



Why we must free the kids

by Marc Purcell

Thirteen-year-old Rusol lies on his bed comatose. He has made numerous suicide attempts since being placed in Immigration detention in early 2001, cutting himself repeatedly and withdrawing from communication.

He has been the subject of twenty child-protection notifications by South Australia's Family and Youth Services, calling for his removal from detention.

A memo contained in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's report on children in detention released in May reveals that the prison company, Australasian Correctional Management, warned the Department of

Immigration (DIMIA) as far back as October 2002, that the boy could not be cared for in detention yet he is still there today.

A psychiatrist at Adelaide's Women and Children's Hospital, cited in the report, said of Rusol: 'I asked him if there was anything I could do to help him. He told me that I could bring him a razor blade or knife so that he could cut himself more effectively.'

Rusol's ongoing detention, along with another 150 children here and on Nauru, proves that the Human Rights Commission's findings are not all in the past.

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CSSV - Updates

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Between July 1999 and 30 June 2003, 2184 children passed through Australia's mainland detention centres. At its height in June 2000, the Australian detention system had 164 babies imprisoned.

1058 children were Iraqis, fleeing Saddam Hussein with their parents; 870 were Afghans, victims of the Taliban, while another 211 were Iranian. While some only spent a few months detained, the average time in detention was over a year, and by 2003 was 1 year, 8 months and 11 days.

The vast majority were recognised as refugees: 97.6% of Iraqi children, 95% of the Afghan kids and 74.2% of the Iranians. However they have only been granted temporary protection visas.

A prison culture prevails in Australia's detention centres and the Human Rights Commission found they are fundamentally unsafe for children. The difference between prisoners and asylum seekers is that the latter are never charged with any crime, nor sentenced, yet people are detained for years.

Children were named by numbers, and rallied for head counts; their movement was curtailed in prison lock-downs; they were tear gassed, blasted with water cannons and exposed to confrontations, to adults self-harming and to riots. In the six-month period from July to December 2001, there were 159 alleged, attempted or actual assaults in detention centres, 19 involving children.

The Commission found very high rates of children injuring themselves including suicide attempts. Between January and July 2002, 137 child protection notifications were made.

The Commission found the treatment of children in Australia's detention centres to be 'cruel, inhumane and degrading'.

Mental health experts have been unanimous for years that detention is damaging to children and that kids could not be treated in detention since the system itself causes the harm.

The tragedy is that it need not have been so. The Minister and the Department have always had the

powers to remove children and their parents from high security detention.

The Minister has a range of legal and administrative devices including bridging visas, ministerial discretion, and options to place children in the community. The means were there; the political will lacking.

A better way is now possible for Australia. The reality has always been that more asylum seekers, such as 1600 East Timorese, live in the community than in detention.

The Government funds the Australian Red Cross to provide basic health and welfare to such community asylum seekers to the tune of \$11.5 million in 2001/2 for 2600 cases. Compared to \$2 million per week it cost to detain 1326 asylum seekers in December 2002, the savings of a more humane approach are dramatic.

There is no reason why, once health security and identity checks are completed in detention, families and children cannot be moved out to be cared for and monitored in the community. Evidence shows that people do not disappear when linked into such a system.

The Human Rights Commission has called on the Government to remove all children and their parents from detention centres in Australia and on Nauru within a month.

People smuggling of any significant numbers is a historic issue, dealt with over three years ago by the Government's tough policy stance and the collapse of the Taliban and the removal of Saddam. The absence of new boat arrivals gives the Government the opportunity to re-appraise the detention system's terrible impact on kids like Rusol.

For God's sake, stop punishing children and families and let's ensure that tragedies like Rusol's never occur again in Australia.

Marc Purcell is Executive Officer at Melbourne's Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace.

*Reprinted with permission from the Herald Sun 14th May 2004. **

The Pokies post-2012: getting it right

by Anne Tuohey

Research reports commissioned by the State Government's Gambling Research Panel have this week validated the widespread community concern about Victoria's pokie industry. One report confirms that 90% of Victorians support a cut in pokie machine numbers. The second report finds that pokie machines are the dominant form of gambling for 85% of problem gamblers. The Bracks Government's imminent review of the electronic gaming industry licenses is a crucial step in taking stock of an industry which causes significant harm to some members of the community.

There is concern that the Government may settle for a deficient process lacking in rigour and therefore avoid a significant rethink of the structure of the industry. The Community Action on Pokies Problem group (CAPP) and the Inter Church Gambling Taskforce urge the Government to get the process right. The review is a valuable opportunity to hear a range of views including the ongoing community disillusionment over this industry. A sound process, which is genuinely consultative, inclusive and thorough, will send a message to the community that the Government is committed to finding a solution to the harm from pokies, in the public's interest.

CAPP and the Taskforce ask that there be ample opportunity for informal public hearings, submissions and moderated debates between the industry and other experts. The review process will also require a considerable investment of time to examine and evaluate the experience of twelve years of pokies in Victoria.

The pokies were introduced in 1992 amidst Commonwealth funding cutbacks, economic crises and world downturns. Governments everywhere were anxiously seeking alternative streams of revenue, particularly any not viewed as directly imposed by government, but of a voluntary nature. The pokies appeared like the answer to a Treasurer's prayers.

While they may have solved an 'on paper' budgetary issue, the underlying effect has been to the widespread detriment to individuals, families and community. Many concerns have been exposed publicly such as last year's Four Corners program on specific practices by Tattersalls. The British Government recently warned against following



Victoria's appalling record with the pokies. Almost all of us know someone directly or indirectly affected by problem gambling.

This review presents the Government with the opportunity to determine the risks associated with any future options and apply precautionary measures. Harm minimisation strategies are worthwhile but we need to prevent further harm before it occurs.

It is after all not an industry created for an essential purpose like public transport, water, electricity. Public interest becomes very important when profits are the driving force, first and foremost. The recent report confirms that the pokies cause the greatest addictive problems of all gambling products and we know that losses are concentrated disproportionately in worse-off communities.

Most Victorians believe there is something inherently wrong when they learn of the State's heavy reliance on a product which causes untold harm. State revenue from all gambling taxes is now running at 16%. Let us use the review to devise a future arrangement which genuinely maximises public interest and in particular, protects the vulnerable.

The review must adopt a process which comprehensively covers all aspects of the pokie industry. Fair gambling advocates do not believe existing parliamentary standing committees are the right review mechanism. We call on the Government to develop a new and innovative process

which better meets the industry's features. Our position paper outlines some of the detail.

The review also presents an opportunity to challenge any mute acceptance that the industry continues at the same level of activity after 2012. There has been an element of social experimentation with this industry when one considers that Victoria went from having no pokies in 1992 to having a total of 30,000 machines in the space of seven years.

The pokies industry received a major and unexpected windfall in the take from pokies, well beyond what anyone had expected at the time they were introduced. Now the industry wants to maintain the level of profits that they have become accustomed to, regardless of the harm caused to the community.

It is therefore entirely appropriate to include an examination of the long-term efficacy of maintaining this level of industry activity. In tandem with the review, we urge the Government to hold discussions with the Commonwealth about possible federal funding streams to compensate in the event of reduced revenue from gambling.

The credibility of the review will be off to a good start if a person with knowledge of consumer protection, public-private arrangements and with high integrity and standing in the community is appointed as chair. The community will also support broad terms of reference which include a

balanced evaluation of the current system and other possible scenarios. These could include the strengths and weaknesses of venues holding individual licenses compared with the current duopoly licenses (as well as Crown's separate license). Market-share issues should also be considered in line with National Competition Policy.

The Government has allocated \$4.2 million to cover the review. We ask that this be fairly distributed to address the inequity of power and wealth between the gambling industry and the fair gambling sector. There is a precedent in the Brunswick to Richmond Power Line Inquiry where the government of the day provided support to those outside the industry itself.

This is the industry most Victorians didn't want so let's make sure we examine it rigorously. We ask for a balanced assessment which has equal regard for social, economic and environmental considerations. Only then can the public and the Government honestly conclude what is in Victoria's best interest. *

Anne Tuohey is the Catholic Church representative on the Inter Church Gambling Taskforce and a member of C.A.P.P.

A copy of the CAPP and Inter Church Gambling Task force position paper on the licensing review can be viewed at www.css.org.au

Bells to ring out continuing protest against detaining children

At 5.15pm on Thursday 10 June, church bells rang out across Australia, in protest at the ongoing detention of children in detention centres in Australian and Nauru. The 10th of June was the deadline given to the Commonwealth Government by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission for releasing the 162 remaining children and their parents

from detention centres.

Brenda Hubber, of the Melbourne Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office, and mother of two, said: 'A great injustice is occurring in the land and the bells are a wake up call to the Australians that the mistreatment of children in detention must end.'

'We think that there is a better way for Australia to treat asylum seekers

and we know it is wrong to imprison Children. Children in immigration detention, for long periods of time are at risk of serious mental harm', she said.

'We will continue to ring the bells on the 10th of each month until every man, woman and child have been released from mandatory detention', she added. *

Polls support improved social services rather than tax cuts

By Joe Caddy

Polls published in recent months indicate that a majority of Australians would prefer a higher level of social service provision rather than tax cuts. Indeed the 2003 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes undertaken by the Centre for Social Research at the Australian National University revealed that 48% of Australians support increased social spending while only 28% support tax cuts.

The experience of recent state and commonwealth budgets however suggests that governments are failing to respond to this emerging trend.

In Victoria the State Government in its May budget showed some desire to tackle social issues and should be commended for increased funding to support carers of people with disabilities and for children in foster care. Improved concessions for the education maintenance allowance and students and low-income earners using public transport are also welcome. The provision of additional teachers in disadvantaged schools promises to

assist marginalised young people improve their life opportunities.

However an over-concern for excessive budget surpluses and a reluctance to borrow for long-term infrastructure means that any attempts on behalf of the State to produce positive social outcomes for the poor are overly constrained. Indeed many of the positive programs offered in the budget will be funded through regressive revenue-raising measures such as gambling taxes and increased fines and government charges.

Again at the Federal level the Commonwealth Government in its budget was constrained in its funding of social programs, largely neglecting them and opting instead to hand out cash dividends to families and tax cuts to the well off.

Unfortunately an obsession with 'surpluses' and a 'debt-free' ideology means that governments in Australia approach the social agenda with one hand tied behind their backs.

A smart government or a potential

alternative government would note the emerging trend indicated in polls and validated in the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes and would take advantage of it. Certainly governments need to continue to manage the economy responsibly and Australia's current position in the economic cycle does not suggest that it would be time to post a budget deficit. However modest increases in progressive taxes to fund universal health and education services and reasonable levels of borrowing to fund public investment in transport, housing and other infrastructure would be well received by an electorate that seems ready for government to take a stronger positive role in building an equitable society with opportunities for all.

As we approach a federal election let us hope that the parties will hear the call of the electorate and respond in ways that are not so much brave but sensible and politically astute. *

Communities take control

By Joe Caddy

The Communities in Control Conference, Revolution in Community – Why? How? Now! held at Moonee Valley Racecourse in early June was a resounding success. Catholic Social Services in association with Our Community convened the conference which saw 1,500 people from across Australia and from all sectors of government, business and community service gathered to discuss and reflect on how to work for inclusive communities of health, well-being and social justice.

In addition to the 1500 who attended a further 700 applicants had to be turned away due to the limited size of the venue. This level of interest suggests that Communities in Control is more than a conference; it is becoming a movement.

All of the speakers including our international guests, David Henshaw CEO from the City of Liverpool in the UK and Shelley Martin from the University of California Berkeley's Centre for Community Wellness, as well as locals Clive Hamilton, Hugh

Mackay, Mike Pratt, Richard Eckersley and Phillip Adams were challenging and well received. Political leaders including Deputy Premier John Thwaites, Minister for Victorian Communities, Federal Treasurer Peter Costello and Federal Minister for Children and Youth Affairs Larry Anthony also provided valuable input. *

Copies of presentations will be available through the CSSV website. www.css.org.au

The Society of Social Concern

By Syd Tutton

Wow! What an event, or should I say events, to celebrate the sesquicentenary of the founding of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia by the English missionary priest in Melbourne, Fr Gerald Ward, in 1854. I even learnt the meaning of the word 'sesquicentenary' was 150th, but then I was only educated at St Ig's in Richmond.

The celebration focused on a Mass in the Priests' Crypt at the Melbourne General Cemetery where this little known priest is buried; the Ozanam Lecture given by Fr Frank Brennan SJ, with Loreto nun, Sr Libby Rogerson, as the respondent; and the Mass of Thanksgiving, celebrated by Archbishop Hart with archbishops from other States and Fiji, bishops from Victoria and many, many priests from the dioceses and religious orders. The latter event was followed by a colourful procession to the Melbourne Town Hall for the presentation of a musical pageant encapsulating our 150-year history in Australia.

The Society had its genesis in the wake of the Scientific Revolution, the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution, when the Church had lost much of its power and purpose. It was precisely at this time that Frederic Ozanam and his companions responded in an active way to the poverty they saw around them. For lay persons it commenced a new way of being Catholic. It was the new face of radical commitment in the Church.

The founders of the Society began their mission to the poor by bringing

families they visited bread, wood and above all friendship. Visitation to the homes of those in need is still the unique core work of our Conference members. Last year, over a quarter of a million people were visited in their homes and five million dollars was provided in assistance – none of it government money.

However, the Society is not just a hand-out welfare organisation. Its mission is much deeper and it is best summed up in the words of Ozanam: 'We are not content with tiding the poor over the poverty crisis. We must study their conditions and the injustices which brought about such poverty, with the aim of long-term improvement.'

We attempt to raise the consciousness of the wider community to social justice issues and to also have a practical involvement through 'on the ground' advocacy on behalf of the needy and socially excluded.

The seventh Ozanam lecture delivered during these celebrations by Fr Frank Brennan SJ, was an appeal to the wider Australian community. Fr Frank's lecture was entitled 'The Church's Voice and State Power for Justice and Peace: Seeking Decency and Equality for all', on the rights and aspirations of the Aboriginal peoples.

The Lecture can be accessed on the website www.svdp-vic.org.au or by ringing Paula Salemme on (03) 9895 5815.

At the grass roots level, the Society in Victoria has a Social Justice Committee which deals directly with

and complements our National Committee. The Committee acts out the vision and teachings expressed by Frederic Ozanam, that is one of advocacy for low-income and disadvantaged Victorians, and the delivery of practical sound justice at a local level.

The Committee helps empower Conference member's capacity to identify needs locally and get to the grass roots issues. It also raises the profile of poverty and inequality through media activity, delegations to policy makers, writing formal reports, and establishing and being involved within broader networks by working collectively with other agencies that are concerned with social justice issues.

The Society is an active member of Catholic Social Services Victoria as the important peak body of Catholic welfare agencies and social justice organisations. The sharing and networking in this body ensures 'we don't reinvent the wheel' and that we act together in advocacy on appropriate issues.

Our celebration of our 150th was a rededication of our commitment to those whom God loves most – the poor, the socially excluded, the isolated and the alienated.

Our mission lives on in the theme of our celebration: 'The Passion for Justice Continues'. *

Syd Tutton is the State President of the St Vincent de Paul Society (Vic) and member of the Council of Catholic Social Services Victoria.



Successful Council Planning Day

By Paul Linossier, Council Chairperson

Mary MacKillop conference centre, 16 individuals and a hitherto unexpressed but nonetheless keen interest in collaborative leadership make a dangerous mix. Add some honest reflection, good hospitality and an after-dinner sip and what do you have? Well this year, in the month of May, at Mt Eliza, we had the Annual Planning Day for Catholic Social Services Victoria. Council members and Secretariat staff joined together to reflect over 24 hours on the achievements of the last year and the directions for Catholic Social Services Victoria over the next 12 months.

The session started with an insightful and frank facilitated panel discussion led by Paul Fogarty (Centacare Bendigo) on the challenges for leadership in Catholic social agencies. The panel included David Beaver (Centacare Ballarat), Carol Vale (Bethlehem Community) and Julie Morris (Good Shepherd Aged Services).

The theme of leadership was to occur regularly through the course of the next 24 hours. In turn, we took reports from each of the Council's four standing committees: Strategic Development, Policy and Research, Mission and Network Development, and Governance and Finance. Each reflected on their achievements, the gaps of the last year and the important issues to take forward into 2004/2005. We then looked at the performance of the Council as a whole, on the work undertaken by the Secretariat and the other items which had come across our table in the last year, though not necessarily planned for through the above processes.

And then there we were reflecting on the nature of leadership within Catholic Social Services Victoria itself: how we are organised as a Council and as a Peak Body, our knowledge and relevance to our member agencies, and our impact on them as both Catholic organisations and as quality service providers. Increasingly the form of

leadership took shape, revealing itself as inspiration, of the heart, influential, and modelling collaborative relationships. By the end of the Thursday session there was a consensus that whilst CSSV needed to be more explicit in its leadership, this had to be balanced by authenticity - an authenticity that comes from listening to our members and listening to the poor.

Several things emerged on the Friday morning which we will take forward in the next few months. The first was to begin a modest restructure of the Secretariat and create a full-time Executive Director position. Since the formation of Catholic Social Services Victoria (as opposed to the previous Catholic Social Services) Fr Kevin Mogg, as Episcopal Vicar, has also undertaken the role of Executive Director. Fr Kevin is very supportive of the move to establish a distinct Executive Director position (as allowed for within our Constitution) to lead the Secretariat. The new position will report, both to Fr Kevin and the Council of CSSV. It is hoped that the position will be advertised publicly in the next month.

And what responsibilities will the new Executive Director be called to? Well we named the vision for the next year as establishing CSSV as 'an influential, accountable, articulate, member-focused and transparent organisation working for compassion and justice in our time, and modelling collaborative leadership in the Church'.

With this in mind, we will develop a leadership Charter which will inform the way in which we pursue this vision and our more specific goal for the period, namely

'To achieve our vision through creative engagement of:

1. Our members;
2. External policy and decision makers; and
3. The wider Church.'

This leaves us then with seven objectives or challenges for the year ahead:

1. To discern and promote the vision for the development of the Church's social mission to Victoria;
2. To strengthen the understanding and ownership of Catholic social teaching in our social mission;
3. To research, publish and advocate on key issues of justice and disadvantage;
4. To better understand the needs of our members, to strengthen our relationship, and to give effective voice to their experience and the struggle of the poor and marginalised;
5. To actively engage the issues and concerns of rural and regional Victoria;
6. To strengthen CSSV Governance and organisational development; and
7. To better align our resources and commitments.

Perhaps the most exciting part of the day was the strong sense of ownership and consensus regarding these directions. As a Council we look forward to acting on them over the year ahead, and to reporting on our progress at our annual meeting early next year.

In doing so we must remember that collaborative leadership was part of Fr Kevin's earliest hopes for Catholic Social Services. As reported in a recent press clipping highlighting Fr Kevin's appointment as a Member (AM) in the General Division of the Order of Australia, Kevin said that being *'together under one umbrella gave the Church more political punch, a greater capacity for research and an opportunity to develop social policies.'* And on the relevance of this work of justice and compassion for those at the margins: *'The work of the Church with the poor and the disadvantaged is an absolute necessity. It's our role. Really. Without it, we should close down.'* *

From all at CSSV, congratulations Fr Kevin Mogg, an honour most deserved!

The Welfare Needs of Victorian Schools

By Susan Pascoe, Executive Director, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria

The research into the nature, range, scope and impact of the welfare issues that school principals are called upon to deal with in their role as leaders of Catholic school communities was undertaken by the Australian Youth Research Centre at the University of Melbourne in collaboration with the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV). The researchers were Ms Helen Cahill, Professor Johanna Wyn and Dr Graeme Smith. The research methodology includes the implementation of focus group meetings, surveys to all primary and secondary schools and case studies. The full reports and the Seminar Series Paper 3 can be accessed from the CECV website www.cecv.melb.catholic.edu.au in the Funding for Catholic Schools section.

The need for the study was underpinned by a deep concern held by many in Catholic school communities about the escalating welfare needs of students and families. The research highlights the fact that societal change is affecting the work of schools. Students and parents are seeking help from schools in a range of welfare areas as schools are becoming the point of care for the local community. Consequently, there are more demands on principals' and teachers' time and energy. This in turn is impacting on staff workload and well-being. Many principals report that they and their staff are under-resourced to deal with the range of needs encountered, in particular, family welfare and student mental health.

This is the first Australian study to document the impact of social change on the work of schools. As welfare issues are symptomatic of those faced by all schools, these findings have broad relevance to all families and school communities.

Analysis of the survey data utilised a

'priority' rating which identified those issues that rated high on **frequency** and **impact** and low on adequacy of **resourcing**. The five key areas of action stress the importance of:

1. Ensuring success in learning for all students. Schools face challenges in providing a learning environment allowing all students to experience success in learning, which in turn builds self-confidence and promotes wellbeing. This is especially the case in the secondary sector, indicative of the fact that respondents highlighted the provision of alternative settings as highly inadequate.

2. Addressing student mental health. The mental health priorities include, depression, anxiety and the conduct-related mental health disorders including ADHD, Autism, Aspergers syndrome and conduct disorders.

3. Supporting families living in poverty, undergoing change, disconnected from community networks, experiencing family break up and dealing with mental health and substance abuse.

4. Supporting social health by addressing the prevalence of bullying and the impact of negative or defiant classroom behaviours.

5. Promoting staff wellbeing by supporting teachers in developing class management skills and effective relationship skills. Welfare-related workload also needs to be addressed as it impacts on staff time, leading to reduced time for curriculum planning and burnout.

Those schools with high numbers of families in receipt of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) identified higher impacts in the areas of family break up, violence, crime, incarceration of a family member, presence of troublesome outsiders and higher parental involvement in student disputes. High EMA schools

also indicated higher levels of offending, truancy, racism, bullying of others, violence, defiant or negative classroom behaviour, running away, lack of pathways for less academic students and rudeness to staff.

Student wellbeing and pastoral care have always been central to the ethos and mission of Catholic schools. Yet even the most robust and system-wide efforts to provide for the pastoral care of students are proving insufficient in the face of current need. Schools cannot be expected to do more without providing additional support.

The research evidence will be used to support the CECV funding campaign. State government funding in Catholic schools in Victoria has been the lowest in Australia for a decade. The CECV recognised that in order to present a case to Government for additional funding to support schools' preventative and intervention measures, some well-grounded, comprehensive and empirical evidence of need was required. The CECV noted that in the 2003-2004 State government budget, funding for 256 additional student welfare officers had been allocated in government primary education. An equivalent commitment of funds for Catholic schools is being sought by the CECV.

The research affirms the place of the pastoral care of students at the heart of Catholic education. The CECV is currently working on reviewing policies and working towards a systemic strategy that seeks to uphold and strengthen achievements through key initiatives. These include supporting teachers to undertake graduate welfares studies, strengthening the role of schools as core social organisations and promoting greater collaboration between welfare agencies and Catholic schools. *

Judge Michael Strong gave a sparkling talk at the dinner after the Annual General Meeting of Catholic Social Services Victoria in March, quoting from a sermon given by his grandfather, Dr Charles Strong, following the execution in the United States of two prisoners after six or seven years of imprisonment.

Michael Strong, a judge of the County Court of Victoria, commented that little had changed in the 77 years since his grandfather's sermon, 'except that prisoners can expect to spend twice that period of time on death row.' Michael Strong is an advocate for women and children and chair of the board of Berry Street Victoria.

The highly charismatic Dr Charles Strong delivered this sermon about 1927, presumably in his break-away from the Presbyterian Church, the small Australian Church in Melbourne. Below is an edited extract.



Dr Charles Strong

Humanity versus Crime and Criminal Law *By Dr Charles Strong, 1927*

'The spirit of humanity lies at the root of all law. Our criminal laws are imperfect attempts to express it. In the name of what is anyone arrested, tried and punished? Where does the authority come from to do these things? Consciously or unconsciously, are they not done in the name of humanity? Brutes have no courts of justice.'

'This leads us to think of criminal law today in the light of this spirit of humanity. On what is our criminal law based? To a large extent, on just those very passions which the spirit of humanity condemns: anger, revenge, brute violence and the inhumanity which it opposes to inhumanity. A prisoner treats his fellow with brutality, therefore treat him with brutality'

'I need hardly remind you of the treatment meted out to prisoners not so very long ago. The judges and the lawmakers themselves were cruel. There is no sadder page in history than the treatment of the offenders against the laws; torture, hanging, branding, solitary and dark cell confinement, the treadmill, the lash, transportation. Judges and lawmakers did not feel that to be cruel was to sin against humanity. The wrongdoer had sinned and they thought by themselves sinning, to cure him of sin. Hence, the horrible treatment of men

and women and even children in days gone by. Many of our laws might well have been called criminal laws, not in the sense of laws to prevent crime, but in the sense of laws the enacting and carrying out of which were themselves crimes.

'A democracy which claims to be self-governing, but does not interest itself in the criminal, nor see that cruelty is abolished and the reformation of the wrongdoer made the chief object of the law, is itself criminal.

'The law does not consider the prisoner in determining his sentence, whether it be three months or three years. The law professes to weigh the crime and estimate the guilt by the nature of the offence. The prisoner and his history are at best, secondary. Prison life is so abnormal, so unnatural, that it affords little chance of reformation and results often in psychoses, neuroses, sex perversions and general physical and moral disintegration. The prison supplies the herd's machinery for collective vengeance. Such is the indictment.

'We are all in part responsible not only for criminal law but also for the conditions and environment that lead to crime and anti-social lives and deeds. We glorify war and make murder a fine art, kill off the fit and fill the air with suggestions of violence and crime, with details of tragedies

and trials that doubtless tend to unhinge still further unstable minds. In our criminals we may thus see ourselves magnified, and the harvest of our own folly.

'We have ourselves to blame for much crime in that we allow thousands of the young to be brought up in an unwholesome physical and moral environment in our great cities and under conditions that tend to foster vicious habits. We train the intellect in the neglect of the conscience and the heart and that spirit of humanity which I began by speaking of as the distinguishing feature of our race. Then we hold up our hands in horror and shut the wrongdoer up in a dismal gaol, out of sight, out of mind, or after weeks or years of imprisonment, as in a recent case, employ a masked man to hang him or place him in an electrified chair.

'It is a new spirit we want – the spirit of a divine humanity, not only reforming, or transforming beyond recognition, our prisons, but reforming or transforming the society outside of prisons, a society which is so largely responsible for crime and for the criminal law and the treatment of the criminal. *

'Let us not judge the prisoner but judge our own selves.'

Australia's first trained social worker

Norma Alice Parker, 1907-2004

By Damian J Gleeson

The distinguished pioneer Australian social worker and founder of professional Catholic social welfare, Professor Norma Parker Brown, died in Melbourne on Easter Saturday, aged 97.

Norma as she was affectionately known to everyone, established Catholic social work at St Vincent's Hospitals, Melbourne (1932) and Sydney (1936), and was instrumental in the formation of Catholic welfare bureaux (Centacare) in Melbourne (1935), Sydney (1941) and Adelaide (1942).

The eldest of five children, Norma Alice Parker was born into a working-class Catholic family in 1907. Her mother Annie Westhoven, came from an Anglo-German Catholic family; her father, Ernest, from a Wesleyan Methodist tradition.

Norma attended Sacred Heart High School, Perth and won an Exhibition (i.e. scholarship) to study Arts at the University of Western Australia (UWA) in 1925 with the intention of being a teacher. At UWA she joined the Newman Society, founded by the scholarly and pastorally dynamic priest, Monsignor John Thomas McMahon, and also formed a lifetime friendship with Constance Pauline Moffit (1906-88) who would become another pioneer Catholic social worker.

The young women's interest in social work was stimulated by an academic, Ethel Turner Stoneman, and Monsignor McMahon who arranged two scholarships.

While Norma's mother, 'had much misgivings' about her daughter travelling to America at the tender age of 20, her father, then president of Perth's Celtic Club, was more easy-going.

Norma obtained a Master of Arts and a Diploma of Social Services from the National Catholic School of Social Service (NCSSS) at the Catholic University of America in 1930. America provided an extraordinary exposure to the impact of the Great Depression and social work responses. Her lecturers included several leading American scholars - Monsignors John Ryan and William Kerby, and Catholic women such as Helen Cronin, Louise McGuire and Beatrice Mullin.

Under the supervision of Fr Paul Hanley Furfey, Norma researched teenage girls' personality issues and presented a thesis: 'an objective study of the child's changing interests and rounded personality at different development states.'

After graduating Norma spent another year in America working at a range of government and church agencies including the Los Angeles Catholic Welfare Bureau and St Elizabeth's Mental Hospital in Washington, DC.

When Norma returned home in mid-1931 she remarked in characteristic modesty that she had 'some knowledge and skills'. Perth's Catholic weekly, *The Record*, hoped an 'opening will be found for this talented daughter of the West within her own State'. However the closure of her potential employer, the State Psychology Unit, and the government's unwillingness to embrace professional social work led Norma publicly to challenge the view that medical staff could adequately undertake welfare work.

Unable to gain employment in Perth, Norma moved to Melbourne and completed further qualifications through the Victorian Institute of

Almoners, becoming the first Catholic to graduate from the Protestant-dominated institute. With Australian and international qualifications, Norma became Australia's very first trained social worker and commenced at St Vincent's Melbourne in April 1932.

In 1934-35 Norma and Miss Moffit's review of Catholic welfare services in Melbourne identified over-crowded orphanages, insufficient and untrained staff and a culture of resistance to new models of care. The women advocated comprehensive child welfare programs that would incorporate the physical, material, mental and the moral wellbeing of each child. They also cautioned the children's institutions to 'keep abreast' of new approaches to child-care and to be open to the option of not always institutionalising children.

Melbourne's Archdiocesan Vicar-General, Fr John Lonergan, was impressed with Norma's vision and persuaded Archbishop Mannix to approve the formation of the Melbourne Catholic Social Service Bureau based on similar agencies in America in September 1935.

Professional social work created uncertainty for many voluntary charity workers. Norma's reforms encountered considerable resistance from influential church interests in the 1930s and 1940s. In Melbourne, for example, the Sisters of Charity effectively terminated Norma's services because of a mistaken belief that charity and professional social service were one and the same. Her presence - vibrant, articulate, self-assured and open-minded - contrasted with that of untrained volunteers who were often ill-equipped to deal with the growing complexity of issues, such as truancy, desertion, alcoholism, and unemployment.



Professor Norma Parker Brown (centre) played a pioneering role in the development of social work in Australia. With her here in 1966 are two other Catholic social activists, Miss Mary Tennison Woods (left), the first woman admitted to the bar in Adelaide and one of the founders of the first women's legal practice in Australia; and Mrs Jean Daly (right), a prominent commentator on Catholic social thought. Photo courtesy of the Sydney Catholic Weekly.

In 1936 Norma moved to Sydney and established a Social Work Department amongst a more pleasant medical environment at St Vincent's Darlinghurst.

At national conferences of Catholic women in the late 1930s Norma outlined the limitations of voluntary charity and recommended the establishment of Child Guidance Clinics to assist delinquent children.

An offer to start professional social work in New Zealand in the late 1930s was declined because Norma felt there was equally important work to be done in Sydney and she was concerned that the social work profession was being influenced by anti-Catholic forces.

In 1940 Norma was appointed to the Sydney Board of Catholic Action, a position that enabled her to press for a welfare bureau. Norma and several colleagues presented a detailed submission on Sydney's Catholic welfare services, Needs in the Catholic Social Work Field, which led

Archbishop Gilroy to approve the formation of Sydney's Catholic Welfare Bureau in May 1941. In the following year she visited Adelaide and assisted Archbishop Matthew Beovich in the formation of a similar bureau.

Norma's intellect, experience and international perspective positioned her to be a principal player in Australia's social work profession. She was a prominent member of the NSW Almoners Association, president of the Social Workers Association of NSW, 1940-43; inaugural president of the National Association of Social Workers, 1946-53; and a foundation member of the Australian Council of Social Service.

Norma also made a large contribution to community welfare, including psychiatric social work and social policy making. She established Australia's first social work department in a mental health facility at Sydney's Callan Park in 1943. A decade later she was instrumental

with another Catholic social worker, Eileen Davidson, in the formation of the NSW Association of Mental Health.

After working for church organisations for nearly a decade Norma commenced an academic career at Sydney University, where she worked for 25 years. Norma and Katharine Ogilvie persuaded an unsympathetic male-dominated committee to transform the university's Diploma in Social Studies to a full academic course in the early 1950s.

In the late 1950s Norma married Clarence (Mont) Brown, who had been a prisoner of war during World War Two.

In 1966, three years before retirement, Norma accepted another major challenge, establishing a social work department at the University of New South Wales (UNSW), and in doing so she became one of its first female academics. As a result of Norma's leadership, UNSW developed an impressive reputation and attracted twice the number of social work students by 1970 than the established Sydney University.

Norma Parker was very much a product of her free-thinking heritage and professional training. In the tradition of her American mentors, her vision was tempered by patience and pragmatism. She did things because they needed to be done, not because of ideology, feminist aspiration or personal ambition. She consistently displayed integrity and selflessness throughout her long career and was equally graceful dealing with friends and sceptics.

Norma Alice Parker Brown was a person of modesty and compassion, and embodied the ideals of professional social work. Her leadership in Australia parallels the contribution of Agnes Regan to American Catholic social welfare.

D J Gleeson is writing a history of Australian Catholic social welfare for a doctorate in history at the University of New South Wales. He spoke at Norma Parker Brown's Memorial Service at Monash University on 17 April. He can be contacted at gleesonfamily@yahoo.com.au

CSSV - Updates

Sir Gus Nossal to speak on eradicating poverty

In celebration of Catholic Social Services' Sunday and recognising Anti-Poverty Week 17 – 22 October, CSSV is hosting a major address by Sir Gustav Nossal AC CBE, 'Eradicating Poverty for Healthier Communities'. The event will take place on Monday 18th October, 7.00pm at the Cardinal Knox Centre, 383 Albert Street, East Melbourne. A flier complete with booking details is included with this edition of *Micah*.

Librarian Needed

CSSV is looking for assistance with cataloguing its collection of journals, magazines etc. If there is a retired librarian who would be happy to volunteer their services to us for a short time, we would be extremely grateful.

Please call Marg Casey on 9287 5566.

Catholics go online

An independent online e-magazine to debate public and church issues has appeared as *OnlineCatholics*, and is available at www.onlinecatholics.com.au. It aims to promote conversation about significant public policy issues in the light of Catholic hopes and values. Its Board of Directors consists of Peter Bearsley, Garry Eastman

(chair), Robert Fitzgerald, Kathleen Gilbert, Peter McNamara and John Menadue, with Kate Mannix editor. Subscriptions to this weekly magazine cost \$55 a year. It promises to provide a lively lay forum for important debates.

Thanks to Karon

It is with great sadness that I advise you all of the departure of Sr Karon Donnellon from Catholic Social Services Victoria after four wonderful years. Karon has provided an enormous contribution to CSSV in that time and her generosity of spirit has enabled and enriched those with whom she has worked. She has worked as Editor of *Micah*, in mission development, and performed managerial and organisational roles within CSSV; been very involved in the supervision of chaplaincy at the two juvenile justice centres in Victoria; represented the Episcopal Vicar for Social Welfare on the Boards of several agencies, amongst many other things - and her cheery and informed presence will be greatly missed.

Whilst expressing enormous gratitude for the extraordinary commitment Karon has given to CSSV in particular, the broader welfare sector will also be very sorry to see her leave and we wish her every possible happiness in the immediate future.

Very Rev Kevin M Mogg EV AM

Micah June 2004

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East Melbourne 8002



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