

Chairperson's Report 2019

Asylum seekers are people who, because of fear of persecution in their home countries, have crossed international borders in search of protection. No-one chooses to be an asylum seeker.

Our vision: A New Zealand where asylum seekers and convention refugees are welcomed, supported and thriving.

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. ASST advocates for legally compliant and compassionate treatment of our clients and all who seek asylum.

I am very pleased to report that over the course of the last financial year Asylum Seekers Support Trust (ASST), has been able to support and enable many clients who are seeking, or have had confirmed, the formal determination of refugee status. The table below highlights some summary information on the work of ASST over the period.

- Number of individual clients worked with: 402
- Number of clients who lived in the hostel or villas at some time: 56
- Number of residents who were children: 9
- Number of different nationalities of clients: 42
- Average length of stay in ASST accommodation: 5 Months
- Number of community dinners and events held: 43
- Clients able to be moved out of detention to be accommodated at the hostel: 5
- Referrals to other agencies: 100

Although statistics do not tell the story of the relationships formed, the challenges faced or the incredible resilience of our clients, they do provide some insight into how ASST lives our mission. Our clients come from a wide variety of countries, alone or with families, have diverse needs and unique experiences of seeking asylum. The ways ASST can provide practical support varies from person to person but the values of empathy and kindness and respect are intrinsic to the ASST approach for every client interaction. In addition, the wide-ranging work highlighted in the figures above also demonstrates the resourcefulness, tenacity and huge effort of everyone involved in planning and delivery of services. I am continually awestruck by what such a small organisation can achieve.

The work of ASST is truly a collaborative effort with many people and organisations coming together to create the outcomes we seek.

Firstly, I would like to thank the employees of ASST for their incredible contribution during the year:

- Team at 30 June 2019: General Manager - Tim Maurice, Social Worker - Freyja Stoker and Client Services Co-ordinator- Bella Munro.

Together Tim, Freyja and Bella are an exceptional team and routinely receive outstanding thanks and praise from our clients and sector partners. They are professional, committed and extremely capable. They are also deeply respectful of our clients and grateful to be able to play a role in improving the life our clients in New Zealand.

- Former team members: I would like to recognise Andrea Smythe who worked for ASST for 8 and a half years concluding in April 2019. Andrea showed unwavering commitment to ASST clients during her employment. I would also like to thank Susie Newborn for her leadership of ASST from July to November 2019 – Susie brought fresh energy around community engagement and connected easily with sector networks.

Secondly, ASST has a dedicated and effective Board who volunteer their time to help steer ASST using sound judgement and deep commitment to both our clients and the sustainability of the Trust. I would like to thank all Board members who served during the year and note the extra duties the Board took on to meet the needs of an organisation with so few permanent employees

- Returning Board members – Fiona Taler, Steve Wilson, Sana Basharati
- Retiring members – Sanj Silva, Helen King

I would particularly like to thank the Executive Committee:

- Vice President: Anchali Anandanayagam
- Treasurer: Tracy Hickman
- Secretary: Laura Fear

In addition, I would like to thank:

- All organisations who provided funding - especially Foundation North, JR McKenzie, Lush Charity Pot, Auckland City Council, Sir John Logan Campbell Trust, Catholic Caring Foundation, Lotteries Commission.
- Not For Profit Works – who, with funding from the Tindall Foundation, partnered with ASST on a significant operational review to build our capacity to optimise our organisation
- Regular volunteers at the hostel
- Sector organisations who so willingly collaborated during the year (with a special mention to Red Cross, Refugees as Survivors, English Language Partners, Mixit)
- Our clients and especially those involved in the ASST Advisory Group
- Donors of goods, services or money – everything offered was greatly appreciated

The second half of the financial year was one of particular improvement and growth for ASST. The team made significant operational and service delivery improvements, increased compliance monitoring of high-risk areas and strengthened relationships with government, Not For Profit and philanthropic organisations. Significant effort was also directed towards increasing income in order to help more asylum seekers, provide a wider range of services and ensure sustainability. The Treasure and General Manager AGM reports reference some key initiatives relevant to these areas. Because of all the hard work done in 2018/2019 to optimise effectiveness of operations, the capacity to focus on the issues that impact many of our clients has been enhanced. I would like to thank the team for their commitment to continuous improvement and the change they embraced throughout the year. A strong focus on advocacy, together with sustainability can be expected in the year ahead.

Although the year in review had many highlights in relation to the support given to clients by ASST, it must be noted that the situation globally in relation to safe living conditions in countries of origin continued to decline. Conflict escalated in many parts of the world and authoritarian regimes continued to persecute millions of people. Countries who were once a very welcoming of refugees and migrants, 'closed their doors' to focus on domestic issues. The UNHRC reported over 70million people as being internally displaced, refugees, asylum seekers or stateless during the periodⁱ. This number represents an astonishing level of suffering and displacement forced on ordinary people. Locally, there were 510 claims made during the 2018/2019 financial year – of which around one third were 'successful' when first assessed. Another 1007 'Quota' Refugees were resettled to New Zealand during the year.ⁱⁱ

Although ASST welcomes all activity to welcome and support refugees and asylum seekers to New Zealand, the following was evident throughout the year and is relevant today:

- Per capita there are at least 80 nations who resettle more refugees than New Zealand. For a comparatively wealthy, developed nation New Zealand resettles very few refugees
- Although it has been formally established by the Government that refugees bring social and economic benefits to the communities they live in, this is not widely communicated or accepted in mainstream communitiesⁱⁱⁱ
- Although New Zealand is a signatory to the United Nations Human Rights Convention recognising the right of all peoples to claim asylum, funding to deter arrivals has increased and requirements for obtaining a work visa applied more stringently^{iv} (effectively making it extremely difficult for many asylum seekers to obtain a work visa). For most people in any situation, working represents a source of agency, pride and contribution. Inability to work reduces opportunities for newcomers to participate in the community and build self-worth.
- Asylum seekers and Convention Refugees (those whose claim is made and accepted in NZ) receive limited support from the Government, are frequently exploited by employers and often marginalised in the community.
- Many of the claimants ASST work with seek help because they are destitute and have fled from traumatic and dangerous situations. Asylum seekers in New Zealand often find the claims process to be very daunting and difficult and may be re-traumatised by the process, especially if they are detained or unable to work in New Zealand.

For ASST to continue to support asylum seekers and refugees, the role of every willing individual and agency is paramount. Although the scale of the issue can seem overwhelming there are very simple things we can all do to help. Just doing one thing on the list below could change the trajectory of someone's life and their experience in New Zealand.

Please consider:

- Donating time, expertise or resources to ASST. ASST is an organisation with a long history of demonstrating impact and maximising the use of all resources
- Contacting local or national MPs:
 - ask our Government to vocally oppose the actions of regimes that lead to the conditions that force people to seek asylum
 - seek a more substantial increase in the resettlement quota and associated support for communities and organisations that serve asylum seekers and convention refugees

- advocate for more support and inclusion for asylum seekers who have arrived in New Zealand – including expediting access to services, work visas and family reunification, limiting detention practices
- Elect candidates and community leaders who support compassionate, humane and empathetic treatment for everyone
- Role model friendly, inclusive and empathetic with everyone – but especially strangers

I need to do more of the things above myself and hope that with further efforts ASST's vision can become closer to a reality for many of the amazing people we serve.

Rebeca Holdsworth

Chairperson

18 October 2019

ⁱ <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/documents/statistics/statistics-refugee-and-protection.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/3169-swc-18-min-0131-minute-annual-refugee-quota-proposed-increase-pdf>

^{iv} <https://www.budget.govt.nz/docs/summary-initiatives/b19-sum-initiatives> and Immigration New Zealand, Review findings and changes: *Work Visa Asylum Category (for external stakeholders)*, 9 October 2019 (via email)