

# Building better lives



Brotherhood  
of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty

## Executive Director's message



## Working together for a brighter future

The latest national account figures confirm that the global financial meltdown is having far-reaching consequences and few of us will be left unaffected. Sadly, it now appears that many will feel the brunt of job cuts as the economy contracts.

We need to heed the lessons of previous economic downturns if we are to avoid some of the worst impacts in this one. At the Brotherhood we believe the focus for the next three years should be on measures that support job retention, stimulate job creation, help people acquire the skills to be work ready and develop the physical infrastructure that will be needed when economic growth returns.

There is a strong association between long-term unemployment and poverty and social exclusion. There is also an intergenerational cost through the impact of poverty on families and their children. It is essential that our governments implement measures for the groups in the community that are the most vulnerable to long-term unemployment and social exclusion.

A Brotherhood of St Laurence analysis, using data from the 1990–91 recession, suggests a peak in long-term unemployment will occur in mid 2011. This would mean that in Victoria, where there are currently 18,000 people counted as being long-term unemployed (out of work for 12 months or more), the number would increase almost four-fold to 66,000.

In the 1990–91 recession, gross domestic product bottomed in mid 1991 but the peak in unemployment occurred 18 months later, in December 1992, at 10.7% nationally. The peak in long-term unemployment was not felt until two years after GDP bottomed, in mid 1993, when 36.5% of all unemployed people were long-term unemployed (according to the Bureau of Statistics).

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## Supporting bushfire relief

We have all been touched by the heartbreaking stories from individuals and communities following Victoria's bushfire disaster in February.

All of us at the Brotherhood of St Laurence share the concern shown by all Victorians, as well as that shown nationally and internationally, for the victims and the survivors of the bushfires. The tragic loss of life, the injuries to so many and the destruction of so many homes and community buildings is an overwhelming disaster.

Often extreme adversity such as this brings out the best in our community. The relief effort to date has been strong, but the reconstruction of the homes and towns and the rebuilding of people's lives and their communities will take a great deal of time and effort.

The Brotherhood has provided strong support to the bushfire relief appeal by receiving cash donations as well as accepting and processing material goods, which we then pass on to Victoria's major relief agencies, including the Red Cross and VicRelief Foodbank. It is our belief that by helping to build the capacity of these agencies, which are specialists in the area of disaster relief, the Brotherhood is helping in the most effective and efficient way possible.

## Parent power

Mai came to Australia from Vietnam and was living in Flemington with her husband and two young children when she saw – almost by accident – a poster for the HIPPY home tutoring program.

Mai sensed the potential for her children and for her own education and parenting skills. But she didn't realise at the time that it would also lead her into the workforce.

After the local HIPPY coordinator, Nicola, encouraged her to give it a go, Mai started the HIPPY program with her son Daniel. 'It was really good – we got the HIPPY materials and the HIPPY home tutor came to me really quickly. We joined the parenting group together and I learned many things from that.'

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Mai Nguyen and Marisa Pizzini

## Parent Power

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The program even broadened Mai's social contacts. 'I started to talk to the African women. At first we didn't talk, we would just pass each other on the way to the shopping, but through HIPPY we talked and we found with our children we had things in common.'

HIPPY – the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters – is a home-based parenting and early childhood enrichment program targeting disadvantaged families.

It empowers parents to be their child's first teacher, strengthens the bond between parents and their children,



Mai and family at the HIPPY graduation

fosters parents' involvement in school and community life and can offer parents a pathway to employment.

The program runs for two years, for 30 weeks each year during school terms. At the end of the first year, Mai was approached to become a HIPPY Home Tutor. 'I really wanted to do it because I wanted to share the program with the other mums and children.'

'Nicola helped me do the CV and I went to the interview where I was a little bit nervous, but after a couple of weeks I got a call from Marisa (Pizzini), the Fitzroy coordinator and she told me I got the job. I was over the moon.'

Mai's first step as a home tutor was to work with Marisa to organise a parenting group. 'We do activities like colouring and reading and drawing and exploring things like cooking. The kids get really excited, they really enjoy their learning, we show them some science with simple things like how the raw eggs float and the cooked eggs sink.'

Part of the first year on the job for home tutors involves training for the Certificate III in Community Services. That training and her work has helped Mai 'understand different

people and how to deal with different people from different backgrounds. It has also taught me how to be professional in what I do.'

Mai's son, Daniel has graduated from the program and her daughter Anna is in her second year. 'When Anna started prep this year, she could already draw and write and read some books', says Mai.

Mai has no hesitation in recommending the HIPPY program. 'It is for you and it is for your children. It will give you something and teach you some things.'

Marisa Pizzini says there are benefits on many levels – for children, for parents and for home tutors.

'It helps parents become their child's first teacher. The child and the parent develop a stronger bond and the children are more confident when they get to school because they have done this preparation.'

'Particularly after the first year, you notice a difference when the children go to school. Teachers will ask parents, "what have you been doing with your child before coming to school?" They really notice the difference.'

'There's also a sense of community because we come together in parent groups – it brings parents together, it builds a community spirit.'

'For the children, HIPPY graduation is the pinnacle: you just see their pride and their parents' pride.'

## Working together for a brighter future

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People with low skills, poor education and little or no work experience are far more likely to be left behind as the economy emerges from recession. Single parents and mature-aged retrenched workers, as well as Indigenous Australians and those with low English proficiency, are all vulnerable.

So are young people. Among the people hit hardest in the last recession were those aged 15–19 who were not in full-time education. The unemployment rate among that age group doubled in the 1990–91 recession to 27%, stagnating at that level until mid 1994.

If we are to avoid the related levels of social exclusion and welfare reliance, it is imperative that we focus on economic participation. Australia cannot afford to have large numbers of job seekers with

poor skills excluded from the workforce when the recovery eventuates – that will simply lead to another skills shortage. It is crucial that we maximise the work skills and capacities of the predicted pool of unemployed people – particularly young people – not only in the longer term interest of maintaining a strong and competitive economy, but more importantly to ensure that these people are not forced to become long-term unemployed and live in resultant poverty.

Our experience and research both demonstrate that it is imperative that we continue to support young disadvantaged people during these hard times so they can confidently take their place in the mainstream economic and social life of our nation.

Programs such as the Brotherhood's Parents as Career Transition Support program (PACTS), which works with disadvantaged parents to help them encourage their children to continue their education, are extremely important in supporting disadvantaged young people to develop the skills necessary for future employment.

It is an enormous encouragement to all of us at the Brotherhood that you, our very loyal supporters, are willing to assist us with this important work.

Please accept our warm thanks for your help.

Tony Nicholson

Staff from Freehills volunteered their services and helped prepare and serve lunch to the hungry crowd

# Spirit of sharing boosts the ABC Giving Tree Appeal

Victorians have once again exemplified the spirit of sharing by donating thousands of gifts to the ABC Giving Tree Appeal 2008.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence, in partnership with 774 Melbourne and ABC Local Radio Victoria, set out last year to collect quality gifts for disadvantaged individuals and families across Victoria.

Working with around 40 other charities across the state, the Brotherhood collected the gifts and distributed them to disadvantaged people of all ages. Feedback from regional agencies

was extremely positive, with a general consensus of a 'very successful appeal' and some agencies reporting a doubling of donated gifts from 2007.

Many families and individuals were able to enjoy Christmas with the help of the Brotherhood and ABC.

An official launch of the ABC Giving Tree Appeal was held at the Brotherhood of



St Laurence Christmas Party on Friday, 5 December, at the Brotherhood's headquarters in Fitzroy, with performances by the Solstice Choir, Sacred Heart Primary School Choir and the Sierra Leone Women's Choir. Father Christmas also entertained the children, and hundreds of members of the Brotherhood's community shared in the spirit of Christmas.

## Achieving goals is Mahalet's mission



**Mahalet Tsegaya is a young woman with a purpose – tackling social injustice. The 17-year-old student, who came to Australia from Ethiopia in July 2007 has just completed the Community Services Leadership Program (CSLP), learning skills to initiate and lead a project of genuine benefit to her local community.**

Mahalet and other students at the Young Adult Migrant Education Course (YAMEC) at the Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE took part in the CSLP pilot as part of their VCAL curriculum. The students were engaged in a range of projects on racism, young people's engagement in sports, young women's sexual health, the environment, and building bridges of understanding between young and old people in the community.

Mahalet says working with the community enabled her to see the world in a different way.

'I think it is important because you get to share your opinion with different people with a different ideas and opinions,' she says. 'Youth need to speak up more about the issues that affect them, because if they don't speak up about their problems they don't get a solution. From my experience the main problems are getting a job, trying to fit in and trying to learn a new language in a new country. Through my work with the community I developed confidence in myself, and more importantly, I learnt different skills.'

Mahalet says the best way to implement change is to work with a variety of people and learn from them. 'As you try new things you make mistakes and you learn from your mistakes as well – life is full of new things and if you don't force yourself to try something you don't get to experience life.'

Mahalet's project was focused on sexual abuse of women and women's sexual health. 'This is especially important for women who come from the cultures where they don't talk much about sexual abuse or sexual health.'

Families always play an important role in a young person's life and Mahalet says she appreciates the support of her uncle and aunty – she lives with them in Fitzroy and is now studying hairdressing at Preston TAFE.

The CSLP pilot was developed by the Brotherhood of St Laurence with the support of Rotary Club Melbourne and the Lord Mayor's Charitable Fund – Eldon and Anne Foote Trust. It aimed to provide an opportunity for disadvantaged young people to be active creators of positive change in their community by encouraging their development of social and civic responsibility and empathy. The integrated CSLP curriculum combined personal development, citizenship, language and literacy, and employment skills.

## Donor spotlight – Sarah Taylor



**I started giving to the Brotherhood of St Laurence after finishing university and getting a full-time job. This time was in itself the culmination of several years of getting onto my feet.**

Having left home in bad circumstances as a teenager, my sister and I spent nearly a year with first-hand experience of poverty, including homelessness and domestic violence.

I guess you could call it an 'Oliver Twist' experience. From this I was determined to become educated and less socially vulnerable myself, but also to not forget the people still in disadvantaged positions.

I didn't want to develop selfish or hypocritical politics. Giving to charities is a simple way of reflecting this commitment.

I believe the effects of unfairness can be utterly crushing, both on the individual and on society as a whole.

But I also believe in the transformative powers of giving someone the benefit of the doubt, refraining from judgement and helping them get on their feet.

This is our shared responsibility. In this sense my outlook aligns with the values of the Brotherhood, and I'm very impressed with their drive and vision.

I especially like the fact that the Brotherhood is not a passive charity. It speaks up on issues, investigates thoroughly and spearheads research into the structural causes of poverty. And I like the op shops – the Brunswick Road store is brilliant!

Sarah Taylor

## Coolibah Christmas Lunch

Thanks to the generosity of the Castle Hotel publican, Clive Blackford and his family, 150 socially and financially disadvantaged people were able to enjoy a free Christmas lunch in 2008.

Supported by Brotherhood staff and volunteers, the day highlighted what can be achieved when NGOs, business and the general community work together and all do their bit.

The Castle Hotel in North Melbourne will also be donating an Easter lunch for Brotherhood Aged and Community Care clients and the Choir of Hard Knocks.

The hotel's suppliers donate as much as they can, helping make the day possible for those who would otherwise miss out.

Donations of Easter eggs or funds to purchase Fair Trade Easter eggs would be greatly appreciated by the Brotherhood



to ensure that everybody receives the trimmings of the Easter holiday period – please call (03) 9483 1302 if you can help.

### Please find enclosed my gift of:

All donations to the Brotherhood of St Laurence of \$2 or more are tax deductible

\$30    \$50    \$100    \$200    \$\_\_\_\_\_ my choice

Payment method:    Cheque    Money Order    Visa    MasterCard    DinersClub    AMEX

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Street \_\_\_\_\_

Suburb/town \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

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

Card number \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry date \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Please send me information about the Solutions program (the regular giving program)

Please send me information about remembering the Brotherhood 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.

