

# Building better lives



Brotherhood of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty

*Building better lives since 1930*

## Executive Director's message



Tony Nicholson

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the formation of the Brotherhood of St Laurence by Father Gerard Tucker, a man who was determined to end social injustice and improve the lives of people forced to live in poverty. As we look forward to continuing our work over the coming year, it is timely to reflect on some of the achievements the Brotherhood has made since that time.

Family Day Care, for example, was developed and pioneered by the Brotherhood

a wonderful and flexible environment for children whose parents work and thousands of Australian children are cared for in this way in numerous homes every day of the week.

The Coolibah Day Centre in Fitzroy which the Brotherhood established in 1946, in order to provide support to local older people who suffered from a lifetime of poverty, is the forerunner to the Senior

Citizens' Centres which today provide care and assistance to older Australians throughout the nation.

For almost 50 years too, the Ecumenical Migration Centre has been at the forefront of migrant rights and is widely recognised as developing innovative programs which help people who are newly arrived in our community to overcome past trauma and settle into their new country.

in order to assist families living in the high-rise flats in inner city Melbourne. An evaluation of the program demonstrated its success and it was later handed over to the local council for expansion. Today Family Day Care is recognised as providing

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## Congratulations HIPPY graduates

Fitzroy Town Hall played host to a vibrant gathering in December when hundreds of HIPPY participants and their families came together to celebrate their graduation night.

The Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters has been hugely successful in changing lives. The program aims to prepare young children for primary school by helping parents gain the skills necessary for them to assist their children in early childhood numeracy and literacy.

The thrill of receiving a certificate for their efforts brought many, many smiles and families proudly lined up for their photos afterwards, including Phuong Do Thi's family.

'I am very happy and proud of Hong and myself', the proud HIPPY mother said. 'I didn't believe I could teach him and that he would understand but he does.'

'This is good for me because now I can communicate with the teachers at his school about Hong Chen Lim's school work. Also he will be more confident when he starts school.'

HIPPY Fitzroy site coordinator, Katherine Sciglitano says the difference can be measured after a family completes the HIPPY workshops and training.



Family learning: Phuong Do Thi, Sarah Lim and Hong Chen Lim on graduation night

'It's very effective in preparing children for their first year of school', she says.

'They will start school with basic numeracy and literacy skills as well as the ability to take directions – their communication skills will be greatly improved.'

'Most children go into the program with very few skills and many of them have never even handled a book.'

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## Executive Director's message

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Our Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY), which the Brotherhood brought to Australia and piloted in 1998, has also been extremely successful. Following its replication in a number of communities, the program is now federally funded for a nation-wide rollout.

While we remain committed to these areas of our work, we see great promise for the development of new activities. Our collaboration with the Australian Government in developing the new Yarra Centre for Work and Learning aims to tackle high levels of unemployment on public housing estates. This exciting project will work in partnership with the City of Yarra and the Victorian Office of Housing, and utilise the full range of Brotherhood services.

We are also very pleased to be working in partnership with the Laverton Community Centre in Melbourne's west on the Goodbye Graffiti program. The program will employ and train unemployed people to remove graffiti from roads and railways. The newly opened Banksia Community Respite Centre provides respite care for people living with dementia on the Mornington Peninsula. New pilot programs to help this group of people and their carers will be trialled at the Centre. Following evaluation we hope these new programs may be used to help many others living with this debilitating condition.

We are also looking forward to our involvement with ABC Learning Centres in partnership with Social Ventures Australia, the Benevolent Society and Mission Australia. This initiative will allow us to provide children and families who use the ABC Centres with the benefits of the many years' commitment that the Brotherhood has invested in quality child care and the learnings we have accumulated through that experience.

We hope you share our pride in the Brotherhood's achievements over the past decades and join us in our enthusiasm for future activities to help people who are struggling with disadvantage so that they may take their rightful place in the mainstream life of our community.



Corinne Grant enjoys lunch at the Brotherhood's Community Christmas Party.

# Wishing Tree Appeal & Community Christmas

**Thousands of disadvantaged children and their families were recipients of a wonderful selection of gifts this Christmas, thanks to the generosity of shoppers, who made donations of toys at their local Kmart stores in December.**

The Brotherhood of St Laurence has been a long-term partner with Kmart in the annual Wishing Tree Appeal and we were very pleased to be able to distribute over 20,000 gifts to disadvantaged communities across Victoria. Staff, volunteers and drivers at our Community Resource Bank worked very hard throughout December, collecting, wrapping and distributing gifts to children and families in need.

This wonderful appeal was launched at our Brotherhood Community Christmas Party in Fitzroy, where popular comedian and entertainer Corinne Grant joined a happy throng of local residents and clients to enjoy a day of festivities. Attendees of

the party included many newly arrived refugee families, elderly residents of our aged care facilities and children from the local Sacred Heart Primary School. The occasion provided a joyful social occasion for many people living in disadvantaged and isolated circumstances.

We are grateful to Freehills for contributing to the party with both financial and volunteer assistance. Glenn Gilbert, one of the enthusiastic volunteer helpers made the comment: 'Today has opened my eyes to the plight of those less advantaged, and also to the wonderful volunteers and staff who exemplify the values of the Brotherhood. I look forward to participating as a volunteer again.'

## Congratulations HIPPY graduates Continued from page 1

'During the two years of HIPPY each child works directly with their own parents, engaging in specific activities for 15 minutes for five days a week. One of the most common activities is having HIPPY books read to them, either in English or in their first language.

'Everyone benefits – the child is given a good start and the parents gain confidence in their role as first teacher.'

Parents involved in the program are offered training opportunities by undertaking studies in Certificate III in Community Services while working as a HIPPY home tutor.

In 2009 the HIPPY program began a national rollout, which is continuing this year – a great result after the successful pilot program back in 1998.

# Essendon Christmas Lunch



Essendon footballer Alwyn Davey with Coolibah member Frank, an Essendon supporter of 84 years.

Essendon Football Club helped spread some Christmas cheer in December when the club treated 100 members of the Brotherhood community to a very memorable Christmas lunch at Windy Hill.

Festivities commenced when members of the Brotherhood's Coolibah Centre were escorted to the party by Essendon coach Matthew Knights. For Coolibah member and long-time Essendon supporter Frank, the party was a great opportunity to meet the players.

Supported by the club's entire playing list, coaching staff and new Chairman David Evans, the lunch was part of a continuing social inclusion partnership between the Brotherhood's Coolibah Centre and the Essendon Football Club. The club has generously donated 10 AFL football club memberships along with additional tickets to AFL matches to the Coolibah Centre.

## School days

While education is theoretically free, Brotherhood research suggests that cost remains a significant barrier to full participation for disadvantaged students.

Our 2009 School Education Expenses survey indicated an average annual price tag of \$3,624 for each student attending primary school, and \$3,928 for secondary students, with more than half of this cost required to be paid in the first term. These costs include levies, camps, uniforms, books, transport, internet access, home computers and printing.

Some families simply do not have the income available to cover these costs at the start of the school year. For this reason many children from disadvantaged families are unable to participate fully in

school life. Up to 56% of parents surveyed said their children had missed out on basic school equipment or activities, and 40% had kept their children home at least some of the time, due to cost. Understandably, this level of exclusion affected children's self-esteem and their attitude to school.

Our experience and research has consistently demonstrated that education is a key pathway out of poverty and disadvantage. We are continuing to work in partnership with agencies throughout Victoria to deliver education packs to disadvantaged school students across



Education is a pathway out of poverty

the state. These packs help to ensure that children start the school year with essential stationery items and on an equal footing with their peers.

## Parish Partnerships

For over 10 years Fr Don Edgar and the people of the Anglican Parish of Footscray have been providing assistance to the local Sudanese community.

Through offering a meeting place for community members, the parish plays an important role in the lives of newly arrived refugees, many of whom have suffered trauma and loss on their journey to Australia.

We were delighted when Don approached the Brotherhood, through our Parish Partnerships Program, with a request for us to assist with this wonderful work. Our strong background in delivering refugee programs through our Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC) has enabled us to provide specialist expertise to the

enterprise. In addition, we are helping the parish to undertake government-funded capital building works, which will expand the services that can be provided to the Footscray community.

It has been a joy to get to know the families participating in the programs offered by the parish. I have recently met Susan Deing and her two lovely children. Susan came to Australia from the Sudan six years ago, after spending over 12 years in a refugee camp in Kenya. She attends English language classes and the children enjoy the playgroup program.



Susan and her three-month-old son, Gong, pictured here with Fr Jeff O'Hare.

Her ambition is to complete a degree in theology, and she and her two sisters, all of whom live in Melbourne, are currently working to sponsor their elderly mother to join them here in Australia.

Fr Jeff O'Hare

# Farewell Rev Peter Thomson

The Reverend Peter Thomson, a friend and mentor to many at the Brotherhood during his nine years as chaplain, and for many years after, will be greatly missed. He passed away peacefully on Friday 15 January 2010 in Mansfield, with his wife Helen and son Damian by his side.



Reverend Peter Thomson

His was a remarkable life, as advisor and confidante to former British prime minister, Tony Blair and the former Western Australian premier Geoff Gallop, after the three met in the 1970s at Oxford University. He was first ordained in 1959, and in 1969 was appointed chaplain at Timbertop, the Geelong Grammar School campus near Mansfield. He returned to Britain in 1996 to support Tony Blair and his family in the lead up to the general

election and beyond.

Father Jeff O'Hare, who, along with Geoff Gallop, delivered the eulogy at Peter's funeral service, encapsulated some of his energy and magnetism: 'Engagement with others is what he craved, and his delight in teaching, mentoring and friendship, debate, argument, listening and communication gave him purpose, and offered thousands of students, over the years, a window to God.'

## Financial Health Pilot Program

In February, the Brotherhood launched a pilot program, the **Financial Health Service**, a free money guidance and information service.

Recent research has shown that learning about money, before a crisis hits, is a major gap for people on low incomes, particularly women. This program assists people who are vulnerable to financial hardship during changes in life circumstances, such as moving in and out of employment, coping with an illness or becoming a parent. The pilot will run in the City of Yarra until November 2010, and will be evaluated by the Brotherhood's Research and Policy Centre.

## New Charter Member

**Mike Wilson is the first Brotherhood staff member to be made a Charter Member in the last 25 years.**

Mike has been working at the Brotherhood since 1989, in a range of diverse roles including staff development, strategic planning and the provision of support to the Board and the Executive. He is currently documenting the history of the Brotherhood. Mike has continued to be inspired by the work of the organisation, particularly in the areas of research, practical service delivery and policy development, and the way in which work can bring about long-term social change.



Mike Wilson

'The Brotherhood has constantly evolved, matching its responses to the needs of the time, and sometimes being ahead of the times.'

'I have found it particularly satisfying to see many bright people, with great capacity, move through the Brotherhood, gain training and experience, and then go on to make a significant contribution elsewhere in the community', he says. 'I like to think that our work influences on a broad level, and that the vision and mission of the Brotherhood infiltrates much of the wonderful work being done in the wider Australian society.'

'I'm inspired to stay involved because there is still so much work to be done. I am really looking forward to contributing my experience both from within the organisation, and from out in the broader community, and being able to reflect this within the Charter Member group, which includes many people with long and rich experience in a range of sectors.'

## Brotherhood film screenings

Throughout 2010, the Brotherhood will screen a series of films that highlight issues relevant to the Brotherhood's work, such as poverty, unemployment and refugee settlement.

A light supper, drinks and entertainment will be offered at each film night.

Our first film will be held on Thursday 29 April. Visit [www.bsl.org.au](http://www.bsl.org.au) for further details.

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