

From the Mercy Foundation Team

The Mercy Foundation is committed to addressing the root causes of disadvantage across Australia. Our focus is ending homelessness, ending modern slavery and helping communities address social justice issues at the grass roots.

This year we received 43 EOIs for our Grants to End Homelessness program. Whilst the level of need in communities around Australia is growing, we are encouraged by the many community groups and organisations bringing about positive change for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Later in this newsletter we highlight some of the outstanding outcomes of current grant recipients. To quote Australia's Human Rights Commissioner, Lorraine Finlay, these individuals are "bringing human rights to life".

As the year concludes, we have much to be grateful for. The vision of our founders, the Sisters of Mercy North Sydney, guides our mission of addressing social disadvantage and bringing about systemic change. We are grateful to the Sisters who continue to offer us much encouragement and to our Chair and Board Members who provide us with guidance and support. We are thankful to our partners across the country, determined to bring about better outcomes for disadvantaged women, men and children. We are thankful to the Mater Hospital Sydney for their significant financial support, and to our donors and supporters, whose generosity has transformed lives and created lasting change.

As the end of the year approaches, we wish you a joyful Christmas, a restful break, and a peaceful New Year.

With gratitude,

Sr Bernadette Mansour RSM, Volunteer

Lara Turner, Finance Manager

Leesa Feilen, Projects and Communications Lead

Helena Hassani, Modern Slavery Lead

Sue Mowbray, Chief Executive Officer

“Bringing human rights to life”.

Lorraine Finlay



Restoring Dignity

This year a record 135 Home in a Box sets have helped families and individuals settle into their new home after a long experience of homelessness. Thank you to our generous donors and to our suppliers, who make this project possible. We recognise and appreciate the dedicated service workers who help find safe, affordable and appropriate homes for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

The Order of Malta Craft Group has provided beautifully knitted and crocheted blankets, as has Sr Patricia from the Sisters of Mercy North Sydney. These handmade gifts add a personal touch for each recipient of a Home in a Box.

We received this feedback from a Senior Practice Leader:

I want to share a poignant moment we experienced during a recent Home in a Box drop off. One of our clients, woman who had an extensive history of homelessness and who has faced numerous hardships, became visibly upset and cried when she received the items. Her emotional reaction was a powerful reminder of how much your support means to our most vulnerable consumers. It's moments like these that highlight the importance of your work and the significant impact you have on the lives of our homeless folk.

Thank you for helping us make this project possible.



Grants to End Homelessness

This year, grants were provided to nine organisations to help prevent or end homelessness, particularly concerning women.

- A grant to **Uniting WA** is providing housing and support to four young mums and their children, who would otherwise be homeless.
- A project funded with the **Older Women's Network Blue Mountains** has already housed 20 women aged over 55 years, who were at risk of or experiencing homelessness.
- A grant to **Prison Network** in Victoria is developing a pilot program to assist women leaving prison to access housing, employment and therapeutic care.
- A project with the **Northern Community Legal Centre** has assisted 33 clients to resolve legal issues that might otherwise lead to homelessness or financial hardship.
- **Cana** has assisted 46 women and men to participate in an Art Therapy program that has helped 28 people to access housing and maintain their tenancies.
- Grants to **Lighthouse Foundation** and **Sisters of Charity Foundation** has helped to house and support a total of ten survivors of modern slavery.
- Grants were also provided to the **Western Australia Alliance to End Homelessness** to develop a supportive housing modelling project and another grant awarded to the **House of Welcome** is currently assisting women to find employment and long-term housing.

Housing is a fundamental human right. Unsafe or precarious housing and homelessness is deeply detrimental to health and well-being.

We congratulate all our grant recipients who work tirelessly to end and prevent homelessness for some of the most marginalised groups in our country.



Ending Modern Slavery

From our Modern Slavery Lead, Helena Hassani

Modern slavery, particularly forced marriage, continues to remain a significant issue and concern in Australia. This practice involves compelling someone to marry without fully or freely consenting, often through coercion, threat or deception. This can occur when an individual is unable to understand the nature and effect of marriage due to their age and mental capacity.

Despite forced marriage being criminalised since 2013, there has been a spike in the number of cases and referrals in recent years. This year, there were two major forced marriage convictions in Australia.

The first case was in Perth and sadly resulted in the death of a newlywed woman. The second case occurred in

NSW, where two teenage girls were rescued from forced marriage after escaping their father and seeking help from police. They were later supported by a forced marriage organisation and the Australian Federal Police.

Many forced marriages are unreported for several reasons, especially when the victim/survivors fear getting their loved ones in trouble or are unaware that support is available.

These cases demonstrate the need for ongoing efforts in the prevention of forced marriage in Australia and to provide support and assistance to those who are experiencing these violations of human rights and abuses. These cases also show that raising awareness about forced marriage is critical both for prevention and intervention purposes.



Social Justice Small Grants

This year, 17 innovative projects were seed funded through the Social Justice Small Grants program, to increase social equity, promote inclusion and challenge unjust structures and systems. Our hard working grant recipients have achieved remarkable results as illustrated by these three examples:

Prison Fellowship Australia: Changing women's lives post-release

This project helps women navigate life after prison. The aim of the project is to reduce social isolation, build community connections, improve mental health and reduce recidivism. Forty-six women participated in the program. The team started working with women 6 months before release and continue to provide support for 12 months post release.

The project met all its expected outcomes and due to its success, it will continue into the future. The project is helping women change their expectations of the future to successfully reintegrate with community connections and support.

"This grant has changed the course of many women's lives. We can't always measure how much, as we don't know what the outcomes would have been without it, but through our observations and the feedback of women and people involved in the prisons, we can see a well above average success rate for women who have been involved. So, thank you!"

Bidi Koorliny: building new skills to prepare for a restorative justice process

This is our second grant to Bidi Koorliny, working to bring about restorative justice in Collie, WA. A 10-week program provided 5 participants, including Aboriginal Elders, with basic skills for facilitating Peacemaking and Community Circles tailored to the

Aboriginal community in Collie. The participants continue to meet regularly to apply skills to actual scenarios of crime and wrongdoing in their community. This will assist them in preparing a restorative justice process that is specific to Aboriginal culture in the south west region of Western Australia.

Eritrean Families in the Hume and North, Melbourne, Victoria: Serving the community's needs while preserving a rich cultural heritage

The Jabana project aimed to support the integration and well-being of Eritrean women with skill-building workshops, community activities, and health and wellness sessions. This project helped revive the traditional Jabana communication platform among three generations of Australian women from Eritrean backgrounds.

The project's goal was to foster a sense of community and empower participants with the tools to navigate their new environment with confidence.

Twenty Jabana gatherings were attended by 50 to 70 women and girls from the Eritrean community. The success of the Jabana project was in creating a culturally sensitive, responsive, and empowering program for Eritrean-Australian women. The program continues, helping to effectively serve the community's evolving needs while preserving their rich cultural heritage.

Mercy Youth Awards for 2024

Congratulations to the winners of the Mercy Youth Awards! In this year's competition, students were challenged to think about how their purchases impact on people and planet, considering issues such as environmental impact, sustainability and forced or exploited labour.

We received a number of excellent entries that interpreted the theme in diverse and creative ways. Please refer to our website www.mercyfoundation.com.au for more information.



First Prize: Carina C, Year 10



Second Prize: Catherine W, Year 10



Third Prize: Matilda W., Year 10

Home in a Box



135 Homes and Counting

Since 1 January, we have distributed 135 Home in a Box sets to families and individuals who are moving from a long period of homelessness into their own home. Many have faced hardship such as domestic violence, illness, family breakdown, trauma, disability, and unemployment. They all share the same challenge: they cannot afford the basic household items needed to make a house a home. That's where Home in a Box comes in!

We recently received this feedback about the Home in a Box project:

"With the generous assistance of the Mercy Foundation, I have been able to provide a number of my clients who have experienced long term homelessness as a result of significant domestic and family violence with a Home In a Box.

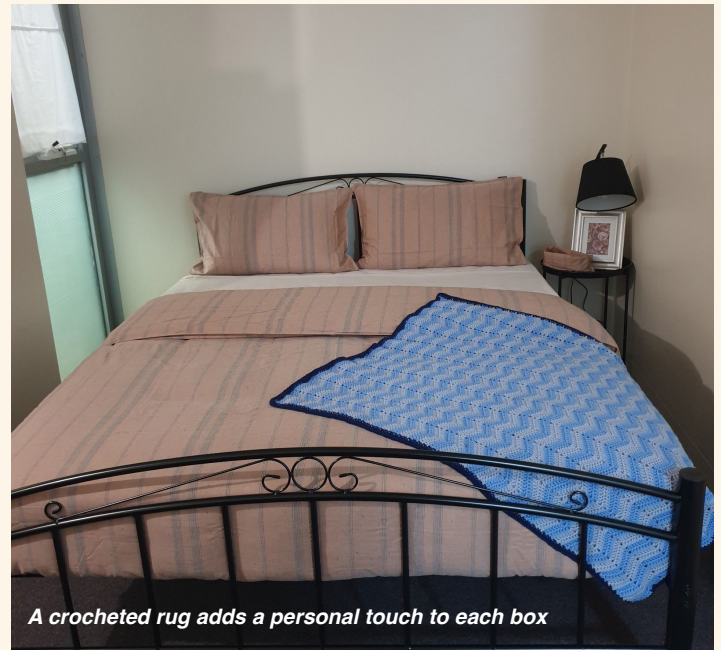
I would especially like to sincerely thank Leesa at the Mercy Foundation for the care, compassion, generosity and hard work you all do every day!"

Coming from homelessness, the women I case manage have no belongings. There are certain things that we can source however the items that make a home are very difficult and often expensive to acquire.

Mercy Foundation's Home in A Box fills this gap by providing these quality items that will belong to the client. These items make the home. Quality linen, pillows, towels... make a bedroom. Cutlery, plate sets, cooking utensils, a dustpan...things we might take for granted, make a kitchen.

For a woman who has experienced violence and abuse to have a safe and secure home with brand new quality items is a huge step towards healing and a renewed sense of dignity.

The women I have provided the Home in A Box to have expressed deep gratitude and are overwhelmed at the kindness of Mercy Foundation. The sense of joy and vicarious pride I feel as a Practitioner when I go to my clients homes and they show me around and where they have put the items they have been given is really gratifying. Being shown a freshly made bed, towels in a bathroom, a cutlery drawer, the plates and bowls cupboard... these things are so important.



A crocheted rug adds a personal touch to each box



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

Donation Amount (donations over \$2 are tax deductible) A tax deductible receipt will be mailed to you.

Name:

Address:

(Please tick) Cheque Money Order Master Card Visa

Card Number: / /

Cardholder's Name: Signature:

Post this form to Mercy Foundation, 40 Rocklands Road 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.

Thank you for your support, it is greatly appreciated.

