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Doing Justice

REFLECTIONS FROM THIRTY YEARS



JESUIT SOCIAL SERVICES 1977 – 2007



DOING JUSTICE

REFLECTIONS FROM THIRTY YEARS - JESUIT SOCIAL SERVICES 1977-2007

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Jesuit Social Services works to build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the health and wellbeing of disadvantaged young people, families and communities.

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Doing Justice

REFLECTIONS FROM THIRTY YEARS



JESUIT SOCIAL SERVICES 1977 - 2007

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Preface



ANNIVERSARIES are traditionally times for recording histories. At the thirtieth anniversary of Jesuit Social Services we sought the advice of Greg Denning, then Emeritus Professor of History at Melbourne University about writing our history. “Don’t write a history which records the events of the last thirty years. Such histories are a bore”, he said. Instead he urged us to capture the memories of those who experienced the spirit and ideals of Jesuit Social Services. What we wrote, he suggested, must come out of reflections we made about ourselves. That is what we have tried to do in this little book.

We came together on four occasions to remember and reflect on our thirty years. Organisations need to weep and laugh a little, to share stories. Greg suggested that our conversations be an exchange of the gifts of our experiences. Through that exchange we might all be enriched. From those conversations came

memories and stories that have contributed to this book.

Greg died on 13 March 2008 while on holiday in Tasmania. He had set us well on our way in bringing the story of Jesuit Social Services into the form it has now taken. In encouraging us to write this story, Greg repeated his often-quoted phrase: “the gamble is being yourself”. For Jesuit Social Services the gamble has been: to reflect on who we are and what we have become though the successes and the disappointments of our thirty years and to express that without fear or apology; to celebrate how we have gone to some of the darkest and most desperate places in our community and dared to come face to face with the experiences of those living there; to rejoice that we have kept faith with our commitment to making a difference, even when the going has been hard; to proclaim our continued commitment to go into places where there is injustice.

This book does not tell of every area of our work, of every event in the evolution of this organisation. But it is a record of some of the experiences of those who have worked at Jesuit Social Services and, to a lesser extent, some of the stories of those we have supported.

In transforming these memories into text we bind the past to the present and ourselves to all those who have been a part of the story of Jesuit Social Services. Greg Denning also urged us to say something which would make the world a better place. This is the most important reason for writing the story of Jesuit Social Services.

As the stories in this book testify, Jesuit Social Services has come face to face with the experiences of those whose lives have been affected by the structural injustices in our community. With that comes a responsibility not only to support those in need but also to advocate

for structural change. Policy development and advocacy have been a core part of the work of Jesuit Social Services since 1977.

From the early days of Four Flats, advocating for those whom many believe have forfeited their rights has been a hallmark of the organisation. It has not always been popular. But underpinning this work is the recognition of the dignity and worth of all human beings, regardless of their circumstances and the pain they may have inflicted on others.

The wisdom gained over the years through our practice has informed the policy and advocacy work undertaken. But it is not enough to advocate on the basis of what we know anecdotally. Jesuit Social Services has sought to underpin its activity with robust research that provides the intellectual rigour to support its service delivery and advocacy efforts. This work has had an impact that extends far

beyond the people we serve on a daily basis. The three research projects that investigated locational disadvantage, for example, helped shape social policy at the state and federal level and made a significant contribution to the social inclusion debate.

But more than achievements, activities or formal events, what is important in remembering the past is the spirit of the place and the spirit that existed between the people at Jesuit Social Services. At the first conversation David Green reflected

The memories that stay with me are about distinctive kinds of emotions, engagements and pictures rather than things you analyse and dissect.

That spirit will continue to drive the way Jesuit Social Services will be shaped in the future.

Jo Dunin

1977 January

Four Flats opened in **Hawthorn** as a hostel for young people, 17 – 21 years, released from custody.

1981

Four Flats moved to **Collingwood** and developed as an outreach and supported accommodation model.

1984

Youth Grow Garden Project established in the grounds of the Abbotsford Convent.

1987

A **Rooming House** opened in Carlton to accommodate young men upon their release.

Brosnan Centre (formerly Four Flats) opened in **Sydney Road Brunswick**.

1989

Accommodation for intellectually disabled young people in the justice system begins.

1992

Vietnamese program at Brosnan Centre established.

1995

The organisation officially incorporated as **Jesuit Social Services**.

The purchase of property in **Langridge Street Collingwood** to house **Connexions**, a program for young people with dual diagnosis of mental illness and substance misuse.

1996

New services coming under the umbrella of **Jesuit Social Services**:

- **Parenting Australia**
- **The Outdoor Experience (TOE)**
- **Richmond Community Care**
- **Vietnamese Welfare Resource Centre**
- **Big Brothers Big Sisters** (moved to Independence in 2002)

1997

Arts & Culture program established.

Perry House, a purpose built supported residence in Reservoir for young people with intellectual disabilities involved with the justice system.

1998

The Ignatius Centre for research, policy and advocacy established in Richmond.

Domestic Violence Prevention Program – a national program working with young people to prevent domestic violence.

1999

Program for Parents established to provide parent education training to over 3000 parents in schools across Australia.

Published ***Unequal In Life: the distribution of social disadvantage In Victoria and New South Wales*** by Tony Vinson.

2000

Brosnan Centre moved to **Dawson Street Brunswick**.

**Jesuit
social
services**
1977 - 2007



2000

Brosnan Centre began **Bridging the Gap** – providing transitional support to young adults exiting prison.

Men & Family Relationships

working with men in prison and their families to strengthen relationships.

2001

Communties Together

established to encompass the community development work in the public housing estates of Richmond, Collingwood and Fitzroy.

2002

Gateway established for young people with multiple and complex problems providing them access to education, training and employment.

2002

Brosnan Centre provides **Pathways Juvenile Justice Housing Program** in Dandenong.

Brosnan Centre provides

Correctional Services

Employment Pilot Program for men (CSEPP) in Morwell.

2003

Community Justice Group

Conferencing program established based on restorative justice principles.

Inside Families

program established to work with prisoners with drug problems and their families.

2003

Education and Professional

Services Unit

established to facilitate the sharing of the organisation's unique body of program and practice knowledge.

2004

Support After Suicide

established.

XLR8 Mentoring

program for young people in the justice system established.

Published **Community Adversity & Resilience: the distribution of social disadvantage In Victoria and NSW and the mediating role of social cohesion** by Tony Vinson.

2005

African Program established in Flemington housing estate.

Leaving Care Mentoring

program for young people exiting out of home care.

2005

'Abbotsford Biscuits' launched to provide training and a real work environment for unemployed young people.

Strong Bonds – website to provide resources for workers and families with young people struggling with mental illness, substance abuse and other complex problems.

2007

Start Over Crime Prevention

program based in the City of Yarra and City of Darebin established with the aim of diverting 12-18 year old young people from involvement in the youth justice system.

Link Out providing pre and post release support to men.

Women's Integrated Supported

Program (WISP) providing pre and post release support to women.

Published **Dropping off the Edge: the distribution of disadvantage In Australia** by Tony Vinson – a research project into locational disadvantage Australia wide (with Catholic Social Services Australia).



George's STORY

George came to Four Flats in 1977, just months after it opened. This is the only voice of a resident we have from that time. In 2007 George returned to say thank you for what had been done for him all those years ago. This is his story.

FIRST-BORN children are often the most adored. But Annie's first baby, George, was born with a turned eye. She was deeply ashamed of him. He remembers her shouting at moments of inexplicable rage "You are a freak!" Perhaps she felt guilt and grief at having produced a less than perfect child. She abused George and his brother, physically and emotionally, and when George was eight years old they were taken into care and placed in a boys home. Annie's daughters remained at home with her. George went to high school near the orphanage and his memories of that time are painful. He was bullied and taunted for his eye condition and because he was "an orphanage boy".

George's parents had separated when he was very young and his father went to work on the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Scheme, occasionally returning to the district. One day he bought his eldest son a bicycle. George took the bicycle to school and suddenly everyone wanted to be his friend and ride his new bike. This sudden popularity was a new experience for George. He could not deny anyone a ride on the bike. No matter how roughly they rode it over the bumpy dirt roads on the edge of town, George would give his bike up to anyone who asked. Before long it disintegrated. In his desperation to win back his popularity he stole two bikes. With two, he could ride with a friend.

He was arrested and charged with theft. He was given a three-year sentence, reduced to eighteen months on appeal. He didn't understand why he had been treated so harshly. Country magistrates were well known for handing down harsh sentences in rural towns where a long sentence would get "rid of the problem", at the same time sending a signal to others: don't offend in this community.

George was transferred to Langi Kal Kal and he remained there for the full eighteen months. During this time he had no visitors. His mother did not reply to letters from the administration at Langi Kal Kal, asking if she was prepared to take him back home on release. By this time George's father had returned from New South Wales and was living in Gippsland again. He later told George that he did not visit him because he did not know he was in custody. Because there was nowhere for him to go, George remained in custody for the full term of his sentence. Towards the end of his time, Peter Norden and Alex Firmager visited him at Langi Kal

Kal and invited him to Four Flats for a weekend to see if he would like to come and live there. He vividly remembers the visit.

I had nowhere to go and no one I could turn to outside of the institutionalised system... In other words - no choices!

After a very encouraging three days at Four Flats, meeting the other residents and getting a feel for the place, they offered me the option of staying for up to three months. “Until you can establish some independence,” they stressed.

George stayed for four months. During his time there, he went out at night with the other residents and discovered a world he had never known - the city life of pubs, discos and rock concerts. He loved going to hear bands playing and Alex Firmager gave him some guitar lessons, showing him some basic chords.

He left the hostel at the end of October 1977 and drifted for a while. He was sleeping rough and still hanging out with other residents from Four Flats. However he kept in contact with the staff at Four Flats and in

December he visited the hostel and the staff saw he was struggling to get his life together. He decided to leave Melbourne and move to Adelaide where he was offered a job as a lighting assistant in a theatre. He stayed there for some years.

George went on to become a professional musician, releasing a CD which has sold over 70,000 copies. He toured the world promoting his music. He now lives in Melbourne with his partner and has published several books. He is currently writing his autobiography. He talked of his time at Four Flats.

Offering me that “choice” equated to trust in my eyes, which also translates to belief - a belief that I could do something productive, and not be stuck playing the hand life had dealt me to that point.

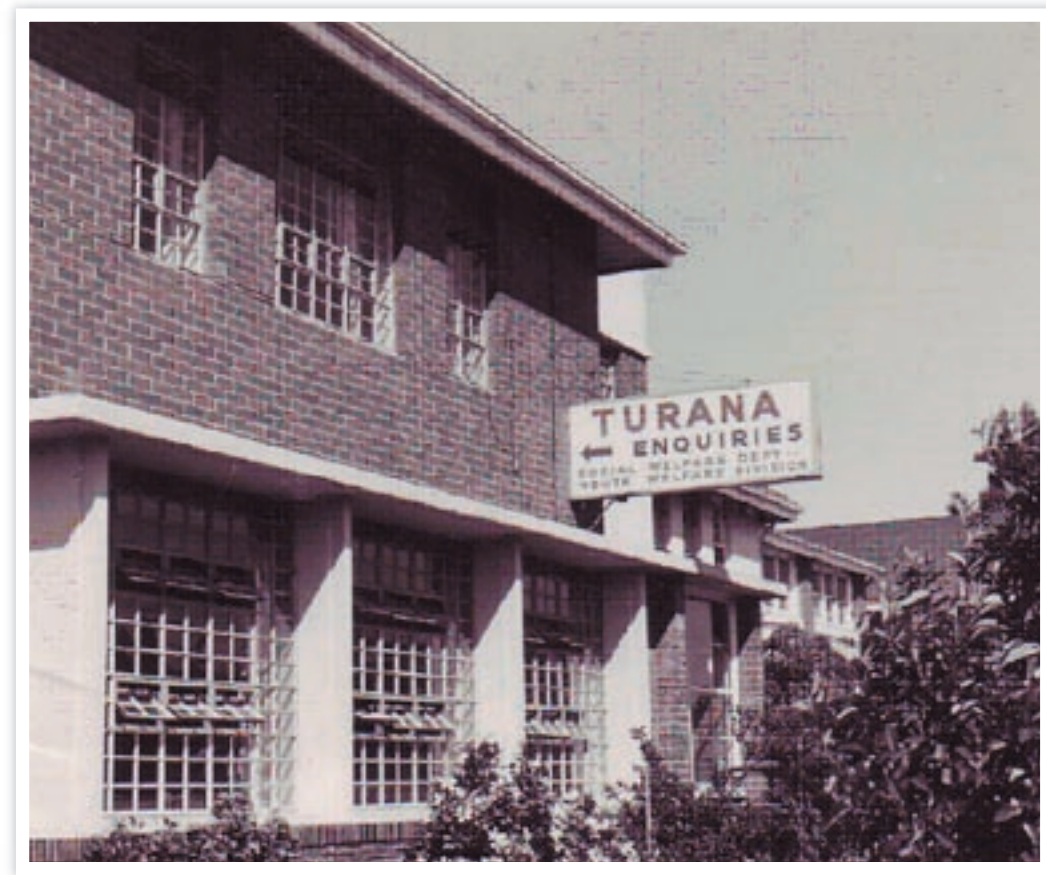
In being given this choice, I recognised and appreciated that someone believed in me, more than I did in myself at the time.

My stay at Four Flats gave me a vehicle to find my way forward.

George attempted a number of times to reconnect with his mother but she has continued to reject him. He did establish a relationship with his father and he visited him regularly as his health deteriorated. He regularly took him food and helped him with household chores. On one of these visits he told George that he too had been abused as a child. His father suicided at the age of 71. As George sorted through his belongings, he found a letter from Langi Kal Kal written in 1976, asking if he was prepared to offer George a home on his release. His father had never replied to the letter.

George’s story is similar to that of many other Four Flats residents in his experience of abuse, neglect and institutional care. His life after leaving Four Flats is not so typical. Many did manage to make lives for themselves which were free from offending, but George’s extraordinary success is far from the norm. His perspective on this is surprising. He said, “While I am not a religious person I do believe I have been blessed”. His resilience and capacity to be so positive in spite of his experiences are perhaps a clue to why he did manage to make such remarkable changes in his life.

I had nowhere to go...



I had nowhere to go and no one I could turn to.

“ In being given this choice, I recognised and appreciated that someone believed in me, more than I did in myself. ”





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.

The chaos and struggle of their lives made it hard...



The chaos and struggle of their lives made it hard to hold them long enough to help them turn their hopes into realities.

“ The starting point has always
been to enter into a relationship
with people.

”





MOTIVATIONS

Jesuit & secular

The 1970s was a period of great social change. It was a time of strongly held political views. People marched against the Vietnam War. Governments were dismissed. A whole array of social movements emerged, as people spoke about what a community should look like.

AMONGST those hoping for changes in the structures of society, especially those working with the most marginalised, there was an optimism about how society could be more just.

The Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) has been known for its involvement in education in secondary schools and universities around the world. In the late 1960s the Superior General of the Order, Fr. Pedro Arrupe SJ challenged his fellow Jesuits to rethink the focus of their mission.

the moral obligation of the Society (is) to rethink all its ministries and every form of its apostolate to see if they really offer a response to the urgent priorities which justice and social equity call for.

Responding to this call, in 1975 the 32nd Congregation of the Jesuit Order declared in its decree, Our Mission Today:

There is a new challenge to our apostolic mission in a world increasingly interdependent but, for all that, divided by injustice: injustice not only personal but institutionalised: built into economic, social, and political structures that dominate the life of nations and the international community.

The founder of the Jesuits, Ignatius of Loyola, saw that it was not enough to express a commitment to justice. What is required is an action-oriented commitment to the poor.

This challenged a young Jesuit, Peter Norden, to imagine a project which would work with very troubled young people exiting custody and so began Four Flats hostel. In his proposal for the hostel he wrote:

Not only must the Church preach on the value and dignity of each individual person, but it must also give leadership through action in attempting to assist those in our community whom others are not prepared to help.

At the centre of this work with each person was a focus on personal relationships. Looking back over the first two years, Peter Norden reflected on the work with the young men at Four Flats.

We were trying to give a sense of security through a caring, friendly, compassionate house through personal presence, of giving stability in sometimes extraordinary situations – as a sort of anchor.

The decision to live with and share day to day life with the young men of Four Flats was a clear sign that ‘solidarity’ was a driving force in the decision to set up the hostel. In the 1977 - 78 Jesuit Year Book, Peter Norden wrote

Our belief in God and our preaching of the Word must be given concrete expression in action, especially in our care for the poor and those abandoned.

Not all who were part of Four Flats were motivated by Catholic social teaching. Some, like David Murray, the second Director of Four Flats, came from a secular perspective.

We spoke of access, choice, dignity and opportunity. For many of us working at Four Flats, it was less of a job and more of a political statement about what a just society should look like. If we weren’t able to care for these damaged young people in our midst then what sort of a community did we have?

For Murray this was not at odds with the views expressed at the 32nd Congregation of the Jesuits.

It was, if you like, a coalition of the willing - those of us with a political and social objective in a partnership with those whose theological and spiritual position brought them to the same place.

This was expressed in the daily life of Four Flats through efforts to support young people just released from custody. Understanding what led young people to a life of offending laid the foundation for the work done by Jesuit Social Services today. Many of these young men came from broken, grieving families who could not care for one another. David Murray expressed it this way:

We were in a close relationship with a group of young people who had experienced such severe abuse, neglect and deprivation as children. This was the result and impact of violence, loss and grief. Their experience of education shows how isolation and exclusion and failure can lead to anger, violence and contempt for the mainstream and a paradoxical longing for inclusion. Their experience of homelessness shows us how basic needs such as shelter and food were not automatically available in the way most of us understood.

A defining feature of Ignatian spiritual teaching is that the work for justice must be adaptable and responsive to the areas of greatest need. It also calls for a willingness to respond creatively to emerging needs. Jesuit Social Services was formed because of a realisation that helping young people released from custody was not enough. There were many areas of unmet need and the work of Four Flats was just the beginning.



“

If we weren’t able to care for these damaged young people in our midst then what sort of community did we have?

”



4flats

BROSNIAN * CENTRE

Time and again the offer was made: “There is a place for you here, if you want it.”

MANY came and found care and support, often for the first time in their lives. Some came but left without warning – slipping away not wanting to talk to anyone about their decision. If they talked, they might have to think about why they were leaving. Hopes of making a new start often drew them away - a flat with friends, a car, maybe a job, the things they hoped would make a normal life. But with no experience of how that could be achieved, the harsh reality often brought disappointment and failed hopes. They were always welcomed back to try again.

This was how Four Flats began. A large Victorian home, owned by the Jesuits, in Power Street Hawthorn, was opened as a hostel in 1977 for young people released from custody. The name was chosen because the old home had been divided into four separate flats. Not very imaginative, but with no suggestion of its connection with

a religious order it did not discourage young people from coming to live there. Nor did it draw the attention of the neighbourhood that this was where ‘offenders’ lived.

One flat was shared by the two Jesuits who lived in the hostel, Peter Norden and Paul Callil. The other three were for the residents, young people released from custody in need of somewhere to live. Alex Firmager and Sue Ellis came to work with the Jesuits in providing a supportive home for the residents. Alex had worked at Langi Kal Kal Youth Training Centre and Peter Norden noticed the care and patience he showed in his work with the boys there. He invited Alex to come and work at Four Flats. A few months later Sue joined the team with the challenging task of helping the boys find work.

The first residents arrived from Malmsbury on January 9th 1977. Within a short time eight young men were living there. Some stayed several months, some left as soon as they saw an opportunity elsewhere. When the time came to leave, some found it very hard.

Arriving home drunk after a night on the town one evening, ‘Graham’ wept and shouted in anger, frustration and

rage at the pain and rejection of his childhood. Alex sat with him and listened. These moments were sometimes fleeting. The young people at Four Flats often fled from the support they so desperately wanted.

‘George’ had never felt secure with his family where he had been subjected to physical and sexual abuse. ‘Mick’ had been in Pentridge where he had lived in fear. He had learned to be wary of everyone and to keep to himself. Finding purpose and fulfilment where there had been none before was hard. There was the risk that they might try and not succeed, be disappointed and be left wondering if they might ever break the patterns that constrained their lives.

Jobs were scarce for young people yet the staff kept finding work for the boys. It proved even harder to keep them working. A night on the town often had more appeal than the discipline of an early night in bed. Sometimes when this extended into the early hours of the morning, staff would drive around looking for the boys in the likely haunts of inner Melbourne. The residents would be brought home, perhaps drunk, to the safety of Four Flats. These young

people were accepted in all their mess and difficulty, in their anger, frustration and grief at the course their lives had taken and in the choices they made.

There was little point in restricting the residents with unnecessary rules. They had to find their way in this brief time of care and support before they had to move on. Alex and Sue, along with resident Jesuits, Peter Norden and Paul Callil in the first year, and Pat Mullins in the second year, modelled the behaviour they hoped the young men would learn themselves – respect, patience, co-operation. The things learnt in families. But these young men came from families broken by alcohol, mental illness, poverty, isolation and lack of hope.

The staff visited many of their families and tried to bridge the gulf that had developed over many years. Sometimes the challenge proved too great where the hurt, rejection and sense of failure had filled the spaces where love and care should have been. The chaos of their earlier experiences spilled into their lives.

Towards the end of 1977 a tragic event occurred which profoundly affected not only the residents and staff at the hostel but caused enormous pain beyond Four Flats. One of the residents, Carl, had been sent to the home of a Hawthorn resident to wash down her kitchen walls. This was part of an effort to provide employment opportunities for the residents.

When Carl returned to Four Flats that evening, staff noticed his clothes were blood stained. Shortly after, the police arrived and Carl was taken away and later charged with the murder and rape of the woman in whose home he had been working. The crime was reported in page one headlines in The Sun and the victim’s family expressed their deep distress and horror. This violent incident shocked and profoundly disturbed staff and residents at the hostel.

Paul Callil remembered that, in their distress, staff struggled to remain focused and to continue the daily routine. The Four Flats staff had been well aware that their work was not well understood by the wider community but their belief in the importance of caring for the most

rejected had sustained them. This terrible event shook their confidence and forced them to face the harsh and shattering reality of working with traumatised young people.

With wide media coverage, Peter Norden faced a challenging interview on the television program, *A Current Affair*. In the face of this critical publicity, he realised there was a risk that the Minister for Social Welfare could withdraw departmental support and force the hostel to close. Peter Norden met with key politicians and secured support for Four Flats.

In reflecting back at the end of 1978, Peter Norden summed up these difficult times.

The experience of working at Four Flats has been mixed – one filled with a lot of pain, hurt, suffering, which I wouldn’t have really wanted, but it came. Sharing that suffering with the young people was a rich experience. There were also happy times, successful times. But the experience of struggling and uncertainty also stays in my mind. It was an experience of

identifying with people who have been rejected – on all sorts of levels – sometimes a personal level – face to face, sometimes publicly. As a result of that identification and association we too have been rejected and criticised. At the same time it has given us a sense of purpose and meaning.

The terrible events of September 1977 were to increase the resolve of Four Flats staff to keep working with this group of troubled young men. But that effort took up a great deal of energy, leaving little time to support others who could not get a room at the hostel. At the end of the second year Peter Norden left to study theology in preparation for his ordination and David Murray became the new Director. Towards the end of 1981, after four years at Hawthorn, it was decided that more could be achieved by closing the hostel. Four Flats set up an office in Cambridge Street Collingwood and accommodation for the young people was arranged in nearby suburbs. This way many more young people could be supported.

Andy Walsh, one of the new staff to work at Collingwood, remembers the confidence of those early days.

We were housed in a very small building at 1 Cambridge Street, sparse in resources, a couple of filing cabinets and a Ford Laser motorcar. But that didn’t matter. A small team could do anything and these young people stretched all of us, professionally and personally. But we were respected across the state at Youth Training Centres because they knew how difficult it was to hang in with this group of offenders.

It was a precarious existence. Funding was provided by the Social Welfare Department and David Murray remembers many times when there was not enough money to pay salaries. He would go into the city and plead his case, returning with the good news that, for another week, all would get paid. This was a time before tenders and service agreements. The criteria for accepting residents at Four Flats were very simple. The least they had in every dimension the more likely they were to be selected for support.

Fr John Brosnan retired as chaplain to Pentridge prison in 1985, a position he held for thirty years. Brosie, as he was affectionately known, had been worried about the fate of young men sent to Pentridge. He knew how hard it was for them inside, but he knew it was even harder when they were released. He too saw many return to custody again and again. It was Brosie's words which continue to inspire the work today.

*There are three things needed by people upon their release from prison:
A place to live that is decent
A job that they can handle
And friendship,
and the hardest to provide is friendship.*

In 1987 Four Flats was given a new name, Brosnan Centre, in honour of the man who had been a constant support to prisoners locked away behind the bluestone walls of Pentridge.

It was soon evident that the little office in Cambridge Street Collingwood was just too small. A larger building was purchased in Sydney Road Brunswick and soon

after Bernie Geary became the Director. As a small agency, the focus was on simple ways of helping young people manage from one day to the next. He remembers that it was chaotic and unpredictable but there was a closeness between staff and young people.

A lot of the kids probably thought that the Brosnan Centre was their family. I don't think that was a good thing in retrospect. At the time we thought it was, but in hindsight we were not their family at all.

The structure was simple. Bernie Geary remembers that as the Director he had a caseload of eight to ten young people.

Everybody had a case list. Work was less complicated in those days. I went to D Division at Pentridge for about five hours every Friday to see who was in prison, who was moving on. It was a lot simpler.

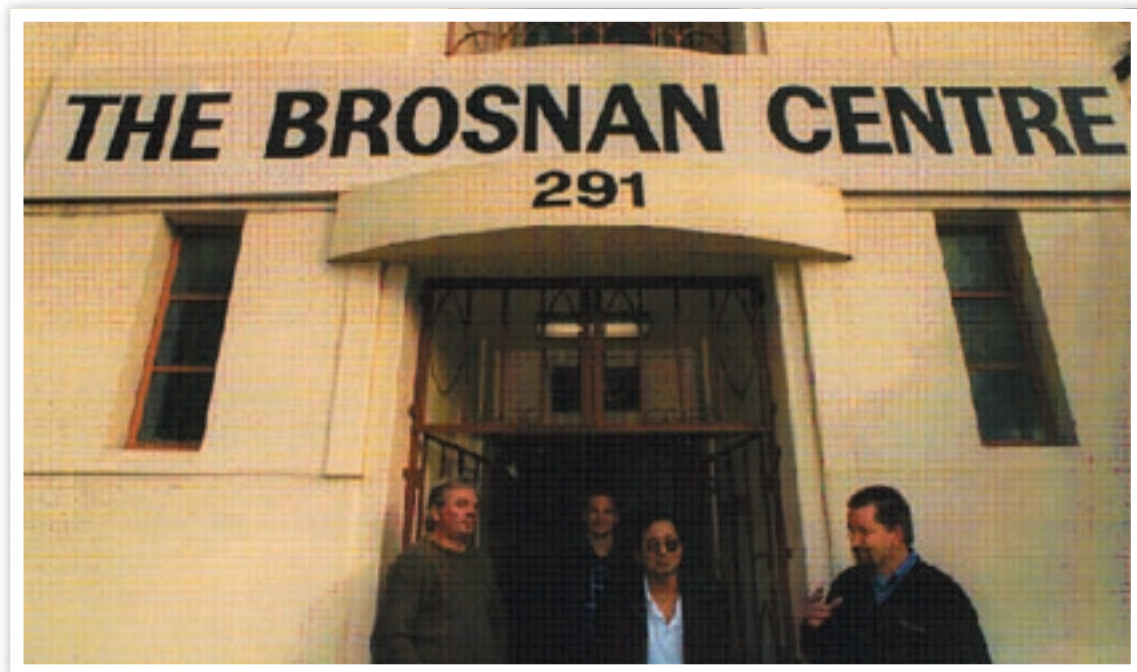
In time, helping young people reconnect with their families, however difficult those relationships had been,

came to be seen as important. The 1980s saw the arrival of hard drugs on the streets of Melbourne and many young people were dying. Each death of 'one of their own' rocked the tight knit band at the Brosnan Centre. There were too many funerals. The going was hard.

Release from custody, so long hoped for, could be terrifying when it finally came. Having nowhere to sleep could be too much to bear on the first night out. Many looked all too quickly for ways to return back to the 'security' of prison. In 1987 a rooming house opened in Nicholson Street Carlton to provide short-term accommodation. It gave a few months of certainty until something more permanent could be found.

Over time the ways of helping have changed. There are now specialised professional services for the many problems faced by these young people. This has created many more possibilities for those seeking a new way of living. But there are still many challenges to be faced.

These young people were accepted in all their mess and difficulty...



Pat Mullins SJ, Alex Firmager, Sue Ellis and Peter Norden SJ
outside Four Flats in Hawthorn.



SEVEN MANAGERS OF THE BROSNAN CENTRE WITH THE FR BROSNAN MEMORIAL
(FROM LEFT TO RIGHT): Tony Hayes (1999-2001), Mark Griffiths (1983-1988),
David Murray (1979-1983), Paul Newland (1993-1998), Bernie Geary (1988-1992),
Fr Peter Norden (1977-1978), Peter Coghlan (2001-2007)

*These young people were accepted in all their mess and
difficulty, in their anger, frustration and grief at the course
their lives had taken and in the choices they made.*

“

The least they had in every dimension the more likely they were to be selected for support.

”





PERRY *house*

“Hello Mr Perry!” they called out. As he walked the corridors of Pentridge Prison, Brian Perry’s name would echo round the building. Many of the intellectually disabled young men he had watched over at Turana had graduated to Pentridge, but they had not forgotten him.

INTELLECTUALLY disabled people are like foreigners in their own land. Forever misunderstood, misinterpreted, disregarded, excluded. When they are locked up in prisons, they are vulnerable. When they are released, they are the least likely to be given support.

Wayne was sent to Pentridge. At first it was not so obvious that he was a bit slow but before long he found himself in the clutches of an older prisoner who offered to 'protect' him – in return for sexual favours. He was paid with a can of Coke. This older prisoner hired him out to other prisoners.

With de-institutionalisation came the promise of support services in the community. Promises were not fulfilled. Many lived unsupported and, with few options for accommodation, homelessness was common. Prisons came to be 'home' for many.

When the intellectually disabled offend, there lies the challenge of negotiating that tricky path between punishment and care. When their offences are serious, the challenge involves protecting both the community

and the offender. In 1991, the Department of Community Services provided the funds for the Brosnan Centre to house David who had committed arson and sex offences and who could not be released from custody without supervision.

Money was provided for renting and staffing a house in Brunswick, where David was safe and cared for and where he did not pose a risk to others. He became the first of many to come there. With the arrival of more residents, a larger house was needed and another property was obtained nearby.

Brian Perry worked at Turana with the 'special needs kids'. It was clear he had a gift for this work. Brian had patience and he understood the challenging behaviour of these young

people. Bernie Geary, the Director of the Brosnan Centre, asked Brian to come and work in this new project. Brian was respected in the justice system. Many new referrals came because those who worked in the youth training centres and prisons knew the work Brian did.

Brian's other love was football umpiring. Controlling the behaviour of testosterone charged footballers was probably a lot easier than the less predictable work he did at the Brosnan Centre. Brian died suddenly of a heart attack while umpiring a game. When a purpose built residence in Reservoir was opened in 1996, it felt right to name it Perry House. Caring for some of the most vulnerable and forgotten people in our community is a gift. Brian used his gift well.

“

...forever misunderstood, misinterpreted, disregarded, excluded.

”



Rob Ware and Brian Perry



Former Victorian Premier, Joan Kirner with Brian Perry, Bernie Geary and young people from Perry House

A person wearing a dark jacket and a cap stands in a field, holding a pitchfork. The background is a solid, bright orange color. The person is positioned in the center-left of the frame, facing slightly to the right. The pitchfork is held horizontally, with the tines pointing towards the right. The foreground shows some dark, silhouetted vegetation.

garden

While I was attempting to plough a straight row in our farm paddock recently, a brilliant orange Flame Robin, a frequent visitor, popped into view at the far end of the paddock and proceeded to hop about just off my line of vision. As the old ‘Red Fergie’ roared on, this interloper drew my eye further and further to the right, in cunning little hops, before flying off – and leaving me with the crookedest row I’ve ever ploughed. I spent the next few minutes thinking about how the incident was like the young people we worked with - you know, easily distracted from the task at hand by more attractive alternatives...

—Paul Newlands 1990

GARDENS are places of hope and care. We bring together earth and water and seeds and then we hope. With the right conditions we make something that will feed us or that will simply give pleasure for its aesthetic beauty. For those for whom life has seemed out of control, being a tiller could bring great satisfaction. For those who have no skills or experience of the routine and demands of regular work, a garden could be a place they could begin.

In 1984 the Commonwealth Employment Program provided funds to Four Flats to start a garden project. The Good Shepherd Sisters at Abbotsford made available a vacant piece of land. Paul Newland was the first supervisor of the Garden Project. He remembers selecting the first six young men, treating them as though they were going for a job interview, giving them a sense of what they might expect in the future.

They built up the soil, bought equipment and sowed seed. They watched their efforts rise out of the soil. This was a kind of therapy. They were at the mercy of nature, forced to deal with its seasons and cycles. Growing plants need care, nurturing and patience. They need time. Just like these young men who worked in that garden. When the plants didn't flourish the way they hoped, they had to try again.

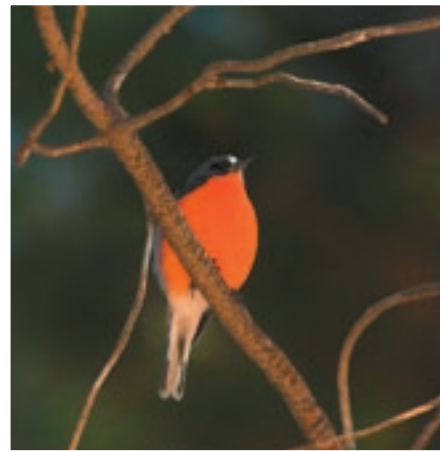
Their efforts were rewarded and they soon decided to make this a commercial enterprise selling fresh organic fruit and vegetables. This wasn't just mucking about, filling

in time, pretending to work. It was serious. In 1985 they moved across to the rich alluvial soil on the river flats in the grounds of the Abbotsford Convent down by the Yarra, in the sun. It was spring and the summer crops grew quickly. The boys were happy – they could see it all taking shape in front of them. It was a real job for them. They had all the gear a real worker has – overalls, boots and equipment. They caught the tram or the train to work in their work clothes. They looked like workers and they felt like workers. They felt part of the community. By the end of the first year, eighteen young people were employed.

But it was not all easy. Heavy rain flooded the garden on one occasion and their hard work and hopes were washed down the river and out into the bay. They had to start again. This was a test of their persistence and some could not stay with it. Some came and took up where others had left off. Sometimes the boys argued, feeling that others didn't pull their weight. There were some testing moments. But in the outdoors, some of the tensions were let go.

Federal funding lasted only a year. The garden continued with support from the Victorian government until 2003. For many who worked there over those years it was an oasis from which they could move forward into a life they had never experienced before. For others it was a glimmer of what life could be like if only they could break away from old ways of being.

They watched their efforts...



They watched their efforts rise out of the soil.

“ ...being a tiller could bring
great satisfaction. ”





connexions

I felt I was really seeking out those who needed it most, some of the most isolated, depressed and distressed young people in our community. It was a humbling experience to see how resilient they often were.

JULIE WILSON had years of experience working with young people with a history of offending at Malmsbury Youth Training Centre and then at Brosnan Centre. When she went to work at Connexions in 1996 she understood what it meant to work with isolated young people. This work was established to support young people who fell between the cracks into homelessness, drug misuse and mental illness.

In the early years at Connexions, the staff spent much of their time visiting young people where they were living. Julie went to Fitzroy into the decrepit rooming houses that offered a bed and a little more privacy and sometimes more security than could be found on the streets. From a door that fronted on to Gertrude Street, a passageway would lead to back lanes and doorways, into two storeyed terraces with rooms off at all angles.

Julie also went to the places where these people would go for sustenance. Soup kitchens and food vans in the inner suburbs. Places like Footscray, North Melbourne, Collingwood and Fitzroy. These were the points where those who slept under cardboard came for a daily feed and, just as importantly, some social interaction with someone who showed a personal interest.

In 1995 at least half of those people in Australia who had a serious mental illness were not receiving any treatment from mental health services and many young people who had problems with substance misuse received no support from drug and alcohol treatment services. Those with both a mental illness and a substance misuse problem were in a void. The work done with young people at Brosnan Centre had shown that there were many young people who had a dual diagnosis of mental illness and substance misuse problems. Their needs were beyond the resources of Brosnan Centre. When Jesuit Social Services was formed, this very pressing need was seen as a priority and so Connexions began.

Linda Moran works at Connexions now. She also worked with offenders in the early 1980s at Four Flats. She talks about her work.

I was drawn to the Jesuits because of my values. It's a feeling, it's an emotional experience for me working here and I was passionate about the young people then and I am still very passionate about the young people that I work with now.

Connexions has changed the way it works. There are more assessments, reports and planning meetings. But this has not changed what lies at the heart of this work. Linda sees this as being about relationship. She believes the young people she works with are resilient and being totally respectful is central to the way she works.

It doesn't mean that you have to always like them or their behaviour necessarily, but you can still see beyond all their behaviours to who they absolutely are and I think to understand that you also have to understand a lot more about yourself. I have learnt through all the relationships I have had with all the young people and families at different times. It's a heart experience. It's about sitting in a room with someone and quietly connecting.

Over eleven years the work has changed. Julie reflected on her years at Jesuit Social Services and what that means for those working today.

Perhaps the most important things we can offer are a presence, a respect for the right to be individual and self determining; to listen and to encourage, to offer support and to be caring, to find something genuinely likeable in the other person, so that person can feel likeable; to give of yourself without pushing yourself onto another person. I have always felt that if I can show respect to someone, then that person can come to respect themselves; if they come to respect me, then that can widen to respect for others more generally.

Some of the most isolated, depressed and...



Some of the most isolated, depressed and distressed young people in the community.

A group of people, including a man in a hat and others with large backpacks, are walking away on a dirt path towards a bright orange sunset. The scene is silhouetted against the warm light of the setting sun.

THE OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE

They went fishing, mucking about in the speedboat and they all had a try at water skiing.

IT WAS February 1977 and it was the first weekend trip for the residents of Four Flats. The first of many. Kevington was a favourite destination. They camped and went canoeing on the Goulburn River.

Many of these young people had never been on a holiday of any kind. Never had a chance to enjoy the novelty of camping, lighting a fire and cooking in the open. In these short breaks from the city, everyone could be closely connected. A little community under canvas on the edge of a river or a beach.

In 1990 the Brosnan Centre took a group of young people camel trekking in the outback. The trek leaders, supported by a Brosnan Centre youth worker, Ron Johnson, took small groups of young people on month long treks between Port Augusta in South Australia to Burketown on the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Camels are not easy going. The skills of handling these cranky creatures need to be learnt. Adjusting to the extremes of weather and learning how to survive the desert environment provided many ‘firsts’. A few young people stayed in the outback, found work and did not return to Melbourne. Most came back and tried to make a new start. They hoped that this would become an ongoing project. But this was a time when governments were not so interested in funding projects like this. It was not to be.

Carrying everything you need in a pack on your back is a challenge for all but the very experienced bushwalker. The highest peaks in Victoria are found on the Bogong High Plains. Mt. Bogong and the majestic Mt. Feathertop are terrifyingly beautiful. But the weather can be warm and balmy one minute and turn to an ice-cold blizzard within half an hour. This is not a place for the fainthearted. But for those who go there and walk the tracks, it is a place of great reward.

In 1992 the Brosnan Centre engaged an outside contractor, The Outdoor Experience (TOE), to take young people on several ten-day walks to this part of Victoria. There is something in the rhythm of walking in a group with a difficult destination as your goal. Wills become united as the less fit struggle, while the more fleet of foot surge ahead and then wait. The group has to keep together. Those leading these trips need to read the group and understand just how far everyone is capable of going. Knowing when to push on and when to call a rest.

When Jesuit Social Services was formed in 1996, it seemed logical to broaden the range of activities on offer. TOE operated a wilderness therapy program for young people with substance misuse problems. They had the experience of working with young people facing many challenges and introducing them to the therapy of activity, clean air, beautiful places and new ways of forming relationships.

Now part of Jesuit Social Services, TOE has prepared and taken groups of young people on all sorts of adventures. Kayaking, skiing, fishing and mountain climbing. Finding other parts of themselves that were buried in the mess of their troubled lives. Finding skills they never imagined they might have.

finding skills...



finding skills they never imagined they might have...

“ The therapy of activity, clean air,
beautiful places and new ways of
forming relationships. ”





No longer safe in their own country ravaged by war, they fled, only to experience unspeakable horrors at sea when they were intercepted by pirates.

THOSE who made it to land spent long periods in refugee camps where they were again exposed to abuse and exploitation. Vulnerable, frightened, desperate people are easy targets.

A flimsy 17-metre fishing vessel carried the first Vietnamese refugees into Darwin Harbour on April 26 1976. This marked the beginning of a wave of refugees fleeing from post war Vietnam.

Nam and his parents arrived in Melbourne in those early years. The adjustment was hard. Nam's father had been an engineer in Vietnam but with no recognition of his qualifications, he could only find work as a cleaner. Nam's mother was lonely and she grieved for the way they lived with extended family back in Vietnam. Tensions rose and before long, Nam's father left. His mother's loneliness increased and she slid into depression and anxiety. Every time Nam went out, she fretted. When would he be back? Where was he going? How long would he be away?

Nam found his mother's anxiety suffocating and he was angry that his father had left them. He found relief in drugs. He slid into heavy use and began offending to support his habit. Nam's mother now lived in fear. He became violent and began selling their household possessions. His life was out of control and finally a prison sentence, although deeply shameful for her, gave Nam's mother some respite.

Brosnan Centre staff visiting the prisons saw many young people like Nam and recognised a new approach was needed. They did not have the language or the cultural understanding. And so Hieu Nguyen came to work at the Brosnan Centre in 1992. Like many he visited in the prisons, he too had escaped Vietnam in a leaky boat. His memories still haunt him.

Nam's mother did not visit him in prison and, still fearful he would return to his old ways, she did not want him

back home when he was released. So he went to live in a house which Hieu shared with recently released young Vietnamese men, just around the corner from the Brosnan Centre. Hieu visited Nam's mother and listened to her fears. He showed her that Nam needed her support if he was to make a new start in life. They would never be able to live together again, but they could still be connected.

Those who went to prison were not the only ones in the Vietnamese community who needed help and support. Families caught between two cultures were struggling. Parents yearned for the way of life they knew in Vietnam. Children growing up in the Australian way felt lost between two cultures.

At the Vietnamese Welfare Resource Centre, Son Nguyen and Kim Nguyen have worked with families on the Flemington housing estate for many years as they have faced the grief and pain of the past and made new lives

in a strange and different country. The trauma of escaping from a brutal war, the loss of professional and social standing and the dislocation from the familiar have left many families vulnerable and fragile. In 1996 this work became part of the newly formed Jesuit Social Services.

As the early challenges of new settlement are gradually overcome, as new cultural ways are negotiated, Son and Kim have brought people from the community together to share their stories. Talking openly about difficulties has not been part of the Vietnamese way of coping, but talking has brought the possibility of finding new ways of strengthening family relationships.

Son says that

everyone has to learn a second language – the language of love. This is deeper than a spoken language.



“Everyone has to learn a second language – the language of love. This is deeper than a spoken language.”



ARTFUL DODGERS studios

Adam was living in emergency accommodation. He rarely went out, spending most of his day watching television and using drugs.

A FRIEND suggested he come to the Artful Dodgers Studio at Connexions because 'you can do art downstairs and get help upstairs'. When he went to the studio he felt uneasy. Was this just another agency with workers just like everywhere else? He came and tried it out. Having people in the room watching him made him anxious. He had been very isolated for a long time and even being in a room with four or five people was something he wasn't used to.

Adam liked to write poetry. But when he received encouragement and praise he wasn't sure if this was genuine. He was fearful of the voices in his head. Could he trust anyone here enough to tell them about this? Maybe. In time, he felt more at home, he felt able to trust the workers and he felt he could share his secret about the voices.

Creating a space where vulnerable young people feel able to explore the arts might seem simple. Give them a room, some equipment and let them have a go. But it takes a lot more than this to make a place that will give welcome, security and support to the mentally and emotionally fragile young people that Connexions was hoping to reach. They were looking for another way of engaging young people while creating an opportunity for them to give expression to their experiences, feelings and skills.

Many of the young people who came in those first years had been homeless, often disconnected from families and other supports that might have helped them as they slipped into mental illness and drug use. It was common for many of them to be engaging in risky behaviours. Prostitution, offending, intravenous drug use, needle sharing, suicide attempts and other forms of self-harm. The harsh, raw, destructive edge of life.

When Sally Marsden came to Jesuit Social Services in 1996 as the first coordinator of the studio, she had been working as an artist practitioner in community cultural development since 1984. She knew it would need careful preparation to make to the studio work. Six months of research and planning was done before the studio opened. In the first year, sessional artists came in to share their expertise on short projects. Better not to lock the young people in to anything long term or they might feel they are 'in school'. It had to

have the right mix of relaxed and easy but with enough being offered to entice involvement. These were young people whose recent experiences with institutions had been negative. Their behaviours often meant they were unwelcome at school, at home, among friends, anywhere that might have given them a sense of belonging. Could they trust anyone? Sally had a challenge ahead of her.

The studio was run on an open access model. The young people could come and go. There were no deadlines, no roll call. Young people could work alone or on a group project.

In that first year the visiting artists offered sessions in mosaics, music, voice, radio, body art. They held a studio exhibition of drawings, prints, painting and body art. There was a group performance utilising puppets and original music. The pain and grief was being drawn and painted and sung and spoken.

In 1997 an exhibition of work was taken out from the studio and installed in twenty-one prison cells of the old Pentridge prison. The bluestone building in Coburg had only recently been closed and as part of

the Fringe Festival the exhibition was opened on the theme 'Entrapment'. For the artists there was a powerful significance in creating their art on prison doors. Due to public demand, the exhibition was extended for four weeks and 10,300 people came to see the works.

Adam's early intense involvement at the studio had dropped away. He had taken up the offer to 'go upstairs' and get some help. But then he went 'bush' for three months. On his return he was anxious – would they give him a hard time, drill him about where he'd been? But there was no interrogation and "it was a real blast to be back". Now he became intensely involved working on a group project which extended over six months.

Sally and her staff had noticed that the young people who usually started working alone in the studio would often be drawn into a group. Support and encouragement were shared between the young artists. As the group formed a bond, they then might begin working together on a project. Adam recalled that time. "The social aspect of the studio helped me to start asking questions about myself, about how, why and what I was doing

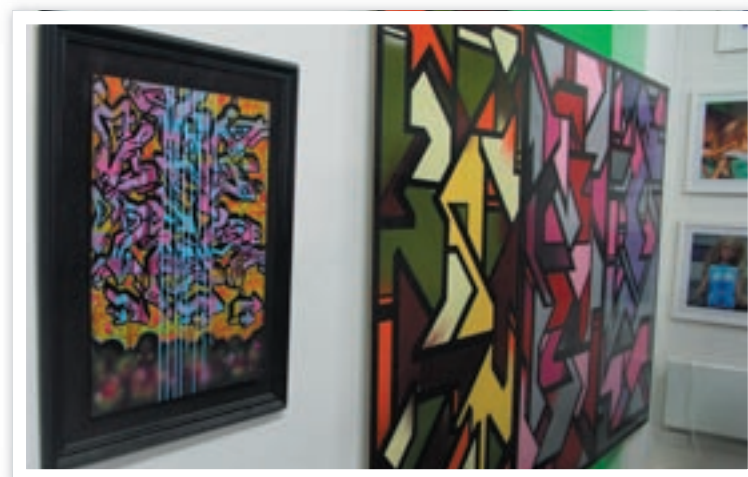
in every way. Being in a group was still hard; it was really difficult to relate to others. But because I was doing art and felt good about it, I wanted to stick to it and keep going".

In 1998, the 2nd National Conference on Homelessness at Melbourne Town Hall and the Art and Community Conference at St Kilda Town Hall became the venues for another exhibition of artwork on doors depicting homelessness. The pun was made again when the exhibition was called 'De-hinged'.

In the eleven years of the Artful Dodgers Studio, many young people have formed lasting relationships there. It can be a roller coaster of wins with new skills and confidences gained, and losses with the resurgence of personal insecurities and anxieties.

Adam says: "I am encouraged to make my art. I don't see it as therapy as we are not always doing one to one and talking about our feelings. The artists give us our own space to do our own art. The 'ears' are there if you want them. This year has been a year of change for me."

the pain and grief...



the pain and grief was being drawn and painted and sung and spoken.

“...a place that will give welcome,
security and support to the
mentally and emotionally
fragile young person.”

to go back to school.

• QUESTION •
WHEN ARE YOU GOING
TO ACCEPT ME FOR
WHO I AM?

• ANSWER •
I'M NOT THE BOXES U
KEEP PUTTING ME IN. I'M
ME. DON'T TRY TO FIX
ME → JUST ♥ ME 虫葉



parenting



When things go awry in families, children are left confused, angry and desolate.

THE one thing shared by many of the young people helped by Four Flats and the Brosnan Centre has been their troubled beginnings. As David Murray has said, when young people engage in self-destructive and antisocial behaviour, this often points to what was going on in their families. So when Jesuit Social Services brought into the organisation a number of already existing programs, the decision to include Parenting Adolescents Australia made sense.

Parenting skills are not something we are born with. They are learnt. We watch our own parents. We watch parents in our extended family and circle of friends and we learn how to be parents. When that opportunity to learn is missed, raising children becomes overwhelming. In the process

children are damaged, and so are their parents. Their grief and rage that they cannot get it right is a destructive force which goes on being played out as their children grow to become adolescents and adults.

We now know that when parents are unresponsive or confused, the child's development gets side tracked. We now know also that family life offers the opportunity to experience the positive effects of depending on and interacting co-operatively with others.

The work of providing training workshops was new activity for the organisation. It is not at the coalface of need. It is preventative work. And it is part of working to change the things that lead to disadvantage.

Constance Jenkin has been co-ordinating this program since it became part of Jesuit Social Services in 1995. Rather than teaching parents directly, the main focus of this program is offering workshops and training sessions for those in a position to work directly with parents.

Parenting Australia became part of Jesuit Social Services because there was an acute awareness that many of the adolescents and young adults who came to the Brosnan Centre had experienced trauma and broken attachments.

Parenting Australia provided programs across Victoria and beyond. Not headline making, but vital work in breaking the cycle that creates desperate, broken young people.



“ Parenting skills are not something we are born with. They are learnt. ”



COMMUNITIES

Being short of the basic essentials of life, including food and shelter, has long been the recognised face of poverty and disadvantage. The series of studies of the distribution of disadvantage throughout Australia undertaken by Jesuit Social Services has revealed the all-encompassing nature of poverty and its web-like character. The findings have illustrated that disadvantages tend to concentrate among the same people and their effects on health are cumulative. The children born to poorer families incur more ill-health, are more likely to drop out of school and more likely to become mentally ill. They are more likely to be unemployed. They are more likely to get chronic illnesses and die at an early age. These different strands of disadvantage frequently inter-lock. Poverty diminishes the quality of a person's life across all these dimensions.

—Tony Vinson

AT THE time Cathy Guinness came to work for Jesuit Social Services, a 'whole-of-neighbourhood' approach to tackling poverty and disadvantage was being launched. It was now understood that poverty affects whole communities, not just individuals.

Old ways of 'managing' disadvantage were being replaced by a respect for people in need and an understanding that this was *their* community and they wanted to be a part of making it change for the better.

Cathy remembers how hard it was to break new ground and take risks.

It was challenging because our organisation was moving into a new sort of work and up to this time, Jesuit Social Services had been focused in a different way. I was breaking new ground for the organisation and it was a terrific challenge for me. I had come to work within an organisation whose reputation for standing up for human rights was legendary.

I had to make mistakes and deal with them. I was in the front line, at the community level, working with new cultural groups and new languages. Jesuit Social Services expected me to take risks. I felt part of a bigger enterprise which could bring about changes in government policy as well as run programs at the front end of disadvantage.

The work broadened from Richmond to include the housing estates at Collingwood and then Fitzroy. In 2001 the program took the name *Communities Together*.

Cathy sees her work as an act of faith.

I believe that communities have within themselves the understanding of what needs to be done and that they are the best people to do it. I have got a great passion for community and for the energy that is within the idea of community. I have seen it over and over that each community can be helped to find the things that they are really interested in themselves and really want to get changed. If people with leadership and energy from within those communities become engaged, huge change can come about. The workers may come and go but the community is always there.

High-rise housing estates are richly diverse. Communities Together supports people to express their different cultures in ways which connect them to others. The issues that worry residents are diverse. Security, opportunities for connection, opportunities to influence decisions about their quality of life are just a few of their concerns.

The African Program at the Flemington housing estate was inspired by the work being done by Jesuit Social Services within another migrant community. Son Nguyen and Kim Nguyen had been working at the Vietnamese Welfare Resource Centre, on the Flemington housing estate for a long time. More recently it became the home of many of the African people who fled war and unrest in their homelands. Abdul Rachman Ozman, a leader in the Somali Community, came to Son for advice. He recognised that the support the Vietnamese community was receiving was just what his people needed. A dialogue began with Jesuit Social Services, and so the African Program started in 2004. Cathy Guinness recalls the beginning,

It was a huge adventure. There is a great energy within the idea and the reality of community.

The African Program is alive with that energy. There are possibilities created through listening to and supporting communities, through being open to new challenges.

This was their community...



This was their community and they wanted to be a part of making it change for the better.

“ There is a great energy within the
idea and the reality of community. ”





SUPPORT *after* SUICIDE

*Michael did not arrive home from work.
The children were agitated. They were
hungry and wanted their dinner.
Pam felt they should wait but sensed
something was not right.*

WHEN she rang his mobile there was no answer. Her husband was always on time and she began to worry. Later that evening Michael's boss found him. He had hanged himself at the factory.

Pam's grief and shock left her paralysed. But she forced herself to keep going. She had to support her three children - Max 19, Sam 17 and Jillian 12. Why didn't he tell her how he was feeling? Why hadn't she seen the signs? If only she had been more attentive. Or was it something she said or did that caused Michael to feel such deep despair?

When Pam first sought help at Support After Suicide, she said she had come because of the children. She was worried the boys might copy their father. But it wasn't just the children who needed help. Pam began to talk about her experience of her husband's death. The boys could see that this made a difference. When she told them the counsellor had offered some sessions for all of them, Sam was not so sure. "We might as well give it a go", said Max.

After two sessions they realised they were all feeling Michael's death in very different ways. They accepted the offer to each see a counsellor individually.

Bereavement following the suicide of a loved one often brings overwhelming pain, guilt and isolation. Those who suffer in this way have few places to go where their pain and distress can be understood. Recognising this as an unmet need, Support after Suicide was begun by Jesuit Social Services in 2004.

This has been an area of bereavement counselling which even many professionals have avoided. The stigma surrounding suicide and the overwhelming pain of the bereaved often results in others feeling ill equipped to provide comfort and support. Those who work with the

suicide bereaved need to understand their own grief and pain. Only then can they sit with and hold another in the raw desolation of losing someone to suicide.

There is one difference between this program and all the others at Jesuit Social Services. Suicide knows no boundaries. It affects all classes of people from all walks of life. Money, status and access to privileges in life are of no consequence when you lose someone to suicide. The clients of Support After Suicide share a sense of isolation. The stigma of suicide leaves the bereaved cut off. So the realisation that you are not alone can be transforming. Angela attended a group session after her mother suicided.

The hardest thing is that I did not tell my mother how much I loved her. I was terrified right up to the minute before I went to the first group; and when we started to say why we were there I began to realise that it did happen to other people and that we were all terrified and struggling with the same things.

Some come to talk just once or twice. Some come for many months and some come and go. Those who come choose their own way of accepting the support offered.

“ Suicide knows no boundaries. ”





gateway

Making it through school and getting a job seem like the usual milestones in most people's lives. So much so that it is easy to forget that these achievements have never been a possibility for some young people.

TERRY got involved with drugs when he was sixteen years old and shortly after was told to leave his family home. He was in and out of refuges every few weeks between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. Terry received two youth detention periods of six months and two months. Such experiences leave little capacity to learn, to gain confidence or to imagine the possibilities that work might offer. In all this turmoil Terry had little chance to even dream of gaining a skill that would give him a chance to work.

Not long after his release from youth detention, Terry was arrested and convicted of robbing a taxi driver. This time he received an adult sentence of eight months. By now his mental health had deteriorated and he spent a significant period of time in the acute assessment unit in Melbourne Assessment Prison where he was diagnosed as suffering from schizophrenia.

A stable job gives self-confidence, a chance to be independent and to

make choices. It offers a chance to form relationships with others who have that experience too. It creates the possibility of being relied upon, of giving support to others and of being supported in turn.

Where do you begin when there is nowhere to start learning about managing life? What do you do when there is nowhere to find support to step into a learning environment where you won't be judged or rejected if you can't keep up?

In 2002, Jesuit Social Services received a substantial grant over five years from the Colonial Foundation to develop a range of programs which would give people like Terry a chance.

Terry was referred to Gateway by the Brosnan Centre after his release from prison. He participated in a group program which helped him to address his drug related issues and to plan for a healthier lifestyle. He gained enough confidence to begin working at the Gateway kitchen making Abbotsford Biscuits. He was working with pastry chef Loretta Sartori whose patience and skill gave him a chance to learn as he worked. Terry also had the chance to develop trust and he began

to talk. Loretta sees that the learning goes beyond acquiring cooking skills.

Conversations fly across the workbench as we share the repetition of the task at hand. Often under the guise of humour home truths surface, with traumas and past experiences being shared with an honesty reflecting the trust that has developed between the team. What can be witty and fun one moment belies the depth of sadness that has touched a young person's life.

After a time at the Kitchen, Terry applied for a traineeship through Gateway and William Angliss. He completed four months of the traineeship and then obtained employment at a restaurant.

But there are many who have come to Gateway who have found it more difficult. Matthew had many psychiatric admissions interspersed with heavy drug use. He has also been convicted a number of times for drug related offending. He left school after year eight and struggled to read or write. Matthew attended a program which helped him look at ways of

managing his drug related problems and to try and develop healthier ways of living. These were all big challenges for him, even within the supported environment of Gateway. Within a couple of months, Matthew reoffended and this time he received a custodial sentence. But there had been significant gains. He had developed important connections and stays in touch with the Kitchen staff. He talks of his dream to learn to read and write with confidence and to learn a skill and find work. He is not sure what that might be yet. It is hard to have a sense of what you want to make of your life when life has been so unforgiving.

The staff at Gateway were well aware that more could be done to help young people like Matthew. The programs which helped Terry and Matthew are no longer funded but Jesuit Social Services is looking at new ways of offering a chance to learn which are safe and supported and which allow for the disrupted and sometimes chaotic episodes that some young people experience. The biggest task will be to convince decision makers that it will be worthwhile. Matthew and Terry would say it most certainly is.

new ways of offering a chance...



*new ways of offering a chance
to learn which are safe and supported.*

“ It is hard to have a sense of what
you want to make of your life
when life has been so unforgiving. ”



Afterword

THE WORK of Jesuit Social Services continues to evolve. In our thirtieth anniversary year we were asked by the Jesuits to take a national leadership role in social justice. And so we have moved into new areas of work and new locations. Our story continues as it began, responding to difficult, entrenched social problems and emerging unmet needs.

The memories and stories told at the four conversations have been part of what has shaped this book. At those conversations there was much joy, laughter and pride. There were also tears and regrets. There was the wish that sometimes more could have been done. But there was also great pride in our faithfulness to the most vulnerable; of being present with people in their bleakest and most joyful moments; of standing with those who have been rejected and dismissed. The purpose of our story can be expressed in the words of historian Greg Denning

I can't give life to the dead, but I can give them voice. I can't give justice to the victims, but I can shake the living from their moral lethargy to change the things in the present that are the consequences of the past.

Reflecting on the past provides signposts for the way forward. David Green spoke of how Jesuit Social Services from its earliest days was not just an observer on the sidelines.

The Jesuits in a sense didn't see themselves as outside this system but right in the middle of it and as a real action part of it. So this wasn't the church or an Order standing outside and knocking to get it. This was an Order that was in there, part of the action as it were.

It is this willingness to be in the action, to be working directly with those in need as well as advocating for change to the structures that keep them at the margins, which will guide our future directions. It resonates with the foundational insight of Ignatius of Loyola who founded the Jesuits – that 'God is in all things'.

Our vision is to 'build a just society'. Our mission, 'standing in solidarity with those in need and expressing a faith that promotes justice', is how we do it. Our values – welcoming, discerning, courageous – have shaped our first thirty years. It is these values that we step off from as we go forward into the future.

Julie Edwards, Chief Executive Officer

Doing Justice

REFLECTIONS FROM THIRTY YEARS



JESUIT SOCIAL SERVICES 1977 – 2007



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I Understand

*Now I understand
how life can turn us around
taking our heart and souls
and turning them inside out
the bottom of the barrel
is no place to be fathomed
to sink without a way to swim
with eyes that can't see their way to win*



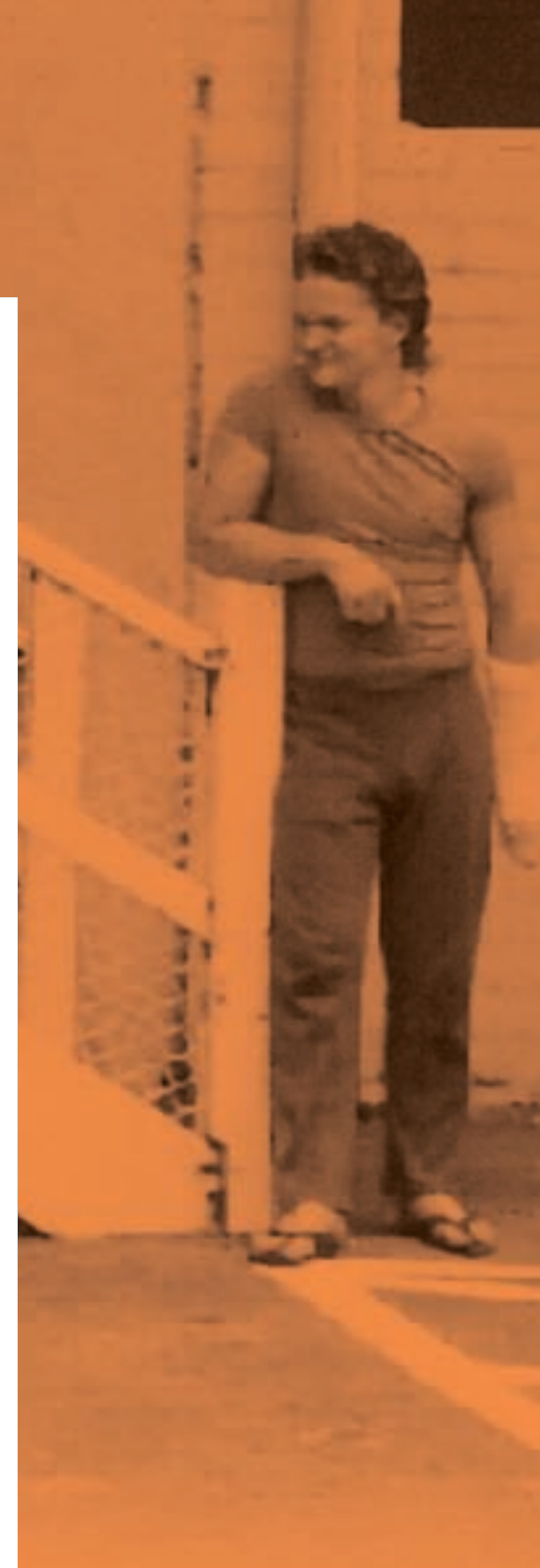


*Now I understand
why life sometimes has to end
with a captive hand's own pen
a new way to begin
on a road that never bends*





*Now I understand
that dignity is a test
a fragment of divinity
in a soul that knows what's best*





*Now I understand
the poignancy of a breath
as it takes us away
through the glorious starlit sky
where there is no need for why.....*





*Now I understand
why the night has to come
why the universal truth
knows the total sum
is to make way for the sun
where all is allowed
and loneliness is shunned.*

—George, Four Flats Resident 1977

