

Evaluating the role of a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to enable People Seeking Asylum Access Services in Australia: the case of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC)

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Background

- There are around 90,000 people seeking asylum in Australia. The majority are systematically excluded from mainstream services.
- To fill this service gap, the ASRC provides needs-based services.
- However, there was no culture of fully engaging people seeking asylum in the design and implementation of its work.
- Evaluation evolved through time and played a key role in the journey of transformation.

M&E Culture in ASRC

- Evaluation work at the ASRC started in late 2016 with one evaluator (M&E manager) but was put on hold during COVID-19
- At the time, out of 30+ programs, there was only one team that had a program logic (no culture of evaluation)
- Whilst the ASRC consider people seeking asylum as its members, their voices were not often included in the design of its programs and activities (Anna S., M&E progress review 2020)

Definition

HRBA: empowering people to know and claim their rights and increasing the ability and accountability of individuals and institutions who are responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling rights ([SHRC - Care about Rights \(scottish humanrights.com\)](http://SHRC - Care about Rights (scottish humanrights.com)))

Human Rights Based Approach = P.A.N.E.L

Participation

- People should be involved in decisions that affect their rights

Accountability

- Monitor how people's rights are being affected

Non-discrimination

- All forms of discrimination must be prohibited, prevented and eliminated. People with the biggest barriers in realising their rights should be prioritised.

Empowerment

- Everyone should understand their rights, and be fully supported to take part in developing policy and practices that affect them

Legality

- Approaches should be grounded in the legal rights that are set out in domestic and international law, and in holding duty bearers to account

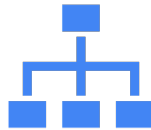
Purposes

- Assess the processes that the organisation undertook to embed HRBA
- Evaluate changes that resulted from HRBA approach
- Learn lessons and enhance our understandings for further improvement

Key steps and processes



1. people seeking asylum, staff, BoD, LT and stakeholders were consulted on HRBA and related strategic goals (Apr 26-May 31, 2021)



2. An organisation-wide Outcome Measurement Framework (OMF) was developed in line with the strategic plan.



3. A Developmental Evaluation approach was used to monitor, assess, and provide feedback on the change process.



4. Baseline data were collected through surveys and analysed using a mixed methods approach (baseline in Sep 14- Dec 26, 2022).



Study Design and Data collection

Members consultation (strategic plan):

- A survey instrument was developed by the Incus group, with input from several ASRC staff.
- We conducted cross-sectional survey by phone (26 Apr-11 June 2021) by a team of 10 research assistants in the participants' preferred languages
- Option of English or an interpreter if the assistant did not speak their language

Results of Members Consultation- Strategic plan

- 729 responded to the survey.
- 57 % were male and 43% female (<1% as other)
- The median age was 35 years
- 583 (80%) of the participants were involved with the ASRC for at least 3 years
- The most common services received: **food, legal and education**
- **94%** felt that it was important to include their voices in designing and implementing its programs

Strategic Consultations led to (outcome):

- Transform itself into a rights-based organisation that embeds the voice of people seeking asylum in its decision-making processes.
- Develop a strategic plan with a focus on embedding the voices of people seeking asylum at all levels of the organization
- Develop outcome measurement framework (OMF) and aligning all programs to the OMF
- Establishing baselines and subsequent measurement of progresses

Looking to the future

The ASRC, in reflecting on the culmination of its 2018 – 2021 strategic plan, undertook a transformative review process that was inspired by a reflection of our past 20 years, while looking ahead with courage and confidence at the future of the ASRC and in turn, building an enduring legacy towards long-term change for and with people seeking asylum.

One of the most significant parts of this process was ensuring the voice of people seeking asylum was heard in the review, but also, the development of our new plan, too - 700+ members participated in our review. Its why today, the organisations 2021 – 2024 plan is built on the foundations of lived and living experience - centring the rights, voice, opportunity and pathways forward for refugees and people seeking asylum here in Australia and overseas.

This plan encapsulates new ideas, innovation, transformational change and a focus on the very people the ASRC was founded to stand alongside, but the core of the Arc's purpose still remains true. We continue to be led by our values and are relentless and fearless in the pursuit of injustice. And our independence continues to be maintained uncompromisingly, allowing us to fill in policy gaps through service delivery, while seeking long-term change in the political landscape for people seeking asylum.

We do so, wholeheartedly, in partnership and collaboration with refugees and people seeking asylum.

Out of this process, the ASRC has established four key pillars of intent - our goals, that will guide the delivery of the organisation's work, and the ethos of how we work with our sector and the community.

Our goals 2022 - 2024

1.

We will prioritise and embed the voice and rights of people seeking asylum and refugees in our work

2.

Our services, advocacy and culture will be aligned to the human rights of people seeking asylum and refugees

3.

Our integrated, streamlined approach will deliver the best possible experience and outcomes for people seeking asylum and refugees

4.

We will work with the movement as a valued advocacy and sector partner to realise the rights of people seeking asylum and refugees

“ ASRC helped me to find a job. Because of this I feel independent and that made a difference to my life.”

— Female, 3-4 years at ASRC

Year 1 Strategic Plan actions

Over the next 6 months, the ASRC, thanks to your generosity, will be making a transformational investment in the future of how and why we deliver on our work, with more than \$3 million of initial increased investment planned by 2023.

By June 30, 2022 we will have begun this transformation under eight key actions:

Action 1

The implementation of an Affirmative Action Policy that grows the representation of people with lived experience across our workforce, from the leadership of the organisation through the Board, cascading across all facets of our service delivery, advocacy and operations.

Action 2

Accelerate cultural change through the delivery of diversity and inclusion training that builds on the opportunities of building a strong, diverse multicultural workplace, unconscious bias and privilege and promotes allyship.

Action 3

Transform all our services to align with the Victorian Equal Opportunity Human Rights Commission - Human Rights Based Approach that builds new accessibility to our service programs. Our aim is to have this approach fully operationalised by June 2022.

Action 4

In this time, our humanitarian work will transition to a service model that is based on rights and prioritisation, building more access to a wide range of services for people, including current and new members.

Action 5

Create a new standalone holistic triage service at the Footscray Centre. This service will operate 5 days a week, with all service delivery programs represented, working together at the same time, in the same space, and with the same access points.

Action 6

Through a new way forward, we'll map the current member journey to identify opportunities for improvement in our service delivery; act on these and also develop a plan for future work.

Action 7

Identify our priority areas for advocacy and establish roadmaps for each policy area to drive systemic change, in partnership with community members.

Action 8

Further refine and develop the Refugee Leadership and Capacity Building fund in collaboration with the lived experience community, building its mechanism and governance frameworks and disbursing the first round of funding. The future of our work is refugee-lead and advised and this fund will ensure the ASRC plays an important ally role, amplifying and building the capacity of the wider refugee sector.

ASRC Outcome Measurement Framework(OMF)

Our Values

- Welcoming
- Courageous
- Authentic
- Collaborative

Our Purpose

What we do as an organisation and why we exist

The human rights of people seeking asylum and refugees are at the heart of all we do. We work with people with lived experience to deliver and enable services and build a movement that delivers equality, inclusion and justice.

- We are a **Rights-Based organisation**. This means that all people seeking asylum and refugees have a right to our assistance.
- Equality, inclusion and justice** means that all people seeking asylum and refugees have a voice and agency to live well and create change. We provide agency and a platform to be heard. And together we pursue systemic change to create equality, inclusion and justice.
- Deliver** means we work with people with lived experience to support their needs. We collaborate to achieve our shared vision, and we advocate for systemic change.
- Enable** means we help others to create change. We share our experience and expertise, we invest in refugee-led initiatives, and we build the capacity and leadership of people with lived experience.
- Movement** means that we work together with our local, national and Asia-Pacific community to contribute to change.

Our Strategic Goals

Strategic Goal 1:
We will prioritise and embed the voice and rights of people seeking asylum and refugees in our work

Strategic Goal 2:
Our services, advocacy and culture will be aligned to the human rights of our members people seeking asylum and refugees

Strategic Goal 3:
Our integrated, streamlined approach will deliver the best possible experience and outcomes for our members people seeking asylum and refugees

Strategic Goal 4:
We will work with the movement as a valued advocacy and sector partner to realise the rights of people seeking asylum and refugees

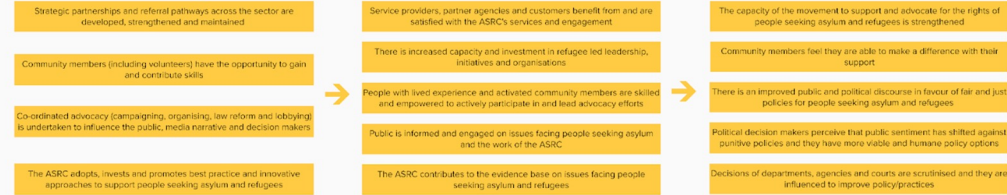
Our Vision

People seeking asylum and refugees can live safely, sustainably, independently and equally.

Our outcomes at an individual and family level What outcomes does our work achieve for individual and families in the short to medium term?



Our outcomes at a systemic level What outcomes does our work achieve for our movement and system in the short to medium term?



Our desired long-term changes What outcomes does our work enable in the longer-term?

- Individuals and families enjoy the best possible health and wellbeing
- Individuals and families feel a sense of belonging and live safe and dignified lives in the community
- Individuals and families are self-determining, resilient and can enjoy their rights
- The ASRC is a visible and valued partner in the asylum seeker and refugee support sector and movement
- There are fair and just laws and policies in place for people seeking asylum and refugees that respect and uphold their human rights

Our Foundations

What needs to be in place internally to enable us to succeed?

- People seeking asylum and refugees are directed to the support they request, internally or externally, in a timely manner
- The ASRC delivers activities and services in a culturally safe, trauma informed and strengths based manner
- The ASRC supports activities and services with robust, fit for purpose and appropriate systems with accessible and accurate data
- The ASRC has a robust, inclusive and trusted system for people with lived experience of seeking asylum to provide feedback and shape service design and delivery
- The ASRC uses feedback and evidence to continuously improve and adapt our work, and this is communicated back to our community
- The ASRC has a thriving workforce where wellbeing is central to our organisational culture
- The ASRC resources programs sufficiently and undertakes ongoing management and planning to ensure integrated service delivery
- The ASRC employs people with lived experience of seeking asylum at all levels
- The ASRC undertakes active recruitment and management of a suitable volunteer base
- The ASRC is financially sustainable with diversified source of income
- The ASRC is independent and committed to advocacy for systemic change
- The ASRC has consistent, constructive engagement and collaboration with others in the movement
- The ASRC is responsive and remains in sensitive, humanitarian contexts

Our assumptions

What assumptions are we making about how our desired change will occur?


- Decision makers and or entities governed by the ASRC and partners
- Supporters are kept motivated and have time to take action on development goals
- People with lived experience that responded to previous short and medium term goals and outcomes in their own meaning
- The ASRC occupies a niche within the field in particular, it has a unique role to play in the sector
- Individuals have sufficient resources and skills to allow being self-reliant
- The movement is likely to be developed to people seeking asylum and refugees
- Our core members, allies and leaders have strong leadership capabilities

Highlights of the strategic plan implementation by Goals



Embedding the Voices of people seeking asylum and HRBA Focused Actions (Goal 1 & 2)

Goal	Selected success indicators	Target	Achievement
1	Newly hired staff with lived experience of seeking asylum	30%	31(21%)as of Sept 2023
	Retention of staff with lived experience	80%	Not yet defined
2	Staff completed HRBA trainings	100%	76 (52%)



Improving experiences of People Seeking Asylum (Goal 3)

Results of Baseline Surveys
(Members, workforce and
community partners survey)

—Results (Members survey)

“ I feel welcome and safe at the ASRC.” 82%

“ I believe the ASRC listens to and treats me with respect and dignity.” 84%

” I feel comfortable providing feedback or making a complaint to the ASRC if I am unhappy with any of the services.” 65%

“Because this center held my hand like a savior and connected me to life when I was in the most difficult situation, and I was about to commit suicide and I was disappointed with everyone and everything.”



—Results (Members survey)

I felt I had a say in how the ASRC can be run, including in planning services and priorities. - **69%**

I felt confident in making informed decisions about my protection claim.- **68%**

I trust that the ASRC takes my feedback seriously. -**78%**

—Results (workforce survey)

Workforce agreed that “the ASRC is a rights-based organisation that works with people seeking asylum and refugees to seek their rights and understand their responsibilities.” – **67%**

Workforce who agreed that “the ASRC embeds the voices of people seeking asylum and refugees in its work.”- **72%**

Workforce who agreed, “I work with people seeking asylum and refugees for them to seek their rights and understand their responsibilities.” – **73%**

—Results (workforce survey)

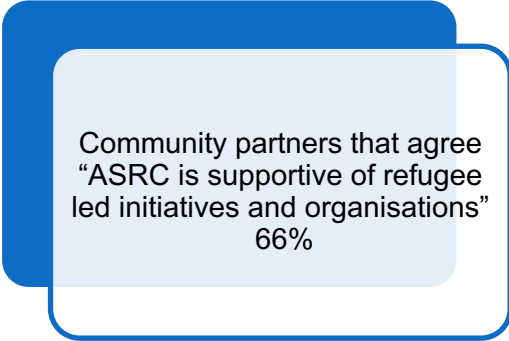
Workforce who report that “The ASRC operates in a trauma informed manner”
53%

Workforce who report that “The ASRC operates in a strengths-based manner”
46%

Workforce who state that the ASRC operates in a culturally safe manner
70%



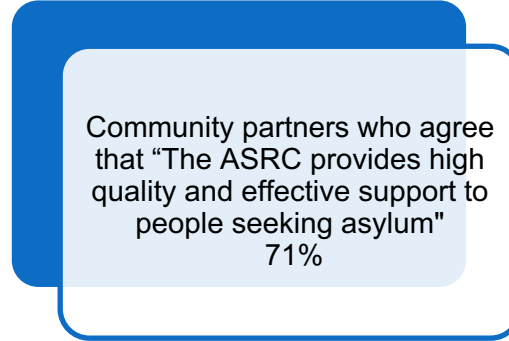
—Results (community partners survey)



Community partners that agree
“ASRC is supportive of refugee
led initiatives and organisations”
66%

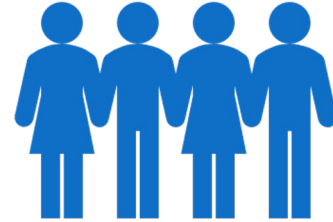


Community partners who report
that “The ASRC operates in a
strengths-based manner”
43%



Community partners who agree
that “The ASRC provides high
quality and effective support to
people seeking asylum”
71%

ASRC as a Valued Advocacy org. in the Sector(Goal 4)



**Identified priorities of advocacy
and built consensus**

**Disbursed capacity building grants
for 13 refugee led organisations**

Discussion

- Although targets were set for affirmative action in the strategic plan, there were no baselines nor industry benchmarks available
- Majority respondents of the three baseline surveys indicated that the ASRC is a rights-based organisation and embeds the voices of people seeking asylum which shows a positive tendency of the organisation towards HRBA but not sure about their understanding about HRBA.
- Gaps were also observed in the surveys in embedding the voices of people seeking asylum, trauma informed, human rights and strength-based approaches.
- Obtaining timely and accurate data was a challenge to track the changes due to issues related to privacy and confidentiality.

Discussion

Limitations

- It is too early to fully account for the outcomes of the introduction of HRBA.
- It was not easy to engage external stakeholders or duty bearers in the consultation and evaluation process

Lessons


- Measuring achievements with the HRBA lens was not easy (methodologically, methodically and varying levels of understanding of HRBA among the stakeholders)
- Delay and disruption of the implementation of the strategic plan due to internal and external factors
- It was not easy to change from a needs-based charity approach to HRBA in practice (due to fundraising priorities, donor expectations and established service delivery models)

Conclusion

- **HRBA** and its focus on empowerment and systemic changes have encouraged the participation of people with lived experience of seeking asylum.
- The approval and implementation of the strategic plan put the ASRC in the spotlight to be accountable to its members, staff and partners (no turning back)
- **Implications:** the inclusion of an HRBA and related indicators in our monitoring and evaluation can be used as a benchmark in the sector to evaluate services from the perspectives of service users such as people seeking asylum.
- **Future directions:** More objective research on HRBA and developing simplified tools to combine HRBA into evaluation



Acknowledgements

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 - ASRC members and workforce
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 - ASRC LT & Program Quality and Impact team
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- [ASRC strategic plan consultation document](#)
- [ASRC Outcomes Measurement Framework \(OMF\)](#)
- [Refugee Council Australia , Analysis of UNHCR Global Trends Statistics from 2013 to 2022](#)



Questions, comments or
suggestions??

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