



Annual Report

2022-23



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Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Gadigal and Bidjigal people of the Eora Nation, the Traditional Custodians on whose lands we usually work. We pay our respects to Elders, both past and present. We also acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the various lands on which many of us work from. We acknowledge the Darug people on whose land most of our outreach programs operate from. Sovereignty was never ceded. It always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

About Us

Refugee Advice & Casework Service (RACS) is a nonprofit organisation providing essential legal support and advocacy to help people who have fled persecution find safety and protection in Australia. We are an independent public voice for the rights of stateless and displaced people, refugees, and people seeking asylum.

What We Do

RACS provides free legal support to individuals and families seeking asylum in Australia. Our services support women who have experienced or fear domestic, family, gender-based or sexual violence; members of the LGBTQIA+ community; stateless people; children who have been separated from their parents; refugees separated from family members who are hoping to reunite in Australia; and people in detention. We provide legal support for a range of protection visas; assist in family reunification; assist Australian-born children to access citizenship; and lodge appeals to Government.

Message from the President

Chris Yoo

Around 10 years on from having the privilege to join and serve on the RACS Management Committee there has been one constant. While the world has changed around us in countless ways – the more things change, the more they also stay the same. The challenges of war, persecution and displacement faced by asylum seekers and refugees remain ever-present and the need for an organisation like RACS to walk alongside that community, champion their rights and do whatever is possible to save lives is as important as ever. Australia is lucky to have the RACS team to step up to that need, which it has now done again for its 36th year.

RACS remains the only dedicated community legal service for people seeking protection in NSW. Nationally, it is recognised as a leader amongst community organisations dedicated to this cause.

It remains a privilege to be involved with a team that constantly innovates to respond to the changing landscape of need.

As one example of RACS's agility, this year we established a dedicated service for people fearing harm due to their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression or sex characteristics. The team has listened to the needs of the community and adapted its practices to ensure the service offered is safe, welcoming and inclusive.

2023 has also been a year in which RACS has grown from strength to strength in its advocacy work, navigating a shifting political and funding landscape, and emerging as a leader in advocating for structural changes to establish more humane refugee and immigration policies. Somewhere in between ensuring it can meet the needs of its clients at the frontline of service delivery, RACS could also be found at the frontline of policy change – via its media appearances, engaging in parliamentary roundtables, senate inquiries and significant policy submissions.

Much of this can be attributed to the work of Centre Director and Principal Solicitor, Sarah Dale. I want to honour Sarah for her tireless efforts leading RACS. By the time you read this, she will have completed 10 years working at RACS, including over four years at its helm. Sarah is a fierce and fearless advocate – exactly the ally refugees and people seeking asylum can count on – and a leader who is well loved by the RACS team and well respected within the refugee rights sector. I have no doubt that RACS will continue to grow in influence and impact under her leadership.

I thank our staff, volunteers and pro bono partners for showing up daily for our clients. Your commitment is changing the lives of individuals and families, for many at a time of immense vulnerability.

Finally, I would like to thank our Ambassadors, Patrons and RACS supporters for the ongoing contribution they make to the mission of RACS. It is encouraging to know we have friends and allies in the fight for justice and dignity for and with refugees.

I thank all of the extended RACS family for your ongoing support of the organisation.



Chris Yoo President, RACS Management Committee

Message from the Centre Director

Sarah Dale

The past 12 months has ushered in immense changes to the lives of refugees, both in Australia and around the globe. RACS, for another year, has remained at the forefront of the fight for justice for those seeking asylum and I'm incredibly proud of the work our team has achieved. We've risen to political and legal challenges and continue to grow our organisation as we support the increasing number of people who seek our services.

We've seen a new Federal Government sit in office for the first time in over a decade, bringing with it incremental shifts in refugee policy. The most significant change has been the introduction of the Resolution of Status visa in February 2023. RACS jumped into action at the announcement, which finally provided a clear pathway to permanency for more than 19,000 refugees holding Temporary Protection Visas or Safe Haven Enterprise Visas. We have received 218 Resolution of Status visas for people since February and expect that number to grow before the year is out.

For the 10 years that I have worked in this space, I have never experienced such a momentous change for so many people as this.

In June, the last refugees detained on Nauru were evacuated to Australia, ending their terrible time in offshore detention. However, that is not the end of their journey through our arbitrary immigration system. Many refugees, now onshore, still face barriers to justice, as most are living on short-term bridging visas without permission to study. And we cannot ignore the further 75 people who remain in Papua New Guinea, with no end in sight to their lives in limbo. Their plight serves as a stark reminder that our work is far from complete. We continue to call for an end to Australia's harrowing offshore processing policy. Justice will not be served until a permanent place to call home is found for all needing protection.

Our advocacy work has led us to Canberra many times over the last year, reminding those in Government of

the urgent need for coordinated efforts to address the ongoing displacement crisis in our global community. We have continued to advocate for an increase in Australia's humanitarian intake, particularly impacting the communities RACS has long supported – those from Afghanistan, Iran, Sudan and Myanmar. We continue to call for the extensive changes necessary to restore justice and dignity to our visa processing, including the need for financial support and assistance for those people whilst they await an outcome, the need to return to international law as first principles in our protection system, the abolition of temporary visas and fast track processing and a genuine and attainable pathway to family reunification.

We are immensely grateful to all our supporters over the last 12 months, from donors to volunteers, from interns to pro bono lawyers. We are especially grateful to UNSW and the UNSW Law and Justice department for their continued support of the work we do.

This coming year will mark my 10th year at RACS. When I began in 2013, I was excited to join a passionate and committed team defending the rights of people seeking asylum. The past decade has been marred by the curtailment of rights, a denial of justice and an insurmountable human cost to those who simply sought our safety.

However, whilst it seems incremental right now, there is a pathway to progress towards a system we have called for. We remain a determined, driven and resolute team, always standing alongside our community to pave the way for a future where justice prevails, and every individual is afforded the dignity and respect they deserve.



Sarah Dale Centre Director and Principal Solicitor

The Resolution of Status Visa:

A Path to Security and Stability

In February 2023, the Australian
Government announced that people seeking
safety in Australia eligible to hold or holding
a Temporary Protection Visa or Safe Haven
Enterprise Visa (TPV or SHEV) would now
have a pathway to permanency in Australia
through the grant of a Resolution of
Status visa.

The Resolution of Status visa, or RoS, was introduced as a response to the critical concerns surrounding the long-standing temporary protection regime, which left 19,000 individuals in a state of uncertainty for over a decade. Despite being found to be refugees, those who held TPVs or SHEVs were required to reapply after a certain period, subjecting them to ongoing uncertainty and stress. The RoS visa removes this exhausting process, reducing the emotional and financial burden on those who had already undergone extensive assessments.

RACS was relieved at the life-changing implication of this much-awaited news, as we assist thousands of people each year seeking asylum in Australia, including providing a dedicated service to those whose only option was to apply for a TPV or SHEV.

Since the announcement in February 2023, RACS has submitted 457 RoS applications and received RoS visas for 218 people. These numbers reflect our work as of June 30, and we expect hundreds more RoS visas to be granted before February 2024, as per commitments made by the Government.

The RoS visa creates a way forward for thousands of families to gain Australian citizenship, access full working and education rights and begin the process of family reunification. Temporary visa holders cannot sponsor family members to come to Australia, but with permanent visas and eventually, citizenship, hundreds of individuals will be able to reunite with their family in Australia. We anticipate an increase in clients accessing our dedicated Family Reunion program in the next few months, as more RoS visas are granted.

We're grateful the Government implemented the Resolution of Status visa after more than a decade of calls for meaningful change, but recognise significant change still needs to come for those not included in this announcement and to address the systemic issues still embedded in the asylum process.

The Resolution of Status visa brings with it the potential to positively transform the lives of these refugees, as evidenced by the hundreds of people RACS has already helped to finally call Australia home. RACS looks forward to the day when all who need protection in Australia are afforded the same opportunity.

CASE STUDY

maryan's Story

In 2012, Maryam and her family arrived in Australia from Iran, by boat. They were forced to flee all they knew for fear of persecution and torture.

The family arrived with no protection, no support and no finances.

"Everything was very, very hard for the last few years."

Maryam began the overwhelmingly complex process of applying for protection visas for herself, her daughter and husband. However, the financial cost of such visas was insurmountable.

Eventually, Maryam reached out to RACS for legal support in 2013. RACS has since assisted the family to be recognised as refugees, in order to be granted protection. The legal process was as long as it was arduous, and the family experienced their fair share of setbacks.

Maryam's application was rejected twice before both she and her daughter were finally recognised as refugees and were able to apply for protection visas.

Unfortunately, Maryam's husband was refused recognition – and therefore a visa – again and again.



RACS client Maryam and her daughter.

Through the RACS Judicial Review Program, Maryam's husband made one final attempt at an appeal, and was granted a 5-year visa.

"I got my husband. My daughters got their father. I didn't just get a visa. I got my family."

With the announcement of the Resolution of Status visa in February, Maryam and her family were supported by RACS to apply for permanent visas.

In June 2023, after 12 long years of waiting for permanency, Maryam and her family were granted Resolution of Status visas.

"It will be easier for us: when I get [protection] it's a good feeling because nobody can tell me 'you don't have a visa."

"I'm very happy...RACS helped me. They didn't care where I am from. They just want to help."

RACS Supervising Senior Solicitor and Maryam's lawyer,

Ben Lumsdaine, has worked with the family since 2015.

"The mental and emotional relief this permanent visa brings is invaluable," Ben said.

"Her youngest daughter was born here, and her oldest daughter has been here since she was an infant; they don't know any other country. This is their home."

Although the many years of the legal process took a huge toll on the family, the significance of a permanent visa enables the family to now apply for citizenship and achieve their long-held dreams of further education and opening their own business.

The Resolution of Status visa gives Maryam and her family the certainty they have been looking for since they left Iran.

RACS is so relieved that her permanent protection has been granted and grateful to the family for sharing their story.

Women at Risk

Helping women who have suffered or are at risk of gender or domestic violence.



260Legal sessions

170 Clients

The following case study is a testament to how vulnerable our clients can be, how many external service providers a client may require and the maze they still have to navigate once onshore, at times on their own. This case makes clear that without appropriate legal assistance, valid protection claims can quite easily fade within our system. We work with many organisations to strengthen the bridge between legal, health and welfare service providers, by sharing knowledge and training in the hopes of significantly improving the way valid protection claims are presented to the Department.



Learn more about RACS's other programs at www.racs.org.au

CASE STUDY

Aisha's Story

Having fled her country from a remote village, Aisha arrived in Australia after being granted a humanitarian visa. After a few years, Aisha lodged an application to sponsor a man she had never met on a partner visa. A year after that, Aisha proceeded to apply for Australian citizenship.

When processing both applications, the Department of Home Affairs raised some concerns, as the information provided by Aisha for both applications varied greatly to what was already in the Department's system. As a result of these inconsistencies, Aisha's sponsorship and citizenship applications were refused. Her humanitarian visa was also cancelled. After years of lawfully living in Australia and receiving permanent protection, Aisha became unlawful. It was only after Aisha approached RACS for help that her unique challenges and vulnerabilities become apparent.

Aisha had numerous unique vulnerabilities, including illiteracy as a result of never attending school in her home country; very few interpreters could speak her language; and various health conditions including depression, anxiety, alcoholism and suicidal ideation. Further health reports suggested psychosis and partial dementia.

As a result of her language barriers, poor health and memory, Aisha heavily relied on others for her visa applications. With friends or acquaintances assisting on different occasions, none of whom were legally trained, the responses sent to the Department began to conflict. This ultimately led the Department to question Aisha's identity and credibility.

RACS assisted Aisha to lodge another protection visa, however in order to process this new application, the Department requested the prior inconsistencies be addressed. RACS was able to gather the many medical reports, liaise with Aisha's social workers and prepare a detailed and coherent statement for the Department. While her protection visa remains pending, this statement and supporting evidence was able to provide context and reconfirm her protection claims, aiming to put Aisha's best case forward for reconsideration.

A pseudonym has been used to protect the identity of this client.

Our Achievements

RACS has worked tirelessly over the last 12 months to improve access to justice for refugees and people seeking asylum, through casework and our advocacy. Some of our achievements are listed here.





Policy and advocacy

Each year, RACS is asked to contribute legal submissions to parliamentary inquiries. Our policy team is dedicated to crafting these submissions, which explain in detail the current justice system in reference to refugees and people seeking asylum.

RACS made four policy submissions to the Government in the last 12 months:

- The Migration Amendment (Evacuation to Safety) Bill 2023;
- Migration, pathway to nation building;
- Responding to the Humanitarian Program Discussion Paper; and
- · Operation of Commonwealth FOI laws.

Each policy submission requires weeks of dedicated work by our policy team. This is a large part of our advocacy work, ensuring Government representatives, international bodies and local communities are all aware of the legislative flaws and changes needed to create a justice system that is fair and equitable for all.

Community Sessions

RACS coordinated and attended 34 community sessions over the last year, across the many communities we serve. These community sessions are a way for RACS to present specific and timely legal advice about family reunification, and visa and citizenship applications to refugees, their families and their supporters. Community members are able to ask our senior solicitors their questions directly, ensuring we actively work towards making justice accessible.

Awards

Best Project

RACS Afghanistan Crisis Response Clinic 2022 NSW Humanitarian Awards

The RACS Afghanistan Crisis Response Clinic was awarded Best Project as part of the 2022 NSW Humanitarian Awards, organised by the Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) and the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA). The awards commend people and organisations who've made an exceptional contribution towards refugee and asylum seeker issues.

Finalist

Law Firm of the Year 2023 Lawyer's Weekly Australian Law Awards

RACS was a finalist in the 2023 Australian Law Awards, for "Law Firm of the Year". We were nominated alongside some incredible firms and humbled to be recognised for our work.

Finalist

Academic of the Year 2023 Lawyer's Weekly Australian Law Awards

Katie Roberston is the Director of the Stateless
Legal Clinic, in partnership with RACS, The University
of Melbourne and the Peter McMullin Centre on
Statelessness. Katie's work is vital in ensuring stateless
children born in Australia are granted citizenship.
We are proud to work alongside Katie and grateful
for the service she provides to stateless children and
their families.

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Our Impact at a Glance

for FY 2022-2023



Resolution of Status

Since the Government announcement in February 2023, RACS has worked to submit hundreds of RoS visa applications, with hundreds more expected to be granted before the end of 2023.

Applications submitted

Resolution of Status visas granted



Women at Risk

Our Women at Risk program supports women who have suffered or are at risk of gender or domestic violence. This program assists with visa applications, including protection and temporary visas, and bridging visas; attending interviews and hearings; and connecting women with health and welfare services.

260 Legal services provided

Clients in the Women at Risk program



Volunteers

We are immensely grateful to all our volunteers who support our legal team each year, many of whom are just beginning their legal careers. Without our volunteers, RACS simply wouldn't exist.

Volunteers

Universities

11,373 Volunteer hours



Family Reunion

The Family Reunion service provides individuals with advice about their options to sponsor family members to come to Australia. RACS assists with preparing applications and sponsorship forms, and providing legal representation at interviews and tribunals.

173 Family Reunion clients assisted



Legal Support

RACS provides a range of legal support to refugees each year, from first interaction at our outreach clinic or over the phone, through to tailored legal advice to support them through the legal process.

14,703 Legal requests answered

Department of Home Affairs interviews attended



Community Sessions

RACS coordinates and attends many community sessions each year, across the many communities we serve. These sessions are a way for RACS to present specific and timely legal advice to community members and provide an opportunity to ask our senior solicitors legal questions directly.

34 Community sessions held



Pro Bono

Thank you to the hundreds of pro bono lawyers who assist us in supporting refugees and people seeking asylum throughout the grueling legal process.

10,465+ Hours provided by 16 firms



Policy and advocacy

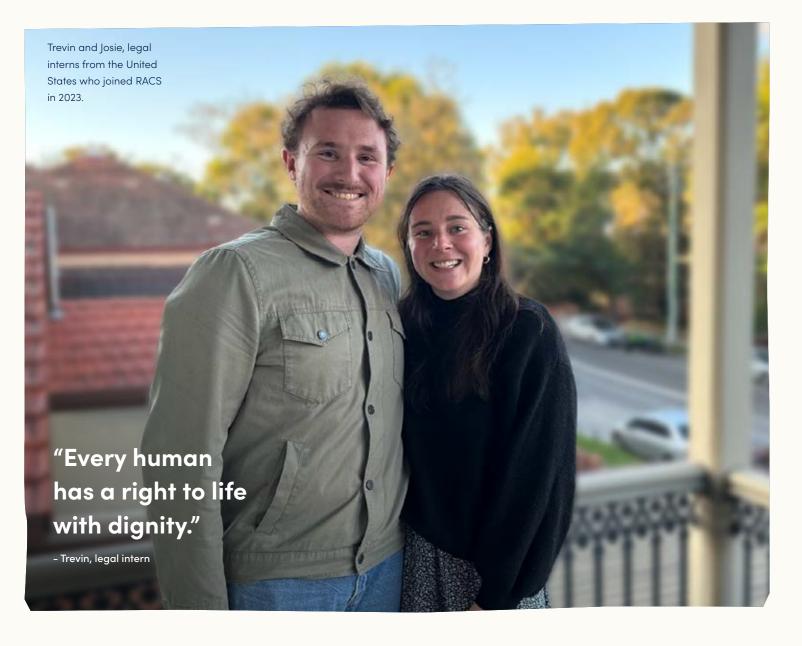
Policy submissions

Public hearings attended



Secondees

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Volunteers and Interns

RACS was supported by 111 legal volunteers in the last 12 months, who provided over 11,000 hours of free legal support to thousands of refugees and people seeking asylum.



111

11,373Volunteer hours

Our volunteers are an integral part of our team; RACS simply wouldn't exist without volunteers. Our solicitors provide invaluable legal training to each volunteer, equipping them with the skills and knowledge to triage clients over the phone. Over the course of the last year, our volunteers played a pivotal role in helping clients and their families obtain permanent protection in Australia. Many of our volunteers were able to deliver the good news to clients themselves that their protection visas had been granted.

We hosted volunteers from six Australian universities: University of NSW, University of Sydney, Western Sydney University, Macquarie University, University of Technology Sydney and University of Newcastle. RACS also hosted two legal interns from the United States, from Santa Clara University and Indiana University.

Trevin AndersonSoria and Josephine Haseman joined us from two US universities for their summer internship program. They spent their six weeks with RACS assisting our legal clinics, helping to prepare legal submissions and learning the legal issues refugees face in Australia.

Trevin

"I have greatly enjoyed my time working with RACS. The sense of community in the office stems from every person wanting to make a difference, and from the common belief that every human has a right to life with dignity. The team of solicitors, administrators, PLTs and volunteers approach their work with perseverance and treat each client with respect and compassion. They provide each client with enthusiastic advocacy which often goes above and beyond.

While at RACS, I had the opportunity to help draft their submission to the Australian Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights, in which we advocated for a federal Human Rights Act. I researched Australia's offshore processing of migrants and current policies such as Operation Sovereign Borders and wrote about how a federally legislated Human Rights Act would help ensure the human rights of refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia in the future.

RACS serves as a reminder that wherever injustice exists in the world, it is overshadowed tenfold by the endeavours of those advocating for a better way, a kinder way.

It's been said that when we save one life, we save the world - the Refugee Advice and Casework Service has saved the world many times over.

I am honoured and humbled to have been a part of their efforts, if only for a few weeks."

– Trevin AndersonSoria, 2025 Juris Doctor Candidate, Santa Clara University School of Law

Josie

"I had the opportunity as a law student from the United States to join the RACS team during my summer break. It's been an incredible experience.

I had little experience with the Australian legal system and was prepared to feel a bit out of place. Thankfully, my colleagues at RACS were always ready to answer any questions and work with me through any problem. Despite flying halfway across the world, it was hard not to recognise that a lot of the issues facing refugees and people seeking asylum are very similar to those at home.

The ethical and moral obligation to try and diminish or solve these problems remains the same regardless of where they are taking place.

Each day, I got the chance to work with the lawyers at RACS and provide people at risk with invaluable legal advice and services. Over time, I got to see that some of this work produces real, life-changing results.

I am so proud to have had the chance to be a part of this organisation and I know this experience will be a strong influence in any work I do in the future."

– Josephine Haseman, Juris Doctor Candidate, Indiana University Maurer School of Law

Our Pro Bono Partners

Each year, our work is supported by 16 generous law firms who supply our team and clients with thousands of hours of pro bono work.

This past year, these firms have provided

pro bono hours to RACS.

10,465+

We are grateful and humbled by the work of the teams at these firms and for their continued commitment to supporting people seeking asylum.

Allen & Overy

Allens

Arnold Bloch Leibler

Baker McKenzie

Barry Nilsson

Dentons

Gilbert + Tobin

Hall & Wilcox

Herbert Smith Freehills

King Wood & Mallesons

Lander & Rogers

Norton Rose Fulbright

NSW Bar Association

Slater & Gordon

Wotton & Kearney



Testimonials

We are immensely grateful for the work of all secondees who spend the better part of six months with RACS, training and learning the complexities of refugee and humanitarian law and policy.

Between 2022-2023, RACS hosted nine secondees from a number law firms who assisted RACS solicitors with client casework and advocacy. The following are three testimonials from secondees and law graduates who completed their secondment with RACS.



Julia Barham | Barry Nilsson

"My role at RACS varies each day - some days I am speaking with clients and answering their enquiries, while other days I am working at the back end preparing visas for lodgement. It is a pleasure to be able to assure clients that RACS will comprehensively handle their visa application process and is a service that is always available to them.

An especially impactful encounter was having the privilege of notifying a client about the grant of his permanent visa. As I guided him through the advice sheet encompassing his responsibilities, rights, and obligations as a permanent resident, I was elated to give him the news and answer his queries. The following week, he returned a call to follow-up on our conversation and to express his thanks.

Working at RACS has highlighted the inaccessibility and injustices inherent in the Australian justice system; however, the team at RACS are bright and passionate individuals who are fundamentally challenging humanitarian legislation and policy for vulnerable people seeking safe refuge."



Lydia Ganci | Allens

"It has been a pleasure to spend the last six months working at RACS. With the introduction of the Resolution of Status visa earlier this year, it has been a very busy but also exciting time for RACS's clients. It has been wonderful to see so many clients obtain permanent visas after nearly a decade of uncertainty.

For me, two particular highlights were assisting a client being granted a permanent visa and released from detention after ten years; and assisting a family at the Immigration Assessment Authority to obtain a refugee finding, who are now on the pathway to obtaining their permanent visas. These positive outcomes are wonderful news and a direct result of RACS's continued advocacy. It has been a privilege to be able to assist RACS in providing that service.

As a secondee from Allens, it has been very important to see how RACS works with commercial firms through their pro bono practices. A secondment has been a great way for me to gain a better understanding of the work RACS does and really become immersed in the practice. It has meant that I have been able to take carriage of matters and follow them through over the six-month period. I also feel that I can now bring this knowledge and experience back to Allens and hopefully expand the pro bono work the firm does with RACS.

RACS is a wonderful place to work. Their team are unbelievably dedicated and caring to both the clients and staff. I felt immediately welcomed as part of the team and supported in my work. I feel very privileged to have been seconded to RACS and encourage others with the opportunity to do so."



Isabelle Yates | Barry Nilsson

"Through my pro bono placement at RACS, I assisted a range of clients in applying for their Resolution of Status visas. By doing this, I was able to offer some sense of security and belonging after they had endured punitive and dehumanising immigration policies, often for many years.

I distinctly remember the process of assisting a family of four Tamil refugees - mum and dad and their two teenage sons, who helped out with translating between Tamil and English during our phone calls. I recall when I said that their permanent visa applications were completed and submitted, I could

hear the parents' reaction once their son translated, and even though I couldn't understand what they said, the relief in their voices transcended the language barrier.

My time at RACS showed me how the practical, detail-oriented and persistent qualities to which legal practitioners aspire can be used to make tangible differences in the lives or marginalised and vulnerable groups. I am so grateful that I had the opportunity to learn from such a skilled and compassionate group of professionals."



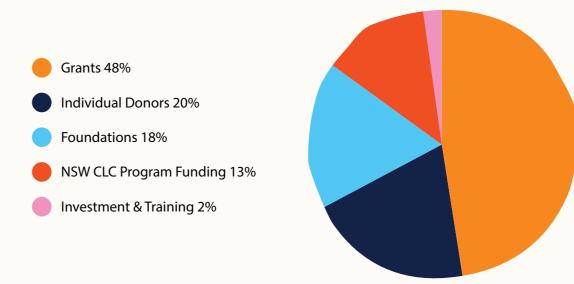
UNSW

RACS is extremely grateful to our Major Supporter, the University of New South Wales, which has provided free office space to RACS for many years and whose students complete placements in RACS's Legal Student Volunteering Program.

"UNSW Law & Justice is so proud to continue supporting RACS and its work assisting those who are most in need of this critical legal support. We value partnering with such a vital service to this vulnerable community."

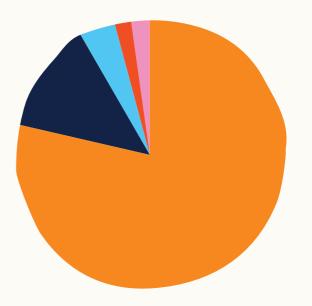
How we are funded

Where the funds come from



Where the funds are allocated





[–] Professor Andrew Lynch, Dean of the Faculty of Law & Justice at UNSW.



Thank you

Thank you to our dedicated partners and donors for supporting RACS's work. We are grateful for the legal and community support we receive each year, ensuring our critical work continues to serve refugees and people seeking asylum.

Major supporter

University of New South Wales

Funding partners

Berg Family Foundation
City of Parramatta
City of Sydney
Danks Trust
DOOLEYS Lidcombe
Catholic Club
Inner West Club Grants,
Wests Ashfield Leagues
James N Kirby Foundation
Multicultural NSW
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Pro bono barristers

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Board member

Board member
Dr Daniel Ghezelbash
Board member

Amelia McKellar Board member

Zoe Ghani



It's legal to seek asylum.



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RACS is registered with the Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits Commission (ACNC).







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