

# Building better lives



Brotherhood  
of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty

## Executive Director's message

# Dedication is appreciated

As I chatted to one of the elderly people who come to our Coolibah Centre recently it became clear that one of the great pleasures in this lady's life was the friendship she has developed with one of the volunteers who help the Centre on a regular basis.



These Waverley Auxiliary ladies have contributed a combined 170 years of service.

As we talked I reflected, once again, on the enormous contribution volunteers make to the Brotherhood's work, and indeed to many, many other organisations.

This edition of *Building better lives* honors and celebrates the wonderful support the Brotherhood of St Laurence receives from its dedicated band of volunteer workers.

Brotherhood volunteers contribute more than 300,000 hours of work each year, which in economic terms equates to about \$5.9 million. They work across our organisation, including in our aged and community care programs, child and family services and employment programs, as well as with our social policy and research area, library and fundraising team and in our retail stores.

The enormous contribution volunteers make throughout Australia has been recognised by both the federal and state governments with the Victorian Premier recently announcing Victoria's Volunteer Strategy. The aims of the Strategy include a commitment to sustain existing volunteer support as well as to encourage young people to also become involved through volunteering their time and skills.

Volunteering helps to build stronger and more cohesive communities. Volunteers come from all walks of life and by giving their time they help the entire community to be stronger and more socially inclusive.

Recently I attended an event to celebrate 40 years of support from our Waverley

Auxiliary. Throughout this time many hundreds of volunteers have worked to raise approximately \$2 million. This outstanding effort has certainly made a major contribution in helping the Brotherhood continue to provide services to disadvantaged people.

At the same time, volunteers themselves often tell us that they gain a number of benefits from the help they give. Their experience of working with a highly respected organisation and with staff who have a broad range of skills and abilities enhances our volunteers' own skills, develops their confidence and broadens their social networks.

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## Pursuing her dream of a better life

Sumner House aged care volunteer, Shobhana Thapa, is enjoying her new role with the Brotherhood at Fitzroy.

'I really like to help people who are in need because there have been lots of times when I needed help', Shobhana says.

'It's only because of the help I got from others that I have been able to survive in this new country', she says. The 23-year-old came from Nepal in January last year to continue her nursing studies after two-

and-a-half years as a Registered Nurse at Kathmandu University Teaching Hospital.

Adjusting to the very different way of life in Australia provided many challenges for this inspiring young woman.

'It was very difficult in the beginning to adjust to the new culture and new community.



Shobhana Thapa

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## Pursuing her dream

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'Everything was very different from what I had experienced so far in life – and my lack of English created a bit of a problem for me at first.'

In fact, Shobhana couldn't pursue her dream of studying nursing because she was unable to pass an English test.

'But as time passed, I took it as a challenge and improved my English gradually.

'I started to volunteer in a non-profit organisation called Lentil As Anything in Abbotsford. It was a great opportunity for me to learn hospitality skills as well as to get to know lots of new people.

'I learned various kitchenhand and barista skills and did a Certificate I in Hospitality (Food Handling) provided by Brotherhood of St Laurence as well as a barista course at Northern Melbourne Institute of Technology.



Sumner House resident Merico Tori with Shobhana Thapa

'And working in the front of the house in Lentil As Anything helped me improve my English skill a lot, so today I can understand and speak much better.'

Shobhana helps Sumner House residents with various facets of daily life, from dressing and tidying their rooms to serving meals and helping them to eat, and assisting them to get to in-house activities.

'Now I am studying for my Diploma of Community Welfare at Layas Institute

in Melbourne, so volunteering in a related field will help me to understand community and apply the theory to the real world. Later I plan to go back to nursing studies', Shobhana says.

'Volunteering gives me lots of satisfaction and happiness and it's a very good opportunity to learn new skills.

'Meeting new people and experiencing another culture is wonderful – and I enjoy making a difference.'

## Dedication is appreciated

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While we acknowledge the tremendous support of our long-serving volunteers I am also encouraged by the increasing numbers of young people coming to us and offering to help in a variety of capacities.

We are delighted to have the support of these young people, some of whom are studying a particular course, some are supporting us as part of their employer's social contribution and others are volunteering out of hours, totally in their own time. Many of these young people have told us how much they enjoy their volunteering experience and we look forward to their ongoing support.

While the Brotherhood gains enormous benefit from all our volunteers, it is our hope that the experience volunteers gain through their support of our work enhances their own skills, confidence and knowledge and benefits their journey through life.

Tony Nicholson

## A helping hand with homework

Brotherhood Homework Club maths tutor, Richard Chen, is a mechanical engineer with engineering firm GHD.

'I have been very fortunate to be where I am today because of the influence other people have made in my life', Richard says. 'It is a wonderful privilege to be able to do the same for others.

'I found out about the Brotherhood through the young professionals committee at GHD, who have supported the Homework Club for a number of years.

'As I got more involved in the tutoring program at Fitzroy Library, I started to realise that the Brotherhood is providing more than just a tutoring service – this is a platform for these young people to grow personally in becoming more confident individuals as they develop positive relationships with the volunteers.'

The Brotherhood has a partnership with

GHD, which sends two volunteers each afternoon.

'Their support helps me to integrate volunteering with work', Richard says. 'It's great to spend time with the students and build good friendships with them – their smiles are extremely rewarding.'

With 15–25 students attending each afternoon, the Homework Club relies on volunteer tutors to offer free tuition in a range of specialist subjects such as maths, science and English and also assist students to practise reading.

Eight students from the Homework Club completed VCE last year and are now studying at university.



Homework Club tutor, Richard Chen, centre, with Jackie Maleek, left and Sani Alie

## Making the transition

Last year school was not a priority for 16-year-old Mitchell Venturin. The Dromana Secondary College Year 11 student struggled to complete assignments on time and was hoping for an apprenticeship. 'I didn't really want to stay at school', Mitchell says. 'I felt I was wasting my time.'

But help from the Brotherhood made a big difference to Mitchell's plans. 'Youth Pathways has really helped me. Without Kellie's help I wouldn't be at school – she talked me into coming back.'

Mitchell now combines school with one day a week welding and metal fabricating at Peninsula Bull Bars in Dromana, a role he is enjoying immensely.

'It's different, and I get time out from my school friends and get to meet new people.'

Youth Pathways aims to help 13 to 19-year-olds who are most at risk of not successfully moving through school to Year 12 or its equivalent and making the transition to further education, training or employment.

Brotherhood of St Laurence Education Development Worker and Youth Pathways Coach, Kellie Taylor, first met Mitchell last year through a school referral.

'Towards the end of the year he decided that he wanted to leave school and didn't complete his enrollment paperwork for Year 11. Mitchell wanted to work in a trade and was hoping to get an apprenticeship – but he wasn't aware that he could stay at school and work towards a school-based apprenticeship. Now he successfully combines school with a VET Building and Construction course and one day per week of work experience.'



Mitchell Venturin in the workplace

Young people participating in Youth Pathways receive three phases of personalised assistance specifically directed to meet their needs: assessment, assistance, and ongoing support and guidance.

During the assessment phase, Youth Pathways establishes whether the young person is eligible for the program and consults with them to identify their obstacles, needs and strengths, and then develops an individual transition plan. The plan outlines strategies for overcoming the obstacles.

In the assistance phase, Youth Pathways delivers individualised case management and intensive support. A minimum of six hours of this assistance is delivered face to face.

'During the ongoing support and guidance phase, Youth Pathways has regular contact with the participant, to make sure they stay on track and continue to receive the support and guidance they need', Kellie says.

**Volunteers provide reception and administrative support at Youth Pathways in Frankston.**

## Women on the Move

The women huddled together over glossy maps to plan their route on a bright, sunny Sunday afternoon. Kangaroos were a popular first choice, and the Women on the Move set off to discover marsupials at Melbourne Zoo.

The women took a break outside the butterfly house. One woman, heavily pregnant, chose a shady spot as her new friends unwrapped platters of Middle Eastern delicacies. A volunteer shouted the group to a round of hot chips and tomato sauce.

Women on the Move (WoM) was established in 2008 to address the isolation of women and families in the outer north of Melbourne. Initially focusing on Craigieburn and then expanding to the surrounding areas, the program links women to local services, public transport and community networks, encouraging their confidence

and independence. Women volunteers provide an open mind, a helping hand, and a shoulder to lean on.

Many of the volunteers, often migrants themselves, speak of the pride they feel for their role.

'Helping people really increased my self esteem', says one volunteer. 'My proudest moment is to tell my friends that I am a volunteer for the Brotherhood of St Laurence', says another.

'We receive referrals from community agencies and by word of mouth, of refugee women who are particularly isolated for one reason or another', says Jess Letch,

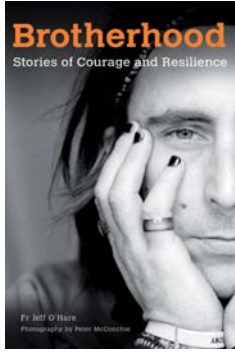


Enjoying a day at the zoo

WoM coordinator at the Brotherhood's Ecumenical Migration Centre. 'Some women might be caring for a disabled partner or newborn baby. Others are newly arrived and have no family here in Australia.'

'Women on the Move builds connections across cultures and across neighbourhoods', says Jess. 'There are times when we all need someone to turn to.'

# Brotherhood – Stories of Courage and Resilience ... out now



**'It doesn't take much for life to alter course, and for our well-made plans to dramatically change. The courageous people that have opened up their lives to us in this book are still dealing with the consequences of adversity. Their stories, as well as being honest and compelling, are vibrant with love, friendship and a sense of community.'**  
*Russell Crowe*

Brotherhood Chaplain, Father Jeff O'Hare, and renowned Australian portrait photographer, Peter McConchie, have pooled their talents to produce a compelling collection of stories and photographs, featuring the life stories of 29 clients and friends of the Brotherhood. Each of these people share their extraordinary experiences of hardship and adversity and inspire us with

their ability to develop friendships and engage with their local communities.

Through our reading of the book we develop a greater understanding of the importance of the help offered by organisations like the Brotherhood. In almost every case, the Brotherhood has stepped into a troubled life at just the right moment, and provided ongoing and much valued support.

These stories remind us that wherever we might be in the social spectrum, we are all the same underneath. We all share the same fears, flaws and frailties and in times of need we all benefit from help and support.

*Brotherhood – Stories of Courage and Resilience* is available from bookshops Australia wide, or you can order a copy by phoning 03 9483 1301 during office hours. All royalties from the sale of the book go towards supporting the important work of the Brotherhood.

## Order Brotherhood – Stories of Courage and Resilience today!

Just \$29.95 each (inc. GST) plus \$3.00 postage and handling per order. To order phone 03 9483 1301.

## Support group brings hope

**'Can't we have it again next week?' 'We don't want to wait a whole month!' These were just some of the positive comments from women at the first meeting of Bentons Square Women's Group.**

The group was started by two Brotherhood volunteers, Dizzy and Marg, to help women living isolated lives on the Mornington Peninsula. Some of the women suffered from a disability, others simply have few family or friends – sometimes because they originally came from other countries and had left family members behind.

Dizzy and Marg, who dedicate an afternoon each month to help the women



Marg and Dizzy have started a new support group

live more connected and happier lives, set out to discover what was available for disadvantaged people in the peninsula area.

One of the major difficulties is lack of transport. 'It's such a big issue – if you don't have a car, getting around is really hard,' Marg says.

'Finding out what is available and actually getting help must be extremely hard for

people who are disadvantaged in any way. We would love to have a small bus so that we could take the women on visits.'

The new group has already created a supportive and warm environment where women feel free and comfortable to tell their stories and relate to each other. The pleasure they feel in each other's company is clear.

Bentons Square Women's Group aims to include a variety of craft activities, including scrapbooking. If you have any craft materials you would like to donate please phone Marg on 0403 188 536.

'We are also looking for up-to-date computer donations so we can help older people learn computer skills', Dizzy says. 'This will help them stay connected with family and friends as well as allow them to access a range of helpful community information.'

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 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.

Donations to the Brotherhood of St Laurence of \$2 or more are tax deductible.

