



thirty YEARS *at a glance*

Being young and just released from custody, with no place to call home, no money and no friends, is a terrible place to be.

RECOGNISING this need led Peter Norden, a young Jesuit in training, to open a hostel, called Four Flats, in January 1977. The Jesuits provided a house in Hawthorn to begin this bold venture. This was where Jesuit Social Services had its beginnings.

The hostel had room for only eight residents at a time. Finding a way of supporting them was never easy. The chaos and struggle of their lives made it hard to hold them long enough to help turn their hopes into realities. With so many other young people released from prison in need of support, it was decided in 1982 to close the hostel, move to Collingwood and provide outreach support to a much greater number of young people. The most urgent needs of housing and financial assistance were a first priority. But there were many other pressing

issues which were compounded by loneliness and isolation.

By 1987 the numbers of young people in need of support had grown. A larger building was purchased in Sydney Road Brunswick, just a tram ride from Pentridge Prison. It was now called the Brosnan Centre in honour of Fr John Brosnan who had been the Catholic Chaplain at Pentridge Prison for thirty years.

From this work with young people in the justice system, it became very clear that their experiences were part of a much bigger picture of struggling communities, fractured families, traumatised refugees and migrants, isolated lonely people suffering from mental illness, unemployed young people who had never seen a parent work, parents who had no map to guide them through raising children. In 1995 Jesuit Social Services was formed to expand the work beyond Brosnan Centre and to confront some of these broader challenges.

One new program was Connexions which was the first service in Victoria for young people with the dual diagnosis of mental illness and

substance use problems. This was challenging work. Jesuit Social Services continued as Four Flats had begun.

In 1977 there were eight young people living at Four Flats. In 2007, through fifteen different programs, over four thousand people received assistance from Jesuit Social Services and more than two and a half thousand people participated in group programs.

The starting point has always been to enter into a relationship with people, listening to their stories and offering the possibility that they could realise their hopes. The story of Jesuit Social Services is the sum of all the individual stories of those who have

been supported. Stories of pain, loss, unfulfilled hopes. And stories of new beginnings, of being held in moments of great difficulty, of being heard rather than ignored or rejected, of being respected rather than seen as not worthwhile.

It is also the story of those who have worked at Jesuit Social Services. In telling their stories, they laughed and cried. They reflected on the good times and those moments when their efforts seemed to no avail. This is a precarious enterprise and there is no certainty about the outcomes. Living with that uncertainty requires a commitment to continue to support the most vulnerable and isolated in our community.

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