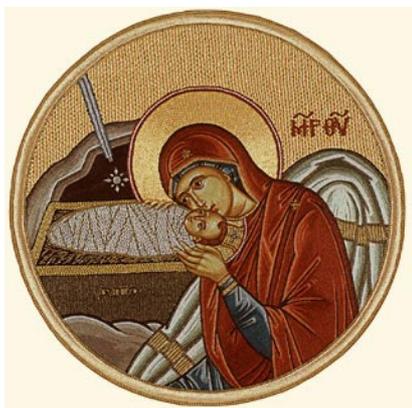


## mini MICAH – December 2009

### *Monthly update for members and friends of Catholic Social Services Victoria*



May Christmas be a time of peace and joy for you and yours, and may it be a time of hope throughout the world. May we all be inspired in 2010 in our work of loving service, to build a more just, equitable and compassionate society.

With best wishes from all at Catholic Social Services Victoria.

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## CSSV News & Development

### **CSSV Political Forum**

December 1<sup>st</sup>. saw 50 members and guests gather at the Thomas Carr Centre for the 2009 Political Forum.

Presentations from Deputy Premier Rob Hulls, Minister for Community Services Lisa Neville and Minister for Housing Richard Wynne outlined elements of government policy and activity to assist Victorians who are disadvantaged.

There were some updates of good news relating to homelessness - a new accommodation service at Alphington will see Villa Maria manage a home for young people suffering major disabilities, many from traumatic accidents; and that the exciting 'common ground' project in Elizabeth St. will see the development of an inner



city accommodation option for the homeless – but a recognition that there is just not enough accommodation, and competition for available funds. This is a continuing challenge to our advocacy.

Major challenges identified in the Ombudsman’s recent report into Child Protection services were also acknowledged.

Ministers were positive about the strength of existing relationships with the Catholic sector and acknowledged the cost effectiveness of dealing with not-for-profit agencies.

Photo: Ministers attentive at the 2009 CSSV Political Forum: from left, Minister for Housing Richard Wynne, Minister for Community Services Lisa Neville, Deputy Premier and Attorney General Rob Hulls.



In a separate session, Opposition front bench members outlined their perspective on key issues, and joined in discussion. The opposition speakers, Shadow Attorney General Robert Clark, Shadow Minister for Community Services Mary

Wooldridge, and Shadow Housing Minister Wendy Lovell acknowledged the interests of Catholic social services in action for those who are marginalised or vulnerable, and were keen to highlight gaps in current services and shortcomings with new and existing legislation. Prison reform is one area where more discussion is indicated.

Government Ministers almost inevitably have more exposure than do their opposition counterparts, so this engagement was a useful session for both CSSV members and the politicians themselves.

A lively and broad discussion and questions followed both sets of speakers. Shortage of public funding was an issue in many areas.

Follow up from the Forum will include interaction with the minor parties represented in the Victorian Parliament, and further discussion on some of the specific issues that arose: both political groups welcomed the continuance of the interaction.

Thanks to all who attended: the politicians, their staff members, and CSSV members and friends. Thanks in particular to those who helped prepare the day.

CSSV prepared Background Notes for politicians who participated in the **Forum**. This statement sets out principles that CSSV ascribes to in public policy analysis, and some of the issues that the Catholic social services community consider are important in Victoria today. Click to access a copy: <http://css.org.au/papers.html>

### Reporting back from CSSA Enrichment program on Catholic identity:

Eight Victorians joined the CSSA Enrichment program to Rome and Leuven in September/October 2009. As part of their follow up to that program, this group reported back to around 30 leaders and friends of Catholic social services in Melbourne on 18 December.

Reflecting the program itself, the reports were rich and varied, with some areas of focus including:

- the content of lectures from the program (Peter Bearsley, Chair of the CSSV Council)
- implications for leading an organisation in Australia (Paul Fogarty, Director of CentaCare Sandhurst)
- our impact on clients, and what we learn from them (Jenny Glare, MacKillop Family Services)
- the impact of our work on the broader Church (Fr Joe Caddy, CEO of Centacare Catholic Family)



### Leuven



Wed 11 November 2009

Report on Catholic Social Services Enrichment Program, 2009



Services, and, as Chair of CSSA, leader of the Enrichment program.)

Discussion was wide-ranging, with a focus on building Catholic identity. Formation of staff was seen as the key here – this would involve foundation work as well as continuing professional development. Strategies for transmitting the mission and ethos of an organisation were a must. Relations between our sector and the broader Church also need tending.

Very little of this is new, but there were some insights into material that was already known to many. And each of us engages with an issue at different times and in different ways: the evident impact that the enrichment program had on the Victorian members flowed through to at least some of the other participants in the 18 December session.

The need for further follow up was identified. Identification of suitable courses and resource material for use by agencies was part of this. Further refinement of some of the issues around identity was another – for example, the difference between Catholic and broader Christian identity in social services could be a rich topic for review.

CSSV will be following up a number of aspects of this broader question: a workshop on 'recruitment for mission' will be a priority for 2010.

## Child protection

On 26 November the Victorian Ombudsman tabled a report that highlighted serious problems with the administration of the child protection system in the state, with many children not being adequately protected.

The Report made recommendations relating to most aspects of the system, including information system inadequacies, an excessively adversarial approach in the Children's Court, and problems caused by high staff turnover and shortages of case managers.

The Government accepted all recommendations, many of which involved further reviews, enquiries etc. Additional funding had been announced in September, but the pressure is now on the Government to adequately fund the system in its 2010 budget.

While the Report was concerned primarily with the functioning of the Child Protection system, media and practitioner reflection turned quickly to the underlying causes of the demand on the system, and what needs to be done:

The number of families under stress seems to be increasing, so increased levels of preventative work is essential. This would involve more active family support, targeted education support, etc, and systematic work to tackle entrenched community disadvantage. Parenting education is a priority in some areas. Our goal must be to effectively meet the needs of families at the 'front end' of the system, well before protection issues arise.

The shortage of suitable placement options for children and youths, and the very negative consequences flowing from inappropriate placements is highlighted by the case studies in the Report.

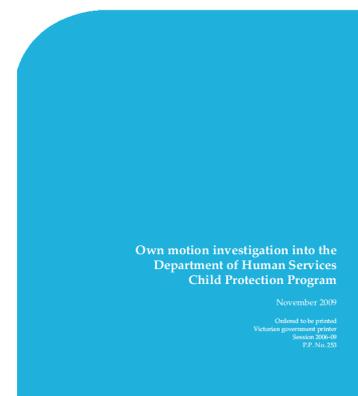
Resourcing of service providers is a key need, in order to enable development of clearly articulated care plans based on individual needs, to provide optimal living conditions, and to provide appropriate levels of remuneration for committed staff.

In addition, as Bernie Geary OAM, Child Safety Commissioner in Victoria, has noted, as a community we are challenged to give a greater priority to the well being of all children. This applies to our own children and to others in our local communities. It involves working to ensure that this priority is adequately reflected across community and Government programs. Click to access further comment: <http://css.org.au/news.html>

## Imprisonment in Australia

The annual Australian Bureau of Statistics Report on *Prisons in Australia* triggered comment by CSSV on this largely hidden part of our social structure.

There were 29,317 adults in Australian prisons on 30 June 2009, 6% more than a year earlier: these numbers give cause for concern: squeezing more people into a given space makes rehabilitation even more difficult.





Careful consideration is needed before we change laws in ways that will increase prison numbers further – these are not matters that are best dealt with in the heat of State election campaigns.

The increase in indigenous incarceration is more alarming, and a matter of national shame. The ABS reported that there were 7,386 indigenous adults in prison on 30 June 2009, an increase of 10% on a year earlier. The data also shows an increase of 52% percent over the past ten years in the proportion of indigenous Australians who were in prison, compared to an increase of 5% in the rate of imprisonment of non-indigenous adults.

An adult aboriginal Australian is 14 times more likely to be in prison than a non-indigenous adult, up from a ratio of 13 in 2008. In August this year the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research suggested that most of the increase in recent years in indigenous incarceration was due to the increased severity of the criminal justice system, and not to increases in offending. It is clear that the role of the justice system in increasing indigenous incarceration needs to be addressed, lest prisoner numbers simply keep increasing.

Victoria, with its Koori Courts, and *Aboriginal Justice Agreement*, has taken significant steps to redress the injustice of the current situation, which is reflected in Victoria's having the lowest rate of indigenous imprisonment of all jurisdictions except Tasmania. But this is still not enough: even in Victoria, indigenous Australians are incarcerated at an unacceptable level of 10 times the rate for non-indigenous adults. Click to access further analysis and comment: <http://css.org.au/news.html>

### **CSSV Planning for 2010**

At its planning meeting on 4 December 2009, the Council of CSSV endorsed general directions for 2010 that would complement the work at the national level of CSSA and add to the overall strength and impact of the Catholic social services sector in Victoria.

Continued advocacy was endorsed, focusing on advancing particular issues at Departmental and the political level, and on continued broader engagement in the lead up to the 2010 Victorian general election.

Member support activities: a best practice workshop on the impact of mental health issues on broader service delivery; and advancing dialogue on models of cooperation between Catholic social services agencies were among items focused on.

Fostering a Catholic ethos in the sector is a continuing priority. Specific directions included building on the 2009 meeting of religious working in Catholic social services, and on an identification of need in the aged care sector

Any feedback on 2009, or comment on priorities for 2010 would be most welcome.

### **Emmy Silvius**

Emmy has recently undergone surgery on her knee, and will be off work for another six weeks or so. Please keep her in your prayers.

### **Around the Sector**

#### **Vale Sr Ann Halpin**

Ann passed away on 10 December, after some months in hospital. A Presentation sister, Ann's many achievements include establishing 'Wellsprings for Women', which reaches out to women in the Dandenong area. She will be missed by many, as evidenced by the huge crowd at her funeral last week.

We at CSSV give thanks for Ann's contribution to the lives of so many, and pray that she rest in peace. We offer condolences to Veronica and all associated with Wellsprings, the Presentation sisters, and all those whose lives she touched; and we join them in working to build on her heritage.

### **World Day of Peace – "if you want to cultivate peace, take care of creation"**

World Day of Peace is celebrated on 1 January each year, and the Pope releases his statement for that day in mid-December. The statement released earlier this month by Pope Benedict XVI for World Day of Peace 2010 focused on care for the environment as a central element of Catholic social teaching.

This document as summarised by commentator John L Allen Jr in the following terms:

*Benedict's title was "If you want to cultivate peace, take care of creation" – a deliberate play on Paul VI's famous injunction, "If you want peace, work for justice."*



*Benedict accented a vision of the cosmos as a gift of God, which human beings have an obligation to "care for and cultivate." In that regard, the pope called for "a profound and farsighted revision of the model of development," based not only on the needs of today's "living beings, human and non-human," but those of generations to come.*

*At the level of specific policy measures, Benedict XVI advocated:*

- *A new mode of calculating the cost of economic activity, which would factor in environmental impact;*
- *Greater investment in solar energy and other forms of energy with a reduced environmental footprint;*
- *Strategies of rural development concentrated on small-scale farmers and their families;*
- *Progressive disarmament, including "a world free of nuclear weapons."*

Click here to access a copy of the document:

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20091208\\_xliiii-world-day-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliiii-world-day-peace_en.html)

### **E-seminars - an easier way to access theology**

The Broken Bay Institute conducted two "e-conferences" in 2009, one on St. Paul and another on St. Luke. They were well received, by a broad range of participants – see [www.bbi.catholic.edu.au](http://www.bbi.catholic.edu.au) for details of this. Centacare Broken Bay have advised that two more e-conferences have been scheduled for 2010: 'Mary – First Disciple' on 18 May, and 'Jesus the Christ', with Gerald O'Collins SJ, on 16 September. For more information contact: Virginia Ryan, Phone: 02 9847 0556, [vryan@bbi.catholic.edu.au](mailto:vryan@bbi.catholic.edu.au)

### **East Melbourne office space**

Office space 1: CSSV members and friends are welcome from time to time to use space in our offices for meetings, etc. We have ready access to a meeting room that accommodates 10 people. If these facilities are not being used then we are very happy to make them available.

Office space 2: ACCESS Programs, a division of Centacare Catholic Family Services, located at 174 Victoria Parade, has some office space to sub let. This includes 1 office (could suit 2 people) and a workstation area (could suit 3 people), plus shared reception and meeting rooms. Rent is approximately \$11,000 per annum. Enquires can be made to either Robyn Rose at 9662 3929, [robyn.rose@centacaremelbourne.org.au](mailto:robyn.rose@centacaremelbourne.org.au),

### **For your diary**

 **Wed 24 February 2010 – Breakfast Briefing** – speaker tba

 **Thurs 11 March 2010 - CSSV Commissioning Mass and Annual General meeting**

Mass at All Saints Church and Hall, Nth Carlton, followed by AGM and supper at St Mary's House of Welcome, 165 Brunswick St, Fitzroy. Guest speaker at the AGM is Melissa Brickell, Coordinator of Aboriginal Partnerships at MacKillop Family Services.

 **Friday 20 August 2010 - CSSV Annual Dinner**

### **Who am I?**

**Kiera McDonald** – Manager St Vincent de Paul Society's Ozanam Community Centre and Family Violence Service

### **Q: Tell us about where you work and your role**

I work for St Vincent de Paul Aged Care and Community Services managing their sites; Ozanam Community Centre (OCC), North Melbourne, and Family Violence Services (FVS) Metro.

OCC provides support to men and women who are homeless and marginalised. For some of the most marginalised and isolated clients who are unable to access traditional treatment services we provide basic needs and community on an ongoing basis. For others, we facilitate engagement with a wide range of services aiming to generate stable and sustainable autonomy, well-being and community connectedness.



The FVS is in an undisclosed location to protect the safety of the women and children escaping and enduring family violence. We provide a refuge and support through case management, group work and therapeutic opportunities.

My passion is to develop services that build a best practice and holistic culture that is safe and welcoming for some of the most marginalised people who may be excluded from more traditional treatment models. In my experience to achieve this it is essential that staff know they are also prioritised, supported and valued.

**Q: Have you a piece of advice or an encouragement that has helped you in life or work?**

A quote from an indigenous woman goes something like this: if you have come to rescue me don't bother but if you have come because your freedom is bound up with mine then take my hand and let us walk together.

Another famous quote is: When I gave food to the poor, they called me a saint. When I asked why the poor were hungry, they called me a communist (*Dom Helder Camara*).

For me the first is a reminder that this work we do is not necessarily altruistic- it is not about helping people in need. Remembering that my liberty is bound with others eliminates some of the potential for power imbalance and patronising. One person is not more deserving than another. I recognise that my wellbeing is bigger than just my own. The world I inhabit is only ok if *all* people are ok and treated with dignity and fairness, having equal access and opportunity.

The second is a reminder that it is essential for all to have our basic needs met and that sometimes the work we do necessitates providing band aides - but it becomes a never ending battle if we don't also challenge the *underlying causes* of social injustice. It requires us to ask, loudly and persistently, the unpopular and difficult questions; to champion for systemic change.

**Q: What do you do to wind down or relax?**

Gardening plus good food and wine shared with loved ones including my kittens! I look forward to annual holidays and try to include some activities that get the adrenaline going - the most recent was to NZ where we did snowboarding, white-water rafting and paragliding. I came back black and blue but very relaxed! And I admit it; I love a good sing along!

**Q: Have you a particular role model?**

My grandmother. She has experienced racism, poverty and loss and has thrived to be a vital, loving, progressive thinking, spiritual, physically competent (she builds things and can mend anything!) 87 year old woman.

**Q: If there is one thing you could change in the world today what would that be?**

That more people could be like my grandmother (!); brave enough to challenge their old beliefs and behaviours; environmentally conscientious; willing to try new things (she sent a sms for the first time last weekend) and thinking globally.

**Contact us**

*mini MICAH* thrives on news! Send your news, updates, and any items of interest to [office@css.org.au](mailto:office@css.org.au). Please also let us know of any events, celebrations etc in your agency or program – we are keen to keep in touch with developments, and to assist with publicity etc where that is appropriate.

**Catholic Social Services Victoria**  
383 Albert St (PO Box 146) East Melbourne Vic 3002

<p><i>Denis Fitzgerald</i> Executive Director <a href="mailto:d Fitzgerald@css.org.au">dfitzgerald@css.org.au</a> 9287 5569</p>	<p><i>Terry O'Shannassy</i> Member Support and Projects <a href="mailto:toshannassy@css.org.au">toshannassy@css.org.au</a> 9287 5570</p>	<p><i>Emmy Silvius</i> Office Administrator <a href="mailto:esilvius@css.org.au">esilvius@css.org.au</a> <i>Emmy is on leave till end Jan 2010</i></p>
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To nominate new subscribers or to unsubscribe to mini MICAH, email [dfitzgerald@css.org.au](mailto:d Fitzgerald@css.org.au)