

Community Food Program



About the ASRC

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre is a not-for-profit organisation which supports and empowers people seeking asylum who live in our community. Established in 2001 in a gifted space in Footscray, the organisation has grown from an informal foodbank to the largest independent humanitarian organisation in Australia supporting people seeking asylum. The ASRC receives no funding from the federal government, enabling us to maintain an independent voice that advocates for change.

We provide over 35 programs including food and material aid, healthcare, education and training, employment pathways, legal aid and detention advocacy. Our aim is to support the wellbeing of our members and empower them to be independent and to have agency over their own future.



The Community Food Program

The ASRC Foodbank, daily Community Meals (currently suspended due to COVID-19) and Harvest of Hope community garden are collectively known as the Community Food Program. Five staff members oversee the program, with 100 volunteers carrying out the day-to-day duties that keep the program viable.

The objective of the program is to provide food security for people seeking asylum. The Foodbank represents a key area of support for our members. We rely on the community to keep our shelves stocked, with approximately 70% of Foodbank groceries donated by individuals, food rescue agencies, local businesses, families, schools, churches and other community groups. These donations provide essential food and goods for around 1000 people seeking asylum, many of whom are children. Most of those people have no income, and many have no work rights.

The effects of COVID-19

COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on the asylum-seeker community. With many people in this sector employed in sectors such as hospitality and cleaning, they experienced massive job losses when the pandemic struck. Job Keeper and Jobseeker are not available to people seeking asylum. Those who have lost jobs have no government safety net and no other income source.



Increased demand for Foodbank

The ASRC has seen a growing number of families accessing our Foodbank as the impact of the pandemic is felt. Demand for food trebled over the course of 2020, with around 1500 individuals relying on ASRC for weekly as their primary source of food.

The need for food donations is greater than ever.

How the ASRC Foodbank works

Under usual circumstances, the ASRC Foodbank is much like a supermarket, where members can select the items they want from shelves. Accompanied by a volunteer, they take trolleys through the store where they can choose a mix of perishable and non-perishable items. These include fresh fruits and vegetables including those grown at the ASRC's Harvest of Hope community garden. Food quantities are allocated according to family size.

During the pandemic, we pivoted to pre-assembled food packs. These include pantry staples packs, and also fresh produce packs, plus bread, eggs and yoghurt. Toiletries, dishwashing liquid and laundry powder are added on a monthly basis. While we strive to return to the self-select model when it is safe to do so, the current system ensures that this vulnerable community has access to essential food while minimising the risk of infection.

More than just food

Many people seeking asylum are in living with trauma and uncertainty, trapped in a political limbo that is out of their control. **For these people, the ASRC Foodbank represents much more than a source of food; it provides a sense of dignity and empowerment. The food on the ASRC shelves allows families to prepare familiar meals from their homelands, providing them with a sense of normalcy and connection.**



The importance of our supporters

For nearly twenty years, the Foodbank has been able to supply food to people seeking asylum, thanks to donations from the community.

Giving food is one of the most immediate and tangible ways to help people seeking asylum. **It also sends a powerful message to people seeking asylum that we see them, we recognise that they are no different from us, and that, despite the inhuman policies our government is implementing in our names, we will welcome and support those who came here seeking safety to create a fair and compassionate Australia.**

There is no such thing as a donation too small; every contribution helps keep food on the table, and ensures the Foodbank remains a positive force in the lives of those seeking asylum. Without your support, we would not be able to do this.

