

Jesuit Refugee Service Australia's newest recruit, lawyer Wren Chadwick, hopes to put to good use her experience in legal and advocacy roles in Australia and post-disaster work in the Solomon Islands when she takes up her job as a field-worker in Papua New Guinea.

Wren replaces Mariano Griva, who recently completed his year-long placement as JRS' first representative in PNG.

With a background in legislation reform, health policy, village development and disaster relief, Wren says she is looking forward to combining her expertise and her passion for refugee rights in the border region of western PNG.

Ten thousand West Papuans, displaced in the decades following the handover of Dutch-controlled West Papua to Indonesia, today eke out a living in the province of Daru in PNG. Most live in remote border settlements, while the remainder have either assimilated into the population of Kiunga or live in the officially-designated refugee camp, Iowara. They are known as 'the forgotten people' due to their relatively small number.

'The main focus [of my role] is to help build the capacity of the Diocese of Daru-Kiunga in their work with the refugees', explains Wren. 'There's some need for training in human rights and refugee law, and there's a research function in terms of visiting refugee settlements and finding out what their needs are.' The third prong of JRS' work in PNG is that of advocacy, which will incorporate interaction with the PNG government.

Already fluent in four languages, Wren says she is hoping to pick up the local language, Bahasa Malay, in PNG. 'Language is a great asset and a key to another world', she says.

Originally a graduate in development studies and international relations, Wren decided to study law in the wake of the Tampa incident of 2001, in which a group of refugees rescued by a ship were prevented from entering Australia.

'I thought there needed to be more lawyers out there doing good work', she says. Her work with refugees in Perth solidified her resolve. 'That got me fired up, but I realised I didn't really have the skills I needed to contribute.' Wren returned to her home city of Brisbane and completed a postgraduate law degree.

Stints private and public law followed, after which Wren was selected as an Australian Youth Ambassador. She spent over two years in the Solomon Islands, working for the National Disaster Management Office after the tsunami hit in April 2007.

'It was fascinating to see what those often quite small coordination centres have to deal with. For the first 48 hours the media clogged up our lines.'

Upon her return to Australia, Wren worked jobs such as the reviewing of the juvenile justice system in Queensland. Her role with JRS, she says, will provide the perfect opportunity to combine her legal experience with her desire to work in social justice. 'Social justice has been a primary motivator for as long as I can remember', she says.

*By Catherine Marshall*

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