

ANNUAL REPORT 2025



Asylum Seekers
Support Trust

Our Guiding Principle

**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 people, it is people, it is people!

Prepared By :

Asylum Seekers
Support Trust
10 November 2025

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

CONTENTS

		ABOUT US	1
		CHAIRPERSON'S MESSAGE	2
		OUR OPERATIONS TEAM	4
		ASST SERVICES OVERVIEW	6
		KEY ACHIEVEMENTS	7
IMPACT EVALUATION REPORT	12		
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2026	13		
LEGAL STRUCTURE CHANGE	14		
OUR BOARD	15		
FINANCIAL OVERVIEW	17		
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	20		

ABOUT US

The Asylum Seeker Support Trust (ASST) was founded in 1989 as the Auckland Refugee Council Incorporated (ARCI). It adopted its current trading name in 2015, and in 2025 was reconstituted as the Aotearoa Refugee Support Trust (ARST).



OUR MISSION

ASST supports people who come to NZ seeking asylum and a safe and peaceful life, by providing critical humanitarian services to those in need, and advocates for legally compliant and compassionate treatment of our clients and all who seek asylum.



OUR VISION

An Aotearoa New Zealand where asylum seekers are genuinely welcomed, fully supported, and empowered to thrive in a safe, inclusive, and compassionate society.



OUR VALUES

Respect for everyone we interact with, Inclusion of all people, Empathy for others, Integrity in all our undertakings, Impact resulting from everything we do.

CHAIRPERSON'S MESSAGE



“

As we head into another year, I thank you once again for your continued interest in and support of the Asylum Seekers Support Trust.

”

Tēnā koutou katoa, whānau

It is my pleasure, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, to once again report to you on another year of challenge, growth, and success for our organisation.

Looking back at my report from last year, I noted that times were increasingly hard for most people across the country due to the cost-of-living and housing crises. It will come as no surprise when I say that these challenges have only deepened in Aotearoa New Zealand.

I also reflected on people who have fled devastating conflicts, political persecution, human rights abuses, and the effects of climate change, and are seeking international protection as refugees in Aotearoa New Zealand. Sadly, the world has not become any kinder over the past twelve months, as we continue to witness sobering human suffering from conflicts and wars in other parts of the world.

Despite this, I am immensely proud of the way our team has risen to these challenges in advancing our mission. I am also deeply grateful that our funders and all those who support us in various other ways continue to recognise our work and maintain their contributions to the operations of ASST. Your passion, dedication, and continued support within the community and across government agencies have enabled us to press on in our mission to assist people who have come to this country seeking safety and dignity.

Within this annual report you will find information about some of the significant achievements of our General Manager, Dawit Arshak, and the ASST Team over the past year. The Board and I are very impressed with their accomplishments, and I am sure you will be too.

As you will also read, there has been growth in parts of our operations in recent months, with administration and advocacy being strengthened through part-time appointments. Management has also undertaken a difficult but necessary workplace restructure to ensure we allocate our funding resources as effectively as possible. The main outcome has been to reduce the number of senior registered social workers on our staff from three to one, with the Client Services Manager role and one of the Senior Social Worker positions being disestablished. Our sincere thanks go to Tim Maurice who has generously shared his expertise and years of experience with ASST to lead this change process.

In closing, I want to acknowledge a significant piece of work that the Board has been engaged in for more than twelve months: the transition of our organisation's legal status from an incorporated society to a charitable trust. This has been a major undertaking, and I extend special thanks to our Board Trustee and Secretary Jen Lander, assisted by Maithili Sreen, as well as to the law firm Simpson Grierson for their many hours of pro bono legal support.

As we head into another year I thank you once again for your continued interest in and support of the Asylum Seekers Support Trust. We do not take your generosity or solidarity for granted. We do truly appreciate you being part of our community.

Ngā mihi nui
Dr Bernard Sama
Board Chairperson

“

Your passion, dedication, and continued support within the community and across government agencies have enabled us to press on in our mission to assist people who have come to this country seeking safety and dignity.

”



OUR OPERATIONS TEAM

The ASST Operational Team is a passionate group dedicated to supporting asylum seekers in their journey to rebuild their lives in Aotearoa. With backgrounds in social work, community engagement, administration, and communications, the team works collaboratively to deliver essential services and uphold ASST's mission of compassion, inclusion, and integrity in every interaction.



Dawit Arshak
General Manager



Maria Mezher
Administration Manager



Gina Kwok
Senior Social Worker



Kidist Tegegne
Community Development



May Eqbal
Senior Support Worker



Vijitha Visagan
Support Worker



Tim Maurice
Finance / Admin



Feras Alhantosh
Driver



Asif Ahmad
Communications

Two New Roles Created



Maria Mezher
Administration Manager

This year, we have introduced two new key roles — **Administration Manager** and **Advocacy Lead** — to strengthen both our internal operations and our external impact.

The Administration Manager role was created to streamline day-to-day processes, enhance coordination across teams, and ensure smooth delivery of essential services, allowing staff to focus more on client support.



Becky Little
Advocacy Lead

The Advocacy Lead role was established to amplify the voices of people seeking asylum, engage with policymakers and partner organisations, and drive systemic change towards fair and compassionate treatment.

Together, these roles have improved our organisational efficiency, advocacy reach, and overall ability to support asylum seekers who choose Aotearoa New Zealand as a country in which to thrive.

Recent Departures

Following the conclusion of a workplace restructure two of our senior roles have been disestablished and consequently Christina and Shilear have left ASST at the end of October.

They have been staff members since December 2021 and January 2020 respectively and their years of service are greatly appreciated by us and the many clients they have assisted.

They leave with our best wishes and gratitude for their significant contributions to the growth of ASST.



Shilear Basharati



Christina

ASST SERVICES OVERVIEW



Advocacy & Support

Our team work tirelessly supporting asylum seekers throughout their asylum journey with Immigration New Zealand and the Courts ensuring they receive fair treatment and access to their entitlements from essential services such as Legal Representation, WINZ, IRD, and the health and education sectors.



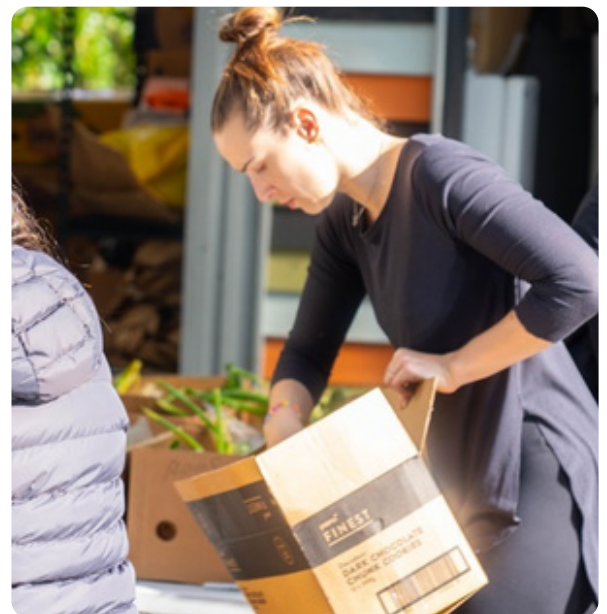
Emergency Housing

We run a hostel and family units plus source other accommodation in the community, providing safe temporary housing to asylum seekers, helping them transition from a place of crisis to a place of stability.



Food Assistance

ASST distributes food boxes every Tuesday and Friday, providing essential support to more than five hundred people. With the dedicated efforts of our staff and volunteers, and the invaluable support of Kiwi Harvest and Fair Food, we ensure that no one goes hungry.



6,214

Food Boxes and
Vouchers

2,671

Immigration Support
Provided

2,649

Work and Income
Support

2,951

Client Check Ins
Completed

Key Activities Figures for 2024/25 at a Glance

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Record New Clients

Our Client Services Team handled a steady rise in new arrivals, with a growing need for emergency housing, food parcels, warm clothing, visa assistance, and access to income. In November 2024, ASST recorded 142 new referrals – the highest on record. This remarkable workload was managed by a small but dedicated team who continue to support each asylum seeker with dignity, respect, and empathy.

Website Refresh asst.org.nz

The redesigned website was launched in 2025 with clearer navigation, improved accessibility, and updated content for clients, volunteers, and supporters. The new design enhances user experience by making key information easier to find and ensuring compatibility across all devices. It also includes improved security features, simplified donation and contact forms, and integrated multilingual support to better serve our diverse community. Regular updates and new content will continue to be added to keep visitors informed and engaged with our work, events, and advocacy initiatives.

Women's Driver Licence Programme

Funded by Foundation North, the programme supported fifty-four women to obtain a New Zealand driver licence through theory lessons, practical training, and testing. The initiative is aimed at promoting their independence and employability in this country.



Record Number of New Client Referrals in Just One Month



Computer Literacy Workshop Participants

40



Women Supported for Driving Licence Programme

54



Empowering Clients for Employment

58

Christmas Drive for Children's Gifts

The annual Christmas Drive reached over 300 gifts this year – bringing smiles to asylum seeker families during the holiday season. St Augustine's Church generously donated 100 gifts, alongside many other donors, supporters, and funders who contributed to this collective effort. Their kindness ensured that every child received a special present and that families felt remembered and supported during a challenging time of the year.

Workshop on Asylum Seeker Entitlements

This information session guided clients on their rights and entitlements, covering Work and Income benefits, healthcare access, schooling options, and English classes, ensuring asylum seekers better understand available support services.

Computer Literacy and Safety Workshop

With funding from J.R. McKenzie Trust, ASST's first digital-skills workshop trained forty participants, teaching safe device use, online awareness, and how parents can protect children from scams and unsafe content.

Social Media Expansion

Our social media presence expanded significantly this year, reaching a wider audience and strengthening engagement with our supporters through regular updates, storytelling, and campaign highlights.

Children's Well-Being and Safety Workshop

ASST hosted a workshop featuring the Ministry of Education, Plunket Whānau Āwhina, and Neighbourhood Support. This included topics such as child safety laws, school enrolment, health services, and community safety awareness.

Empowering Clients for Employment Success

ASST's employment workshop welcomed fifty-eight participants, many with CVs ready for review. In collaboration with Employment New Zealand and Red Cross Pathways to Employment, the session covered employee rights, interview skills, and job-search preparation, helping clients gain confidence and readiness for work.



Empowering Clients for Employment Success



Know Your Rights Workshop



Child Safety and Wellbeing



Digital Skills for Life Training

80%

of Clients Reported Major Positive Impact

Over 80% said ASST made a major positive difference in their lives.
Source: ASST Impact Evaluation Report 2024

60+

Lawyers Listed

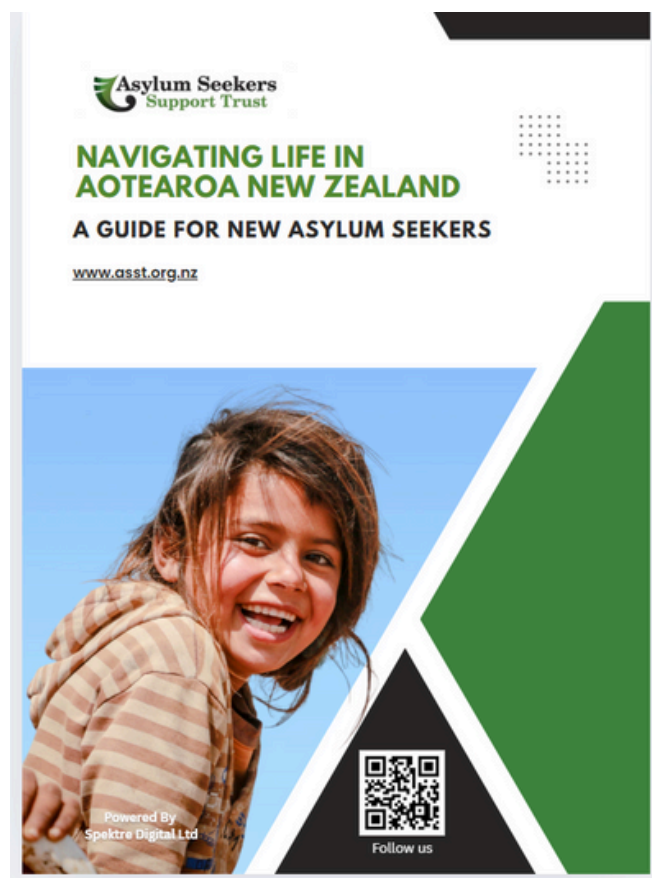
A nationwide directory connects asylum seekers with 60+ refugee lawyers.
Source: ASST Guide for New Asylum Seekers 2025

Guide Booklet: Navigating Life in Aotearoa New Zealand

In 2025 ASST released a Guide for New Asylum Seekers: Navigating Life in Aotearoa New Zealand, a comprehensive resource designed to help newly arrived asylum seekers understand their rights and access essential services. The booklet provides clear, step-by-step information on topics such as asylum and visa services, welfare support, healthcare, education, housing, and community resources. Distributed nationwide and available online in multiple languages, the guide ensures that every person seeking asylum in New Zealand can find trustworthy, practical information to rebuild their lives with dignity and confidence.

Nationwide List of Lawyers

ASST has compiled and published the Nationwide List of Lawyers — a first-of-its-kind resource connecting asylum seekers across Aotearoa with qualified legal professionals experienced in refugee and protection law. The list includes contact details and language options of lawyers offering services under legal aid, ensuring equitable access to justice for asylum seekers.



Weekly Food Boxes

ASST operates a weekly food distribution programme supporting hundreds of asylum seekers and their families across Auckland. With generous backing from Fair Food NZ and KiwiHarvest, our team and volunteers deliver around 130 food boxes every Tuesday and Friday, reaching an estimated 500–600 people every week. The food boxes provide essential nourishment and help ease the financial strain faced by many new arrivals while also fostering a sense of care and connection within the community.





Pearl of Island Meat Donation



Christmas Gathering

2024 2025

ASST TEAM IN
ACTION



ASST Volunteers



Weekly Food Deliveries



Podcasts : Beyond Borders



World Refugee Day



Annual Meeting 2024



Junk2go Donation Collection

BELONG

TO A COMMUNITY THAT SUPPORTS



Meeting With Politicians

IMPACT EVALUATION REPORT

01. Measuring Our Impact

In 2024 ASST completed its first Impact Evaluation Report, sponsored by JR Mckenzie Trust. This has provided valuable insight into the difference our services make in the lives of asylum seekers. The evaluation confirmed our positive impact, particularly in areas such as housing stability, healthcare access, and essential welfare support.

02. Voices of Our Clients

Many clients described Asylum Seekers Support Trust as a lifeline during their most challenging moments, offering not just practical help but also empathy, safety, and hope. The responses and stories highlight the power of personalised, trauma-informed care that restores personal dignity and community connection.

Using Insights for Change

The report's findings have been shared with funders, government agencies, and sector partners to inform future planning and strengthen advocacy for equitable support systems. These insights now guide ASST's ongoing priorities in service delivery, evidence-based advocacy, and long-term impact measurement.

People's Evaluation Of Us



Eight out of ten clients said ASST made a "huge" or "significant" difference in their lives.

Clients highlighted improved access to housing, healthcare, and legal support, as well as the kindness and the respect they received from our team.

You can find the full report on our website.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2026

Enhancing Our Capacity to Deliver Holistic Support

Goal

To strengthen ASST's ability to provide comprehensive, person-centred support as widely as we can across Aotearoa New Zealand, that addresses the complex and evolving needs of asylum-seeking individuals and families – ensuring their safety, dignity, and long-term wellbeing where they have chosen to build their future

01

Sustainable Housing Solutions

Advocate for and secure safe, stable, and appropriate housing, recognising it as a cornerstone of successful resettlement, healing, and community integration.

02

Accessible Information Provision

Develop and maintain robust systems for delivering clear, timely, and accurate information to all asylum seekers across the country, empowering them to navigate support agencies.

03

Partnerships and Advocacy

Strengthen strategic partnerships and advocacy with government agencies, NGOs, and other community organisations to influence refugee and asylum policy, and to promote equitable access to essential services and opportunities.



Legal Structure Change

From Incorporated Society To Charitable Trust

Over 2024–2025, the Board of ASST has undertaken an important transition of its legal structure from an Incorporated Society to a Charitable Trust. This was driven in part by legislation change. It also reflects our growth as an organisation and our commitment to strong governance, transparency, and long-term sustainability. The new legal entity structure ensures that ASST can continue to deliver vital humanitarian support while operating under a modern and accountable framework.

Pro Bono Legal Support

The Board acknowledges and sincerely thanks Simpson Grierson for their considerable pro-bono (i.e., free of charge) legal advice and many hours of work for us on the legal structure change.

SIMPSON
GRIERSON

TIME
FOR
CHANGE

Improvement Through Change

1

Stronger Governance

The Charitable Trust model provides a clearer governance structure and empowers trustees to oversee the ASST mission more efficiently and effectively

2

Appropriate Governance

The governance framework is now brought in line with how ASST is run in practice, and eliminates the administrative burden of maintaining an inappropriate membership structure.

3

Long-Term Sustainability

By moving to a Charitable Trust framework, ASST strengthens its ability to manage risk and better secure future support for people seeking asylum in Aotearoa.

OUR BOARD

The Board is a dedicated team with diverse expertise in humanitarian work, law, accounting, teaching, social services, and advocacy, all committed to creating a welcoming Aotearoa New Zealand for asylum seekers. Their skills drive ASST's mission and values, ensuring impactful, compassionate, and legally sound support for those seeking safety in this country.



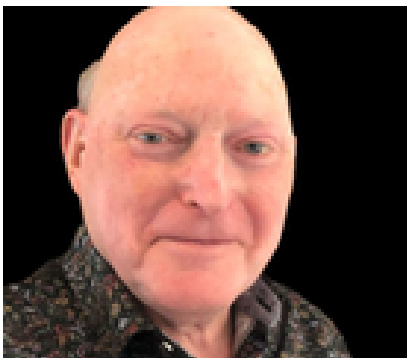
Bernard Sama
Board Chair



Andrew Barron
Deputy Chair



Jen Lander
Secretary



Colin Jeffery
Treasurer

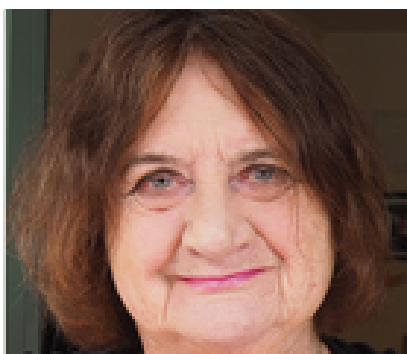


Maithili Sreen
Board Member



Jane Smith
Board Member

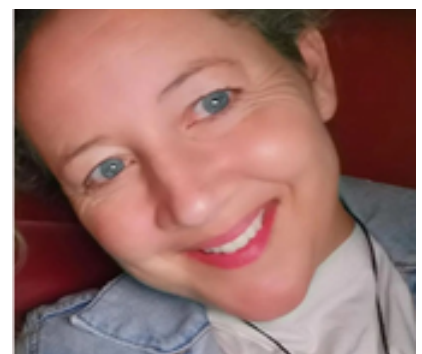
Outgoing Board Members



Judy Wilford
Board Member



Baptist Lobo
Board Member



Bella Munro
Board Member

We express our gratitude to our outgoing board members Judy Wilford, Baptist Lobo, and Bella Munro for their dedicated service and leadership in their governance roles. Each of you has been an invaluable part of our journey, shaping the direction of our organisation for several years and contributing in many ways to our mission.

With the new legal entity ARST now providing the governance framework for ASST they have resigned from the ARCI board with effect from the conclusion of the last ARCI board meeting which was held on 20 October 2025.

Judy Wilford began volunteering with ASST in 2019. She was elected to our board at the September 2020 AGM and served as Deputy Chair for the two years to 2024. Judy has had an extensive career primarily in education and university roles and also brought to the board her strong belief in the need for justice for those seeking asylum and in the responsibility of this country to provide a safe welcome and the support they need. Whilst stepping down as a board member now, Judy intends to continue her support of ASST as a volunteer.

Baptist Lobo was brought in as a member of the ASST Board in December 2020 especially to fill the officer position of Treasurer which was vacant at that time.

**Thank You Judy, Baptist,
and Bella**

He has continued to serve as Board Treasurer since then, bringing his expertise as a Chartered Accountant and FCPA backed by his years of experience in responsible positions and financial leadership roles. Baptist is a member of various not-for-profit boards and runs and manages his own chartered accounting practice. His many other commitments have meant that Baptist has decided to resign from the board at this time.

Bella Munro worked with our clients from 2018 to 2020 and was elected to the board in October 2023. She understands the systemic challenges and marginalisation that asylum seekers face and is a strong advocate for human rights and social justice. Bella has worked for UMMA Trust supporting women and families from refugee backgrounds, completed her Masters in Social Work in 2022, and is currently on parental leave from her role as a social worker with Starship Community. With her fourth child and other demands Bella feels she does not have the time at present to give the trustee role the attention it deserves.



FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

In the latest financial year to 30 June 2025 our expenses were \$34,535 more than our income. This though was less than the \$80,000 deficit forecast in the budget. This better outcome arose primarily as lower than budgeted payroll costs arose from two staff resignations in the latter part of the financial year.

As noted by the board chairperson in his message, management has recently completed some staffing changes that will reduce the future cost of remuneration. This operational restructuring has been necessary to hold our ongoing costs within our forecast future income.

Last year we noted the first direct funding from MBIE (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment) for our work with people seeking asylum. This year we can report with pleasure that MBIE has extended that contract to September 2028 and will continue their funding of \$500,000 for each of the next three years.

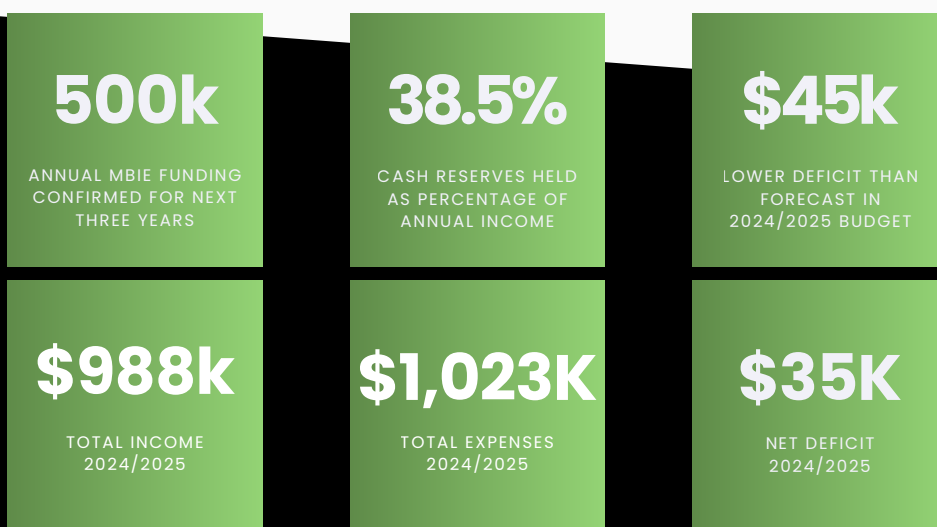
We are also grateful to have received the continued generous funding support in 2024/25 of Foundation North, JR McKenzie Trust, Cathro Family Trust, Lottery Grants Board, plus other grants and donations. We sincerely value and appreciate these important relationships.

Knowing that we have that funding from MBIE covering around half of our expected costs we can now plan future years with more certainty. We will though remain cautious in our financial management, mindful of some funding being less certain and also conscious of the need to allow for the impact of continuing inflation in costs.

With cash reserves carefully built over the last three years to be around one third of our annual income we now have a more secure financial base to weather for a short period any significant drop in income while we adjust operations to meet unexpected circumstance. We would like to build that buffer a little more but are pleased that ASST is now in this more comfortable financial position.

The board is grateful for the services of our Accountant Tim Maurice, board members Baptist Lobo as Treasurer of ARCI and Colin Jeffery as Treasurer of ARST, and our Auditor Bhavik Khatri. We greatly appreciate the expertise and dedication they bring to their respective roles in the management, oversight, and review of our financial matters.

The two key financial statements contained in the Performance Report for 2024/25 follow for your information.



Key Financial Figures at a Glance

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

"How was it funded?" and "What did it cost?"

For the year ended 30 June 2025

Revenue	Current Year \$	Last Year \$
Donations, koha, bequests, other general fundraising	23,504	22,763
General grants	306,908	355,567
Capital grants and donations	-	50,000
Government service delivery grants/contracts	500,000	500,000
Non-government service delivery grants/contracts	-	-
Membership fees and subscriptions	174	88
Revenue from commercial activities	112,758	91,730
Interest, dividends and other investment revenue	34,169	29,710
Other revenue	10,865	9,950
Total Revenue	988,377	1,059,808
Expenses		
Expenses related to fundraising	897	-
Employee remuneration and other related expenses	702,429	514,479
Volunteer related expenses	867	359
Expenses related to commercial activities	73,130	57,030
Other expenses related to service delivery	219,822	130,160
Grants and donations made	-	-
Other expenses	25,768	11,837
Total Expenses	1,022,913	713,865
Surplus (Deficit) for the Year	(34,535)	345,943

Page 3

These financial statements have been extracted from the Annual Return submitted to Charities Services. The full Annual Return (sixteen pages) plus the Auditor's Report can be found online on the Charities Register (www.charities.govt.nz) by searching our Registration Number (CC20172) or our Charity Name (Aotearoa Refugee Support Trust). It is also available on our website (www.asst.org.nz).

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

“What the entity owns” and “What the entity owes”

As At 30 June 2025

	Current Year \$	Last Year \$
Current Assets		
Cash and short-term deposits	138,420	65,017
Debtors and prepayments	5,466	4,467
Inventory	-	-
Other current assets	507,168	692,504
Total Current Assets	651,054	761,988
Non-Current Assets		
Property, plant and equipment	56,583	62,616
Investments	-	-
Other non-current assets	-	-
Total Non-Current Assets	56,583	62,616
Total Assets	707,637	824,604
Current Liabilities		
Bank overdraft	-	-
Creditors and accrued expenses	11,530	6,623
Employee costs payable	71,186	88,297
Deferred revenue	187,334	245,300
Other current liabilities	560	12,822
Total Current Liabilities	270,610	353,042
Non-Current Liabilities	-	-
Loans	-	-
Other non-current liabilities	-	-
Total Non-Current Liabilities	-	-
Total Liabilities	270,610	353,042
NET ASSETS (ie, Total Assets less Total Liabilities)	437,027	471,562
Accumulated Funds		
Capital contributed by owners or members	-	-
Accumulated surpluses or (deficits)	437,027	471,562
Restricted reserves	-	-
Discretionary reserves	-	-
Revaluation reserves	-	-
Other reserves	-	-
ACCUMULATED FUNDS	437,027	471,562

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



* **Our Funders:** Your generosity enables us to continue our mission and support those in need. Thank you for your continued provision of the funding essential to our work.

* **Our Volunteers:** Your dedication and compassion are the backbone of our organisation. Thank you for your consistency in the service you provide to us and our clients.

* **Our Donors:** Your donations of clothing, appliances, food, and other items greatly assist us in providing essential support to those we serve. Thank you for helping us meet the needs of our community.

* **Our Clients:** You inspire us every day with your resilience and courage. Thank you for your trust in us as you navigate the difficulties you deal with rebuilding your life in this country.

* **Our Partners:** Government and non-government bodies, community organisations, our alliances, faith-based groups, and all the individual supporters. We are grateful for your ongoing support and cooperation.

New Clients

879

2024/2025
Year

Staff

09

Full-Time
Equivalent

Volunteers

20+

Food Delivery,
Board, Others



Together, we are building a more inclusive and supportive community for asylum seekers and refugees in Aotearoa.

We extend our sincere thanks to our funders and sponsors whose ongoing support has been instrumental in enabling ASST to continue its vital work. Your financial contributions and partnerships have helped us to provide essential services to strengthen our programmes, and to create meaningful opportunities for people seeking asylum in Aotearoa New Zealand.



**CATHRO
Family Trusts**



BK Audit



**The R D Butland
Charitable Trust**



**SIMPSON
GRIERSON**



hello.



ASB

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SPEKTRE DIGITAL LTD





FOR MORE INFORMATION

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