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ACRATH News

Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans

June 2025

ACRATH's 20 years of Impact

Twenty years ago, a small group of women religious met to discuss reports of people being trafficked into Australia for sex work and other forms of exploitation. Two decades later, with your support, our organisation is now companioning victims/survivors, advocating for their rights, educating the community, and raising awareness against human trafficking and modern slavery within Australia and beyond.

In 20 years ACRATH's impact has been significant – thanks to your support. Please [donate](#) today and help us support victim/survivors for the next 20 years.

ACRATH has received some government funding and grants over the 20 years, but funding has come mostly from you, our community. Because of your willingness to help victim/survivors of human trafficking we continue advocating for systemic change that will improve their lives in Australia. This year we need \$350,000 to continue our work. Please [donate](#) today.

We asked for \$350,000 last year and you helped us achieve our target. Let's do it again this year. In ACRATH's 20th year we are strengthening the Companionship Program which provides support to women, who have been trafficked, and their children. ACRATH will be providing more training opportunities and ongoing support to build the ACRATH companions' capacity to assist survivors of modern slavery to take charge of their own life.

ACRATH receives regular feedback from the referring agencies that our Companionship Program is a highly valued complement to the formal case-work supports that are provided through government funded programs. As detection and response to instances of modern slavery improves, so too is the need for a range of supports for the increasing number of victims and survivors identified. The need for ACRATH companions will also grow.

The experiences of the women in the Companionship Program inform ACRATH's advocacy work at the National Roundtable and annual advocacy trips to Canberra meeting ministers and departmental staff. During 20 years of impact ACRATH has played a role in many significant developments including the Modern Slavery Acts (2018), the establishment of both Federal and State Anti-Slavery Commissioners, and an additional pathway for victims and survivors into the Support for Trafficked People Program. ACRATH President Sr Clare Condon sgs said "The heart of ACRATH is its members across the nation, with regional groupings in Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria and the East Coast. The work done locally and in collaboration with one another and with other civil society agencies is our unique way of responding to the issues involved in human trafficking."

We ask you to consider supporting victim/survivors of human trafficking by [donating](#) to ACRATH today.



New NEO appointed



Congratulations to Sarah Puls sgs on her appointment as ACRATH National Executive Officer. Sarah is no stranger to ACRATH. Sarah was a member of the NSW/ACT regional for several years and served as regional coordinator before moving to Melbourne in 2013 and becoming a member in Victoria. Sarah has participated in the advocacy week at Federal Parliament and is a former member of the companions working group.

ACRATH President Clare Condon sgs said the National Committee appointed Sarah with an initial three-year agreement following an extensive search through the Recruitment Agency REACH. She starts as ACRATH's National Executive Officer on 23 June.

"She brings diverse experience as a clinical pastoral supervisor at Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, Caseworker at the Jesuit Refugee Services, and Pastoral Carer at Villawood Detention Centre. In recent years she has been involved in formation at her congregational level in Kiribati," Clare said.

Sarah has recently completed a formation programme at the UISG, Rome. She holds a Master of Divinity, Grad Dip Migration Law and Practice, Bachelor of Social Work and BA.

Clare also thanked Lys Crowe for the competent and extensive work as Interim National Executive Officer since December 2024.

The National Office staff also expressed their appreciation for Lys's leadership and management skills, highlighting how supported they felt throughout the new staffing transition. They acknowledged that stepping into a role that had been held for ten year by Christine Carolan, the outgoing National Executive Officer, was no easy task. Yet, Lys navigated the challenge skilfully, working hard to maintain stability during an uncertain time.

Words can hurt

*Samira's Criminal Justice Stay Visa was confronting to those who saw it. Trafficked into Australia, freed and then helped into support services by Australian Federal Police (AFP), Samira was no criminal. ACRATH volunteer Stancea Vichie mss saw first-hand the impact of that visa name. She recalls accompanying Samira to see a real estate agent and the suspicious look Samira received when presenting her passport. It was fortunate for Samira that Stancea was able to explain briefly the background of that visa.

It took ACRATH, as part of a group of committed NGOs (particularly Anti-Slavery Australia and the Salvation Army), several years to get the visa name changed, but it happened. Women like Samira are now issued with a Referred Stay Visa.

"I remember so clearly coming back into the ACRATH office and telling the executive officer Christine Carolan about the distressing experience with Samira, who was already very traumatised by her ordeal of being trafficked," Stancea said.

"Christine and I were so upset for Samira that the wording of her visa had caused her so much more distress and humiliation. Christine became very determined then to work for a change to the visa name so that trafficked people did not have to endure the humiliation of having the word 'criminal' on their visa," Stancea said.

Stancea, who has been part of ACRATH's Companionship Program since it began more than 15 years ago, began her association with Samira after the AFP contacted ACRATH seeking some support for Samira. Stancea has been a Companion to Samira, and other victim/survivors of human trafficking since that time. ACRATH, through its Companionship Program, provides one-on-one support to victim-survivors of human trafficking and their children and group support to seasonal workers from Timor Leste and Pacific nations. It's the experiences of these trafficked people and seasonal workers that have added evidence, insights and 'on-the-ground' information to many ACRATH campaigns.

"We knew that trafficked people were further impacted by having a visa that said Criminal Justice Stay. If someone went for a job or to try and rent a house, they had to show their passport as their official documentation. Suddenly, it could mean, there was no job or house available," Stancea said. "This was the lived experience of these people, and we could take that information to policy makers. It wasn't theoretical, it was real life experiences."

The visa name change was one of the many issues that ACRATH and others including Anti-Slavery Australia, took to the National Roundtable year after year. The issue was also raised during ACRATH's advocacy visits to Canberra, often resulting in important meetings with departmental officers and ministers who were told of the firsthand experiences of trafficked people using the visa.

On 27 May 2015 the Federal Government announced a series of reforms as part of the Human Trafficking Visa Framework including the change of visa for trafficked people. The Minister for Women, Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash said: "Under the reforms announced today, trafficked people will instead be granted a specific subclass of bridging visa that has been redesigned for their exclusive use."

At the time Christine thanked ACRATH members for their six years of advocacy and commitment to bringing about this change.

She wrote: *I just want to acknowledge the tenacity of so many ACRATH members who have kept asking:*

- *for changes to visa names so they don't stigmatise trafficked people,*
- *for access to English classes for people on temporary visas,*
- *for better access to Social Security payments.*

So many people in ACRATH have worked on this issue – by writing to, and also meeting with the relevant Ministers, by speaking to many many Members of Parliament, and by working strategically with government departmental officers, Ministerial advisors and with like-minded NGOs.

These changes represent our collective work with victims who have faced real barriers to rebuilding free and independent lives.

*Samira is not her real name.

[Donate](#) to ACRATH today so that advocacy work, to improve the lives of victim/survivors of human

Charlee's running to stop slavery

Charlee Dornom was shocked to discover teenage girls her age are forced to marry and that children even younger are forced to work on cocoa plantations with little hope of an education. It prompted her to run 10km for ACRATH in last year's Run Melbourne. This year Charlee, a Year 11 student at Padua College in Mornington wants to do more to support these vulnerable young people so she's running a half marathon in the event on Sunday July 13. She needs your [support](#)

Charlee first heard about forced marriage last year when an ACRATH member spoke at a Mercy Education State Seeds of Justice Leadership Camp in Templestowe, Victoria, which she attended as a member of her school's social justice team.

"I was saddened by the exploitation of children and to hear that this is happening right here in our own backyard. I was alarmed to find out how many people live in modern slavery, and I hope my run will draw attention to the issue while raising funds for ACRATH and the amazing work they do," she said.

"I'm raising money for ACRATH because the organisation provides one-on-one support to victim-survivors of human trafficking and their children through the Companionship Program. They advocate to MPs and other change makers to act and develop policies to eliminate slavery in Australia's supply chains of goods and services. ACRATH also educates workers in the health, education, and community sectors to identify and support victims of modern slavery," Charlee said.

Many at Padua College are already aware of forced labour, particularly in the supply of cocoa beans for chocolate. The Social Justice Team raised awareness of slavery free chocolate and coffee by supplying a morning tea for the staff using slavery free coffee, tea, and sweet treats. This highlighted the issue for the social justice team and the staff.

Charlee's a little nervous about running such a long distance but loved the comradery on the course last year.

Charlee is a Mission Captain, a member of the Respectful Relationships Team and a House Leader at Padua College and tries to give back to her college community. Already several of her classmates have donated to ACRATH on Charlee's behalf. You can join her fundraising efforts [here](#).

Join the Run

Run or walk with Team ACRATH on Sunday, 13 July 2025, in Run Melbourne: Register now to run or walk with us! Rally your family, friends, or colleagues to join or donate. Register [here](#).

Why Run? It's estimated that 41,000 people in Australia and 50 million worldwide are trapped in modern slavery *. Behind each statistic is a person at the heart of ACRATH's (Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans) work.

With your support, we advocate, educate, and walk alongside victim/survivors.

In 2024, more than \$15,000 was raised to support ACRATH's programs! [Join Run Melbourne today.](#)

The screenshot shows a GoFundMe page for "ACRATH - PADUA COLLEGE - CHARLEE D". The page has a goal of \$500 and has currently raised \$395. There is a "Give Now" button and a "Share page" link. The description reads: "Following my efforts in the 10km last year, this year I have decided to run the half marathon @Run Melbourne. I am running as the sole representative of Padua College to support ACRATH. The half marathon will be a big challenge for me as I have never attempted this distance before. After attending a conference last year with my school's Social Justice Team, I was inspired to take action."

Noelene's push for change

Sr Noelene Simmons sm has been part of most of ACRATH's big moments; the moments that changed outcomes for trafficked people. She's participated in the Federal Government's National Roundtable year after year and met MPs from all political persuasions in a bid to achieve outcomes that improve life for victim/survivors of human trafficking. She knows first-hand the time, energy and resources needed to bring about change.

Hope and determination have kept Noelene working in ACRATH for almost 15 years. In 2017 she began a term as ACRATH's President after 3 years as the NSW regional coordinator; she still manages the ACRATH website.

Each roundtable, meeting, and campaign brings change closer. One of the biggest achievements involving ACRATH was the introduction of the Modern Slavery ACT in 2018. It came after many years of advocacy alongside other NGOs and policy makers.

"The Modern Slavery Act was the result of a lot of work by committed people. That's what has always been important, no matter which side of politics we are working with. We always take the trafficked person and their issues with us. They are at the heart of what we do," Noelene said.

Noelene believes the National Roundtable on Human Trafficking and Slavery has been crucial in bringing about systemic change. However, it is just one part of the 'mix' and would not be effective in isolation.

"The roundtable involves formal working groups and networking groups, including the group of NGOs who did years of advocacy and research on developing alternative pathways for trafficked people, de-linking the services for people trafficked into Australia from a criminal justice response. This meant the advice to the roundtable was strong because we had done the work," Noelene said. This work led to the introduction last year of an additional referral pathway to the Support for Trafficked People Program.

A roundtable working group also did years of work on supply chains and labour exploitation that went into the development of the Modern Slavery Act.

"Apart from the important formal work during the roundtable with NGOs, ministers and department staff, a lot of networking goes on during breaks that creates opportunities to speak one-to-one with relevant ministers and department heads," Noelene said.

Nothing happens overnight in advocacy. It can take years of work, research, meetings, and a lot of hope to keep an issue on the table. She is always heartened by the respectful way people deal with each other and the open and respectful conversations that she is part of, despite the impatient desire to see changes.

"There is a great sense of collegiality at the National Roundtable because we all have a common desire to end human trafficking and support victim/survivors," she said.

Many of the people Noelene encounters during the roundtable meetings are faces she sees again during ACRATH's annual Canberra advocacy trips. It is a chance, in many cases, to continue a conversation or update a minister.

Noelene has been involved in ACRATH's annual Canberra advocacy trips since 2010 and knows the groundwork necessary to take a team to Canberra, including a lot of pre-training and workshops to ensure each member of the advocacy team 'is on top' of the issues.

"One thing we always do when meeting with a minister or departmental head is to ask them what advice they have for ACRATH. Often, they will direct us to someone else who can help us with what we are working on and sometimes they will even arrange a meeting," Noelene said.

Advocacy has made a difference – it works. Last year during the Canberra visit, ACRATH members thanked MPs for what has been achieved, including:

- the establishment of Australia's first federal Anti-Slavery Commissioner
- the introduction of an additional referral pathway to the STPP, the Support for Trafficked People Program
- the introduction of the Forced Marriage Specialist Support Program
- the introduction of the workplace justice visa
- the introduction of new laws and regulations to enhance the rights of seasonal workers.

ACRATH's advocacy comes at a cost. Volunteers who go to Canberra each year need to be trained and they stay in Canberra for several days. Help fund ACRATH's important advocacy – [donate](#) today.

Bequest program launched

ACRATH has launched its new bequest program as part of this year's fundraising campaign. Leave ACRATH a gift in your Will and create a legacy that supports the future of victim/survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery.

Your bequest will also support ACRATH's mission to eliminate human trafficking and modern slavery. It is estimated that there are 41,000* women, men and children living in modern slavery in Australia, often in plain sight. Modern slavery includes crimes of domestic servitude, forced labour, forced marriage and sexual exploitation. ACRATH supports victims and survivors of modern slavery through the many different services we provide Australia-wide.

"We deeply appreciate your consideration of leaving a lasting impact by including ACRATH in your Will. Your legacy is crucial in advancing our mission to eliminate human trafficking and modern slavery in Australia. Be assured that your contribution will directly benefit victim/survivors, who are always central to ACRATH's mission, heart, and efforts," said ACRATH President Sr Clare Condon.

A brochure has been developed which covers key issues relating to bequests including:

1. Discussing your bequest with loved ones.: Ensure your family understands and supports the legacy you intend to create.
2. Deciding on the type of gift you wish to leave – money or property, shares etc.
3. Consulting a legal professional or other resource for correct wording.

The brochure is now available at <https://acrath.org.au/support-acrath/leave-a-bequest/>

If you would like to meet and discuss confidentially your bequest with ACRATH, please contact us at eo@acrath.org.au

*Walk Free Global slavery Index in 2023



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Call to action June 2025

ACRATH supports the work of many like-minded organisations both in Australia and globally. Many produce resources that can be used in a variety of settings and some have campaigns underway. Our newsletter regularly includes this page, encouraging people to find out more and consider becoming involved in actions and advocacy.

Sisters in Africa urge Pope Leo XIV to uphold Francis' commitment against trafficking

<https://www.globalsistersreport.org/sisters-africa-urge-pope-leo-xiv-uphold-francis-commitment-against-trafficking>

Australian Federal Police: Human Trafficking and Slavery

<https://www.afp.gov.au/crimes/human-trafficking-and-people-smuggling/human-trafficking-and-slavery>

Talitha Kum holds 5th Leadership Training Course in Lima, Peru

<https://www.talithakum.info/en/news/talitha-kum-holds-5th-leadership-training-course-in-lima-peru/>

Tanzania Catholic Association of Sisters combats human trafficking

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/africa/news/2025-05/tanzania-catholic-association-of-sisters-tcas-against-human-tr.html>

Advocacy at the European Level

<https://renate-europe.net/advocacy-at-the-european-level/>

Youth Ambassadors Across Asia Unite to Prevent Human Trafficking

<https://www.talithakum.info/en/news/youth-ambassadors-across-asia-unite-to-prevent-human-trafficking/>

Your clothes may have been made by an outworker earning \$10 an hour. This is what you can do about it

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-24/clothes-made-by-outworkers-earning-less-than-half-minimum-wage/105330754>

Southeast Asia: Traffickers pose as Christian missionaries, pilgrims to exploit victims

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2025-04/southeast-asia-human-trafficking-posing-christian-missionaries.html>

Anti-Slavery Australia

<https://antislavery.org.au/>

Alliance to End Human Trafficking

<https://alliancetoendhumantrafficking.org>

WA ACRATH Movie Fundraiser

WA movie goers used a night out to learn a little more about modern slavery and to support ACRATH. Close to \$3000 was raised at the event and all money will go towards ACRATH's ongoing support of victim/survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery.

There were familiar faces at the May event, but also 'new' ones amongst the 125 people keen to help tackle the issue. Supporters enjoyed the movie 'Tina' - a story inspired by true events. Following the loss of her daughter in the Christchurch quakes, music teacher Mareta takes on the role of a substitute teacher at an elite school and finds students there in need of guidance and care. It is a fabulous story of healing, love, community, and hope. An experience of loss like that experienced by many victim/survivors of human trafficking.

Along with purchases of a delicious variety of homemade biscuits, the raffle was generously supported by all who came along, with 18 amazing prizes on offer.

Would you consider running a fundraising event for ACRATH. If so, get in touch with the team in the national office at office@acrath.org.au



ACRATH needs core business funding and additional funding for special projects.

Please consider a regular donation to ACRATH so that we can plan ahead. Thanks.

<https://www.trybooking.com/au/donate/acrath>
or <https://acrath.org.au/donate>

Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible

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