



HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS

A COMMUNITY OF SERVICE

Volume 53 No 3
December 2020

Newsletter

GREETINGS EVERYONE,

Well, we have almost made it to the end of this tumultuous year!

We hope you, your family and community have stayed well throughout the pandemic and that the toll and strain of this time has not been too great.

We know many people are suffering and our hearts are with those whose lives have been turned upside down, and to whom life is looking bleak and uncertain as we head into 2021.

We have managed a very productive year at Highways and Byways in 2020 – despite our physical office being closed for quite a few months. An online meeting seems completely normal these days. Upon lockdown everyone got on with their work, quickly establishing home based offices and getting used to seeing each other in a square on a screen. It goes without saying we are very much looking forward to our Christmas get together – this time in person!

Most importantly, we have welcomed three new members to the Highways and Byways community and we are delighted that they have joined us. – see opposite.

We have some wonderful stories of the impacts of our small grants in this edition. One such program is the I Am project (below) in Smithton Tasmania, where young women were beautifully mentored by older women in the local area. Read about this successful program on Page 2.



*The 'I Am' Project,
For young women
in Smithton, on the
far north west coast
of Tasmania*

WELCOME TO OUR NEW PEOPLE!

This year we welcomed **Cheryle Royle** as our latest Board Member. Cheryle is the former CEO of St. Vincent's Private Hospital in Brisbane, and has a wealth of experience at Board level.

Denis Fitzgerald has also joined us taking on the role of Patron of Highways and Byways. Denis is a former director of Catholic Social Services Victoria and is involved in many volunteer ministries.

Staff wise we are delighted that **Marnie Wylde** has taken up a new position of part-time grants Administration Officer. Marnie has hit the ground running, launching the 2021 Small Grants Program – whilst working 100% remotely and having not met staff yet!



*Cheryle Royle,
Director of
Highways
and Byways*



*Denis Fitzgerald
Patron of
Highways
and Byways*



*Marnie Wylde,
Part-Time
grants
Admin Officer*

In November 2020 we launched our 2021 Small Grants Program with the theme 'Healing the Land – Healing Ourselves – Together'. We are keen to support communities suffering the impacts of ongoing drought and climate change, and those getting back on their feet following the devastation of the fires which began in Australia in September 2019.

2021 – 2030 has been declared the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. Within a few hours of opening our grants program we had our first application!

Please let others know in your community who may be interested in a small grant. Further information is available on our website.

<https://highwaysandbyways.org.au/grants/>

**FOOD FOR THE HIGHWAYS AND
BYWAYS FUNDRAISING GET-
TOGETHERS – THEY'RE HAPPENING!**

Join us if you can - Cook a delicious meal, host a cocktail party or have a lovely afternoon tea or brunch for family and friends. All donations support our forthcoming Small Grants Program.

We hope you have a joyful, peaceful and connected Christmas and we look forward to being in touch in 2021. Thank you as always for your wonderful support.
Liz McAloon, Executive Officer

SUCCESS BREWing IN WALGETT

Walgett, NSW

A few new faces have started turning up for Friday night food and fun activities at the Walgett Police Citizens Youth Club. They are young women who now consider the PCYC a safe place to 'hang out', following the success of 'Girls BREW', an eight-week program to build connections in the small town in western NSW.

Twelve Indigenous girls aged between 12 and 18 participated in the program with a special focus on building resilience, following the loss of a 17-year-old local girl who most of the program participants knew or were related to. The program and weekend away was held with support from Highways and Byways.

"We really tried to engage the girls we knew needed support and we also wanted to strengthen the connections between the participants," said Amanda Cheal, Club Manager of Walgett PCYC.

The girls gathered each week learning cooking and meal preparation, aboriginal art, dance and fitness, mentored by local Indigenous women and PCYC staff and volunteers. The program ended with an overnight stay at Pilliga forest where the girls had pottery lessons, which they loved.



One participant, Nyokia said: "The Girls BREW program gave me the opportunity and confidence to step out of my comfort zone. I really enjoyed the artwork lessons and especially the pottery class. The Police Officers, PCYC staff and workshop teachers were really helpful and lots of fun. I really looked forward to the program every week."

Amanda said another key aim of the BREW (Belonging, Resilience, Empowerment and Well Being) program was to strengthen the relationships between the community and police, which at times can be negative experiences. The program helped break down these barriers and build new relationships with local police. Since BREW, Walgett PCYC has employed one participant and others are volunteering at the PCYC programs.

"The girls now feel like they belong at PCYC and enjoy hanging out and taking part in activities in a safe, positive and welcoming environment," Amanda said.

I AM MOVING FORWARD, NOT AWAY

Smithton, TASMANIA

Jodie Saville wants local girls to thrive, not just survive. Too many miss opportunities while they are waiting to 'escape' Smithton, a small isolated town on Tasmania's north-west coast.

Circular Head Aboriginal Corporation, Soroptimist International of Circular Head and Smithton High School ran the 'I Am' Project, involving 17 secondary school aged girls, with support from Highways and Byways. I Am aimed to empower young women to reach their full potential by helping them to develop a positive body image, increased confidence, resilience and a strong sense of self.



Each week the girls were taught new skills, all the time supported by local women and women who had been educated in Smithton, but who had pursued a career elsewhere, or who had come back to Smithton to work.

"We wanted the girls to see that they can achieve a great deal during their schooling and life at Smithton and not just think of escaping. But we also wanted them to learn about career paths and feel comfortable about pursuing something outside of their town," said Jodie, the I Am Project coordinator. "The idea was to also create a sisterhood amongst the girls and their mentors who are local women they will continue to see around."

The girls organised an event at a local café where guest speakers including a paramedic and a vet, talked about their own lives growing up in Smithton and pursuing careers. The girls organised everything from the decorations and tickets and food to greeting guests at the door. They also participated in an I Am graduation night where they walked on stage and had their photos taken.

"All but one of the girls walked on stage and that's pretty incredible to see," Jodie said.

Jodie believes the I Am Project was a great success and said some of the girls have since joined the Circular Head youth leadership group, one successfully applied for part-time work and another girl felt confident enough to sing publicly for the first time during a local 'Out of the Shadows Walk' this year to raise awareness and remember those lost to suicide.

STARTING OVER WITH HOPE ~ AND SOMEONE IN YOUR CORNER

Wellington, NSW

Life after prison can be tough, really tough. A woman, often disconnected from her children, tries to come back to her old life. But it's lonely, sad and uncertain. Then she's offered a chance to go away for a few days with her children and be looked after and supported by people who care and who won't judge her.

That sums up the experience for three women and their children who were part of the 'Writing Our Way Home' project by Barnardos Australia and supported by Highways and Byways.

The women from Wellington, in NSW, stepped out of their difficult lives for a few days and glimpsed how things could be. The weekend, run in partnership with The Write Road, is part of a 'wrap-around' support service provided by Barnardos Australia.



"I felt connected to everything that was happening; the kids, the other women."

It felt good to be with other mums; like a safe place. I'd like to do things like this more often."

~ One of the Mums from the Wellington camp.

Shiree Talbot, from Barnardos, works closely with the women and says two of the families are thriving in recent months and are working to overcome challenges most people could never even imagine.

"We work very closely with these mothers who are from families that have experienced generational trauma. Any support for the mothers will of course benefit their children, who are at risk of not completing school and becoming vulnerable to a lot of other issues," Shiree said.

The 'Writing Our Way Home' weekend focused on culturally meaningful ways for the Indigenous women to share and write stories and connect with their children and community on country.

Shiree said workers were able to help the mothers recognise the emotional and social needs of their children through the process of 'writing our way home'.

"These mothers and kids can have a pretty tough life at home so being together in this safe place meant they could bond with each other and enjoy each other. All the time workers are supporting them to manage any challenges that come along. These women and their children have all suffered so much grief and loss." Shiree said.

"One night we had a camp-fire and the women were showing their kids what to do. They were passing on knowledge and their kids were absorbing what they were saying. The experience made the women feel so valued."

Shiree said most people would have trouble understanding the significance of the camp. "It's about helping these families have hope for a future, helping them believe that there can be a future."



SHARING RECIPES, COOKING TIPS AND HOSPITALITY

West Moonah, HOBART, TASMANIA,

West Moonah might not be on the Tasmanian foodies trail, but that could change anytime, thanks to the locals who are sharing their love of food, culture and talent for cooking.

The Share Food, Share Skill program, run by the West Moonah Community House and supported by Highways and Byways, means dozens of people from around Hobart can now create Arabic, Chinese, Indian and Spanish culinary delights.

The program continues the great food tradition at the community house, where cooking classes have proved successful in bringing together people, especially those isolated or newly arrived migrants.

West Moonah has a high migrant population and the Community House's low-coast child-care centre has children from as many as eight different language groups.

"We love our food here and talking about food is a great way of breaking down barriers. People also feel valued when they see others enjoying what they cook," said Kim who works at the West Moonah Community House and was lucky enough to sample some of the food created during the four-week Share Food, Share Skill program.



The teachers were recruited from the area, including Community House Board member Jose Navarro, who ran the Spanish cooking class. Kim said the Share Food, Share Skill program attracted participants from other parts of Hobart and some people attended all four cultural nights.

One participant said: "Widad was an amazing teacher, I feel confident to cook the dishes at home."

It was great to feel a part of the community. I feel more connected to my cultural roots, which has been difficult since moving to Tasmania."

The food classes are about more than just teaching cooking skills, they are an opportunity for cooks to share their culture and recipes that in some cases, have been cooked by generations of the same family.

The classes also highlight some of the Community House's other programs including the Family Food Patch and Move Well, Eat Well. Widad Al Azzawi, a local woman who volunteered to run the Arabic cooking class, has since run three more classes at the Community House.



HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS – A COMMUNITY OF SERVICE supports people and communities experiencing hardship and disadvantage, especially in rural Australia.

We do this through our annual grants program and longer term initiatives in small rural communities where we partner with local organisations. Highways and Byways is a registered charity with the Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits Commission.

Highways and Byways continues the vision and mission of the Missionary Sisters of Service and Father John Wallis.

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MISSIONARY SISTERS OF SERVICE

A mission of love and service into the highways and byways.

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MSS REMAIN ACTIVE THROUGHOUT COVID

As we embrace the warming days, many of us are breathing a big sigh of relief that the strict COVID-19 restrictions, particularly in Victoria, have been finally lifted. As is our tradition to adapt to the times, we've become quite comfortable over the months in gathering 'over Zoom' and keeping in touch via mobile phone.

In this spirit, Corrie van den Bosch MSS led a contemplation gathering via Zoom (pictured below) on 4th October, the feast day of Saint Francis of Assisi. About 60 people from a variety of locations across Australia, and from New Zealand and Spain, prayed for the healing of our suffering world and for an outpouring of love upon all of humanity.

"All of us know some people and situations that tug at our hearts," said Corrie. "We are also well aware of the global issues that plague our world. It is for these, and all the other people, places, creatures and situations of suffering that we gather for prayerful meditation, that we might be – and become – a healing presence in our world." This continues to be our prayer.



Over the months we have continued to add our voice to important issues that impact vulnerable people.

We joined with more than 300 organisations from across Australia in signing an open letter to Prime Minister Scott Morrison calling for more safe, secure and affordable housing. The initiative was led by the national 'Everybody's Home' campaign, which we endorse, calling on the Federal government to build 30,000 new homes in Australia in the next four years.

In on our work with families across Tasmania, Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia over the years, we have come to know how important it is to have a home. We particularly feel for migrants, refugees and temporary visas holders within our community, who were already facing particular hardship pre-COVID.



WE CAN DECIDE WHICH END WE CHOOSE

The MSS were also co-signatories to an open letter to our Prime Minister endorsing the support for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The letter was released on 6th August, which marked the 75-year anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings and was endorsed by 61 faith organisations. An interfaith prayer gathering was also held to commemorate the event, which some of our sisters attended, online of course!

Each year Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH) participates in the United Nation's 16 Day's Campaign to end gender-based violence (25 November – 10 December). Stancea Vichie MSS has been a member of ACRATH for many years now. Human trafficking is a \$150 billion global industry and Australia is not exempt from this tragedy. We encourage you to look at ACRATH's website (www.acrath.org.au) to access more information, resources and practical tips on how we can each help in the effort to fight human trafficking.

Protecting Vulnerable Children and Adults

The Missionary Sisters of Service recognise the inherent dignity of all people and are committed to creating and maintaining an environment that is safe, supportive, caring and nurturing for all children and adults at risk. In line with new national standards, together with our mission entity, Highways and Byways – A Community of Service, the Missionary Sisters of Service Community has safeguarding information available on its website, including relevant policies and the mechanism to register a complaint. We've also published our Safeguarding Commitment Statement on the website. Following this, on Sunday 25th October, we joined in the Catholic Religious Australia National Day of Sorrow and Promise, which acknowledges survivors of abuse within the Catholic Church and all those who have been hurt by that abuse. Underpinning this, is a clear promise for a better, safer future.

More information on each of these stories can be found on our website:
www.missionarysisters.org.au/News



Marie inside the mobile bookstore. Photo courtesy MSS Archives

On the road with Marie Murphy MSS

Marie Murphy celebrated 57 years as a Missionary Sister of Service this year. Born and bred in Mackay, Queensland, she was 21 years old when she made the long trek south to Tasmania, to join the community in 1964.

Following her formation years in Hobart and Launceston, Marie was transferred to Ellendale in central Tasmania, where she was based for five years (1970—1974). As part of her mission work, she provided Religious Education in all of the schools in the area, teaching and preparing the children for Confirmation, Communion and Reconciliation and so forth.

There was certainly a lot of driving while on mission and the roads weren't always the best, explains Marie. "If we stayed late in Tarraleah and needed to head off to Wayatinah and there was frost on the road, the men would advise us to drive with two wheels in the gravel on the side of the road ... The people were so good to us. They always looked after us and gave us advice on what to do."

As well as the Religious Education and sacrament classes, Marie and another Sister would also stop in at homes in the country areas they were visiting. "Often, you'd be offered a cup of tea and they'd say, 'everything's alright', but then over the cup of tea they'd start telling you all about what's going on in the family, and in life. I really enjoyed the home visits, and spending time with families. The home visits were a very important part of our ministry."

In 1975 Marie was transferred to Toowoomba, Queensland, where she was based for two and a half years. There she was part of the 'inland mission' visiting families and providing Religious education for the children in western Queensland.

Each mission trip could be up to 5 weeks at a time. Marie recalled a particularly amusing story: "At one place, the man of the house had run the bath for us and the water was filthy! I thought, 'I'm cleaner now than if I get into the bathtub!' The water was brown as brown—it was all the western soil straight from the river."

When Marie and the accompanying Sister headed west or south from Toowoomba, usually in a car with no UHF radio, they relied on the women who'd gone before them along with the families they visited, and friendly passers-by. "We never got lost," said Marie.

There were weeks-long mission trips down south-west from Toowoomba, to Cunnamulla, Dirranbandi, and Goodooga, which is just over the border in New South Wales. Marie was also based in Whyalla, South Australia for some time and travelled the vast distances visiting families in the outback opal mining settlements and the big sheep and cattle stations, as well as the farming areas of the Eyre Peninsula. She later spent time in Sydney, NSW, working as a pastoral carer, as well as in Mackay, Queensland.



Marie is grateful that in her later years she was able to move back to her hometown of Mackay in Queensland where her family is—she is the eldest of 12. And though some family, including her parents, have passed away, she is happy that she can be close to the remaining family members.

Read the full story at www.missionarysisters.org.au/2020/10/09/on-the-road-with-marie-murphy-mss