

# ASRC Sustainability Report

The changes we have made to be efficient  
and sustainable

OCTOBER 2023

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# A note from the CEO



It is my pleasure to share our Sustainability report as promised during the 'Save the ASRC' appeal. Thank you to all our amazing supporters who gave to this appeal. As you will read in this report, we have made some significant changes and have a clear way forward for the ASRC to remain strong into the future.

We have not forgotten the trust, support and love you showed us as you rallied around in our time of need. I spoke with hundreds of you during this time and I heard your two key messages loud and clear:

1. You came to our aid because the ASRC is important to people seeking asylum. The ASRC represents hope for a fairer, more welcoming, and just Australia and closing our doors is not an option.
2. You wanted to know how we have responded to this crisis, the changes, and decisions we have made, ensuring we are now safe and sustainable for the long term while continuing to deliver on our core purpose for being.

I am proud to share that we have delivered on what you have asked.

Within this report, we share the significant work undertaken to resize our organisation, overhaul our systems, processes, structure and culture, across all levels of our organisation, to ensure we don't encounter this situation again.

What I am most excited to share is that despite the significant and difficult decisions we have had to make, the ASRC remains at the forefront of championing change with refugees. We have never been more impactful in driving national policy and law reform, and in measuring our impact due to our newly formed Program Quality & Impact team.

Going forward, we have a compelling and inspiring vision that is driven by 22 years of expertise and a track record of how to make change happen. I hope that after reading this report, you will reach out to see how you can be part of creating a welcoming and just Australia for people seeking asylum and refugees.

Thank you,



Kon Karapanagiotidis  
CEO, OAM

# A note from the Board Chair



The Board is pleased to endorse this Sustainability report, the culmination of an extensive body of work to safeguard the future of the ASRC. In this report, we outline the significant changes we have made to improve the efficiency and agility of our organisation, so that we can navigate through the challenges that will come our way.

As a Board, we are confident that we have strengthened our processes, procedures and systems, and have the right management team in place for the future.

We will continue to strengthen and learn at the Board level. The Board has worked with senior restructuring professionals at advisory firm Grant Thornton to understand best practices and lessons learned from our experience. Recommendations from our advisors have been actioned by the Board and Leadership team in full.

We are continuing to recruit new, highly experienced Board and subcommittee members who will bring additional governance, risk, and strategy capabilities.

As we move forward with the organisation's strategic plan, we do so with the knowledge that we have a passionate community of people behind us, people like you, who believe in the mission and value of the services and policy change that the ASRC has been delivering for the past 22 years. We recognise that this is our major strength and on behalf of the Board, I would like to personally thank you for your continued commitment and trust in helping to deliver many more successes by partnering with refugees and people seeking asylum into the future.

Thank you,  
Mike Sum  
Chair, ASRC Board

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Michael". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

# Factors that led to a significant downturn in income

## Impacts of COVID-19

- Refugees and people seeking asylum often don't have work rights or access to Centrelink, Medicare, or any other social security benefits that allow them to live independently in the community.
- This challenging environment was exacerbated by COVID-19 as people were not eligible for JobSeeker or JobKeeper or other income support mechanisms. This resulted in a staggering increase in demand for our services, a three-fold increase in requests for help at the start of the pandemic.
- In response to the demand for our services and with support from the State Government and our donor base, the ASRC expanded its direct service delivery from March 2020 to June 2022 by increasing access to legal representation, food, housing, social services, education, and employment support.
- During COVID-19 we continued to invest in fundraising to drive acquisition and raise awareness in the community. We had an increase in support during this time.

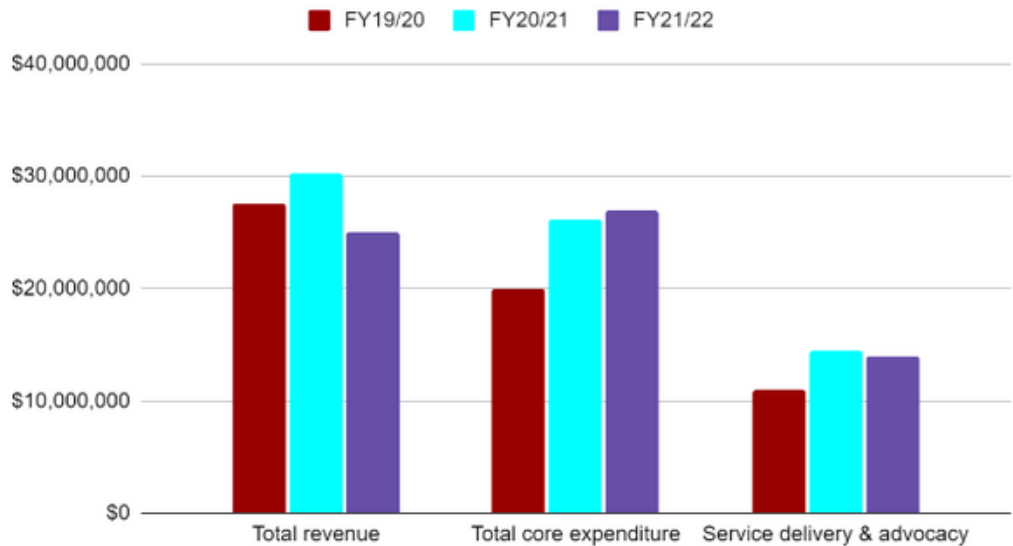
- Advocating for the rights of people seeking asylum did not stop during COVID-19. We continued to focus on ensuring that a spotlight was shone on the policies that were putting people's health at risk and significantly impacting their economic and legal rights.

## Challenging Philanthropic Landscape

- In the first half of last financial year, we saw a sharp decline in public donations, which was a result of the cost of living increases due to inflation, interest rate rises and the aftermath of COVID-19.
- Compounding this was a change to a more compassionate Federal Government, which created a perceived drop in the need to keep giving because our community was hopeful that we would finally see the change to more humane refugee policies that we have all been fighting together for the past 22 years.
- At the same time, we experienced a sharp increase in our operating costs - with a 30% increase in emergency housing costs for clients, a 70% drop in community food donations to the ASRC Foodbank and 42% increase in costs to provide utilities to people in need.
- We have also seen a 70% drop in food donated to the ASRC Foodbank.
- The number of food donors has declined year on year. At the same time, our food program supported on average 215 families pre COVID-19, this increased to 600 families during COVID-19. Post pandemic, we continue to support around 420 families: a 95% increase on our pre-pandemic numbers.
- Due to the decline in donations and the continued demand for our services, the 'Save the ASRC' appeal was launched in February to help keep our doors open. We were humbled by the response to this appeal, which raised \$5.2 million in 19 days from 22,500 donors to meet our funding shortage for the 2022 -2023 financial year.

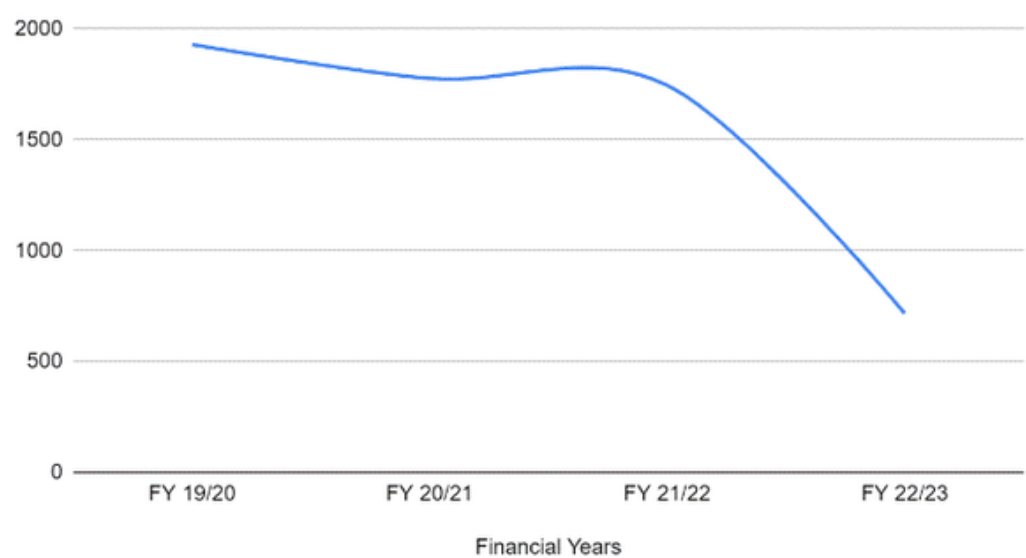
The following graphs highlight the drop in revenue and food donations and the increase in demand for services and expenditure.

Graph 1: Revenue & Expenditure FY 20-FY 22

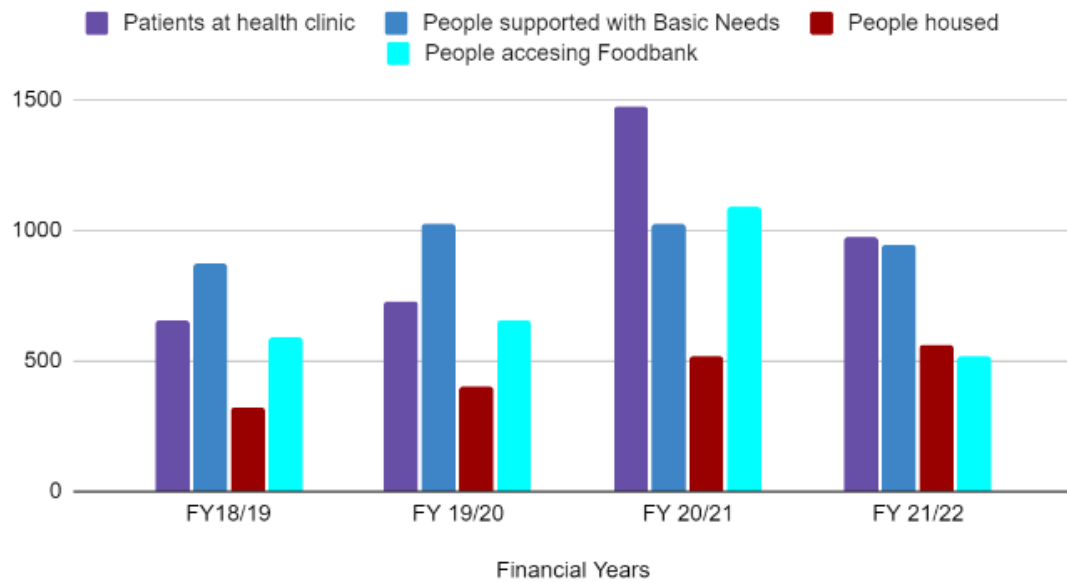


*\*Revenue includes income from donations, grants and social enterprises, Core expenditure includes service delivery, community engagement, fundraising costs, staff and volunteer management and accountability and administration.*

Graph 2: Decline in the number of food donors to the ASRC Foodbank



**Graph 3: Increase in demand for services FY 19 - FY 22**





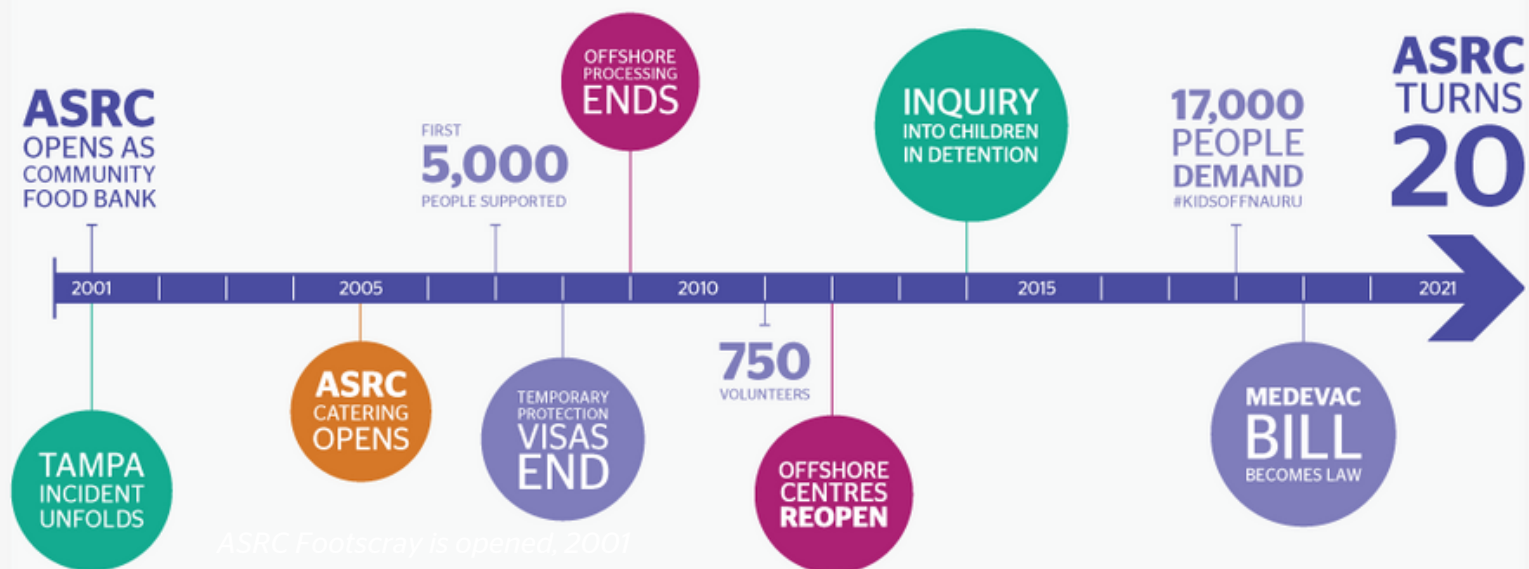
## Measures taken to remain a viable and sustainable organisation

In February 2023, the ASRC acknowledged the headwinds we faced and the gravity of our financial situation. With our Board's support we set about immediate actions to remain a viable and sustainable organisation.

The ASRC transformation has taken place over the past six months. Below are the key financial management and governance improvements that have been implemented to ensure our long-term sustainability:

- We have reduced our annual operating budget by approximately \$6.0million, effective from July 2023, representing a 22% resizing of our organisation to ensure we live within our financial means.
- We reshaped our Humanitarian Operations service delivery, prioritising people facing the most barriers to sustaining themselves during the refugee determination process. Our reduced financial capacity resulted in a consolidation of our Casework and Response and Support Services and establishing a Triage and Case Coordination response. This streamlining ensures we prioritise the most vulnerable people and assist in stabilising their situation.
- We know our reduced services in casework and legal support have an impact on many people facing extreme uncertainty and insecurity. We are working hard to ensure we are providing everyone who seeks our help with information on how we can support them and the different support options available to them. We continue to advocate for a safety net for people seeking asylum using the evidence of the people we serve.

- Our financial structure has undergone significant overhaul to ensure that we can respond to an ever-changing economic environment and provide strong business partnering, analysis and planning. Our Finance team meets with budget owners monthly to analyse income and expenditure trends and to support the allocation of resources.
- We have matured and improved the quality of our income forecasting with more robust planning and analysis, and new processes have been implemented to ensure income and expenditure are aligned. We have also improved projections for the expected financial outcome for the year.
- The organisational reserves have been replenished via a modest surplus in FY24 to ensure four months of operational expenses are catered for to appropriately manage risks and unexpected headwinds.
- Our Finance team has developed new, and improved existing policies and processes, to help support financial literacy and stewardship across the organisation. This includes a new Delegation policy which strengthens accountability for financial outcomes. Training programs are being developed to lift overall financial literacy across the organisation.
- We are working towards further income diversification and expansion of the fundraising portfolio through investment in multiple income streams to manage risk and connect with more diverse audiences.
- Our services have been redesigned with a focus on workforce safety, sustainability (workload and improved program data collection), scalability (greater automation and efficiencies), training and capacity building of staff and volunteers.
- The Board has undertaken a 'lessons learned' workshop with the audit and consulting firm Grant Thornton Australia. The recommendations from that session have been actioned by the Board and Leadership team in full.
- The Board is working through Board renewal and recruiting new members, ensuring we have a breadth of experience and skills drawing on our Board skills matrix.
- We have created a new Head of Governance and Risk role to further sharpen our focus and investment in risk management.



## Delivering impact in challenging times

We drive systemic change and immigration reform through our independence, our movement and 22 years of expertise doing the work.

We have the uniqueness of being independent of Federal Government funding and a service and advocacy organisation, enabling us to draw on our decades of frontline work to build a compelling case for change.

We have 240,000 active advocates and supporters in our movement, a social media following of more than 450,000 people and last year alone, we were featured or quoted in 4,210 media stories.

**TAFE access for all people seeking asylum in Victoria.**

Earlier this year, we celebrated a win 11 years in the making, in convincing the Andrews Government to open TAFE access for all people seeking asylum in Victoria. We are currently in dialogue with the State Government on how to build together a statewide blueprint for inclusive and equitable policies for people seeking asylum.

We have been at the forefront of all major refugee policy successes at a local and Federal level over the past decade. In Victoria, we successfully championed access to concession public transport, TAFE, and access to public schools for children on bridging visas and access to hospital emergency departments for families with no Medicare card. We recently launched two ground-breaking reports on how Federal Government policy is driving nationwide destitution for people seeking asylum.

### Human Rights Law Program

Our Human Rights Law Program furthers our agenda for change through strategic litigation, policy papers and submissions to the government and runs the nation's oldest gender legal clinic for women and the LGBTQIA+ community.

Advocates and supporters who, in recent years, have played an important mobilising role in supporting the realisation of 16,500 extra humanitarian places for Afghanistan, the acceptance of the NZ deal for 450 refugees and permanent protection being granted for 19,000 refugees who were on temporary visas for the past decade.

Alongside the efforts of refugees and people seeking asylum and sector partners, during the first 12 to 18 months of the new government, our campaigns and advocacy work has contributed to the announcement of permanence for refugees living with Temporary Protection and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas, the abolition of a Ministerial Direction preventing refugees who came by sea from reuniting their families and the evacuation of the last refugees that our government held on Nauru.

### We continue to be the safety net for thousands of people seeking asylum each year.

We fill the gaps caused by the Federal Government policy that leaves 98% of people seeking asylum without an income safety net. We do this by investing in creating an Australia where families seeking asylum have food, health, and housing security.

Our \$2.2 million care fund provided by the State Government combined with our frontline service team directly provides food, housing, aid, and medicines to families with no safety net, Medicare and often no right to work. In the past financial year, we provided 102,797 nights of shelter, 7,466 medical appointments, 12,982 welfare appointments and delivered food to 420 households each week.

[We move communities from surviving to thriving through our empowerment work.](#)

We provide tailored pathways to meaningful and secure employment. In FY23, we provided 48,749 hours of paid employment through our social enterprises, ASRC Catering & ASRC Cleaning, and grew our customer base by 45%.

We have partnered with the University of Melbourne to run two cafés in Carlton and Southbank, creating meaningful pathways to careers in hospitality for our community while providing affordable meals to students.

We have also assisted 204 people in securing employment and delivered a further 872 hours of English classes to help people obtain the English they needed to be job ready. We support women to build lives of self-determination and independence through our Women's Empowerment program too.

We are helping build the next generation of refugee leaders and refugee-led organisations.

[Community Advocacy and Power Program](#)

In FY23 we trained 57 people across four states via our Community Advocacy and Power Program who went on to complete 16 advocacy projects as graduates reaching thousands of Australians through media interviews, opinion pieces, public speaking events and targeted campaigns, led by people directly impacted by the issues that they are advocating for.



CAPP Graduates, 2023



### [Refugee Resource Hub - Dandenong](#)

We support this community by running Australia's only incubation hub for refugee/migrant-led organisations in the Southeast of Melbourne, home to the largest population of refugees in Australia.

Our Refugee Resource Hub is home to partner organisations that can deliver vital programs to refugee and migrant communities, we are assisting by providing subsidised access to office space by providing peppercorn rent.

### [We have an Asia Pacific focus as climate change drives displacement in our region.](#)

As climate change will create unprecedented displacement, we acknowledge the need to look beyond our shores towards our Asia Pacific region. The ASRC is investing in strengthening local refugee-led organisations to help meet this impact.

We have co-funded the first refugee-led grants award program for the Asia Pacific region partnering with the Asia Pacific Network of Refugees providing impact and enablement grants to 21 refugee-led organisations assisting over 100,000 displaced persons across ten countries with everything from education, health and aid to employment and advocacy assistance.

This impact stretched across Afghanistan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Iran, India, and the Thai-Burma border.



*The Refugee Resource Hub located in Dandenong, opened in 2022*

# Our Future: Where to from here?

## Strengthening our impact

### Where we can have the biggest impact:

The ASRC is at a critical juncture.

Our future depends on our ability to move on from being just another crisis-driven, needs-based charity fighting for survival in a cost-of-living crisis, to taking our place as catalysts of a human rights movement to deliver a 'better Australia' for people seeking asylum.

In doing so, we will not only ensure greater impact and sustainability for ourselves as a uniquely independent service and advocacy organisation, but the long-term sustainability of the outcomes and impact we can achieve on behalf of our community, sector, and wider movement. This will be our true success story and legacy.

A truly sustainable and impactful ASRC will be built on increasing resilience and agency in our people, systems, and ways of working. This is essential not only for the community we serve, but for ourselves as service providers and advocates for change, as well as the community that supports us financially to deliver this change.

The ultimate way the ASRC can ensure the sustainability of our frontline services, resources and workforce is by:

- Building the capacity of the people we serve to meet their needs and access their rights.
- Building the capacity of decision makers to fulfil their obligations to people seeking asylum by delivering visa certainty, an income safety net, and access to universal health and social services.

#### How we are designing for impact?

Our vision forward remains to drive systemic change that reforms our refugee system to be humane, fair and uphold the human rights of refugees whilst also providing a safety net and the pathway and platforms for refugees to thrive while championing this generational change.

We will achieve our vision through our:

- peerless systemic advocacy
- strategic litigation and test cases
- Senate committee reports
- legal research
- data and M&E from our frontline work
- running public advocacy campaigns
- our investment in refugee leadership and incubating refugee-led organisations
- delivering excellence in our frontline services and through our longstanding relationships and access to the Australian Government on matters of national significance for people seeking asylum and refugees.

To achieve this, we are growing our Program Quality and Impact Measurements team, we are investing further in strategic litigation, running more test cases before the High Court and Federal Court, building our policy and research capability and in being a trusted independent legal and policy adviser to the Australian Government and the crossbench.



We are also sharpening the focus of our frontline services to deliver in key strategic service delivery gaps of legal, health, housing and food security while growing our partnerships with the State Government and the corporate sector to scale up our social enterprises and employment pathways for people seeking asylum and refugees.

Our systems, processes and ways of working will evolve, and we will continue to reflect and evaluate to ensure we meet the needs of all our stakeholders and partners.

#### Sustainability through Quality and Impact

We will establish key performance indicators across our service and advocacy pathways, as well as the data systems and infrastructure to evaluate our outcomes against external quality and compliance standards. This will ensure accountability to our members, donors, philanthropic funders, and stakeholders, and will attract new and diverse donors, supporters, and funders to our work.

#### Sustainability through Capacity Building and Collaboration

Building the capacity of rights holders (people seeking asylum) and duty bearers (decision makers) under a human rights-based approach is our primary mechanism for ensuring the impact of our work, and the sustainability of our resources.

This depends on the degree to which we increase the capability (the knowledge, skills, confidence, and well-being) of people seeking asylum to access and self-advocate for their rights during their visa determination process. It is equally determined by the degree to which we enable people seeking asylum to create a life that has meaning for them, amid uncertainty and dislocation.

The impact and sustainability of our work is also determined by the degree to which we expand the capability and willingness of decision makers to meet their rights obligations to people seeking asylum - both in relation to their visa determination process, and access to fair and effective settlement support.

In this work, the ASRC will function not only as a charity/provider of essential needs, but as a catalytic agent in a wider movement, supporting a collaborative approach to advocacy and community engagement that takes a whole-of-society approach to advancing the human rights (and potential) of people seeking asylum. This includes being collaborative and sharing our knowledge, information, and resources with a broad network of allies and stakeholders - building their capacity to support the rights of people seeking asylum too.

#### Sustainability and impact through innovation

Being able to co-design, test and iterate new program models or initiatives to enhance the resilience of people seeking asylum in areas of critical need and/or development remains crucial.

Our existing services must be adapted to our community's identified needs and goals in a seamless way, inviting co-design and co-evaluation of our efforts, and building their capacity for social and economic participation while they wait for visa certainty. This will strengthen their pathways to successful re-settlement, and their longer-term ability to thrive in Australia.

#### How are we fostering the flexibility and focus to drive social and systemic change?

Legislation and policy that undermine the human rights of refugees and people seeking asylum have deep roots in power dynamics and vested interests which require long-term, focused strategic effort to overcome.

At the same time, we need to respond with speed and flexibility to unpredictable events with potential to accelerate positive or negative change.

Our ability to drive social and political change through our campaigning and advocacy work is critical to the ASRC's organisational sustainability. As well as making a dramatic difference in the everyday lives of people seeking asylum, effective campaigns to win the right to live freely as part of our community, with the right to work, study and access a fair, equal social safety net, while engaging in a fair refugee determination process with funded legal support, would significantly reduce demand for our direct services over the long-term.

The ASRC's approach to advocacy and campaigning is both "top-down" (direct lobbying, policy development, media, and messaging) and "bottom-up" (mobilisation, community organising, capacity building). These approaches are complementary and interdependent.

While our ability to influence policy through "top down" approaches depends on our movement's capacity to develop and wield power from the "bottom up", our credibility as subject matter experts bring strategic focus to our capacity building, mobilisation and community organising work.

Over the last decade, conservative politicians sought strategic advantage through a continuous escalation in negative rhetoric and punitive policy directed towards people seeking asylum.

After years of defensive, reactive campaigning, the period following the election of a more progressive government can be disorienting for movement participants, as exhaustion and disillusionment with the lack of immediate change undermining participation.

During this phase in the political cycle, campaigning organisations like the ASRC play a critical agenda-setting role, through the initiation of longer-term, proactive campaigns that build community power, shift public attitudes and lock in positive change.

This requires the ability to prioritise and focus public attention on specific elements of a broader social problem over sustained periods. In 2022, the ASRC aligned our advocacy priorities with our areas of expertise and strength and the changes that people with lived experience of seeking asylum said would make the biggest difference to their lives.

Following extensive consultation with people with lived experience, we identified four priority advocacy areas for 2022 - 2025: fairness, freedom, safety, and refugee-led campaigns.

**Fairness:** The ‘fairness’ advocacy priority focuses on securing a fair refugee assessment process and a path to permanence for people seeking asylum in Australia, including people subjected to the previous governments’ unfair “fast track” refugee assessment process.

**Freedom:** The ‘freedom’ advocacy priority focuses on securing freedom from arbitrary and indefinite detention, both within Australia and the offshore detention system established by our government.

**Safety:** The ‘safety’ advocacy priority focuses on ensuring people seeking asylum have the right to work, study and access fair and equal, mainstream social safety nets for the duration of the refugee assessment process.

**Refugee-led campaigns:** Historically, successful movements for social change have most often been led by the people directly affected. While the ability to build collective power across social groups through alliances and partnerships is critical, the experience and expertise of people with lived experience of seeking asylum must be at the core of our campaigns and advocacy work. In addition to the campaign priorities identified through consultation with people with lived experience, we are committed to adding value and support to refugee-led campaigns, including strategic advice, media and communications support, mobilisation of ASRC supporters and contribution to budgets.



## Thank you!

Thanks to you the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre has been able to provide support to around 7,000 people whilst continuing to campaign and advocate with refugees for fair policies that provide permanent protection, access to safety nets and freedom from detention.

We are grateful for your commitment during one of the most challenging times in our 22-year history. We hope that in reading this Sustainability report you can see the changes we have made, the impact we have in our community, and most importantly, the difference your support makes to help grow a more sustainable and impactful ASRC.

We are deeply committed and will continue to learn, adapt, and innovate and will best support the rights of people seeking asylum to live freely and sustainably in our communities.

Please get in touch if you have any questions or would like to discuss supporting our work.



[fundraising@asrc.org.au](mailto:fundraising@asrc.org.au)



1300 692 772

## Appendix: FY24 Profit & Loss statement & Forecast Cash position

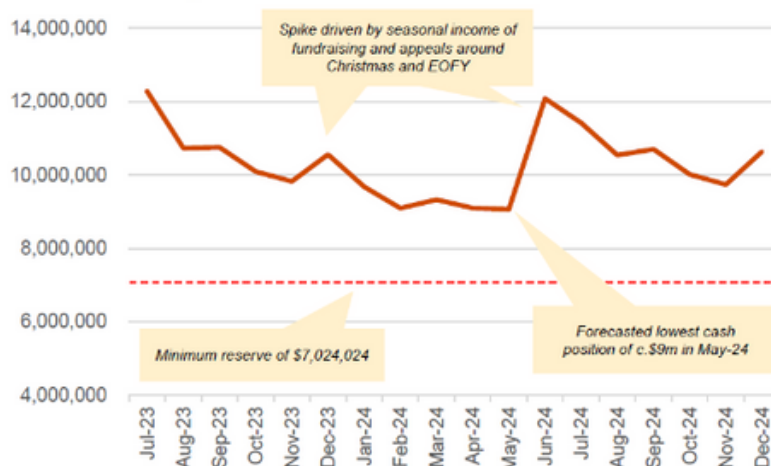
### Profit & Loss statement FY24

#### P&L FY24

	FY23 (pre-audit)	FY24 (forecast)	Variance (\$)	Variance (%)
<b>Sales</b>				
Fundraising Income	10,340,982	5,650,000	(4,690,982)	(45%)
Donations	10,480,691	8,603,000	(1,877,691)	(18%)
Grants	4,572,970	2,870,000	(1,702,970)	(37%)
Corporates	624,274	715,000	90,726	15%
Bequests	294,743	100,000	(194,743)	(66%)
Merchandise	196,801	35,000	(161,801)	(82%)
Catering	1,554,347	2,034,349	480,002	31%
Cleaning	1,573,259	1,620,000	46,741	3%
Advocacy	230,633	210,000	(20,633)	(9%)
Non-Operation Income	5,471	30,000	24,529	448%
<b>Sales</b>	<b>29,874,172</b>	<b>21,867,349</b>	<b>(8,006,823)</b>	<b>(27%)</b>
COGS	563,257	443,897	(119,359)	(21%)
<b>Gross Revenue</b>	<b>29,310,915</b>	<b>21,423,451</b>	<b>(8,126,182)</b>	<b>(28%)</b>
<b>Operating Expenses</b>				
Employee costs	19,660,630	16,073,376	(3,587,254)	(18%)
Client needs	3,020,298	1,739,000	(1,281,298)	(42%)
Program Delivery Costs	511,754	175,220	(336,534)	(66%)
Consumables	49,012	55,000	5,988	12%
Expense Community Engagement	1,000,111	342,600	(657,511)	(66%)
Brand & Asset Management	119,103	172,374	53,271	45%
Events	49,069	101,820	52,751	108%
Office Management	720,913	415,260	(305,653)	(42%)
Financial Expenses	437,682	169,646	(268,036)	(61%)
ICT Expenses	755,999	750,998	(5,000)	(1%)
Occupancy Costs	565,930	520,977	(44,953)	(8%)
Travel	59,442	73,300	13,858	23%
Depreciation & Amortisation	715,360	1,154,500	439,140	61%
Other Overheads	48,355	33,380	(14,975)	(31%)
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>27,713,658</b>	<b>21,777,451</b>	<b>(5,936,207)</b>	<b>(21%)</b>
<b>Operating Surplus</b>	<b>1,597,257</b>	<b>(354,000)</b>	<b>(1,951,257)</b>	<b>(122%)</b>

### Forecasted Cash position FY24

#### Forecasted Cash position







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