



**ASYLUM SEEKERS
CENTRE**

**2003
END OF YEAR
REPORT**

ASYLUM SEEKERS CENTRE (INC)

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ASYLUM SEEKERS CENTRE PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

The Asylum Seekers Centre aims to assist asylum seekers regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality and religion. The Centre is committed to human rights, believing that all people have the same human, social and legal rights.

The Asylum Seekers Centre is first and foremost a referral base and hospitality centre for asylum seekers. It aims to raise awareness of the needs of asylum seekers within the community and offers a variety of services including English classes, health care assistance, a job skills program and other recreational activities that asylum seekers are not able to access in the mainstream social system. The Centre provides access to services and information without prejudice and aims to avoid duplication of any other services.

All services are free and confidential.

*The Asylum Seekers Centre provides services and support to refugee applicants.
It is sponsored by the Good Shepherd Sisters and the Mercy Foundation and assisted by other groups
and individuals.*

COMMITTEE REPORT

It gives me great pleasure to write this report on behalf of the Management Committee of the Asylum Seekers Centre. I am particularly pleased to do so after a year of such marvellous success in Centre activities at a time when casework has become increasingly complex and the needs of families and individuals seeking protection in Australia ever greater.

The keys to the success of the Centre are the people involved - people from disparate backgrounds who have joined together with a desire to make a difference in the lives of asylum seekers. Firstly, and most importantly, the asylum seekers themselves have brought courage and determination to a new life in very difficult circumstances - this is inspiring. Add to this the devotion of staff, volunteers, supporters and the help of funding bodies and it is clear why the Asylum Seekers Centre is a very special place.

By contrast, our Federal government has turned the screws ever tighter on those who seek refuge in this country from persecution elsewhere. The past year has been no exception. As I write this report, the Government is proposing the granting of temporary stay to all asylum seekers if they can prove a need for protection. Should this become law, the work of the Asylum Seekers Centre will be further complicated as more clients of the service, although recognised as refugees, would face a further examination of their claims at a later date - all the time with the threat of forced return hanging over their heads.

The extent of the assault on the rights of asylum seekers in recent years, and the alacrity with which politicians and high-ranking bureaucrats have pursued an agenda motivated by populism and fear-mongering, is nothing short of shameful. That it has continued unrelentingly in 2002/03 in the absence of boat arrivals is illogical and mean-spirited.

The flipside of the assault on asylum seekers has been the way in which those opposed to these policies have rallied in support of the people affected by our government's scant regard for basic human rights. People are what matter and the activities of the Centre are a testament to the power of people in the face of looming forces of intolerance. In this regard, the last year has witnessed real progress in raising funds to assist families seeking asylum and those refugees with temporary residence. People of goodwill have consistently given of their time to raise money and with every month more and more supporters come forward eager to assist.

I therefore wish to take this opportunity to thank all those who have contributed in some way to the success of the Centre in the last year. In particular, my thanks go to Sylvia Winton who has steered the ship with great ability and the help of an excellent team of staff and volunteers, through storms created far from Surry Hills.

I also wish to acknowledge the many donors without whose continued support the Centre would founder for lack of resources. My thanks go equally to my fellow committee members who give freely of their time and expertise in the midst of busy schedules.

Finally, my admiration is extended to the many people seeking protection who bring with them the hope that they will find a place free from fear in Australia - a land that was once synonymous with granting newcomers a fair go. A parting hope is that we are able to revive this belief in ourselves as a nation. The Asylum Seekers Centre is showing the way.

Lachlan Murdoch
for the Management Committee

CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT

Dear Friends

A temporary life

The first group of people who were issued a three year Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) saw its expiry during this year. Many lived in hope that they might at last bring their loved ones to safety or that they might start to live with dignity and without the uncertainty that is palpable for all those on a TPV. Sadly this was not so. For this group it has been a time of high anxiety. Some of our work has been to support those in limbo. One Palestinian man reported, "I was told three years ago at my interview with DIMIA that I was recognised as Stateless and that at the end of three years I would be granted a permanent visa, then I would be able to get my wife and child to join me". An ASC caseworker accompanied this man to his recent DIMIA interview where he was told that there is just a possibility that DIMIA could send him back to Iraq (the country he fled and had been tortured in) "so we will not make a decision at this time because Iraq is not stable". He reports that his wife has now said "do not contact again, I do not believe you ever intended to come and I cannot believe anything you tell us". He attempted suicide soon after hearing his DIMIA answer.

If it is not the uncertainty for the person on a TPV, then it is the person struggling to survive while living in the community, waiting the outcome of their application to DIMIA or the Refugee Review Tribunal, (RRT). Recently I sat with a man who sobbed as he told of his elderly mother having to flee her home as "they came looking for me". He is concerned "they will kill her". Survivor guilt is common for refugees. He now awaits an appeal of the RRT decision at the Federal Court. Our task is to accompany and advocate, support and attempt to keep him alive while the decision is challenged. For over 2 years he has lived without permission to work, no dignity and increasing despair.

Through the year we celebrated with several folk who received 'good' decisions and were granted permanent protection. Even for them it is a mixed blessing. New issues arise with knowing they are safe. The struggle to get their family to join them, to be constantly mindful of what might be happening to those they left behind. One successful man from Guinea was told it would be about five years before his wife and children could join him. When he arrived at our Centre he had no English, so his asylum seeker life has been incremental steps – prove the need for protection, attend English classes to a level suitable to gain employment; get any work - enough to survive, because as an asylum seeker, there is no access to Centrelink. Then good news "you are recognised as a refugee". He returned to us when he learned how long it would be to get his family to safety. Sure enough – five years. Had he been able to finance their journey and their expenses on arrival it might be quicker. One step forward and ten steps back. How can he be happy at knowing he is a refugee yet not being able to sponsor his family?

A civil society?

One of the most common differences I ascertain, between working with refugees in Australia in the early 1990's and today is that daily, now I hear "I wish I had never come to this country".

For them and for many Australians there is disbelief in the harshness of our policies. It is a time to wonder if Australia is a civil society.

Refugee applicants present themselves to the Government either immediately on, or very soon after arrival in Australia. A harsh refugee policy is not about border protection, no terrorist would go through the difficult journey and the hurdles to enter this country as a refugee.

An extract of a poem written by a recently successful asylum seeker reminds us:

*A refugee is not a criminal
A refugee is not a terrorist
A refugee is not a thief*

*It is me today
It is not about race, religion or country
It could be you tomorrow*

A place for social capital

For all the harshness of policy, the difficulty to prove the need for protection, the cruelty and torture that are part of our daily work, there is another side to the Centre that is becoming more obvious. It is a place strongly held together by social capital, the generosity of volunteer and salaried staff is overwhelming. One large firm allows staff an extended lunch break, thus providing a time that they are able to attend the Centre and assist with English language support; academics, medical practitioners, barristers, retirees, parents, students, gardeners, folk from every profession and from every faith offer service and kindness. The Centre is the channel for that social capital – a commodity sadly unmeasured in our economically measured society. Perhaps you are able to provide a service pro bono to an asylum seeker in your rooms. Contact the Centre or see www.asylumseekerscentre.org.au

During the year we instigated monthly Supporter Luncheons to provide an opportunity for busy business people to visit the Centre and learn about our work and of the lives of those we accompany and advocate for. Thank you to the volunteers who provide a delicious meal on those days. If you would like to be invited, or to nominate another we should include, please contact the Centre.

This year we further increased our emergency assistance provided to asylum seekers. Several are given enough money to buy a weekly ticket to reach the Centre thereby accessing the support that is offered. For those with no permission to work, no access to Centrelink, and no way to survive, a day at the Centre provides contact, support, a meal, perhaps medical attention, an English class or computer class and often much more.

The Asylum Seekers Centre is a place of hospitality and welcome. It continues to be an oasis for many people, a welcoming place in a largely unwelcoming country, a safe place for people who have fled situations of great danger. Some refer to the Centre as their home – they have no family and home left. These people teach me about courage, determination, humility and survival, daily my life is enriched by my work and people who attend the Centre.

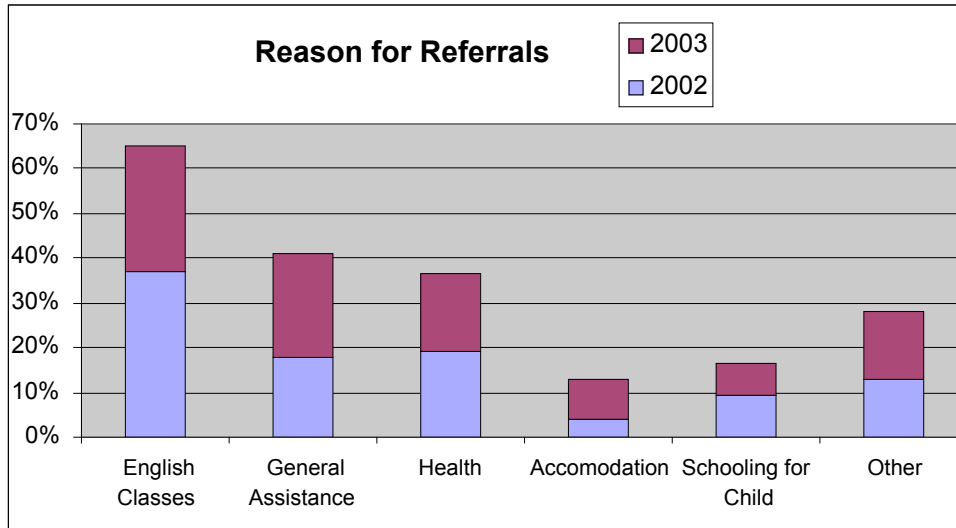
A New Children Support Project

Children often suffer unintentionally when a family is in the refugee process. They are uprooted from their education, if a parent does not have permission to work, or access to welfare of any kind, how can they provide for their child to participate fully in school? How can they provide medical care, school uniforms or how can a child attend excursions? Mindful of these difficulties the Centre is to employ a family support worker who will contact families and provide financial assistance in education and health aspects of the child's life. Presently we respond when a family comes to our attention, but we plan to initiate care in a systematic manner where children are involved. We have support for this project from the Myer Foundation, the Thomas Family Foundation and Perpetual Trustees. It is still under funded by \$10,000. Can you help?

Sylvia Winton
Co-ordinator

What attracts clients to the Centre?

Most new clients state that it is English classes that draw them to the Centre, however, they soon become aware of the other services that are available to them. “The Centre is my home” asylum seekers often say, and so the Centre and Centre staff become a point of contact and kindness. A place to turn to when lost in the refugee process; when there is bad news and further help required or to share good stories.



Since commencing operation ten years ago, the Centre has welcomed over 2,350 asylum seekers. Last year we saw 152 new clients while many of those who had been before returned to avail themselves of the services and hospitality they know they can expect. All the time an asylum seeker is in the process, they can turn to the Asylum Seekers Centre.

Whatever it is that attracts asylum seekers to the Centre, the initial interview provides an opportunity to assess the range of needs, to make appropriate referrals for legal, medical and welfare assistance or to welcome new people to the Centre.

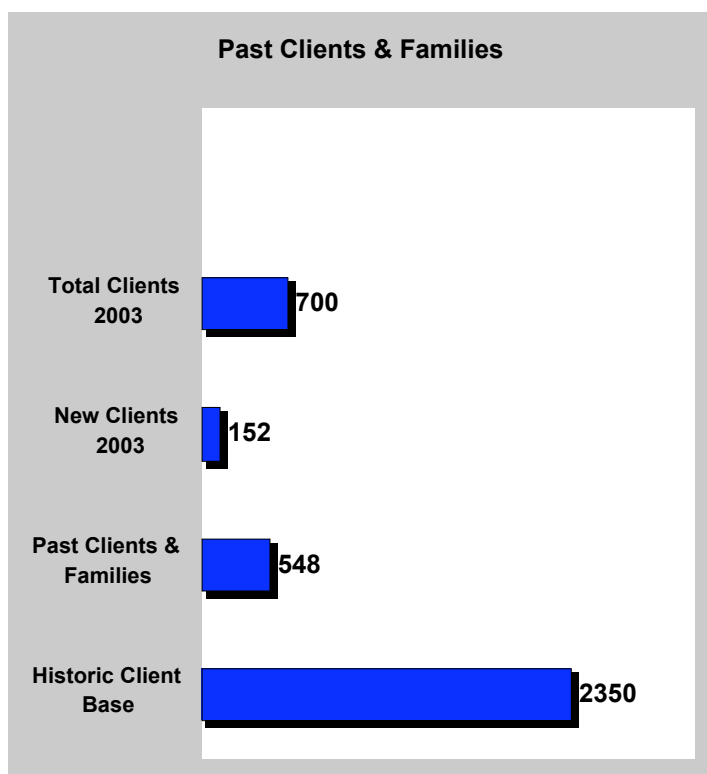
This year these initial interviews were conducted by salaried staff members, either myself (as Co-ordinator), Maree Delaney (Assistant Co-ordinator), Jenny Marsh (Caseworker). Beverley Hilsden or Karen Aldis (Health Care Co-ordinators) undertook the demanding work of finding appropriate health care following the initial interviews. The dedication and commitment of the casework staff is greatly appreciated. They exhibit patience, understanding and compassion. They accompany and plead the cause of those without a voice.

We also had the assistance of 84 volunteers who worked at the Centre, with around 25 volunteers actively involved at any one time including the kindness of Sr Ruth Boland who continues to offer support to several isolated families in their homes. (See page 15 for a full list of people who worked at the Centre in 2003.)

While new numbers who sought assistance were greatly reduced on the preceding year, the needs were enormous. More than 70% of those who attend the Centre have no means of support, no access to welfare and, even those who do eventually get permission to work often lack the English language skills to compete in the employment market, yet employment is their only means of survival. This year we increased the amount allocated for emergency assistance – travel, food, accommodation and pharmacy. Donations to support this work are tax deductible. Refer to back page of this report.

A place of welcome for old and new clients

Each year we report on the numbers of new clients we have interviewed. The graph below, displays that these are not the only people assisted in one year. As stated earlier, in the ten years of operation we have met 2350 cases. Some of these are families thereby increasing the number assisted. Exact numbers are difficult to identify, save to say the scope is much larger than the 152 new folk assisted in the 2002-2003 year. At all times while an asylum seeker is in the process of proving the need for protection, they can return to the Centre. Many we meet are six or seven years in Australia, desperately struggling to prove that return to their country is not safe. In many cases their fear is supported by reports from United Nations High Commission for Refugees, Amnesty International and current world events.



Hospitality and Welcome

Each Monday to Thursday about 20-25 people share lunch, normally this is kindly prepared by a volunteer, while on other occasions an asylum seeker will prepare their traditional dish and tell us something of why this meal is special to them. Sharing a meal is inevitably something more – it is a show of hospitality and welcome, a time to celebrate goodness and for asylum seekers, a moment to forget the pain. Thank you to all the volunteers who make this important aspect of Centre work possible.

Volunteer Staff

A desire to make a positive contribution; divergent attitudes from public policy; a reservoir of skills and abilities to share, are just some of the reasons folk volunteer their services to the Asylum Seekers Centre. In 2002-2003 we had 84 volunteers on staff, 21 of whom were new. We received in total 77 new applications to join our volunteer program, 6 of whom were motivated by our Website. These offers made available expertise in a wide range of areas, including legal, IT, web design, hospitality and cooking, English teaching, human resources, professional development, media/communication, financial/accounting, targeted fundraising, reception, transport, gardening, and individual support.

Centre volunteers report finding an outlet for their concern and passion for asylum seekers in their work at the Centre. It often takes many months for asylum seekers to develop trust in the

Centre and begin to open up and let others in. When this happens, it is both rewarding and very challenging. In recognition of the demands on staff, we offer regular professional development sessions throughout the year (see page 9 for details of training offered).

Achievements throughout the year, credited to volunteer staff and pro bono services rendered, include:

- Launch of the Asylum Seekers Centre Website, www.asylumseekerscentre.org.au, January 2003. Designed, developed and maintained by Andrew Peel (Dot + Pixel) with costs waived. Rebecca Scott assisted with website production. Our sincere thanks to Andrew and Rebecca for their professionalism and dedication.
- Implementation of a structured cabling project, January 2003. At no cost to the Centre, network computer cabling was laid under the floor by James Logan, who was assisted by Neil Every. This provided Health Care Staff with access to the office network, improved security of computer hardware in the Centre, and gave students access to the internet and printer. Once again, sincere thanks to James and Neil for their hard work and thrift.
- Enhancing our hospitality and nutrition program. Daily lunches were offered throughout the year by a generous group of volunteers including Judith and Jock Keene, Janelle Kidman, Mary Baker, Annette Bennett, Eileen Anastas, Jane Hargreaves, Robyn Mitchinson and Julia Champtaloup with the Show Mercy Group. The Show Mercy Group also provided a monthly evening meal at the Centre, an opportunity for those linked with Show Mercy to meet and share stories with many of our asylum seeker families and individuals.
- To our bookkeeper, Martyn Green, a very sincere thank you. The financial reporting demands on small organizations have become more complex. Your donation of time, wisdom and skill is very generous.
- Monthly, professional development was provided to salaried staff by Jenny Graves, through the generosity of STARTTS. We thank Jenny for her gentleness and insight.
- That first point of welcome to asylum seekers has been provided this year by Carol Brunton, Jenny Cornish, Vahideh Aboukazemi, Jan Grant and Sheila Newman.

The work of salaried staff and the generosity of skilled volunteers enabled us to offer clients the opportunity to participate in a range of programs and activities: an English Program, a Health Care Program, a Job Search Skills Program, a Refugee Applicants Development Program, "Open Forum" sessions and monthly bus trips, as well as special events.

It is only through the kindness of all staff at the Centre that we continue to provide an environment of welcome and hospitality where asylum seekers are treated with respect. The work undertaken would not be possible without the support of each staff member, each volunteer and each donor. *Sincerely, thank you (see pages 15-17).*

Student Placements

John Purnell, a Jesuit Novice, accompanied and advocated for many of the folk he met during his two placements. He facilitated a visit to Lakemba Mosque to tell of Centre work. Katrina Hill a social work student from Sydney University, assisted with employment placement and arranging the Christmas Party, a major event in the life of the Centre. Miguel Guerrero, social work student also from Sydney University, assisted in developing an OH&S Policy for the Centre, as well as providing casework support to many. Students from Riverview College, SCEGGS Darlinghurst, Loreto Kirribilli, Roseville College, Loreto Normanhurst, Brigidine College and Japanese students from the Australian Catholic University also spent time in the Centre. Each student on placement brings their life experience, their training and their unique strengths. They enrich our work at the Centre

Consultants

Thank you to our Public Officer and consultant solicitor John Balazs of Baker and McKenzie, Solicitors, to Chris Betar of Whitehead, Dingly and Betar for his accounting expertise and support, to Hon. Auditor Darrel Causbrook of Causbrook and Associates. Thank you also to Jesuit Refugee Service, for payroll services to the Centre and for the partnership they provide.

The Management Committee are like consultants, always available when wisdom and guidance is needed, each member of the Committee provides expertise, wisdom, support and encouragement. A very sincere thank you (see page 14).

Patron

We wish to thank Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC, Governor of NSW, for her patronage of the Centre and we look forward to showing her first hand the work we do.

Funding

Funding is entirely from the non-government sector and is always uncertain. We seek the stability that committed funding for a number of years can provide. The Centre has status as a registered charity and gifts of \$2 and over are tax deductible.

Monthly Supporters' Luncheons bring business people into the Centre to see firsthand the work we undertake and to hear from those we work with. Offers of finance, pro bono support and kindness have resulted. It was as a result of a luncheon that Peter McAdam generously arranged a very successful and fun Quiz Night, planned to become an annual event.

A special thank you to Geoff Stumbles, Maya Cranitch and Peter McAdam who formed a funding committee and have supported me in this aspect of work.

The fundraising aspect of keeping the Centre operational is always a challenge. If there is some aspect of our work that you would particularly like to target with your donation, please complete the form at the back of this report.

We are especially grateful to our major sponsors, The Good Shepherd Sisters and the Mercy Foundation, both of whom have renewed their support for one year.

Also a special thank you to the Presentation Sisters of Wagga Wagga, St Canices' Church Kings Cross, St Mary's School Erskineville, The Australian Ursulines, the Australian Catholic University, the Sisters of St Joseph, the Sisters of Mercy Wilcannia-Forbes, the National Council of Churches and the Society of Friends for your support.

For the generous one-off donations that have occurred in this financial period, we are also most grateful (see pages 16 & 17 for a list of financial supporters).

English Program

English classes continue to be identified as the main reason that new clients turn to the Centre. We also find many asylum seekers return to classes at various stages during the refugee process: perhaps when they lose work and recognise that more English is required to regain employment, or even when they lose their permission to work and attending the Centre provides social contact, support and an opportunity to keep the mind active. For those without permission to work, the cost of reaching the Centre is enormous and often prohibitive. During this year we have identified lonely and isolated people who have benefited from the travel support we have provided.

The English Program in 2003 consisted of seven six-week sessions, including one Language-in-Action Program. Once again, we offered four levels of English, allowing us to place clients in classes at appropriate levels, whether they had just a few words of English (Introductory), could converse easily in English (Advanced), or as with most who come to the Centre, had English skills somewhere in between (Beginners or Intermediate). Brendan Doyle offered IELTS preparation for students at the Advanced Level.

Students who attended classes for twenty or more hours in a session received certificates recognising their achievement. Many students were unable to attend regularly due to transport costs or other priorities, such as the need to find work.

The Centre has a large staff of qualified volunteer ESL teachers; each volunteer commits to a single two-hour session each week. However, several teachers make a greater commitment, teaching more than one class a week, offering their services on a relief basis, and/or offering extra classes in response to demand from students. In the course of the year, we had 27 different ESL teachers assist at the Centre.

Teacher's meetings and staff development seminars are an important aspect of the English program and are held in the non-teaching weeks. Our thanks to Maya Cranitch from Australian Catholic University (ACU) for her dedication and professional input to these sessions. In 2002-2003, themes for professional development included Torture and Trauma and the Effect on Learning; Effectively Teaching Pronunciation; Motivating Learners; Barriers to Learning for Moslem Students; Techniques for Facilitating Learning- in and out of the classroom; Reconciliation - How to Work with People at the End of the Refugee Process; Writing Advocacy Reports. Thank you to all who shared their wisdom and skills in the professional development of staff.

The Language-in-Action Program in November/December once again focused on the themes of summer, beaches, holidays, cultural and religious festivals, Christmas, Australian history and indigenous Australians. This Program incorporated excursions to the Art Gallery, the State Library and the Museum of Sydney and a bushwalk/picnic at Wiseman's Ferry with lunch provided by volunteers. Chris Grieve kindly provided transport for the excursions.

Writing Workshops conducted by Jules Wynhausen were very popular. Students had the opportunity to have their pieces of writing corrected, and to practice filling in forms and letter writing. Commitment to writing practice at home was encouraged.

Pronunciation Classes conducted by Jane Roberts have been well received. Students develop their ability to understand the Australian accent and to pronounce words more clearly in a relaxed and supportive environment.

English Conversation classes conducted by Laura Mooney, and more recently by Judy Green, have provided an alternative way of learning and practicing English as well as being fun. Feedback from students has been very positive.

Access to English lessons for women with young children has improved. Jennifer Crago and Delia French have provided Home Tutoring services to clients of the Centre. Also, Centre staff advocated for low cost childcare where possible, thereby enabling mothers to attend classes we offer.

Lisa O'Neill and Celine Auton shared the role of English Co-ordinator in 2003. We are very grateful to Lisa and Celine who have been at the Centre since it opened in 1993, and to all our ESL teachers. We are also grateful to Australian Catholic University, to Valerie Hoogstad and Maya Cranitch for their continued support of the English Program.

Textbooks and resources generously donated by the Australian Catholic University, the Australian College of English, AMES, the Children's Hospital School, the Sydney English Language Centre and individual donors in 2003, have been of tremendous value to the program.

Health Care Program

It is only through the Health Care program offered at this Centre, that many asylum seekers have access to any treatment. This is because Medicare entitlements are linked to work rights, and, as stated earlier, many asylum seekers do not have permission to work and no way to access a

doctor, hospital, midwife, or other medical care, for the months or years it may take to prove their need for protection.

The health care co-ordinator case manages the person's health issues and accesses specialist care when necessary. Further, the Centre provides pharmacy assistance to those with no means of paying for medications. This latter aspect of our work, pharmacy assistance, has become increasingly expensive, particularly with the introduction of a higher charge for medications for those without Medicare.

We welcomed Beverley Hilsden to the Health Care Co-ordinator role in May 2003 and sadly farewelled Karen Aldis. A large aspect of the program is advocacy and we thank the health care professionals who have responded to our requests to waive fees.

During this year 17% of new clients identified health care as the initial reason for turning to the Centre. However, the Health Care Program is utilised by approximately thirteen clients per week which includes old clients returning to the Centre for health care and those new clients who were previously unaware they could access health care at the Centre.

Referrals to Health Care Professionals

Type of Referral	No. of Clients
Dental	33
GPs	36
Specialists	2
Procedures	74
Mental Health	18
Ophthalmology	10
Physiotherapy	2
Pregnancy Care	3
Child Health	5
Community Health Centre	1

We particularly thank Dr Mark Harris and Dr Barbara Booth, medical practitioners who assisted approximately 5 people each week. A very special thank you to Kerry McCouat, physiotherapist, for her weekly physiotherapy sessions held at the Centre. Physiotherapy and massage relieve muscular skeletal pain and injury, but can also improve body image that can be distorted by torture experiences.

Monthly health care sessions were made possible by the assistance of volunteers: Margaret Cunningham (Effect of Refugee Experience on Children), Kerry McCouat (Back Care), Jenny Cornish (Self Massage and Stretching), Immigrant Women's Speakout (Domestic Violence), Livingstone Road Centre (Men's Health) and staff from the Mater Hospital, Jill Mason, Cathy McKnight and Pat Burgess (who presented on Nutrition, Infectious diseases and Stress and Relaxation respectively).

Details of Health Care Seminars and Classes

Date	Health Care Seminars & Classes	No. of Participants
July	Men's Health Talk	6
August	Coping with Stress/Relaxation	8
September	Effect of the Refugee Experience on Children	12
October	Nutrition	12
February	Infectious Diseases	8
March	Domestic Violence	10
April	Back Care	8
May	Self Massage & Stretching	7
July-June	Yoga	31 Classes

Dharma offers regular Yoga classes to assist folk with relaxation, stress release and improved flexibility.

Again this year we have assisted several pregnant women who had no access to Medicare. Particularly challenging.

Thank you to the Mater Hospital, to Margaret Benjafield and Rhonda Granger, for answering our pleas when an asylum seeker without Medicare desperately needs attention from a consultant practitioner. Thank you to those practitioners who have responded. Thank you to the Mercy Foundation for the continued involvement in our health care program.

Thank you also to the Sisters of Charity, and to Margaret Campbell and staff at St Vincent's Clinic for their support in accessing cardiology investigations, radiology, and other consultant practitioners for asylum seekers who are without Medicare.

Dr John Southwick, Dr Robert Gammel and Dr Watson kindly responded to pleas for dental care, while the United Dental Hospital and Westmead Dental Hospital assisted at times of crisis.

University of NSW Student Eye Clinic again provided examinations for eight of our folk.

Douglas Hanly Moir provided up to fifty pathology services for the Centre when clients had no Medicare.

A very special thank to Dr Edward Ryan, who saw many asylum seeker folk at very short notice.

To all those practitioners who assisted us and responded to our pleas for help, Thank You.

We continue to meet many asylum seekers without Medicare cover and no means to pay for health care or prescriptions. We seek more health care practitioners who will see an asylum seeker in their rooms and waive fees. The greatest cost associated with our health program is providing funds to fill a prescription and we urgently seek sponsorship for the pharmacy assistance aspect of Centre work.

Job Search Skills Program

Designed to assist those asylum seekers who have permission to work in their efforts to find employment, classes focus on job-seeking skills - such as where and how to look for jobs, how to contact possible employers, resumé preparation, writing application letters, phoning employers, presenting well in job interviews and rights and responsibilities of employees.

Asylum seekers overcome tremendous barriers to gain employment. Many are unfamiliar with the interview process- not the norm in their own countries. They are therefore less skilled in 'selling themselves' than other applicants for the same jobs. Also, for many, the stress of a job interview causes a decline in the quality of their use of English in the interview and some have little English to start with.

Jean John and Peter McLean presented 40 job search skills classes through the year. Kate Minto, Martyn Green and Jane Hargreaves joined them in assisting people to find work (see page 21).

In addition to running these classes, 16 clients were placed directly in employment; 10 in training; intensive, practical job search assistance was provided to 35 clients seeking employment. In many of these cases the asylum seekers were successful in finding employment.

Asylum seekers have a compelling need to work; for many it is their only means of income. Most of those assisted by the Centre have proved to be extremely loyal employees and very grateful for the opportunity to work.

We are keen to have a range of employers who might give an asylum seeker the opportunity to work.

Refugee Applicants Development Program

The Refugee Applicants Development Program offers activities that help asylum seekers grow in self-confidence and engage in enjoyable and creative activities (see page 21).

Computer and Internet skills

Designed to introduce novice students to Computers and the Internet, and to develop skills of more advanced students. The computer lab is equipped with 8 donated computers that have been upgraded this year. All 8 computers are networked and can access the Internet, as opposed to 1 computer in 2002. Neil Every maintains lab computers with the help of Warwick Johnson.

Warwick Johnson provided 40 one-and-a-half hour classes during the year, assisting an average of 6 students per session. Warwick's employer, an international software firm, offers him flexible work arrangements to support his commitment to the Centre.

Essential research for refugee cases, job search activities, and in some circumstances, communication with friends and family are made possible by the availability of computers in the lab.

“Open Forum” meetings

During the teaching sessions, we regularly hold “Open Forum” meetings at the Centre. These open meetings provide an occasion when asylum seekers can help evaluate the Centre's programs, plan future activities, share information and talk about any matters of interest or concern. In 2003, there were 33 “Open Forum” meetings with an average of 11 participants.

On one occasion a lawyer attended "Open Forum" to explain the refugee process, and tell how to assist in the preparation of their refugee case and to answer questions. This was especially valuable when so many asylum seekers do not have legal assistance in applying for protection.

Bus trips

Monthly bus trips were again a popular social activity run by the Centre. These trips provided approximately 15 asylum seekers with welcome respite from day to day worries and concerns. Activities on the day involved soccer/football, bushwalking, swimming and sightseeing and destinations included Bundeena, Manly Dam, Wiseman's Ferry, Thirroul Beach, Manly Beach, Cronulla Beach and the Kokada Track Memorial Park at Concord. These outings were possible thanks to St Mary's School, Erskineville, who provide a twenty-seat bus, to St Canice's Church, Kings Cross, who also provided a bus on occasions. St Canice's Parish also cover the costs of fuel and supplies. Thank you to Chris Grieve, Huw Luscombe, Maree Delaney and Mary Baker our volunteer bus drivers through the year and also to Estelle Adamek, Felicity Hartigan, Janice Haworth, Jane Hargreaves and Lynne Poleson for providing tasty lunches for folk to enjoy on the days.

Special events

In July, a peaceful and restorative day to retreat and recognise the volunteer staff was facilitated by Helen Kearins. This was funded through a generous donor.

The Society of Friends provided an opportunity for 19 asylum seekers to visit Woodford in the Blue Mountains.

A group of young people arranged Resound - a concert held in a pub. The proceeds of which were directed to the Centre.

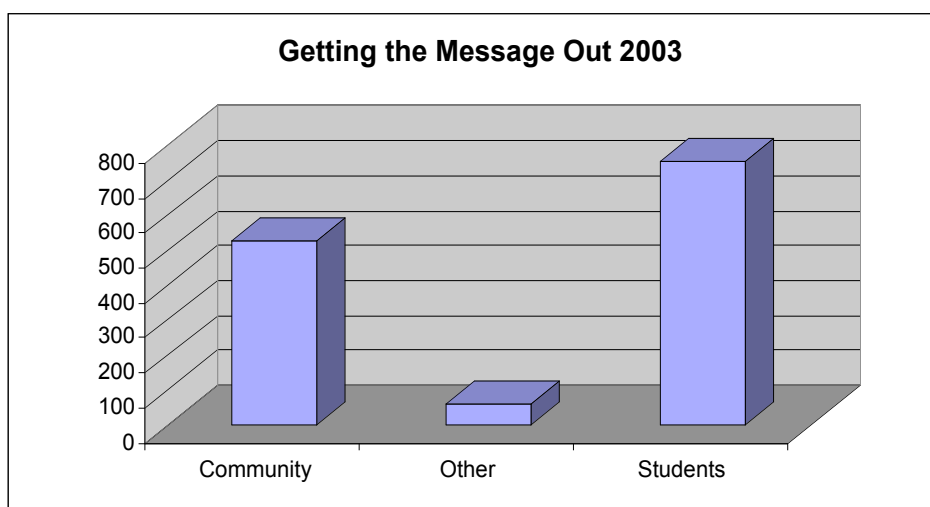
Six staff from Lend Lease Corporation, as part of their contribution to the community, attended the Centre, kindly undertaking maintenance and repairs to the building.

Many clients do not have legal assistance and must prepare themselves. Suede Stanton, provided pro bono research assistance to many asylum seekers.

Once again our Christmas Party attracted many present and past clients, friends and supporters to the Centre for a wonderful gathering with dancing, music, delicious food and the sharing of presents. To Maree Whybourne and the kind folk who donate Christmas presents that make the day special for the children, thank you. To Show Mercy supporters for catering, thank you and thank you also to Ken Hastie, Red Cross for his part in making this a successful occasion.

Research, Advocacy and Community Education

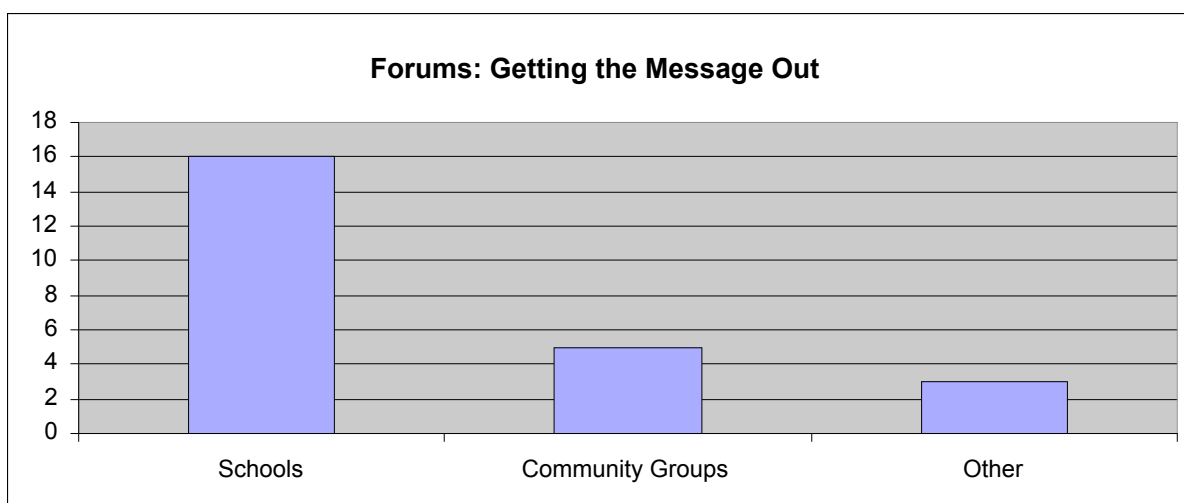
The Asylum Seekers Centre works very closely with other organisations to foster co-ordinated casework and concerted advocacy. The Centre continues to participate in the Asylum Seekers Interagency that brings together representatives from a wide range of agencies. The ASI has three working groups, one focused on detention issues, one on legal issues and one on housing and welfare issues. This year Maree Delaney and Jenny Marsh have chaired the latter two working groups.



The Centre is represented at the New South Wales Asylum Seeker and Refugee Forum (NASRF), Refugee Review Tribunal Community Liaison Committee, Refugee and Displaced Persons Committee of the National Council of Churches, TPV Legal Working Group, TPV Support Group, as well as other interagency meetings.

A public submission to the HREOC Inquiry into Children in Detention was made by Jenny Marsh and Sylvia Winton.

Over the year, Centre staff networked with representatives from the Catholic Education Office allowing a door to be opened further for asylum seeker children to attend Catholic schools.



Requests from schools and community, for Centre staff to present at public forums on asylum seeker issues have increased and this is an important aspect of our work. In the last twelve months, Centre staff in the role of advocate and educator have presented at nineteen schools, conferences or forums. A presentation on average every two to three weeks which required time to research and prepare. These presentations have reached over two thousand people, a huge increase from the previous year.

Further, over the last twelve months fifty-one students from fifteen different educational institutions including high schools and TAFE Colleges visited the Centre. Smaller scale presentations have been made to these students also.

Those agencies that receive government funding are constrained from speaking on the difficulties that asylum seekers face.

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE ASYLUM SEEKERS CENTRE INC.

The Asylum Seekers Centre is incorporated in NSW. The Co-ordinator reports to the Management Committee.

Management Committee Members in 2003

Ms Maya Cranitch	Sr Helen Kearins, RSM (Secretary)
Mr Lachlan Murdoch	Fr Cao Van Nguyen, SJ
Ms Margaret Piper	Ms Geraldine Read (Treasurer)
Sr Noelene White, RGS (Chairperson)	

Consultants in 2003

Hon. Public Officer	Mr John Balazs Baker & McKenzie, Solicitors
Hon. Accounting Consultant	Mr Chris Betar Whitehead, Dingly & Betar, Accountants
Hon. Auditor	Mr Darrel Causbrook Causbrook & Associates

STAFF AT THE ASYLUM SEEKERS CENTRE IN 2002/03

Salaried Staff

Co-ordinator	Ms Sylvia Winton
Assistant Co-ordinator (3 days a week)	Ms Maree Delaney
Health Care Co-ordinator (2 days a week)	Ms Beverley Hilsden, Ms Karen Aldis
Caseworker	Ms Jenny Marsh
Admin. Assistant (2 days a week)	Ms Jenny Cornish

Volunteer Staff

Healthcare projects	Ms Vahideh Aboukazemi	Yoga	Ms Robyn Kirk
General support	Ms Estelle Adamek	ESL Teacher	Ms Geraldine Koh
Hospitality	Ms Eileen Anastas	ESL Teacher	Mr Nicholas Korner
ESL Teacher	Sr Celine Auton	ESL Teacher	Ms Yvonne Kosky
General support	Mr John Bartholomew	Healthcare locum	Ms Paula Llavollol
Bus trips and outreach	Sr Mary Baker	Computer cabling	Mr James Logan
Hospitality	Ms Annette Bennett	Bus driver	Mr Huw Luscombe
Pastoral	Sr Ruth Boland	ESL Teacher	Ms Jenny Manning
Doctor locum	Dr Barbara Booth	Physiotherapist	Ms Kerry McCouat
Office	Ms Carol Brunton	ESL Teacher	Ms Elaine McLaughlan
Computer	Mr Mike Cleary	Job skills	Mr Peter McLean
ESL Teacher	Sr Kath Clune	IT Support	Mr Daniel Melinz
ESL Teacher	Mrs Jennifer Crago	Job skills assistance	Ms Kate Minto
ESL Teacher	Ms Dani Dados	Hospitality & Funding	Ms Robyn Mitchinson
ESL Teacher	Ms Nour Dados	ESL Teacher	Ms Laura Mooney
ESL Teacher	Mr Brendan Doyle	Website	Mr Leonardo Murgio
Funding Committee	Ms Elisabeth Emrys	ESL Teacher	Mr Ben Ng
IT support	Mr Neil Every	English tutor	Mr David Nolan
Home tutor	Ms Delia French	ESL Teacher	Sr Coleen O'Brien
Hospitality	Ms Camilla Galwey	ESL Teacher	Mrs Lisa O'Neill
ESL Teacher	Sr Therese Gaudry	House maintenance	Mr David Owen
Office & Hospitality	Ms Jan Grant	Website	Mr Andrew Peel
ESL Teacher	Ms Judy Green	Gardening	Ms Stephanie Poleson
Book keeping	Mr Martyn Green	Archives	Sr Margaret Press
Bus driver	Mr Chris Grieve	Healthcare locum	Ms Nieves Rivera
Yoga	Ms Dharma Hadley	ESL & Pronunciation Teacher	Ms Jane Roberts
Hospitality & Job Skills	Ms Jane Hargreaves	ESL Teacher	Ms Patricia Rolls
ESL Teacher	Ms Virginia Harper	General support	Ms Frances Rush
Doctor	Prof. Mark Harris	Website	Ms Rebecca Scott
Hospitality	Ms Felicity Hartigan	General support	Ms Carolyn Smith
Hospitality & Funding	Ms Janice Haworth	Legal research assistant	Ms Suede Stanton
Research & Submissions	Ms Margaret Hetherton	ESL Teacher	Ms Valerie St John
ESL Teacher	Ms Tanya Jackson- Vaughan	Finance Committee	Mr Geoff Stumbles
Job skills	Ms Jean Johns	Community support	Ms Melissa Sweet
ESL Teacher	Sr Rita Johnston	Office & Hospitality	Ms Sheila Truswell Newman
Computer teacher	Mr Warwick Johnston	Transport	Mr Bill Vickers
IT Support	Mr Tomasz Kaminski	Newsletter	Mr Peter Walker
Hospitality	Mr Jock Keene	ESL Teacher	Ms Ruth White
Hospitality	Dr Judith Keene	ESL Teacher	Ms Tanya Wood
ESL Teacher	Fr Peter Julian Kelly	Transport	Mr Michael Wyatt
Hospitality	Ms Janelle Kidman	ESL Teacher	Mr Jules Wynhausen

LIST OF FINANCIAL SUPPORTERS DURING 2003

The Asylum Seekers Centre receives no government funding. We rely entirely on the generosity of sponsoring organizations and those groups and individuals who donate money, equipment or services. We gratefully acknowledge the support received from the following organizations and individuals in 2003.

Major Sponsors

Good Shepherd Sisters

Mercy Foundation

Other Sponsors

Australian Catholic University
Australian Ursulines
Jesuit Refugee Service, Australia
St Canice's Church, Kings Cross
Sisters of Charity, Australia

St Mary's School, Erskineville
Sisters of St Joseph
Perthville Josephites
Presentation Sisters

Other Sponsors and Donors

Estelle and Ed Adamek
David Addington
Faris Al'Shammaa
William Ashton
The Australian Catholic University
Joanne Babb
Peach Bleasdale
Caroline Bowyer
Rosemary Bradley
Jean Brick
Brigidine College
Brigidine Provincialate
Michelle and Wal Buccci
Anne and Bill Byrne
Catholic Schools Office
Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace
Catholic Women's League
Mary Cavanagh
The Chesworth Family
E.A. Clarke
Maya & Michael Cranitch
Margo Crute
David and Barbara Darmanin
Stephanie Donnelly
Helen Earlem
A.R. Elmslie
Karu Eustace
Maria & Ralph Evans
Denise Fallon
Richard Farquhar
Sue Fisher
French Family Trust
Ken Gabb
Lissa Giurissevich

Barbara Guthrie
Cyril Hally
Jonathan Harverson
Fiona Haworth
Judith Hayden
Anne Henderson
Margaret Hetherton
Freda Hilson
Holy Spirit Parish, St Clair
Kate Horne
Andrew Hoyle
Emma Hurst
International Christian Peace Movement
Sue Javes
Chris Joyce
Janelle and Tony Kidman
Kincoppal, Rose Bay
Sally King
Maureen Kingshott
Mr and Mrs Knox
Nicholas Korner
P. Korner
Leichhardt Council
Loreto Community
Geoffrey and Anne Long
Angela Lynch
Pat Lynch
Ronda Mahoney
Mallesons Stephen Jaques
Manly Catholic Social Justice Group
Marist Sisters Provincialate
James and Marilyn Marsh
Mary Immaculate Parish Social Justice Group,
Manly

Peter and Jenanne McAdam	St Cecilia's Catholic Church, Balgowlah
Kevin McCormack	St Ignatius College, Riverview
Kerry McCouat	St Kieran's Parish Social Justice Group, Manly Vale
Sue McGrath	St Patrick's College, Campbelltown
Anne McLaughlin	St Vincent de Paul, Eastern Suburbs
Peter McLean	Emma Slaytor
John and Susan Menadue	Petrina Slaytor
M and C Mollins	Judy Searle
The Myer Foundation	Sisters of Mercy, Wilcannia-Forbes Congregation
National Council of Churches in Australia	Nagham Samaan
Nolan Family	Santa Sabina School
North Sydney Friends of Asylum Seekers and Refugees	Carolyn Smith
Kerry O'Brien	Dick Smith and Family
Maurice O'Conner	Patty Snudden
Carol Odel	Society of Friends, Blue Mountains Meeting
Our Lady of Mount Carmel Primary School	Valerie St John
Melanie Oxenham	Charlie Stansfield
Brian Page	Pam Stewart
Kate Palmer	L. Strathdee
Meredith Park	Summer Hill Social Justice Group
Paul Parry	Melissa Sweet
JM and L Payget	Juliet Thomas
Charles Plumridge	T and M Totsuka
Robert Powell	Dianne Truss
Margaret Power	Louise Tunstall
Eleanor Putnam	Matthew Tyne
RF and JF Reid	Mitchell Ward
Religious of the Sacred Heart	Maureen Watterson
Clare Reoch	Anne Webber
Resound Organisers	We Care, Bundeena and Maianbar Support for Asylum Seekers and Refugees
June Reynolds	Tessa Wells
Val Rodgers	Maree Whybourne
Frances Rush	Natasha Winton
Jim Rush	Sandy Winton
Graham and Joanne Russell	Margaret Young
St. Anthony in the Fields, Parish	

Donations in Kind

Throughout this year, donations in kind have been overwhelming. They have included clothes, food, phone cards, toiletries, furniture, travel passes and computers.

To those who donated, an enormous THANK YOU.

GENERAL STATISTICS
July 2002 - June 2003

Table 1. Number and gender of new clients

	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Total
Female	0	6	2	2	9	7	3	2	7	3	6	4	51
Male	12	7	12	10	7	9	6	9	9	6	7	7	101
Total	12	13	14	12	16	16	9	11	16	9	13	11	152

Table 2. Sources of referrals to the Centre

Year	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Total
Friends/Family	7	6	7	4	11	7	5	3	6	3	8	4	71
Aust. Red Cross	4		3	3		3	1	4	2	1			21
Solicitors/Mig. Ags.	1		1				1		1	1	2	5	12
RACS		3	1		2	1		1		1	1		10
Medical Services	2				1	1		2	2	1			9
STARTTS			1	1	1	1	1					1	6
Education Centres									2		2	1	5
Main Welfare Orgs.	2								1	1			4
Emergency Accom.				1			1		1				3
Legal Aid Comm.						1			1	1			3
IARC				2									2
Immigration					1	1							2
Other			1	1		1		1					4

Table 3. Main reason for initial referral to the Centre

Year 2002/03	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Total
English classes	6	4	6	4	6	2	3	1	2	3	5	1	43
General assistance	2	2	3	2	2	4		4	2	3	4	7	35
Health care	1	3	2	2	4	3	2	3	4		1	1	26
Legal referral		1	2	3	1	1	1		2	2	2	1	16
Accommodation	1	1	1		2	2	2	2	3				14
School for children		2		1	1	3	1		1		1	1	11
Job search skills	2					1				1			4
Tertiary Education								1	2				3

HEALTH CARE PROGRAM STATISTICS 2002/2003

Total number of medical examinations by Drs Mark Harris & Barbara Booth 118
 Total number of physiotherapy examinations by Kerry McCouat 113

Table 5. Referrals to health care professionals

Referrals to:	No. of clients
DENTAL CARE	
United Dental Hospital	12
Westmead Dental Hospital	9
Private Dental Care	12
GENERAL PRACTITIONERS	36
MEDICAL SPECIALISTS	
Dermatologist	1
General Surgeon	1
PROCEDURES	
Cardiology	2
Pathology	50
Radiology	22
MENTAL HEALTH CARE	
Community Mental Health Crisis Team	3
Private Psychiatrist or Counsellor	3
STARTTS	10
Transcultural Mental Health Centre	7
OPHTHALMOLOGY	
Ophthalmology Clinic, Uni. of NSW	8
Ophthalmology Clinic POW Hospital	2
PHYSIOTHERAPY	2
PREGNANCY CARE	3
CHILD HEALTH	5
COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE	1

Table 6 Details of Health Care Seminars & Classes

Date	Topic	Numbers
July	Mens Health Talk	6
August	Coping with Stress and Relaxation	8
September	The effect of the refugee experience on children	12
October	Nutrition	12
February	Infectious Diseases	8
March	Domestic Violence	10
April	Back Care	8
May	Self Massage & Stretching	7
July-June	Yoga	31 classes

JOB SEARCH SKILLS PROGRAM STATISTICS 2002/2003

No. of clients placed directly in employment:	16
No. of clients placed in employment training or volunteer work:	18
No. of clients given intensive assistance in seeking employment:	35

Table 7 Job Search Skills classes

No. of classes	No. of hours per class	Average no. of participants
40	1.5	5

REFUGEE APPLICANTS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM 2002/3**Table 8 Refugee Applicants Development Program classes**

Classes	No. of classes	No. of hours per class	Average no. of participants
Art	6	1.5	2
Conversation	36	1	7
Computer and typing skills	40	1.5	6
Daily Lunches	176	1	12
Pronunciation Workshop	18	1	5
Soccer in the Park	12	1	3
Singing Class	5	1.5	4
Writers Workshop	24	1.5	5



Please help us remain open

How can I donate to support the work of the Centre?

Please instruct your bank to credit our account as follows:

(This can be done over the internet or by filling in a form at your bank.)

Account name	:	Asylum Seekers Centre Incorporated
BSB number	:	032023
Account number	:	150833
Bank	:	Westpac Banking Corporation
Branch	:	547 Crown Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010
Reference	:	Please enter your name as the reference until you receive your reference number.

✂.....

Kindly return this section to us and we will provide you with a reference for use with further donations.

Name : _____

Address : _____

Email : _____

I wish to commit \$20 \$50 \$100 _____ per month.

I would like to donate _____

Reference : (Office use) _____

Or you can send a donation to us:

The Co-ordinator
The Asylum Seekers Centre
38 Nobbs Street
SURRY HILLS NSW 2010