

April 2025



Our Lady of Pentecost Parish

Asylum Seeker Support Program

Program Update



Dear Our Lady of Pentecost Parish Community,

On behalf of everyone at CatholicCare Victoria, especially our Asylum Seeker Support Program (ASSP), I would like to express our heartfelt gratitude for your generous gift in 2024. Your support enables us to continue empowering vulnerable and disadvantaged asylum seekers in our communities.

The ASSP provides comprehensive, individualized support to asylum seekers, addressing their unique and multifaceted needs with care and respect. By strategically utilizing our limited resources, we strive to offer dignity, encouragement, and practical assistance to individuals and families navigating the challenges of their journey while awaiting visa determinations in Australia.

We are delighted to share this impact report with you, which highlights the meaningful difference your contribution has made to the lives of those we serve. Your generosity directly supports their journey toward hope, stability, and a brighter future.

If you have any questions, comments, or feedback regarding the report, please do not hesitate to contact me. We deeply value our partnership with you and are inspired by your commitment to this important cause. Together, we can continue making a transformative difference in the lives of asylum seekers and work towards creating a more compassionate and inclusive community.

Thank you once again for your invaluable support.

Kind regards,

Bertrand Fernandes
Senior Manager, Philanthropy
Catholic Care Victoria

ASSP Our Lady of Pentecost Parish Asylum Seeker Support Program (ASSP)

Program Report: April 2025

Introduction

Asylum seekers in our community face profound uncertainty and overwhelming barriers to essential opportunities such as housing, employment, financial security, and access to health and wellbeing services. The limitations of their bridging visas—such as restricted work and study rights and limited access to Medicare—combined with their exclusion from government safety nets like Centrelink, public housing, and employment programs, place them in a precarious and highly vulnerable position.

Without access to financial support, a single setback—such as losing a job—can quickly lead to homelessness. The absence of stable housing and security compounds their struggles, leaving many asylum seekers vulnerable to poor mental health, language barriers, and social isolation.

Your generosity helps bridge this critical gap, providing asylum seekers with the support and stability they need to rebuild their lives and thrive in a new and unfamiliar environment.

Program Summary

CatholicCare Victoria's Asylum Seeker Support Program (ASSP) stands as a beacon of hope for individuals displaced from their home countries, helping them build a safer and brighter future in Victoria.

Through personalized, holistic care, the ASSP recognizes the diverse and often complex needs of both individuals and families. Each case is carefully assessed to provide tailored support that upholds dignity, fosters resilience, and encourages positive steps forward.

Amid the uncertainty of awaiting visa determinations from the Australian Government, the ASSP offers compassionate assistance, maximizing limited resources to empower asylum seekers through one of the most challenging chapters of their lives.

Key Program Updates

The Challenges Asylum Seekers Face

Asylum seekers in our community live with profound uncertainty, confronting significant barriers to housing, employment, financial security, and access to essential health and wellbeing services. The restrictive conditions of their bridging visas—including limited work and study rights and constrained access to Medicare—only deepen their vulnerability.

Excluded from government safety nets such as Centrelink, public housing, and employment programs, asylum seekers are left in precarious positions where even minor setbacks, such as the loss of employment, can lead to homelessness. This instability exacerbates feelings of insecurity, poor mental health, language barriers, and social isolation, leaving many without hope or a clear path forward.

Your Generosity Makes a Difference

Through your invaluable support, we have been able to bridge these critical gaps and provide asylum seekers with the stability, resources, and dignity they need to rebuild their lives. Your contributions have directly enabled the following outcomes:

Housing and Rent Support: \$8,000

- **Crisis Rental Support:** Provided one month's rent to a single mother of three at immediate risk of homelessness.
- **Eviction Prevention:** Paid rental arrears for a family facing eviction after the father's heart surgery and the mother's significant mental health challenges.
- **Stabilization Support:** Offered three months of half-rental assistance for a family after the father was incapacitated by two serious accidents.
- **Relocation Assistance:** Covered moving costs for a single mother transitioning to a new rental property.

Emergency Relief: \$2,000

- Delivered essential resources, including Coles vouchers, material aid, nappies, and baby formula, to support 60% of asylum seeker households who rely heavily on ASSP to meet their basic needs.

Education, Training, and Empowerment: \$5,000

- **Certificates for Employment:** Funded food-handling certificate courses for several clients to increase job readiness.
- **Driving Programs:** Provided 10 driving lessons to multiple women, empowering them to access employment and educational opportunities.
- **Transport Support:** Supplied ongoing Myki top-ups for clients with no income or financial assistance.
- **Educational Resources:** Purchased online tools for a woman undertaking a Certificate III in Accounting.
- **Workforce Preparation:** Paid for a Manual Handling Course for a woman preparing for NDIS support work.
- **Mental Health Support:** Funded a six-month gym membership for a young man unable to work due to prolonged visa processing times, helping to improve his mental health and wellbeing.

Creating Lasting Impact

Your compassion and generosity have empowered asylum seekers to overcome adversity and move forward with dignity and hope. Thanks to your contributions:

- Families have avoided eviction and found stable housing.
- Individuals have gained access to training and education, unlocking new opportunities for employment.

- Asylum seekers have received the critical resources they need to meet basic needs and navigate everyday challenges.
- Vulnerable individuals have been supported in improving their mental health and overall wellbeing.

Looking Ahead Together

Your support has been instrumental in transforming the lives of those we serve, creating pathways to stability, resilience, and opportunity. As we continue this essential work, we are deeply grateful for your partnership and shared commitment to supporting the most vulnerable in our community.

Client Story 1

Case Study One: A Family's Journey to Stability and Opportunity

Meet a blended family of three adults and four children, each navigating immense challenges. Until recently, they lived in two separate, substandard rentals in Melbourne's southeast, struggling to keep up with high rent costs. With limited income and mounting stress, they faced the risk of financial collapse.

Among the children is one with severe autism, ineligible for NDIS support due to visa restrictions—a devastating gap in care. Meanwhile, both women in the household were determined to improve their future. They enrolled in a Certificate III in Health Services Assistance, a qualification that would open doors to employment in aged care, where demand is high.

Juggling part-time study, 120 hours of unpaid placement in an aged care facility, and casual work as Uber Eats drivers, they worked tirelessly to build a better future for their family. Despite their best efforts, they couldn't save enough for both the bond and the first month's rent to move into a shared home, where they could consolidate resources and create a more stable living environment.

How Your Support Made a Difference

Through the Asylum Seeker Support Program (ASSP), we stepped in at a critical moment. We provided:

- **Material aid and pantry support**, including monthly supermarket vouchers, to alleviate the financial burden of basic needs.
- **Financial assistance** to cover the first month's rent (\$2,580), enabling the family to secure a safe, single home where they could live together.

This stability allowed both women to focus fully on their unpaid aged care placements, complete their studies, and earn their certificates. ASSP also supported them with resume updates and guidance on job applications.

The Outcome

Today, both women have successfully completed their qualifications and placements, and they've been invited to apply for casual positions at their placement facility. With the prospect of stable employment on the horizon, the family is now on a stronger path toward financial independence and a brighter future.

This remarkable journey of resilience and determination was made possible because of donors like you. Your generosity provided the stability they needed to focus on education, navigate challenges, and take significant steps toward building a secure and hopeful future.

Without Catholic Care Victoria's ASSP, a lot of these families would be homeless and would not be able to feed their family. Our longer-term goal with these families is to empower them so that they can make a brighter future for themselves

Client Story 2

Case Study: A Journey of Resilience and Hope

For several years, the Asylum Seeker Support Program (ASSP) has been walking alongside a courageous single mother and her two sons as they navigate the many challenges of seeking asylum in Australia.

The family's story is one of resilience. After enduring family violence and a subsequent family breakdown, the mother found herself solely responsible for raising her children with no support from her ex-partner. Living on short-term three-month Bridging Visas and facing restrictions like work rights without study rights, the family struggled to achieve stability.

How ASSP Made a Difference

Through regular monthly home visits and outreach, ASSP provided holistic and tailored support to address the family's immediate needs and create pathways for long-term progress.

Housing Support

- Assisted with occasional rent payments for their share-house accommodation.
- Supported the transition to a safer, independent housing unit.
- Provided occasional utilities support to ease the financial burden.

Training and Employment

- Covered the cost of a Food Handling Certificate for the mother, enabling her to gain employment in hospitality.

Emergency Relief and Material Aid

- Furnished their new home with essential items, including beds, mattresses, and linen.
- Provided monthly Coles vouchers and pantry donations to help meet basic needs.

Advocacy and Legal Support

- Advocated on behalf of the family with letters of support to The Minister regarding their legal case.

- Connected the family to the Red Cross for emergency relief resources.
- Supported the son’s application to the Monash Asylum Seeker Scholarship Fund with an advocacy letter.

The Outcomes

With the support of ASSP, the family has made remarkable progress:

1. Employment and Independence for the mother:

The mother initially secured employment in a restaurant kitchen and has since progressed to holding two positions in aged care facility kitchens. Her long-term aspiration is to complete a Certificate III, enabling her to further her career in aged care once her visa permits study rights.

2. Educational Opportunity for the Son:

The eldest son graduated from Year 12 in 2024 and was awarded a full scholarship through the Monash Asylum Seeker Scholarship Program to pursue a Bachelor of Engineering (Hons) starting in March 2025. This achievement is groundbreaking for the family, as asylum seekers face steep barriers to tertiary education, including the requirement to pay international student fees upfront—fees that, in this case, would have exceeded \$200,000.

Looking Ahead

This family’s journey exemplifies the transformative power of ASSP’s support. By addressing immediate needs, fostering education and employment opportunities, and advocating for systemic change, ASSP has helped this family create a foundation for a stable and hopeful future.

The mother continues to work tirelessly to provide for her children while pursuing her dream of further education. Her son, equipped with the opportunity to study engineering, represents the potential that exists when barriers to education are removed for asylum seekers.

Your Role in This Story

Your generosity makes success stories like this possible. By supporting ASSP, you provide families like this one with the dignity, stability, and hope they need to thrive. Together, we are changing lives and building brighter futures for some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

“Thanks to ASSP, I gained the confidence to pursue my job, and my son’s scholarship to study engineering at Monash is a dream come true. ASSP has given us hope and a future we never thought possible. We’re so grateful for the support and the donors who made this possible.”

Case Study Three: A Family’s Journey from Crisis to Stability

In September, a family of four—a couple and their two young children—turned to the Asylum Seeker Support Program (ASSP) for help. Their world had been turned upside down after the father, the sole income earner, was involved in two serious accidents. In one of these, he was

considered a victim of crime. These life-altering events left him unable to work, and as a casual employee without sick leave benefits, the family's financial situation quickly unravelled.

Two months behind on rent and facing an eviction notice, the family was at risk of losing their home. The stress of impending homelessness compounded their challenges, creating a situation of deep vulnerability.

A Lifeline in a Time of Need

The ASSP stepped in at this critical juncture, covering the family's outstanding rent of \$3,900 to ensure they could remain in their home. This immediate relief gave the family the breathing space they needed to begin addressing their longer-term challenges.

Recognizing the complexity of their situation, ASSP provided additional advocacy and support. The father was successfully referred to TAC and Victim of Crime Programs, giving him access to the specific assistance needed to aid his recovery and navigate the aftermath of his accidents.

Empowering the Family's Future

Meanwhile, the mother, who had previously completed a Child Care Certificate but had never worked in the field, was determined to contribute to the family's income. However, lacking a driver's licence was a significant barrier to securing work.

With ASSP's encouragement and support, she was provided with 10 driving lessons, valued at \$770, to build her skills and confidence. Her dedication paid off—she successfully obtained her driver's licence. Equipped with newfound independence and mobility, she has since secured casual employment at a childcare centre and now drives herself to and from work.

The Outcome

Thanks to ASSP's holistic support, this resilient family has overcome significant hurdles. They have transitioned to a new rental property, the father is accessing vital recovery programs, and the mother is now contributing to the family's income while building her career.

This journey from crisis to stability is a testament to the family's determination and the life-changing impact of ASSP's support. Your generosity as a donor has played a crucial role in helping families like this rebuild their lives, offering them hope, security, and a brighter future.

If CatholicCare did not come to help us when we are facing eviction, today our family would be homeless. Also we are very grateful that CatholicCare is still continuing to assist us with ER and pantry support.

Photos



Sewing Classes



Consultation Session

Thank you

On behalf of Catholic Care Victoria, thank you again for your generous support for Asylum Seeker Support Program. I hope you enjoyed reading about the impact of this work as summarised in this report.

Please feel free to reach out to me on 0428 096 560 or at bertrand.fernandes@catholiccarevic.org.au if you have any questions about this report or your support.

Kind regards,



Bertrand Fernandes
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Catholic Care Victoria