Jesuit Refugee Service South Asia

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The Jesuit Refugee Service is an International Catholic organisation established in 1980 by Pedro Arrupe SJ. Its mission is to accompany, serve and defend the cause of forcibly displaced people.

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These are dark days in Afghanistan, as insurgents step up their attacks against innocent civilians and humanitarian organizations that do their utmost to help them. In January, the Haqqani network rocked Kabul with two attacks within the space of a week: a hotel siege that killed 22; then explosives, loaded into an ambulance, that killed 103. The chilling attack on 25 January, which targeted the Save the Children premises in Jalalabad, killed six and injured many more. This attack led to their understandable decision to temporarily suspend operations in Afghanistan, a decision that will affect the future of 1.2 million children. When Fr. Prem was kidnapped in Herat in June 2014, JRS suspended operations for a month; but then decided we had to carry on, in commitment to the children and youth of Afghanistan and to their future. It was by no means an easy decision and, three years on, we must ask ourselves: What do the current circumstances call us to? Faced with such challenging situations, our presence in strife-torn regions boils down to a simple question: If we don’t do it, who will? I am reminded of the words of Vincent Cochetel of UNHCR, who was kidnapped while engaged in humanitarian service in Chechnya. In a TED Talk, when asked why he returned to work after his ordeal, he replied: “We do this because one life matters. Sometimes that’s the only difference you make – one individual, one family, a small group of individuals – and it matters.”

Our JRS service to the people we serve matters a great deal. The work of peace and reconciliation often starts from a tiny group whose voice begins as a whisper and gradually draws in others, to share a dream for a better tomorrow. Our task is to replicate oases of peace and infuse resilient young people with the spirit and skills to make their country a better place. We cannot just give up, because giving up means abandoning our people in great need, and turning off the light of hope that we have kindled together. There is a deeper reality at stake here, one that Vincent also mentions in his remarkable testimony: “If I had quit, that would have meant my kidnapper had won. They would have taken my soul and my humanity.” This is a struggle between good and evil. JRS around the world is guided and motivated by values of peace and justice, and giving up will mean giving up on these values. We need to persevere, to witness that good overcomes evil, because this is what we believe. This, of course, is no easy task. Right now, there are times when it seems foolhardy, even impossible. We need to keep asking ourselves: “How can we kindle a spark of hope and leave behind a lasting legacy? How can we continue to give hope and peace through education, even in such challenging times? How can we advocate for greater security?” I ask these questions because I feel that we need to reflect about these issues. But let our enquiries always be guided by the question: If we don’t do this, who will?
JRS Tamil Nadu organised a State level Staff and Teachers’ Training and Get-together. The event, first of its kind, was held at Trichy Multi-purpose Social Service Society Campus, on 16 and 17 December. Two hundred teachers and 35 staff from the field offices and country office participated in the training.

The participants were divided into four groups and four training sessions were conducted in order to make the trainings more effective. Each session was activity-based and promoted the following skills: concentration, attentive listening, quick thinking, decision making, team-building, coordination-cum-organisation of team work, collaboration and cooperation, trust-building, responsible leadership, self-awareness, building confidence, conflict resolution, clear and assertive communication, improvisation of imagination, positive attitude, and identifying safe places and safe adults in view of strengthening child protection.
“the event was a great success both as a training programme and as a celebration of fellowship and friendship.”

Ms Pushpa Mary JRS teacher, Tamil Nadu

Each participant realised that these useful skills could be easily transmitted to the children and other members of the refugee community in the camp. The expert team of trainers included Mr Jambulingam, Dr Sritharan, Dr Sri Priya from Loyola team and Ms Mayra and Mr Jame two Spanish volunteers from Clown Science Dreams Barcelona. The event provided ample space for a gathering together as a JRS family and for fun and frolic. The post-supper get-together was marked by singing, dancing, poetry recitals, debate, and celebration of birthdays as well as Christmas.
JRS Tamil-Nadu in collaboration with St. Joseph’s Institute of Management (JIM), Trichy, organized a preparatory training for the alumnae, who graduated from the JRS life skills training centers at Mullaikudi and Tharapuram on 20 December 2017. Forty-eight, alumnae along with the current batch of 27 trainees attended the one-day workshop. As an initial training, the workshop focused mainly on equipping the alumnae with skills that can complement the training they have received at the life skills training centers. It also helped the trainees in identifying their competencies. The facilitator stressed the fact that the participants should enhance their career-readiness by developing apt competencies, which include knowledge, skills and right attitude. Furthermore, he pointed that the job market requires the candidates to have the following skills: communications, confidence, creative and critical thinking, computer skills, and ability to work in a team.

The workshop included group activities in which the participants were divided into four groups based on their choice of a trade like embroidery, sales and marketing, accountancy, and computer application. The participants reported that the workshop provided them with new learnings and understanding about their own aptitudes, skills and competencies. They added that the workshop enhanced their confidence and hope for a better future. The participants were overjoyed to meet their batch-mates after a long period of time.
Mawi, one of the advanced-level tailoring students mentions how happy and grateful she is to Jesuit Refugee Service for the opportunity to learn many new skills at the Chin Training Center such as designing clothes, using a sewing machine, embroidery etc. She is very confident in her ability to stitch clothes for her friends and family.

On 16 December, the 2017 Graduation Day Program of the students was organized at the Chin Center, at Chanakya Place. Certificates were awarded to the advanced and basic tailoring students who had successfully completed their 6-months training at the Center. This year there were 9 students who graduated in advanced-level tailoring, 14 in basic-level tailoring and 5 in embroidery. Apart from the tailoring classes JRS also conducts Spoken English and Computer Classes for Chin refugee youth. After the completion of their JRS courses the refugee women start small business initiatives using their skills in stitching and embroidery, and sell and market their products like shirts, blouses, bed-sheets, pillow covers etc. among the members of their community, friends and relatives, and also abroad. They thus inspire and encourage women from their community to do the same. At the conclusion of the graduation ceremony, the guests and JRS staff together sang a medley of Christmas carols to usher in the festive spirit among all those gathered for the program.
#Do1Thing  Hope for refugees begins with you  JRS South Asia

To mark the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees on 14 January, JRS has launched the #Do1Thing Campaign, to share what individuals are doing to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate refugees into their communities.

What is that one thing you and I can do so that others can know that, they are not acting alone, but are part of a movement, a revolution of compassion and tenderness.
I am Arifa Mosawai; I was born in a very poor family. My father is very old. He is a simple worker and he does not know Dari language. He did not study in school. My brother met with an accident and he is not able to work. Life become very difficult for us. Nevertheless, I am continuing my school. This is my experience as a student in Jesuit Refugee Service in Daikundi Province. I learned many skills such as reading, speaking, listening and writing. I am fortunate to study in this JRS program. I realize that if I do not study I will be in the darkness of ignorance in this world. I will not be able to speak in public today. The kind teachers in our village who teach English classes are very effective and changed my entire life. For example, as girls we have many problems in Afghanistan. They do not have the right to choose and decide about their life. The girls do not have the right to go to school. I am a very lucky girl, because I can read and write everything written in English. I can write on a topic and I can read books in English. I can teach others. JRS taught me how I can be a successful person; how to help other girls to improve and be educated; and how to share knowledge with others. In addition, if I go somewhere outside my country, I will not have any problem in communicating with others even if they speak to me in a different language. Education provided by JRS has changed my life and saved us from ignorance. I am very thankful to JRS for giving me this opportunity to reach the first step of my dream.

Written by
Arifa Masawi, JRS student
October 2017 marked the fourth year that I decided to serve with JRS-Afghanistan. The thought first crossed my mind while I was completing my philosophy studies in Chennai, in 2005. It was the same year that JRS launched its educational programs in Herat. Since then, many Jesuits and lay volunteers have served with JRS in different capacities and in various provinces of Afghanistan. After my ordination, I was assigned to a parish for socio-pastoral ministry for 18 months. As a young Jesuit, I was looking for challenging, apostolic involvement, and the thought of volunteering in Afghanistan revisited me. Having spent the last four years in that country has afforded me grace and opportunities. As a frontier mission of the Society of Jesus, it has been at times demanding, yet fulfilling. The JRS presence in Afghanistan is a concrete expression of our faith in God, who identifies with the poor and marginalized. It has been encouraging to see so many young Afghans, particularly girls, seeking to participate in JRS’s programs.

“Studying for the online diploma program has offered me a unique experience that has not only improved my understanding of the subject matter, but has also put me in direct contact with people from other religions and cultures”.

-Sahar  JRS Student Bamiyan
JRS’s educational curriculum in Afghanistan includes courses in English language, teacher training, IT, adult literacy classes, Konkur classes, an onsite/online certificate and diploma programs in liberal studies at the university level, and higher education training for the education department staff. JRS is presently serving in four provinces: Herat, Kabul, Bamiyan, and Daikundi. These educational programs are largely concentrated in urban areas, but always with the vision of reaching out to marginalized communities. Forced displacement—due to ongoing conflicts in rural areas, as well as natural disasters—has driven many people to live in informal settlements on the outskirts of the cities.

![Number of Students passed in Konkur exam in 2016](image)

Every year, JRS provides around 9,000 youth and children with quality educational programs across different learning centres in the four provinces. In 2013, in collaboration with Jesuit World Wide Learning (JWL), JRS launched its first higher education learning centre in Herat. The English language courses and the onsite/online diploma programs, which are offered in collaboration with Jesuit universities worldwide, provide access to higher education to the refugee community.
JRS educational initiatives have grown to be centres of excellence that above all provide safe spaces for girls to study and improve their English skills. These creative programs truly reflect the JRS Global Education Initiative (GEI) in reaching out to the vulnerable sections of society and forming future community leaders. It has empowered the students by giving them hope and opportunity to create a more viable future for themselves and for their communities.

* Names has been changed

“Studying in the program has helped me to improve my thinking and communication skills. More profoundly, the experience provided me contact with students from various parts of the world, which has allowed me to grow in mutual respect and understanding”.

Samargul, JRS Bamiyan
Thank You

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