

A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

SPRING 2026

NEWSLETTER

This Spring Edition celebrates the spirit of service, leadership, and community that continues to inspire the work of the Mercy Foundation.

A highlight of the season was the awarding of the **2026 Mercy Youth Awards**, recognising young people whose entries embody the Mercy values of compassion, courage, justice, and excellence. This year, the Mercy Youth Awards Art Competition focused on the theme of Unity. The winning entries demonstrated not only artistic talent, but also creativity, a deep connection with the theme, and a thoughtful understanding of the importance of belonging, inclusion, and our shared responsibility to build stronger and more compassionate communities.

We have also selected the winner of the **2026 Cath Leary Social Justice Award**, honouring individuals and groups whose actions reflect a deep commitment to social justice and the dignity of all people. Inspired by the legacy of Cath Leary, award recipients have shown outstanding dedication to supporting those who are vulnerable, promoting inclusion, and addressing issues of inequality.

This year, we recognise the tireless efforts of the Immigrant Women's SpeakOut Association. Their work is a powerful reminder of our shared mission of creating a more just and compassionate world.

Another significant moment for the Mercy Foundation was the **Commissioning of new Board Directors**, as well as myself, as CEO. During this special occasion, led by the team at Mercy Partners, we welcomed those who have accepted the responsibility of governance and stewardship within the Mercy Foundation. We are grateful for their willingness to share their expertise, wisdom, and leadership in service of our mission.

We welcome Peter Knoblanche, Brian Bissaker, and Erin Longbottom as new Board members and celebrate Kevin Gardner and Jennifer Burn AM, as they step into their new positions as Chair and Deputy Chair. As they begin their term, we thank the Board for their commitment and look forward to the contributions they will make in guiding the future of our organisation.

Together, these awards and celebrations embody the spirit of Mercy, reflecting our commitment to service, justice, and the dignity of all people and reminding us that to love is to serve and to serve is to love.

With gratitude & solidarity,

Maeve Brown



Congratulations to the newly Commissioned Board Directors and CEO of the Mercy Foundation!



Pictured L to R: Peter Knoblanche, Nicole Christensen, Sr Bernadette Mansour rsm, Maeve Brown (CEO), Louwana Saba, Brian Bissaker, Jane van Beek, Kevin Gardner (Chair), and Jon Anderson (Mercy Partners). Not pictured: Jennifer Burn AM (Deputy Chair) and Erin Longbottom.

2026 Cath Leary Social Justice Award

This year, the Mercy Foundation is proud to recognise the tireless work of the Immigrant Women's SpeakOut Association of NSW, Inc.



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 Award was established in 1996 to mark the United Nations International Year for the Eradication of Poverty and in 2014 the Award was renamed in honour of Cath Leary, a former Board member and friend of the Mercy Foundation, who passed away in 2014. Cath dedicated her life to social justice and bringing about positive change for marginalised people and the Mercy Foundation continues to recognise others who embody her same spirit and commitment.

This year, the Mercy Foundation is proud to recognise the work of Immigrant Women's SpeakOut Association of NSW, Inc. for their tireless efforts, leadership, and decades-long commitment to upholding human rights and human dignity, especially for women victim-survivors of domestic and family violence.

Immigrant Women's Speak Out (SpeakOut) is a key organisation for migrant and refugee women within NSW, supporting women experiencing domestic and family violence or who are at risk of homelessness due to violence or abuse. SpeakOut empowers women by providing information, guidance, and other direct services, while also helping women access the resources they need to live independently; free from violence, exploitation and discrimination.

In the last year, SpeakOut has supported 364 women and children, as well as an additional 600 community members through community strengthening activities including primary prevention workshops promoting healthy relationships. SpeakOut provides crisis accommodation but also works to advocate for systemic change to address the barriers that create long-term homelessness.

The Mercy Foundation has previously funded SpeakOut through our Grants to End Homelessness, including projects that have focussed on establishing an employment hub for migrant women with limited English and additional support specifically for migrant and refugee women living in SpeakOut accommodation, who have experienced DFV and homelessness, to access tailored support to become financially independent.

The Mercy Foundation Board recognises that SpeakOut strongly meets the Cath Leary Social Justice Award criteria through its long-standing work to address the systemic causes of poverty, homelessness and exclusion affecting migrant and refugee women, while combining advocacy for structural change with culturally responsive, respectful support that expands women's safety, independence and opportunity.

Our congratulations to the team at SpeakOut for their decades of service working to end homelessness and for continuing the vital work of advocating for the rights of migrant and refugee women at-risk of or experiencing domestic and family violence and homelessness.



2026 Mercy Youth Awards - Unity

This year the Mercy Foundation invited secondary students (years 7-12) to use their creativity to explore how unity can bring people together to address social justice challenges, particularly for those effected by homelessness and mental health issues. Through their artwork, students were encouraged to communicate messages of compassion, inclusion, understanding, and hope, showing how communities can stand together to support those who are often unseen and unheard.

We received 112 entries and the panel was very impressed by their creativity and thoughtfulness. The entries below are the winners of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd prize. To view the full images and descriptions, as well as the artwork from the Highly Commended entries, please visit our website:

www.mercyfoundation.com.au/grants-awards/mercy-youth-awards/

mercy foundation[®]
UNITY
THROUGH ART



YOUTH
2026 awards

Congratulations to the winners!

To view the full image and descriptions,
visit the Mercy Foundation website:
www.mercyfoundation.com.au/grants-awards/mercy-youth-awards/



1st Prize

Emma, Yr 10
Monte Sant' Angelo
Mercy College, NSW

My artwork, threads of hope, represents how unity and compassion can help support anyone who is experiencing homelessness and mental health challenges. The thread that continues through different people's experiences connects acts of kindness displaying that even small acts can make a difference in someone's life. In the middle of the page there is someone experiencing homelessness and someone extends a helping hand symbolising dignity and inclusion. My artwork communicates that when people come together they create positive change and contribute to the building of a stronger more connected community.



Equal 2nd Prize

Kate, Yr 10
Monte Sant' Angelo
Mercy College, NSW

My artwork depicts a simple act of kindness to help a homeless person. I decided to draw with a ballpoint pen on cardboard, as I was inspired by the many cardboard signs that I see with people who are experiencing homelessness. My drawing shows the simple act of kindness, which is getting a coffee for someone. I wanted to draw this because I believe that you don't have to make a big gesture or provide someone with money or presents to build unity, but carry out simple acts that let people know that you care and are there for them.



Equal 2nd Prize

Nidhi, Yr 12
Mac Robertson Girls
High School, VIC

My artwork explores how art can create unity by encouraging and eliciting empathy towards people affected by conflict. I incorporated newspaper fragments reporting on Middle Eastern conflicts to represent how suffering can become reduced to headlines, blunt statistics and obfuscating words on paper. In contrast, the girl's piercing, wide, alert eyes confront the viewer, emphasising that behind these stories are real people whose lives are being affected. Her partially obscured face reflects how individuals can become lost within larger conflict narratives. White weaving flowers symbolise hope and solidarity. Through combining these elements, I hope to reunite viewers with the humanity behind the news. Geographical difference is all there is. "Don't just read about me. See me."



Equal 3rd Prize

Angelina, Yr 8
University High School, VIC

This was a poor neighbourhood. From young students to elderly locals, people lived behind the same walls yet barely spoke due to indifference. One day, I grabbed my brush and started a mural. I invited everyone to draw freely, with no restrictions. In hindsight, that was a bad idea. A boy painted the map of his country, then someone protested there was no space for other cultures. An old lady said it should show the neighbourhood's history and drew her chihuahua. Everyone wanted their ideas to be at the centre. The wall looked disjointed, just like its creators. While painting together, people began talking. This old neighbourhood may seem poor, but its people's joy is rich. The wall is now a canvas for stories, with spaces left open for new people, cultures and memories to join.



Equal 3rd Prize

Estelle, Yr 10
Monte Sant' Angelo
Mercy College, NSW

My artwork, "The Lion and the Lamb," represents unity through the contrast of a powerful lion and innocent lamb resting against one another. The lamb is biblically presented with innocence, purity and sacrifice. The lamb represents Jesus, the Lamb of God. "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" John 1:29, stated by John the Baptist. The lamb is snuggled against a Lion, seen in scripture as a powerful figure, often compared to the devil. 1 Peter 5:8 "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." My artwork represents unity as it spotlights two contrasting powers coming together in peace.



HOME IN A BOX UPDATE

For over 15 years, the Mercy Foundation has been providing boxes of new linen, homeware, and kitchenware to people moving from homelessness into more permanent housing.

Boxes are requested by caseworkers working with individuals and families and the referring organisation ensures that the person receiving a box will have ongoing support, because it's not just access to a home, it's the support to keep it that is also essential.

In 2025-26, the Mercy Foundation supported 117 individuals through the Home in a Box Program and so far, in 2026-27 we've given out 24 boxes in support of 25 adults and 18 children, and it's only October!

M's Journey to Safety and Support

One of the people supported in recent weeks is a man we'll call M.

M. is in his 60's and has been homeless for over a decade - rough sleeping, couch surfing and living in unsafe housing. He has significant mental health issues, but is receiving ongoing treatment and support from the Community Mental Health Team at St Vincent's Hospital. M. recently secured permanent and safe housing through Homes NSW and moved into his unit in September.

His Clinical Nurse, recently shared this note of thanks, reminding us of the dignity and hope that something as simple as a box of essential household items can provide.

I dropped off the Home in a Box to M. this morning and he was absolutely delighted. He was so appreciative of everything provided.

I have never seen him so animated and excited. He opened everything straight away and carefully unpacked and put all of his new items away.

He even stripped his bed and put the new doona set on right then and there.

The beautiful painting was proudly placed on his fridge as soon as he saw it.

Thank you for your kindness and generosity. It was wonderful to see how much joy these gifts brought him.



LINENHOUSE

Kennards
Self Storage

MAXWELL
WILLIAMS
DESIGNER HOMEWARES

Hospitality
Products

HC
HC Distributors

Sisters of Mercy
North Sydney

TO MAKE A DONATION & FOR MORE INFORMATION

Your compassion can help break cycles of homelessness and exploitation.

To donate to the work of the Mercy Foundation, please visit our secure website at www.mercyfoundation.com.au or call us on 02 9911 7390.

 **mercy foundation®**
at the service of human dignity


A Ministry of: **MERCY PARTNERS®**