

Jesuit Social

Winter Appeal 2004



Services

June Newsletter

Standing in solidarity with those in need, expressing a faith that promotes justice

“EVERY CHILD DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY SHALL BE SEPARATED FROM ADULTS”

U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 37C



One of the key concerns of the Brosnan Centre since its establishment in 1977 has been to deal with the negative impact of a period of imprisonment on vulnerable young people after their release.

Over the years, we have found that the more immature the young person, the greater the negative impact of being exposed to older, seasoned criminal offenders.

Yet the current Victorian legislation still allows young boys and young girls who are only seventeen years of age to be placed in adult prisons. This is despite the fact that the Bracks Government made a promise to the electorate in September 1999 and again in November 2002 that it would change this legislation.

To date, there has been no commitment from the Bracks Government to implement this election promise.

Executive Director, Bernie Geary, and Policy Director, Father Peter Norden, have met with the Victorian Attorney General, Rob Hulls on two

separate occasions to discuss this issue, over a period of more than five years.

The Government says that it is committed to making this change, but it explains its lengthy delay by saying the change in legislation is expected to cost it money, since there is a greater cost of holding young people in Juvenile Justice Centres than prisons. As a consequence large numbers of seventeen year olds are required to appear before adult courts throughout Victoria, instead of being granted the extra attention provided by the Children's Court jurisdiction.

A child is defined as being under the age of eighteen throughout Australia. Victoria is the only State or Territory in Australia that has not taken steps to prevent those under the age of eighteen being remanded or sentenced to adult prisons. Recently, the Queensland Government passed legislation to ensure that it conformed to the United Nations Covenant on the Rights of the Child and is expected to regulate to bring about this change in its age jurisdiction.

It is now time for the Victorian Government to take



the step to bring its legislation in line with the rest of Australia, and in conformity with the U.N. Convention, by preventing those who are not adults being sent to adult prisons.

Each day of the week, the thirty staff at the Brosnan Centre are involved in helping young people during the difficult first few months after their release from Juvenile Justice Centres and prisons.

They know from bitter experience what impact exposure to seasoned criminal offenders has on a seventeen-year-old boy. Many young people have been the victims of physical or sexual assault in adult prisons. Others are all too ready to adopt career criminals as their mentors and role models. The cost of this damage is immeasurable.

Does it take a death, or a serious sexual assault of a young person in an adult prison to get the government to act? It's time Attorney General Rob Hulls made this change so that the Department of Justice can no longer be accused of failing to protect vulnerable young people by detaining them in adult prisons.

If they can't vote and can't get a driver's licence and can go to licensed premises, they should not be liable to be sent to adult prisons.

BERNIE GEARY: FAREWELL AND THANKS

After sixteen years of service to the Brosnan Centre and Jesuit Social Services, Bernie Geary has offered his resignation as Executive Director and will soon take up a senior position with the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

During that long period of service with our organisation, since 1988, Bernie has filled the roles of Program Manager at the Brosnan Centre, Director of Programs, Policy Director and, during the last two years, Executive Director of Jesuit Social Services.

These years have been eventful ones at Jesuit Social Services, with many new initiatives and new programs established to support young people, families and communities in need.

During that time, Bernie has helped to guide these new developments with a great deal of energy, compassion, good humour and encouragement to all involved.

Bernie's personal skills include a great capacity to advocate on behalf of young people in need and he has served on a broad range of Advisory Boards and consultative committees for both State and Federal Governments. While he will be sorely missed at Jesuit Social Services, we thank him for his remarkable contribution and wish him well for his future work with the Vinnies.

The Board has appointed Julie Edwards, our Program Director, as Acting Executive Director, to take effect from 21 May. The position of Executive Director will soon be advertised publicly.



JUSTICE CAN BRING HEALING AND RECONCILIATION AS THIS GROUP CONFERENCE CASESTUDY ILLUSTRATES

“Jane Clifton” is a young woman of 15 years of age who was referred to Jesuit Social Services’ program *Community Justice* for a Group Conference by a metropolitan Children’s Court, after the theft of a motor vehicle. She had one prior conviction and another charge pending of a similar nature. In the company of two other young people, Jane entered a vehicle parked at a local shopping centre. As a passenger in the vehicle, Jane and her co-defendants travelled in the vehicle for several days before leaving it in the street. Several personal items of value to the victim were taken and not recovered, including medication that was necessary for the victim to have, due to serious ill health.

Jane resided at a residential unit with her two co-defendants. Jane’s parents, older brother and younger sister resided interstate. Jane left her family home to live with her twenty-year old boyfriend in Melbourne. This relationship was described as abusive and this was the underlying factor surrounding Protective Services involvement. Jane is known to have a good relationship with her mother. However, the family are still very angry with Jane regarding her departure from home.

Jane was supported by a number of professionals and had developed other positive support relationships with residential workers.

Initially, Jane presented with very little remorse for her actions or appreciation for the impact of her actions on the victim. As she moved through the process of Group Conferencing however, she demonstrated a growing appreciation for the impact of her actions and openness for considering how she could make amends for some of the harm that was done to the victim. Jane participated in the preparation for the Group Conference although she was very anxious and afraid about meeting the victim face to face at the group conference. Jane was particularly worried that the victim would be angry with her and she would be shamed because of her behaviour. According to workers involved in Jane’s life, this was a particular concern because it was how Jane described her relationship and interactions with her father.



A young offender taking part in a juvenile group conference.

The victim of this offence chose to participate in the Group Conference supported by a victim support worker from Victims Referral Assistance Service (VRAS). He is a gentleman in his early 60’s, who presented with both emotional and physical fragility due to ill health.

The victim was able to openly talk about the impact of having his motor vehicle stolen both in the preparation phase of the group conferencing process and at the group conference. He recalled that his car was written off and that he was required to put in additional money totalling up to a \$1000 to replace the vehicle. The victim was still paying for repairs to his new vehicle throughout the group conference process. Personal items were also taken that were of value to the victim.

Mobility and freedom became a significant issue for the victim. He was forced to take public transport, which was sometimes difficult for him to access, and it also added further to his financial difficulties.

The victim was clear in stating that he wanted Jane to be aware of the seriousness of the offence and realise the consequences of her actions. He particularly wanted her to put something back into the community, in the form of community work. The victim also showed empathy and concern for Jane and her co-offenders.

The Group Conference involved ten people, including the young person and her professional supports, the victim and his support worker, the legal representative and police informant. The family of the young person did not participate in the conference as they lived interstate. Her counsellor, education/vocational support worker and residential workers supported Jane.

Jane demonstrated significant remorse for her offending behaviour throughout the conference. She presented the victim with a letter of apology, which was handed to the victim by her residential worker and by the end of the conference, Jane faced the victim and made a verbal apology directly to him. Jane also appeared to acknowledge and appreciate the full effect of her offending behaviour on the wider community.

All participants at the Group Conference acknowledged that Jane had a lot of potential and capacity to engage in a positive future without further offending. Jane experienced acceptance from her supports whilst hearing that her offending behaviour was not acceptable. This is especially important for Jane, who is on a protective custody order and without immediate support from her family.



Group conferencing is based on real communication between victim and offender.

The victim also demonstrated care for Jane, encouraging her to maintain her studies. He also asked her about her family, expressing concern that they were not there at the conference with her.

All participants at the Group Conference were involved in making decisions about how to make amends to the victim regarding the harm caused and how to support Jane to prevent further offending. To repair some of the harm caused to the victim, Jane made both a verbal and written apology to the victim and agreed to complete approximately ten hours of community work with the Salvation Army Thrift Shop.

In relation to preventing further offending it was acknowledged that Jane needed to continue with her education, maintain her counselling, continue to explore future pathways with her vocational support worker and to participate in a youth program as a peer educator. Jane recently commenced a distance education course in Year 10 studies. She is doing very well in her studies and presents with ambitions to continue with further education, particularly in the area of youth work. Jane’s residential case manager is supporting her in implementing this Outcome Plan.

Jane attended court following the Group Conference. The Magistrate considered the outcome plan developed by the conference and placed Jane on a Good Behaviour Bond for 12 months with conditions. The agreements Jane made at the Group Conference were the conditions placed on the Good Behaviour Bond.

Reflecting on the conference experience, Jane was able to acknowledge the full impact of her offending and place a human face to the harm caused. Jane stated that she was surprised to see that the victim was a gentle man, who was small and very unwell. Her case manager stated that she had told him that if she knew how fragile and unwell he was she never would have taken his car.

WEBSITE EXCLUSIVE: Find out more about our *Community Justice* program on our web page: www.jss.org/programmes/com_justice/html

Apology letter from a 15year old boy who pleaded guilty to Recklessly Cause Injury and Attempted Robbery charges in the Children’s Court. The victim was a 13-year-old boy.

“I just wanted to let you know that I am sorry for what I did that it was stupid and I am paying for that in more ways than you can think of...

I just want you to know that I know this is no excuse but back then I was having family problems such as my parents split up I got kicked out of school I lost most of my friends and most importantly my

girlfriend. So I had that much anger inside of me and don’t ask me why but it just came out that day and over nothing.

I know I caused you nightmares and I am sorry for that. I am so sorry I have never in my whole life regretted something so much because now I know how young you are and it is one of the worst things that can happen in a junior’s life”.

“THE DINNER PARTY” IN SUPPORT OF GATEWAY’S KITCHEN

“The Kitchen” is part of Gateway’s Creative Industries, which aims to increase the capacity of young people for social connection, safety and economic participation..

Managed by Loretta Sartori, Melbourne’s well-renowned pastry chef, this exciting new initiative includes a cooking school that will offer training in hospitality and cooking, a catering operation and Café, all operating within the commercial kitchen facility in our new Victoria Street location.

Young people will have the opportunity to develop their interest in cooking, to develop skills and achieve qualifications in the hospitality and catering industry, and at the same time to gain valuable work experience.

“The Kitchen” will cater for external businesses and community groups, in addition to providing for the gallery and the onsite theatre.

The program was launched at “The Dinner Party” held last month at the Victoria Street site, when several top chefs donated their time and professional services to model what will be provided in coming years through “The Kitchen” and the young people associated with our Gateway program.

To achieve its goals, Gateway’s creative industries recognised that we need to offer programs that engage and excite young people about learning and employment. For some young people this will take time and we need to build their confidence and skills. For others who need to manage physical and mental health issues, their capacity to engage in full-time, mainstream work may be limited.



Chef preparing the banquet at Victoria Street.

The program therefore aims to provide new and exciting employment activities and flexible work arrangements, where young people work when they are able to.



Chef preparing the meal.

WEBSITE EXCLUSIVE: See what Gateway is doing to remove the barriers for long-term unemployed young people on our web site: www.jss.org/programmes/gateway.html



Group of chefs preparing to serve the meal.



The Gateway staff and trainees at the end of a successful dinner.

MONTSERRAT GAINS A MADONNA



The Jesuit Social Services property at Alexandra, which provides the opportunity of respite care for people who need a little break from Melbourne, has received a gift of a three metre tall bronze statue of the Madonna by famous Vietnamese artist, the late Le Thanh Nhon.

Located high above the Goulburn River Valley, on a seventy-five acre property, two hours drive from Melbourne, Montserrat provides good accommodation facilities in a beautiful scenic setting.

The statue of the Madonna has been donated by the Vietnamese Catholic Community of Keysborough, in recognition of Jesuit Social Services work with members of the Vietnamese community.

More than one thousand people have visited the country accommodation centre since we obtained the property less than three years ago.

It is anticipated that the addition of this beautiful piece of art will give further expression to the sense of peacefulness and tranquillity that is a major dimension of the Montserrat respite accommodation centre.

WEBSITE EXCLUSIVE: For more information about the accommodation centre at Montserrat, go to: www.jss.org.au/programmes/montserrat.html

A BANQUET OF RICH FOODS

Australia is a land of growing prosperity, but our recent research study on the distribution of disadvantage in New South Wales and Victoria, Community Adversity and Resilience, clearly found that this prosperity is not being shared across the whole community. There are many Australian families missing out.

The programs and the policy, research and advocacy work of Jesuit Social Services seek to make a difference and we appreciate your support in helping to bring this about.

Through our engagement with people in need we endeavour to help them to take those steps that are necessary to more fully participate in this society. Those who are not able to make that move face a very bleak future indeed.

Your engagement with the work of Jesuit Social Services is greatly appreciated and we hope that you can sustain this involvement in the coming years.



► **WEBSITE EXCLUSIVE:** To find out more about our latest research on the distribution of poverty in New South Wales and Victoria, go to: www.jss.org.au/programmes/index.html



"Many of our young people need your help to get through this winter unscathed"

You can direct your tax-deductible donation where you recognise programs that have creativity and energy and real engagement with people in need. By that means you can reduce your taxable income before the end of June.

By supporting the work of Jesuit Social Services this month, you provide us with vitally important practical assistance. Please give as generously as you are able to our Winter appeal.

► **WEBSITE EXCLUSIVE:** To find out how you can help Jesuit Social Services by a secure online donation, go to: www.jss.org/help/index.html

Yes! I would like to support the Jesuit Social Services Winter Appeal.

Please tick donation amount

- \$50
- \$100
- \$250
- \$500
- My choice
- \$.....

Please make your donation payable to:

The Jesuit Social Services Winter Appeal

Cheque enclosed OR Bankcard VISA MasterCard

No:

Expiry Date:.....Signature:.....

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FIRST NAME (S) SURNAME

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Please send me details on:

- remembering Jesuit Social Services in my Will
- joining the Jesuit Volunteer program
- please send me information about the Workplace Giving Program recently established by the Australian Taxation Office.



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