

The logo features a stylized green and black graphic on the left, resembling a bird or a flame, with the text 'Asylum Seekers Support Trust' to its right. 'Asylum Seekers' is in black and 'Support Trust' is in green.

# Asylum Seekers Support Trust

## CEO REPORT 2018

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Ko Māunganui te māunga  
Ko Awaroa te awa  
Ko Rainbow Warrior te waka  
Ko Ngāti Argentina me Ngāti Wiwi tōku iwi  
Ko Kia Piritahi tōku marae  
Ko Susi Newborn tōku ingoa

My family were asylum seekers, although I didn't know it at the time. I have memories of my father calling an urgent family meeting in our London house, a city we had lived in for decades, to tell us that he had been stripped of his nationality by the Argentine Junta, for political reasons. Three months later he was dead, silently assassinated in our home in broad daylight, with my mother in a nearby room. For as long as my mother lived she was terrified 'they' would find and kill her too. I remember my uncle writing from Buenos Aires, detailing how he had taught my cousin, at the age of 7, how to break out of the boot of a car should he ever be captured. I was too young to make much meaning out of it all, except that the fear in our home at that time was palpable; we were even too scared to talk about it. What it did do, however, was forge the direction of my life's work.

I joined ASST this May as the interim CEO. The organisation had been without someone at the helm since March, during which time the remaining staff and the Executive Committee of the Board stepped up to ensure the sustainability of the organisation. I had been working with the Auckland Regional Migrant Services, in particular the WISE Collective, and was somewhat familiar with the sector and its myriad of challenges, in particular funding! But little could prepare me for the baptism by fire during my first weeks in our West Lynn office and the

emotional strength needed to support newly arrived asylum seekers. My third or fourth Monday in the job, I found one sleeping on the pavement in front of the office, in a rain sodden sleeping bag, another so traumatised he was only able to sit in my office and sob.

When I first took over as Executive Director, there was no incumbent to show me the ropes, so I am extremely grateful for the support and assistance I received from Andrea Smythe, ASST Office Manager. As someone who has been with ASST for 8 years she is the gate-keeper of the organisation's 'intellectual history', is a mine of information and super organised – to such an extent that the Auditor commented on how she wished other organisations were as conscientious with their paperwork!

Bella Munro joined as Accommodation Coordinator around the same time I started, thereby releasing Freyja Stocker, our outstanding social worker, to concentrate more on day to day issues with clients. Bella is supported by two volunteers: Bernard and Jenny.

Reporting for the period June 2017-June 2018 I note that, in this time, in terms of asylum seekers coming into New Zealand, 2017-2018 saw 438 claims received, 413 eligibility decisions issued, 104 claims decided, 101 approved and 3 declined. Top source countries were China, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh with top approvals being China, Russia and Syria. Much work was done this past year to ensure that Convention Refugees were included in the New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy and afforded the same services available to other newcomers and residents. Connecting them to these services was the first area of focus. ASST presented at the Asylum Forum in early June, whose theme Different Perspectives – Shared Outcomes aimed at clarifying the different perspectives of the various stakeholders in the refugee status determination process.

ASST also contributed to the 32<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of New Zealand Joint Stakeholders Report, coordinated by the Human rights Foundation of New Zealand.

The housing shortage has had an impact on both our service referrals and advocacy because of the increased amount of time our clients remain in our hostel and transitional units. This limits our ability to care

for the increasing number of asylum seekers who come to us for help, and we often spend hours on the phone trying to find alternative emergency housing for them.

We have continued to run the support group for asylum seekers, in conjunction with professionals from Refugees as Survivors (RASNZ) and The Grief Centre. This support group provides an environment in which the participants can feel the relief and support of contact with each other, gain strength from sharing of experiences and learn new coping skills.

Andrea reports that we have had 108 emails this financial year with heart-breaking stories from people requesting our assistance in getting them to New Zealand to apply for asylum. Each and every time, we have to decline as we are not a licensed immigration advisor and hence by law prohibited from giving any relevant advice unless publicly available.

As well as email requests for help, we often receive messages via Facebook from people wanting to come to New Zealand to seek asylum.

Internationally we have seen 68.5 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, of which 40 million are internally displaced, 25.4 million are refugees – over half of whom are under the age of 18 - and 3.1 million are asylum-seekers. 85% of the world's displaced people are in developing countries, 57% of refugees worldwide come from three countries: South Sudan, Afghanistan and Syria. Turkey is the top refugee-hosting nation, followed by Uganda and Pakistan, Lebanon and then the Islamic Republic of Iran. 44,400 people a day are forced to leave their homes because of conflict – that is one person forcibly displaced every two seconds. There were 19.9 million refugees of concern to UNHCR around the world at the end of 2017, but less than one per cent were resettled that year. There are also an estimated 10 million stateless people who have been denied a nationality and access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement.

Closer to home Australia's cruel asylum seeker policy has played out on the world stage in its relentless ambition to be boat asylum seeker-free. The people of Nauru, Manus and Christmas Island have been stripped bare of dignity and hope, their destruction no secret, and the subject of

two films at international film festivals screening in New Zealand this year, one filmed entirely on mobile phone from inside Manus itself.

Last August we also witnessed a military crackdown in Myanmar's Rakhine State driving 720,000 Rohingya into Bangladesh, 500,000 of these children, now living in makeshift shelters in the largest refugee camp in the world. A year later, the UN concluded that Myanmar's top military generals and their targeted campaign of widespread and systematic murder, rape and burning of the Rohingya, should be prosecuted for genocide.

ASST continues to be a member of the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APPRN) an open and growing network consisting of more than 340 civil society organisations and individuals from 28 countries committed to advancing the rights of refugees in the Asia Pacific region.

We are also part of the Auckland Refugee Sector Steering Group (ARSSG) and I am forever indebted to my wonderful colleagues from this group for taking me under their collective wing and giving me guidance in the initial shakedown period. In particular Rochana Sheward from ARMS, Abann Yor and Gatluak Chuol from ARCC, Dr Ann Hood from RASNZ, Amanda Aye and Celia Brandon from the New Zealand Red Cross, and Teresa Marinovitch from Language Connect. Sue Elliott, ASST founding member and someone with decades of experience in the sector, has also been an invaluable support.

Visiting the hostel and the transitional units, and meeting the residents as often as I can has been the most rewarding experience of all. Working with them side by side, in cleaning bees or sharing food, getting to know them a bit more each time, has been both humbling and inspiring. Their tenacity and refusal to give up hope are examples to us all.

Of course none of this would be possible without our funders whose generosity ensures the long term viability of ASST. Our heartfelt thanks to:-

- Foundation North Trust
- JR McKenzie Trust
- NZ Lottery Grants Board
- COGS
- Catholic Caring Foundation

- Auckland Communities Fund

Next year will mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ASST and we plan to have a big celebration! Some of those founding members are still with us today and the longevity of the organisation is due mainly to their dogged determination to improve services for asylum seekers and convention refugees in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Finally, a word of thanks to ASST Board members, in particular the Executive Committee made up of Rebecca Holdsworth (President), Anchali Anandanayagam (Vice President) and Tracy Hickman (Treasurer) who have consistently gone beyond the call of duty in ensuring I was supported in my role. Thank you!

I look forward to a productive and more resourced year ahead during which we engage with new funding and potential sponsorship opportunities. Just a few days' ago I learned that twenty multinational companies announced that they will leverage their core business and social responsibility initiatives to improve the lives and livelihoods of more than 20 million men, women and children who have been forcibly displaced or have had to flee from their own countries. Initiatives like this and Talent without Boundaries which connects refugees and asylum seekers to job opportunities and is the first online platform of its kind that collects the education and detailed work history of refugees, hopefully heralds a new dawn of understanding in which displaced people - to paraphrase the Kurdish journalist and poet Behrouz Boochani in detention at Manus - are not seen as terrorists or dangerous nor the romantic image that many refugee supporters construct and perpetuate, but as people just like you and me. People with hopes, dreams, a longing to be connected, to feel safe and have a home. I am immensely proud to be working for an organisation that does just that.

**He aha te mea nui o te ao He tangata, he tangata, he tangata!**

What is the most important thing in the world? It is the people, it is the people, it is the people!

Susi Newborn – Executive Director

## **Client Services AGM report June 2017 – June 2018**

### Volunteers

In February our long serving volunteer Laura left us to complete her teacher training, so in April we recruited two new volunteers. Jen Lander is our donations' co-ordinator, managing the donations of furniture, clothes and miscellany that are offered to us. Jen is a quiet and tireless worker, taking initiative and getting things done. Bernard Sama is our shopping volunteer. While working towards a PhD and working night shifts in mental health, Bernard finds the time to come every Thursday to do our weekly grocery shop for the hostel and to help our clients where he can. Both Jen and Bernard's contribution is invaluable and it makes the job for client services much easier.

### New Staff

Bella Munro joined ASST at the start of May in the role of accommodation co-ordinator. Bella came at a time where demand for our services was incredibly high and capacity limited. This meant she really had to hit the ground running. Bella took this in her stride and has quickly become an invaluable member of the client services team. Bella has developed strong relationships with our hostel and unit clients as well as with other sector organisations.

### Collaborations

In June this year the support group jointly organised by ASST, RASNZ and The Grief Centre got under way for the third time. While there were fewer numbers than previous rounds, the impact on those that participated was just as profound. An ASST client who attended remarked at the final session that often he feels stressed, overwhelmed and loses hope. When that happens he knows he can count on ASST to find a solution e.g. go to RAS or attend the support group where he feels strengthened and hopeful.

Our collaboration with Red Cross has continued this past year and funding is confirmed through to June next year. This past year has seen a training programme for volunteers developed as well as an outcomes' measurement framework put in place. The programme places Red Cross volunteers who have previously volunteered with quota refugees with

families and individuals referred by ASST. For the first time this year focus groups were run with volunteers and clients to measure the impact of the programme. The impact the volunteers have had on the families and individuals referred to the programme has been overwhelmingly positive. Clients reported feeling more connected to community and society through the support of the volunteers, one client reported making his first friend after being in New Zealand a number of years due to the support and confidence the volunteers had given him. The programme also allows volunteers an opportunity to understand some of the unique challenges faced by asylum seekers and convention refugees in New Zealand, which contributes to increasing awareness in the community and breaking down some assumptions people may have about these groups.

### Looking Ahead

With more capacity since Bella has come on board, we have been able to be more proactive in planning, with a particular view in improving the hostel environment. In the year June 2018 to June 2019 we would like to focus on building a social engagement programme, which would include regular outings for hostel residents around Auckland, as well as more scheduled events at the hostel. Our first planned outing will be to Waiheke Island in November.

We also have a new volunteer who has a background in counselling, who will be working on engaging with families to give cross cultural support, information and guidance on resettlement in New Zealand. This will hopefully be particularly beneficial to our female clients who need some additional guidance and information to assist their resettlement journey.

### Client and Staff Feedback

“I am so grateful for the help. I don’t have much support here. ASST has helped me with clothing, food, toys for my son, books and nappies. I wasn’t able to get a benefit until I had the support of Freyja with Work and Income. I feel like I would not have survived without the support I get from ASST. I very much appreciate the work you do”. (Community Client)

“Asylum Seekers Support Trust has played a big role in providing me the help I needed when I moved to Auckland. They assisted in getting me accommodation, as well as the basic needs to get by on a daily basis

(grocery, beddings etc.). More importantly, Asylum Seekers Support Trust provided emotional support and advice to overcome the struggles of being an asylum seeker in the country”. (Hostel resident)

“The staff at ASST are skilled, passionate, kind, professional and compassionate. The question is not how did they help but where didn’t they help because they supported us in every aspect. They show through their actions not just their words they work silently but their work says everything” (Community Client)

“For me it has been interesting to observe that our greatest successes don’t come in the way one might think. I see the most significant impact of the work we do reflected in the daily and often small moments of connection, conversation and practical support. For example, accompanying someone to an appointment at Work and Income, taking time to drink tea and hear about a person’s situation, or supporting someone to find appropriate housing”. (Bella, ASST)

Freyja Stocker – Hostel Manager and Social Worker

Bella Munro – Accommodation Support Co-ordinator