



Michael, Ellie, Oliver, Ana and Anna from our Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility team

Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility

## “To have my boy back is beyond words”

“If it wasn't for my worker I wouldn't be with my family, I'd be back in jail. He went out of his way to help me.”

Over the past few years, we heard so many similar testimonials from participants about our staff who work at the Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility. This facility provides temporary accommodation and support to men leaving prison – men who would otherwise be homeless, a situation experienced by around half of all people exiting Victoria's prisons. Perhaps unsurprisingly, insecure and unsafe housing contributes significantly to many people returning to custody shortly after release.

The facility supports up to 42 men at a time, and our staff first engage with them while they are still in custody. Our General Manager of Adult Justice Programs, Suzi James–Nevell, says this is key to relationship building and reducing reoffending.

“We set up a transition plan that involves listening to their personal goals and finding that inner motivation that will drive them to do well,” says Suzi.

“Then, together, we figure out a plan for how they can work towards those goals once they've left prison.”

Once residents are settled into the accommodation, our staff support them in a range of ways depending on their needs. This includes helping them to apply for a NDIS package, get their driver's licence or construction ticket, connect with private rental housing and work opportunities, understand the conditions of intervention orders, or start visits with family members.

These support services can last anywhere between three to 12 months and have reduced reoffending.

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## New year brings hope in our collective power



Current affairs, both globally and closer to home, have weighed heavily on us all in recent months. The devastating loss and displacement of innocent lives, extreme weather events, and major shifts in global politics have brought

both profound sadness and a deep sense of uncertainty about how, collectively, we keep moving forward in a positive, hopeful way.

Closer to home, we've witnessed ongoing challenges in youth justice systems across Australia, with some state and territory governments supporting regressive policies that fail children, their families and the broader community – at times, the challenges can feel overwhelming.

The start of a new year presents an opportunity though, to slow down, gather with our loved ones, and feel and be grateful for the deep connections we have with others, and the places and communities we are part of.

Having an interior felt knowledge of these blessings can also help us to recognise the

value of these relationships and the collective power we hold when we work together towards a more just society.

In this newsletter, you will read about how two of our programs – ReConnect and the Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility – tailor support and provide safe and secure housing to people leaving the justice system, which is so crucial in helping people to maintain employment and rebuild their lives.

We're also delighted to share with you the story of one of our long-standing donors – Helen – whose generous contributions serve as a reminder that every gesture, no matter how big or small, has the potential to change lives.

Helen's story, and the article about the community of Loyola College, exemplify the spirit of true and abundant generosity.

Thank you for your continued support in our vision to build a just society. I wish you and your loved ones a happy and peaceful 2025.

*Julie M. Edwards*

Julie Edwards  
CEO, Jesuit Social Services

## Our justice work described as “credit worthy and unique” by global expert

In November, we hosted renowned international criminal justice systems expert Dr Baz Dreisinger for a day.

Baz founded the Prison-to-College Pipeline program at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York, and as Executive Director of Incarceration Nations Network she investigates how justice can be done differently around the world. Baz has written books, made documentaries, and regularly

appears in the media advocating for restorative justice as a replacement to mass incarceration.

During her visit with us, Baz met with some of our leaders and staff from our justice and advocacy programs.

She also spent time chatting over morning tea with staff at the Ignatius Learning Centre, our Catholic Specialist Secondary School for boys who are involved with the youth justice system.

“The Principal, John, the teachers and the staff are truly dedicated to this work,” Baz said.

## “To have my boy back is beyond words” (continued from Page 1)



A courtyard inside our Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility

“Access to a positive social network is critical to breaking the cycle of reoffending, poverty and disadvantage,” notes Suzi.

“Many individuals who enter the program experience broken relationships with their families and friends. This can leave them feeling isolated and without the necessary support to be proactive in rebuilding their lives.”

A resident’s mother reflected on the way our staff at the Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility helped to repair her relationship with her son:

“The idea of taking justice-involved young people and putting them in a context that is not anything like a prison, but a school that’s offering opportunities, is super unique and valuable.”

Baz found within Jesuit Social Services a collaborative spirit, and a willingness to be flexible to meeting new needs and opportunities.

“While Jesuit Social Services has been around longer than a lot of other organisations, you are still open, and you want to bring everyone to the table,” she said.

“If he had not had your place, his only other option would have been going back to live with people he was involved with before he went to jail. He now works fulltime and is a valued member of our family and the community. To have my boy back is beyond words.”

This approach sets Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility apart from other housing and homelessness services that typically stop support as soon as housing is secured, neglecting the many other challenges individuals face after being involved in the justice system.

“What seems simple can be really daunting for people exiting custody,” says Suzi.

“Sometimes as a community, we can have low expectations for those leaving the justice system. In a way, it’s like a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby people match those standards.”

“When you’ve got someone who backs you, you step up and you live up to that. That’s what we are trying to do at Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility.”



Baz Dreisinger (second from right) meets members of our team to discuss our justice work

Baz told us that she considers the scope and legacy of Jesuit Social Services’ justice programs and advocacy work to be unique and incredibly valuable.

Youth Justice Group Conferencing

## Healing through dialogue: Callum's path to making amends



School was not easy for Callum\*. He left before the end of Year 9 and fell in with bad influences who introduced him to crime.

Within a year of his first offending, Callum found himself facing a terrified woman he had woken up while looking for her car keys.

As a result, he spent his 16th birthday in custody, scared, alone, and never wanting to go back to prison.

Callum was referred to our Youth Justice Group Conferencing program. This is a restorative justice process that enables a conversation between young people, victims, the police, and other people impacted by the crime, aimed at diverting the young person from further or more serious offending. Jesuit Social Services has run group conferencing programs since 2008.

Callum's group conference was attended by victims of his actions as well as his mother, the police, legal representatives, and support workers.

It gave Callum the chance to apologise in person to the people he had harmed, and listen to the impact of his offending.

Looking back on the offence, Callum said he felt "ruined and horrified".

"I think about it daily, I wish it never happened. It's the worst thing I have ever done," he says.

Callum's remorse was clear to the people who were harmed by his offending.

As one participant in the process said, "To know that you are now determined to turn your life around is a great comfort to me – it turns something bad into something good. I do forgive you, I really do. I wish you well and pray every day that you will go forward, stick to your resolve and become an asset instead of a liability to our community."

Callum came out of the group conference with an agreed outcome plan, making commitments to enrol at a TAFE, avoid anti-social peers, re-engage with sport, and find mental health support.

Three months on, Callum had not reoffended and had multiple job offers.

"Callum's story shows the value that restorative practices like the Youth Justice Group Conferencing program can have, not just for the young person but for the whole community," says our Principal Restorative Practitioner, Genevieve Higgins.

**"He had reflected deeply on his offending while in custody and showed considerable remorse, but it was only through group conferencing that he was able to speak directly to the people harmed and apologise."**

**Genevieve Higgins**  
Principal Restorative Practitioner

*\*Callum's name has been changed and a representative stock image used to protect his privacy.*

Donor profile

## A legacy of giving: Helen Delves' journey with Jesuit Social Services



Helen Delves, one of our loyal Community Partners

Helen Delves has been supporting Jesuit Social Services since 1997, including becoming a Community Partner by signing up to a monthly gift in 2006.

Our Fundraising Manager, Polly, recently spoke with Helen about what inspired her to give back to her community. What

followed was a heartfelt conversation about faith, compassion, and a strong belief in the power of helping others.

Helen's connection to the Jesuits began when she was young, helping her mum run the St Patrick's Mothers' Auxiliary stand at the annual Xavier College Fair. This brings together over 5,000 participants to raise funds for Jesuit Mission's outreach programs overseas and promote a more inclusive and just world. Her involvement sparked a lifelong commitment to volunteering, and she continued to support the fair for many years.

Eventually, she became the secretary for the Maytime Fair Committee, a Jesuit-led fundraising effort, where she met Father Phil Crotty, one of Australia's first missionaries to India. Through this work, Helen found inspiration in the Jesuits' commitment to supporting the most vulnerable.

"I've been donating to Jesuit Social Services since 1997," Helen explains. "Once I paid off my mortgages, I had a little more to spare, and I knew I wanted to give to an organisation I trusted to use the money wisely."

Helen says her deep admiration for Jesuit Social Services is rooted in a shared belief in second chances.

"Young people today face so many challenges. Many come from difficult family situations and haven't been set up for success. Jesuit Social Services provides the skills, mentorship, and care they need to turn their lives around," she says.

These stories of transformation keep Helen inspired.

"I love reading about young people who've overcome adversity – these stories motivate me to keep giving. The staff and volunteers at Jesuit Social Services are remarkable, and what you achieve is extraordinary."

Today, Helen continues to donate to us every month as a Community Partner, and she has also included Jesuit Social Services – along with other Jesuit causes – in her Will, ensuring her legacy of care and compassion will live on.

"If anyone asked me who to donate to, I wouldn't hesitate to recommend Jesuit Social Services. Your work is enabling people to live good, healthy lives in society."

Helen hopes her journey will inspire others to embrace the power of giving. She believes that every contribution—no matter how big or small—creates change for the better.

"My Christian values taught me to care for others, and I know that by supporting Jesuit Social Services, I'm living out that commitment."

***Helen is one of our Community Partners***, a special group of donors whose regular commitment means we can plan our programs with greater certainty. To find out more about becoming a Community Partner, visit: [jesuit.social/donate](https://jesuit.social/donate)

If, like Helen, you are interested in leaving a legacy of care and compassion by including Jesuit Social Services in your will, you can find out more by visiting: [jesuit.social/bequest](https://jesuit.social/bequest)

Donor profile

## Loyola College continues to show love “more in deeds than in words”



The Loyola College community exemplifies true generosity

“Love is shown more in deeds than words” is a timeless Ignatian principle and lies at the heart of Loyola College.

For nearly 45 years, Loyola College has nurtured students not only academically but also in their journey toward becoming people of empathy, integrity and action.

Named in honour of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, the College embodies a profound commitment to faith, justice and service to others.

To live out this commitment, students participate in a diverse range of philanthropic and volunteering activities throughout the year, including supporting Jesuit Social Services.

Students have assembled hampers of food and warm items for people sleeping rough; tutored primary school students facing learning barriers; volunteered at aged care facilities, welfare agencies, disability services, and parish schools; supported environmental projects; and led advocacy events.

“We aim to guide students to navigate the world with compassion, but our deeper mission is to instil the courage to stand up for the greater good—to speak out boldly against injustice and challenge unfairness wherever it arises,” says Alison Leutchford, Principal of Loyola College.

Alison notes that Jesuit Social Services’ unwavering commitment to the Ignatian principle of justice for all people first inspired the relationship.

“Every House at Loyola adopts a charity and directs its fundraising efforts through House activities and the annual Saint Ignatius Day Walkathon. This initiative encourages students to lead with purpose and actively engage in their fundraising efforts.”

Mannix House in particular is a proud long-term supporter of Jesuit Social Services. Their support has allowed Loyola College to contribute over \$62,000 to our programs so far.



**“We donate on a regular basis and will continue to support Jesuit Social Services’ work and mission. We have the utmost confidence that the money is being used to do good, and that really matters.”**

**Alison Leutchford**  
Principal of Loyola College

Through their commitment to service, Loyola College continues to embody love through action—demonstrating that true faith is lived out through uplifting others.



## ReConnect Program

# Tailored support enables ReConnect participants to flourish

As Father Brosnan once said, “Three things that I have noted are needed by someone leaving prison are: a place to live that is decent, a job they can handle, and friendship.”

Our ReConnect program echoes this wisdom by providing the comprehensive support that enables participants to flourish. It provides up to nine months assistance to men and gender diverse people as they leave prison in Victoria.

ReConnect helps participants to overcome some of the barriers they can face reintegrating into the community after leaving prison.

Barriers can include finding and maintaining employment, accessing housing, and maintaining physical and mental health. These all affect a person’s ability to create a new identity outside of a prison and to overcome the circumstances which led to their offending.

Program Coordinator Sam Noonan says that providing participants with the support and resources they need to establish a positive routine and connections in the community are critical to their successful reintegration. This was shown in the story of former participant Chris\*.

In Chris’ case, securing employment and safe and secure independent accommodation were crucial in his reintegration, which led to successes in other areas of his life.

“Chris was supported to step into employment shortly after release, which he felt great pride in. He said that going to work

every day was able to help him establish a new identity outside of prison,” Sam says.

“His employer has been impressed by his work effort and drive. Chris has told us that he has found his passion and developed a newfound confidence since starting work.”

During his time with ReConnect, Chris developed a strong relationship with his outreach case manager, who helped him achieve a healthy work life balance, including connecting him to supports to address his substance use and mental health challenges.

“Chris was also supported to move into stable housing, which has had a huge impact on his wellbeing and enabled him to really flourish at work. The program also helped him to set up his utilities and secure furnishings to make his home environment a positive one,” Sam says.



**“Having people who believed in him and could help him onto positive pathways was the turning point for Chris. He’s been employed for over a year now, with his role focused on helping others released from custody. This opportunity to ‘give back’ has increased his self-worth and acceptance, which was crucial in making positive changes. He is thriving!”**

**Sam Noonan**  
Program Coordinator

*\*Chris’ name has been changed and a representative stock image used to protect his privacy.*

## Upcoming event – Jesuit Social Services 2025 Annual Dinner



Jesuit Social Services is pleased to announce our 2025 Annual Dinner will be held at the Jim Stynes Grill at the iconic Melbourne Cricket Ground on Friday, 28 February 2025.

The Annual Dinner is an opportunity for our community to come together in support of our shared vision of building a just society – and to connect with new and old friends.

The Frank Costigan QC Address is the centrepiece of the night, and we are delighted that National Children’s Commissioner Anne Hollonds will deliver the 2025 Address.

The Commissioner recently released the report *‘Help way earlier!’: How Australia can transform child justice to improve safety and wellbeing*, which identifies the poor treatment of children as young as 10 years old as one of the most urgent human rights issues facing Australia.

Tickets to the Annual Dinner are priced at \$275 per person. Tables of 10 are also available.



For more information or to book, email [events@jss.org.au](mailto:events@jss.org.au), call 03 9421 7600 or scan the QR code to visit the event page.

## 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.

**Did you know that Australian banks will soon be phasing out cheques?**

To learn more and find out alternative ways you can continue to support our work, visit [jesuit.social/cheque](http://jesuit.social/cheque)

**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**  
 **\$500**     **\$1000**

\$

Please send me information about leaving a gift in my Will.

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You can also donate over the phone by calling 03 9421 7600 or scanning the QR code