



Justice News

Newsletter of the Geelong Catholic Social Justice Committee

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Homelessness and Housing Affordability

The Report of the 2004 Senate Enquiry into Poverty and Financial Hardship stated that there were 100,000 homeless people in Australia on the night of the 2004 Census and it is estimated that 30,000 of these were in Victoria. Of the homeless households, 78% were single person households, 13% were couples and 9% were families. The number of homeless has been exacerbated in recent times by the repeated increases in interest rates leading to a lack of affordability for those seeking to purchase homes which, in turn, has meant more people seeking to rent properties. As a result vacancy rates for rental properties are very low (less than 1%) and rents have risen (12.5% in metropolitan Melbourne in 2007) making it very difficult, or nearly impossible, for those on low incomes, or receiving social security payments, to find housing.

It is estimated that there are 35,000 families in Victoria on the waiting list for public housing, with almost 2000 of these being in the Geelong region. Furthermore the number of families in the Geelong region on the urgent list such as those who are at risk of recurring homelessness, who are coping with a disability, or who have special housing needs, has risen to 276 which is 12% more than at the end of last year.

Governments of all persuasions have either failed to recognize the increasing problems associated with homelessness, or simply ignored them

In Geelong and the Barwon Region alone, it has been conservatively estimated that there are 20 young people between the ages of 12 and 18 years who are homeless on any single night of the week. Youth homelessness is strongly linked to family abuse including physical and sexual abuse, family conflict and unemployment. On leaving home this can lead to drug and alcohol abuse and mental disability including self harming. Crisis, short term and longer term accommodation and support are used to assist these young people. Too frequently, however, those exiting crisis accommodation have nowhere to go.

Providing a roof over the heads of the homeless does not solve their problems. For women, homelessness is strongly linked to domestic and family violence, which in turn can be linked to alcohol and /or drug abuse, gambling problems or mental disability. For families, the lack of suitable rental housing and its lack of affordability, gambling and unemployment are central causes of homelessness.

Unfortunately, over the last 10-15 years, governments of all persuasions have either failed to recognise the increasing problems associated with homelessness, or simply ignored them. In a wide ranging inquiry into youth homelessness this year, the National Youth Commission made ten major recommendations. Under a broad housing strategy it recommended that there would need to be a multi-billion dollar investment in public and community housing; taxation incentives to encourage affordable private rental housing, explicit policies and housing form designs that facilitate access for young people, and a range of essential support measures. The Rudd Government has unveiled a \$2.2 billion housing package with \$623 million being set aside for a new National Rental Affordability Scheme which the Government claims would create up to 50,000 rental properties. We will just have to wait and see when or if this will happen!



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Bill Snowdon



Student group at Bahay Tuluyan Conference

Warrnambool, Salesian College Sunbury, Loreto Ballarat and Sacred Heart College - students were exposed to issues of social justice. The main focus of the day was to learn about Bahay Tuluyan. Students were made aware of what street children go through on a daily basis to simply survive. The real life accounts given by two street children showed how their choices impacted on their fight to survive.

The students participated in a number of different activities including a debate on human (and particularly children's) rights and a work shop designed to explore world issues with a view to finding possible solutions. Students were shown a dance performed by two young women from the Philippines who work with Bahay Tuluyan. The dance expressed what they went through in their childhood as street children.

After attending the conference students commented on their own appreciation of the comfortable lives they live. "Bahay Tuluyan has given life to the children in the Philippines, and has shown us a new point of view to see the world from. It was a great day to remember."

Adrianna Maddalon, Rebecca Goring and Isabelle Hovey

Year 8 Sacred Heart College Geelong.

Bahay Tuluyan is one of the charities Year 8 students of Sacred Heart College will fundraise for this year. One of the presenters at the conference was former Sacred Heart College student, Sandra Chaves. In year 12 (2003), Sandra did her community service at Outpost; she has since continued to help out every fortnight. After leaving Sacred Heart Sandra decided to do voluntary work in the Philippines for two months where she worked with children who had been either neglected, sexually abused or abandoned. The time in the Philippines strengthened her interest in helping children in need. Sandra continues her support of the NGO she was working with and continues to fundraise.

Further information about Bahay Tuluyan can be found at www.bahaytuluyan.org/

Tri-UMPH Festival

Tri schools - United in making poverty history

A Festival inspired by youth to reach out to the local community and to peoples suffering poverty

This upcoming Festival seeks to raise both awareness and funds for the disadvantaged and underprivileged in our society, both globally and locally. The major purpose of the event is to raise funds for a community project in East Timor in the town of Viqueque. The focus is on primary education.

The event will be held on **1 September at the St Joseph's College** campus. The attendance of years 7-12 students and staff is expected to be in excess of 4,000 people. It will provide an opportunity to strengthen bonds within the community, in particular between the three city Catholic secondary schools of St Joseph's, Sacred Heart and Clonard Colleges, as we all strive together for justice.

Further information can be obtained from Simon Cahir at simonc@sjc.vic.edu.au

The Azaadi Project

For the past five years a group of friends from Queenscliff, Victoria, has been supporting a number of young Afghani and Iraqi asylum seekers. These young men had fled persecution in their homelands, and made the long dangerous journey to seek peace and safety. Sadly, they found themselves detained in the soul-destroying environment of Australia's remote Immigration Detention Centres. Many spent up to five years incarcerated there.

Threatened with the prospect of indefinite detention, and the pain of ongoing separation from family, two of the young men made the heart-breaking decision to return to their war-torn homelands. Eventually our other young friends were released from Baxter Immigration Detention, and came to live with their Australian support families in Queenscliff and Geelong.

The Azaadi Project was born out of many shared meals, the mingling of cultures and memories of traditional Afghani cooking. Our young men's confidence had been shattered by the years of detention. We hoped that by involving them in a shared project, there would be many opportunities for them to develop new skills and to regain their self-esteem. Together we prepared a range of Chutneys and Kasaundis that reflect the blending of the spicy Middle East and Central Asian cuisine with the milder tastes of the Aussie palate.

Community response to the Azaadi Project and to the Azaadi product itself has been overwhelmingly positive. We have maintained this voluntary project as a means to assist our young refugee friends and their families. All of these family members live in precarious circumstances overseas, whilst waiting for family reunion. The two young men who reluctantly returned to their homelands now live with danger and uncertainty. The Azaadi Project continues to support them and their families.

The word AZAADI means FREEDOM!

Cathie Bond

Rural Australians for Refugees, Queenscliff

The AZAADI Chutneys and Kasaundis include the hot and spicy flavours of the Tomato Kasaundi and the Eggplant Kasaundi, the authentic Afghani Lemon Chilli Pickle, and the warm and spicy Sweet Date and Citrus Chutney. For those who prefer a milder, chilli-free chutney, we have produced a gentle but richly-flavoured Abraysham Tomato Chutney, and the piquant, exotic, Fragrant Pomegranate Chutney. All these chutneys sell at \$6.50 a jar, and all of the proceeds go directly to refugee family support.

If you are interested in purchasing any of the Azaadi chutneys, please contact Cathie on 5258 3193.



The No Interest Loans Scheme - NILS

Assisting peoples on low incomes

We live in a society that can mainly provide a comfortable life for most of us. We may complain about the rising cost of petrol or food but for most of us we do not have to choose between eating or driving our car, and the breakdown of a household item such as a fridge, washing machine or television may be an irritant but not a disaster. Living on a low income, however, is like living on a knife-edge: just one bill or unexpected cost can place an individual or family into financial crisis.

Families may seek assistance from local welfare agencies which are recording at least 20 requests for whitegoods per week. However, welfare agencies now have policies that preclude the donation of used electrical goods. Thus many people turn to buying these essential items from businesses using credit with high interest (19.5%-25%), renting whitegoods which have been found to result in people paying double for the item (at times spending 25% of their Centrelink benefits on the rental agreement).

These repayments only exacerbate the financial difficulties being experienced. However, the lack of a refrigerator means food can spoil or there is a need to shop more frequently. This places additional costs and stress on already stressed families. To be poor in a rich society is doubly difficult. The poor are unable to afford the economic and social participation in that society while continually being bombarded with advertisements about what is needed to live a happy life. But Geelong will soon have a new program that may go some way to assisting peoples on low incomes to be able to purchase household goods without financial distress.

A No Interest Loans Scheme (NILS), based on the Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services scheme which has operated in various parts of Victoria for a number of years, has been developed. It will initially be auspiced by St Vincent de Paul and will be operating within a few months. NILS is based on the social justice principles of addressing inequality and disadvantage by providing a service based on dignity, trust, mutual respect and non-judgment.

It is but a small answer to a bigger problem but one that may empower both the recipients and the wider community to advocate for change on issues relevant to people experiencing financial exclusion. The Geelong Catholic Social Justice Committee has been one of the initiators of the scheme through two representatives on the NILS steering committee.

Elsie Teer

Elsie Teer is a Geelong Catholic Social Justice Committee representative on the NILS committee



We're on the web!

Earlier issues of *Justice News* and further information about the Social Justice Committee are available on the website of the Justice Unit of the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

<http://www.melbourne.catholic.org.au/ccjdp/geelongdeanery.htm>

Justice News is a publication of the Geelong Catholic Social Justice Committee, and is authorised and published by the Committee's co-ordinator, Gordon Snowdon, c/- St Mary's Parish Office, 150 Yarra Street, Geelong 3220.

The Committee welcomes letters and comments in response to items published in **Justice News**. All letters and comments are placed before the Committee and will be replied to wherever possible. The Committee can be contacted via its coordinator, Gordon Snowdon. The Committee's contact person for media enquiries is Michael Leahy on 5256 1656.

A "Hand Up", not a "Hand Out"

David Butler, a member of the Geelong community concerned with social justice issues, has written a book entitled **A "Hand Up", not a "Hand Out"**. It examines the best ways to help others help themselves, and has many references to East Timor.

One of the book's testimonials is from former First Lady of Timor-Leste, Kirsty-Sword-Gusmao, Founder and Chairwoman of the Alola Foundation:

"Our country, the world's newest nation, relies on its friends as it undertakes the difficult task of reconstruction and development. Through his visits to Timor-Leste, David has come to admire what our country is achieving, especially in the lives of the young. May David's book inspire readers worldwide to continue to extend their hands in practical ways for the well-being and full development of our people".

For further information or to obtain a copy of the book please contact David on 5243 3036 or at dmbutler@tpg.com.au. You can also check out the website at www.ahandupnotahandout.com

