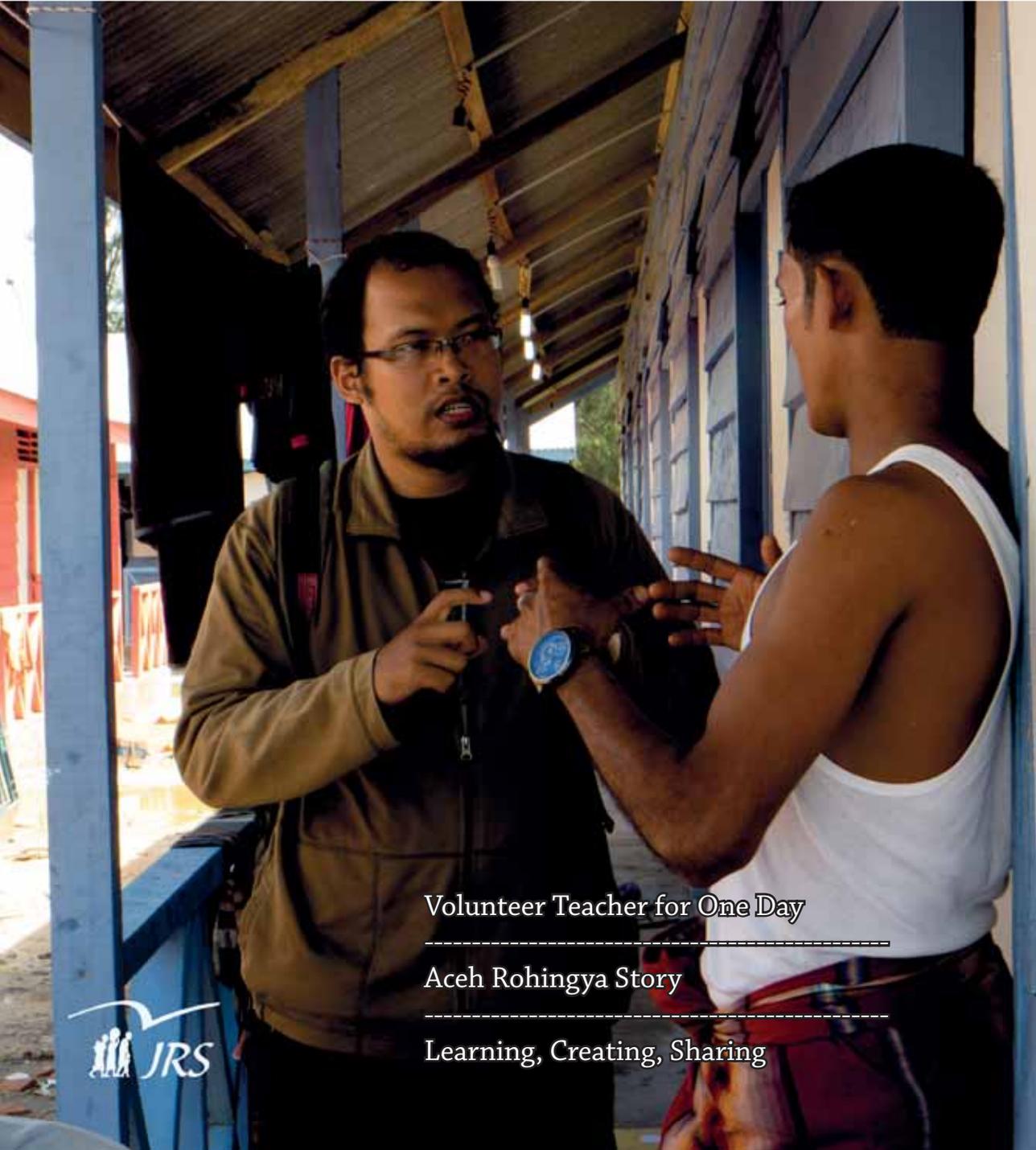


Edition September 2015

REFUGE

Jesuit Refugee Service Indonesia

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



Volunteer Teacher for One Day

Aceh Rohingya Story

Learning, Creating, Sharing



Volunteer Teacher for One Day

Nick Jones



One of the English books used in English classes for refugees

Upon my arrival in Bogor I met endearing people with genuine concerns about the refugee situation in Indonesia. Their work with Afghan refugees, among others, was an enlightening experience.

I arrived with JRS Indonesia staff at the JRS Learning Centre. The JRS Learning Centre in West Java has become a place where asylum seekers look for information, make requests for information to JRS and also engage in educational activities as teachers and students. It is a place of mutual sharing and learning.

Some of these activities are the English classes. I asked the English teachers how I could be of service today and was invited by teacher Mohammed to join his English class at intermediate level. Majd, the other teacher, joined us. The students' ages ranged from 18 to over 50.

Mohammed explained to me that as I am a native English speaker talking to me would be a great opportunity for the students to learn, listen, and practice their English. I obliged and sat down at the head of an oval the seven students had formed with their desks. The assignment from last class was for each student to bring a topic of discussion to this class for all the students to discuss with one another.

Afsar began the first topic of discussion with "What is love?" he said, "I am not sure what love is as I have not experienced it before".

Almost immediately the students sat back, most afraid to answer or afraid to share such an intimate description of their own experiences. This topic did not provide the icebreaker I had hoped. The class quickly moved to the second topic of discussion and the second topic was able to deliver and opened up the tense classroom.

Afshin said, "I ask all of you this because I do not know, but I'd like to know...what is it to be a great man?"

Arash raised his hand and said, "I feel that one who is able to take care of his family and provide for them should be considered a great man."

Armin quickly responded, "What about those who do not have a family? Or do not have any family left? I think a great man should be one who lives his life to make his society better."

Afshin replies, "I think both are good examples of what is a great man" looks at me, "What do you think?"

I pause for a moment and say, "A great man is based on one's perspective but someone who is kind and good can be considered a great man."



English class led by one asylum seeker who volunteers as teacher in JRS Learning Centre

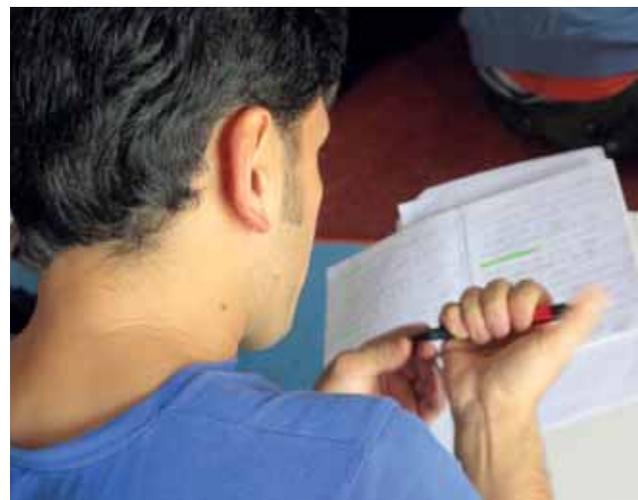
The class continues with discussions on other topics such as; Afghan governance, should children play games? Is it good to spend a lot of time on the phone? How can we make our society better? What are the benefits of exercise?

Finally near the end of our class, Azad asks *"I want to know...when I will get my certificate stating that I have completed the JRS English course? I want to be able to show UNHCR at my RSD (Refugee Status Determination) interview that I have not been wasting my time like others. I have been trying really hard to learn English and I want them to see my efforts"*.

Upon closing the day visiting other parts of Bogor I realize the importance of JRS activities with this community. It provides them an opportunity to keep their mind busy, interact with one another, and give inspiration to one another when trying to answer difficult questions.

What is a great man? Today the answer was a torchbearer. I think all these men wish to be torchbearers for themselves and their families. I hope these JRS activities keep lit their flame of hope so they one day can begin a life that allows them more opportunities to be a great man.

By Nick Jones in JRS Asia Pacific Website www.jrsap.org
**Names have been changed to protect identities



Education is one of the services provided by JRS for refugees, displaced persons, and asylum seekers to sustain and improve their lives

I continue, *"I think Adelphi Stephenson's famous quote applies here who once said: The average man is a lot more than average."*

Some nod in agreement and I look to Majd and ask, *"What is a great man?"*

The class laughs, as Majd looks uncomfortable. He gathers himself quickly and points to the light bulb. He states, *"A great man is... the man who invented the light bulb."*

Majd continued, *"He is great because before him we all sat in darkness. Where would we be without his contribution to our society? He was a light in the darkness leading society for the better. His family's daily life also improved with his invention. We never hear people say anything bad about him even though this new power of light could have made him powerful. I'd like to think that to be a great man, one is a torchbearer for his family and his society but stays humble doing so."*

All the students, including myself, applaud for the genuine and thought provoking answer.

Aceh Rohingya Story

Leonardus Depa Dey & Lars Stenger

When in May this year thousands of Rohingya and Bangladeshi people were prevented to land on any of the South East Asian nations shores, it developed into a humanitarian crisis. Between push-backs on the borders of Thailand, Malaysia and initially Indonesia, people were trapped in the open ocean. The decision of Acehnese fishermen to disregard the recommendation of the navy and instead to prioritize their obligation to rescue of people in distress at sea, saved lives and prevented an even bigger catastrophe. Now as Myanmar prepares for elections in November, the situation for Rohingya people still being disregarded as non-citizens by their country of birth has not changed. Over one million have no access to exercise even simple rights to freedom of movement, work or education. 146,000 remain in IDP camps within Rakhine State where they live dependently on international support after Inter-communal violence broke out since 2012.

As long as Myanmar or ASEAN cannot provide any solution or secure rights of the Rohingya in Myanmar, flight to other countries will persist to be an only option in the face of ongoing discrimination, racism and persecution in Myanmar. What prevented people during the last months from leaving was if not lack of money, the monsoon that makes the journey over the ocean too dangerous between May and October. Taking these factors into account we see not much has changed since the last 3 months.

Raising the questions: Are ASEAN nations better prepared for the arrivals to come? Will Indonesia and Malaysia hold its promise to receive people for one year and extend the welcome to new arrivals? In the case of Malaysia and Thailand will NGOs and international organisations be given access to camps and places of detention this time?



Through providing accompaniment to refugees, touched by their story about their journey and the reality in camps, JRS staff understand how best to serve and advocate on their behalf.

Depa, a JRS volunteer from Aceh province, asked refugees about their journey:

On that day, Tuesday 4th of August, Muhamad, a 20 years old Rohingya man was sitting under a palm leave roofed hut with his two friends, Karim and Hamsa, both 15 years old. They stay at Camp Kuala Langsa since Acehnese fishermen rescued them from the sea in May. I know the three of them for only 3 weeks. I visit them almost every day. Today they are willing to share the story of their journey with me.

As English is still limited, we use some paper and pen to communicate, writing numbers, names, drawing maps of places and their voyage.



A Rohingya woman assists her children to cross a puddle in their camp

women, and children. All Rohingya and Bangladeshi men were put in one side of the boat, and the other side was for women and children. It was too crowded, there was not enough space to stretch our legs or to sleep, and we could only sit. We had to lean on each other to sleep," Karim remembers.

"While on the sea, we were not allowed to go out of the room. We could only go to the toilet. Male and female toilets were separated so we could never know the Rohingya women and children's condition in the other room. There was one captain and 4 crews, they had guns and rifles and were always watching us. They often kicked and hit us. Usually people fought over food because we were given very little water and food once per day, only some rice in the size of our palm and one cup of water. These fights over food always took lives. There were also some people threatened, their families were to send ransom to a Thai bank account of the smugglers. Those family members were from their home village or already working in Malaysia. If they were to ignore this request, their family member on the boat would be killed or thrown alive into the sea," Hamsa adds.

Those three young men left their village and went to the border of Myanmar and Bangladesh. Here at the sea shore far from residential area they met other men and women who also came from their own villages to go to Malaysia. Each of them paid 6.000 Malaysian Ringgit to be transferred to Malaysia. The smugglers put them into small boats approaching a bigger ship, that took them to Langkawi in Malaysia. In Langkawi they saw 10 boats of the same size, here they transferred again to 3 even bigger ships. Those big ships were big but not big enough to host all the people that arrived here.

"Karim and I are from Furunfara-Sittwe, and Hamsa is from Buthidaung," Muhamad tells me that morning. "We were in the same boat, a black boat. There were another 2 boats, green and red, leaving Langkawi at the same time," says Karim.

"There were about 900 Rohingya and Bangladeshi in that black boat. All Bangladeshi were males, and the Rohingyas were men,

Their story didn't end there. After leaving Langkawi, the boat then departed to the high sea. They were in the boats for already two months by then and everything went according to the captain and his crews' will. Things started to change when their boat ran out of fuel and food supplies. The captain and his crew escaped and left them floating. It was quite chaotic because there was no food, drink, nor fuel. Some men entered the female chamber to steal food supply that the women kept for their children. Others disagreed and tried to prevent the theft. It created fights between them. Some fell into the sea and lost their lives because they didn't know how to swim. It started to get quiet after all the food and water were totally gone. They were just floating, hungry and thirsty until Acehnese fishermen rescued them and brought them to land.

**Names have been changed to protect identities

Learning, Creating, Sharing

Max Walden

Between March and June 2015, I had the privilege of volunteering with the Jesuit Refugee Service Indonesia as an English teacher, sport and art assistance in community housing for refugees at Sewon, Bantul. Having begun volunteering as an internship placement for my master degree program, I soon became extremely invested and passionate about my work with the brothers in Yogyakarta and stayed on past my designated internship period.

At the beginning, I was informed about JRS' work in Indonesia and elsewhere and its approach to working with those forced to flee from their homes. I found it particularly interesting JRS' central mission of accompaniment – recognizing the vitality of humanizing people who are too often stigmatized and reduced to the label of 'refugee'.

When I began my regular teaching hours, I quickly found myself fitting in amongst the warmly welcoming teachers and students. I found the brothers generally receptive and enthusiastic, despite their daily struggles and ups and downs in morale at Sewon. Particular highlights were the more social aspects of



Max Walden with one of the students in Sewon

teaching – enjoying a cup of tea and a chat, being treated to a delicious lunch, and of course attending regular futsal with my new friends.

In May I became involved with a joint project with a local art collective in Yogyakarta called MES56. They had been commissioned by the Adelaide Festival to prepare a photography exhibition for September, and for this they chose to focus on refugees in Indonesia. As part of this they wanted to include a series of courses to teach art skills including photography, videography and screen-printing.

We organized a visit to the MES56 artist space and gallery in Prawirotaman street. The first group of brothers was brought along for another discussion about the project, to see the gallery's current exhibition and to enjoy some snacks, tea and laughs. The MES56 members explained their idea for the project, which would be superimposing portraits of them onto famous Australian landmarks they'd like to visit with the title "Alhamdulillah, We Made It". This aimed not to make a controversial political statement, but rather depict them as human beings with hopes and dreams like everyone else.



Our visit to ArtJog - a center piece of Yogya artweeks. Inside the dome behind us is the Wishing Tree art instalation by Yoko Ono.

We also organized for an Afghani artist, friend of MES56, to perform his presentation on art from Afghanistan for the brothers at Sewon. Having informed as many people as I could in class and in their rooms as well as leaving a sign, I was so happy that more than twenty of the brothers attended to come and see the presentation. Particularly the brothers from Afghanistan were so thrilled to see images of their cultural heritage, and several expressed they were inspired to learn artistic skills by seeing both historical and contemporary artworks created by Afghanis.

Next we set about organizing to take twelve brothers over two days to ART|JOG – the centre piece of Yogya Artweeks, one of the biggest arts festival in Southeast Asia – with the hope of further inspiring them and getting others involved. The visits to ART|JOG at Taman Budaya were a great success, with everyone involved having lots of fun (myself included) but particularly the brothers! According to my Afghani friend, refugees from his country would never have seen much art in their home country due to it being banned under the Taliban. Many of the works featured were interactive or multimedia-based, meaning it was very accessible and fun. The entrance included a 'Wishing Tree' by Yoko Ono, where we were all able to write something that we hoped for the future.

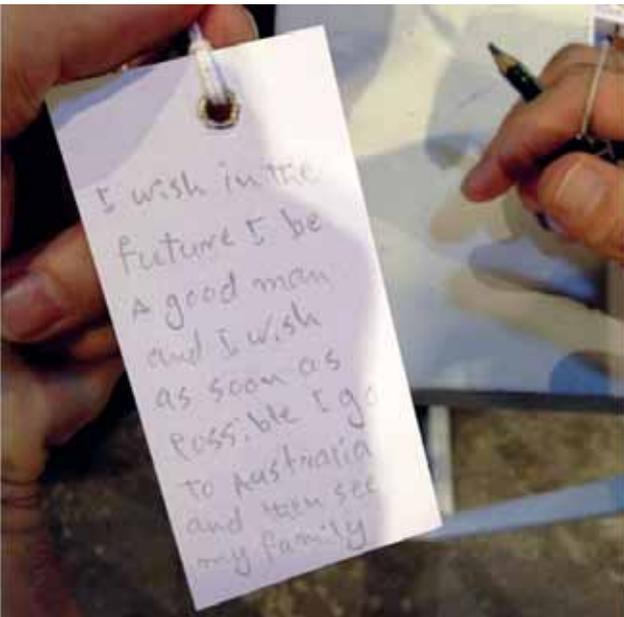


Afghani feast for breaking the fast during Ramadhan

I had almost never seen such big smiles on all their faces, and several of the guys expressed that it had inspired them to make their own work. They asked our Afghani friend if he could also run a painting workshop after the MES56 classes!

The night before I left to return to Australia, I was invited to dinner at the brothers' accommodation to break the fast for Ramadhan. As always I was shown amazing hospitality by all – given samples of all their special foods before the call to prayer for *berbuka puasa* (breaking their fast) even happened! By the time I was treated to an Afghani feast I was already full.

While saying goodbye to all of my friends and colleagues in Yogyakarta was hard, this night was undoubtedly the most difficult. The bittersweet mix of humor and sadness demonstrated by my new friends this evening encapsulated my overall experience of working, socializing and living with them. I will never forget their incredible resilience, hospitality, sense of humor and gratitude for the positive things in their life – in spite of the hardships, anxiety and hopelessness of their everyday situation. Thank you to the staff at JRS and all of the brothers for always making me feel totally welcome and at home. You are friends I will never forget, and *In Sya Allah* we'll see each other again soon in a safe place.



One of the brothers wrote this wish and hung it on the Wishing Tree

JRS Fundraising

Yogyakarta 12-13 September 2015

On Saturday-Sunday, 12-13 September 2015, JRS Indonesia held a public awareness and fundraising event at St Anthony of Padua Parish, Kotabaru, Yogyakarta.



JRS volunteers distribute Refuge newsletters, bookmarks, and envelopes to parishioners before they enter the church for Eucharist.



Fr. Th. A. Maswan Susinto SJ, JRS Indonesia Country Director, preaches a homily in the Eucharist encouraging parishioners to care about refugees and support JRS' service



These generous donations will make tangible difference in the lives of those who have been forced to flee their homes and help them regain hope.

EDITORIAL

Editorial Responsibility

Th. A. Maswan Susinto SJ

Editor

Lars Stenger

Articles Submitted by

Nick Jones

Leonardus Depa Dey & Lars Stenger

Max Walden

Translator

Victoria Sindy M.

JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE INDONESIA

Gg. Cabe DP III No.9
Puren, Pringwulung, Condong Catur
Depok, Sleman
Yogyakarta 55283
INDONESIA

Phone/Fax: +62 274 517405

email: indonesia@jrs.or.id

website: www.jrs.or.id

Send your comments and suggestions to
refuge@jrs.or.id



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