

From the CEO

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Permanent Supportive Housing - its role in ending homelessness

As many of you are already aware, the Mercy Foundation is a great supporter of the concept of 'Permanent Supportive Housing' (PSH) as a solution for people who have experienced chronic homelessness. It is often this group of homeless people who have multiple and complex needs and a supportive housing option can be the best way to end their homelessness and sustain them in their housing.

Housing First

The idea of 'Housing First' coupled with PSH is a concept that has a growing evidence base. Dr Sam Tsemberis, from Pathways to Housing in the US initiated this idea 20 years ago. What it does is ensure that the most vulnerable and chronically homeless people are prioritised for housing. No pre-requisites, just straight into housing as

soon as possible. The follow up support, through Assertive Community Treatment then serves to help people get their lives back together and deal with any ongoing health and other issues. The important part of this approach is understanding that a *stable place to call home* is the most effective base on which to build a recovery. Trying to study, manage health problems and find employment are almost impossible to do whilst living on the streets.

Finland is going to END chronic homelessness.

Finland is a great example of a small country that has made a commitment to ending chronic homelessness. In 2008, they committed to ending homelessness by 2015. They planned to halve it by 2011 and they have done this. The way they have done this is to pour funds into the development of new permanent affordable housing which,

most importantly, is attached to support for those who will need support to sustain their housing.

Research and the Mercy Foundation

Last week I gave a paper at the Australasian Housing Researchers' Conference in Adelaide. My paper brought together some of the compelling evidence about PSH and its capacity to significantly reduce chronic homelessness. We do not yet, in Australia, have a systemic approach to the development of PSH, nor is there yet widespread use of the model for formerly homeless people. I believe it is essential that Australia look closely at the success (and failures) of other countries and adopt and adapt those models that have been shown to work to end chronic homelessness.

Felicity Reynolds

Mercy Foundation Chair honoured

We warmly congratulate our Chair, Professor the Honourable Jennifer Boland, who was awarded an AM for service to the judiciary through the Family Court of Australia, to legal education, and to the community, particularly through social welfare organisations.

The staff and other members of the Board greatly appreciate her ongoing commitment to the work of the Mercy Foundation and congratulate her on a very well deserved honour.



A truly uplifting story!

Helping communities address social injustice in their local area has been focus of our small grants program for over 20 years.

Last year, the MJD Foundation applied for a small grant to purchase a wheelchair lift for the people of Elcho Island, a remote Indigenous community in the Northern Territory. There are a number of residents in the community who use wheelchairs and they need to access medical services in Gove and Darwin.

We are proud to be associated with a project that is truly at the heart of human dignity and we congratulate the team at the MJD Foundation and the local community for the successful implementation of this worthy initiative (see back page for details).



Photo: Galiwin'ku residents celebrating the lift.

A giant step towards ENDING chronic homelessness in Hobart

The first Greater Hobart Homelessness Survey, a joint initiative of Common Ground Tasmania and the Salvation Army, concluded on 28th November 2011.

Over 70 volunteers surveyed people sleeping rough in Greater Hobart about their housing and healthcare needs. The volunteers used a survey tool called the Vulnerability Index* (VI). The VI captures housing, health, institutional history and other relevant data to develop a register of people who are homeless and their housing and healthcare needs. This is a targeted approach that ensures the most vulnerable citizens can be prioritised for appropriate housing and support services that are matched with their needs.

Felicity Reynolds, Mercy Foundation CEO, assisted in this project by training volunteers and helping analyse the data received into usable information.

The survey was the first step of the 50 Lives 50 Homes community campaign to house and support Hobart's 50 most vulnerable homeless people within 6 months. The Vulnerability Index will continue to be used to gather data for Hobart's chronically homeless population to ensure that, the Hobart community, can house and support its most vulnerable citizens.

A summary of the key points from the Greater Hobart

Homelessness Survey data:

- Number of people identified: 75
- Number of people vulnerable: 42 (55%)
- Male: Female ratio: 79:21
- Average Age: 37
- Average years homeless: 4.9

Nearly 100 new accommodation places will become available in 2012 through the Common Ground supportive housing project.

We congratulate Liz Thomas and the team at Common Ground Tasmania and the Salvation Army on their efforts. With the support of the local community, Hobart may very well become the first city in Australia to end chronic homelessness.

**The Vulnerability Index is based on research by Dr Jim O'Connell of Boston Healthcare for the Homeless Program. His research shows 8 key health indicators place a homeless person at a higher risk of dying than a person with the same health indicators who is housed.*

For further information visit the Common Ground Tasmania website, www.commongroundtas.com.au

“With the support of the local community, Hobart may very well become the first city in Australia to END chronic homelessness”.

People surveyed were asked “What do you need to feel well and safe?”

This wordle shows the most popular answers by size. People living on our streets clearly want one thing above all.

A home.



How **your** support is helping to solve homelessness

With the support of our generous donors, many positive outcomes have resulted from the great work of the organisations we partnered with in the last 12 months.

Fab Pad

On the Central Coast of NSW, the Regional Youth Support Service (RYSS) piloted a program to help prevent young disadvantaged people from falling into homelessness. This entailed ongoing casework support combined with a living skills program to provide practical skills such as budgeting, shopping and cooking skills, and home set-up education. The objective was to teach young people painting, decorating, furniture rejuvenation and creative skills to make a piece of personalised art and then help them to decorate their own apartments on a budget to create their own home. The skill and discipline required to complete the tasks also assist them with employability, giving them new skills and pride in achievement many have not experienced before 'Fab Pad' (*Fabulous Pad*). The experience helps young people build positive relationships with adults and their peers and offers them an opportunity to build new supportive networks and friendships.

The results have been terrific. One young expecting couple who had been living in an old caravan moved into their small unit. They have designed and created a home that they take pride in and now have a beautiful 4 month old baby boy.

Another young man, re-establishing his life after spending time in detention, was offered a small unit which he has converted into his own home. This

young man is extremely proud of his unit and now has a comfortable home he has not had for many years.

In total, 6 Fab Pads have been created, for 2 expecting couples, 2 young men and 2 young women. All were previously homeless. In all cases, the young people have not only had the opportunity to make their house a home, but have had the benefit of case management to help them address their needs through Regional Youth Support Service.



A finished 'Fab Pad'.

Neuropsychological Assessments

The Haymarket Foundation was funded for comprehensive Neuropsychological Assessments of selected persons who have experienced long term homelessness. The assessments will provide better informed decisions about the optimal housing and support solutions, resulting in more clients remaining housed for longer periods of time. Ultimately, this will lead to a net reduction in homeless persons.

A total of 8 clients were referred for assessment. Three have been completed and five are pending. All clients are male, with the average age being 51 years and average years homeless being 12.75.

Whilst this project is in early days, the Haymarket Foundation is committed to establishing a relationship with these

men, providing continuity of care and working collaboratively with a number of agencies to ensure that the best housing and support solutions are provided for their clients.

Supporting Asylum Seekers

The aim of this project was to provide stable transitional shelter for asylum seekers living in the Sydney community during their application for a protection visa. There is a high level of homelessness amongst asylum seekers, as they are unable to access government or most mainstream services.

The House of Welcome was able to increase their housing stock from 7 to 10 properties. During the period of the grant, the House of Welcome provided 95 clients with a safe place to live. These people were at immediate risk of homelessness or were already in a homeless situation. The House of Welcome not only provided housing, but also access to wrap around casework support to help with their protection application and access to mental and medical support service (www.houseofwelcome.com.au).

The project also provided credible references for clients to access permanent housing. Asylum seekers continue to be one of the most vulnerable and marginalised populations in our community.



The Mercy Foundation is committed to social justice and structural changes, resulting in 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 chronic homelessness** for individuals in extreme need, and returning dignity to their lives.

A truly uplifting story!

Continued from front page

Last year, the MJD Foundation applied for a small grant to assist them in purchasing a wheelchair lift for the people of Elcho Island. Elcho Island is a remote Indigenous community in the Northern Territory. As a result of the incidence of MJD (Machado Joseph Disease, a hereditary neuro-degenerative condition) in the community, there are a number of residents who use wheelchairs and they need to access medical services in Gove and Darwin.

The number of residents in wheelchairs is expected to climb over the next 5 to 10 years. The only access to Darwin and Gove is by air. Before the wheelchair lift was installed, disabled passengers could only access the

regular passenger transport (RPT) service if they could weight bear and were manually assisted onto the plane, posing significant physical risks to both the person and assistant.

If the person could not weight bear even this was not possible and the alternative means of transport to 'town' was by private light charter plane at very high cost. These costs meant that access to essential and specialist services such as respite care were limited.

The Elcho Wheelchair Lift was launched on February 15 and over 100 community members attended the BBQ lunch. We congratulate the team at the MJD Foundation and the local community for the successful implementation of this worthy initiative.



Community members, MJD Foundation, Partners, Sponsors and other key service providers (FaHCSIA and East Arnhem Shire Council) in front of the lift at Elcho Island/ Galiwin'ku Airport.



Aged and Disability care workers Rosemary and Nancy celebrating at the launch.



Lift with sponsors on display



Traditional Owner Richard Gandhuwuy conducting the Welcome to Country with Shire Councillor Mavis Danganbarr Garrawurra and MJD Foundation Director

Small Grants Open

The Mercy Foundation Small Grants program is currently open. Grants of up to \$5,000 are available to community groups that address a local social justice issue. To apply for a small grant, please visit our website www.mercyfoundation.com.au and download the application form. Visit our grants page on our website to read about grant guidelines and the projects we have supported in the past. Applications close 31 March 2012.

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Please complete this form and send it to:
Mercy Foundation
40 Rocklands Road
Wollstonecraft NSW 2065

All donations over \$2 are tax deductible. Donations by credit card can be made securely through our website, www.mercyfoundation.com.au or call our office on 02 9911 7390 and our helpful staff will process your donation for you.

I would like to donate (please circle):

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- Enclosed is my cheque /money order for the Mercy Foundation
(*please make cheques payable to the Mercy Foundation*)
- I am interested in hearing about your events
- Please send me information about leaving a bequest to the Mercy Foundation
- Please sign me up for your e-newsletter (please write your email address above).

A receipt will be mailed to you. Please visit our website to find out more about the work of the Mercy Foundation and about homelessness, or call 02 9911 7390.

Thank you for your generosity.

SAVE THE DATE

Please mark **Friday, 22 June** in your diaries for the Mercy Foundation Dinner at the Westin Hotel, Sydney. Our guest of honour will be the Hon. Justice Virginia Bell AC. Virginia is a justice of the High Court of Australia and is well known for her dedication and support of the economically and socially disadvantaged

members of our community. On Australia Day this year, Justice Bell was appointed the top honour of a Companion of the Order of Australia.

Please join us for an entertaining evening and help raise funds to END chronic homelessness.

Contact our office on 02 9911 7390 for details or email events@mercyfoundation.com.au for more information.

