

mercy foundation®

Autumn 2015 | 40 Rocklands Road Crows Nest NSW 2065 | T 02 9911 7390 | office@mercyfoundation.com.au



Message from the CEO

As the Mercy Foundation celebrates 25 years of being 'at the service of human dignity' we find ourselves, sadly, more relevant than ever. We live in a country whose leadership is continually failing to respond ethically and compassionately to the needs of those around us – whether they be desperate people seeking asylum from the ravages of war or our own fellow Australians who find themselves without a home. And when called to account by the Human Rights Commission and the UN, our Prime Minister condemns those messengers without proper reflection on the issues they raise.

The current Federal government has also recently removed funding to a range of peak and advocacy groups in the homelessness and housing sectors. The voice of opposition to inadequate policy and program responses to homelessness is quietly being silenced.

We are more fortunate. At the Mercy Foundation, we can continue to be a fearless advocate for the rights and 'dignity' of our fellow citizens. The North Sydney Sisters of Mercy continue to make it very clear that the Foundation must play a vital role in advocacy. Without government funding, we can speak up without fear or favour – remind our leaders of their human and ethical obligations and speak up on behalf of the most vulnerable people in our community.

I'd like to take this opportunity, as the North Sydney Sisters of Mercy celebrate their 150th Anniversary this year, to thank them for their guidance, their hard work and their example. Their work is not yet done – but through the Mercy Foundation we will continue to carry out their mission.

Felicity

25 YEARS

mercy foundation®

All of us at the Mercy Foundation are looking forward to 2015. We celebrate our 25th year since being established in 1990 and the Sisters of Mercy (North Sydney) celebrate their 150th anniversary.

Catherine McAuley started the congregation of the Sisters of Mercy in Dublin in 1831. She was a visionary and social reformer, who could see past the social structures that were keeping people in poverty and fought to build a more just society, to help the most disadvantaged people out of poverty. Catherine's contagious enthusiasm inspired a number of women to join her in her work. This led to a movement that is now present in 40 countries around the globe.

The Sisters of Mercy came to Australia in 1846 to Perth and Mother Ignatius (Elizabeth) McQuoin landed in Sydney in 1865. Since 1865, the Sisters have worked to fulfill Catherine's legacy, providing education, health care, assistance to asylum seekers and refugees and much more, working to build a more just society. The Sisters opened the Mater Hospital in 1906, a public hospital that provided health care to all, regardless of one's capacity to pay. In 1983, the government withdrew funding and the Mater faced closure.

The Sisters rebuilt the Mater as a private hospital and established the Mercy Foundation in 1990 as a means of continuing their commitment to the poor and to address the structural causes of poverty.

Through our grants programs, since 1990, the Sisters have funded in excess of \$2 million to community groups working to address injustice at the grass roots. Since 2008, the Sisters have funded over \$1.25 million to organisations working to end homelessness.

It is our great privilege to carry on the work inspired by Catherine McAuley on behalf of the Sisters.

Celebrating
150
years
Sisters of Mercy
North Sydney
1865-2015

Grants to End Homelessness

The Mercy Foundation remains committed to help bring about an end to homelessness especially for the most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness. Research tells us that people who experience chronic homelessness, if left to survive on the streets, will die 25 to 30 years younger than their peers in housing. Many suffer from one or more of the following conditions: developmental disabilities, serious physical health problems, mental illness or disorders and other complex needs.

We believe that it is not acceptable to allow such disadvantaged people to survive on the streets. This year, we are funding another seven major projects to help bring about an end to homelessness.

This newsletter features an update from one of the projects funded last year under our Grants to End Homelessness, HomeGround Real Estate, an innovative social enterprise and not-for-profit in Melbourne.



Solutions to homelessness: Supporting Australia's First Not-for-Profit Real Estate Agency

HomeGround is one of Melbourne's largest homelessness, housing and support agencies assisting around 10,000 people per year. HomeGround recognised an opportunity to develop a social enterprise based on one of its unrecognized strengths, managing rental properties. The Mercy Foundation provided HomeGround with funding under our Grants to End Homelessness, to help establish this new enterprise.

In addition to providing a conventional real estate service to investors, HomeGround also operates an Affordable Housing Initiative. There are 2 tiers to the initiative:

Tier 1: Quality property and tenancy management services for property owners who are willing to forego a percentage of their rental income to provide affordable rental to low-income tenants.

Tier 2: A private rental management program for property owners who grant assets to HomeGround services free of charge as a philanthropic gesture. The properties are used to house people who have been unable to access permanent accommodation and are currently homeless.

All profit is reinvested to cover the service delivery costs of the portfolio and the tenancy and property management functions, as well as additional housing provision and/or support services for HomeGround clients.

The project kicked off in March 2014. The initiative has been very well received by the market. As of March 2015, HomeGround has helped over 90 people into affordable housing. HomeGround Real estate now manages:

- 35 properties for owners willing to forego a percentage of their rental income to provide affordable housing rental to low income earners;
- 46 properties of owners providing property as a philanthropic gesture, used to house people who have been unable to access permanent accommodation and were homeless, and
- 47 properties managed at market rent.

In December last year, realestate.com.au joined as a key partner to this project, providing funding:

- For a Rapid Rehousing initiative specifically for women facing homelessness as a result of family violence
- To enable the not for profit real estate model to be replicated around Australia.

We congratulate the HomeGround team on this initiative and applaud their outcomes in providing more affordable housing for people who need it most.



HomeGround RealEstate.com Partnership Launch
Heather Holst, CEO Homeground Services, Tracey Fellows, CEO, REA Group, Rosie Batty Australian of the Year, 2015, Penny Fowler, Board Chair, Herald and Weekly Times, Livinia Nixon, MC

Small Grants Report

Unemployment, especially when experienced for a considerable period of time, can corrode self-esteem, reduce confidence and drive people into poverty. Having the added responsibility of supporting a family worsens the impact on the individual.

Through our small grants program, Glen Park Community Centre established a Job Club for local, long term unemployed single parents of primary aged children in the Bayswater North Area the club met weekly and was managed by a facilitator to assist in learning effective job seeking skills to help them find and maintain employment.

The club was run concurrently with a homework hub, so that children of the participants were cared for and provided with homework assistance.

The result was a strong and supportive job club with 9 regular participants. The club met for 24 weeks and participants reported an increase in self esteem, confidence and improved motivation, by learning new IT skills and receiving support from other members of the club. The Job Club helped participants identify their individual barriers to employment and they learnt strategies on how to address them.

One member has gained employment and another is now facilitating



One of the volunteers at the Job Club

the job club in a volunteer capacity, which ensures sustainability of the job club. Another benefit of the Job Club was an increase in the number of students attending the homework hub.

The project is now incorporated into the annual plan to ensure the continuation of the job club. It is also hoped it will be set up and managed in other community centres in the area.

Teaching life-saving water skills

Water safety and swimming skills are essential for children living in Australia. In January this year, 35 young people from Afghani, Iranian, Iraqi, Pakistani, Indonesian and Australian backgrounds attended the Swim2 Survive course in Macquarie Fields. Funding under our Small Grants program enabled the Afghan Fajar Association to run this course. The expectation was that the participants would learn water safety skills and improve their water safety knowledge to prevent them from drowning. Participants were provided with certificates of merit and achievement at the end of the program.

Other valuable outcomes resulting from this activity were:

- development of social skills and friendships between participants
- building trust with families to allow their children to participate
- a sense of achievement for all participants.

The program exceeded all expectations. There were an overwhelming number of participants from different backgrounds coming together to learn swimming and water safety skills. The program received

exceptional feedback from community members, swimming instructors and participants. Importantly, the young people were able to swim independently at the end of the program.



Our policy on personal stories and images

The Mercy Foundation has a policy of not using images of real people who are currently facing traumatic personal crises or who are in other vulnerable situations. This is because we are 'at the service of human dignity'. People's images and stories, especially in the internet age, can stay around on websites or in newsletters for a long time into the future.

People in vulnerable situations, such as homelessness, do recover and they do move back into housing and get on with their lives. We believe our organisation's need to 'tell a story' to help readers understand the problems some people are facing is less important than asking vulnerable people to share their story and their trauma with strangers.

We acknowledge the courageous people who have faced significant hardship in their lives and who volunteer to tell their story and share their personal images to help create change as well as express gratitude

towards an organisation who may have assisted them during a crisis. This decision, made following the resolution of a traumatic situation, is quite different and we might sometimes use those images and stories. Consumer insight and experience can be a valuable way to improve our community's responses to homelessness.

Homelessness is a traumatic personal experience and if current or formerly homeless people would like to volunteer to share their experience with readers or forum participants we would always try to ensure they have the right support to do so. We would always want them to understand that those images and their personal story will likely be found on the internet for a long time to come.

In essence, our need to tell you about our work and the change it can bring to people's lives is not as important as each individual's need to be able to move on with their lives.

Tuesday Night Socials

Kensington Neighbourhood House approached the Mercy Foundation for a small grant to pilot a weekly evening social program, aimed at breaking social isolation for vulnerable and older women in the local area.

The program ran for 20 weeks. Eleven women attended the groups, with a core of six attending regularly. All women who participated lived alone and had little or no social engagements in the evenings. Most of the planned activities focused on health and well being. This included cooking and nutrition activities, arts and crafts, learning conversation skills, healthy eating and living and gentle exercises.

Free transport was provided to and from the venue, enabling those without transport to attend whilst addressing personal safety issues.

The women found the program to be valuable in helping build new support networks and learning new information that was very relevant to their lives. They enjoyed art and craft activities, learning new recipes, tai chi and getting to know each other by sharing

meals and conversation. Providing friendship and companionship to socially isolated women was the most valuable outcome.

The program will continue on a monthly basis.



Reflections



Sr Miriam Grech RSM, Amanda Hogan, Sr Evelyn Crotty RSM and Sr Loreto Conroy RSM, at work at the Mercy Foundation in the early 1990's.

If you have a story or photos you would like to share about the Mercy Foundation, or the North Sydney Sisters of Mercy, please call Sue Mowbray, Business Manager on 02 9911 7390 or email: office@mercyfoundation.com.au

Upcoming Events

July/August:

“Dressing not Stressing 2”

Hosted by Dijanna Mulhearn, this is the second event that will teach you how to look your best. Proceeds will support the work of the Mercy Foundation.

September:

25th Anniversary Celebrations

We will be looking back over the work of the Foundation and the many organisations that we have partnered with and their terrific outcomes.

Yes, I would like to help bring about an end to homelessness.

Donation Amount (donations over \$2 are tax deductible)

Name:

Address:

(Please tick) Cheque Money Order Master Card Visa

Card Number: Expiry Date:

Cardholder's Name:

Signature:

Post this form to Mercy Foundation, 40 Rocklands Rd Crows Nest NSW 2065. You can also donate by phone 02 9911 7390 or online via secure website www.mercyfoundation.com.au and click the Donations tab.

A tax deductible receipt will be mailed to you. **Thank you for your support, it is greatly appreciated.**



at the service of human dignity