

# ACTION AND SOLIDARITY TOOLKIT

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# ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

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Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Australia is a Catholic organisation whose mission is to accompany, serve and advocate for the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and other forcibly displaced communities.

We offer dignity and hope through emergency assistance, temporary shelter, a foodbank, professional casework, community activities, employment support, school engagement, legal advice, targeted advocacy, community organising and a project to empower women experiencing gender-based violence.

Thanks to the kindness of the communities who so generously support our clients, we are able to continue our work. We would love for you to join in making a more just Australia for people seeking asylum.

This Action Kit outlines many different ways that you and your community can get involved to be part of the change.

# Host a Community Conversation

A Community Conversation (CC) is a powerful community expression of sharing, learning, and commitment to action on issues of social justice. It is a conversation with an organisation, such as a school, parish or community group, held with people seeking asylum that emphasises respectful dialogue and mutual sharing of personal stories around values that are important to us.

Duration is between 90 minutes and 2.5 hours.

## What does a CC look like?

At each gathering, people seeking asylum and participants are invited to share their stories. The goal is to build solidarity, to find common ground in our shared values, and build the capacity of our organisations to stand with people seeking asylum.

## What JRS can provide:

- One or more persons seeking asylum / refugees who are prepared to share their story.
- A suggested format for the conversation (with a focus on sharing stories and values).
- An expert on the issue to respond to participants' questions and reflections.
- Someone to facilitate, or co-facilitate with a local leader if desired.

## Participating groups are asked to:

- Turn out members to take part in the Community Conversation and provide a venue and time to gather.
- Meet at least twice with Jesuit Refugee Service leaders beforehand to adapt the agenda to their community and values, and at least once afterwards for debriefing and follow up.
- Identify and bring together leaders willing to run small groups at the Community Conversation (with training and support from JRS Australia, Catholics for Refugees (C4R) and Sydney Alliance).
- We encourage community members to develop the skills to run Community Conversations on their own.



# Hold a Letter Writing Event

Letters are a simple and effective way to engage Members of Parliament (MPs) and are crucial to contribute to humane refugee policy reform. They provide a mandate for politicians to hear the voice of the community and to take action.

First, identify your federal electorate and MP through the Australian Electoral Office's website:  
<http://apps.aec.gov.au/eseach/Default.aspx>

## What does it look like?

- Host a letter writing event with your school, parish or community.
- Identify your electorate and MP. Branch off into smaller groups of 3 people to create a letter for your MP.

## Make your letter stand out by keeping it brief:

1. Introduce yourself (name and address, they will pay more attention if you fall in their electorate).
2. Introduce your issue(s) (choose one or two). Use your own words by making it personal.
3. Ask them a simple, focused question that requires a personal response.
4. Tell them the action that you want them to take
5. Leave your contact details.

Tip: Include relevant facts.

## Some important things to include:

- Refer to recent news, or recent statements made by the MP or their party.
- Include a personal experience.
- Highlight a local connection, this invites the MP to step up for their community.



Many federal politicians have deliberately avoided confronting the moral issues of our current refugee policy, particularly their own part in them as Australia's lawmakers. Be patient, await their response and follow up.

## If MPs respond:

- It's always good to write a thank you letter, especially if you're happy with their response, if you're not satisfied, write back and ask them to follow up in more detail.
- They're there to represent you! Important: Be persistent. Raising issues as a 'grassroots' constituent can have a very powerful and personal impact on both those involved and MPs.

# Stage a Circle of Silence

The Circle of Silence movement originated in 2007 among the Franciscans of Toulouse, France as a peaceful way of raising awareness for the plight of refugees and showing solidarity with them. Since then, the movement has spread to Malta, Spain, and Britain, bringing empathetic people together to express solidarity with people seeking asylum, refugees, and migrants facing injustice and harm.

## What does it look like:

- A Circle of Silence involves a group of people standing silently in a circle in a public space for 20 – 60 minutes.
- Participants can range from 5 – 10 people up to hundreds. The Circle can take place in a school, church, park or any large public place.

## Tips:

1. Begin and conclude the Circle of Silence with a personal testimony from a refugee or migrant about their experience, a story from a participant or a reflection, prayer, or relevant passage.
2. Participants can hold candles, signs, placards or banners.
3. Participants can also tape their mouths or cross their hands in solidarity with those who have been silenced.
4. Remember to have one or two people handing out flyers to passers-by to explain the purpose of the Circle of Silence. Take a photograph or a video and share it with JRS at the end so that others can be inspired by your actions.





# Host a Film Screening

Films are a powerful way to raise awareness about the remarkable stories of refugees and people seeking asylum, and the life-threatening circumstances that many encounter. The images, faces, and narratives stay with us for years.

We invite you to host a film screening or movie marathon at your church, school, home or even at a cinema.

- Sell tickets and snacks so that money can be donated to support refugees and people seeking asylum through JRS Australia.
- Another twist to this familiar and easy event is to ask friends and family to each host their own mini-film screening on behalf of your cause and invite their own networks.

Note: a film screening can also be accompanied by a panel discussion, a call to action, and a commitment to doing something more over a period of time.

Films to watch:

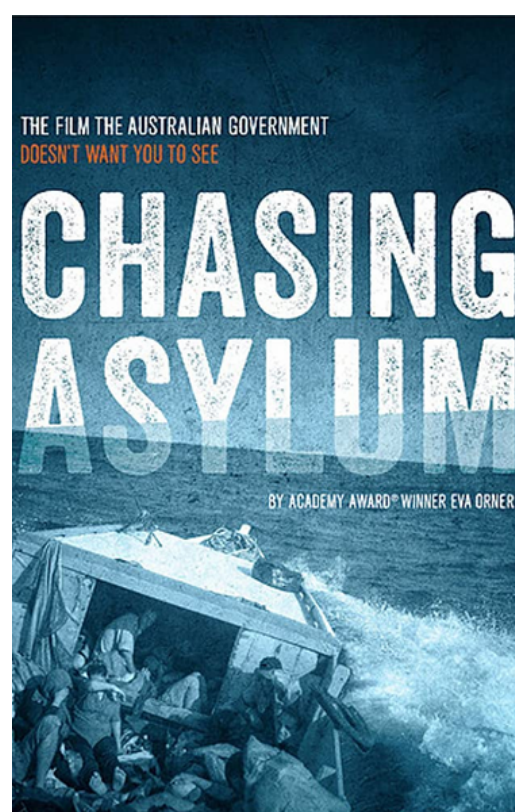
The Staging Post, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, and Mary Meets Mohammed, Chasing Asylum.

## How JRS can help

- Suggest films to watch and help you obtain the film, help you organise and promote the screening, support you to organise a panel discussion with leaders from refugee or asylum backgrounds and help you issue a call to action and carry it out.

## Tips for running this action

- Coordination: Each event must have at least 1 designated leader in charge
- Checklist: Make a list of resources needed, e.g. refreshments, cash box, music, materials, etc. Please use recycled materials where possible.
- Promote your event and photos in social media: Spread the word about your fundraiser and ask your friends and family to get involved.
- Show your friends that you care about refugees and people seeking asylum.
- Remember to tag Jesuit Refugee Service "JRS" Australia.
- Praying and reflection: We invite you to start your event with a prayer for refugees.



# Host a Cook2Connect meal

Cook2Connect is a fun way to use your cooking abilities and share a recipe written by a person from a refugee background in a fun and relaxing community setting.

It is the perfect way to share fellowship following mass on a Sunday, after a prayer meeting or retreat, and is a simple way to commemorate an occasion such as Migrant & Refugee Sunday.

## Hosting a meal is very simple:

Step 1: Register your breakfast, lunch, tea, or dinner with us to get your resource pack.

Step 2: Once you have registered your meal, you will receive a resource pack.

- The resource pack will include: A delicious recipe, the story of the person who shared the recipe and a fact sheet on refugees and people seeking asylum, donation forms and tax receipts.

Step 3: Invite friends, family, or community members to your place or to a designated location (ie. church hall or school hall).

- You can either cook the meal in advance or invite them to cook together with you.
- Ask fellow attendees to bring \$20 or more, which will go towards direct support for refugees or people seeking asylum.



- Spread the word about your event on social media, through parish bulletins or school newsletters. Ensure people RSVP to the event so that you know how many to cater for.

Step 4: Enjoy a special meal with your community all while knowing you are making a difference in someone else's life. Remember to do the following after your event:

- Send your donations to JRS Australia; a tax receipt will be issued to you via mail a few weeks later.
- Share photos or a testimony via Facebook, Twitter, or email.
- Let JRS know how the Cook2Connect experience was for you and how it can be improved.



# Meet your local Member of Parliament (MP)

Meeting with your MP or even the MP's staff ensures your voice is heard. It also sends a very powerful message to them that the local community cares about the treatment of people on the move.

It can be nerve wracking to contact your MP – particularly if you've never done it before. But don't worry! Thousands of people contact their MP every week. It's what they are there for.

## Planning your MP meeting

**Step 1:** MPs can only represent you if you live in their constituency. Use your postcode to find out who your MP is at <https://www.openaustralia.org.au/>

**Step 2:** The most effective way to engage is to phone up their office and make an appointment to meet face-to-face.

- Learn a bit about your MP: the more you know about your MP, the more you can tailor your correspondence.
- For example, what party do they belong to? Have they spoken about refugees and asylum seekers before? What do they have in common with you? Do you share faith? Common city/region of residence? Professional experience?
- Consider the issues you would like to discuss and who you would like in the meeting.

**Step 3:** Make an Appointment:

- Contact your MP's office by email or post, explain who you are and what you represent, and mention where you live in the electorate.
- Explain what your group would like to talk about in a courteous manner.
- Follow up on the same day or the day after with a phone call to the electorate office. Notify the staff member that you have written asking for an appointment and would like to discuss a suitable time or day within a particular time frame (eg. In the next month or before the next sitting period). They will ask for your contact details and likely contact you after speaking with their team. If you have not heard back within 7 – 10 days, feel free to call them again.

**Step 4:** How JRS Australia can help you:

- JRS Australia can share stories, statistics, and information to help you focus on one or two key issues.
- JRS Australia can also support you to build a delegation by providing an expert and contacting a leader with lived experience as a asylum seeker/refugee to accompany you.
- We can help you prepare a clear meeting agenda and script for a 20, 30 or 40 minute meeting and a clear ASK for the MP.

**During the Meeting**

- Usual meeting duration is 20 – 30 minutes, which means that the first few minutes will be taken up by introductions and thanks.
- After this you will have the opportunity to follow your planned template/script.
- Highlight the key issues through prepared stories and information, and provide time and space for the MP to respond. MPs are human beings too, so be polite and respectful, even if you disagree with what they are saying, be sure to listen, reflect, and respond calmly without starting an argument.
- Like any relationship, it often takes multiple meetings (sometimes 5+) to build a robust relationship.

Ensure that you leave 2 – 3 minutes at the end of the conversation in which you ask the MP to do something towards addressing the issue raised.

E.g. asking him/her to raise the issue with the relevant Minister or with fellow MPs, to make a speech or raise a question in Parliament, and to agree to a follow up meeting.



# Run a Food Drive

During these unprecedented times, refugees and people seeking asylum in the community need your help more than ever. Non-perishable food, toiletries and financial donations are desperately needed and appreciated.

Invite local parishes, schools and communities to work together in providing some of these basic necessities to refugee families.

## How to run a Food Drive:

- Select a coordinator, a drop-off point and a time.
- Share what's needed at the JRS Foodbank with your community, as well as when and where people can drop off items.
- Explain the current refugee climate and the need for support (e.g. speak to the congregation at the end of mass or during school assembly).
- Announce the collection dates for donations well in advance; during the Food Drive keep the parish or school updated on donations given so far.
- Coordinate a delivery date and time of donations to the JRS Parramatta office with the JRS team.
- Co-ordinator and team collect donations and drop off donations to JRS Foodbank, 10 Victoria Road, Parramatta.

## Food item suggestions:

- Basmati rice
- Cooking oil
- Long-life milk
- Tinned tuna
- Red kidney beans, lentils, chickpeas
- FruitBiscuits and muesli bars
- Oats and cereal
- Tinned tomatoes
- Tea and coffee



## Toiletries:

- Nappies (large sizes), toothpaste and toothbrushes
- Shampoo, sanitary pads and napkins
- Razors and shaving foam
- Deodorant (male and female) and soap
- New winter blankets

For parish donations to JRS, please contact [foodbank@jrs.org.au](mailto:foodbank@jrs.org.au) or [zoe.grant@jrs.org.au](mailto:zoe.grant@jrs.org.au)

For school donations to JRS, please contact [anne.nesbitt@jrs.org.au](mailto:anne.nesbitt@jrs.org.au)

# Help Employ a Person Seeking Asylum

JRS Australia runs an employment program, Empowered to Work, to support people into the job market, and assist them to maintain employment.

The program focuses on resume development, workshops on working in Australia, employee rights and responsibilities, interview skills and a range of other employment related services.

## Barriers to employment for people seeking asylum often include:

- English-language proficiency.
- Mental and physical health issues.
- Lack of Australian work experience and lack of overseas skills recognition.
- Inaccessibility to childcare services.

Australians in our community could therefore make a tangible difference in the lives of people seeking asylum by lending their skills and engaging with the talents of people seeking asylum to facilitate employment.

## What Empowered to Work looks like:

- Jobs and training through social enterprises.
- Training and employment through social enterprise is a fantastic way for people seeking asylum to begin their working lives in Australia.
- Placements are often 6-12 months and include an element of training to accompany practical work.
- Empowered to Work has made connections with social enterprises that support people to become bakers, hospitality professionals, designers, call centre workers and warehousing experts.



## What you can do:

- We are calling on the community to nominate a social enterprise they know of who would consider employing someone (including paid internship opportunities) from the Empowered to Work project.
- Alternately, if you are a small business owner or know of one who would be interested in employing someone at the end of their placement, please get in touch with the JRS Employment Team: Tamana Mirzada, [tamana.mirzada@jrs.org.au](mailto:tamana.mirzada@jrs.org.au) or Zaki Haidari, [zaki.haidari@jrs.org.au](mailto:zaki.haidari@jrs.org.au)

# Other ways to help

## 1. Donation stand at Church entrance

- The stand includes all details regarding Jesuit Refugee Service, donation boxes, details to donate online/via text, paywave options.
- One or two young volunteers to run the stand.
- Options to donate once/monthly.
- With permission of the Parish one of the volunteers explains the donation stand to the Parish at the end of the mass, or perhaps a simple video is shown.
- Raffle included in the stand with prize.



## 2. Sponsoring a JRS project

- \$40 feeds a single adult for one week
- \$70 feeds one family for a week
- \$350-\$500 pays for a week's rent

## 3. Food Drives

- Collect and donate non perishables such as pasta, rice, canned
- Protein foods, blankets, financial donations, etc. are also important
- Food Drives organised 3 x per year e.g. Lent, June 20 World Refugee Day, Christmas.

## 4. Organize a community lunch after mass

- Offering "buy a lunch, give a lunch", pricing the food slightly higher than average to support your cause.
- Alternative idea: You can combine these three into a big 'jumble' drive/sale where books, shoes, and clothes are sold.
- You could also use this more casual event to do some advocacy.
- For example have people sign a petition, write a letter or take home a flyer with information about a campaign.



## 5. Host a movie event

- Requires a projector, family-friendly movie and large space, potentially to be held in the Church or Parish hall.
- Sell tickets, popcorn and snacks (buy in bulk to make a profit).
- Peer-to-peer fundraising page is to call supporters/congregation members to fundraise on behalf of your organization.

# Get creative and organise your own events!

Have another idea in mind? That's great! Go for it and we are here to support you in your efforts every step of the way. Just get in touch!





# **Keep us in the loop with what you're doing!**

We would love to hear what actions your group is taking!

Email us your stories, updates and photos to  
[zoe.grant@jrs.org.au](mailto:zoe.grant@jrs.org.au) and  
[anne.nesbitt@jrs.org.au](mailto:anne.nesbitt@jrs.org.au)

Thank you for standing with refugees and people seeking asylum.

Together, we can make a difference.