



## Nuwanie's long fight

Many of us take life in Australia for granted. But to Nuwanie Perera, life in Australia is the end result of a decade-long fight.

The 27-year-old Sri Lankan and her mother are proud to finally be permanent residents of Australia, after a harrowing and arduous journey.

"We had to fight for asylum here for 10 years including time spent on temporary work visas and bridging visas. Because of this we weren't allowed to work or study and we had no access to Medicare or government support," says Nuwanie.

Nuwanie and her mum Nayana had settled in Braybrook but a change in visa status during the refugee determination process meant they had to rely solely on charities as Nayana was denied work rights.

"I was only 16 years old and trying to find my own identity so it was tough, but mum put on a brave face," Nuwanie recalls.

"I had been brought up not to feel any different to others and all of a sudden things changed. But mum told me education was my key to a better life."

The pair was forced to move across Melbourne to Eltham, but Nuwanie made the decision to remain at her school in Braybrook, travelling close to three hours each way on public transport. She graduated from VCE in 2006 and received a scholarship to RMIT to study Legal Studies. Things were finally looking up, until a letter in the mail changed their lives again.

"We got a letter from Immigration basically saying the decision had been made that we had to leave Australia, and we had the right to appeal. The stress affected my education and I decided to take some time off."

The support network Nuwanie and Nayana had made in Melbourne held fundraisers and wrote letters urging the department to overturn the decision. They were thrilled when the appeal was successful, but it was an additional two year wait until permanent residency was granted.

"As soon as I was able to work here I got a job. I was so happy I could help support my mum and I."

Nuwanie completed an International Studies degree and is currently studying a Masters at Melbourne University. Nayana has secured work and has married. Long-term, Nuwanie hopes to work with people seeking asylum and use her own experiences for the greater good.

"I think a lot of people are fearful of 'the other' because they simply don't understand them, and I hope that one day in the future that will change."

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**Nuwanie is part of our new Speakers Program. Speakers including Nuwanie can share their stories with groups in workplaces, schools, parishes and other settings. For more information, email [johanna.burns@jss.org.au](mailto:johanna.burns@jss.org.au)**

# Building the capacity of people and communities



I have recently returned to my work at Jesuit Social Services after an extended period of study leave.

Being away from the day-to-day work of leading the organisation was a challenging yet rewarding experience. My study leave was a chance to explore more deeply our Ignatian and Jesuit heritage and practice, and how this is given expression at a community sector organisation in a contemporary environment. This is an area I am passionate about and will be exploring further.

The time away from the office also afforded me the opportunity to revisit our long-term vision for Jesuit Social Services. It became clearer than ever to me that central to achieving our vision to build a just society is our commitment to building the capacity of people and communities, helping all people to reach their potential.

We know people live in communities where they have webs of relationships, and that the assets of their communities can enhance or confine their life prospects. So, at Jesuit Social Services, every day we focus on building the capacity of people but we also build the capacity of communities to support their members to flourish.

Our research into locational disadvantage *Dropping off the Edge 2015* demonstrates the lived experience that people in a small number of communities across the country are burdened with disproportionately high levels of disadvantage. Jesuit Social Services calls on the government, business and community sectors to tackle this grave injustice which affects us all.

As we approach Easter I am inspired by the promise of renewal and hope. We remain committed to building a just society and will continue to tirelessly build the capacity of both people and communities to achieve this.

**Julie Edwards** CEO, Jesuit Social Services

## A helping hand for new arrivals

Each week, in Sunshine and St Albans, dozens of people from countries including Iran, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Burma and Sudan gather for Jesuit Social Services' English Language Support Program.

As the name suggests, the primary purpose of these services is for people to improve their English language skills. However, Community Partnerships Coordinator Carole PondevieLay says that the participants benefit in many other ways.

"Rarely do people present with solely the need for English language support. Common requests include assistance with immigration, housing and health. Others have real concerns regarding basic material needs like food and warm clothing," says Carole.

"Referrals to appropriate services are made regularly and participants are assisted in making appointments and attending meetings."

The program began in 2014 and runs once a week in each location. Participants are seeking asylum in Australia and many have experienced a period of time in detention.

Content covered in all the sessions is aligned to the theme of 'living in Australia', often focusing on settlement topics such as health, education, the law, money, shopping and housing.

"We aim to provide an opportunity for participants to improve their English language communication skills, gain confidence and a greater understanding of Australian society and culture," says Carole.

Rosie says she attends the program every week, sometimes bringing her grandchild. "It is good here because the teachers are kind – they speak slowly and explain everything," she says.

"Today I brought my Learner's book as I'm trying to get my driver's license. My teacher is helping me to understand because some of the words are new to me.

"Sometimes I need information and I know that here I can ask."



## Graduation day

Jesuit Social Services has always looked for innovative ways to create pathways to employment for people who, for a variety of reasons, have encountered barriers when looking for work.

Alex (top right), a recent graduate of our hands-on hospitality training program, says he has grown as a person during his six months with the program.

"I've changed incredibly in terms of building my social skills and confidence," he says.

**"At first I was shy and a bit afraid but now I absolutely love it. I've gained skills that I didn't think I needed but now I realise how important they are."**

For someone like Alex, who says he "had applied for heaps of jobs but had no luck," it means he's feeling more confident about his next job search.

Participants split their time between our social enterprise café The Green at St Columbs and the nearby Kitchen Garden. Between the two sites, they learn skills in customer service, food preparation and handling as well as growing and harvesting fresh produce.

The success of the program is evident in that more than two-thirds of participants move onto engage in further study or employment – this is more than three times the average employment services industry standard.

Over the past year, a total of 47 participants have engaged with the program.

One participant is David (bottom right), who says that in addition to the practical skills that will assist him in finding ongoing work, the program has created a healthy work-life routine for him.

"The main thing this program has done is make me become a lot more responsible. I know I can't have a big night on the weekend because I've got to be up and ready to work on a Monday morning," he says.



## John's lifelong commitment



John Kennedy has had a passion for social change as long as he can remember.

"I have always held a view that we have to do more with and for the underprivileged members of our community," says John.

"It's something that is very important to me and will remain so."

John has a deep history with the Jesuits. Educated at St Aloysius in Sydney, he later decided to become a teacher and spent seven years teaching at St. Ignatius College, Riverview, where his students included former Prime Minister Tony Abbott and current Sydney Archbishop Anthony Fisher.

At just 31 years of age, John was appointed Founding Principal of Loyola College in Watsonia (Melbourne), and remained in the role for almost 30 years.

He can't recall when he first became aware of Jesuit Social Services' work, but says he has a deep affection for a number of influential figures who have been involved in the organisation including Bernie Geary, Frank Brennan SJ and current CEO Julie Edwards.

"I've always been impressed with what Jesuit Social Services does and has to say – and I have also learnt a lot, too.

For example, look at any cohort of prisoners and see such high levels of poverty and low levels of formal education. An organisation like Jesuit Social Services is fantastic at bringing those issues to our attention."

Now retired, John has more time to spend with his wife Bronwyn Lane and children Patrick and Fionnuala, and to indulge in other passions such as politics – he stood for the Labor Party in the seat of Kooyong in 2013.

John and Bronwyn have attended Jesuit Social Services' Annual Dinner every year since its inception and have been part of our monthly giving Community Partner program since 2012.

"We are proud to be Community Partners because it allows Jesuit Social Services to plan long-term projects knowing it has guaranteed income each month, and is not only reliant on government funding which can be uncertain."

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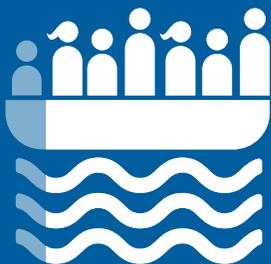
**To discuss joining Jesuit Social Services' monthly giving Community Partner program, please call Nicole Dunham on (03) 9421 7617**

## Not just offshore processing that is inhumane

In the past six months we have had a change in Prime Minister but unfortunately the country's punitive and inhumane policies surrounding people seeking asylum remain.

The current system of offshore processing exposes vulnerable men, women and children to indefinite waiting times, violence and sexual assault and does not respect their fundamental right to human dignity. The Federal Government's Border Force Act – which prevents staff (including social workers, doctors and nurses) from speaking out against the neglect and abuse they witness – again highlights the need for the community to give refugee and asylum seekers a voice.

These issues have again risen to prominence following the High Court's ruling which formalised the legality of offshore detention. This places 267 people seeking asylum, including 37 babies born in Australia, in a very precarious situation as they face deportation from Australia to the harsh conditions of Nauru.



90% of asylum seekers who arrive in Australia by boat are ultimately found to be refugees and granted protection visas.

But it is not just offshore processing that is inhumane. If these 267 vulnerable men, women and children are allowed to stay on mainland Australia and live in the community while their protection applications are processed, they still face a multitude of policies designed primarily to deter others from making their way here rather than to process and assimilate those already on our shores.

### The implications of these policies include:

- The majority of asylum seekers live without work rights. Although the Federal Government has reversed this situation and moved to grant work rights to many asylum seekers living in the community (including people who arrived after 12 August 2012), many in this group have spent the previous years unemployed - which has further compounded the barriers they face in attaining work.
- In general most people seeking asylum are excluded from tertiary education opportunities unless they pay

full fees. This financial barrier puts further learning out of reach for most prospective students.

- People seeking asylum in Australia are not eligible for mainstream Centrelink payments, which means that many people in the community live well below the poverty line.
- People whose protection applications are rejected at the Refugee Review Tribunal stage are still entitled to judicial appeal processes, however the Australian Government not only takes away income assistance at this stage but may also bring the person back into an immigration detention facility.

These measures have a serious impact on the living conditions of people seeking asylum in Australia.

Their experience is characterised by limited access to income support, healthcare and education, restrictive work rights, lack of affordable housing and difficulties in accessing much needed mental health services.

The wider Australian community has recently rallied to show support for the 267 people at risk of sent to Nauru and Jesuit Social Services will continue to give marginalised people a voice and ensure they receive care and support. This means being properly fed, sheltered, secure, receiving medical care and having claims adjudicated fairly.

*Jesuit Social Services provides a leadership role in the Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA), an initiative built on the groundswell of support from Australian Catholics which advocates for policy changes to better uphold the dignity and rights of people seeking asylum.*

## Gertrude generosity making a difference

When Johnno Bing and James Hains discovered the work of Jesuit Social Services' Artful Dodgers Studios, it was if a lightbulb went off in their heads.

More than 15 years ago the pair and a group of friends founded The Gertrude Players, a charitable organisation that operates in the City of Yarra.

Always looking for innovative local endeavours to support, James and Johnno were impressed from the moment they met with the team at Artful Dodgers Studios. The Studios were established in 1996 as a 'soft entry point' for young people experiencing complex forms of disadvantage such as mental illness and substance abuse. Engaging initially with music, art and creative projects, young people can be linked with programs and services to help them address problems they are facing.

"We have always wanted to support music, arts and vulnerable young people," says James.

**"If we are going to hand over a cheque for \$30-40k we want it to be well spent and we could immediately see the great work being done by the Artful Dodgers team."**

Johnno adds that when The Gertrude Players was selecting beneficiaries, "there was no other group that matched our purposes like Artful Dodgers Studios. It was really encouraging to see how it aligned with what we want to do."

The Gertrude Players has generously supported Artful Dodgers Studios for several years, including through its annual The Big Sing event, an 'old-school Carols night' held close to Christmas on the streets of Fitzroy. In the past two years The Gertrude Players has hosted a music trivia night featuring auctions, prizes and giveaways, proceeds of which go directly to the Studios.

The pair's connection with the studios runs deeper than simply raising money. Once a month James and his mum drop by to cook lunch for the participants.

"It's amazing to speak to some of the young people who benefit from the work – you can really see the impact the Studios has on their lives."



Photos from the Gertrude Players' 90s rock trivia night which raised funds for Artful Dodgers Studios.

## Small steps having big impact



In early 2015 Jesuit Social Services commenced a process to develop and implement a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). We have always held a commitment to the principles of reconciliation in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and have been steadily growing our related program and community development work in urban, rural and remote areas of Australia.

In May 2015 the organisation held an All Staff Day designed and led by members of our Aboriginal Advisory Group, which allowed staff from all parts of the organisation to have input into the Action Plan.

"There are a lot of first-generation Australians who haven't been exposed to first Australians and aren't aware of the genocide and devastation their ancestors have faced," says Roger Pugh, Senior Project Officer.

"The All Staff Day was fantastic in terms of getting feedback and educating people about our history," says Aunty Pam Pedersen, a Yorta Yorta elder and staff member.

## Our CEO abroad



Our CEO Julie Edwards recently returned home from Europe where she represented Jesuit Social Services at a number of conferences and events.

In late November, Julie joined 60 delegates from around the world in Loyola, Spain for the Networking for Justice meeting.

This meeting brought together members of the four *Global Ignatian Advocacy Networks* including Migration, Right to Education, Ecology and Justice in Mining to try to effectively combat causes of social and environmental injustice around the world.

Julie then participated in a roundtable discussion titled *Global challenges, networking responses* at Comillas University in Madrid. This event was an opportunity to share lessons learned from networking carried out at a global level by the Society of Jesus since 2008. Julie, in her capacity as leader of the Justice in Mining Network, spoke about the conflict minerals campaign which has been led by the European Jesuit Conference and advocates for mandatory due diligence by European companies of their supply chains and seeks to break the link between the extraction and supply of certain materials and the channelling of profit towards violent conflicts in those countries.



# You're invited to the Jesuit Social Services Annual Fundraising Dinner

Featuring guest speaker **Michael Coutts-Trotter**

**Help us build a just society celebrating with friends, colleagues and supporters while raising money to support our work with marginalised members of the community. Our Annual Dinner, held at the iconic MCG, will also feature auctions, door prizes, music and entertainment.**

#### Date

Saturday 19TH March, 7pm

#### Venue

Members Dining Room, MCG

#### Tickets

\$165 per person – tables of 10 available

#### Booking

Visit [www.trybooking.com/CCNK](http://www.trybooking.com/CCNK)  
or call (03) 9421 7600

### Want to help Jesuit Social Services?

Together we can build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the wellbeing of disadvantaged people, family and communities.

#### I would like to make a donation of:

**\$75**       **\$150**

**\$500**       **\$1000**

**\$**

#### Contact and payment details

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First name

Address

Telephone

Email

Cheque enclosed    OR     VISA     Mastercard

Card number

Expiry

Signature