

March 2015 Edition

REFUGE

Jesuit Refugee Service Indonesia

Accompany, Serve and Advocate the Cause of Forcibly Displaced People



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Choosing To Be Empowered

Triarani Utami



The situation at English class for refugees and asylum seekers, JRS Learning Centre. The class is taught by Laila, a volunteer teacher who is also an urban refugee in West Java.

Women and children are most vulnerable in regards to various issues arising during conflict and displacement. Often, they are suffering when having to deal with the social, political, educational, cultural and economic impact of war or forced displacement.

This is what happened to Laila, her mother and her sister. Violent conflict in their home country Pakistan resulted in a life full of fear. Laila, a 27-year-old woman was not able to continue her work and education at the university due to the worsening security situation. The traumatic situation of Laila and her 10-year-old sister at the time was further worsened when witnessing their mother being exposed to domestic violence.

Until one day, when the building next to their house was destroyed by a bomb blast, Laila made the decision to leave with her mother and sister.

"The three of us arrived in Jakarta in 2012. We applied for asylum at UNHCR to get protection as refugees. At that time, we did not know how long it would take to get a safer life in a third country willing to accept us."

In fact, Laila and her family had to wait a year to get refugee status, and until today, more than two years later, they are still awaiting to be accepted by a third country for resettlement.

The long wait is not without problems. When the supplies and savings they had brought from Pakistan run out, Laila and her family found it increasingly difficult to meet the basic needs of everyday life. There were times when they could just sit hungry in their room in West Java with no money or groceries left. Limited access to social and economic activities made the waiting for Laila and her family unbearable and stressful.

In mid-2014, Laila heard about JRS Learning Centre from a fellow asylum seeker. *"My friend knows that I can speak English fluently. He advised me to go to JRS Learning Centre and become a volunteer teacher for English classes for other asylum seekers."*

Soon after Laila contacted JRS staff, she began teaching at the Learning Centre. When asked why she wanted to become a volunteer teacher, Laila replied, *"In JRS Learning Centre, I am able to meet many people. Otherwise, I would just stay home with nothing to do, except to think and become more and more stressed. With teaching, I feel that I can be a person with a meaning in life."*

Until now, Laila is the only woman from the volunteer teachers at the Learning Centre. Meeting with many people who value education opened doors for Laila, who started teaching children and other adult asylum seekers, who wanted private English lessons. Currently assisted by her daughter, Laila's mother also started to volunteer in the Learning Centre, teaching other women in handicraft.

Understandably, Laila still feels sad sometimes when reflecting on her situation and what had happened to her so far. *"It has been two years now that I lived in Indonesia, and still no news about our resettlement process. I am sad to think that I have lost two years of my life in uncertainty. However, sometimes I also think, wow... I am strong enough to survive that long. Had I known if I had to wait for over two years back then, I would have given up immediately. But it turns out I can get through it."*

Laila's mother and sister are one source of strength for her to continue to survive and become the backbone of the family. *"Sometimes I can teach 5 classes a day continuously even when I have not eaten. I do this especially for my sister."*

"Maybe there will be no chance for me to realize my dreams. But my sister, she will be able to live my dream when we've got a better life later. You know, at this time my only option is to live here. I must try to find the good things that I can be thankful for, because if not, what else do I have?"

Courage and resilience often grow in unexpected ways and places. For Laila and her family, acceptance and hope become the fuel that helps them to move on through hardship and uncertainty, and allowing them choose to be empowered.

**Laila is not the real name.*



Laila and her students discuss the student worksheet at the English class. Learning activities at JRS Learning Centre allow asylum seekers and refugees to meet each other.

Dion's Empathy

Dionisius Waskita Cahya Gumilang

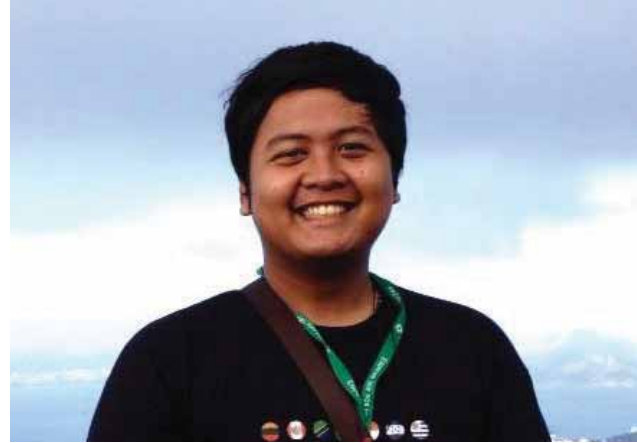
Dion is a staff of JRS Indonesia who is assigned at Manado project to assist asylum seekers in Manado Immigration Detention Centre (IDC). On 29th January 2015, a radio interview with Dion was initiated by Father Rheinner Saneba Pr and Montini Radio Manado 106 FM. On the occasion, Dion shared his experience and reflection upon his involvement with JRS:

When did you start working with JRS and what was your main motivation?

I started assisting asylum seekers in Manado IDC in January 2015. But earlier, I joined JRS as volunteer for urban refugees who lived in community housing in Bantul, Yogyakarta. The experiences I gained during my time of volunteering sparked my motivation to get more involved in the issue of refugees and asylum seekers. Particularly, the motivation came when I taught English to refugees. I found their perseverance despite being in a very difficult situation hugely inspiring. Despite all the hardships they had gone through, they were still able to feel grateful and to show hospitality towards newcomers.

I might have been their teacher but the refugees taught me more about their life lessons and values. No matter how difficult their situation was, they still greeted us teachers with a smile. They were open to share many stories too. Many, or even the majority of the stories were about despair and sorrow. I feel touched, yet at the same time embarrassed about taking things in my life for granted.

This became my main motivation to get more involved with JRS. Apart from that, my educational background was very much connected with the issues of human rights.



Dionisius Waskita, inspired by the perseverance of the refugees and asylum seekers whom he assisted.

Based on the principle that knowledge is only as good as dead wood if you don't put it into practice, I then decided to accept the challenge JRS offered to me.

What has been your most memorable experience with JRS? Have you ever encountered a difficult situation and how did you manage it?

I learned so much about the importance of accompaniment when I taught English to the refugees. One experience that had a significant impact on me was when I taught an elderly refugee from Afghanistan. He was probably at the same age as my grandfather. He had fled from his country to seek asylum from what was a life-threatening situation in Afghanistan. He could not speak English at all. So I started with teaching him the alphabet, which turned out to be very difficult for him to understand. However, his determination to learn made me even more motivated to help him.

Regardless of his limited ability to absorb the study material, he put in lots of effort to



Listening to the refugees/ asylum seekers' stories and ordeals helps them to feel dignified as well as to regain meaning to their life. This has been an important aspect of Dion's activities in accompanying the refugees/asylum seekers with JRS.

learn the alphabet. This experience taught me about the value of perseverance. People have the option either to give up or to stand up. Mr. Hakeem chose to stand up and do what he could.*

The most difficult experience at Bantul was when I had to teach a refugee with learning difficulties that found it hard to communicate. Many of the other students mocked him for being autistic, and they excluded him too. He was also temperamental and had unpredictable moods.

Realizing this situation, in our communication, I positioned myself more as a listener. This turned out to be very conducive to making him feel accepted. I believe that every one needs to be heard. By giving him someone to talk to and allowing him to express himself, I was able to change the perception of him as socially incapable amongst the other students.

What is your hope for the work that you are doing at the moment?

From my work at JRS now, I wish to broaden my capacity to understand people and to apply my knowledge. By doing so it means I will never stop learning. Not only in terms of my job's responsibilities but also of becoming a friend for asylum seekers whose lives are in limbo in Indonesia.

What is your hope for the people you assist now, and also refugee issues in terms of the Indonesian government and wider public?

My hope is that the asylum seekers whom I assist now will have their dream come true of being resettled in a safe country. They have struggled so much in their life and I hope God will grant their wishes. Although at the moment they still need to wait patiently.

I also hope that during their waiting time in Indonesia, they are able to participate in many positive activities, to help alleviate all the pain and sorrow they have experienced.

I hope JRS' continuing presence will bring more insight for the Indonesian government in relation to refugee and asylum seeker rights. I hope it also helps to educate and build tolerance amongst the local communities, as well as motivate young people with a social conscience to help those who are less fortunate.

Pope Francis in his message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2015 said that Jesus Christ is always waiting to be recognised in migrants and refugees. Hopefully, JRS' presence will initiate larger public awareness and understanding of their plight.

**Hakeem is not the real name*

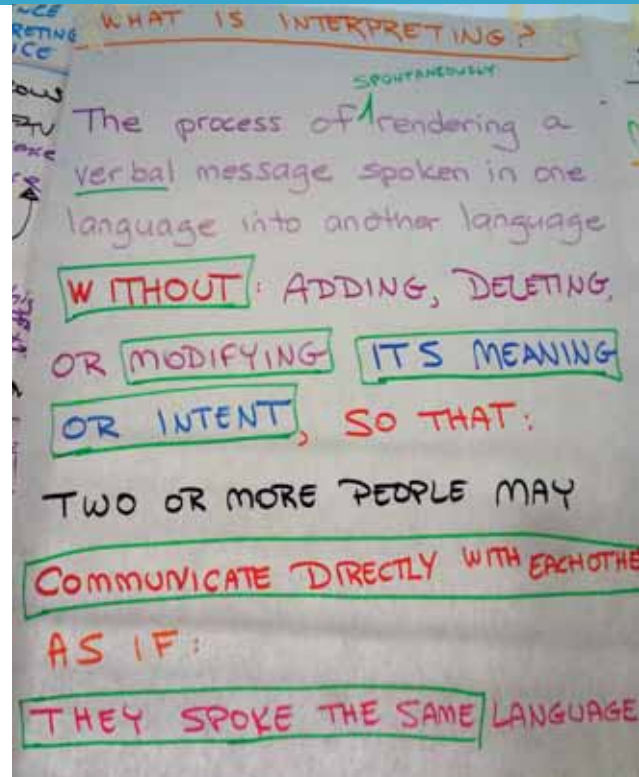
Never Lost In Translation

Lars Stenger dan Gading Gumilang Putra

Being a stranger in a country is not easy but the hardest part is making oneself understood. This is even more true if one comes from far away, from a different culture, language and with different experiences. Many of the asylum seekers and refugees currently seeking international protection in Indonesia experience language as a challenge starting from everyday conversations with neighbors or at the market to situations where every word can be very important, like at the doctor, meeting authorities or during an interview about why they need asylum.

Friends from the refugee community often volunteer to be of support with translating in essential situations in Indonesia's immigration detention centers or within the community enabling asylum seekers and refugees to be heard and understood often without them having much training in how to interpret or translate in the right way.

Authorities, hospital staff, local community leaders as well as organizations serving refugees often depend on those willing to give their time to be an interpreter or translator. JRS aware of the importance of these volunteers selected some talented 16 refugees and asylum seekers from Jakarta and Cisarua to be trained in interpreting skills by an expert, Alice Johnson from the Cairo Community Interpreter Project (CCIP) at The American University in Cairo. The training was held between 10-16 June 2014 included the languages spoken by a majority of refugees and the community here, Farsi, Dari, Urdu, English and also Indonesian.



A documentation from the Interpreter Training on the definition of interpreting

During the 6 day training, refugees learned not only how to expand their capacity in remembering exact words and phrases (interpreter cognitive theory and skills), practiced dialogue-based consecutive interpreting techniques in role plays and debates, reflected on professionalism, ethics and code of conduct that an interpreter is obliged to observe but also how to organize their voluntary services to make them accessible to others. Procedures and protocols are as important as a constant learning of linguistic analysis strategies, terminology research tools and glossary building.

In our daily conversations we take language for granted but as we translate experiences from another language or



Two volunteer interpreters discuss the Interpreter Training materials.

culture many questions may come up that can only be answered by experience, reflection and research as well as ongoing discussions and exchange between people providing the same support to others.

As this was not enough helping people to tell their often sad story or conveying sad messages from community or health professionals can be emotionally challenging and needs emotional resilience for the person providing an interpretation.

After the training in June a pool of volunteers got organized to use the new learned skills to help others. They also regularly have been volunteering with some organizations such as SUAKA and JRS. In their neighborhood, they also have been helping the local community communicating with refugees or helped their neighbors when they need to go to hospital.

On Tuesday afternoon, 18 November, the former participants gathered again to reflect together on what they have learned and experienced since the training. They were very happy when they heard that JRS is providing a

follow up session for the interpreters. Unfortunately, not all of them were able to come to the meeting.

Some of them surrendered themselves to detention centers as they were not able to cover their daily needs. However they are still in contact with the other volunteer interpreters as well as with JRS. They updated us that they have been helping their community when they are in communication with IOM and UNHCR.

In a fruitful meeting the interpreters shared their difficulties and experiences among each other. Now planning to meet regularly among themselves "We don't want to let Alice down. We gained so much from the training and we want to strengthen and remind each other through the meetings. I personally feel that the training was the most memorable moment during my stay in Indonesia," Burhan shared in meeting. Burhan, as well as the other volunteers were excited remembering the training when looking through photos of the event.

The training was not only helpful for the volunteers but also for JRS as organization. Lessons Learned for the team included :

1) people we ask to interpret for us are not interpreters as they don't know much about techniques and ethics – we should call them people who help us to interpret. 2) In that case, service providers have to play a bigger role when working with not trained interpreters by providing basic briefings on how to interpret and confidentiality including remind them to (a) interpret every word (b) no to have side conversations –interpret everything to JRS and the asylum seeker (c) speak in first person perspective “I was” instead of ‘he said that he was’.

“The community often ask various things to interpreters, while they meant to ask the service provider organization. This kind of practice can sometimes burden the interpreters, while they are also asylum seekers and refugees themselves. Collaboration between the pool of interpreters and service provider organization such as JRS can help to fill this gap,” Gading Putra, Legal Liasion Officer of JRS said.

Adam Severson, Interim Refugee Legal Aid Coordinator of SUAKA, mentioned, *“Thank you again for arranging the interpreter training with Alice. I worked with Burhan yesterday. He was excellent. I had forgotten how much difference well-trained interpreters make.”*

As the previous training on interpretation skills was appreciated by refugees participating in it and helped many asylum seekers to communicate with local community, doctors, authorities and organisations JRS will hold another interpreter training in April 2015. New and former participants will be invited and selected to participate to further increase communication and understanding, allowing us to connect without getting lost in translation.

**Burhan is not the real name*

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