



Image provided by CatholicCare Victoria.

Good works in progress: A collaboration of Catholic organisations towards better monitoring and evaluation for the Asylum Seeker Support Program (ASSP)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While the term ‘asylum seeker’ is often used interchangeably with ‘refugee’, there is an important legal distinction between the two terms. An asylum seeker is someone who ‘has applied for international protection and whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which the claim is submitted’.

Consequently, while they await the outcome of their application, asylum seekers do not have the legal recognition and protections afforded to refugees. This distinction highlights the vulnerable position of asylum seekers as they await a decision on their application for refuge.

In partnership with



Unlike refugees, asylum seekers face legal and social uncertainties, including limited access to work, health care, education and social services, making them more reliant on the support of charities and social service organisations².

The full report associated with this summary is a developmental evaluation of the Asylum Seeker Support Program (ASSP) administered and coordinated by CatholicCare Victoria (CCV) in partnership with St John of God Health Care (SJGHC). The evaluation was co-designed and delivered by Australian Catholic University, CCV and SJGHC.

The ASSP is a pastoral care support program for asylum seekers in Victoria that has been running since 2016. SJGHC has been the main funder and stakeholder of the ASSP. The program is an example of two Catholic organisations partnering to achieve mission-related social good. As a developmental evaluation, the report's main aims are to assist the two organisations to progress through a series of steps to prepare the program for an impact evaluation at some point in the future.

The research started life as an impact evaluation of the ASSP's housing services on the economic independence and social integration of asylum seekers. Due to various

empirical and conceptual constraints, the original research objectives were unable to be met. Despite the limitations associated with the original research objectives, the project team negotiated a change in orientation to better prepare the program to be professionally evaluated for impact and value into the future. Key aspects of the original research design could be incorporated into the current research, such as governance arrangements and the role of parish stakeholders. This research also included case studies of two of the program's past clients who were beneficiaries of the ASSP housing service.

The report overall represents a journey of change in research orientation as a deep reflection on the organisational partnership between CCV and SJGHC, as well as an examination of the value of the current ASSP in all its aspects. This research journey has seen a series of organisational, empirical and conceptual challenges for the research team. The rewards for the courage to meet these challenges, change direction, seek clarity and pursue a better path of governance and evaluation readiness have provided a renewed sense of purpose and appreciation for the program to continue the excellent work it has achieved for those experiencing marginalisation and vulnerability.

If you would like further information about the project please contact:

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¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2024). *Asylum seekers*. <https://www.unhcr.org/asylum-seekers.html>.

² Refugee Council of Australia. (2024). *Definitions: Refugees and asylum seekers*. <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/definitions/>.



Image provided by St John of God Health Care.