

REFUGE

Jesuit Refugee Service Indonesia

Accompany, Serve, and Advocate the Cause of Forcibly Displaced People

My Short Experience with JRS

Accompaniment - Encountering Those Forsaken

Baking Bread



My Short Experience with JRS

Giftra Pratama



(Clockwise) Dion, Giftra, Rani, Diah, Dony, Ririn, Risha, Elis, and Rosi in front of JRS House

My name is Giftra, an IT student from President University. I am now in my last period of study, and I am in an ongoing formation process of Magis Jakarta, a community that helps me to know more about God. This community offers me an array of different methods in searching for God. One of it is immersion, learning while living with marginalized communities. I was placed in JRS Bogor together with my 3 friends Risha, Dony, and Ririn.

When we arrived at the JRS' house, Gading, Elis, Diah, and Rani from JRS greeted us. Then brother Dion came and gave us short orientation about JRS and the refugee situation.

We immediately followed JRS' activities that day. We headed to Ciawi Public Hospital. There Dion and I went to meet Musa, an Afghani

man. He came to accompany his 46 years old mother for her cervical cancer treatment. We talked about many things with him. One thing I learned about Musa was that he really loves his mother. He was also a very smart and creative man who encouraged other refugees to provide education for refugee children in that area.

Then we went to see Maya, a 12 years old Afghani girl. She has Down syndrome and was hospitalized for few days because of epilepsy. After hearing Dion's story about her, I was so amazed on how God worked for her and her family. Few days ago Maya was in a coma, doctors had even already asked her family to be prepared to lose her. But God had another plan and she recovered. I saw it with my own eyes that Maya could go home cheerfully.

We also visited Rasid, a 20 years old refugee from Afghanistan, to give him assistance for food and shelter. When we came to see him, Rasid looked really stressed. A day earlier, he went to UNHCR office in Jakarta for his resettlement application, but before he got to see the officer, he had to persuade the security guards. I hope our presence could serve as refreshment for Rasid to continue his life from the assistance and accompaniment given by JRS.

On the second day, Diah took me to JRS Learning Centre. I joined an English class facilitated by brother Afsar. In that session all students were invited to practice English by discussing about a topic, "Should parents save money for their children or just spend the money for themselves?" Three Afghani brothers and I were exchanging arguments and expressing our opinions about it. The discussion was very lively and we could express ourselves really well.

From JRS Learning Centre, we continued our service by visiting an Afghani family who applied for assistance to cover their daily needs. JRS went there for a need assessment. The head of the family was Syarif; he took his family to Indonesia to avoid persecution from the Taliban. After they have arrived in

Indonesia, they faced another challenge. Their economic condition was very alarming. They struggled with their finances and couldn't understand the exchange rate. Moreover, their 4 years old twins were malnourished and often hospitalized. The parents could eat only once per day.

In the evening, Diah and I continue our journey to brother Afsar's place. As soon as we got there, brother Afsar served us some dates, warm coffee, and biscuits. On the third day, we ended our short experience with JRS by having a big delicious lunch with all JRS staff, and then we said goodbye and left Bogor.

Overall, I am very grateful to have this experience with JRS to serve our brothers and sisters, the refugees and asylum seekers in Bogor area. I could learn about their experiences and struggles. I am so blessed I could learn from JRS staff, coming from different background, they have one mission to serve refugees and asylum seekers. I believe the Holy Spirit works through them. I hope all JRS staff keep up the spirit to serve those in need. One day, I hope I'll be joining with JRS again.

*Names of refugees and asylum seekers have been changed to protect identities



Giftra and his group shared their experience with JRS with other Magis Jakarta members

Accompaniment - Encountering Those Forsaken

Zainuddin



Rohingya refugees practise typing on a computer

It was 10:35 am in the morning, Bayeun Village refugee camp in Aceh Timur started to become alive. Rohingya refugees had started their activities. Some teenage refugees gathered in one of the classrooms to begin their English session, whilst a group of children in one corner of a semi permanent wooden building began their play and study sessions with some NGO volunteers. At the other corner, some female refugees and their children sat in a circle with other volunteers. Yet another group was sitting under the trees talking. These were common impressions of the situation in this camp.

After visiting for several days and observing the refugees' activities, I noticed a teenage boy

sitting alone in a tent, while his friends were outside. I was so curious, so I went to see him. "My name Mohammad Hasan," he introduced himself. Looking shy and unconfident, he answered my questions with inarticulate Indonesian. "Saya no like study, saya hari-hari duduk di sini. Sore hari saya play football (I don't like studying, I sit here every day. In the afternoon, I play football)". During my early days here I had never seen him joining his friends in classes.

I couldn't believe Hasan didn't like studying. I tried to find out why he was reluctant to join his friends in studying English or other subjects. One day, I finally got the answer. "Brother, I

don't like study, I'm embarrassed. I can't read, I can't write," he answered when I urged him to tell me why.

After observing for few days, I realized Hasan was not the only one. There were also Rofik, Mohammed Aziz, and Armin who were just sitting around during the study time. They felt discouraged to join the classes for being illiterate.

Then an idea came to me, to do a special and personal intervention for them. I asked my friends to accompany Hasan and the other boys to learn how to read and write. From meeting to meeting we could see they were getting more excited to learn.

One and a half months later, Hasan looked different. He seemed more cheerful and confident. *"Brother, now I can write my name. This is father, this is mother, and this is my sister"*, Hasan wrote his parents' and sibling's name on a small white board. I complimented him with a big smile on my face.

Hasan is a symbol of forgotten refugees, those left behind. While some refugees get up and join activities, there are some out of sight.

Those who are afraid to show themselves, those who are shy and unconfident, they're the ones who need intervention.

While most people choose to pay attention to those who can be seen, we should look out and pay more attention to those invisible. In addressing big needs when caring for people, there are often some small aspects out of our sight. In ensuring no one is forgotten or left behind lays the real value of genuine accompaniment.

Since their arrival in May 2015, much support has been provided to the Rohingya arrivals in Aceh by the local and international community. In an euphoric outpour of sympathy and welcome for the Rohingya guests communities, local and national government were moved to helping them.

As time goes by, the waves of assistance provided for the refugees still continue. Not less than 18 local, national, and international organizations, in cooperation with local governments, are doing their part to help refugees; UNHCR, IOM, JRS, Save The Children,



Writing lesson for Rohingya refugees



English study materials used by Rohingya refugees in Aceh

Dompot Dhuafa, PKPU, Insan TV, Sheep Indonesia Foundation, Peduli Muslim, Red Crescent Indonesia, ACF, CMC, Roja TV, MSF, As-sunni, MDMC, Geutanyoe Foundation, BPBD, Tagana, and Aceh Timur District and Langsa City government, and Immigration Office are working together in helping the Rohingya refugees.

This is a very interesting phenomenon, as it is different to the common response to refugees in Indonesia. Asylum seekers and refugees are usually tended to only by Immigration, UNHCR and IOM who have a direct mandate from or agreement with the Indonesian government. The response to Rohingya refugees and Bangladesh immigrants in Aceh involved local authorities, humanitarian agencies, and community groups collaborating together in a Rohingya Task Force organized by Aceh Timur District and Langsa City government, providing the space for many parts of society to participate, expressing a commitment and concern on refugee and asylum seeker issues. But the involvement of many parties needed proper management and guidelines addressing miscommunication, coordination and overlapping in services, conflict of interests, or even how to avoid jealousy by the local community. Based on this experience, it was necessary to establish guidelines for community based humanitarian

care for refugees. Guidelines based on these experiences are currently combined by Sheep Indonesia Foundation and will be published in the coming months.

As much material support was provided by generous organizations, JRS chose to focus on supporting the coordination of responses as well as increase the understanding on who the Rohingya are, their status as refugees and asylum seekers in conducting public awareness activities, such as talk shows on local radio. Public discussions with government officials were facilitated by some NGOs (Geutanyoe Foundation, SCF, and Sheep Indonesia Foundation) inviting JRS to share about our understanding and experience in accompanying and serving refugees in other parts of Indonesia.

Following the principle to ensuring no refugee is left behind and no aspect is forgotten, JRS focused its support on assisting coordination, addressing emerging gaps and those forgotten, sharing information and supporting others in outreach to the local community and to the Rohingya refugees aiming to improve understanding about cultural differences.

*Names have been changed to protect identities

Baking Bread

Molly Mullen



Adelah and her husband have learned to bake Afghani flat bread to sell to the refugee community where they live in the outskirts of Jakarta

How am I going to provide for my children? This question passes through the minds of all parents. But for some, it is a daily question that motivates their every move.

Adelah and Farzan wondered that same thing when they arrived in Indonesia. They had just escaped Afghanistan with their two children after the restaurant where Adelah worked was shot up in a skirmish between Taliban and government workers.

According to recent research done by JRS the refugee status process can take up to 2.5 years in Indonesia without the legal ability to work. So these parents wondered how, new to a country where they knew no one and didn't speak the language, how in a place where they couldn't legally work they would provide for their children.

Bake bread, of course.

"We knew we were in an Afghani neighbourhood, and we Afghani people eat bread with every meal," she said.

So she decided to bake and sell these large, round flat breads. Of course, she never baked bread in her life before. Farzan remembers this, laughing. The two are almost always smiling and laughing, refusing to be brought down by their circumstances.

"I remember the first few weeks ruining the bread more than once. Or I would take it out of the oven and taste one realising I forgot something in the dough," she said. But things have smoothed out in their bread-making operation. They wake up before dawn and get the giant mixing bowls down from the shelves. Farzan prepares the dough and Adelah mixes it together.

"Some mornings it is hard for me to mix the tough dough," he said, revealing one scarred right hand that is just smaller than his left. "The Taliban broke my hand a few years ago and it healed on its own. Sometimes it hurts to mix with this hand. But if we don't make the bread, we cannot earn money and our children cannot eat."

But Adelah and Farzan are two of the luckier parents seeking refuge in Indonesia. Because it is not a signatory to the convention many people are not able to find a way to make a living and rely on the meagre assistance of NGOs and church groups.

Others find themselves trapped in on of Indonesia's immigration detention centres with their children. Because so many boats filled with asylum seekers transit through Indonesia every year, the Australian government has been putting money into building and maintaining detention centres in Indonesia so they never make it to Australian shores.



JRS facilitate education activities for refugee children in Cisarua

But Adelah and Farzan try not to think about that. They just try to make life as normal for their family as they can while they wait for their refugee decision from the UN's refugee agency (UNHCR).

As they were finishing their tea, their oldest daughter Mariama came bouncing through the living room, hair in pigtails, wearing a bright red dress. She said hello to the JRS staff sitting there, in her best Indonesian Bahasa. Then she said hello in English. She laughs with her dad when he shows the JRS staff his English language homework. With so much on his mind, he is learning more slowly than his wife and daughter.

This seven year old is now enrolled in Indonesian school and spends her days off playing in the street with her Indonesian neighbours. And for all of the English she has learned, she doesn't know the word "refugee."

"My daughter asks me why we moved to Indonesia," Farzan said. "I tell her because it is a beautiful country it is more fun here. And she doesn't ask anymore. I cannot tell her why we left or that we can never go back."

Farzan starts to cry. And then he smiles, and keeps smiling until we leave.

By Molly Mulen, JRS Asia Pacific. First published in 2013

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