

Building better lives together



Brotherhood
of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty

Building better lives since 1930

Mind the gaps: caring for a husband with younger onset dementia

Our Christmas campaign last December highlighted the story of a member of our Younger Onset Dementia Group. Here we tell the story of Debbie, who now cares for her husband who also has younger onset dementia.

Debbie Stevenson is 55 and her 56 year old husband has dementia. While this is not what she expected in her early 50s, she does find some positives in the sea of challenges they face.

Debbie counts her blessings her husband does not know he has younger onset dementia, so he is quite happy. And she has managed to run their business herself over the 18 months since he was diagnosed, so their finances are stable. But the challenges she faces are numerous. Some behaviours related to her husband's dementia can be draining and demanding.

'It's incredibly frustrating when somebody's asking you the same thing over and over. Answering the same question 20 times in 20 minutes actually almost pushes you over the edge,' she says.

Then there's what's called 'sundowning'. Each night, her husband gets restless, and insists they go out. To settle him, Debbie takes him out every evening between six and nine, even though she really needs to wind down after juggling her work commitments and carer responsibilities throughout the day.

One of the supports the Brotherhood's Frankston Banksia Services Centre provides the couple is respite care. On Friday mornings, a respite worker takes Debbie's husband out for a coffee and a game of table tennis, giving her a break.

The Brotherhood's research evaluation of our Caring for Carers support program for carers of people with dementia found women are more likely to assume the responsibility of care for people with dementia

But Debbie is most grateful for the Centre's assistance with navigating bureaucracy. As her husband is under 65, he is not eligible to receive funded dementia care: too young to even be allowed a formal assessment. Debbie feels there is a gap in the system for those in their situation, and the change she would most like to see is a central point of information about what services are available.

'It's a minefield for me as a carer to find out what help is available to me: where it comes from, how



Debbie Stevenson

much it costs, how often I can have it. Without the people at the Brotherhood of St Laurence I just don't think I could get through it.'

'They understand what I'm going through. They see it all the time and very few people can really understand what it's like.'

See more information about our support for people living with younger onset dementia here: www.bsl.org.au/services/people-with-dementia/younger-onset-dementia-group/

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

We at the Brotherhood are deeply aware that poverty and exclusion disproportionately affects women and children. Since our founding during the Great Depression, the poverty-reduction services we deliver have recognised this fact. Moreover, it is women staff and volunteers who have been at the forefront of delivering these services, helping others to build better lives.

Our recent Annual General Meeting (AGM), held late last year, recognised the contribution women have made – and continue to make – towards our vision of an Australia free of poverty.

The 150 attendees at the AGM were treated to a photo exhibition that showcased the impact women have made within the Brotherhood. In this first edition of *Building better lives together* for 2016, we hope you enjoy some of those moving photos.

We know that gender inequality remains a driver of poverty for women and children, and many of our programs and services aim to address this precise issue.

Our research, which informs our practice on the ground, also

continues to shine a light not only on the disparities between the opportunities offered to men and women, but also the positive role that carers – who are predominantly female – play in supporting vulnerable people.

Along with her dedicated team, the Brotherhood's General Manager of Research and Policy, Professor Shelley Mallett, is leading a new study that explores the relationship between poverty and gender.

The study sits well within our new Strategic Plan 2015-2020, which notes how changes to household formation and gender roles – including the distribution of caring responsibilities – present both opportunities and risks.



Tony Nicholson

As the Brotherhood settles into the New Year, fully aware of the challenges and potential that lie ahead, we would like to acknowledge the continued support we receive from our supporters and donors. In particular, we thank those who gave generously towards last year's Christmas Appeal. It is because of your kind support that the Brotherhood can continue working towards an end to social injustice.

Tony Nicholson

Support for youth with launch of Transition to Work

The Brotherhood was delighted in February to partner with the Australian Government in implementing the national Transition to Work program in Melbourne – in Broadmeadows, Frankston and on the Mornington Peninsula.

This follows our consistent advocacy backed by sound research over the past two years to government, policy makers and the media, about the importance of helping young people who face difficulties getting into sustainable employment in the workforce.

High youth unemployment is a generational crisis that Australians cannot afford to ignore. Our globalised economy makes it hard for young people to find entry-level jobs. This puts them at risk of being locked out of stable employment. We need new approaches, such as Transition to Work, to assist young people to build the qualifications, skills, experience and networks they need for secure employment.

The Brotherhood has a strong footprint in the Frankston, Mornington Peninsula and Broadmeadows areas, and our suite of youth programs are a cornerstone of our activities there.

Owing to the strong network of community organisations we have helped to build, our influence and impact in addressing youth unemployment extends beyond Victoria. We are working with over ten organisations across the country, assisting these groups to deliver the Transition to Work service and partnering with them – on an action research program to evaluate it.

See more about our services for young people here: www.bsl.org.au/services/young-people/

Still not equal: the accumulation of poverty across women's lives

Dina Bowman from our Research and Policy Centre shares our latest understanding of the many forces that drive women's poverty in Australia.

Women accumulate fewer assets than men across the course of their lives and are much more likely to be carers than men, which also affects their ability to earn and save. And this means women are more likely to be poor.

Despite gains made in girls' educational attainment and some recent equal pay successes, women in Australia still earn less than men. The Workplace Gender Equity Agency reports that the gender pay gap has stayed between 15% and 19% for the past two decades.

The consequences of a lack of gender equity at work and at home accumulate across the life course.

The gender pay gap has consequences that accumulate. The National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling estimates a woman with a Bachelor's degree can expect lifetime earnings to be 20% less than for a similarly-qualified man (\$2.3 million vs \$2.8 million). The gap is worse for mothers. Mothers with a Bachelor's degree can expect lifetime earnings of \$1.8 million, compared with \$3.3 million for similarly-qualified fathers – a difference of \$1.5 million.

In Australia women tend to be responsible for unpaid work: cleaning, cooking and caring. A recent OECD report estimated that women in Australia do on average 5.2 hours per day of unpaid work compared with 2.9 hours done by men.

Many families in Australia manage the tension between paid work and family responsibilities by the man working full-time and the woman working part-time. This short-term solution to managing work and family pressures has long-term consequences for women's careers and their financial independence. This is because part time work is often casual and lacks opportunities for advancement, and women tend to work in feminised occupations, such as childcare, which are low paid. Furthermore, when relationships cease, women are hard hit, with sole mothers among those who experience the highest level of financial hardship.

The consequences of a lack of gender equity at work and at home accumulate across the life course. Indeed, the Australian Human Rights Commission described the incremental impacts of women's part time or casual work, intermittent workforce participation, and low levels of superannuation as the accumulation of poverty.

This is why recent studies undertaken by our researchers in the Research and Policy Centre have focussed on the challenges facing women in Australia. For example, the recently completed Australian Research Council Linkage study undertaken with researchers from the University of Melbourne, University of Canberra and Curtin University, in partnership with Jobs Australia, pointed out the particular challenges facing older women in the workforce.



Dr Dina Bowman

Our research showed women experience age discrimination differently from and at an earlier age than men, with serious consequences for their economic security in later life.

In a recent book *No! Not equal* my co-author Yvette Maker and I drew on the Brotherhood's research over the past 30 years to examine why girls and women in Australia continue to experience inequality. Importantly, we made some suggestions about what is required to create a more equitable Australia, including the need for reliable up-to-date data, equitable income support and workplace policies, and a commitment to structural and cultural change to enable real sharing of work and care across the life-course.

Dr Dina Bowman leads research and policy on Work and Economic Security in the Brotherhood's Research and Policy Centre.

For more information about our research and policy work email Dina at dbowman@bsl.org.au or visit www.bsl.org.au/knowledge/

Photo exhibition celebrates the contribution of women to the Brotherhood

A photo exhibition celebrating women's contribution to the Brotherhood's work for an Australia free of poverty was unveiled at our last Annual General Meeting in November.

Notable women such as Connie Benn, Jess Millott, Jessie Sumner, Thelma Tuxen, Jan Carter, Alison McClelland, Jenny Trethewey, Cath Scarth, Sarina Greco and Prue Myer have helped shape our programs and research and brought a new flavour to leadership.

Female volunteers have been the backbone of our community stores, and continue to volunteer in varied roles, from mentoring refugee women to working with young people and seniors.

Find out more about our history here:
www.bsl.org.au/about/our-history/

1. A woman with her child, circa 1960, speaking with a social worker from our Social Service Bureau, which operated from 1943 to 1971, helping with basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter and money.

2. Volunteers sorting through donated goods at our Salvage Division warehouse in Westgarth St, Fitzroy in the 1960s. Bishop Sambell started the division in 1957.



3. Jess Millott in the Dining Room of Coolibah Club, where she was Manager for 23 years from 1962. Awarded the British Empire Medal in the 1980 New Year Honours list. Millot House named in her honour.

4. Connie Benn. Appointed head of the Family Centre Project in 1973. Served as Director of Social Policy, Research and Innovation 1977-82. First woman on our Board. Connie Benn Centre named in her honour.

Free pick up and drop off make donating goods easy

We rely on the generous donation of our supporters to stock our 21 Community Stores across greater Melbourne and at Grovedale in Geelong.

Funds raised from the sale of donated goods help us deliver a wide range of programs and services that make lasting change in the lives of disadvantaged Australians and drive change to create a compassionate and fair society.

We welcome donations of books, clothing, shoes, accessories, furniture, homewares and electrical items. We recycle donated fridges, making them more energy and cost-efficient.

All donated goods are sold at affordable prices.

Making a donation is easy. Our stores are very happy to receive goods during trading hours. You can find the store closest to you at stores.bsl.org.au

We also offer a free collection service across greater Melbourne and the Mornington Peninsula. **To arrange for free pick-up, please call 1300 DONATE (1300 366 283) or book online at stores.bsl.org.au**



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