

Building better lives



Brotherhood
of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty

Executive Director's message



Poverty is more than a material need

As I walk through the courtyard to my office at our headquarters in Fitzroy I often stop to have a quick chat with some of the older people who use our Coolibah Centre. Established in 1946 as Victoria's first senior citizens' centre, the Coolibah has been an important part of the lives of its members for more than 60 years.

The members of the Coolibah are vulnerable older people who live in the inner city, who know what it's like to struggle with hardship. Many live alone and the Coolibah is a place where they not only receive meals, welfare support and access to health care, but also, importantly, are able to take part in social activities and enjoy the company of friends. Many of us are lucky to enjoy a close-knit network of loved ones – partners, children, friends, work colleagues – who sustain us and give meaning to our lives. These social networks foster personal wellbeing and a sense of belonging to the community.

However, for others, some or all of these social links are missing. They may not have the physical, emotional, financial and social resources to establish or re-establish these connections. This is sometimes called 'social exclusion'.

A recent Brotherhood report described social exclusion as the barriers 'which make it difficult or impossible for people to participate fully in society'. The report said: 'While income poverty is the most commonly cited cause of social exclusion, other barriers include disability, lack of educational opportunity, inadequate

housing, culturally and linguistically diverse background and long-term parental unemployment'.

Social exclusion has long concerned the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the establishment of the Coolibah Centre back in the 1940s shows we have been acting to overcome it for many years.

Isolation and loneliness are not only personally distressing. They also have knock-on effects. Another recent report by the Brotherhood, with La Trobe University, identified social isolation

Continued on page 2

Mimi makes friends

People can be isolated even when they are surrounded by others. Mimi, who is 65, has lived in shared supported accommodation since 1991. However, until last year, when she moved to a new residential service, she had been unhappy and isolated.

'This is more like when I lived with Mum,' she says of her new home. 'Now I feel free as the wind.'

Mimi, who has an intellectual disability, lived with her mother in Frankston for many years. 'I liked it there. I always had

Continued on page 3



Mimi (right) with Barbara, a Community Nexus staff member.

Poverty is more than a material need

Continued from page 1

as a factor that prevents people from making use of available services.

The report said: 'Socially isolated people who are not well connected with family and/or their local community may have to contend with both the structural barriers that limit their ability to access community services and a lack of informal support to overcome those barriers'. Yet wellbeing improved among those who took up the services.

The Brotherhood's Socialisation Program for frail older people who live at home aims to overcome the issues of isolation and loneliness, through encouraging friendships within structured groups – friendships that can then take on a life of their own. This is just one of the programs offered by the Brotherhood that help older people remain in the comfort of their own homes.

Social isolation does not, of course, only have an impact on older people.

Low incomes exclude families from many everyday activities. People who live in cheaper accommodation on the urban fringe, far from employment and services, are isolated by the sheer logistics of getting out and about.

Poverty isolates children. It excludes them from school excursions and camps simply because they cannot afford the fees. Nor can they afford to join weekend sporting activities as the cost of equipment is prohibitive.

The Brotherhood believes that tackling social exclusion, and building social inclusion, is a vitally important component of working to create an Australia free of poverty.

We will continue to make this central to our services and our advocacy. We call on all of you, who have been so dedicated in your support of our work, to continue to help us make a difference in the lives of people who, through disadvantage and poverty, are marginalised from work and community life.



Tony Nicholson

Rye Community Kitchen

Seven years ago, Susan was involved in a bad accident, which seriously affected her health. Now, in her late forties and living on the Mornington Peninsula, Susan relies on oxygen to assist her to breathe.

It took Susan a long time to adjust to her health issues and find the confidence to leave her home. But now, every Tuesday, Susan joins a social morning of cooking and conversation at the Community Kitchen at the Rye Provincial Tavern. This not only gives her something to look forward to, but allows her to meet new people and make friends.

Community kitchens bring together a group of people on a regular basis to cook and enjoy delicious, affordable and nutritious meals with new friends.

'The Community Kitchen is terrific. It took me a long time to get the nerve to go ... I'm a shy person,' Susan says.

Susan receives assistance from the Brotherhood's Community Care Packages, which links her to a variety of services that enable her to stay living at home. Like many of the men and women who regularly join the group at the Rye Provincial Tavern, Susan lives by herself. The Community Kitchen is one of the few times she gets out of her house and socialises each week.

Age, disability, illness and lack of mobility, combined with little contact with family and friends, leaves many older people and people with disabilities socially isolated.

Donna Coombs, Head Chef and owner of the Rye Provincial Tavern, and mother

of five, felt that she had a role to play in connecting members of her local community to new activities and new friends. In early 2006 she had the idea to start up a community kitchen.

'I'm really into creating a sense of community and getting people out and about,' Donna says. 'I wanted to do something but I wasn't sure how to go about it, so I contacted the Peninsula Community Health Service, who put me in touch with the Brotherhood.'

The Rye Community Kitchen has been running since July last year and is part of the Brotherhood's Socialisation Program, which links isolated people to activities and new friends on the Mornington Peninsula.

The success of the Community Kitchen has led to a number of other activities being run out of Donna's tavern. Members of the cooking group and volunteers have created a Community Garden at the back of the tavern, and a walking group meets there every Monday.

'I get a lot of satisfaction out of this, especially when people make new friends,' Donna says. 'Many of the members of the group have struck up new friendships and they now do things together beyond the weekly Community Kitchen. It's a real community.' ●

Members of the Rye Community Kitchen prepare a delicious lunch.





Angela with Khadra and three of her children.

The gift of friendship

Khadra remembers the sense of isolation she felt when she arrived in Melbourne with her children 14 years ago. Having fled war-torn Somalia, Khadra was separated from her husband as she tried to keep herself and her children alive.

'When I got to Australia, I hadn't seen my husband for a year. I didn't even know if he was alive. I was in a new country. Everything was hard – the culture, the language, and getting over the things we had been through.'

It was four years before Khadra discovered that her husband was still alive and, after years of trauma, the family was reunited in Melbourne in 1996.

The family was living in a flat in Flemington when Khadra heard about the Brotherhood's Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY).

Khadra says that while she didn't know it at the time, her involvement with HIPPY led her family to find a sense of connectedness within their community. As well as her two youngest boys completing the HIPPY program, Khadra trained as a home tutor. This helped her get a job as a multicultural aide at the local primary school – a job she continues to hold today.

When the Brotherhood wanted to make a video on child poverty, Khadra was happy to help. This project led to her meeting the film director, Angela Buckingham, and the two women developed a remarkable friendship.

'After meeting Khadra and her family, I realised I wanted to stay involved with them

all so I offered to tutor her two youngest boys, Abdi and Liban,' Angela says.

For the past two years, Angela and her partner, Chris, have spent time with the family every Saturday. First they tutor ten-year-old Abdi and eight-year-old Liban, then, after lunch, they spend an hour tutoring the two older children, Farhan, 17, and Ayan, 16. They also spend time with Khadra's youngest son, three-year-old Daud.

Having overcome the sense of social isolation she felt when she first arrived in Melbourne, Khadra says she can't put into words how much she appreciates what Angela and Chris are doing for her family.

'They are just like my own family. I really trust them with my kids. Two weeks ago they took the kids to the aquarium and they always buy books for the children and take them to the library. They talk to my older children about what they want to do when they finish school. They just help me so much.'

Khadra says her children are learning a lot from Angela and Chris about the importance of helping others.●

See 'Who's welcoming people today?' on page 4

Mimi makes friends

Continued from page 1

good neighbours who kept an eye out for me,' she says. When her mother died in 1991, Mimi moved into supported accommodation in Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs. But not before she visited her brothers interstate – on the first holiday and aeroplane journey of her life.

Mimi liked her new home initially, however, things went downhill after the residence changed hands.

'It was good to come to the Brotherhood,' she says. Mimi has been a member of the Brotherhood Community Nexus in Carrum Downs since 1996.

Community Nexus has been supporting people with a disability for more than 15 years, helping them realise their aspirations for a fulfilling life. For Mimi and many of its members, the program is like an extended family, caring about them, looking out for them, and advocating on their behalf.

The program also helps people make friends through activities at its Carrum Downs Centre. It encourages members to develop their own lives independently by helping them to pursue the pastimes they enjoy, such as art groups, choirs and sporting clubs.

With help from Community Nexus and her best friend, Maryke, whom she met through Community Nexus ten years ago, Mimi has now moved back to Frankston. This has been her dream ever since her departure after her mother died.

'I wanted to live there because it's my home town,' she says. 'And my wish came true. I kept my fingers crossed, my feet, my eyes.'

Mimi chose a room that faces the Nepean Highway, so she can see traffic and pedestrians go by. She walks to the beach and shops and goes on day trips with the other residents. Maryke is also an important part of her life. 'We spoil each other – that's what friends are all about.'

Because Mimi's life has blossomed she has cut her weekly visits to Community Nexus from three to two days. That suits the staff at Community Nexus just fine – when members spread their wings they know they are succeeding in helping to build more rewarding lives.●

Who's welcoming people today?

'I have so much respect for the difficulties she's faced and overcome. She values education. She wants the best for her kids.' Angela

Angela says coming from a family with a migrant background, and reflecting on stories her parents and grandparents had told her about their early days in Australia, led her to want to stay involved with Khadra's family. (see 'The gift of friendship' on page 3)

'My mum came to Australia from Poland when she was 13,' Angela says. 'I remember being told stories about parties they had on the street in those days. Australian families would come over and invite my grandparents and my mum to their house for parties. They were asked to "bring a plate" and at first my grandmother originally thought they must be poor – so instead of taking one plate she took twelve.

'A few years ago I began to wonder who's welcoming people today. Who helps people when they first get to Australia? Becoming part of a community doesn't happen straight away anymore. So when I met Khadra and her kids, I thought I could do something.'

Many thanks for your wonderful support

It is very easy to feel overwhelmed by the level of need in our community. The number of people living in poverty, the lack of support to families on low incomes, the pressing needs of Indigenous people, the isolation felt by refugees – the list goes on.

Staff at the Brotherhood of St Laurence are confronted by these and other issues on a daily basis. It would be understandable if they felt completely snowed under by the needs of those they seek to help.

One of the major factors that keeps us going is the outstanding assistance and encouragement we receive from you – our very loyal supporters. The knowledge that you are right there behind us every step of the way really does make a difference.

We want you to know just how much we appreciate your support and the fact that you never, ever let us down. ●

Boots For All

Essendon Football Club, the Brotherhood of St Laurence and not-for-profit organisation Boots For All, have joined forces to collect quality, secondhand footy boots and equipment to re-distribute to disadvantaged communities across Australia.

The response to Boots For All has already been great. However, we still have a high demand from communities across Australia, particularly for boot sizes eight and over. So if you, or someone you know, has footy boots gathering dust, please donate them to Boots For All. We'll clean them up and send them on to a child or adult who will put them to good use.

Boots and equipment can be donated at all Brotherhood of St Laurence stores. Visit www.bsl.org.au to find your nearest store. ●



Bombers Matthew Lloyd and Andrew Welsh have offered their full support to the campaign.



Corinne Grant with children at the Brotherhood's Breakfast Club.

News flash! Corinne's star turn

Corinne Grant is dancing with the stars ... for the Brotherhood of St Laurence!

The comedian and longtime Brotherhood supporter will trip the light fantastic as one of the celebrity dancers in the latest series of Channel 7's hit show, *Dancing with the Stars*.

Corinne, who is best known as a regular on the ABC's *Glasshouse* comedy series, has nominated the Brotherhood as her charity. That means that the Brotherhood will not only feature on national TV, but will also receive a small donation each time viewers vote for her, via SMS text message or phone call, as the best dancer in the competition.

We wish Corinne the best of luck in making it through to the finals.

We encourage all the Brotherhood's supporters to support Corinne on *Dancing with the Stars*. *Dancing with the Stars*: 7:30 p.m. on Tuesdays on Channel 7 until November 27. ●