

DISABILITY INCLUSION CASE STUDY: Finding Disability Champions in the World's Largest Refugee Camp

Australia Assists is the Australian Government's humanitarian civilian deployment capability. Managed by **RedR Australia**, technical specialists are deployed to help overseas partners prepare for, respond to and recover from natural disasters and conflict. The Program's approach to strengthening disability inclusion in humanitarian action is set out in the Australia Assists Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2024, available on the RedR website.

CBM Australia provides technical assistance on disability inclusion to RedR Australia under a partnership agreement and has prepared the following case study of Tarryn Brown, a RedR Australia Roster Member and disability inclusion specialist, who deployed to Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

PUTTING DISABILITY INCLUSION INTO PRACTICE IN THE ROHINGYA REFUGEE RESPONSE

The Rohingya people have been one of, if not the most discriminated people in the world, according to UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres.¹ The UN reports that, as at March 2019, over 909,000 stateless Rohingya refugees have fled Myanmar and arrived in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, which is now home to the **world's largest refugee camp**.² Refugees with disabilities are among its most under-served and vulnerable residents.

The international community is responding by providing life-saving assistance for refugees such as food, shelter and health care. Through the Australia Assists program, RedR Australia deployed Disability Advisor, Tarryn Brown, to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in Cox's Bazar, where she worked to facilitate disability inclusion in the agency's response for four months. Tarryn has helped WFP find ways to **ensure that assistance can reach everyone, and that 'no one is left behind'**.

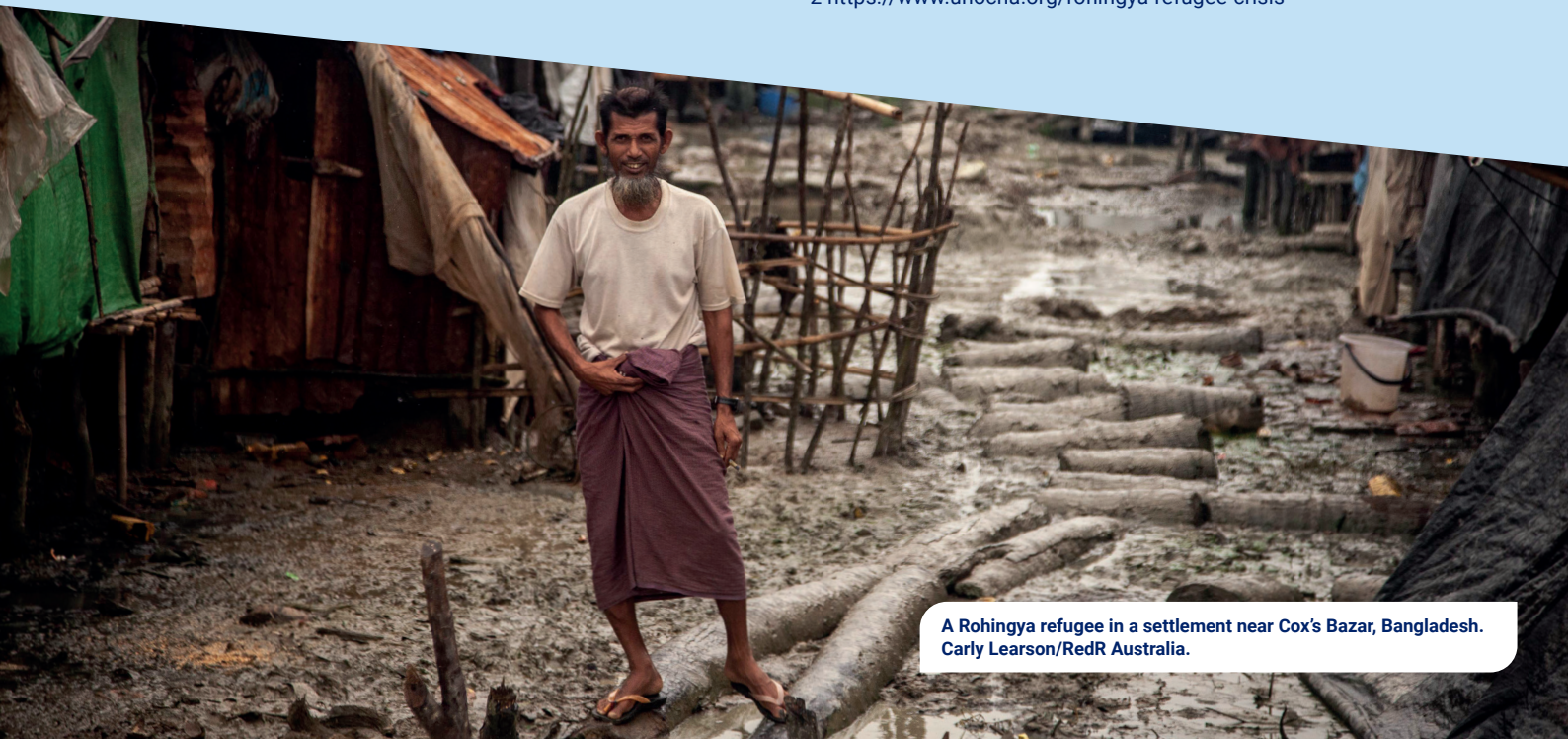
Tarryn's deployment was crucial as there were **no other disability inclusion advisors** working within WFP's global operations, nor in any other UN agency or NGO present in Cox's Bazar. This came with challenges, such as

insufficient data on how many Rohingya refugees have disabilities, and lack of support to establish disability representative groups in the refugee camps. Nonetheless, Tarryn was able to use her unique position to **reach 18 different teams and more than 200 staff** within WFP Cox's Bazar to make sure they heard the message of disability inclusion.

Tarryn's previous experience providing disability inclusion advice to a range of development and humanitarian actors meant she had developed an effective approach to supporting organisational change. Disability inclusion requires **active participation of people with disabilities in the design, implementation and monitoring** of humanitarian assistance. People with disabilities are the experts in their own lives and are best placed to identify solutions to the barriers they face in receiving food assistance, nutrition support, and livelihood opportunities. These barriers can be physical, such as distance from services or building inaccessibility, but other major barriers relate to communication restrictions, and **even the attitudes and assumptions of humanitarian actors themselves**.

1 <https://news.un.org/en/focus/rohingya-refugee-crisis>

2 <https://www.unocha.org/rohingya-refugee-crisis>



A Rohingya refugee in a settlement near Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.
Carly Learson/RedR Australia.

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TAKING THE FIRST STEPS: RAISING AWARENESS AND FINDING CHAMPIONS

To make disability inclusion practical for WFP, Tarryn started by **raising awareness among her colleagues through training sessions** to ensure as many staff as possible understood the basics of inclusion. Grabbing any opportunity she could in the busy, fast-paced operating environment of Cox's Bazar meant making awareness sessions as accessible as possible. Tarryn relayed: *"I didn't try to run a two-day training; instead I broke disability inclusion messages up into modules no longer than 1.5 hours which could be run anytime staff were available in the compound. Thirty minute express sessions caught people up if they missed a session. I wanted to go broad and reach as many WFP staff as possible. **The more people who have the basics on disability inclusion, the better.** The sessions I ran were also good entry points to follow up individually with staff and teams later. The approach was really effective."*

Tarryn also held individual meetings and conducted field visits with different teams across WFP. This allowed her to consult with each team, understand their way of working and key priorities, and together identify concrete entry points for disability inclusion within their specific work for the next 12 months. **Each program team also nominated one or two 'Disability Inclusion Champions'**, who are now responsible for raising disability inclusion in team meetings, and monitoring the progress of team action plans.

Tarryn's WFP supervisor commented on the sustainable nature of her deployment: *"Tarryn proactively identified disability inclusion champions from all WFP programme units in Cox's Bazar. These champions will take the lead in implementing disability inclusion action plans across the organisation going forward. This is a great idea from the perspective of sustainable solutions and institutionalising the agenda into the organisation and its operation. **With the work Tarryn nurtured, WFP Bangladesh should keep this good momentum on disability inclusion going.**"*

Tarryn's approach to supporting disability inclusion also involved **fostering ongoing relationships between local disability organisations, WFP staff and implementing partners**. Tarryn invited people with disabilities to visit the WFP compound to share their experiences and perspectives during team meetings. A Disability Inclusive Food Assistance Forum that Tarryn hosted saw 130 attendees networking directly with people with disabilities and disability organisations. *"That event was a representation of all the networking and relationship building both within WFP and with people with disabilities and disability organisations that I had done. I am hoping that these stakeholders will stay in touch and WFP will be able to **draw on these networks in the future,**"* Tarryn said.

FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE

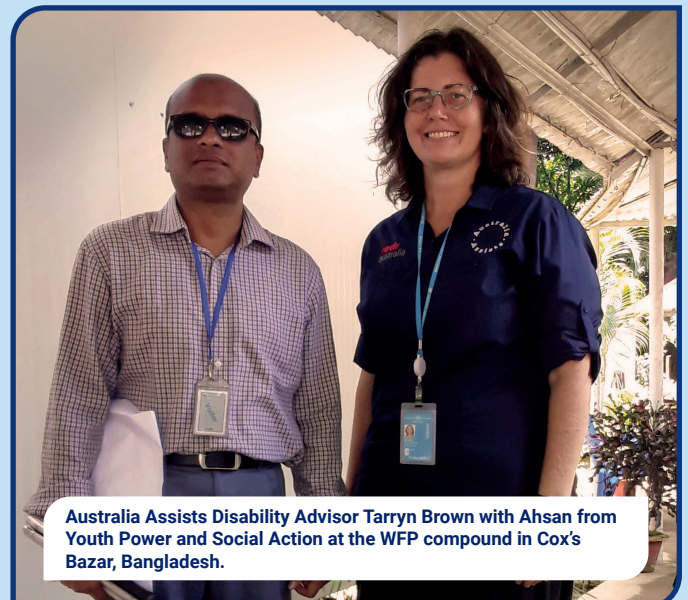
Tarryn's deployment put policy commitments into practice for WFP Bangladesh. The organisation now has clear **action plans for ensuring the meaningful participation of persons with disability** in program design and implementation.

"The experience of having people with disabilities come to the WFP office was the thing that most WFP staff mentioned to me as being really powerful – it opened their eyes to the importance of disability inclusion. If RedR could support all Australia Assists employees to have basic knowledge on disability inclusion, and if each employee had the opportunity to invite a person with disability to visit their host organisation and speak about the barriers they face, this could have a huge reach into the many humanitarian organisations where Australia Assists employees are working."

– Tarryn Brown, Australia Assists Disability Advisor to WFP Bangladesh

In 2020, Tarryn will deploy to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Iraq as a Disability Inclusion Expert. She will provide the IOM Iraq team with technical guidance to ensure that **reconstruction and stabilisation programs**, including social cohesion activities and mental health and psychosocial support services, are **reaching persons with disabilities**.

RedR would like to acknowledge the support of CBM Australia in the preparation of this case study.



Australia Assists Disability Advisor Tarryn Brown with Ahsan from Youth Power and Social Action at the WFP compound in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.