

A newsletter for  
our valued friends  
and supporters

issue 29: December 2007

# building better lives



Brotherhood  
of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty



Executive Director's Message

## Fresh welcome for refugees

A wonderful donation we received recently really summed up for me what the Brotherhood of St Laurence is all about. The benefactor gave us a cheque for \$5000 to assist families experiencing hardship at Christmas.

We are using this donation to help the children who attend the Napier Street Child and Family Resource Centre and their families, many of whom came to Australia as refugees. This is a great way to help some of the most vulnerable people in our society feel welcome in their new land.

The families will receive hampers so that they can enjoy food they normally could not afford. There are gifts for some of the children who would otherwise receive very little, and gifts for some of the mothers, which will be presented to them by their children. And on Australia Day there will be an excursion to the beach – a first for many of the families.

Refugees are some of the neediest and marginalised members of our community. They face many barriers in settling into their new life, including the impact of past trauma, disrupted schooling and joblessness.

We as a community should do everything we can to assist those most in need to rebuild their lives in a safe country. Indeed, this is what refugees want – to put their past behind them and contribute to their new community.

Celebrations are important, but so of course is employment. Our experience is that assisting refugees to enter the workforce is the best way to help them settle successfully.

Our Given the Chance program is another way we are helping refugees make a new start in their new land. It matches them with volunteer mentors to support them in their journey to study and work, and it also works with employers.

With your gift to the Brotherhood we can do even more.

Many thanks again for your support and best wishes from all of us here for a joyful Christmas and New Year.

Tony Nicholson



## Finding a job, the next step to a better life

Liberian refugee Yaya knows that paid work provides a major stepping stone to a better life. When the opportunity to study and take up a child care placement at the Brotherhood's Napier Street Child and Family Resource Centre came up earlier this year, she jumped at the chance.

'I was very interested, because I don't want to stay at home. I want to work,' Yaya says. 'In my country, I used to care for lots of children – my sister's children. I am good at it.'

'Next year, I am going to find work when my son goes to school.'

Yaya's confidence and enthusiasm mark a major change since we first met her three years ago.

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She was feeling desperately lonely and lost after surviving a traumatic journey to Australia as a refugee.

Yaya was in her late teens when she fled her village in Liberia with her mum and younger siblings. In the chaos of escaping the civil war and violence, her dad was killed and she was separated from her sisters. Six years on, Yaya is piecing together information about the whereabouts of her sisters and partner.

After fleeing their home, Yaya and her family lived a very unsettled and unsafe life in a refugee camp, and during this time Yaya had two children. It was a harsh and dangerous time for Yaya, her mother and siblings. Following a course of interviews and medical examinations, the family were accepted onto the Humanitarian Refugee Program and were granted entry into Australia, arriving in Melbourne in 2004.

After surviving what had been a traumatic journey and grieving the loss of her father, Yaya became the central figure in her family and the income provider

of the household at 21 years of age. As she tried to come to terms with her new responsibility, Yaya realised she had no choice but to take the lead and help her family adjust to a new life, a new culture and a new language. Yaya began her English language classes and started to use child care at the Brotherhood's Napier Street Child and Family Resource Centre in Fitzroy.

'When I came to Napier Street it was a great place,' Yaya says.

'They help me with Centrelink and applying for citizenship and child care. I've become friendly with people and other women. I learn a lot about my kids.'

Most humanitarian entrants have experienced bereavement, loss, trauma, sometimes torture and often violence and rape. Asking for help is very difficult and it can take a long time to build trust and relationships with other people.

Yaya knew her children needed help settling into their new life. Once she became familiar with staff at Napier Street, she began to use the centre regularly, attending its family and settlement support services and its African Women's Playgroup, and sharing the care of her children.

Yaya and her family were thrilled when they received their citizenship certificates earlier this year and she is now looking forward to stability, participation and a safe life for herself and her family here in Australia.



## Message from our Chaplain, Fr Jeff O'Hare

There is an old European carol, in which there is a verse: *What can I give him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd I would give a lamb; If I were a wise man, I would give my mind; but what I am, I give him, I give my heart.*

We often think of a gift in terms of an item that we receive or we give, but rarely do we see a gift as an offering of friendship.

My experience at the Brotherhood this year has been that the ones who struggle the most in material wealth are often rich in this extraordinary gift: the gift of friendship and

opening their hearts to others. Giving our hearts in this way is the simplest and yet most profound thing we can do, as it opens doors for us, teaching us about things we miss when we pursue material gifts.

I'm happy without a material gift as I have all that I need when I engage and am engaged, by the people I have been given to care for and who care for me.

All of us have friendship to offer to others. Be generous with your heart this Christmas.

Fr Jeff

## Giving the joy of Christmas

Across the country, thousands of children are already counting down the days until Christmas, eagerly awaiting a visit from Santa. Thanks to the 2007 ABC 774 Giving Tree Appeal, thousands of children in need also have a reason to be excited.

We're thrilled to be ABC 774's partner on their Giving Tree Appeal again this year, and throughout December we're encouraging Victorians to buy gifts for disadvantaged children and families.

Presents can be placed in Giving Tree boxes at ABC stations and ABC Shops around Victoria. We'll then collect and distribute the gifts to families and individuals of all ages, with the help of welfare agency partners across the state.

This year, we want to make sure teenagers are included in the spirit of Christmas. Presents such as CDs, books, games and gift vouchers would be greatly appreciated. A few things to think about if you want to buy a gift:

- make sure your gifts are new, unwrapped and not perishable
- gifts that are chosen with care show the recipients that they are valued
- think of what you or someone you know would like when making a purchase
- toys are a great gift, but of course many parents would not choose toys like guns or swords for their children.

Take the opportunity to end your year on a joyful note. Please give a gift to the appeal and help us reach our target of 10,000 gifts.



Santa and friends at the launch of the ABC 774 Giving Tree Appeal



It's a great opportunity for Skyhooks fans and ABC listeners to own a unique item of memorabilia that's also practical.

Red Symons with Phoenix Fridges trainees Depojay (left) and Gilbert

## Bid for a fridge autographed by Red

As summer heats up is your refrigerator ready to pack up? You could be the proud owner of a fridge with a difference if you are the successful bidder for a Phoenix Fridge signed by ABC radio presenter and Skyhooks guitarist Red Symons.

The Brotherhood will auction the fridge over summer and we'll pick up the winner's old fridge if they want to donate it to Phoenix Fridges, which transforms older models to help

low-income households save energy and cut power bills. The project also trains and employs disadvantaged jobseekers.

It's a great opportunity for Skyhooks fans and ABC listeners to own a unique item of memorabilia that's also practical.

Red put his moniker on a fully refurbished fridge during a visit to Phoenix Fridges in Brunswick to donate his own spare fridge to the Brotherhood. He also

recorded some interviews with Brotherhood staff for his ABC breakfast show.

Fridges are responsible for up to 15 per cent of Australia's household greenhouse gas emissions.

Red's, like all the refrigerators donated to Phoenix Fridges, will either be repaired and retrofitted to make it more energy efficient before resale, or it will be recycled.

The Brotherhood collects old fridges in Melbourne and surrounds free of charge. To arrange a collection call 1300 366 283. Or visit [www.phoenixfridges.com.au](http://www.phoenixfridges.com.au) for more information.

Watch the Brotherhood website – [www.bsl.org.au](http://www.bsl.org.au) – for details of the auction.

## Women on the Move – can you help?

We are looking for some enthusiastic and friendly female volunteers from the Craigieburn area to work with us on a new project that will help isolated refugee women settle into life in their new community.

With funding from the Scanlon Foundation, the Women on the Move project will match refugee women with local female residents. The residents will volunteer their time to help refugee women learn about the transport, child care, health and recreational activities and services available in their area. Through regular contact, volunteers will also help refugee women with their English, improving their self-reliance and their sense of belonging to their new home.

Volunteers will receive accredited training that can be used towards a community development certificate. Training starts in January 2008. For more information call Marta Kreiser on (03) 9305 5100 or [mkreiser@bsl.org.au](mailto:mkreiser@bsl.org.au).



## A big thank you to a wonderful donor

We were absolutely delighted when the owner of The Castle Hotel in North Melbourne, Clive Blackford, called and offered 100 people a special Christmas lunch this year.

Together with his wife and four staff, who are volunteering their time, Clive will be joined by 100 people from the Brotherhood's Coolibah Centre and other aged care services for lunch on Christmas day.

'This is the first time I've done something like this,' Clive says. 'And the thing about Christmas is that everyone should have somewhere to go. They shouldn't be alone.'

'I'm at a stage in my life where I realise I've been very lucky, I've been very privileged. My children have grown up and we've had a wonderful life. It's time to give something back.'

Clive and his staff are putting on a traditional Christmas lunch for his special guests. Coolibah members, Pat, Dave and Graham (pictured with Coolibah Manager, Rod Miller), recently visited Clive to let him know they're looking forward to their special Christmas lunch this year.

## Please find enclosed my gift of:

\$25  \$50  \$100  \$200  \$\_\_\_\_\_ my choice

Payment method:  Cheque  Money Order  Visa  MasterCard  DinersClub  AMEX

Card number \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration date \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

Name on card \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Street address \_\_\_\_\_

Suburb \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (H) \_\_\_\_\_ (W) \_\_\_\_\_

Please send me information about including the Brotherhood of St Laurence in my Will.

We respect the privacy of your personal details. The Brotherhood of St Laurence will not disclose your details to any other party. See our Privacy Policy on our website.

