

## CURRAWONG KITCHEN

REAL SEASONAL FOOD, MADE FRESH  
SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITY



Jess and Chandelle from our Currawong Kitchen

## School canteens feed curiosity

At the front of the line at his school canteen, a seven-year-old carefully selects a clover-green ice block from a freezer of vibrant cubes – a sweet treat he'll finish quickly. Only then does he learn it contained a whole serving size of nutrient-rich spinach.

He'll go home after school and – for the first time – be willing to try spinach for dinner.

Chandelle, who oversees Jesuit Social Services' food security programs in Western Sydney, explains that the homemade ice blocks are one of her strategies to introduce previously unfamiliar food to children experiencing poor nutrition. This is often a result of their families' lack of access to fresh and affordable produce.

"We're different from a typical school canteen," says Chandelle.

"We're passionate about inspiring children to be curious about what they eat and encourage them to try a variety of healthy foods. We want them to develop their palates and trust their taste."

The Currawong Kitchen school canteen was established in 2020 to provide healthy school snacks, catering, and food hampers to families in the historically disadvantaged and under-served area of Mount Druitt.

Two school canteens now sit alongside Jesuit Social Services' affordable grocery stores, Ignite Food Store and Open Pantry, where the parents of school children can shop in a supportive, educational, low-cost setting.

"When it's 6pm and you're trying to feed kids on a budget, you make the best with what you've got," says Chandelle.

"You don't want to waste money on something that's unfamiliar or that your kids won't like."



Homemade ice blocks at the Currawong Kitchen

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## Ecological justice supports people and communities to flourish



For 47 years, Jesuit Social Services has gone where the need is greatest, supporting people and communities who are experiencing multiple barriers to social inclusion, always in line with our big vision of building a just society.

Over time, in light of our living in an increasingly complex era of climate crisis, environmental collapse and rising social inequity, we have been on a journey to understand the importance of ecological justice, including the fact that communities and individuals who already experience social and economic disadvantage are now also disproportionately dealing with environmental challenges, such as extreme heat, fires, and floods.

Our ecological justice work, which you will read about in this newsletter, is focused on the intersection of social and environmental justice. On the ground, we have developed a range of initiatives such as our plastic recycling workshops for school groups and equipping community service organisations

like neighbourhood houses to respond to the impacts of extreme weather.

At a structural level, we continue to advocate for minimum temperature standards within prisons across Australia, and in this newsletter, you will read about the urgency of this issue in the Northern Territory.

You will also read about the recent visit to Jesuit Social Services by Fr Arturo Sosa SJ, the Father-General of the Society of Jesus, and other senior Jesuits. It was a privilege to host them, and share the work of Jesuit Social Services during their time in Australia.

I would also like to acknowledge the tremendous contribution made to our organisation by our outgoing Chair, Patricia Faulkner AO, who will remain a strong friend of Jesuit Social Services. We have been so fortunate to have Patricia on our Board for 17 years, a tenure that has been characterised by her humility, warmth and brilliance.

We welcome our incoming Chair, Francis Sullivan AO, and look forward to working with him.

Thank you, as always, for your ongoing support of our work.

*Julie M. Edwards*

Julie Edwards  
CEO, Jesuit Social Services

## School canteens feed curiosity

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At Currawong Kitchen, when it's the middle of the day and kids aren't tired or cranky, they're more likely to try new things. At Open Pantry, we work hand-in-hand with the parents to give them access to different foods that they're willing to try."

Both the canteens and grocery stores source stock from food rescue organisations including OzHarvest, and homemade snacks like the nutritious ice blocks give new life to donated produce before it wilts or expires.

"We have a composting system, grow our own veggies, implement strategies to avoid

food waste, and recycle where possible," says Chandelle.

"Ecological justice underpins our approach, and Currawong Kitchen and Open Pantry are really good examples of what that actually looks like in a day-to-day setting."

Our school canteen program was so successful that we were asked to run a second canteen; and now we've been asked to run a third. But the program runs on a shoestring budget and needs your support to reach more kids.

## Sharing our vision with Jesuit leaders

In January, Jesuit Social Services was honoured to host special visitors from the global Jesuit community.

Fr Arturo Sosa SJ is the Father-General of the Society of Jesus, the global leader of the Jesuit Order. When he visited Australia for the first time, we were delighted that he made time to visit our Richmond office. This is the first time a Father-General has visited Jesuit Social Services.

Staff from across our services and advocacy teams – justice; mental health and wellbeing; education, training and employment; gender justice; and ecological justice programs spoke with Fr Sosa about our work. He was very interested in the work of our Centre for Just Places, which supports communities across Australia to address and respond to the impacts of climate change.

Fr Sosa also visited our Ignatius Learning Centre and met with our teaching staff and students.



CEO Julie Edwards with Jesuit leaders outside our Richmond office



Fr Sosa speaking with the principal of our Ignatius Learning Centre, John Andrew

## Neighbourhood houses building climate resilience and community connections



Alphington Community Centre in Darebin

In the city of Darebin, nestled in the inner north of Melbourne, there are many community members who experience multiple forms of disadvantage and are vulnerable to the impacts of heat.

As extreme weather events become more frequent, the Centre for Just Places is working closely with communities like Darebin, to build climate resilience. The Centre empowers them to cope with the impacts of climate change and to continue thriving as connected, vibrant communities.

One initiative supported by the Centre for Just Places, working closely with the Darebin Neighbourhood House Network, shines as a beacon of what is needed to enable community-driven climate resilience. It exemplifies how grassroots activity can lessen climate risks and build community cohesion.

“There are close to 400 neighbourhood houses in Victoria and over a thousand across Australia. We started working with neighbourhood houses as they are already an important part of local communities”, said Jack Piper, Climate Justice Coordinator at the Centre for Just Places.

“They provide services to people and communities who are most at-risk from the impacts of climate change. However,

the houses are also at risk of disruption during periods of heightened need, placing the communities they support at even greater risk.”

Carmen Lahiff-Jenkins, the Climate Justice Coordinator for the Network, knows how important it is for neighbourhood houses to be ready to support their communities.

“In an extreme heatwave, communities become isolated, especially vulnerable communities, because people can't leave their houses or continue their social activities.

“Neighbourhood houses are often the only places where they get to speak to somebody besides staff at the local shops. It's vital that we support people to stay connected.” Carmen explains.

Working closely with the Centre for Just Places, the Darebin Neighbourhood House Network strengthened its capacity to plan for climate change. The Network hopes to empower community members to take steps towards building resilience in their homes and neighbourhoods.

“Thanks to the work we've done with the Centre for Just Places, we are prepared to respond quickly. We can pivot within four days and start responding to heatwaves.”

The Darebin Neighbourhood House Network, supported by the Centre for Just Places, now works collaboratively to ensure that all Darebin residents can build climate resilience and grow community connection.

Since working with the Darebin Neighbourhood House Network, our Centre for Just Places has developed a practical climate resilience guide for other neighbourhood house networks to follow.

You can explore the practical guide by visiting [jesuit.social/pcrg](https://jesuit.social/pcrg)

Find out more about the Centre for Just Places at [jesuit.social/cjp](https://jesuit.social/cjp)

ADVOCACY



## Climate emergency and prisons don't mix

On a 38-degree December day in the middle of the desert, 15 people incarcerated at Alice Springs Correctional Centre used t-shirts and pedestal fans to rip a hole in a ceiling, in a desperate attempt to escape the stifling heat of their overcrowded cells.

The incident reignited calls to air-condition the prison – one recommendation of the Northern Territory Ombudsman, and firmly in step with the Territory's human rights obligations to people deprived of their liberty.

At Jesuit Social Services, we support the call to immediately air-condition a facility described by the Ombudsman as exacerbating "notoriously challenging" environmental conditions, which will only worsen as the climate deteriorates.

This is one example of how climate change intersects with criminal justice. It reveals the daily challenge to the health, safety, dignity and human rights of incarcerated people.

Our justice systems must adapt to protect people from extreme heat. Air-conditioning Alice Springs Correctional Centre would be one small step towards a system-wide transition away from harmful and ineffective policies that disproportionately impact the most marginalised members of our society.

But this is only a first step. This crisis of social and environmental justice won't be solved by better or cooler prisons alone.

More fundamentally, we must move away from our reliance on prisons and instead address factors that drive offending behaviour.

Jesuit Social Services has worked alongside people in contact with the criminal justice system over our entire 47-year history, including 14 years in the Northern Territory.

We know Australia's prisons are filled with some of the most marginalised and ostracised members of our society. We also know that prisons, as they currently operate, are ineffective and harmful. Across

the country, recidivism rates underline that the justice system is not working and, in particular, incarceration is an expensive failure. In Northern Territory, for example, a 56 per cent recidivism rate means that people who enter prison are more likely than not to re-offend after leaving. We acknowledge prisons have a role to play, but far too many people cycle in and out, compounding existing trauma and further isolating them from necessary supports without making a positive impact to disrupt offending behaviour. As climate conditions become more extreme and prison populations grow, incarcerated people will endure increasingly inhumane conditions without achieving the outcome of shifting behaviour that the broader community wants to see.

Jesuit Social Services' discussion paper, "Prisons, climate and a just transition", revealed the overlapping social and ecological harms done by our criminal justice systems, and shone a light on what people in detention have a right to expect from society.

Jesuit Social Services calls on all Australian governments to fully implement the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which would help ensure humane standards inside prisons, including adequate cooling and heating. We support a move away from justice systems focused on imprisonment and towards a system where prisons are used as a last resort.

Ultimately, we seek a just transition – to move away from inequitable economic and social systems towards a more sustainable world. We need policies in place to mitigate the impacts of climate change on the most vulnerable people in our society, including those caught up in the criminal justice system.

A just transition can transform society, giving us the opportunity to reconsider how we relate to each other and our environment.

## Alliance key to climate justice in the Northern Territory



Ubirr, Kakadu National Park, Northern Territory

The Northern Territory is on the frontline of intensifying heat, extreme weather events, and rising sea levels. Remote communities and homelands across the Territory are particularly at risk of these impacts with many Aboriginal communities already facing food insecurity, a lack of safe drinking water and access to reliable, affordable electricity.

"The Northern Territory has some of the most intensely collapsing ecosystems in Australia – the savanna woodlands and mangroves are careening towards extinction," explains Ned Bible, Jesuit Social Services' Northern Territory Climate Justice Coordinator. "Climate change is impacting our lives in more ways than we know; building knowledge and awareness is a crucial step to action."

This understanding prompted Jesuit Social Services to help establish a Territory-based Climate Justice Alliance in 2021. Facilitated by Jesuit Social Services, the Climate Justice Alliance includes a number of climate, environmental, and community-led organisations, as well as unions.

Over 18 months, the Alliance built relationships across the Territory, and ran a series of workshops and forums in Alice Springs and Darwin. As a result of COVID-19, the work of the Alliance slowed, but has now reconvened, with renewed energy and vigour to work towards justice for all.

A hope of the Alliance is to help build climate literacy amongst the community and community sector in the Northern Territory.

"We've all heard of climate change", explains Ned. "But we understand there can be obstacles to people taking action, including a lack of understanding of climate science and feeling overwhelmed in the face of such a monumental problem."

"Climate literacy refers to people's level of knowledge and awareness of climate change, and its impacts. In particular, people already facing disadvantage are most likely to be impacted by climate change, yet least likely able to influence change."

Today, the Alliance continues to build on this important work and strives towards a just transition – one that focuses on adapting to the impacts of climate change, and on the alternative economic futures needed to ensure justice for people and planet.

The Alliance wants to see climate change planning and adaptation integrated into the strategic planning of local governments, community services, community health, and other local organisations. Ned gives the example that people who live with a disability are two to four times more likely to be injured or killed in an extreme weather event due to existing health inequities and a lack of access to decision-making that is responsive to their needs. These sector-specific facts can help organisations understand the breadth and depth of climate risks, and plan accordingly, for the wellbeing of the people they work with and the planet.

To be effective, ecological justice must be inclusive, community-led, and place-based. The Climate Justice Alliance embodies these principles to advocate for justice in the Northern Territory.

## Making something out of nothing: from bottle tops to tools and wisdom

Most people see discarded bottle caps from milk and soft drink bottles as rubbish. Stuart Muir Wilson, Program Coordinator at our Ecological Justice Hub, sees them as a way to reimagine climate education and climate action in schools.

“My biggest hope is to teach and empower young people with the skills and resources we’ve got available to us, to meet the world’s most pressing problems at a local scale, and for young people to be able to do something different, inspiring and better.”

Stuart has created a six-month-long school workshop program centred around processing recycled plastics into practical products such as plant pots, cutting boards, utility clips, garden tools and more.

The program helps to show the value of recycled plastics, as opposed to their traditional role as a single-use item. What he creates alongside his students makes us reconsider what we throw away.

With the help of lid donations from neighbourhood houses and school groups, the workshop processed about 260 kilos of plastic last year. Stuart says that the volunteers play an integral part in “making these beautiful products and of moving them through into the circular economy with passion and purpose.”

Student involvement in the workshop is mutually enriching for both the Hub and the children. The students learn practical and tangible ways they can make a difference. The Hub relies on volunteers and financial support to help it continue its efforts.

“I think the program is great because students can really participate and be empowered. The current curriculum on the climate and environment can be quite disempowering and is causing a lot of anxiety

in young people...it’s all about the problems and it isn’t giving them any solutions to think about or implement,” Stuart explains.

“The plastic program gives them multiple entry points to consider how they can be part of the solution whilst simultaneously showing them a new skill and exposing them to a new vocation or educational pathway.”

“Schools wanting to actively engage with us is one of the biggest changes,” says Stuart. “The project allows us to develop a space where we can continue to engage with more schools and students.” The Hub is working with educators to encourage a commitment to social justice projects as part of the standard curriculum.

“If we can keep working with schools and educating state government funders to keep changing their guidelines to better meet ecological justice outcomes, that will help us have the greatest impact.”



Stuart holding a plant pot he made from recycled bottle caps at the Ecological Justice Hub

Jesuit Social Services set up our Centre for Just Places to understand and address ecological justice. We understand that the people who already experience disadvantage are too often the same people most impacted by environmental changes.

Each day, our ecological justice work strives to support the people we work with. Help us continue to be ready to accompany people when they need it most.



“This place has helped get my confidence level back up, improved my people skills and got me interested in life again.”

– Eamonn, Ecological Justice Hub volunteer

### 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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