



Executive Director's Message



As I watched some local children outside our Fitzroy office buzzing around as they returned to school, I reflected on what it is that helps some kids to successfully make the transition to school. What is it that enables some children to achieve at school and find a secure path to employment or further education while others struggle, often throughout their life? I particularly thought about disadvantaged kids - why do some escape the cycle of poverty while others remain trapped by it?

The Brotherhood's research and many years of experience tells us that parents hold the key to breaking the cycle of disadvantage. Parents have the greatest influence on their children's attitude to school, to work and to life in general. From birth onwards, it is the parents' attitude and skills and their interaction with their children that make all the difference.

Helping parents to help their children can be complex and time consuming – and it needs resources. In our work with families we constantly struggle to find the money to help them. It is your financial support – which many of you have given over a number of years – that allows us to help extremely disadvantaged families in the most effective way possible.

All of us who are parents know that on some days there are a few desperate hours between being a good parent and being one that isn't so good.

Days when children's demands just don't stop, the baby won't stop screaming, the washing machine floods and you just don't seem to be able to get on top of anything. Days when you feel very alone and are convinced you must be the worst mum or dad in the world.

Some of us have ways of dealing with these days – we can escape to the park, have a coffee with another parent or just have a long chat to a sympathetic friend.

But imagine you are a single mum with three kids living in a caravan – with no relatives nearby and no transport. What do

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A life changing gift

Ethiopian refugee Engi believed he had come to the end of his traumatic refugee experience when he began a new life as a university student in Melbourne last year.

Yet just as he was about to sit exams at the end of first semester, Engi was forced to withdraw from his course and his future was thrown into turmoil yet again.

Engi had enrolled at university believing his fees were covered by HECS, but instead at the end of first semester he was sent a bill for \$3600 and told he was classified as an international student because his family had arrived as refugees to Australia via New Zealand.

After finding out he was required to pay full university fees up front and knowing his family wouldn't be able to find the money, Engi believed his university days were over and his hopes for the future were dashed.

Then a friend of the Brotherhood of St Laurence's Given the Chance project made a life changing gift, generously giving Engi \$3600 to pay for his semester two fees so he could return to university.

"It was just the simplest thing to do – I couldn't deny to myself that I had the money. I'm not rich but I had enough to help out," said the donor, who wants to remain anonymous.

"It really is such a small amount. I knew the problems this family are facing are really short term and that in a few years they will be fine. But I knew that if Engi didn't continue his studies it would really set back the family."

The generosity of this wonderful donor has changed Engi's life. Over the recent summer break, he worked two jobs and saved enough money to pay his university fees for his second year.

Engi's determination and resilience is an inspiration given his journey to Australia as a refugee and all that his family has been through.

Back in Ethiopia thirteen years ago, Engi's mother, Muluken was at their family home in Ethiopia when soldiers knocked on the door at 3am. They were looking for her husband and Engi's father Alemayehu.

"When I opened the door a soldier pointed a gun to my head and asked 'where is your husband?' I told him I didn't know," Muluken says. The soldiers then placed Muluken under house arrest.



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you do with three unhappy children and nowhere else to go? No family you can call on for help, no money for an outing for the children and no foreseeable escape from your situation.

Imagine you suffered neglect as a child and desperately want to be a good parent to your own children, but have no idea how to go about it.

What if you and your family have recently arrived from a refugee camp to a crowded flat on a public housing estate in inner Melbourne? You have five youngsters to care for but you are so busy dealing with the stresses of fleeing from your war-torn homeland, arriving in a new country, finding a job and paying the rent that you simply cannot meet all the challenges of parenting.

Seven hundred thousand children in Australia are being raised in poverty – a poverty that humiliates them and curtails their life chances. In our experience almost all parents want the same things for their children, no matter what their economic circumstances. They want them to achieve their best and are committed to helping them.

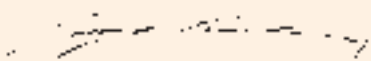
It is the Brotherhood's firm belief that investing in families, particularly in helping parents to help their children, is the one of the best investments we can possibly make.

Many of the Brotherhood's initiatives make that investment, such as our Family Day Care Service at Craigieburn on Melbourne's northern fringe, which assists more than 400 disadvantaged families each year. A trained carer in her own home can give parents the chance to work, study or take a well deserved break. Best of all, the care is often available at short notice, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The carers also work with children with disabilities – a service that is hard enough to find at the best of times, let alone when your family budget is meagre. And our supported playgroups and mothers' groups give parents the chance to meet, share experiences of parenting and make friends.

The Brotherhood's programs help the very neediest families and we work with them intensively. It is our aim that all families are helped to overcome the difficulties they have endured and are given every opportunity to care for their children in a loving environment.

I hope that we can continue this important work together.



Tony Nicholson

A life changing gift

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Alemayehu had earlier fled to Kenya where the family was offered resettlement in New Zealand under the United Nations Humanitarian program. After six long years of separation the family reunited in New Zealand where they lived for six years and became citizens.

In New Zealand Muluken gave birth to their fifth child Bamluk. He was born with Down syndrome and was very sick for his first three years. Life was difficult with five children and Alemayehu was unable to find on-going work. Trained and experienced in electrical maintenance and robotics, he found a job in Melbourne on the Internet and arrived in Australia in November 2003. The family joined him in July 2004. Six weeks after his family had joined him Alemayehu lost his job and the family was plunged into a crisis.

As New Zealand citizens the family has a right to stay in Australia, to work and to receive Medicare and Family Allowance. However they are not entitled to Centrelink social security support or Austudy.

While Alemayehu quickly found a part-time job driving a taxi, the family had to depend on food and petrol vouchers, money from a charity to pay their rent and the wages of their sons Engi and Seyom, then aged 17 and 15, from their after school work. There were times when there was not enough food, serious rent problems, terrible anxiety and no family or friends to help.

In March last year the family was referred to the Brotherhood's Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC). It has a long history of working with migrants and refugee parents to help them and their children settle into a new life in Australia.

Muluken, Alemayehu, and Engi, then 19, enrolled in EMC's mentoring and employment program for refugees, Given the Chance.

Through Given the Chance Muluken now works as a cashier at the Coles Supermarket in Footscray and Engi works night shift stocking shelves. They were among the first refugees employed by Coles under its new partnership with Given the Chance.

"Coles did a great thing for us. All Given the Chance applicants are fast tracked through the interview process ... it shows that when there's a will there's a way," Pretam Kaur, Training and Workplace Support Coordinator on Given the Chance, says.

Through St Vincent Hospital's partnership with Given the Chance, Alemayehu was employed in the hospital's sterilisation unit in January this year. The family is finally breathing easy having survived a traumatic journey.

"We are very grateful to the Brotherhood of St Laurence for helping us. We are hard working, we want to look after the family, send the children to school and care for Bamluk. We just needed help to get jobs here. Now we are happy," Alemayehu says.

Climate change: put everyone in the picture

Climate change and how we deal with it will affect everyone, but low-income and disadvantaged people are on the front line.

The economic and social changes that flow from inaction on climate change will increase social inequality.

This issue was examined by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, the National Welfare Rights Network, The Climate Institute and the Australian Conservation Foundation at a roundtable on 26 March.

Issues such as how the cost of carbon pricing will affect the disadvantaged were examined. The roundtable also identified the new jobs in the "greener" economy and looked at how the disadvantaged might make the most of these opportunities.

This is the first step the Brotherhood has taken in engaging with business and governments to ensure that existing social and economic inequalities are not exacerbated in the way we deal with climate change.

Family Day Care makes the difference



For Craigieburn mother Melinda, the Brotherhood's Craigieburn Family Day Care Service was a crucial lifeline.

When her baby son, Joshua, was six months old she was faced with a quandary.

Having already spent a month in hospital after Joshua's difficult birth, Melinda was suddenly faced with the need for urgent surgery. After her earlier hospitalisation family and friends could not afford to take any more time off to look after Joshua, and her former partner, Adam, works full time.

"I said I can't have an operation – I have to look after Josh," Melinda said.

"I would have put off the operation – I had no options. That's when the social worker stepped in, and everything came together. The social worker became involved on a Friday and the care started on a Monday – it was instant."

The carer who stepped in is Karen from Craigieburn Family Day Care.

Fortunately Karen lived just around the corner from Adam, so it was easy to arrange for family day care during the day while he was at work, and also to help the novice father out with advice on the practicalities of looking after his new son.

Karen has been an accredited carer from home for 10 years - her framed Certificate III in Children's Services takes pride of place on the wall of her entry hall.

Karen looked after Joshua in the daytime during the two weeks that Melinda was in hospital, and for another two weeks while she recuperated. "To begin with I phoned a lot but I settled down a bit when I saw Joshua was fine," says Melinda.

The Brotherhood's Craigieburn Family Day Care Service provides the childcare service in trained carers' homes to about 350 children each week.

It selects and trains carers and matches them to parents. The care is flexible in both the hours available – up to 24 hours

a day if necessary - and in the age range of the children - from zero to 12 years.

As Melinda says: "The flexible hours are great but what I'm really comfortable with is that Josh really loves the carer – you can tell there's a bond."

Carers in Craigieburn reflect the cultural diversity of the fast-growing region on Melbourne's north-west fringe, coming from 20 different countries, including India, Bangladesh, Somalia, Turkey, Malta, Fiji and Italy as well as Australia.

The Family Day Care offices are also a local community hub. They support other activities such as playgroups, the Brotherhood - ANZ Saver Plus matched-savings program that helps families save for their children's education, the Broadmeadows Community Legal Service and two volunteer services trained by the Metropolitan Ambulance Service for medical emergencies, the Craigieburn and District Ambulance Committee and the Community Emergency Response Team.

The Brotherhood has been running the service since 1994 although its involvement with family day care goes back much further. In fact the Brotherhood established the first pilot for a family day care service in Australia in the early 1970s, in response to the number of women in Fitzroy going to work in the factories that were then located in the area.

Welcome Fr Jeff O'Hare

"In 1987 I managed to gain a place as a theological student at the Brotherhood of St Laurence. I had worked hard through my theological training to gain as broad an experience as possible in student placements, so that by the time I was ordained I would have a good overview of the diversity of the Diocese and life in Melbourne.

Nothing could have prepared me for the experiences of '87. It was without doubt the most transforming and life changing experience of my life.

Learning to be with what St Laurence calls the 'treasures of the church'. Learning to listen to their story, learning how precious, real and supportive the sense of community is within the lives of the recipients, learning to be informed by their story, which for me brought the Gospel to life.

Everything since, in all the places I've been to, has been informed by the love, energy and 'rawness' of life in this community. An invitation to come back was irresistible and I was surprised when the students, in wishing me well at my departure from Geelong Grammar School, expressed little surprise that this was the next step in my journey.

We can talk about the eradication of poverty and feel better for the conversation, but to be a worker for a poverty free Australia is a privilege because we have the opportunity to enter into meaningful relationships with the ones who matter the most. I'm thrilled to be back and proud to represent the diocese in this wonderful mission. "

Fr Jeff O'Hare is wearing the Brotherhood of St. Laurence official stole - a gift made and embroidered by Morna Sturrock.





A special donation

A recent donation to the Brotherhood came from a very special couple. Glen, 62, has been visiting the Brotherhood's Coolibah Day Centre since the 1970s after a friend had told him it was a good place to find a meal and make friends. Barb, 57, started coming to the Centre three years ago for the same reason.

Barb and Glen met at the Coolibah last year and Glen says "As soon as I lay my eyes on Barb, I thought 'she looks alright!'" From that point on their friendship developed and while Glen's first proposal of marriage wasn't successful, he didn't give up – and on his second attempt Barb said 'yes!'

Barb and Glen tied the knot on Saturday 2nd December 2006 – the Coolibah's first wedding. The newlyweds have now moved to Tasmania but before they left they donated \$200 to the Brotherhood to say thanks for the support they've received over the years.

Corporate support

Freehills has been an important supporter of the Brotherhood for many years, helping us both through volunteering staff time as well as with fundraising. Most recently Freehills provided funding and staff to help us hold a fantastic Christmas party for the people we assist in the Fitzroy area. This wonderful afternoon of fun and entertainment brought together people in our aged care facility, refugee families and local school children, providing memories that will last a lifetime.

We are most appreciative of all the assistance we have been given by Freehills and are very grateful that they have offered to continue, and extend, their assistance over the coming year.

AXA We are delighted that staff and management at AXA continue to give enormously generous support to a number of Brotherhood services. This assistance includes critically important ongoing funding to our HIPPY program – a program which has delivered invaluable help to literally hundreds of disadvantaged children and their families.

At Christmas time AXA provided a superb lunch to many of the people we help who have disabilities and who live in the Carrum Downs area. AXA organised coach travel to Melbourne, served a scrumptious three course lunch and, to top off a wonderful day, gave everyone a 'goodie bag' full of presents.

Throughout 2007 AXA staff have agreed to extend their commitment to the Brotherhood to not only provide breakfast at the Coolibah Centre on Sunday mornings, but to also help out at our Fitzroy Brekky Club.

The assistance provided by AXA has been invaluable to our work and makes an enormous and positive impact on the lives of many extremely disadvantaged members of our community.

Thank you

for helping us to make 2006
a wonderfully successful year

Thank you for demonstrating your compassion for some of the most disadvantaged members of our community by continuing to make generous financial contributions to our work. We are enormously grateful for your support.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence is extremely fortunate in many ways. It has inspirational leadership, highly skilled and dedicated staff and, equally importantly, wonderful loyal supporters who provide us with encouragement and financial assistance to enable us to carry out our work effectively.

Our organisation is known for its thorough research and its fearless advocacy on behalf of people who are disadvantaged. While this work is, of course, vitally important it is your financial support which allows us the freedom to confront policy makers about issues which we know affect the people on whose behalf we work.

It is your support too, which enables us to develop and trial new service initiatives and to evaluate their effectiveness. We are then in a position to share this knowledge to other agencies as well as to lobby governments to adopt new directions and provide ongoing funding.

While we have no doubt that this work is critically important, we simply could not undertake it without the steadfast assistance provided by our supporters.

Did you know?

- **Students from poorer communities typically achieve lower results at every level of schooling and are far less likely to go on to tertiary study.**
- **One in seven children are growing up in a jobless household.**
- **Children make up 46 per cent of all people who use services for the homeless in Australia.**
- **The prevalence of mental health problems is greater in low income families.**
- **Long term unemployment is a major problem in Australia – 37 per cent of unemployed people have been without work for a year or more.**
- **Nearly one fifth of unemployed people have never had a job.**