



Change tomorrow

Your support today. A better tomorrow.



Le Quyen tending to the garden at BSL's Coolibah Centre in Fitzroy for senior citizens.

Meet Le Quyen from the Coolibah

After retiring from a shoe factory job in Preston, Le Quyen found connection and joy at BSL's Coolibah Centre in Fitzroy. A longtime local, she comes daily to see friends, play mahjong and tend the garden she created in the courtyard. Each Wednesday, she uses herbs from this garden to make dumplings for fellow members. Now celebrating 80 years, the Coolibah Centre remains a vital place of belonging - and for Le Quyen, it feels like home.

Read more on page six. 

Did you see BSL in the news?



Our new public attitudes report sparked an important national conversation.

Australians are increasingly recognising that poverty isn't just about income – it touches health, education, housing, safety and social connection.

You can learn more at bsl.org.au/povertyperceptions



Welcome to our winter edition



In this edition of *Change Tomorrow*, we're delighted to bring you a special interview with Maureen Wheeler AO, co-founder of Lonely Planet and supporter of the Brotherhood of St. Laurence (BSL). Maureen reflects on her early life, the unexpected journey that shaped her career, and what inspired her to help us establish the BSL Innovation Fund.

The Innovation Fund helps BSL to design, test and scale practical, evidence-based solutions across early years, employment, disability and aged care. By working directly with communities, it turns promising ideas into real-world change and strengthens the systems people rely on.

We're also pleased to share stories that show what early support, connection and community can make possible.

Le Quyen, who has built friendships, purpose and joy through mahjong, gardening and daily connection at the Coolibah Centre, now celebrating 80 years as a community anchor for older people.

Anjali, whose daughter Veda found her voice and confidence through one of our early years programs, showing how the right support at the right time can change the course of a family's life.

Murray, who discovered new purpose and lifelong friendships through volunteering at our Moonee Ponds store, proving how powerful community contribution can be.

If lasting change is to be meaningful, it must reflect the real lives and experiences of people like Anjali, Le Quyen and Murray. Their stories guide our work and remind us why listening deeply and partnering closely matters. This is the impact you make possible.

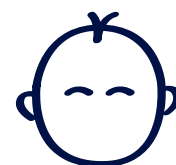
Thank you for being part of this effort.



Irene Payne

Head of Strategic Partnerships & Philanthropy
Brotherhood of St. Laurence

Building a more equitable early childhood system



BSL Talks is a regular webinar series that gathers leading perspectives from research, policy and practice to consider the real-life impacts of research on policy making and creating more effective services. With reform right around the corner in the introduction of 'Thriving Kids' our webinar brought together frontline early years and disability experts, policy makers and a pediatrician to explore what it will take to create a system where every child can thrive.

For too long, families of children with developmental concerns or differences have faced fragmented systems, long wait times and inconsistent access to early supports. Thriving Kids presents the opportunity to build a more equitable, integrated approach: one that meets families earlier, responds to their real world contexts, and strengthens inclusion.

The discussion was rich, thought-provoking, and clearly resonated. It broke our BSL Talks engagement record with more than 700 community sector professionals, researchers and partners registered.

Watch the webinar



“If we don’t design Thriving Kids with equity from the start, then we will inevitably design inequitable systems.”

Professor Sharon Goldfeld,
Director, Centre for Community Child Health,
and Murdoch Children’s Research Institute



“Enriching the environments that they’re in, with the supports that we’re talking about, will support all children to have a healthy childhood trajectory.”

Dr Caroline Croser-Barlow,
CEO at The Front Project

Anjali’s story:

Proof that integrated help works



Anjali remembers how worried she felt when her four-year-old daughter, Veda, stopped speaking outside their home. At kinder, Veda was silent, anxious and overwhelmed. She refused to eat away from her parents and often came home distressed. “We simply didn’t know what was going on or who to turn to for help,” Anjali shared.

With no family support in Australia and a long wait to see a psychologist, the family felt stuck. That changed when Anjali met Lucy, a BSL Early Years practitioner visiting their playgroup. Lucy introduced them to a free BSL Early Years program, and it became a turning point.

Lucy visited the family regularly at home and at kinder, gently building trust. Veda didn’t speak at first, but over time she opened up. Lucy helped the family understand Veda’s emotions and coached Anjali in strategies that eased daily stress. “We started from zero,” Anjali said. “Lucy helped me remove the pressure I was putting on Veda to talk. It made both of us less stressed.”

Today, Veda is more confident and better able to express herself.

66 Now I feel confident about her starting school next year. I’ve completed a certificate in disability, enrolled in a new course, and will soon look for work in this area. 99

Maureen's story:

After a life of adventure, co-founding Lonely Planet and backing great causes – what's next for Maureen Wheeler?

On a blustery Melbourne morning in late March, we sat down with Maureen Wheeler AO to talk about her early life, her unexpected path into publishing and what inspired her to support us to establish the BSL Innovation Fund.

Born in Belfast during the Troubles, Maureen moved to London in her early twenties, where she soon met Tony. Their shared love of adventure shaped everything that followed. "I don't know when my love of travelling started but maybe being born in a very small town that was extremely monocultural was something that made me feel like it would be great to get out and see the world."

Travelling on almost no money, they eventually published their first Lonely Planet book in 1973. "We didn't intend to become publishers. We had travelled overland to Australia and stopped to make some money. We arrived in Australia with just 27 cents and had to get jobs."

Their first book was created at home. "I borrowed my typewriter from work. And we did everything on the kitchen table... It was just 96 pages... we decided to turn that into a book and we stapled every one of those copies and trimmed it."

They sold it to bookshops before heading off again. "Afterwards, we bought a motorbike and spent 15 months travelling around southeast Asia... We sat down and put that book together, but this time we had a real printer."



In conversation with Maureen Wheeler AO in her home.

"We arrived in Australia with just 27 cents and had to get jobs."



66 If you've got money to give away, then you have to decide what are the things that matter to you. The Innovation Fund enables BSL to target resources better. It's a very worthwhile thing if you want to see money being spent where it's really needed. 99

As Lonely Planet grew, life was still far from secure for Maureen and Tony. "We didn't own a house, just a beaten-up car. I felt I needed some security." Maureen turned to social work, driven by a long-held belief: "I was always interested in social work. I always felt that that was the way to make a better life for people working in smaller communities."

Once Lonely Planet became profitable, the couple began giving back to the countries they had travelled through, supporting organisations making a real difference on the

ground. This commitment eventually led to the creation of the Planet Wheeler Foundation, which has backed countless community projects globally – including here in Australia.

What set BSL apart for Maureen was clear. "I met a few people from BSL when I was on different boards and I was impressed by the people. I was impressed by the work they were doing." For Maureen, what is most distinctive is BSL's capacity to turn research on the ground into actual policy that changes lives.

"I like the grassroots element of a lot of the Brotherhood of St. Laurence's research, and I like the fact that they are able to speak to politicians and get something happening in policy."

To learn more about the Innovation Fund, please contact:



Brenda Segal

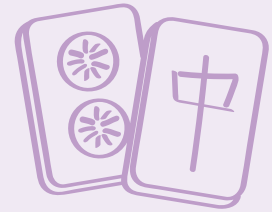
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Le Quyen's story:

Life-long friendships made over mahjong



Since retiring from her job at a shoe factory in Preston, Le Quyen has found daily connection and comfort at BSL's Coolibah Centre in Fitzroy. Born in Vietnam, she arrived in Australia in her mid-twenties with her parents and siblings and has lived in the Fitzroy public housing apartments ever since.

The Coolibah Centre has become an important part of her life. "I just love coming here. I have made so many friends. We love to play mahjong. I have also created a garden bed out the back where I grow Vietnamese mint, spring onion and some Australian vegetables."

She tends to the garden after hours and on weekends, taking pride in the herbs she uses to make dumplings for other members each Wednesday. "It just makes

me so happy. I use these herbs to make dumplings on Wednesdays for all the other Coolibah members. Everyone is so friendly. If I need help to translate documents, staff are there to help."

The Coolibah Centre, now marking its 80th year, was Victoria's first senior citizens' service. Today it remains a vital social hub where older people gather to share meals, chat and take part in daily activities. Some members travel long distances because of the sense of belonging they find here.

For Le Quyen, that sense of community is everything. "My friends sometimes come across the road to wake me up and tell me it's time to go to the Coolibah. I just love coming here."



Le Quyen (centre facing) playing mahjong with her friends at the Coolibah Centre.

"I just love coming here. I have made so many friends. I have also created a garden bed out the back where I grow Vietnamese mint."



From left to right, BSL's Moonee Ponds retail assistant Karmila with long-time volunteer, Murray.

Murray's story:

Something more special than meeting Princess Diana



Murray began his working life in hospitality, spending years in high-end hotels and restaurants around the world. At one point, he worked at the Ivy in London, hosting well-known guests including Princess Diana and Bob Geldof. After a long career in the industry, he reached a point where he needed a change.

Volunteering felt like a natural next step. "My mum volunteered for many years at the BSL Brunswick store and loved it. My sister was also the store manager at the BSL Moonee Ponds store for some time. We now both volunteer here but on different days which is not intentional!"

Sixteen years later, Murray is still a much-loved part of the Moonee Ponds store community.

"I'm now on the pension and I just love being part of this beautiful community. It gets me out of my unit. I have made new friends. We always have a laugh. I also feel appreciated. No one judges you in this store. Somebody is always there for you. It really is just a wonderful place to work."

He enjoys the hands-on nature of the role, especially visual merchandising and getting to know regular customers. "We have our regulars and we notice that more people come in during the colder months to purchase warmer clothes and blankets."

To find more information on volunteering at BSL, head to bsl.org.au/get-involved/volunteer or scan the QR code.



66 To be part of an inclusive organisation that does meaningful work to support those experiencing disadvantage, is really special. For anyone considering volunteering, I say 'do it'. It has changed my life for the better. 99

Turn the page on poverty with Brotherhood Books

Brotherhood Books is a social enterprise of BSL. Discover our collection of over 50,000 second-hand books of all genres from just \$7. Our team of dedicated volunteers gratefully receive book donations and carefully sort, clean and sanitise all books before being dispatched.

When you shop with us, you're not only reducing your carbon footprint, you're also supporting BSL's evidence-based programs aimed at creating a more compassionate and just society where everyone can thrive.

Together, let's write a new chapter in the fight against poverty.

As a valued subscriber of *Change tomorrow*, we're offering you **15% off* your next purchase at Brotherhood Books** – just use CHANGETOMORROW at the checkout! Shop now at www.brotherhoodbooks.org.au or scan the QR code.



*Terms and conditions apply. Excludes gift cards. Offer is single use only and expires 30 June 2026.



Global students, local change

For several years, BSL has partnered with Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI), a US university that sends students overseas to work on community projects. Each group that came to Melbourne brought fresh ideas and practical skills that strengthened BSL's work.

Supported by WPI faculty and guided by BSL mentors, students were matched to projects where they could make a real difference. They helped develop youth engagement tools, improve digital media resources and create new ways for the sector to learn online.

Read more about Ian, Maria, Thea and Nicole's meaningful contribution.



Thank you for continuing to support our work. You are helping to advance a fairer Australia through BSL's leadership on policy reform, our partnerships with communities, and the quality of our services.



Brotherhood of St. Laurence
Working for an Australia free of poverty

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and waterways on which our organisation operates. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present.