

# BUILDING BETTER LIVES TOGETHER

A newsletter for our valued friends and supporters



Brotherhood  
of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty

ISSUE 79 June 2020



**Above** As a Christmas present, Renee bought Ethan his first concert tickets. Here they are in February before the show.

## Re-engaging in education – the key to a better future

At the end of Year 5, Ethan's school attendance had dropped to nothing. He was struggling to participate in class and other kids were picking on him. "Ethan is a very sensitive soul," says his mum, Renee.

Ethan's anxiety got so bad, it would make him physically sick. "He'd be sick on the way to school, and he'd have to have another day off," Renee explains. If he did make it to school, he'd only last a couple of hours before needing to be picked up. She worried he wouldn't attend Year 6 at all.

When Renee found out about our education program in her local area, she applied straight away. The program works to rebuild students' engagement with learning, so students are more able to participate in mainstream education.

Renee knew Ethan's only chance at getting through school would be with the support of specialised services. Although it was full, BSL worked to accommodate Ethan into its program for compassionate reasons.

Ashleigh, an Engagement Program Therapeutic Lead, explains the program takes a unique approach. "We use integration and communication," she says. "It's not 'our problem' or 'your problem', it's 'let's work through this together'."

Family support is also integral to success of our program. "It's a whole-family package. There's genuine care," says Renee.

Even in lockdown, Ethan never misses a day. "It makes me feel happy," he says.

Trusting his teachers has helped Ethan's willingness to participate. "If he doesn't understand, he won't shut down, he'll message for help," says Renee.

"The aim is to get Ethan back on track, and I'm so happy he's engaging. He's out of the cycle of anxiety," says Renee. "He's a different kid."

The advice Ethan would give someone in his position two years ago? "I'd say, don't worry, everything's going to be okay."

Now is the time for compassion. Please join us in supporting the most disadvantaged in our community today.

Donate today  
[bsl.org.au/donate](https://bsl.org.au/donate)



Above Executive Director, Conny Lenneberg.

## Executive Director Update

Welcome to the June edition of *Building better lives together*. It's astounding to think back to this time last year and how much things have changed for everyone. We've all been so deeply affected by the coronavirus pandemic, with lockdown, distance learning, job losses, isolation and uncertainty.

While the current crisis has hit our community hard, we have also seen our community come together. With

so many people now having lost their jobs, I think there is an increased understanding that any one of us can find ourselves suddenly in difficult circumstances, for reasons beyond our control. This understanding is contributing to greater empathy and compassion for those around us, and a greater value placed on community and caring.

We know that in this crisis, young people at risk of disengaging from learning pathways need our support more than ever. In some cases, their disconnection has been exacerbated by a remote learning environment and they risk losing the valuable connections they have built.

This month, money raised will go to our senior youth programs to help young people to complete school, or to find the training pathways they need to thrive as adults. You can read about these programs below.

In this edition, you'll hear the story of Ethan and his mum, Renee. Ethan's neurodiversity means he struggles to participate in mainstream classrooms, but his needs aren't high enough to require special schooling. You'll also hear from Liah, a coordinator from one of our youth programs who writes a letter to his niece, Nyaneng,

a current participant. He shares his own experience of arriving alone in Australia as a teenage refugee and explains how she can use our support to thrive in education.

Finally, we share some sobering numbers on how disengagement from learning and leaving school early affects young people's life chances. It's always a good time to invest in education, but now more than ever, we need to maintain our good work of keeping students on the path to meaningful working lives, and your support can help us do that.

Each day we hear about wonderful examples of generosity and see the human spirit shine. This gives me great encouragement that our community will grow stronger and more compassionate as we come to realise that we're all in this together.

Thank you once again for reading our stories of people making change in their lives. Without the support of people like you, our work wouldn't be possible.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Conny Lenneberg".

**Conny Lenneberg**  
Executive Director

## Our programs support young people to thrive

As a member of the Brotherhood of St. Laurence (BSL) community, you'll know that our work to support young people is critical to our mission to reduce poverty in Australia. This month, your donation to *Building better lives together* will go towards our senior youth programs.

"Young people who complete educational qualifications are much more likely to have the capacity to find ongoing work." Sally James, Head of Youth Programs.

Like you, we know that mainstream school doesn't suit everyone, and BSL delivers several programs to help young people re-engage in education

and training. Because of the wonderful support we receive from donors like you, we are able to offer a range of alternative programs and services for young people who are studying, as well as those who have left school early and are in need of support.

Young people who join our education programs, get help to stay involved in learning and support to overcome difficulties at home. Students can get help with career goals and skills development. Together with your support, our programs and partnerships equip school leavers with skills and help them plan their careers, and put them on track to the world of work.

BSL works for an Australia where all young people, no matter what their background or circumstances

are, have the chance to achieve their educational and vocational goals, find a job and live a fulfilling life. We understand that young people take diverse pathways to adulthood, and that recognising and nurturing young people's talents and capabilities, instead focusing on deficits, enables them to thrive.

Our youth programs are underpinned by belief in the talents and capabilities of our participants. We work with young people to create a positive mindset, and this works to help promote a shift in the way society values young people – as valuable, contributing members of the community.

With your support, we can help more young people achieve educational and vocational goals that will give them a better start in adulthood. Visit [bsl.org.au/donate](https://bsl.org.au/donate) today

We wanted to share with you a letter that Liah wrote to his 15-year-old niece, Nyaneng, after she started to attend one of our programs. Liah is a youth worker – and a very proud uncle!

**Dear Nyaneng,**

You know, I came to Australia when I was just a bit older than you are now.

When I first arrived, there was no support for people from South Sudan. We were left to try and fit in ourselves. It was hard, and there were many times that I saw other young people give up hope.

I wanted to make sure the difficulties I went through would not be repeated in my lifetime. So I joined BSL's youth program team. I knew straight away it was something worthwhile. Something important.

I'm so glad that now you have joined too. It's not just about helping you learn – it's so much more! It's about connecting with each other and the wider community, so you won't feel alone. It's mentoring and is about building confidence.

There is support for parents who don't speak as much English and can feel lost about how they can help their children – especially if their kids have special learning needs. I try to advocate for families if they need housing, or even just to fill out forms.

I'm really passionate about our community, and I'll share my experience with you and the other young people at BSL. If there are difficulties for them at home, or if language is a barrier to getting the support they need, I can help. Even after the crisis of COVID-19, we'll make sure no-one is left behind. And, with even more support from the BSL community, who knows how many more we can help!

I'm happy you feel like you belong now, and I'm so proud of everything you've achieved.

**I know you'll do great things!**

**Uncle Liah**



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29 May 2020

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I wanted

# The Brotherhood of St. Laurence is working to support young people.



**1 OUT OF 4** students facing disadvantage do not complete Year 12.

(ACARA, 2018)



Young adults in regional Australia are

**2X AS LIKELY TO BE EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS**

compared with young adults in metropolitan areas.

(Regional Australia Institute, 2019)

**28%**  
REGIONAL

**14%**  
METRO

## THE DIGITAL DIVIDE AND COVID-19

ONLY

**68%**

of children in Australia's most disadvantaged communities **access the internet at home**, compared with

**91%**

in the most advantaged communities.

(The Smith Family, 2013)

*With the support of our partners, ANZ and Schneider, BSL was able to very quickly source more than 110 laptops for high needs families and students facing disadvantage.*

## EDUCATION IS KEY TO LIFE OUTCOMES

ONLY

**61%**

of students facing disadvantage were in **full-time work, study or training** by age 24, versus

**74%**

of students overall.

(Mitchell Institute, 2015)

Individuals with higher levels of education have higher paying jobs, better general health, and a lower likelihood of engaging in crime.

(Mitchell Institute, 2017)



## YOUR SUPPORT IS CRUCIAL

Help us continue our work to towards helping **young people** in Australia get access to a brighter future!

Visit [bsl.org.au/donate](https://bsl.org.au/donate) or call **03 9483 1301**



Brotherhood of St Laurence  
Working for an Australia free of poverty

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