



Jesuit Community College participant Darcy. Hear about how the College has helped Darcy on page 5.

Jesuit Community College celebrates 10 years

Jesuit Social Services has long believed that education and employment are key to enable someone to meaningfully participate in society. Having worked for many years with people who face significant barriers to mainstream education and employment pathways, we founded Jesuit Community College in 2011. Our goal was to help people, and by extension their families and communities, reach their full potential.

"You start with the end in mind, and the end is always employment," says Lorraine Nesbitt, General Manager of Jesuit Community College. "Employment is one of those things that can solve a lot of the problems our participants are facing."

The College delivers courses that teach life, employability and work skills across a wide range of areas including: literacy and numeracy, English language skills, hospitality, animal care, permaculture, garden and horticulture, financial skills, aged care, carpentry and construction.

Long-time trainer, Astrida Pepe, who has been working for the College for nearly 10 years, has seen the impact of the College on participants time and time again.

"Many of the people who come to us have been really hard done by – emotionally, socially and in education. They have low self-worth. We build relationships based on each person's strengths and then help them develop skills that reinforce these strengths."

From 130 students in its first year, the College has steadily grown, with over 2,000 participants preparing for work and further study through its courses in 2020. Looking forward to the next 10 years, Lorraine knows the College has the potential to do more.

"We want to keep growing so we can help more people. We know that digital literacy is a huge area where the College has the potential to help."

Reflecting on what she's most proud of about the College, Lorraine is clear: it is how the team lives the College's vision and values every day.

"Our vision is for people to be contributing members of the community by way of employment. But we recognise that every individual has a whole range of barriers and our team comes together to address those. We are and will forever be wholly committed to this vision."

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Education and employment the key to a flourishing life

As COVID-19 continues to impact all our lives in significant ways, the pandemic exacerbates some of the existing inequalities in our society.

This includes the gaps in education, training and employment, apparent in the children and young people who face barriers when trying to learn remotely, the number of people in insecure work who have had their livelihoods disrupted and the number of people who struggle to find employment.

Education, training and employment can provide the foundation for connection to community. They help people recognise their value and allow them to develop and use their skills and experience to lead productive lives. That's why, 10 years ago, Jesuit Social Services established Jesuit Community College.

As a Registered Training Organisation, we connect with and engage people who would otherwise not participate in education and training, giving them the confidence and employability skills that will improve their social and economic participation in the community.

Pre-COVID, the College was supporting more than 2,000 students to access accredited and non-accredited training programs as well as employment pathway programs.

In this newsletter you will read more about the history of Jesuit Community College and the work it has done to transition to online and blended modes of delivery during COVID – particularly as demand for services are as strong as ever.

You will also read about our new school - the Ignatius Learning Centre - for young people who have contact with the youth justice system, and the impact it's had since it opened earlier this year. You will also learn about Birty and her success in the Victoria Police Diversity Recruitment Program.

I hope you and your loved ones are safe and well during this difficult time. Thank you for your support of our work and our vision to build a just society.

Julie Edwards

CEO, Jesuit Social Services

Birty's perseverance pays off

Birty's journey as a participant in the Victoria Police Diversity Recruitment Program through to joining Victoria Police in early 2021 is one typified by hard work and perseverance.

"At times it was really challenging and it was so important to have my classmates and teachers to motivate me and each other. When I got accepted into the Victoria Police academy, I couldn't believe it. It was the most amazing feeling, and I was so proud of all the obstacles I had overcome along the way."

The Victoria Police Diversity Recruitment Program, run by Jesuit Social Services, Victoria Police, Victoria University Polytechnic and community stakeholders, provides support and guidance to African Australian participants to succeed through each stage of the Victoria Police Recruitment Program.

Participants engage in a 15-week course to build skills and capabilities for success, supporting them to reach their goals. The other aim of the program is to support Victoria Police's workforce to reflect the cultural diversity of the Victorian community.

Birty says one of her biggest hurdles along the way was passing the push-up component of the fitness test.

"I got myself a personal trainer and was practising push-ups on tables, benches and couches. When I passed, I was so happy, I cried."

Having graduated from the academy earlier this year, Birty now works in Melton in Melbourne's west.

The first known female Ethiopian to work as a Victoria Police officer, Birty is a trailblazer and says her parents are extremely proud of her success.

One of her most meaningful moments to date was seeing the positive impact her presence has in the community.

"I attended a job and the lady we visited started crying saying 'I've never seen a police officer who looks like me'. It was really emotional for me and it made me feel so good."



Birty with Victoria Police Assistant Commissioner Luke Cornelius.

Vaccination centre helping Western Sydney navigate COVID-19

Western Sydney, where Jesuit Social Services has provided a range of programs and services since 2008, is one of the critical locations at the centre of New South Wales' COVID-19 outbreak.

Our research into locational disadvantage, conducted over more than 20 years, demonstrates that locations in Western Sydney, including Mount Druitt, are among the most disadvantaged locations in NSW.

Preventing the spread of the virus and promoting health and safety among Western Sydney residents is critically important in supporting the community to navigate the current crisis.

That is why Jesuit Social Services, in partnership with Emerton's Holy Family Parish, has taken a leadership role in establishing a vaccination centre in Western Sydney.

"When we heard that NSW Health was focusing on reaching vulnerable communities, we knew that Jesuit Social Services could play a key role. We approached the Premier's department and negotiated with NSW Health to establish the vaccine hub, and we are working with local service providers to receive referrals for eligible community members to book their vaccine," says Monique Perusco, Manager – Social and Community Services with Jesuit Social Services' Western Sydney team.

The vaccination centre is open once a week and can administer up to 100 vaccines per day. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are prioritised in recognition of lower vaccination rates among this group nationally.

"By utilising our long-standing relationships with local people, agencies and communities, we are able to provide access to vaccinations for people who may not have otherwise had access to them, and connect them with clear, factual health advice," says Monique.

"This initiative has been extremely well received by the local community, and we are proud that we can play a meaningful role in keeping Western Sydney safe during this challenging time."

As our vaccination program is small and very targeted to reach vulnerable community members in a particularly high-risk area, we cannot offer vaccines to the wider public at this stage.

To find your local vaccine centre and book an appointment, please visit www.health.nsw.gov.au.



Jesuit Social Services staff member Rosie receives her COVID-19 vaccination at our Western Sydney vaccination centre.

Keeping 'Youth at the Centre' of our 5th National Justice Symposium

In July 2021, Jesuit Social Services partnered with the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) to host the 5th National Justice Symposium in Mparntwe/Alice Springs and online. Our biennial National Justice Symposium brings together key stakeholders and experts to explore issues and themes relating to criminal justice systems. This year, nearly 250 people came together for the day both in-person and online.

The date of this year's Symposium coincided with the fifth anniversary of the announcement of the *Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory*. The Royal Commission exposed the shameful treatment of Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory's detention system, and provided a blueprint for reform. Four years since accepting the Commission's recommendations, the Northern Territory Government has backed away from key reforms – this has seen an immediate rise in the number of Aboriginal children detained.

Against this backdrop, the overarching theme of the 2021 Symposium was 'Youth at the Centre'. Our aim was to bring together young people with lived experience of the justice system, Aboriginal Elders, local and international experts, sector representatives, advocates, lawyers and academics to explore what is working and what needs to change in order to end the over-incarceration of First Nations children.

We started the day hearing from young people across the Northern Territory and grounding ourselves in their stories, their hopes and dreams, the challenges they face, and their ideas for change. Following this, Elders from the Strong Grandmothers Group from the Central Desert Region and Serena Dalton, Founder of Grassroots Youth Engagement in Palmerston shared what they know works in caring for their kids – namely maintaining their connections with culture, community, family, Elders, language and Country.

We then moved into a discussion of the fragility of reform, hearing from international experts, Clinton Lacey and Candice Jones, as well as our Australian panellists, Cheryl Axleby (Change the Record) and Phil Boulten SC.

Successes and challenges shared by Clinton and Candice in pursuing a reduction in the number of youth incarcerated in the US provided an important opportunity for reflection on the reform journey in Australia.

We heard how it is possible to shift the culture in youth justice systems so that the focus is on the best outcomes for children and young people at every stage of their engagement with the justice system.

Clinton spoke boldly of a system driven by love for the young people in their care and he claimed that a government's budget is a moral document reflecting who and what we value.

Next, we heard from a range of practitioners, including Muriel Bamblett (Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency), Craig Freaan and Genevieve Higgins (Jesuit Social Services), David Woodroffe and Anna Gill (NAAJA), Judge Tony Fitzgerald (Aotearoa/New Zealand) about delivering effective interventions for young people at all points of the justice system. This illustrated how good work can be done even within systems that are flawed.

Our last session of the day focused on the power of community, importance of solidarity, raising voices, and shifting narratives. We heard from Larrakia women Mililma May and Sharna Alley, co-founders of Uprising of the People, a Darwin-based grassroots organisation. Mililma and Sharna concluded by echoing the Strong Grandmothers' message from earlier in the day – children belong on Country, not in detention.

Visit www.njs21.jss.org.au to access content from the 5th National Justice Symposium, including session recordings, speaker bios and more.



Julie Edwards with international speakers Candice C. Jones and Clinton Lacey in their session at the National Justice Symposium.

Hands-on training helps participants find their way forward

For many people, the prospect of acquiring a new set of skills to break into the workforce or change careers can be incredibly daunting.

Jesuit Community College Trainer Bradley Lark says tailoring the training provided through the Café Operations course to the specific needs and skill level of its learners makes a huge difference to their experience.

"We find out where the participant wants to head and what their interests are. Then we develop a program for them over a six-month period. We find that is a lot more engaging than just washing dishes and sweeping floors."

For Café Operations participant Darcy, the hands-on experience offered as part of the training is a highlight. "I was expecting the course to be hands-on, but not this hands-on. That's one of the things I've most enjoyed. In a lot of courses you have to do all the prep work before you get into the hands-on stuff. But we're trusted to get behind the counter and actually give things a go. I've learned a lot about redefining my craft and better ways that I can put myself out there when customers come in."

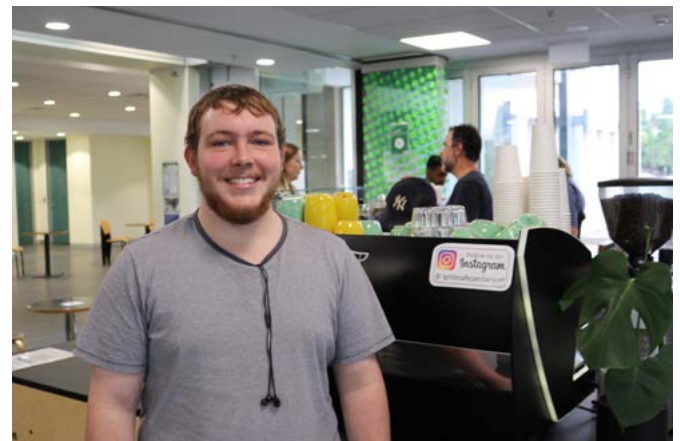
As a result of struggles with his schooling, Liam was apprehensive about participating in the course. These concerns were quickly dispelled. "I came into the course thinking education can't be that pleasant, but somehow they managed to make it pretty decent, made me want to keep coming, which was quite the opposite of school. It's easy to just come and if you put your head down and do the work, then you'll pass the course. I appreciate that. It's the kind of course that I needed at this point in my life."

Brad, who also manages our Ignite Cafe in Camberwell, says that in addition to the hands-on skills, the training provides the accredited certificates participants need to find work in the competitive hospitality industry. "In this course, we're delivering Work Health and Safety, Food Safety and the Responsible Service of Alcohol, which is a really good set of certificates to have for anyone looking for entry level employment into hospitality. They also learn how to work with others within a commercial environment."

Liam says that the training has made a dramatic change to his outlook. "I have developed skills like it's nobody's business. I almost had no skills when I came into this, I had never done anything to do with coffee, I made instant.

"I'm looking forward to getting a job a couple of nights a week, so I can start getting my own money so I'm able to do my own things and not rely on family members to always be shelling out cash.

"It's gratifying to be able to hand someone a coffee and say, 'Hey, here's your latte, mate. And I just made it.' You know, it's pretty cool. It's pretty, pretty cool."



Ready Set Work Cafe Operations participant Liam.

Bernie helping students get their lives back on track

After almost two decades teaching at Melbourne's Xavier College, Bernie Brysha decided it was time for a change. So last year, he joined the teaching staff at our Ignatius Learning Centre, a therapeutic school environment for young people in contact with the youth justice system.

"I have always had an interest in teaching students who experience barriers and challenges, and ultimately I don't think young people in trouble are dealt with well. By locking up young people, we aren't addressing the root causes of their problems or helping them to rehabilitate," says Bernie.

Having opened in early 2021, the school is already having a positive impact on its students, many of whom have been disengaged with mainstream schooling.

"Students are engaging well and, more importantly, engaging in ways they wouldn't be in a different environmental setting. We provide a more malleable curriculum than they could access elsewhere, and we focus on helping students believe in themselves above anything."

Given the vulnerable students the school works with, it has continued to provide face-to-face learning during COVID-19. Attendance has remained strong even during Melbourne's lockdowns, demonstrating the success of the tailored approach the school takes with its students.

"Students can come here where they feel comfortable and supported. Relationships are fundamental to the work we do and this has been shown during the COVID-related changes we have had to navigate."

Bernie teaches literacy and hospitality as part of the Ignatius Learning Centre's VCAL curriculum, which provides work-related experience and a qualification recognised by TAFE institutes and employers.

"I'm teaching the boys in the kitchen to cook their lunches, helping them to gain kitchen skills and a knowledge of kitchen safety. It's really positive to help them get in touch with better quality food while learning new things."



Bernie (center) with staff from our Ignatius Learning Centre. Photo taken prior to mandated wearing of masks indoors.

Dropping off the Edge 2021

As we have previously reported, Jesuit Social Services will release a new *Dropping off the Edge* report in the second half of 2021.

This continues our research into locational disadvantage conducted over more than 20 years, including previous *Dropping off the Edge* reports in 2007 and 2015.

This edition of the Jesuit Social Services newsletter is focused primarily on our education, training and employment programs. The importance of this work is supported by findings emerging from an early analysis of our *Dropping off the Edge* data. We can see that in communities with five or more indicators ranked as highly disadvantaged, *jobless parents* and *young people not engaged in training or work* are two of the most prominent indicators.

Dropping off the Edge 2021 measures disadvantage based on 37 indicators spanning seven domains including: social distress, health, income, education and inter-generational disadvantage. Environmental indicators, such as air quality and green canopy, are included for the first time.

We look forward to sharing more of the report's findings with you in the near future.

Fresh food relief over six lockdowns

Our Ecological Justice Hub in Brunswick is centred around an established permaculture garden and workshop that are usually home to hands-on courses like carpentry, habitat design, composting and more.

For the past 18 months, however, through six lockdowns, the team at the Hub has been providing fresh food relief every week to vulnerable members of the community.

"Over the past year and a half, we have learned that people of all locations, ages and experiences can find themselves at a disadvantage and can benefit from community support," says the Hub's Senior Project Advisor, Michael McGarvie.

Every Tuesday morning, a small group of dedicated volunteers box up fresh garden greens, honey and eggs – all produced in the Hub's garden. The boxes are delivered to local emergency food relief organisations with whom the Hub has partnered throughout the pandemic.

"The recipients are extremely grateful for the gesture and have expressed their immense appreciation in having freshly harvested food to distribute. They say they don't get fresh greens from their other sources of food donation."

This initiative has allowed the Hub to maintain community by facilitating social connection during times of isolation in a COVID-safe way.

"We've learned that being visible, open and welcoming are some of the most important elements of our outreach and linkages with the local community."



Ecological Justice Hub team members Stuart Muir Wilson and Dominica Meade gathering fresh produce from the Hub's garden.

Elijah finds his voice

When young guitarist Elijah Augustine first came into Artful Dodgers Studios, you would be lucky to get a word out of him.

Thanks to weekly songwriting sessions, ongoing performances at the studio's Megaphone events and engagement with other studio participants, Elijah has found his voice.


"I didn't say much when I first started at The Dodgers. I was the Quiet Man."

Artful Dodgers Studios is a creative space based in Collingwood where young people living with difficult circumstances create art and music with the support of experienced artists and mentors.

Artful Dodgers Studios' producer Jesse Sullivan says "It's been great working with Elijah. He takes his music very seriously and has grown into being a wonderful performer full of personality."

For Elijah, participating in Artful Dodgers has been transformational. "I have gained a lot of confidence working with Jesse, and I also really like the Artful Dodgers team. They make me feel like I'm one of the family."

Most recently, Elijah performed at an online benefit concert hosted by Artful Dodgers Studios, in a line up that included fellow up-and-coming musicians and Australian music icons Paul Kelly, and Vika and Linda Bull.



Please make a donation today to support people to create a better future for themselves, their families and their communities.

Want to help Jesuit Social Services?

Together we can build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the wellbeing of disadvantaged people, family and communities.

I would like to make an ongoing monthly gift of:
\$ _____ (Please specify amount)

I would like to make a one-off donation of:

\$75 **\$150**

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\$

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Due to current safety restrictions, we kindly ask you to consider donating online if you are able to do so. Please visit jss.org.au, click DONATE and select 'Spring Appeal 2021' in your campaign selection. We still welcome donations by mail but please note there could be a delay in processing your generous donation.