

# BUILDING BETTER LIVES TOGETHER

A newsletter for our valued friends and supporters



Brotherhood  
of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty

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**Above** Julie has been part of the Growing Learners program since January 2018.

## Mother of five makes leaps and bounds

As a lone parent to five children, Julie shows remarkable resilience despite the struggles she has faced. With little support and with a child with a learning disability, Julie's situation has proved challenging.

Julie and her son Ozzy were participants in the Brotherhood of St Laurence's Growing Learners program, which supports parents and their young children to learn together through play – and parents are helped to develop career pathways. Julie was referred to the program to get extra learning support for Ozzy, and found the experience to be tremendously successful. 'I started Growing Learners in January last year, and it was just great. Ozzy has come along in leaps and bounds!'

Julie is currently studying a course in community services with hopes to work in mental health. Despite the challenge of fitting in study around her children, she is enjoying the course and looking forward to securing work in the future. 'It will be worth it,' she says. 'My dream is to have a job that I love.'

For Julie, Growing Learners has been a lifeline in a difficult time. Coming from the United Kingdom to Australia, she lacked friends and family to offer vital support. It was difficult to feel connected to the community, or access necessary services. 'I wasn't going out, I wasn't socialising and meeting new people,' Julie says. 'Isolation is strange because you think you're okay and then you go out and realise what you're missing. Or you panic because you've not been out of the house for so long.'

Money struggles are an ongoing stressor. 'I budget to within an inch,' Julie says. But unexpected

expenses such as replacing a broken vacuum cleaner can throw off the balance. 'That's when the food shop dwindles and fuel doesn't get put in the car. They're the first things to go.' Growing Learners teaches financial management skills in a non-judgemental way. 'It was definitely helpful and nice to see that other people are in the same boat.'

**'My dream is to have a job that I love.'**

The program has made a world of difference to Julie. 'If you'd have seen me at the beginning of last year, and then to see me now – I'm a different person,' Julie smiles. 'I'm proud of myself. Challenging things have happened, and I'm still here. Now I can see the light, and it's getting bigger and bigger.'

Visit [bsl.org.au/growinglearners](https://bsl.org.au/growinglearners) to read more about the Growing Learners program.

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Above Executive Director, Conny Lenneberg.

## Executive Director's message

No matter what our age or stage in life, having strong social connections and economic security is vital to enjoying a good life and overcoming adversity.

Our Youth Unemployment Monitor measures trends relating to young people and work, and the evidence

we gather helps us to keep the issue high on the social policy agenda.

Despite living in a prosperous nation, young people increasingly face barriers to finding secure, entry-level jobs and are instead condemned to cycle through a series of 'survival' jobs that lead nowhere. This means young people struggle to make ends meet, and their talents are not utilised in our economy and community.

We can do better than this. Through our work, we know that targeted employment and training programs to support young people ensure that those with so much to contribute, are able to share in this country's immense wealth.

With appropriate and timely support, we transform people's lives, as the story of Connie Benn shows. This International Women's Day, it is my privilege to share with you how Connie, a pioneering figure in the Brotherhood's history, developed models of support for families that still underpin our approach to social justice and disadvantage.

I hope you enjoy reading about her in this first edition of Building Better Lives for 2019.

Thank you for the support you give us and for all you do for an Australia free of poverty.

**Conny Lenneberg**  
Executive Director

## Campaign spotlights youth unemployment

Being young isn't what it used to be, even in one of the most prosperous countries in the world.

Australia's youth unemployment rate of 11.3 per cent\* is double the overall unemployment rate, and in some localities it's much higher. The shift from stable, full-time employment to part-time and casual work can create shaky foundations for young people trying to build independent adult lives.

The Brotherhood launched its campaign for youth employment in 2014, and produces an informative Youth Unemployment Monitor to ensure this generational challenge stays on the agenda. The publication focuses on solutions including

advocating for more targeted employment services for young people.

Since our campaign began, the Australian Government has set up the Transition to Work (TTW) program for young people, which we run in Broadmeadows and Frankston. We also coordinate a national 'community of practice' of 11 TTW agencies to develop an effective model for assisting young jobseekers into decent, sustainable employment.

There's more to be done. In December we released the 12th Youth Unemployment Monitor, which zeroed in on high rates of part-time work and underemployment – more than 550,000 20-24 year-olds work part-time. In a video for the campaign,



Above With only part-time casual work it's hard for Quaylin to reach his goals.

casual swim instructor Quaylin said: 'I have an idea of what I want to do with my life, where I want to be career-wise and dream-wise. But with the current income I've got and hours I've got, that's very far from my reach right now.'

Find out more: [bsl.org.au/advocacy/youth-employment](https://bsl.org.au/advocacy/youth-employment)

\*ABS December 2018



## Paying homage to one of the Brotherhood's most influential female leaders

Concetta (Connie) Benn was an innovative social worker whose work with the Brotherhood of St Laurence and government created systems to provide practical help to families experiencing poverty and disadvantage. Her work in Fitzroy not only had a local impact, it also changed community development and welfare models of social work nationwide.

The child of Italian immigrants, Connie possessed the natural ability to connect with all kinds of people, from staff to community members, politicians and professionals. As the first female member of the Brotherhood's Executive, Connie was an inspiration and mentor to many. She used her leadership to pursue a new agenda and ideas with passion and energy, which gave opportunities and encouragement to other women.

The approaches pioneered by Connie's work on the Brotherhood's Family Centre Project in the 1970s and early '80s still underpin the Brotherhood's work on social justice and disadvantage. This iconic Australian anti-poverty experiment developed a focus on unemployment and sole parents, proving that given the right resources, supports and opportunities, there is a capacity in everyone to build a good life.

Connie Benn was a dynamic thinker and an inventive pioneer who worked tirelessly to transform the social work landscape of Victoria. After the Brotherhood, she worked in several government roles, where she helped establish the Victorian Women's Trust, before going on to become professor of social work at the University of Melbourne.

The Women's Trust's vision of full gender equality is echoed in the 2019 International Women's Day theme: #BalanceforBetter. This serves as an opportunity to reflect on the way Connie's work impacted women, families and the challenges we still face in ensuring balance is created and celebrated. The Connie Benn Centre in Fitzroy partners with the Brotherhood of St Laurence to deliver family services including playgroups, parenting programs, Breakfast Club, Homework Club and Saver Plus.



**Above** Connie Benn (1926–2011). International Women's Day is on 8 March.



**Above** Peter was part of our Christmas campaign.

### A special thank you

My name is Peter and through the Brotherhood's Christmas fundraising campaign, I told my story hoping it will help others like me.

I am thrilled to hear how many in the community gave to this campaign. Your generous donations enable the Brotherhood to support people like me, to build a better life. This work cannot be done without your commitment and kindness.

The Brotherhood's Given the Chance program helped me secure a permanent role at ANZ. It means I can now financially support myself and my family. Before joining the program, I struggled to find decent work. Life was really tough in Australia.

Staying hopeful gave me strength through many hard times in my life. The next chapter will now be much easier thanks to the training I've received, and the new skills and experience I've gained.

Your support of people like me is really encouraging and greatly appreciated. Thank you!

#### **Peter**

*Given the Chance is our long-running work placement program that helps marginalised job seekers like Peter to build their skills and find secure work.*

## Catching up with members of the Brotherhood's Coolibah Centre

The Coolibah Centre, in Fitzroy, is a Social Connection Hub for older people and people with disability. The hub enables members to be healthy, active and enjoy life to the full in a friendly and relaxing environment.



**Mei Zhi**

**How long have you been coming to the Coolibah Centre?** 12 years. I attend six days per week.

**What activities are you involved in?** Cooking class, gardening, English class, arts and crafts, singing and walking.

**What's your favourite thing about the Coolibah Centre?**

Everyone is welcome and equal. It keeps me busy and brightens my life. I'm happiest when I am here.

**How has the Coolibah Centre supported you to live a good life?** My husband is unwell and can't leave the house, so it is good I can come here and be part of the community.



**How long have you been coming to the Coolibah Centre?** Five months. I attend six days per week.

**What activities are you involved in?** I take part in the exercise class as it helps me strengthen my legs. My recent illness has affected my mobility, so this helps to build back my confidence.

**What's your favourite thing about the Coolibah Centre?**

Having company during the day keeps me social as I go through the next chapter of my life. I don't feel left out.

**How has the Coolibah Centre supported you to live a good life?** Having a place like the Coolibah keeps my mind happy and occupied. The fact that I can have breakfast and lunch there helps me a lot. The meals are affordable and the food is healthy. I don't have to worry about preparing meals each day.



**Clifford**



**Xue Zhi Yang**

**How long have you been coming to the Coolibah Centre?** 13 years. I attend four to five days each week.

**What activities are you involved in?** Cooking, English class, iPad learning class, snooker, and arts and crafts. One of my paintings is hanging in the Coolibah staff room!

**What's your favourite thing about the Coolibah Centre?** When I joined, I found a sense of belonging. I like that it's multicultural – it doesn't matter where you are from or what language you speak, you are treated with respect.

**How has the Coolibah Centre supported you to live a good life?** It has offered me so many opportunities to learn about new cultures and to learn new skills.



**Chang Zhan**

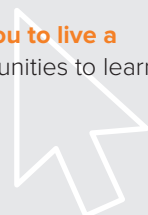
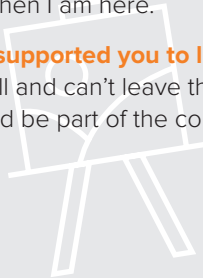
**How long have you been coming to the Coolibah Centre?** 13 years. I attend five days per week.

**What activities are you involved in?** English studies, table tennis, cooking, walking and exercise group.

**What's your favourite thing about the Coolibah Centre?**

My favourite thing is meeting other members. I have met many of my best friends here. We're like a family. We help each other in difficult times.

**How has the Coolibah Centre supported you to live a good life?** Having access to all the activities has helped me live a good life.





## Stepping Stones to small businesses and big hearts

Milla is a participant in our Stepping Stones to Small Business program, and has set up a part-time business: Lux Way Photo Booth.

In 2017, work in Milla's field of engineering started drying up – contracts got shorter, and work became harder to get. Because of this, a move from her home in Indonesia to Australia to join her partner (who had already been here for 10 years) was an obvious decision.

On arrival, Milla applied for hundreds of jobs, but was unsuccessful. 'Most places want you to have local experience,' she explains. She found some casual work three days a week, but with the insecurity of casual employment, she knew she needed to find something else. Soon she was thinking, 'What if I start my own business?'

Wanting to learn how to run a business 'the correct way', Milla enrolled in a Brotherhood nine-week Stepping Stones course. Stepping Stones to Small Business is our education

program for migrant, refugee and asylum seeker women to learn about money and how to start a small business in Australia. 'I expected just to learn about small business, but the program taught me personal finance, time management, even photography!' She built a network with her classmates and has regained the confidence she lost trying to find a job.

Starting the course, Milla knew she wanted to make a mobile photo booth for events. 'I am not a photographer so it's a bit random, but I love the energy a booth brings to an event!' Her engineering background came in handy – she spent her spare time over several months building the booth. 'It took a lot of googling and trips to Bunnings!' she says.

On the course, Milla learnt how to write a business plan and implement it. Since launching in November, she's had three clients and is working on targets for 2019. 'Your business will work as long as you make a solid plan,' she believes. Her website, [luxwayphotobooth.com.au](http://luxwayphotobooth.com.au), is live and she is proud of it. Milla will go on to have regular meetings with her business mentor organised through the program.

Find out more about Stepping Stones to Small Business at [bsl.org.au/steppingstones](http://bsl.org.au/steppingstones)



Above Milla launched Lux Way Photo Booth in December.



## We welcome the aged care royal commission

The Brotherhood of St Laurence welcomes the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety established by the Australian Government last October.

The Royal Commission is a unique opportunity to contribute to the future of the aged care sector and one that meets our wish to have an efficient, high-performing system of aged care.

The Commission is tasked with investigating several matters, including the quality of aged care services and how best to deliver them. They will also be reviewing the future challenges and opportunities for delivering accessible, affordable and high-quality services across the country.

The Commissioners have written to approved aged care providers, including the Brotherhood of St Laurence, inviting them to make a submission. We made a submission in early February, within the requested deadline.

Our aged care services include two residential facilities, Social Connection Hubs and home care services that support older people to remain living at home in familiar surroundings.

## Opportunities abound from the Youth Transitions Support Pilot

Majd, 21, has had much to overcome despite his young age. Majd grew up in Mosul, Iraq, and was forced to flee the country due to dangerous unrest when ISIS arrived. With his family, Majd fled to neighbouring Jordan, where he completed his secondary education. He eventually made the journey to Australia as a refugee at age 19.

In Melbourne, Majd noticed stark cultural differences between Australia and Iraq. Joining the Brotherhood of St Laurence's Youth Transitions Support Pilot (YTSP), he got help navigating local culture and education and training opportunities. 'When I first arrived here I was confused about education opportunities – the system here is not easy to understand,' he says. 'My friend told me about the



**Above** Majd is studying towards a career in software engineering.

Brotherhood. They've helped me a lot and I've met some really nice people.'

Majd secured work with the Brotherhood as a Youth Advisor, a role which provides important input into the development and delivery of YTSP to support other newly arrived people to settle into Australian life. He's also busy studying information technology and

English language. In the future, Majd hopes to work in software engineering, and he's on his way to achieving his goal. 'I have a passion for IT and engineering,' he says.

Find out more about the Youth Transitions Support Pilot program at [bsl.org.au/youth-transitions](https://bsl.org.au/youth-transitions)

### Research and Policy Centre update

## After a lifetime of work, women are more likely to be poor

In Australia, women tend to work part-time; have jobs without paid leave entitlements; have low incomes; be responsible for unpaid care and domestic work; and carry the cost of caring in the short and longer term. All this contributes to a lifetime gender pay gap.

The gap is attributed to a range of ongoing inequalities, including discrimination, women's and men's concentrations in different industries, the undervaluation of unpaid work and women's responsibility for the bulk of family

care. When relationships break down, women are more likely to experience economic insecurity after separation, with sole mothers and their children hit hard.

According to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, the full-time average weekly earnings for women in May 2018 were 14.6 per cent less than for men.

Because superannuation is connected to an individual's earnings, women who work part-time or have interrupted employment patterns have lower superannuation savings than men. Even working full-time, women not only earn less money than men, they also experience age discrimination at an earlier age, making their paid working life shorter.

The effect of these differences on women's savings and superannuation has serious consequences for economic security later in life. Even if a retired woman has access to support through a partner, unexpected events like the end of a relationship or death can leave her vulnerable to poverty.

Research into why girls and women continue to experience inequality and what we can do about it is undertaken by the Work and Economic Security Division of our Research and Policy Centre.

For more information on our research and policy work visit [bsl.org.au/research](https://bsl.org.au/research)