

# MOIRA

Issue No.16 Quarterly Newsletter of Catholic Social Services Victoria December 2004

## Making a difference

by Kevin Mogg

*The angels greeted the birth of Jesus with the Good News – “Glory to God and Peace on earth”. I am sure those two sentiments are deeply connected – that it is precisely peace on earth that would give glory to God. But as another year rushes to its end the news is not all that good.*

The Vietnam-like conflict in Iraq; international terrorism; the executions of innocent hostages; the conflicts in Dapur and the Ivory Coast; the seeming intransigence of Jew and Palestinian and their backers; the disastrous spread of AIDS and HIV; continuing desperate poverty in a large sector of our world – and so it goes on and on.

There can be a strong temptation to become resigned, cynical, despairing, angry – yes, all of these at different times. However, in our better moments we know that hoisting the white flag is a mean and unworthy response.

The fact is that good women and men do what they can. They continue, despite everything, to make a difference. Recently I was present at a Board meeting of the Sacred Heart Mission in St Kilda. I was moved by the way the Mission, like many similar bodies, tries to offer support, security, welcome and even a possible way forward for some of the most disenfranchised people in our society.

There are the Moira Kellys who see the extremes of pain, injury, illness in the children of the world and decide to do something about it. While a comparatively small number of children is involved, what a difference surgery has made to them! When we think of these and similar

ventures let's remember, too, the generosity of many individuals and groups who make Moira's work possible – Lions groups for example.

And you have the Gus Nossals who have the audacity to defy the previously accepted given that children of the third world will never have access to widespread immunisation. With help from the Gates Foundation and others, many youngsters now have a future chance at life.

The daily work and struggles of members in the welfare sector of our part of the world make them the front-liners in responding to the Holy Father's call to us all at the turn of the millennium in the document *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, to measure every thing in the life of the Church against the sole criterion of charity. Their lives in service of God's poorest remind us that, in the midst of everything, and sometimes despite everything, good men and women enable us to make a serious attempt to say quite truthfully yes – there is glory to God because some at least make a serious attempt to create peace on earth. That's surely the real beauty and hope of Christmas. ❁

kindest regards to all  
Kevin M Mogg

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## Farewell and thanks to Fr Joe Caddy

After seven years of distinguished service Joe has left CSSV for the position of CEO of Centacare Catholic Family Services.

During those seven years Joe has been Director of Policy and Advocacy with CSSV. In that role he has helped lift our organisation to a position of considerable influence in the welfare sector – both within the Church and in the broader public arena.

Joe's great capacity to engage people, to obtain their trust and confidence and to bring others with him has been quite outstanding. In several key areas of public policy he has been extraordinarily effective.

Over the past years Joe's influence has flowed into the national scenario with his position of Chair of Catholic

Welfare Australia and his role on the Executive of ACOSS.

His contribution has been extremely significant – as all in the welfare field including the leaders of other Church bodies would testify.

His friendship too has enriched the lives of so many within and outside of our organisation.

Joe now becomes the CEO of Melbourne's largest service delivery welfare agency – Centacare. He will bring great energy and ideas into this area – we wish him well in this new challenge.

How can a few lines express our gratitude, our admiration and our hopes for you Joe?

Every blessing, Kevin Mogg,  
 Episcopal Vicar. \*

## Congratulations



*Fr Kevin Mogg with former Prime Minister Mr Malcolm Fraser and Mrs Tammy Fraser who also received an award.*

CSSV extends its best wishes and congratulations to Father Kevin Mogg upon the recent bestowal of his Order of Australia medal. Given in recognition of his tireless work within the social welfare sector, this medal is fitting recognition of Fr Kevin's commitment and drive as Episcopal Vicar for Social Welfare. He has much of which to be proud not the least of which is the leadership role he has amply demonstrated both in Victoria and nationally in seeking to improve the circumstances of those less fortunate in our community. \*



## Elections, faith and social conscience

by Bruce Duncan

The recent elections in Australia and the USA have raised urgent questions about the relationship between religious faith, politics and social concern. Some commentators in Australia have expressed fears that a new religious Right might emerge like that in the USA, relying on a fundamentalist or literalist interpretation of the Bible, and imposing social policies in the name of religion.

Others consider this unlikely, as Australians have long proved resistant to the showmanship of US evangelism, and to the slick sell of the Gospel as a guarantee to wealth and individual success. Australians seem not so readily convinced that one can serve both God and Mammon.

The US elections certainly reflect a concern about so-called family values, but the religious Right has no monopoly on values. As the mainstream Christian denominations well know, there are other moral values:

- truth-telling by governments;
- refusing to go to war on spurious pretexts;
- not killing the innocent;
- preventing torture, and educating one's soldiers in the rules of war;
- providing jobs and a decent livelihood to all citizens;
- defending the principles of social justice and equality of opportunity;
- not pandering to the rich by excessive tax cuts to the wealthy;
- providing adequate health care and social security for everyone;
- supporting an international system of governance based on respect for law;
- protecting the environment, especially by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, etc.

The churches also know from bitter experience that religious faith cannot

automatically determine public policies. The same religious faith can inspire many different interpretations of how people should live, their moral values, and public policies.

### Jesus and social values

The Gospel writers did not see the relationship between religion and politics as we do today, but nevertheless repeatedly emphasised the social implications of faith. It is a message that Pope John Paul II has constantly tried to highlight, especially by making Jesus' statement in Luke 4: 22-30 the centrepiece for the Year of the Great Jubilee in 2000.

Luke makes the passage the heart and soul of his Gospel, highlighting it as the central mission statement of Jesus. You recall the incident of Jesus in the synagogue reading from the prophet Isaiah:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the  
captives,  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's  
favour [the Jubilee].*

The passage does not deny the personal and other dimensions of faith, but emphasises Christ's acute concern for the 'poor', those suffering and oppressed, powerfully implying that social concern and responsibility for one another is not just a metaphor but is essential to faith.

We can see this passage as a Gospel imperative to help nurture and activate the social conscience of our people and of the nation, by engaging in a deeper conversation with our contemporaries, and by drawing on the rich resources available to us, from our own social

traditions as well as from our history and culture, the social sciences and disciplines available.

It was no accident that Pope John Paul II wrote so movingly about the implications of the Jubilee in his 2001 encyclical, *At the Beginning of the New Millennium*. He was particularly insistent about 'our commitment to history' as Christians, about the duty to help fashion a more caring and humane world.

He also highlighted the Last Judgment scene from Matthew's Gospel, a most astonishing parable, when God will judge us not on our piety, but on our practical solidarity with the homeless, the sick, the hungry - in a word, 'the poor', to use the code word of the Bible. According to the Pope, the whole credibility of the Christian message hinges on our taking to heart the message of this parable.

### A split between faith and social responsibility?

Why does the Pope so strongly insist on this social dimension? Because in the past many Christians have given an excessively spiritual interpretation to the Gospels, without realising the social implications embedded in them. The Pope is particularly keen to overcome the split that developed in the consciousness of many Catholics between the realm of faith and the secular world of work and society.

The Vatican Council in its great document, *The Church in the Modern World*, declared that this split between faith and social responsibility was one of the most serious errors in the Church. Its opening words trumpeted a call to engagement, not disengagement, with the problems of the contemporary world.

*Continued on page 4*



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*The joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts (par. 1).*

The Pope recognises of course that the world of religious devotion is highly complex, searching for ways to express communion with God. But he does not wish piety to become an escape from real life responsibilities, or still more, to construct an indulgent fantasy world that ignores the need to work for peace and justice in society and the world as a whole. He is insistent that concern for social justice and solidarity with struggling people is an 'essential' part of the mission of the Church.

Indeed John Paul on 29 October 2004 called for a new social activism among Catholics as he commended the new *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* that he had directed be prepared. He saw it helping 'Christians in their daily commitment to make the world more just', and based on 'an authentic, solidaristic humanism.' He especially stressed the role of lay Christians in shining the light of the Gospel on 'the realities of work, economy, politics', peace-making, 'justice and friendship among peoples.'

In other words, concern for social justice is not an optional extra, or an 'add-on', but springs from the heart of the Gospel. It is a direct response to Jesus' call to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, not just by individual charity, but by how we organise society and institutions to carry out these tasks in a more effective and universal way.

Hence it is puzzling to hear some talk that concern for social justice can become a rival to the Gospel, as if they were opposed. It is true, of course, that some people might fail to make the link between the Gospel message and concern for social justice. But part of our task is to make those links transparently clear, and indeed to stress that any sense of God or the Gospel that ignores or downplays concern for the poor and social justice

is a distortion and perhaps even a betrayal of the Christian message.

Instead of fearing some rivalry between concern for social justice and evangelisation, in our conversation about public issues we could be helping draw people to the heart of the Gospel. Far from social justice being an obstacle to faith, it can become a privileged lens of insight into God's passionate concern for human wellbeing.

In my view, it would be a great mistake to trivialise or downplay concern for social justice, especially among younger people. It is not a mistake either John Paul II or the Vatican Council has made.

As the Pope said in his World Day of Peace message for 2005, peace depends on securing the human good for all people. But genuine peace must be founded on social equity and solidarity, a commitment by everyone to support the wellbeing of others, especially those most in need. The search for the common good must take into account the social and economic problems: inequalities, privations of all sorts, injustices and insecurity.

Concern for justice, peace and equity in society is one of the most powerful means for many people to discover what true belief is all about.

## God's startling solidarity

Those of us in the churches, in close dialogue and collaboration with other religious traditions, have an urgent contribution to make to informing the social conscience of our communities. Our fundamental conviction is this: that the great mysterious presence sustaining the universe, that we call God as if it were clear what that word means, is mightily concerned about our human wellbeing.

So insistent is God to convince us of this, we Christians believe, that in Jesus this mysterious presence takes on human flesh, and lays down his life in an astonishing act of solidarity with all the 'poor' of the earth, all those suffering and searching for life and justice, truth and meaning. Jesus asks us to share a similar concern for one another.

This is a vision of God that I suspect is astonishingly attractive not just to Christians, but is one that people from other religions could largely endorse, and even non-believers would find it immensely heartening. It demolishes the dualism in western history that has been the source of so much confusion. God takes delight in the full flourishing of our beings, and all that is genuinely human is precious to him. Is this not what the Incarnation and the birth of Jesus are all about?

Hence we Christians can engage in the social transformation of the world, inspired by values in Scripture certainly, but not in an imperial or manipulative way, and certainly not by trying to impose religious beliefs on others. We are part of the wider public conversation in society, a conversation which encourages all to join the earnest search for the human good and the truth about human wellbeing, and which prizes dutiful conscience above all. In this free and earnest pursuit of moral truth, we honour primacy of conscience as the most sacred core of our beings before God.

Though the major world religions have different perceptions of God and their belief systems have developed almost in parallel universes as it were, we can reverence the religious traditions and search of all without prejudice to our own beliefs. We need to expand the conversation among the religious traditions so we can further the human good together. Religious faith does not substitute for human wisdom. It is not some sort of magical process providing easy solutions to difficult problems. It invites us to use our intelligence as well as commitment.

How marvelous is that word 'conversation'. It implies mutual respect among people, a willingness to listen and learn, to be open to different and even opposed points of view. Can we not imagine ourselves as a family gathered around God's kitchen table, discussing our various views robustly enough, but earnestly seeking the truth about human wellbeing, and knowing that we are all precious in God's sight? \*



## The Meeting Point Project *by Carmel Stafford*

The Meeting Point Project is a joint initiative of the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne; Catholic Social Services Victoria; Welfare Rights Unit, Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service; Victorian Independent Education Union and Pastoral Associates Archdiocese of Melbourne.

It aims to identify some of the responses schools are currently making to meet the needs of the most vulnerable students and families in their school community. The intention of the project is to assist schools to promote inclusion and participation of these students in all school activities, and to identify agencies and institutions within the local communities that are able to work in partnership with schools in addressing the poverty experienced by many families.

In every school there will be families who struggle to make ends meet. They may be in arrears with their rent or mortgage, and could be facing eviction. They may have had or could be facing their gas or electricity being disconnected. They may have just left a domestic violence situation and are struggling with all the bills that moving suddenly to a new place brings. They may have a partner or child with a disability or a chronic health problem. They may not have

food in the house at times. They may not be able to afford prescription costs, baby formula, nappies, or funeral costs if a loved one has died. Schooling costs such as camps, excursions, materials charges, books and uniforms may also be unaffordable. If a child is experiencing hardship at home because of poverty-related reasons, it is absolutely vital that they do not experience this at school.

The Meeting Point Project runs workshops with schools, pastoral associates, and school boards where the Church's social justice teachings and the implication these have on schools are explored. The premise that Catholic schools operate as part of the public and not private sector of education and the challenges this holds for working with low-income families in a Catholic school is also explored.

A low-income awareness checklist is presented which lists a series of statements that indicate awareness in schools of the needs of low-income families and students. These statements are related to policies and practices on school fees, booklists, uniforms, excursions and socials, homework, nutrition, special provision, advocacy, and internal policy development.

A critical section of the workshop is identifying what initiatives schools



*Carmel Stafford*

are undertaking, how they do this, and how they can support each other in doing this. Information is provided about social security payments and appeals processes for breaching and overpayments. Case studies of families who are experiencing hardship and have sought assistance at community agencies are presented. Their detailed fortnightly income expenditure statements are shared and practical information about family assistance programs, grants and services is distributed.

The workshop is concluded by identifying further actions that schools at an individual, regional, and state level may take to support their initiatives for the most vulnerable in the community.

We welcome inquiries from parish education boards, school boards, principals and other school personnel. I can be contacted on 9364 1860. ❖

*Carmel Stafford is a financial counsellor with Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service.*

## Marie Tehan: a life beyond politics

The sad, early death of former Kennett government minister Marie Tehan (The Age, 2/11) should not pass without noting her post-political career. Like the late Sir Rupert Hamer, she was a highly principled champion of human rights and played a leading role behind the scenes on the boards of the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre, the Catholic Commission for Justice Development and Peace and the

Refugee Committee of the St Vincent de Paul Society, among others. She was shocked by the mental and emotional state of detainees during a visit to Maribyrnong Detention Centre and became a champion of asylum seekers, speaking at many public meeting about the injustice of mandatory detention. Her manner was forthright and humane, and her sharp mind would brook no cant. Part of her legacy is the

example she provided to care about the dispossessed. ❖

Vale Marie.  
Marc Purcell, Sunshine.

*Marc is the former Executive Officer of Catholic Commission for Justice Development and Peace and worked in close collaboration with Marie Tehan. Letter used with permission.*



# Sir Gus Nossal: time to eradicate poverty and disease

by Bruce Duncan

One of Australia's leading medical scientists insists that we can make rapid progress in eliminating many infectious diseases in developing countries, save millions of lives, and help substantially in raising living standards.

Sir Gus Nossal, Director of the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research from 1965 to 1996, and Australian of the Year in 2000, was the keynote speaker to highlight Anti-Poverty week at the Knox Centre, East Melbourne, on 19 October.

Sir Gus outlined the astonishing progress made in eliminating some major infectious diseases: smallpox earlier on, and more recently polio, almost. In 1988, polio claimed 350,000 victims in 125 countries, but following the largest health campaign ever, polio had been reduced to 1900 cases in Asia and Africa by 2000. Mopping-up was continuing in the hope of eliminating the disease entirely.

The polio program was coordinated through the World Health Organisation, and over 20 years, involved 200 countries and 20 million volunteers, and immunised 2 billion children. It was a resounding success that could be emulated in other areas of disease control.

After making outstanding contributions in his field of immunology, Gus Nossal in 1993 was asked to head an advisory group for the World Health Organisation, and became involved in efforts to raise funds for major vaccination campaigns. In 1997, he approached the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for support, and

became chair of the Gates Children's Vaccination Program. From an initial grant of \$100 million, the Gates Foundation continues to fund health and immunisation programs, from a capital fund that has now reached \$2 billion.

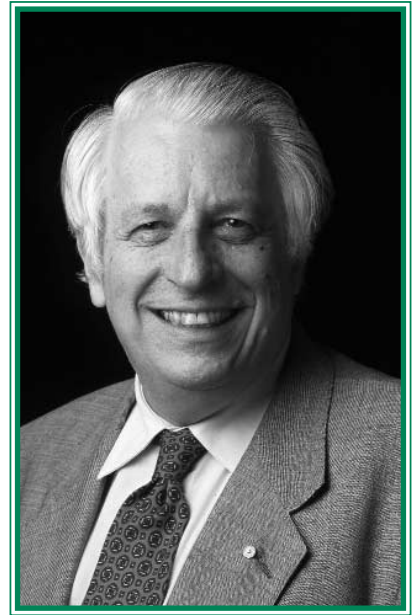
Sir Gus was very active in developing the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation in January 2000, targeting the 74 poorest countries, and so far reaching 70 of them. He estimated that 2.7 million lives could be saved: from measles, 800,000; hepatitis B, 600,000; Hib, 400,000; pertussis, 300,000; and tetanus, 240,000.

## Supports Millennium Goals

Sir Gus strongly supports the UN Millennium Goals to halve the extent of hunger and the most acute poverty in developing countries by 2015 (from the 1990 base figure), to bring 130 million more children into schools, and to strengthen the institutional framework in all aspects of governance, finance, law and education.

Sir Gus said that health involved much more than the absence of illness, and must begin with social justice in the international context. He instanced the Marshall Plan after World War II which gathered the resources to rebuild Europe and widen economic prosperity, as an example of what could be done now to eradicate hunger and the worst forms of poverty.

He quoted his friend, James Wolfensohn, president of the World Bank, speaking in Melbourne in February this year, that the world spends a trillion US dollars a year on



*Sir Gus Nossal*

defence, well over \$300 billion a year on agricultural subsidies, but only \$50-60 billion on international development assistance. Nossal concluded: 'A person visiting us from Mars would think we are all quite mad!'

Better health outcomes were a key driver for lifting living standards, he said. Many infectious diseases in developing countries were easily preventable with vaccinations. Eradication of such diseases would increase economic productivity, improve educational outcomes and reduce much human suffering.

Sir Gus quoted studies that estimated an extra annual \$30 billion of donor support would fund essential interventions against infections and nutritional deficiencies, saving 8 million lives a year and leading to an economic benefit of \$186 billion a year. A new global health research fund could disburse \$1.5 billion a year to focus on research most relevant to developing countries.

Further vaccination programs could save many more lives. He highlighted a new campaign beginning in 2007 against Meningococcal A, a disease affecting 700,000 people over the last ten years, with a 10% mortality rate. The campaign has been supported by



grants from the Gates Foundation with the WHO and other organisations, at a cost per dose of only 40 cents.

Sir Gus had been Deputy Chairman of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation from 1998 to 2000, and in his Knox Centre address said it was shocking that our indigenous people had a life expectancy 20 years less than others, and that men in the age group 35-50 had a six times greater risk of mortality than other Australian men.

He lamented that there had been no real advance in reducing the problems

of suicide, abuse, drug and alcohol problems and violence. He regretted that the process of reconciliation had been pushed into the background, and called for urgent efforts to tackle problems of exclusion and deprivation endured by indigenous Australians.

In concluding, Sir Gus argued that war was not the answer to new problems of terrorism, but that the underlying problems were social and economic. He quoted a statement made by 108 Nobel Laureates of 7 December 2001, during the centenary

celebrations of the Nobel Peace Prize:

"The most profound danger to world peace in the coming years will stem not from the irrational acts of states or individuals but from the legitimate demands of the world's dispossessed. Of these poor and disenfranchised, the majority live a marginal existence. If we permit the devastating power of modern weaponry to spread through this combustible human landscape we invite a conflagration that can engulf both rich and poor". ❖

## Using the law to break the poverty cycle

by Fr Joe Caddy

It is often the case in community services that a person will front up to a program or a service with a particular issue but through the encounter will end up addressing a much deeper set of issues or concerns. For example a request for emergency relief will be met but it may lead to longer term finance counselling and help with the family budget. Or again an individual intervention around a young person's refusal to attend school may result in helping a school community to deal with issues of bullying or exclusion.

While we are used to this flexibility in community services, it is not something that we generally expect to find in the more formal legal system and the courts.

It was most refreshing therefore to hear the State Attorney General, The Hon Rob Hulls, in his address at the Catholic Social Services Victoria Anti-Poverty Week Oration. In his response to the key note address of Sir Gus Nossal, Mr Hulls spoke forcefully about the capacity to use the law to address issues of poverty and disadvantage. In doing so the Attorney recognized that attendance at court in many instances is an indicator of

underlying social and individual issues. This is an acknowledgement of the fact that the presenting issue of crime is in fact a symptom of deeper issues of poverty and incapacity.

The great Pentridge Chaplain Fr John Brosnan used to remark of his flock that they had been sinned against infinitely more than they had sinned. This is not to excuse criminal behavior but rather to place it into a social context. If then as a society we are to achieve real justice, then we must recognize and redress the injustice that lies within that social context.

In that respect the Attorney and the State Government are on the right track in the directions outlined in the Justice Statement, released in May. The statement, which provides a blueprint for the direction of the legal system over the coming ten years, recognises that if the system is to operate in a flexible and compassionate way it must be built on clarity and inclusion.

For the Attorney, in achieving reform "the starting point must be a properly functioning criminal justice system, one capable of dispensing a fair and independent process to the accused;

justice and recognition to victims; and consistency and authority to the wider community in the context of constant change".

A key strategy in implementing that reform has been the introduction of problem-solving courts. In the fight against disadvantage the Government is determined to build on the work of the existing models such as the Drug Court, the Sex Worker List at the Magistrates' Court and the Koori Court.

In the words of the Attorney "We know that marginalization contributes to people's alienation from the law, in turn driving them into a cycle of crime. To break this cycle, the law must be smart enough to take account of issues ranging from the offender's culture, health or even age which may compound isolation and disadvantage".

The Attorney General articulated a vision for Victoria of how the justice system might reflect more clearly the dictates of social justice. ❖

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*Fr Joe Caddy is now Chief Executive Officer of Centacare Catholic Family Services Melbourne*



# MacKillop History sets a benchmark for recovering stories

by Paul Linossier

On Wednesday 20 October, *The Age* newspaper reported on the launch the previous evening of *Holding On To Hope – A History of the Founding Agencies of MacKillop Family Services, 1854 – 1997*. This beautifully presented book of some 350 pages including hundreds of photographs started some four years previously when the authors, Jill Barnard and Karen Twigg, were commissioned by the Board's History Committee to undertake the project. During the course of the larger project Karen and Jill were able to weave in the insights of several oral history projects that gave voice to the experiences of some 50 people who had been in the care of various of the agencies, as well as former staff, both lay and religious. The end product is a major work which tells the story of a significant part of the child welfare response of the Catholic community in Victoria from the earliest days of colony.

The launch took place at the South Melbourne Town Hall at a dinner marking the 150th anniversary of the founding of the earliest works of MacKillop Family Services. It was in 1854 that Fr Gerald Ward established a home in Prahran which later moved to South Melbourne (1857). The newly formed St Vincent de Paul Society was responsible for that work until it was transferred to the Sisters of Mercy in 1861. In time – 1874 – the Sisters would consolidate their Melbourne work at the Girls' Orphanage facing Napier Street, with the Christian

Brothers taking responsibility for the boys in a separate orphanage facing onto Cecil Street.

At the same time in Geelong the Friendly Brothers Society, another lay Catholic movement, was established to care for disadvantaged children and families in that district (1848). We know that by 1855 the Friendly Brothers had arranged for the placement of a number of children in private board and that they would soon move to take over a former temperance hotel to establish the first formal Catholic Home in Geelong. In time Our Lady's Orphanage, then St Catherine's and St Augustine's Orphanages, would emerge from this work.

Closer to the turn of the century the Sisters of St Joseph would take responsibility for a new work established by the South Melbourne Chapter of the St Vincent de Paul Society which was soon moved to the healthy environs of 'semi-rural Surrey Hills', and so emerged St Joseph's Homes for Children. Later, St Anthony's Orphanage at Kew, the Broadmeadows Babies Home and the Receiving Home at Carlton were also established or developed by the Sisters of St Joseph.

Preparing an organisational history can be a challenging exercise at the best of times. To cover 150 years and to trace seven, if not eight, separate institutions across three different religious orders was an enormously difficult task. The authors are to be commended not only for what they

have produced but also for the way they approached the task, genuinely entering into the experience and the story. But to simply focus on the history itself is to understate what was originally hoped might be achieved.

When MacKillop was first formed in 1997 the Board established a Records Management Committee to review what the organisation ought to do with the many thousands of client records inherited from the founding agencies. That committee provided a series of recommendations that laid the foundations for the establishment of:

1. a Heritage and Information Service which works with former residents from each of the Homes
2. a common archive for the historic client records
3. the commissioning of an organisational history
4. the development of a permanent display regarding the experience of children in care.

In essence there were four themes to the approach adopted by the Records Management Committee: preserving the record, giving voice to the story, connecting people, and learning for today. Each of these themes came together over the two days of 19 and 20 October, 2004.

The 150th Anniversary Dinner at the South Melbourne Town Hall, where the Acting Premier John Thwaites launched the *History*, was a great celebration, and a real sense of community was evident amongst

former residents and staff, representatives of other agencies, Local and State Government representatives, religious and supporters.

That atmosphere continued into the next morning with the opening of the South Melbourne Archives by Minister Sherryl Garbutt. Two hundred and sixty people were present and it was standing room only with people spilling out into ante rooms and passageways. More than half were former residents of the various institutions. The sense of community which emerged the night before was even stronger on this occasion. Housed in a purpose-built archive room with associated preservation facilities and welcoming room are the individual records and admissions registers for some 120,000 former residents of the founding homes. In addition, a collection of 8,000 photographs has been put together to ensure that the story is not lost.

Minister Garbutt was joined by John, a former resident of St Vincent's Boys' Home, and Melissa, a former resident of St Catherine's in Geelong, who both spoke of their experiences. John and Melissa bravely shared their personal experience in a public forum

and they were joined by spontaneous "Maurie" who delighted the gathering with a telling of his philosophy on life!

The Archive encompasses half of the former dining room at the St Vincent's Boys' Home. What was unexpected was the reaction to the organisation's commitment to develop the front half

of the dining room as a permanent display on the development of child welfare and to record the experience of children in care across the years in Victoria.

The mood on the morning was one of community and celebration. Subsequent feedback tells us that many former residents felt that for the first time their story or experience had been acknowledged in a respectful way, that they belong and that it was a significant and positive experience.

*The Age* article of 20.10.04, "Hidden

projects has been to be able to hold both experiences as true and as valid.

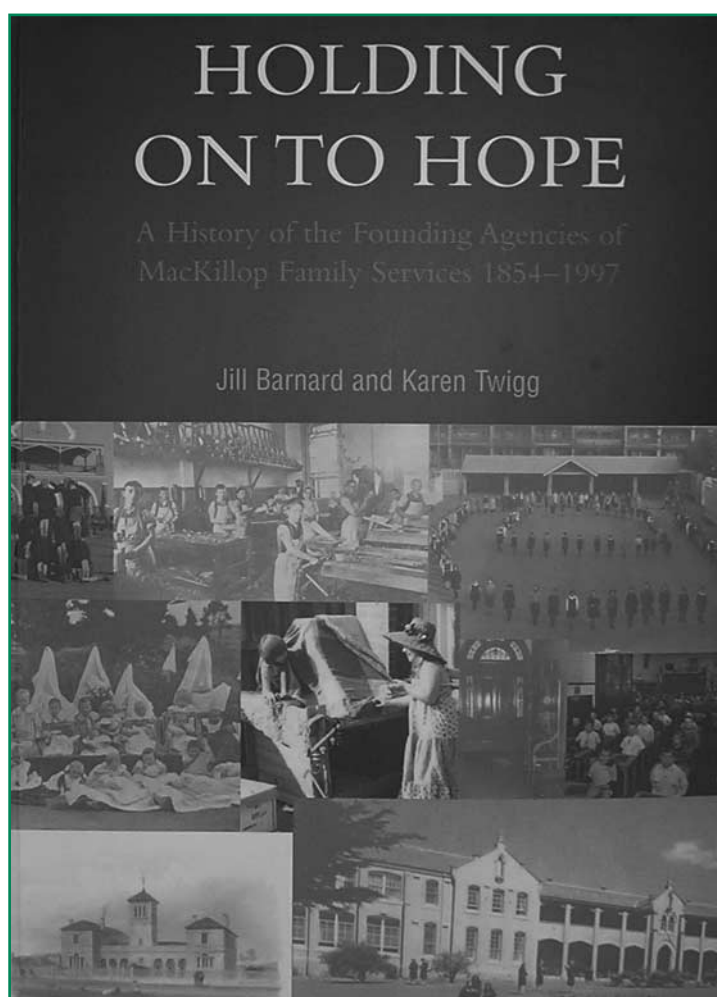
It is co-incidence but significant timing that the launch of the *History* came after the release of the Senate Reference Committee Report, *Forgotten Australians*. That Report, too, reminds us that we must hold and give voice to both experiences if we seek to move forward and effect reconciliation and healing wherever possible.

*Forgotten Australians* also challenges us to seriously engage with each of the recommendations and to reflect on our current practice in their light. The model of preserving the record, giving voice to the story, connecting people, and learning for today is consistent with the message of *Forgotten Australians* and a helpful way for past providers to move forward. I would be pleased to be in conversation with member organisations of Catholic Social Services Victoria who are interested to work on their response to these recommendations.

Copies of *Holding on to Hope* are available from MacKillop Family Services on (03) 9699 9177. Enquiries regarding access to personal records by former residents and their families should be

directed to the Heritage and Information Team (03) 9699 9177. Support and counselling is also available from VANISH 1800334043 and CLAN 1800008774. ❖

*Paul Linossier is the Chief Executive Officer of MacKillop Family Services and Chair of CSSV Council.*



Orphanage Lives" set out two stories: one a positive experience of being in care, and the other a recounting of abuse and violation. The challenge for us as an organisation, through the development of our Heritage and Information Service, the Archives and display area, the *History* and the other



# Living with a mental illness

*The following document is a summary of a report submitted to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) and the Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA) Mental Health Community Consultations by The Brotherhood of St Laurence and Catholic Social Services Victoria in September 2000.*

Catholic Social Services Victoria has become increasingly concerned about the difficulties facing people living with a mental illness. Together with the Brotherhood of St Laurence we have been meeting with a range of consumers, carers, friends and organisations over the past five months to discuss the issues of concern to people whose lives are touched by mental illness. The key issues that have emerged in these discussions, and more broadly through the work of the organisations, are summarised below.

## Stigma and discrimination

The experience of stigma and discrimination is endemic, ranging from the common media portrayal of people with a psychiatric illness being violent and aggressive to discrimination in employment and even to how people are treated in mainstream medical services.

Employment is where many consumers feel they are particularly vulnerable to discrimination. To survive at work a person often needs to conform to a fairly narrow stereotype - difference is not well tolerated by peers or supervisors. Consumers are likely to attempt to hide any mental health issues, which may mean they do not get the support they need and it may make their work experience more difficult.

Experiences of stigma and discrimi-

nation are widespread and serve to make the everyday lives of people who have a mental illness much more difficult than they need to be. Concerted and sustained advocacy and education campaigns are required if we are to make an impact on the widespread unfair and unjust treatment experienced by an already disadvantaged group within our community.

## Inadequate housing

There is a serious shortage of affordable housing in Victoria, leaving many people in 'housing stress', where their housing costs are so great that they are not left with a sufficient income to meet other basic needs. People with a mental illness form a significant part of this group who struggle, and often fail, to keep a roof over their head.

Public housing waiting lists are currently measured in terms of years, with some consumers being told that they are unlikely to ever obtain a public housing unit. Private rental is one of their few options, but the cost can be debilitating.

Rooming houses and Supported Residential Services (SRS) have become home to many people with a mental illness but such facilities are often ill equipped to provide the support many residents require. The Victorian Homeless Strategy (VHS) 2002 reported research which had found that 47 per cent of people living in crisis accommodation, SRS or boarding houses had significant mental health problems (VHS 2002, p6).

Affordable housing is a major issue for people living with a mental health problem. The Victorian Homeless Strategy 2002 reported that long-term

housing and support for people with a mental illness drastically reduces inpatient stays (VHS 2002, p7). Without access to stable, safe and affordable housing it is extremely difficult to treat people for their psychiatric illness.

## Poor access to services

Individuals speak of the difficulties they have accessing the mental health services they feel they need. In acute care, consumers have spoken of being refused hospital beds even though they were at a crisis point, resulting in them being admitted a few days later in an acute psychotic state. There is a clear picture that emerges - help is reserved for the most psychotic episodes only and prevention or early intervention is of a low priority. Acute psychiatric services are under-funded, rationing access to a point where people have to beg for assistance.

Community-based services are also chronically under-funded. People seeking case management are often forced to wait for long periods before receiving assistance. Extra resources are needed to strengthen the commitment to both community-based services and to preventative care.

Another major issue is the availability of services catering for dual disability. Individuals who have a mental illness as well as a drug and alcohol problem are even more limited in their access to services. The services that are available and are specific for them are few and therefore very hard to access.

## Inadequate income

The majority of consumers with whom we have consulted have been living on the Disability Support



Pension, and have spoken of the difficulties of getting through each fortnight, until the next payment. Housing costs, as discussed earlier, 'eat a large hole' into what they get, leaving little to survive.

Living like this is hard and would put a strain on most people's mental health and wellbeing. Unfortunately, meeting the expenses of basic necessities means that many people have no money to participate in leisure and social activities, a situation that isolates them further.

Providing people with a sufficient income to allow them to live with some dignity must be a priority in a wealthy and civilised society.

## Employment

The majority of consumers spoken to during the consultation were not working, but many had in the past and wished to do so again in the future. They, however, acknowledged the great barriers that would have to be overcome if they were ever to achieve their aims.

Many of the consumers had been working when they became unwell but often had lost their job, usually due to their illness, before they obtained a diagnosis. Getting back into work after a major illness was proving difficult for those who wanted to work. The exceptions to this were some people who said they had received good employment assistance from disability employment agencies.

Rehabilitative programs that centre on consumers re-entering the workplace need to be made a priority within the mental health system. Programs do already exist, but they, like many services, are limited by a lack of funding and high demand. To help alleviate the barriers that consumers face, there is a definite need for increased funding and support in this area.

## Interaction with the prison system

The inability of people living in poverty to access the mental health



*Phillipa Angley, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Kate Kricker & Theresa Lynch, Catholic Social Services Victoria.*

system in a time of crisis predisposes them to the risk of offending and potential incarceration. One of the many concerns we have is the over-representation of poor people with a mental illness in prison.

It is acknowledged that services for prisoners are generally limited. This unfortunately leads to a deficiency in treatment for those needing psychiatric care and support. The experience of prison also makes managing the illness more challenging.

It is our position that all prisoners with a mental health problem should have access to appropriate care and treatment. We also believe it crucial that the police and courts execute diversionary options for offenders with a mental illness, recognizing that a sympathetic response is required.

## Conclusion

People living with a mental health problem are one of the most acutely disadvantaged groups in Australia. They are more likely to be living in poverty, with limited access to affordable and secure accommodation, to have low education and to be without employment. Sadly we have the

knowledge and abilities to treat people. However, the failure of governments to adequately resource services and the lack of commitment to genuine reform have led to a chronic deterioration of care and support to consumers, their families and carers.

With one in five Australians expected to suffer a mental illness in their lifetime this presents as a significant concern for all those wanting to access the optimal in care and support. There is a real need to increase funding so as to ensure timely and appropriate responses within the mental health system. It is not acceptable that people seeking relief from the symptoms of their mental illness are unable to receive the help that will preserve their rights and dignity. The ability of consumers to access service systems across the spectrum of care demands that both federal and state governments urgently increase their investment into services. \*

*Edited by Kate Kricker who is a final year social work student at La Trobe University on placement at CSSV.*

# CSSV Council and Secretariat update

## Project updates

At the moment CSSV is involved in a number of research projects which have been undertaken either as in-house activities or as part of collaborative ventures with other organisations.

These projects address issues as diverse as:

- **Housing** - determining the capacity of parishes and looking at issues associated with the employment of underutilised resources for social housing projects
- **Aged Care and Homelessness** - seeking an understanding of how Catholic agencies have responded to the issue of ageing homeless, and developing a coherent approach to addressing this situation
- **Disability Services** - conducting a study of issues confronted by ageing parents caring for ageing disabled children
- **Criminal Justice** - collaborative research with Monash University addressing post-release issues for female prisoners
- **Mental Health** - joint research with the Brotherhood of St Laurence aiming, amongst other objectives, to develop an advocacy campaign
- **Drug & Alcohol** - collaborating with Australian Catholic University on work being undertaken on the impact that drug and alcohol clients have on non-drug treatment community agencies
- **Poverty** - undertaking a study exploring perceptions of poverty in collaboration with Australian Catholic University
- **Community Building** - seeking to develop an understanding of, and practical responses to, the issues being experienced by growing communities – the Northern Areas Project

## Diary dates - 2005

Annual General Meeting 16 March 2005 at MacKillop Family Services South Melbourne. Details will be released in early 2005.

## Recent submissions

- Submission to the Department of Human Services: *Protecting Children: ten priorities for children's wellbeing and safety in Victoria*, October 2004
- Joint submission with the Brotherhood of St Laurence to The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and the Mental Health Council of Australia addressing Mental Health Community Consultation matters, September 2004
- Paper prepared in collaboration with Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services briefing the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne on concerns with the Energy Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2004, November 2004
- Letters of concern jointly signed by CSSV, St Vincent de Paul and Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services forwarded to Victorian government ministers and back benchers regarding concerns with the Energy Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2004, November 2004

## Work in progress

- **Child Protection Reform** - Ongoing involvement with the State Government and other key stakeholders in the review of child protection policy, practice issues and related legislation

## Other

- Supporting La Trobe University in the provision of learning opportunity for a social work student conducting research on the issue of mental health

*Micah December 2004*

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