

Building better lives together



Brotherhood
of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty

Building better lives since 1930

Coolibah Centre: serving a hot meal with a side of internet skills

From its earliest days, the Brotherhood of St Laurence has been a leader in caring for older people.

We recognise that they make an enormous contribution to the community, and with proper support and opportunity for companionship – especially for those who don't have family and friends in their inner circle – they can flourish.

The Coolibah Centre, in Fitzroy, was established by our founder Father Gerard Tucker in 1946, and earned a place in the history books as Australia's first senior citizens day centre.

Originally conceived as a place to provide warmth and a hot meal for older men living in low cost housing around Fitzroy, it opened its doors to local women in the 1950s.

Today, it enjoys a diverse membership – and continues to serve a hot meal at lunch time.

Recognising the social challenges that people face in the outer suburbs where such services and infrastructure are not abundant, the Coolibah service has also extended its reach to Melbourne's outer north – offering a regular session each Friday to older people in the Craigieburn area.

Back in Fitzroy, the centre runs activities six days a week. It is a vibrant hub, fostering a sense of community and wellbeing with a busy program that includes table tennis, gardening, cooking, exercise and art. Regulars are able to acquire and update computer skills, increasingly important to navigate contemporary society.

Graham, 73, has been a Coolibah member for more than 21 years. From Tuesday to Friday he takes the role



Coolibah Centre resident DJ Graham.

of the disc jockey at the Coolibah, playing music for everyone to enjoy.

'Our approach with all of our aged-care programs is to support people in continuing to live the life they value, and for Graham, that means playing music', says Marica Cindric, Coolibah program coordinator.

Yusheng, 87, has also found companionship and support at Coolibah Centre, where he has been a member since 2006. Adjusting to life in Melbourne when he arrived from China 22 years ago was challenging.

The Brotherhood staff are 'always ready to help', Yusheng says. 'In case you got any problems, they will try to help you solve the problem.'

Find out more about the Coolibah Centre at bsl.org.au/services/older-people/coolibah-centre/

Invest today. Be a part of lasting change.

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

I feel honoured to be entrusted with the leadership of the Brotherhood of St Laurence. It's inspiring to be part of an organisation that has been working for more than 80 years towards the goal of an Australia free of poverty, and has such enduring support from so many parts of the community.

I've recently spent six years heading up World Vision International's development and advocacy programs in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. When I came home to take up this role, I returned with fresh eyes. My sincere belief is that there is no reason for anyone to live in poverty in a country as prosperous as Australia. We are a nation that has been blessed in so many ways in terms of people and material resources and, as I see it, it is really a question of our priorities: how we share the wealth of this nation, so all people in our country have the opportunity to have a good life.

Like all of us, people who struggle also want to build better lives: they want a secure home, a job and social connections to family and friends.

In the 21st century, growing inequality and a rapidly changing economy mean some people in Australia really struggle to find opportunities. Poverty and disadvantage is increasingly emerging in our growing outer

suburbs where, despite a veneer of prosperity, services and infrastructure are sparse. The Brotherhood is responding to these urgent challenges in these new areas by establishing community hubs offering social services that will help build sustainable and resilient communities: our mission continues to be as relevant today as it was when the Father Gerard Tucker established the organisation in 1930 in a vastly different social and economic context.

From the start, Father Tucker paid keen attention to issues facing older Australians. Our Coolibah Centre, featured in this edition, was the first day centre established for senior citizens in Australia, and has been flourishing for more than 70 years. A persistent thread to our work has always been to support older people to live at home, near the people and places they value, and our home care packages and high quality respite services are assisting people and families with that objective.



Conny Lenneberg.

In the 21st century, growing inequality and a rapidly changing economy mean some people in Australia really struggle to find opportunities.

With the raising of the pension age and rising mature-age unemployment, economic security in older age is a major theme of our policy work and the practical programs we run. Our work is in constant need of investment so we can continue to provide the breadth and range of assistance essential to achieve positive outcomes for people who seek our help across all age groups.

I thank you for working with us, and being inspired to support an Australia free of poverty.

Best regards,

Conny Lenneberg
Executive Director.

My sincere belief is that there is no reason for anyone to live in poverty in a country as prosperous as Australia.

A little help goes a long way

Growing older can bring new challenges but, with help from the Brotherhood's Care at Home service, many people continue to live independently, enjoying life in their own homes and communities.

Elizabeth, 87, and Arthur, 95, have used the service for the past few years.

The couple moved to Australia from South Africa in 1960 to seek out a better life for their three children. It was difficult at first as they had left all of their family behind and finding work 'was tough,' remembers Arthur.

Eventually, he found a job at a publishing firm and, when their daughters went to school, Elizabeth began work as a short-hand typist.

The family lived in Blackburn for 24 years before moving to Mornington where they live now. The couple led active lives over the years, before and after retirement.

Recently Arthur's health has deteriorated and his challenges now include heart issues and macular degeneration. 'I am past my use-by date', he jokes. Elizabeth became his primary carer, while also managing the house and garden, with the help of a fortnightly visit from a Brotherhood home carer. 'I do all his medication, his appointments, drive him to the doctors', explains Elizabeth. 'I am his eyes.'

In 2015, a hip operation left Elizabeth with limited mobility so that she could no longer look after the house and garden. The Brotherhood increased the couple's

support so that a home carer visits every week to help with cleaning or anything else they need. 'She is very good and a delight', says Elizabeth. A gardener visits monthly while their client advisor from the Brotherhood checks in with them regularly. 'We are so lucky to have this available. They are special people', says Elizabeth. Through the Brotherhood's Social Connections program, the couple attend monthly Morning Melodies concerts, where they enjoy music and lunch.

The Care at Home service, like all Brotherhood aged services, is predicated on Brotherhood's Enhancing Capabilities approach, which builds on each individual's strengths, and shifts the emphasis from care as an end in itself to the understanding that care is a tool for living. The Brotherhood supports participants to manage their government-subsidised Home Care Package in a way that offers greater individual choice and control over the type and delivery of services they access.

This valuable support from the Brotherhood means Arthur and Elizabeth can remain safe, happy and healthy at home together. Elizabeth says, 'I honestly couldn't have managed without it.'

Learn more about the Brotherhood's Care at Home service at agedcare.bsl.org.au/care-at-home/



Arthur and Elizabeth.

Volunteer embraces companionship and sense of community

Companionship and community is found among members and volunteers alike at Banksia Carrum Downs – a social connections hub for older people run by the Brotherhood.



Marie is content knowing that she is helping to make a difference in other people's lives.

Marie enjoys an outing with some of the Banksia Carrum Downs members.

Volunteering at Banksia for three years has had a remarkable impact on Marie's life. She has discovered a welcoming community and a sense of direction.

Marie came to Australia in 2003 from Mauritius to pursue study. Adjusting to life here was difficult. Although she found work and began a course, Marie felt overcome with inadequacy and lacked confidence.

Things got worse after her relationship broke down, and she became a single mother to her young daughter. Facing many difficulties Marie struggled to move forward and she worried for her daughter and their future.

Spurred to make a better life for herself and others Marie began studying a community services course in 2015. 'Because of my personal experience, I wanted to make a difference', she says. Fortunately, a placement at Banksia introduced Marie to a wonderful community and work that she loved – helping elderly people, which evolved into a regular volunteer position.

The warm, welcoming environment at Banksia ensures Marie always looks forward to her weekly visit. Marie's work involves spending time with the members, taking them on outings and helping with activities.

She has formed great friendships.

Marie intends to continue working with older people. She is inspired listening to the members' stories. 'They have been through a lot', she adds. 'They give me lots of courage and motivation.'

Marie is content knowing that she is helping to make a difference in other people's lives. 'At the end of the day I know I was here making them happy, and making them have a good day. And going home I feel happy too.'

Find out how you can volunteer at bsl.org.au/volunteer/

Honour for contributor

When you think of Australian success stories, think no further than Quin Scalzo. The seventy-year-old came to Australia from Italy in 1955. His family – there were six siblings – settled in North Melbourne. They had very few resources.

On Australia Day, Quin became a Member of the Order of Australia.

Quin Scalzo AM, as he now is, was honoured for his contribution to business and his considerable charity work, including his work with the Brotherhood of St Laurence. He is the chair of our committee which finds jobs for disadvantaged young people in Melbourne's northern suburbs, where unemployment bites hard. And his food importing business, which he founded in his Burwood home in 1977, offers work experience for young people.

Employers like Quin are integral to the Brotherhood's efforts in reducing youth unemployment, which is over 12 per cent nationwide. Without the support of business people who are willing to give the disadvantaged a chance, many more job seekers would remain locked out of employment.

Quin's own story speaks of success and resilience in the face of personal hardship.

Quin was 11 when his father died, forcing him and his 14-year-old brother to take on jobs to ensure the family had food on the table. At 15, Quin left school. He had one pair of pants, one jumper and one shirt. The plucky teenager also had a great desire to improve his lot.

'I was always driven, always enjoyed working, I've always seen more the positive side to people than the negative side', said Quin in a recent *Age* article noting his Australia Day honour. 'The glass is always full, because you can make it that way.'

Scalzo Food Industries, which began importing and distributing nuts in the late 1970s, now employs 400 people and has sales revenue of more than \$400 million. He says he rode the wave of Australia's expanding tastebuds. His company now imports over 1000 food lines from 40 countries.

So, thank you, Quin, for introducing us to new foods and for your invaluable work in supporting disadvantaged people into jobs.

Employers like Quin are integral to the Brotherhood's efforts in reducing youth unemployment.



Quin Scalzo AM and his wife Lina.

Social inclusion is key to our approach

Developing programs that enable social inclusion and reduce social isolation is central to the Brotherhood's approach. All of us yearn to be valued for our contribution and potential, and above all, to belong somewhere and live a life that we value. This thinking is the basis of all our work, the design of our services and the research we conduct.

Nearly half of the Brotherhood's aged-care clients live alone, and almost three quarters of these clients are female, which is consistent with those living alone in the general Australian older adult population.¹

Social networks of discretionary relationships and being socially engaged have direct links to health benefits and reducing the risk of social isolation.² The aim of social inclusion programs is to create enjoyment, purpose and meaning, as well as fostering skills and knowledge-sharing through social interaction with others.

We put this thinking into action at Banksia Services Carrum Downs, a social connections hub and place of companionship for members as they pursue lifelong interests and try new activities.

The varied program includes art, music therapy, games, cooking lessons and classes in using computer tablets and the internet. The hub also organises regular excursions to cafes, restaurants, bowling clubs and swimming pools.

Banksia members relish the chance to form friendships and engage with

others. Margaret, 88, both a member and volunteer at Banksia, brings her cooking skills to the hub with weekly volunteering in the kitchen.

'Banksia is like my second home ... I always felt that my volunteer work at Banksia was appreciated and valued. I have made friends and I do miss them a lot when I'm not there.'

1. Simons B, 2017, Brotherhood of St Laurence Home Care Packages Client Profile, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Fitzroy, Vic.

2. Simons B, Kimberley H, McColl-Jones N, 2015, *Adjusting to Consumer Directed Care*, Brotherhood of Laurence, Fitzroy, Vic, p. 18.

Home sweet home at Sambell Lodge

The Brotherhood's aged-care facility in Clifton Hill provides a safe and nurturing environment for disadvantaged older people such as Dawn.

Five years ago, Dawn had a serious accident before she moved to Sambell Lodge. She was left with a speech impediment, limited jaw movement, shaking hands and chronic pain. This hasn't stopped her living a full life at Sambell Lodge. 'The quality and service are great', she says. 'I love it here.'

Dawn grew up in a convent in Ballarat with her two sisters and later was married for 28 years to a musician she met when she moved to Melbourne. Dawn has worked various jobs, including in a factory and fruit picking. She enjoyed bushwalking with her husband and their dogs and also loved painting, but sadly can no longer do this due to her shaking hands.

In her room Dawn proudly displays photographs of her paintings and family members. She's a

Western Bulldogs fan and football posters cover her bedroom walls.

Dawn describes Sambell Lodge as a great community and has made many friends, often joining other residents for bingo and exercise classes. She feels well looked after. 'The staff are nice. I wake up and look around and think, this is my home.'

Soon she can look forward to a new home in the same location, because the redevelopment and expansion of Sambell Lodge will commence shortly. It will ensure that the specialised, high-quality care offered to residents will continue and be extended to others in modern facilities that will reflect the highest community standards.

For more information about Sambell Lodge visit: agedcare.bsl.org.au/residential/clifton-hill-residence/



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