

25 YEARS

**mercy** foundation®

at the service of human dignity for 25 years





# Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney:

## A history of working towards justice with local communities

In 1893, the Sisters of Mercy North Sydney established St Vincent's School, Redfern. From 1893-1920 it operated as a Girls High School and as the needs of the area changed, it became a primary school for boys and girls. The school closed in 1974 and the convent and school were then used by the Parish of Redfern for Fr Ted Kennedy's ministry with the Aboriginal community.

Aware of the growing need for professional health services for the local community, in 1979 the Sisters agreed to transfer the titles of their premises to the Aboriginal Medical Service Co-operative Ltd (AMS). The premises were used to establish a Detoxification and Rehabilitation Centre as part of the overall health care of the Aboriginal Community. This initiative was the first of its kind in Sydney.

Today, the AMS Redfern is a world-class health facility. It is the largest and busiest Aboriginal health service in Australia. It remains a community owned, community run and community controlled health service.



*Above: Sr Josie Byrnes RSM and Sr Joanne Kirk RSM handover the deeds to Mrs Naomi Mayers. Administrator, AMS.*

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*Left: Mercy Foundation Opening Ceremony, 24 September 1990. Sr Loreto Conroy RSM carries the flag, followed by Sr Josephine Byrnes RSM, Sr Maureen McGuirk RSM, Sr Anna Koeneman RSM, Mr Dermot Dorgan, Mr Jim Cleary, and Sr Joanne Kirk RSM.*



# Celebrating 150 years at the service



For 150 years, the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney, have devoted their lives to carrying on the legacy of Catherine McAuley, founder of the Sisters of Mercy.

Catherine McAuley founded the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland in 1831. Catherine was a charismatic social reformer, driven by the words of the Gospel and her unrelenting pursuit for social justice. Many women joined Catherine as Sisters of Mercy, working to bring about an end to chronic poverty, particularly for women who suffered ill health, lack of education and homelessness. The Sisters not only served the poor, they courageously challenged the social structures that resulted in disadvantage and social isolation.

In 1865, Mother Ignatius McQuoin established the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney. Since that time, they have established many ministries to address the needs of their community. This included primary and secondary schools across NSW and Papua New Guinea and the Mater Hospital in North Sydney, where the Sisters provided health care to all. The hospital built a reputation of readiness to care for anyone brought to its doors.

In 1990, the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney, established the Mercy Foundation as their vehicle to continue their commitment to alleviate poverty and challenge the structures that contribute to social inequity.

Since 2008, the Mercy Foundation has focused on ending homelessness for women, women with children and chronically homeless individuals. Today, the Mercy Foundation carries on the legacy of the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney and their founder, Catherine McAuley.

# of human dignity

## From the Congregation Leader, Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney

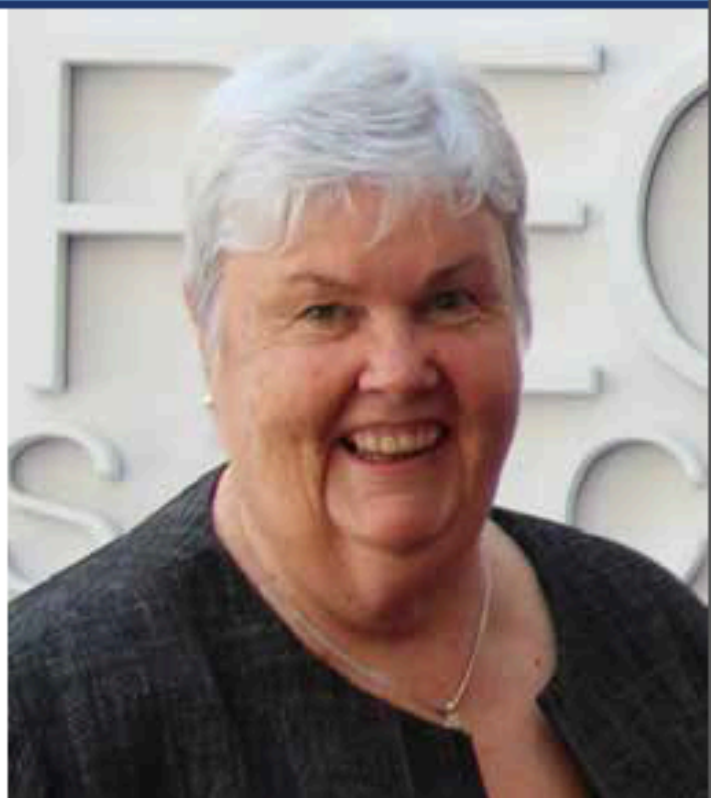
When the Mercy Foundation was established in 1990 the Sisters of Mercy North Sydney "hoped that it would be one of the new expressions of Catherine McAuley's charisms in a contemporary world." Twenty Five years later it continues to express the charisms of mercy, justice, compassion, empowerment and hospitality.

As recorded in *A Century of Mater Care* (2006), "The establishment of the Mercy Foundation was a significant turning point in the Sisters' history. The dilemma for the Sisters, after the closure of the Public Hospital, was how to maintain their mission to the poor and vulnerable. The idea of the Foundation was to distribute excess funds generated by the new Private Mater Hospital to those in need across the community. The Foundation was the means by which the Sisters continued their Mission and launched another era of Mater Healthcare"

The aim of the Mercy Foundation is to be an education-action program which seeks to be part of the struggle against poverty, oppression and other areas of human need. As a vibrant diminishing Congregation we are strongly committed to the Mercy Foundation as it continues to achieve its goals. We see this as our legacy.



Sister Loreto Conroy RSM Congregation Leader  
Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney



The Mercy Foundation  
looks To the past with  
gratitude and respect  
To the present with  
compassion To the  
future with confidence.



# At the service of human dignity

## Early Grants

1990 saw the establishment of the Mercy Foundation and the first grants made to community organisations across Australia. It was clear from the start about how the funds would be spent: 'to provide practical support for people working together to eliminate poverty and to create a more just social order.' This included financial support, education, collaboration and advocacy.

Some of the grants made in the early 1990s were to indigenous organisations and projects, to women's support groups, court support schemes, literacy projects, child care, rural projects, homeless women and young people, health projects and advocacy projects.

Over the past 25 years the Mercy Foundation has distributed more than \$4.5 million in grants. Over the same period it has given its collaboration and expertise through educational programs, advocacy efforts and specific community projects.



## Responding to the Rural Crisis

In 1994, rural Australia was in the grip of a deepening crisis as a result of persistent drought. The Mercy Foundation responded by providing \$40,000 to Centacare to provide a much needed counseling service to a large rural area, based out of West Wyalong. During this time, the Foundation also supported the Women of the Land Gathering at Gunnedah, and provided seed funding to the Coalition of Rural People with Disabilities.



# Social Justice

## Grant Making: FairWear

In 1993, the Mercy Foundation provided seed funding to Asian Women at Work, an organisation established to bring about justice to low paid Asian migrant women who worked as outworkers in the clothing and textiles industry. The women were often exploited as a result of unjust practices, some working for payments of \$2 per hour.

In 1996, the FairWear campaign was born. A coalition of church and community organisations pressured retailers and manufacturers to adopt a code of practice to prevent exploitation, educate consumers about ethical shopping and support unions to provide information to outworkers about their rights.

In April 1997, the NSW Minister for Fair Trading launched the FairWear campaign. The campaign was highly successful. One significant outcome was that 40 retailers signed up to a Code of Practice to protect the rights of outworkers in the clothing industry.

The Mercy Foundation provided significant funding to the campaign and was an active partner in seeking justice for outworkers in the clothing industry. Much was achieved from the partnership of Asian Women and Work and the Mercy Foundation. The FairWear campaign brought about structural change resulting in fair work practices and the protection of rights for migrant outworkers in Australia.



The campaign continues today. Read more about FairWear at [www.fairWear.org.au](http://www.fairWear.org.au)



# Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Social Justice

Asylum seekers are one of the most disadvantaged groups in our community. Most suffer from severe financial hardship and many are also experiencing the effects of trauma after fleeing their homeland for safety and asylum. Since 1990, the Mercy Foundation has worked extensively in partnership with other organisations to uphold the rights and return dignity to this marginalized group.

The Mercy Foundation provided funding to help establish the Asylum Seekers Centre in NSW, which was jointly sponsored by the Good Shepherd Sisters. The Mercy Foundation has since provided funding to The House of Welcome and the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre in Melbourne.

The Foundation has funded service workers, safe and sustainable housing, employment assistance, health care, English lessons, job skills, emergency housing, legal assistance, interpreting assistance, and microcredit schemes.

We continue to advocate for the release of children in detention, for fairer treatment of asylum seekers in the community, for an increase in the number of refugees resettled in Australia, for faster determination of refugee assessments, and the provision of services to assist asylum seekers and refugees in the community.





# Grant Making: NILS

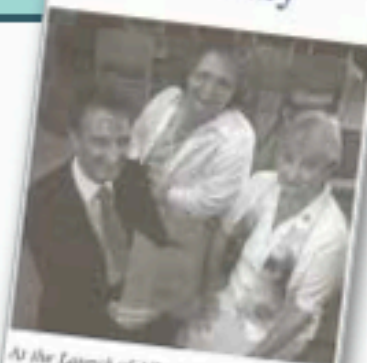
Into the 2000s the Mercy Foundation continued to identify new social justice projects and make grants to community organisations. There was a growing emphasis on environmental projects whilst continuing its social justice and advocacy work.

Some of the grants included projects to address sexual exploitation and trafficking in women, anti-violence, indigenous culture, grants to neighbourhood and women's centres and media projects.

The Mercy Foundation became involved in helping to establish NILS (No Interest Loans Schemes). These innovative initiatives were established to offer people on low incomes the opportunity to purchase a needed but expensive household item (such as fridges or washing machines) and repay the loan with no interest over an agreed payment period. This made it possible for families to obtain the item immediately and repay the cost over time. Many people on low and fixed incomes would otherwise need to resort to costly short term loans through the private sector.

NILS have now become common practice throughout Australia and continue to play an important role in assisting people living in poverty.

## No Interest Loan Scheme launched in Albury



*At the launch of Albury NILS:  
Scott Anderson (Ian Potter Foundation),  
Vivien Viss (Albury Wodonga Community  
Centre) and Helen Kourina (Mercy  
Foundation)*

**T**he Albury No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS) was launched on February 20th. The scheme is coordinated by the Albury- Wodonga Community Centre and will also be accessible to other community groups.

The scheme aims to assist people on low incomes to access credit to buy essential household goods such as washing machines and refrigerators. NILS makes it possible for people on a low income to take out a loan without the burden of high interest rates and with a re-payment plan that is tailored to their financial circumstances.

*Albury No Interest Loan Scheme is supported by the Mercy Foundation and the Ian Potter Foundation.*



# Ending Homelessness

Since 2008 the Mercy Foundation has had a special focus on homelessness, specifically on the goal of working to end homelessness. This is one of the most important social justice issues of our time. People who experience homelessness are some of the most vulnerable people living in poverty in our nation.

Those who experience chronic homelessness, which is a small percentage of total homeless numbers, often have multiple health problems and are at greater risk of death than people who are housed. Chronic homelessness can be ended with permanent housing and the right community supports to sustain that housing.

The Foundation introduced 'Grants to End Homelessness' in 2008 and since then we have focused on those projects and services that are working to end people's homelessness. There are multiple ways of doing this, but they all include linking people who are homeless with housing.

'Housing First' and 'Rapid re-housing' are the most effective ways to end people's homelessness. These are approaches that acknowledge that people cannot get their lives back together and receive appropriate support and health care or look for work without the stabilising effect of a permanent home to live in.

As well as Grants to End Homelessness, the Foundation actively works with the government, housing and homelessness sectors to influence policy and improve the use of evidence based activities that will work to end people's homelessness. The Foundation does not believe that a country as wealthy as Australia should have a long term population of people who are locked out of housing.







## Vulnerability Index

One of the best ways to involve local communities in ending chronic homelessness is to undertake 'Registry Weeks'. This is a methodology developed in the USA and based on research by Dr James O'Connell, a physician who works with homeless and formerly homeless people in Boston. The community comes together over three mornings to survey every homeless person in a local area, using the Vulnerability Index'. This serves to find out who is homeless as well as what health and housing needs they have. The community then works together to source housing supply and prioritise the most vulnerable into housing as soon as possible.

The Mercy Foundation co-ordinated a Registry Week in inner Sydney in 2010 and follow-up was primarily undertaken by the NEAMI Way2Home outreach team. By 2013 Way2Home had linked more than 200 homeless people into permanent housing. The Mercy Foundation was involved with Registry Weeks in Sutherland and Inner Sydney in 2015.

## Common Ground

The Mercy Foundation has supported the development of permanent supportive housing to ensure a supply of housing and support for people with high needs who have experienced chronic homelessness. The Foundation was particularly active with the Australian Common Ground Alliance – a network of organisations that supported the development of Common Ground permanent supportive housing in capital cities across Australia.

In Sydney in 2008, the Foundation established a working group to advocate for a Common Ground in Sydney. Working in partnership with corporate and community organisations as well as government entities a Common Ground at Camperdown was built with NSW government funding. Opening in 2011 it houses and supports formerly homeless people and people who need affordable housing.

The Mercy Foundation CEO continues to be active in supporting permanent supportive housing initiatives and she facilitates a monthly Community of Practice with Common Ground senior managers across Australia.

# Grants to End Homelessness



## Funding innovative ways to end homelessness

A grant to End Homelessness was provided to HomeGround Real Estate to set up a not-for-profit social enterprise that offers a professional property management service and reinvests revenue back into the community.

Thanks to property owners who generously provide their properties for rent at a reduced price, or in some cases, free of charge, the agency's portfolio includes properties that are leased to formerly homeless people and low-income rentals. HomeGround Real Estate is an innovative response to the growing issue of housing affordability.

## Helping local communities end homelessness

The wait for social housing in Murwillumbah is 16 years. The Mercy Foundation provided seed funding to set up a program that secured long term housing and intensive case support for homeless people living in the Murwillumbah Shire. Since the start of the project, Murwillumbah Accommodation Support Project has helped 67 people end or prevent their homelessness. This successful project was later funded by Clubs NSW.





# Research + Advocacy



Supporting robust academic research and good program evaluations lie at the root of good practice, effective advocacy and systems change. The Mercy Foundation has supported a number of research projects over the years, most recently – a study on older women and homelessness in Australia, called “Older women’s pathways out of homelessness in Australia”.

This research undertaken by Dr Maree Petersen and Dr Cameron Parsell from the University of Queensland found an emerging trend of higher numbers of women aged over 55 experiencing a housing crisis and homelessness in Australia. The majority of these women had led lives of housing stability and had raised children and cared for family members. The key reason for their later life housing crisis is poverty and the high cost of housing. The Foundation has been working hard to advocate to government for policy change and is working with the sector to identify projects to address the problem.

# Advocacy and Education



A key role of the Mercy Foundation has always been and continues to be, as an independent and fearless advocate on issues of poverty and injustice. We continue to make submissions to government as well as raise issues and awareness in the media and other public forums.

The Foundation has also always performed a role in training and education. From the start it fostered community training programs and in the 1990s and early 2000s it developed and managed a comprehensive urban ministry education program.

In recent years, the Foundation has hosted large public seminars on ending homelessness as well as smaller forums and workshops on emerging practice issues such as working with homeless people with traumatic brain injury and effective permanent supportive housing support programs.

Inspired by the Foundation's 'Housing When' forum in 2009, representatives from Wentworth Community Housing introduced a brand new 'Housing First' program. Since then, their program has permanently housed and supported many homeless individuals and families in outer western Sydney.



# Home in a Box

When people have been homeless for a considerable period of time, they no longer own the basic everyday items needed to set up a home. It's difficult to find the extra money needed to make a house a home when you are living on a tight budget.

Home in a Box was developed with the assistance of a young woman who had experienced homelessness and found it difficult to settle into her new home without basic homewares. The boxes contain high quality sheets, towels, pillows, doonas, cutlery, a dinner set, glasses, toaster, kettle, kitchen utensils and more.

Home in a Box is delivered by the service worker who has worked with the client to place them into permanent housing. The recipients are often overwhelmed when they receive the boxes.

The comments below come from a service worker:

"I have only just received feedback from the gentleman last week, he was in tears, he said he had never been given anything so beautiful and new.

He said "I am a rough old man, I'm not used to fluffy towels. I need for nothing, now I have everything".

Thanks to My House, Kennards Self Storage, Maxwell Williams, Holmans Commercial, Hospitality Products and the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney for their generous contribution to the Home in a Box project.



# Small Grants



A small grant was provided to the Bowen Residents Action Group to deliver after school activities for local children. The Homework Centre assists children to complete their homework, provides access to computers and encourages students to attend school. The program has been a great success and the additional facilities have been used by adults to take computer lessons. The centre also provides assistance to local refugee families, with reading and completing forms.



A creative art therapy project was funded under the small grants program to deliver age appropriate and culturally sensitive sexual health education to children and teenagers in remote Indigenous communities in Alice Springs.

Art2Healing developed a "train the trainer" program to ensure the program can be run again in the future.



A small grant to Bayley House enabled them to take five young women with high support needs to Phillip Island for three days. Most had never been away without their parents or carers before. The getaway was a great success, with the participants increasing their confidence and boosting self-esteem whilst relaxing in a holiday setting and enjoying new experiences. The getaway represented a significant milestone for each participant. Following the success of this program, more getaways are planned for the future.

# Cath Leary Social Justice Award

Since 1996 the Mercy Foundation has recognised an individual, group or organisation with a clearly notable record of work for change in social and cultural structures that impoverish and disempower people. The Mercy Foundation Social Justice Award was established in 1996 to mark the United Nations International Year for the Eradication of Poverty.

Through this Award, the Mercy Foundation wishes to affirm and promote:

- The important goal of addressing systemic social justice problems in Australia.
- The importance of work which is aimed at changing the things that cause people in our society to live in poverty, have inadequate access to education and/or employment, or experience homelessness or housing insecurity.
- The importance of doing this work in a way which demonstrates an attitude of fundamental respect for all people.
- Working to develop increased opportunities for people living in poverty.
- Advocacy activities - speaking up about and promoting solutions to structures and systems which contribute to inequities in our community.



In August 2014 the Board made a decision to name the annual social justice award, the Cath Leary Social Justice Award. This is to recognise the significant social justice work made by long term member of the Mercy Foundation Board, the late Cath Leary.

For many years Cath gave freely of her time, intellect and sharp sense of social justice to the Mercy Foundation.

Previous winners of the Award are:

- Asylum Seekers Resource Centre, Melbourne
- Micah Projects, Queensland
- Grocon
- Catherine House Adelaide



# Support The Mercy Foundation



Your donation will support programs that serve to alleviate poverty and disadvantage, increase knowledge of effective interventions, community education and for advocacy efforts to bring about change.

If you would like to make a donation or intend to make a bequest please complete the attached form and return to us reply paid or donate online at [www.mercyfoundation.com.au](http://www.mercyfoundation.com.au).

The Mercy Foundation is a not for profit, registered public benevolent institution. Donations over \$2 are tax deductible.

Your financial support not only enables us to continue our work, it urges us on to continue the work of those who came before us, for those who await justice. Thank you.

Help create change and support people in need

Your support will help the Mercy Foundation continue its work to alleviate poverty and disadvantage throughout Australia.



The Mercy Foundation is committed to social justice and structural change that brings about greater social equity and inclusion in our community. At the heart of all projects and activities is the service of human dignity.

Our focus is on ending homelessness for vulnerable women, women and children, and chronically homeless individuals, returning dignity to their lives.

The Mercy Foundation is a not for profit, registered public benevolent institution. Donations over \$2 to the Mercy Foundation are tax deductible.

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