people who make this community,” Frances has often said.

It begins with people seeking asylum themselves, who come from every corner of the world. She has long spoken of her admiration for their strength, determination, and generosity, even after unimaginable trauma. For Frances, leadership was about relationships.

That ethos extended to staff and volunteers. Across 10 years as CEO, Frances led through some of the most challenging



periods the sector has faced with generosity, clarity, and resolve. The commitment of ASC staff and volunteers, she says, never faded, even when adversity was constant. Their care and determination, shown day after day, became the backbone of the organisation.

Under Frances' leadership, the ASC also benefited from principled governance. She worked closely with Chairs and Board members who both challenged and supported the organisation, including Steve Bradley, the late Betty Hounslow, Clare Petre, Peter Waters, and the late Steven Glass.

Frances was dogged in her fundraising efforts. She humanised our appeals, ensuring they told the real stories of people seeking asylum with honesty

and care. She built enduring relationships with major donors and partners, grounded in trust, shared values, and a deep belief in the importance of this work.

Partnerships were another defining feature of her tenure. Frances understood that no organisation achieves systemic change alone. Collaborations with refugee and human rights organisations, unions, hospitals, cultural institutions and faith-based groups expanded the ASC's reach and strengthened its advocacy – helping meet immediate needs while pushing for long-term change.

Place has always mattered deeply to Frances. For people forced to flee, the loss of home and belonging cuts deeply.

The ASC, she believed, had to offer more than services – it had to offer a sense of place. From its beginnings in a suburban house in Surry Hills to its current home in Newtown, the Centre has been shaped by that philosophy.

The Newtown building itself became part of the ASC story: quirky, labyrinthine, filled with murals and memories. It echoes with sewing machines, shared meals, music, and conversation. It hosts Iftar dinners, spontaneous dancing, and quiet moments of care – what Frances often described simply as “a place of joy and welcome”.

The move to Newtown also marked a period of significant growth. During Frances' tenure, the ASC expanded from

supporting around 400 people each year with eight staff and 80 volunteers, to more than 4,600 people annually with around 40 staff and over 400 active volunteers.

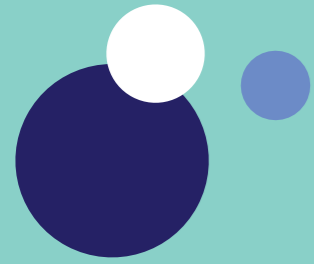
That growth was not without strain. Frances' leadership was shaped by two persistent challenges – funding and public policy – and one defining crisis: the COVID-19 pandemic. When borders closed and support disappeared almost overnight, people seeking asylum were among the most vulnerable. Securing emergency funding, working alongside sector partners, and ensuring people were not left destitute remains one of Frances' proudest achievements.

As she steps away, Frances leaves with immense pride – not only in the organisation's growth, but in its integrity. The ASC has strengthened its advocacy, deepened its community focus, and embedded lived experience at its core. With a new strategic plan and a strong team in place, she is confident it will continue to thrive.

But more than anything, Frances leaves with determination. With more than 120 million people displaced worldwide, the work is far from finished. Her legacy is not just an organisation that has grown, but a community that continues to reject fear and division, and to choose welcome.

Frances will continue that work, as she always has. And the Asylum Seekers Centre will carry

her imprint – in its people, its place, and its unwavering commitment to dignity and justice for people seeking asylum.



Finding family at ASC's Auburn hub

The first thing Nurul notices when she walks into the Asylum Seekers Centre's Auburn hub is its warmth.



"Everyone is just smiling all the time," she notes.

"They make you feel at ease!"

A former doctor in her home country, Nurul came to Australia seeking safety with her two children. Starting again has not been easy. Like many people seeking asylum, she arrived without established networks and with her professional qualifications unrecognised.

Through the Asylum Seekers Centre, Nurul connected with employment support, crisis casework, and family support.

But at the Auburn hub she found something just as important: community.

The Auburn hub is a key part of ASC's strategy to foster connection and belonging. Located in the heart of Western Sydney, it brings together everyday supports, partnerships, and shared spaces to reduce isolation and help people rebuild their lives alongside one another.

Clients can access practical assistance – such as help with Medicare card renewals and navigating essential services

– while also connecting into a broader network of programs and relationships.

"When I need a community to help me to raise the children, so they don't feel like they were left out or they don't have another relative in here [Australia], ASC Auburn brings me that comfort," Nurul explains.

"Despite being different in physical, you can be entertained

by someone at Auburn... whatever your problem."

For Nurul and her children, the Auburn hub has become a place of belonging - where staff, volunteers, and families build connections that feel like extended family.

Her children adore Jude, the ASC's Community Connector volunteer.

"Jude loves to greet everyone," Nurul says with a smile.

"We feel like there is a family, like a grandmother is there."

"The kids will come to her and try to get her attention!"

They are just as fond of Meg, ASC's Community Participation Coordinator.

"If I say to them, I wanna go ASC Auburn without bringing them, they will be super mad to me," Nurul laughs. "Because they love Meg like a big sister."

These relationships create something powerful for families who have often experienced isolation and uncertainty: trust.

"You know, it's so difficult to trust people because sometimes people will judge us," Nurul explains.

"[But] when you meet people [at Auburn] people know that everyone has their own story." "That creates a secure, safe place for everyone gathering."

This sense of connection is strengthened through the Auburn hub's co-located and partner-led services. On any given day, clients might share a hot lunch together, attend English classes, join computer tuition, or participate in a playgroup.

The hub is also designed to support families in practical ways. Childcare, introduced in 2024 through a partnership with



Goodstart Early Learning, allows parents to participate in programs while their children learn and play nearby.

"I feel peace because my kids is out there playing with the childcare staff."

For Nurul, the activities at Auburn offer not only practical knowledge and skills, but moments to breathe. A beach safety workshop helped her overcome a long-held fear of water.

"This is a good thing because I'm scared of water...So this gave me information and knowledge and also helps me as a mum to help my children to be safe in the beach."

Wellness sessions are another favourite for Nurul.

"Mothers, most of us, not really do exercise at home because we are already struggling with the kids and house chores.... It's a good opportunity for stretching and learn how to remember, how to take care of our own self."

During these sessions, Nurul describes a unique relief and a stillness she calls the "peace moment."

"You can let out your heartfelt [feelings] and not be judged by anyone."

"I found a family in there," Nurul says. "Not only the staff, but lots of good people."

These connections have proven to be a lifeline during dark and difficult times.

When a fire tragically damaged her home, Nurul turned to the community she had built at Auburn. A friend she had met at the hub, Shanna*, immediately extended a helping hand.

"She offer me, 'come, come to my home. I will take care of your children. You just rest.'"

It is this network of support that has allowed her to keep her "big dreams" alive. One day she hopes to become a practitioner helping others heal from trauma.

As she works toward finishing her studies, Nurul is buoyed by inspiration and hope.

"ASC changed our family life... it's not like a bit of hope, it's a lot of hope!" she declares.

"Because I know if I have a problem, I know there is ASC can lift you up. There is someone that will stand up for you."

2,592 meals served at Auburn



19 external workshops hosted at Auburn



19 lunches or programs initiated by clients at Auburn (funded by the Asylum Seekers Centre)



We connect people to supports and services

2024-2025 highlights and achievements

The Asylum Seekers Centre is a place of welcome and often the first place people turn when they arrive in Sydney seeking safety. Here, people are met with practical, personal support across healthcare, employment, education, childcare, family services, and community connection – helping people rebuild their lives with dignity.

In 2024-25, we supported 4,648 people across Greater Sydney, providing essential help while people waited for safety, certainty, and the chance to belong.

This year, we strengthened early support through new Welcome and Orientation sessions and a Transition Program for people granted refugee status, ensuring no one navigates complex systems alone. Listening closely

to our community, we introduced a Community Engagement Framework and Community of Practice, deepening community-led programs and embedding best practice across all services.

Guided by client voices, we expanded partnerships, co-designed flexible programs, and tailored support to what people told us they needed most.



Health clinic

Our on-site health clinic provides essential primary healthcare for people seeking asylum who would otherwise go without. We offer nurse, GP, and physiotherapy appointments, access to medications and specialist services, fee waivers, and health navigators who accompany and support clients through the health system.

In 2024-25, we launched the Health Navigator Program, developed by Professor Mark Harris and employing two ASC alumni and former clients. We also expanded nurse-led and sexual health screenings, and partnered with UNSW's Kirby Institute to roll out Hepatitis C point of care testing, improving early intervention and continuity of care.

The ASC Health Clinic's nursing and pharmaceutical program is generously supported by Sydney Local Health District.



Employment support

Our Employment Services team supports people seeking asylum to prepare for and secure meaningful work through personalised assistance, including job advice, resume and application support, interview coaching, and connections to training and employment through our Employer Partner program.

This year, our partnership with Settlement Services International (SSI) through the Asylum Seeker Employment Skills Support (ASESS) program strengthened job readiness support. A co-designed job fair with the Working Group on Employment for Refugees and People Seeking Asylum created pathways to employment and education.

The ASC Employment Service is generously supported by a multi-year grant from the Paul Ramsay Foundation, and the Scully Fund proudly supports pathways to employment. The Digital Sisters project, funded by Good Things Foundation, supported 30 women to build digital awareness and online safety.



Community engagement

Our community engagement programs create connection, belonging, and joy through inclusive social, recreational, and educational activities for children and adults. From classes, workshops, and excursions to sports and school holiday programs, our activities support wellbeing while strengthening community networks.

This year, more than 50 children participated in the Kids in the Kitchen program teaching healthy eating skills, while Play Matters NSW delivered an eight-week Sing & Grow music therapy program supporting child development and family wellbeing.

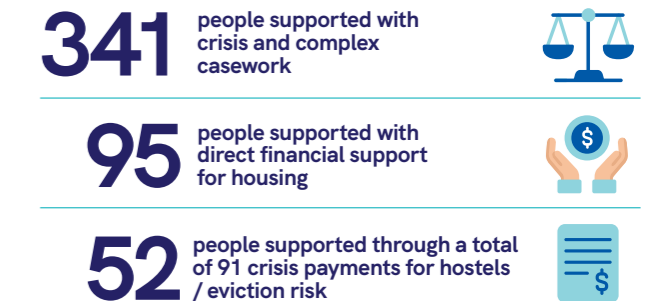


Complex casework

Our casework team provides intensive case management and critical support for people seeking asylum at risk of or experiencing homelessness, mental illness, complex visa matters, family and domestic violence, and family disruption. We connect clients to housing, financial assistance, healthcare, and other essential services.

In 2024-25, we introduced a Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence Policy, implemented risk assessment tools for client safety and wellbeing, and conducted a comprehensive consultation to ensure staff are trained in our response to suicide ideation. We also joined the Domestic Violence NSW Migrant & Refugee Advisory Committee, and partnered with the Sisters of Charity for housing support for those in crisis or at risk of homelessness.

Our partnership with Bridge for Asylum Seekers continues to support clients with financial assistance to prevent destitution and homelessness.



We connect people to supports and services continued


2024-2025 highlights and achievements



Family support

Our family support program helps families navigate education and early childhood systems, removing financial and systemic barriers to participation. We support families with school enrolments, fee waivers, uniforms, supplies, childcare, and advocacy with schools, while also supporting family connection and community engagement.

With support from the Aberbaldie Foundation, in 2024-25 we launched the ASC Schools Scholarship Program, providing dignified, scholarship-based assistance to 40 families experiencing financial hardship to engage with the activities of their school with dignity.

363 
children supported with school enrolments & fee waivers

49 
children supported with childcare/ preschool placements

Food support

Our food support program does more than provide meals – it builds community. At our Newtown and Auburn centres, clients receive hot, nutritious meals while connecting with others, celebrating culture, and reducing social isolation. Meals are prepared with respect for dietary needs and cultural traditions, ensuring everyone is served with dignity.



9,870 
hot meals served



Lunch and Learn

Lunch and Learn is a seven-week work experience program that builds job readiness and pathways to employment for people seeking asylum, while providing meals for our community. Participants complete a food handling course and receive a certificate while cooking together, sharing traditional recipes, and developing practical skills in a commercial kitchen.

The program also empowers participants to lead sessions, building confidence and leadership. Coordinated by a person seeking asylum now employed by the ASC, Lunch and Learn is proudly supported by the City of Sydney.

52 Lunch and Learn sessions 

37 Lunch and Learn participants 

62% of Lunch and Learn participants went on to find work 



Everyday support

Our everyday support desk helps people navigate the practical challenges of life in Australia – from transport and phones to healthcare and identification. Delivered by staff and volunteers, this support removes barriers to participation and helps people stay connected to essential services.

2,959 Opal card renewals and applications 

805 Opal card top ups 

4,537 occasions of service by Everyday Support volunteers 



LGBTQIA+ support

Our LGBTQIA+ Support Program, supported by funding from Pride Foundation Australia, provides affirming, trauma-informed peer support for LGBTQIA+ people seeking asylum. Through confidential group sessions and community activities, the program fosters safety, connection, and resilience.

This year peer group members participated in the GROW program, a six-week facilitated mental health literacy program, promoting wellbeing and resilience amongst members.

133 members of the LGBTQIA+ Peer Group 

24 LGBTQIA+ Peer Group events / sessions 



Digital connectivity

We help bridge the digital divide by refurbishing and distributing donated devices, enabling people seeking asylum to access services, education, employment opportunities, and stay connected with loved ones.

In 2024-25, the Digital Sisters project, funded by Good Things Foundation, supported women seeking asylum to build digital confidence, online safety skills, and stronger social connection.

405 laptops / phones / tablets refurbished and distributed 

We engage community

2024-2025 highlights and achievements

Listening to our community

In 2024-25, we strengthened client-led practice by launching the ASC Annual Consultation, ensuring community voices directly shape our services and advocacy. We also introduced a Community Engagement Framework, developed program logics across services, and established a Community of Practice to embed best practice organisation-wide.

Community connection in action

Iftar dinner

In partnership with the Galaxy Foundation, we welcomed over 200 community members to break fast together in a powerful celebration of connection and solidarity.



Wellbeing sessions in Auburn

Supported by the Mercy Foundation, we delivered wellbeing sessions at our Auburn centre, strengthening mental health and resilience in a safe, welcoming environment.

Community members take the stage at Art Gallery of NSW

Seven ASC clients took to the stage to share their musical talents, extending our longstanding partnership with Art Gallery of NSW and opening up access to creative opportunity.



Human Rights Day event

More than 60 clients gathered to celebrate rights, dignity, and inclusion, supported by Galaxy Foundation and Advocates for Dignity.



Family days

With support from RUOK, Newington College, and the Association of Engaged Buddhists, we brought families together at our Auburn centre for practical support, women and children programs, shared meals, and community connection.

Specialist programs



Sing & Grow program

We worked with Play Matters NSW to host an eight-week, evidence-based music therapy program supporting child development and strengthening family relationships.

Kids in the Kitchen and early childhood programs

Over 50 children participated in our Kids in the Kitchen program, building confidence and healthy eating habits, alongside evidence-based speech and language support for families.

Alumni program

We launched the ASC Alumni Program, enabling former clients to stay connected, share experiences, and continue contributing to the ASC community.

LGBTQIA+ wellbeing

Members of our LGBTQIA+ support program peer group completed our six-week GROW mental health literacy program, strengthening resilience and peer support.



Volunteers

2024-2025 highlights and achievements



498 volunteers in 2024-2025, a 13% increase from the previous year

38,480 hours of volunteering

\$1,846,841 volunteer contribution in \$ in 2024-25

What work do volunteers at the ASC do?

- Administration
- Academic English Tutoring
- Everyday Support
- Community Engagement
- Community Connectors
- Family and School Support
- Community Speakers
- Computer Tutoring
- Employment Advisors
- University Advisors
- Fundraising Support
- Health Navigation
- Intake
- Complex Casework
- IT Support
- Communications support

At the Asylum Seekers Centre, volunteers are the beating heart of our community. In FY24-25, 498 people gave their time, skills, and compassion to support people seeking asylum as they rebuild their lives in Australia.

Together, 282 regular volunteers and hundreds of new and one-off contributors delivered 38,480 hours of service, valued at \$1,846,841.

Their work spans thousands of moments of practical support, accompanying clients to medical appointments, navigating complex systems, assisting with job applications, teaching English, and offering reassurance during times of uncertainty.

This year, 87 new ongoing volunteers and 148 one-off volunteers joined our community. We also celebrated long-term milestones: 37 volunteers reached five to 10 years of service, 19 reached

10 to 20 years, and four surpassed 20 years. Among them is Professor Mark Harris, who marked an extraordinary 25 years with ASC.

Our volunteers reflect the diversity of the communities we serve. Many speak multiple languages and bring deep cultural knowledge and lived experience, enabling ASC to meet people where they are with understanding and trust.

That lived experience is central to our growing Health Navigator program. Launched in 2024-25 and developed by Professor Mark Harris, the program employs two ASC alumni and former clients as trained peer supporters. Working alongside volunteers in our on-site clinic, they help community members navigate Australia's healthcare system and accompany them to medical appointments, ensuring no one faces health challenges alone.

We also expanded our Welcome & Registration team, adding volunteers to support five additional reception positions and five weekly administration shifts. This increased our capacity to respond to community needs and handle enquiries more efficiently.

Innovation continues to shape the volunteer program, with new roles such as video animators and web specialists helping ASC amplify the voices of people seeking asylum and strengthen our advocacy.

In a challenging environment, ASC volunteers remain a powerful source of hope. They bring expertise. They bring generosity. And above all, they ensure that every person who walks through our doors is welcomed with dignity, respect, and the knowledge that they are not alone.

Volunteer stories



Professor Mark Harris, Health Clinic

For 25 years, Professor Mark Harris has provided vital medical care to people seeking asylum through our on-site health clinic.

"The GP clinic has met a clear need, and it has been rewarding to see patients, whose health might become severely compromised by common preventable and treatable acute and chronic conditions, able to access care and maintain their health and wellbeing," says Mark.

Mark's commitment has improved the wellbeing of countless individuals and has also helped shape the healthcare legacy that the Asylum Seekers Centre is proud of today.



Patricia Thorn, Welcome and Registration

After retiring from a long career in IT, Patricia started volunteering at our Welcome and Registration desk. She is the first person people see when they come through the doors of the Asylum Seekers Centre, every Wednesday, for over a decade.

Patricia greets people as they arrive, checks them in, and directs them to the appropriate services like employment, health, or family support. At its core, her work creates a safe space where members of our community feel safe, heard, and valued.

"I think it's a privilege to simply be able to sit there and ask, 'How can I help?'," says Patricia.



Matt Alishah, Computer Classes

As a computer tuition volunteer, Matt Alishah teaches digital literacy, empowering people seeking asylum with essential tech skills needed for employment and accessing services.

Matt shares that he feels a personal connection to the work of Asylum Seekers Centre.

"My dad's from a country that's been at war for about as long as I've been alive, and as I grew up, his challenges working and raising a family in Australia were obvious to me," says Matt.

"I've realised there are things I can do to help people feel more welcome here."

We influence policy and legal change

2024-2025 highlights and achievements



Strengthening our advocacy capacity

Thanks to generous funding from The Scully Fund, we appointed the Asylum Seekers Centre's first full-time Advocacy Lead, significantly strengthening our ability to influence policy and amplify lived experience. This role directly supports our 2024-28 Strategic Plan commitment to systemic change for people seeking asylum.

Our advocacy steering group, Advocacy Lead Mark Johnson, CEO Frances Rush, Head of Communications Maddison Bates-Willis, and Head of Services Kylie Mackie

2025 Federal Election advocacy

We launched a dedicated federal election campaign website with resources to support informed engagement, including our advocacy priorities and vision for the 48th parliament, a 'quiz your candidates' guide, and a lived experience-centred conversation guide.



Open letter to political parties

We led the release of an open letter, endorsed by more than 35 refugee, human rights, and multicultural organisations, calling on major political parties to avoid divisive rhetoric and to approach issues affecting people seeking asylum and refugees with dignity and respect throughout the federal election campaign. The letter received media coverage in ABC and The Guardian.



Human Rights Day

On Human Rights Day, we ran a campaign inviting the community to pledge support for the human right to seek asylum under Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Craig Foster, L-FRESH The LION, Wendy Sharpe, Nadine Cohen, staff, volunteers, and supporters shared content affirming this fundamental right, amplifying awareness and solidarity for people seeking asylum.

Challenging Labor's three brutal bills

We opposed Labor's proposed migration legislation that would expand deportation powers, impose harsh restrictions including travel bans, and risk tearing families apart. Our response included a parliamentary submission, targeted media engagement, and a public advocacy campaign highlighting the real-world impacts on people seeking asylum.



Housing and homelessness advocacy

We advocated for the inclusion of people seeking asylum in the NSW Homelessness Strategy, working with sector partners to call for access to crisis accommodation and housing support.



Federal Budget advocacy

Ahead of the 2025-26 Federal Budget, we called for meaningful support for people seeking asylum. The allocation of just \$20 million for vulnerable people seeking asylum – compared with \$581 million for offshore detention – highlighted the failure to meet need and prompted the launch of ASC's first formal advocacy campaign, Fix the Safety Net (more on this in the 2025-26 annual report).





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 2025

	FY 2025	FY 2024
	\$	\$
INCOME		
Grant income	2,774,500	2,286,626
Donations	2,246,119	2,124,037
Fundraising events & sales	281,409	67,838
Finance income	102,641	113,059
Other income	25,635	478,434
Total Income	5,430,304	5,069,994
(LESS) EXPENSES		
Services		
Employment assistance	(574,308)	(655,733)
Healthcare	(377,226)	(351,573)
Intensive support	(549,745)	(495,811)
Community engagement	(478,065)	(541,459)
Welcome and registration	(248,794)	(280,458)
Direct services management	(1,118,903)	(810,869)
Volunteer & HR management	(137,830)	(152,701)
Total Services	(3,484,871)	(3,288,604)
RELIEF & HOUSING		
Client relief	(455,133)	(584,846)
Housing & accommodation	(3,913)	(31,498)
Total Relief & Housing	(459,046)	(616,344)
ADVOCACY		
Advocacy	(87,627)	-
MANAGEMENT & SUPPORT		
Management & administration	(278,344)	(271,750)
Building maintenance, rates & utilities	(53,383)	(54,801)
Communications	(276,277)	(271,985)
Fundraising	(507,747)	(483,073)
IT costs	(164,017)	(153,859)
Running Costs	(310,877)	(314,597)
Total Management & Support	(1,590,645)	(1,550,065)
Total Expenses	(5,622,189)	(5,455,013)
Net Surplus	(191,885)	(385,019)
OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME		
Other comprehensive income for the year, net of tax	-	-
Total Comprehensive Surplus for the Year	(191,885)	(385,019)

Statement of Financial Position

Asylum Seekers Centre Incorporated
ABN 47 164 509 475
For the Year Ended 30 June 2025

	FY 2025	FY 2024
	\$	\$
ASSETS		
Current Assets		
Cash & cash equivalents	3,217,264	3,148,151
Receivables	29,574	55,941
Other current assets	566,923	12,863
Total Current Assets	3,813,761	3,216,955
Non-Current Assets		
Property, plant & equipment	2,137,282	2,133,736
Total Non-Current Assets	2,137,282	2,133,736
Total Assets	5,951,043	5,350,691
LIABILITIES		
Current Liabilities		
Deferred revenue	1,790,977	1,022,642
Payables	115,283	126,727
Provisions	350,820	317,267
Total Current Liabilities	2,257,080	1,466,636
Non-Current Liabilities		
Provisions	80,381	78,588
Total Non-Current Liabilities	80,381	78,588
Total Liabilities	2,337,461	1,545,224
NET ASSETS	3,613,582	3,805,467
EQUITY		
Accumulated funds	3,613,582	3,805,467
Total Equity	3,613,582	3,805,467

Financial highlights

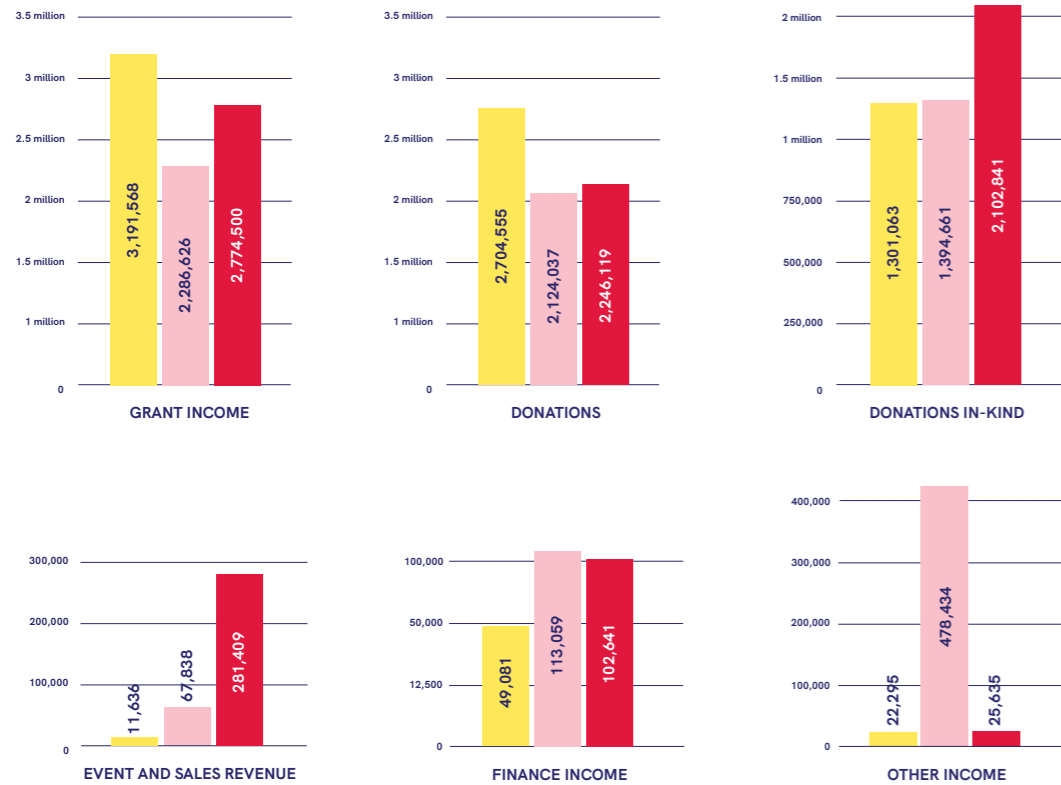
Our Supporters

We were proud to have the support of 2,532 donors in the 2024-25 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.

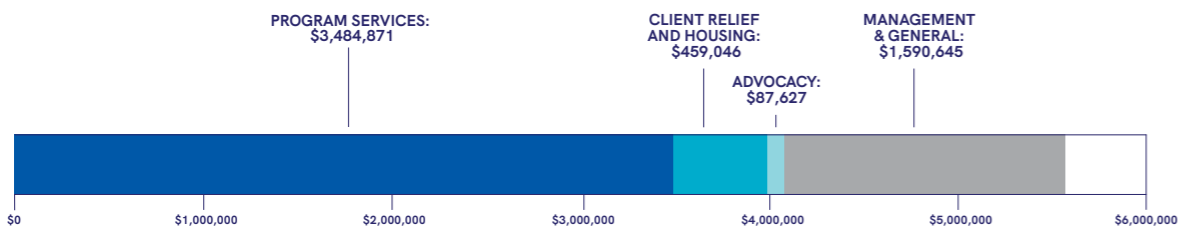
We delivered

\$3.9M of the Asylum Seekers Centre's total expenditure in 2024-25 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 \$7.5M.

2024-2025 Source of income



2024-2025 Allocation of expenses



"ASC changed our family life... it's not like a bit of hope, it's a lot of hope," says ASC community member Nurul.

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 Australia.



Clare Petre
Deputy Chair

(stepped down December 2024)

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.



Abang Anade Othow
Deputy Chair

(appointed Deputy Chair February 2025)

Abang Anade Othow is an educator, speaker, writer, and social impact leader, and the founder of Buckets of Hope. She has been recognised as a National Ambassador for the NSW Department of Education and the Refugee Council of Australia. Her forthcoming HarperCollins book draws on her personal journey and introduces the Buckets of Hope method as a practical framework for resilience and hope. She holds a Master of Teaching, a Bachelor of Arts, and a Diploma in Business.



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.



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 the Advocacy Coordinator at Refugee Council of Australia. He was previously the Refugee Advisor at Amnesty International Australia and chaired the NSW Asylum Seeker Interagency. From 2007 he has attended the UNHCR NGO Consultations and Annual Tripartite Resettlement Consultations in Geneva.

Our Board continued



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.



Nawaz Isaji

Nawaz Isaji is a partner at L.E.K. Consulting's Australian practice. There he focuses on strategy and transaction related projects for major Australian businesses and investment organisations across the Asia Pacific region. He was formerly a partner in PwC's Strategy& business. Nawaz holds a Bachelor of Engineering & Bachelor of Laws from UTS, Sydney and an MBA from INSEAD in Fontainebleau, France.



Giles Gunesequera
OAM

Giles Gunesequera OAM is the founder and CEO of Global Impact Initiative, where he effectively merges financial strategies with significant social outcomes. Giles serves on the United Nations Advisory Boards for Climate & Health and Sustainable Finance, and is an Industry Fellow at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), where he is pursuing a PhD focused on Impact Investing, Affordable Housing, and Indigenous Communities. He holds qualifications from University of Oxford, University of Melbourne, and Monash University.



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.



Alex Lee

Alex Lee is the CEO of The Glen Group of residential Drug and Alcohol rehabilitation centres. He has been involved with not-for-profit organisations for more than 20 years, particularly in mental health, refugees and people seeking asylum, and the alcohol and other drugs sector. Alex has a Bachelor of Commerce (Accounting and Business Management), is a chartered accountant, and an Honorary Fellow of UTS.

Tributes



Clare Petre

After a decade of dedicated service on the Asylum Seekers Centre Board, including terms as Chair and Deputy Chair, Clare Petre concluded her tenure in December 2024.

Clare joined the Board at the encouragement of the late Betty Hounslow, bringing with her a distinguished career across community and government sectors. Her more than 16 years as the Energy and Water Ombudsman NSW shaped the strong governance lens, policy insight, and commitment to fairness that she brought to the ASC.

During her time with us, Clare championed both practical reform and systemic advocacy. She worked alongside the executive to secure access to concession Opal fares for ASC clients and consistently urged us to pair wraparound support for individuals and families with efforts to challenge unjust laws and systems.

Clare's contribution was marked by principled leadership, clarity of purpose, and an unwavering belief in the resilience and potential of people seeking protection. Reflecting on her time with ASC, Clare described the organisation as "a beacon of hope... in the face of a political race to the bottom over people seeking their human right of protection" – a sentiment that speaks to the conviction and clarity she brought to her service.

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 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.

Our Patrons continued



Hugh Mackay

AO

Hugh Mackay is internationally recognised for his pioneering work in social research. He is the author of 22 books, including 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



Aberaldie Foundation

Alan Cameron AO

Andre and Sarah Serna

Annie Williams

APS Foundation

Australian Communities Foundation

Beeren Foundation

Danny Gilbert

David Lacey and Marian Shapiro

Elizabeth Avery

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The Garrett Riggleman Trust

The Knights Family Jabula Foundation

The Scully Fund

The Todd Family Foundation

Tony Weir

Our Major Supporters

continued

Major community fundraisers



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

Photography: Sarah Wilson and Erin Black

Design: domenichartolodesign.com

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





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