

The Brosnan Centre

**From Community Service
to Social Action**

Peter Norden



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Peter Norden grew up in leafy Hawthorn where as a young child he came under the influence of the Jesuits at their parish in Glenferrie Road. From the age of nine, he attended their oldest established secondary school in Australia, St Patrick's College in East Melbourne. Five weeks after his eighteenth birthday, he joined the Jesuit Order and began studies for the priesthood.

- In 1977 he founded Four Flats Hawthorn, which later became The Brosnan Centre and grew into Jesuit Social Services.
- He was ordained in 1981 and appointed the Chaplain at Melbourne's notorious Pentridge Prison in 1985, after the retirement of his mentor, Father John Brosnan.
- In 1995 he became the first Director of Jesuit Social Services.
- In 2007, he was made an Officer in the Order of Australia 'for service to community development through social research and programs aimed at assisting marginalised young people and offenders, to the mental health sector, and to the Catholic Church in Australia'.
- In 2008, after forty years he decided to leave the Jesuits and was appointed a Vice Chancellor's Fellow at the University of Melbourne, based in the Melbourne Law School.
- He is currently an Adjunct Professor in the School of Global, Urban and Social Sciences at RMIT University.

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Dedication

These personal reflections and historical account of the work of The Brosnan Centre are dedicated to all of those who contributed to the planning, establishment and operation of this service to released offenders over a period of 40 years.

Several hundred individuals made unique contributions in very different capacities. They include the early planning group, representing the then Social Welfare Department and the Youth Parole Board. Then there are the four staff members who worked with me in the very first two years. Next, the members of the Advisory Committee that later merged into a Board of Management. The donors and volunteers also contributed so much, as did the immediate neighbours in Power Street, Hawthorn who made the half way house a real home. It is important to say thank you.

Clearly, it is not possible for all to be acknowledged personally in this historical account.

Instead, on this 40th anniversary of its foundation, I want to include as many as possible who were directly involved in the early years and reflect on my personal involvement over a period of more than 25 years.

Ten years ago, Jesuit Social Services published *Doing Justice: reflections from thirty years*, which was the outcome of the work of social historian and former Professor of History at the University of Melbourne, Greg Denning, himself a former Jesuit. This simple publication will focus more narrowly on the work of The Brosnan Centre with released offenders. It will show how it endeavoured to give expression to the ideals and the work of Father John Brosnan OBE whose name it adopted.

While my personal involvement with the work includes nothing of the last ten years, I want to focus more on the earlier years and the approach that was taken. This became the formula for the development and extension into the work of Jesuit Social Services that I had a direct role in shaping right through to the end of my time as Director in 2002.

Peter Norden AO

Preface

Reference to Social Action in the title of this brief history of the Brosnan Centre explains how, in its expanded present-day form, the organisation has inherited its most important asset, a legacy of fundamental humaneness and value integrity. A positive formal stimulus in that regard has been the declared principles of its auspicing body, the international Jesuit Order. Those principles emphasise 'the service of faith and the promotion of Justice.' But how often does one find a wide gulf between such declarations of organisational commitment to serving the disadvantaged and actual on the ground practices? Especially in an era when the value of rational efficiency, or preoccupation with the calculated returns on social investments can see the neediest of people, especially some youth, written off as a 'bad bet'. A full-on acknowledgement of the inherent dignity and individuality of each person cannot be reconciled with current bureaucratic schemes of pre-determined dosages of attention to the needs of the disadvantaged, or tolerance of social policies and structures which weigh unjustly upon them.

How did the Brosnan initiative avoid value slippage and make a reality of its declared commitment to comprehensively and faithfully respect and support troubled young people? The short answer, as the present account illustrates, was the great good fortune of acquiring staff and affiliates for whom the requisite attitudes and dispositions came naturally. Not that what I read about them or what I have directly observed over an almost two-decade acquaintance, would lead me to characterise them as saintly. Perhaps the exception was their inspirational mentor Father Brosnan although this could be said to be a case of a 'knock-about' priest having sainthood cast upon him. I once described one of the key staffers given to robust expressions of encouragement of young people as 'the Spencer Tracy of young offender aftercare in Victoria'. The naturalness and authenticity of the diverse characters of those directly involved in the work of Brosnan was really an asset in forming constructive relations with a group whose experience of 'helpers' all too often took the form of fleeting encounters with distant authority figures.

Then, as now, young people in trouble with the law generally grew up in localities marked by the accumulation of disadvantages of various kinds, ranging from educational deficiencies and lack of work skills, to

health problems, domestic violence, child abuse and poor health. Indeed, the 3% most disadvantaged postcode areas in Victoria have three-and-a-half times the rate of juvenile convictions than is the case in the remaining 650 postcode areas. This pattern, confirmed by formal studies, was grasped intuitively by significant numbers of influential people drawn into a support network for the Brosnan project. However, a clientele with the potential, in equal measure, to attract criticism and kindly support, was but a first difficulty. A second was a staff of well-motivated, committed individuals of varying degrees of preparedness for the work to be done. Add the fact that community supporters can bear unrealistic expectations of the attainable outcomes, and circumstances existed in which the project could as easily become a tangle of good intentions as a coherent scheme to provide enhanced life opportunities for those whose lives had started unpromisingly.

What was required was an imaginative, disciplined and above all else, clear thinking driver behind the wheel, steadfast in adherence to the three principles of respecting the inherent dignity of the individual, promoting positive life achievements in partnership with the young people served, and acting to ensure that just social arrangements and conditions prevail in their lives. These were the leadership qualities shown by (then) Father Peter Norden SJ. The Brosnan story tells of Peter's unflinching observance of the dictum that the job remains half done until the social conditions or policies that give rise to problems have been remedied. I have been privileged to observe Peter in this social change promoting role and while noticing a degree of grimacing on the part of the recipient of his firm but cheerfully introduced request, it is no surprise that his efforts have met with such a measure of success.

Of course the project as described here has flowered into something much larger and more diverse in its programs in the form of Jesuit Social Services. As is to be expected, the management styles and challenges have evolved under the leadership of the CEO Julie Edwards and her staff. There are new achievements which also justify pride as well as others that have continued from the era described in this history. However, over and above the programmatic elements of Jesuit Social Services, there remain less tangible legacies of an earlier era in which the courageous pursuit of social justice took root within the organisation.

Emeritus Professor Tony Vinson AM

Foundations

These are my memories, observations and reflections about the foundation of The Brosnan Centre, dating back 40 years. They contain my personal perspectives on what happened from the very first days of planning and establishment of the half-way house in Hawthorn. They also contain my experiences of the development and growth of the organisation Jesuit Social Services during the time that I was responsible for its leadership.

It was my involvement with the chaplaincy work of Father Kevin Mogg and Father Joe McMahon at Turana and Malmsbury and Langi Kal Kal Youth Training Centres from 1969 – 1976 that first exposed me to the needs of young offenders leaving correctional institutions.

In my early years of training to become a Jesuit priest and during my studies to be qualified as a social worker at the University of Melbourne during that period, I found some extra time to get to know the needs of young men finishing their sentences, often without a clue where they would go..

For five years, from 1970-1974, I took basketball teams from the Xavier College boarding division to the Turana Youth Training Centre in Parkville most Friday evenings. I knew little about basketball, but soon learnt how to manage the game.

Some of the trainees would tell me ‘Hey I’m getting out next week’. However, I often found they were there again the following Friday, only lasting a few days ‘on the outer’.

After release, most would drift from place to place, living a chaotic existence in the first few weeks, often returning to the places they knew best, either Pentridge Prison, or, if they were lucky, a Youth Training Centre.

I found out about a place called ‘Rushall House’, located in North Fitzroy, which offered some emergency accommodation for this group of young men. However, it was disorganised, with few resources and only one part time residential worker. I used to give him an evening off during that time and found out how difficult these young men found it settling down after finishing a correctional sentence.

I realised something better had to be done and began to think through how this might be possible early in 1975.

Early planning

I was just finishing my university studies. Before commencing theological studies, I was expected to spend a few years working at one of the Jesuits' prestigious secondary schools, like Xavier in Melbourne, or Riverview in Sydney. However, I was completing professional training as a social worker and the leadership of those schools at the time could not envisage a role for a social work trained Jesuit.

Instead, the Jesuit Provincial at the time, Father Pat O'Sullivan, wanted to respond to the newly formulated international mission of the Jesuits at that time: the service of faith and the promotion of justice.

In other parts of the world, Jesuits were standing in solidarity with the poor and the disadvantaged. At the time, the list of those Jesuits who were killed because of that commitment to justice was growing. Almost fifty died within twenty years.

The Australian Jesuit leader knew he had to find ways of giving concrete expression to this radical mission statement in the works of the Australian Jesuits. Patrick O'Sullivan encouraged me in my involvement with young offenders. He gave me hope to start a new social ministry at that time.

During the Easter break in 1975, I put together a proposal for the Jesuits to establish a half way house for young offenders just released from custody. It was a 20-page document, outlining the need, explaining its urgency, and developing the bones of a strategic plan for its implementation. Indicative of the enthusiasm of the Jesuit leadership at that time, I was encouraged to proceed with further planning and preparation.

Completing my fourth year at the University of Melbourne that year, I was then given a posting with the Jesuit parish community in Hawthorn, running the Manresa People's Centre, and spending much of the following year, 1976, planning and preparing for the establishment of a half way house at 56 Power Street Hawthorn. The Jesuits owned a big two storey, double fronted house in busy Power Street, and it began to be prepared for a new function during the later months of 1976.

During that year, I worked closely with the then Hawthorn Local Council (now Boorondara) on their Welfare Advisory Council. I got to



know key people in the Hawthorn community, especially the neighbours living in proximity to the residence at 56 Power Street.

At the same time, I began working closely with senior personnel of the Social Welfare Department of the Victorian Government and those with senior positions on the Youth Parole Board and the Youth Training Centres and prisons.

That planning group consisted of Isabelle Kuester from the Youth Parole Board, Bruce Anderson and Dave McKenzie from Malmsbury, Tony Adami and Ross Lord from Langi Kal Kal and Mike Kelly from the Hostels Division of the Social Welfare Department.

Funding was secured to undertake independent research evaluation of the project from the Canberra based Criminology Research Council, through its then Director, Bill Clifford. Elery Hamilton-Smith AM was engaged to undertake the independent evaluation and he began work monitoring the planning stage in mid-1976. Elery had been a very experienced practitioner in the field of youth work and community development and in his later years had formed a very successful consultative service with his then wife, Jean.

The evaluation grant was for a period of three years, covering the planning for what was intended to be a two-year demonstration project, followed by a period of assessment report writing in the following six months.

Later in 1976, further operational funding was also approved by the



Victorian Government, under its then Minister for Social Welfare, Brian Dixon. Brian Dixon was the Member for St Kilda and an old friend of Father Brosnan from the anti- death penalty campaign to prevent the execution of Ronald Ryan. Father Brosnan, a DLP supporter, had saved Dixon's seat, and the Hamer Government, in a recent State election by speaking up for him when the Catholic Right to Life unfairly targeted him in relation to abortion policy. Brian got home by just 120 votes and the Hamer Government by one seat. This initial funding was provided through the Hostels Division of the Youth Services Division.

Beginnings

During 1976, I began regular visits to the Youth Training Centres at Malmsbury and Langi Kal Kal and to J-Division, the young offenders section at Pentridge Prison. At the different locations I came across many of the young men I had met as younger teenagers at Turana during the five years that I visited there with basketball teams from Xavier College. I also worked alongside of the youth welfare chaplains, who had a significant ministry there at the time.

Malmsbury is about two hours from Melbourne and Langi Kal Kal around three. I would arrive mid-morning and consult with senior staff, then meet individually with prospective releasees who had little idea where they would be living upon release. We were not interested in first or second

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offenders, but young people who had spent much of their young lives in the welfare institutions or youth training centres: young people who had little prospects of success upon release. I would stay throughout the day and have the evening meal with the trainees. I would then remain on for more informal interaction over a coffee and a smoke, seeking to break down the barrier of distrust and build a relationship of engagement. This meant returning home to Melbourne well after 10 pm in a car without even a heater.

I visited the young offenders' section at Pentridge on Sunday mornings, as a volunteer with the St Vincent de Paul Society prison visitation group. It was coordinated by Mick O'Brien, who was working with the Public Solicitor's Office. He later became the Deputy Director of Victorian Legal Aid.

This early exposure and training had a big influence on my life at the time and I became deeply committed to improving the prospects of young people leaving correctional institutions.

On an early visit to J-Division in 1976, one of the young inmates asked me to see a friend who was too scared to talk to me. I found him behind the building, sobbing and looking extremely distressed. He told me that the evening before several of the inmates with whom he shared a dormitory had raped him. He was then transferred to single cell accommodation in nearby A-Division. That young man was serving six months for car theft, but following his traumatic experience turned to drugs and developed a long criminal career with several armed robbery convictions. It was the first of many serious tragedies that I came across in those years, and which enhanced my determination to develop a post-release program that would effectively help these damaged young people find a place in society, away from correctional institutions.

The proposal to open a half way house for offenders was certainly a new venture for the Australian Jesuits and, to the credit of their leadership at the time, an innovative responsibility for a Jesuit in training.

In the final months of 1976, I started searching for suitable staff to be employed in the half way house. Jesuit Brother Paul Callil was assigned to work with me in the first year. Paul's honest way of dealing with people and practical down to earth knowledge of what would be required in a residence of this kind was a blessing and of enormous assistance.

We had sufficient funding to employ two full time workers and I had been really taken with the work of an experienced group worker from Malmsbury youth training centre, Alex Firmager. The second person

employed to begin work in January 1977 was Susan Ellis. Sue did not have professional training or experience in the welfare field, but had just returned from a two year working holiday through Europe. She had excellent relationship and communication skills and was a very adaptable person, eager to learn and to contribute to the new enterprise.

I will say a lot more about Brother Paul, Alex and Sue in a later chapter. Simply put at this stage, the four of us were very different but had a broad range of skills, energy and experience to contribute to the task.

Motivations

What led a 26-year-old trainee Jesuit to be inspired to establish a half way house for young offenders, instead of pursuing an academic career or a ministry of education at one of the Jesuits' secondary schools or university colleges of residence?

Well for a start, I had come from a different background to many of the young Jesuits with whom I had been undertaking studies for the previous seven years. Although growing up in Hawthorn, seen as a comparatively wealthy area, I did not come from a professional family. My father trained as a carpenter and my mother worked with him in a grocery shop behind which we lived in rented accommodation in Glenferrie Road.

My mother and her two sisters, soon after the First World War, spent several years in a Catholic orphanage in South Melbourne run by the Mercy Sisters, following the early death of their mother and the severe trauma their father experienced through his war service years.

Therefore, I had a desire to be involved with the disadvantaged and felt that I had a natural affinity with a different group of people than the ones that the Australian Jesuits were working with. In addition, as I explained earlier, the Jesuits throughout the world were being asked to be more engaged with those on the margins of our society and to give expression to the new international mission of the Order: the service of faith of which the promotion of justice was an integral part.

It was only a decade following the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church in Rome in the early 1960's and a time of energy, optimism and renewal in the Church. Many young men and women at that time graduated from Catholic schools and committed their lives to work as priests, nuns or brothers. A new form of thinking was then challenging the Catholic Church throughout the world: liberation theology.

The Jesuits wanted to contribute towards the creation of a more just

world. In order to do this effectively, many realised that you could only do this by being engaged and exposed to the realities of the world outside of your comfort zone.

Therefore, the motivation for the establishment of The Brosnan Centre in 1977 was both personal and institutional. The Jesuits clearly had strong motivation to establish works that expressed a changed organisational direction. It was an exciting and challenging time to be part of the Catholic Church in Australia.

Methodology

‘See, judge, and act’. This was a basic methodology presented to young people in the church at the time: the methodology of Catholic action.

Eight years of regularly visiting Youth Training Centres prior to 1977, and several years of working as an Honorary Probation Officer during my early years of Jesuit training, had given me some understanding of what the task might involve. I felt very strongly about the lack of opportunities that young people in conflict with the law had at that time.

Four years of professional social work training at the University of Melbourne also helped, in that it gave me a methodology, a disciplined way of assessing and analysing social needs. I also sought to learn from what others had already done, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States. There was a wealth of information and material on half way houses and post release centres in those countries. I knew what to look out for and where some of the pitfalls might lie.

One of the key ingredients I was certain about was that a successful venture of this nature would only come about because of a real engagement and empathy with the young people we were intending to assist. As a group of highly institutionalised young people, they had had their fill of professionals who treated them simply as clients and were not prepared to go the extra mile. Many had been hurt and rejected by their own families, if they had even known their family. They were not slow to be withdrawn or, on the other hand, to challenge by aggressive or threatening behaviour people who presented themselves as ‘helpers’.

Therefore, the essence of the Brosnan Centre from the very beginning was engagement and relationships that were non-judgemental and enduring. Whenever possible, we commenced and developed these relationships during the time that the young person was still in custody, often several months before he or she was released. When that occurred,

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as the early evaluation reports found, there was much greater hope of success through involvement in the after care program.

The Youth Parole Board and the senior administrators at the Youth Training Centres would often point us in the direction of those young offenders who showed 'good prospects' upon release. We were interested in a different young person. In this sense, the work was always more a Christian outreach ministry than a social work initiative.

However, to be clear, we were always about bringing about change, not reinforcing dependency or helplessness. In our interventions, in our group therapy sessions, there was a lot of confrontation. We just did not accept that the life script of these young people had already been written... even for those who had been deeply scarred by early life experience or the brutality of the prison experience.

The other key aspect of the Brosnan Centre initiative, that grew into the organisation Jesuit Social Services, was that we were interested not only in individual change but in structural and policy change as well. However, policy and research work needed to be solidly based in substantial involvement and experience of the lives of the people alongside whom we were working. Many welfare organisations then and now are more interested in building their organisation and expanding their funding base, not risking all because of what they are committed to.

The Management Group

The planning and advisory group that functioned throughout 1976 stepped aside to a management group, and a company limited by guarantee was established: Four Flats Hawthorn Limited. The name chosen was intended to be somewhat anonymous. It reflected the model of the residential service that was being provided at the property at 56 Power Street.

Mick O'Brien, an experienced solicitor working in the field of legal aid, was appointed the Chairperson of the new management group. Our Company Secretary, Jim Fuller, from the Federal Prosecutor's Office and our accountant, John Quin, who helped us establish an appropriate level of financial management, ably assisted him. Two neighbours were also on the management group, Maggie Ryan, who at that time was completing her Doctorate in Social Work, involved in professional practice at the Women's Hospital, and Peter O'Bryan, the partner of Frank Galbally from Galbally & O'Bryan lawyers. In the early days, a local GP, Dr John McEncroe, and a senior Hawthorn police officer, Sergeant Bill



Gooden, were also involved. Two other members of the Management Group were Father Grant O'Neill, the then chaplain at Turana Youth Training Centre, and Sister Ann Dalton, the Provincial of the Good Shepherd Sisters, an Order that had extensive experience of work with the disadvantaged and street people.

Many generous people contributed to the management and governance of The Brosnan Centre (and later Jesuit Social Services) over the years. I cannot acknowledge them all. However I want to recall those individuals who provided their professional services in the very early years of our operations.

The Youth Welfare Chaplains to the juvenile justice institutions contributed a great deal through personal involvement and support to our staff and as members of the Management Group over the years.

These included not only Grant O'Neill, but also Brian Glasheen, Michael Mulcahy and Brian Jory. Brian left the priesthood during the 1990's and encountered serious illness and died several years ago now. Like many who leave the priesthood, he received little personal support from his former colleagues and little financial assistance from the Melbourne Archdiocese.

It was a new venture and there were many 'unknowns' as we started out in 1977. Yet we were provided with expertise from a wide range of personnel, many of whom provided their services for a very long time. They deserve acknowledgement on this 40th anniversary of our beginnings.

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Early staffers

The Jesuit Provincial, Father Patrick O'Sullivan, had assigned Paul Callil, a Jesuit Brother, and me to this latest initiative of the Jesuit Order. I employed two salaried members of staff, Alex Firmager and Susan Ellis.

In addition, numerous volunteers were engaged from the local community, including cooks, cleaners, tradespeople, and friendly neighbours. For example Sally O'Shaughnessy, a mother of eight, committed her family to providing a prepared meal each week for our household. Another was Julie Kantor, who had just left secondary school. Her mother, Ann, volunteered her to cook a meal every Thursday evening. Ann a psychotherapist had been a Board Member of VACRO for many years and was deeply committed to the welfare of the families of prisoners. Julie was a vivacious young teenager and was never short of helpers to peel the potatoes and set the tables on her evening on duty! Ann Consedine was a 60-year-old widow who volunteered to give the main kitchen and dining room a thorough cleaning once a week. Jack Duffy lived across the road and provided his plumbing services with minimal fees whenever required. Maggie and Des Ryan also lived opposite and found out the birthdays of each of the residents providing a birthday cake to make a special occasion. They also generously opened up their backyard swimming pool to the residents. Tony Prytz, who had been one of the boarders from Xavier College who was a regular member of the basketball team that visited Turana, had begun university studies. He volunteered to join the residential community for the first two months, playing a kind of bridging role between the young men released from institutions and our staff group.

Alex Firmager was a very important part of our early staff group. He had by then extensive experience in the welfare field, after working as a Irish labourer living in the East End of London and digging tunnels for the underground railway. After he arrived in Australia, he worked for a couple of years as a prison officer, but realised that this was not for him. Instead, he was employed by the Social Welfare Department as a Youth Officer at Malmsbury Youth Training Centre and later at Turana, now the Melbourne Juvenile Justice Centre in Parkville. Alex had lived a tough life in his early years and brought a great wealth of human experience to his work in the welfare field. He was employed as a Group Worker, and essentially shaped and fashioned our treatment model within the residential unit. He was very skilful at engaging alienated and angry young people and could deal sensi-



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tively and gently, but also could confront and challenge, the most intimidating and potentially violent young men.

Alex, for example, worked very sensitively with some of the residents lacking social capacity and who experienced intellectual disability as well. I recall him excelling with other more competent individuals who were more outgoing or even aggressive. One such character was Timothy Neville, now deceased, who had been through the welfare institutions in Geelong, but was articulate and at times manipulative. Tim later became a 'heavy' at Pentridge. He was in the group of four inmates who managed to escape from the new ultra maximum-security section, Jika Jika in 1983.

Susan Ellis was new to the welfare field. She had worked in a range of administrative roles before heading overseas in her mid twenties for an extensive working holiday. She presented as an insightful, enthusiastic, eager to learn worker, and fitted excellently into a role of FieldWorker, able to respond generously and quickly to whatever need arose.

Brother Paul Callil had previously worked within the Jesuit secondary schools ministry, not as a teacher but as a sports coach, boarding master and practical hands on sort of person. He had an important role in establishing and managing the practical aspects of life at 56 Power Street. Although he had limited formal welfare work experience, Paul had always been interested in the social work field and had accompanied many of his former students in work with aboriginal and homeless persons.

Paul was challenged by the work at Power Street, especially when our investment of time and effort was often met with failure or rejection. Before he died several years ago now, he told me he greatly appreciated his time working at the half way house but found it difficult to maintain positive expectations in the face of many disappointments.

At the end of 1977 Father Paddy Mullins, whose ministry had previously been in Townsville with indigenous people, replaced him. Paddy was also a very down to earth sort of person and related easily and in a non-threatening way to the young men and later young women with whom we were engaged. He had a great sense of humour and was hard to fluster. He later continued his work with indigenous people in remote parts of Australia and currently works in Mount Druitt, one of the most disadvantaged communities in New South Wales.

My role in the first two years was one of leadership and management of the new initiative, engaging extensively in outreach into the correctional institutions and supporting Alex in the residential treatment program.

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The institutions

Over the last forty years, there have been several significant changes in the correctional field in Victoria. The prison population has increased incredibly, as it has throughout Australia, despite the fact that there has been no comparative increase in serious crime. In 1977, the Victorian prison population was relatively small and almost half of that population resided in Coburg at the infamous Pentridge Prison. All male offenders aged seventeen upwards were held at the notorious D-Division remand section at Pentridge. There they awaited trial, unless they were fortunate in obtaining bail. Our young people rarely got bail, regardless of the nature of the charge, because they often did not have a stable place of accommodation. Therefore, a lot of my time was spent at Pentridge, in the D-Division remand section, and in J-Division, in those years the young offenders section, which held about 120 young men aged 17-21 in four large dormitories.

Both of these sections of the prison were completely inappropriate in difference respects. The remand section had little capacity for segregation between young and old, serious offenders and minor offenders who were refused bail and awaiting trial. The dormitories in J-Division were almost completely unsupervised from 4 pm until 8 am, with just one officer on patrol between four large dormitories, places of frequent violence and sexual assault.

The other institutions that Alex Firmager and I regularly visited during those first two years were the Classification Section for 17 -21 year olds at Turana in Parkville and the two adult Youth Training Centres, based in country Victoria, at Malmsbury and at Langi Kal Kal, west of Ballarat.

Victoria led the way in providing an alternative sentencing option for the criminal courts in making available an alternative to adult imprisonment for those aged between 17 and 21. This meant that Magistrates and Judges in Victoria were able to impose a period of incarceration in a facility that was specifically designed for younger adult offenders. Both Malmsbury and Langi Kal Kal provided good opportunities for further education and training in employable skills, like carpentry, metalwork and spray painting. In addition, Langi Kal Kal, which is now an adult prison, had 1,000-acre cattle and sheep farm that was a wonderful alternative for city kids serving a sentence for comparatively minor crimes, such as car theft or burglary.

For several years, Alex Firmager had been a senior worker at both

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Malmsbury and Turana Youth Training Centres. He was highly regarded at those institutions. From 1976 onwards, I began a long period of involvement at Pentridge Prison, and I can assure you that in those early years the place was barbaric. There were few non-custodial staff, apart from the prison doctor, nurses and psychiatrist and some welfare officers. Professional outside visitors often had a difficult time negotiating the closed brutal environment.

The Victorian Juvenile Justice Centres (as they are now called) were always seen as more advanced than those of other States and Territories around Australia. In accord with the Victorian legislation, they truly incorporated the welfare of the child as the primary goal of their operations, in contrast to what was happening in other States and Territories. New South Wales, in contrast, had enormous numbers of young offenders incarcerated, often in brutal military style run institutions. A place like Mt Penang was run as a quasi-military camp. Its graduates filled the New South Wales prison system for many decades to come.

Only in recent times has the Australian community been exposed, once again, to the brutalities of juvenile justice detention. Its extremes were exposed in an ABC Four Corners program in July 2016, which focused on the Dondale Juvenile Justice Centre in the Northern Territory. Such punitive regimes have never produced positive outcomes in terms of behavioural change. The lives of these young people are intertwined with a complexity of social needs and disadvantage.

I cannot say, however, that Pentridge Prison in the 1970's was in advance of any other adult correctional facility in Australia. The model of operation there was shaped by the penal mentality entrenched in Australian society since the days of transportation. I was exposed to that brutality from a very young age and it reinforced in me how much needed to be done after release to help put together the lives of young offenders.

Disaster strikes: the death of Mrs Cooper

After more than thirty years working within the criminal justice system in Australia, during which time I observed a great deal of violence, trauma and sadness, there is nothing that can match the disappointment and tragedy that I closely observed in the death of Mrs Joyes Cooper in 1977. It was an experience that caused me a great deal of sadness and grief, which remains with me today.

The half way house, where possible, sought to find employment for

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the young people who were engaged in the residential program. To supplement those limited job opportunities, we began a handyman service, advertised through the local Catholic Church, in the Hawthorn area. The parish had been supportive of the work we had started at the beginning of 1977 and received regular updates of the progress of that work during the year.

Several parishioners responded to a news item in the parish notices offering handyman services by young people at the half way house.

In September of that year, we arranged for Colin, an eighteen year old, to help clean down the kitchen walls of an elderly woman who lived in Shakespeare Grove, in the western part of Hawthorn, not far from the Xavier boat sheds.

Normally one of our workers would accompany the young person to the work site and depending on the circumstances would remain until the job was completed. On this occasion, Mrs Cooper said that there was no need for our worker to remain during the morning.

Early that evening, the homicide squad arrived at the half way house investigating the stabbing death of an elderly woman in Shakespeare Grove. It was an unthinkable event. It was an absolute tragedy that should never have occurred. The death of this elderly, defenceless lady impacted most of all, of course, on her family. Mrs Cooper had two sons, both of whom had been educated at the Jesuit-run Xavier College. One was a Kew Councillor at the time and later became a Victorian parliamentarian as part of the Kennett Government. He was due to become the Minister for Police and Corrections, if Jeff Kennett had been returned at the 1999 election.

Nothing could ever make up for this senseless loss of life and nothing could ever provide any comfort to Mrs Cooper's family members.

Understandably, one of the sons visited the half way house a few days after his mother's death deeply distressed and angry. Any attempt on my part to express remorse or comfort was futile.

Within two days of Mrs Cooper's death, a Jesuit Brother, Brian Lord, was moved by the Jesuit Provincial from Sydney to Melbourne, to be available full time to assist Mrs Cooper's husband with any practical matters in the coming months, but his services were not requested.

Colin was convicted of manslaughter in May 1978 and sentenced to twelve years imprisonment. Following his conviction and sentence, Mike Willesee interviewed the family for his evening show. He was the compere of the then highest rating commercial current affairs program, Willesee

at Seven, the equivalent of today's 60 Minutes. That evening, I responded live at Channel 7 studios, my first experience with the media. My intention was to convey a truly felt sense of grief and understanding for the continuing pain of the family. Their interview had been pre-recorded. As the interview concluded, Robin Cooper summed up the sadness and the anger of their family in these words: 'As far as we are concerned, the Catholic Church, and the Jesuits in particular, can go to hell'.

Before heading to an advertisement break, Willesee responded: 'After the break, we speak to the young Jesuit trainee responsible for placing this young offender in the home of Mrs Cooper'. In the interview that followed, I did whatever I could to empathise with the enormous loss felt by the Cooper family. Little could be said or done to fill that loss.

The Cooper family attempted to have the half way house closed, but we received enormous support from within the Hawthorn community, including from the Hawthorn City Council, under the leadership of the then Mayor, Betty Marginson, and from the local State Member, Dr Walter Jona, who was the Victorian Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs.

More than twenty years later Robin Cooper again reported on the details of the crime in a Herald Sun full-page feature on violent crime. My sense of grief and regret remained with me. I did not want to allow the article to pass without attempting once again to express my sorrow to the family. So I wrote to him expressing my sorrow and understanding of their continuing pain, twenty years later. The letter was returned by the Cooper family, unopened.

I was never given the opportunity to respond to the questions and the confusion as to why this elderly woman was killed in such a violent way. I thought it might have helped family members to learn something of what went through the mind of this young man convicted of their mother's killing.

I myself found out what happened only some years later. While working at Mrs Cooper's home that morning, Colin heard her talking on the phone to a friend and found out that her first name sounded the same as his own mother's: Joyce. Mrs Cooper said to her friend that she had a young man working in her kitchen and she did not like the look of him at all. It seems that she went on to say that she would be glad when he left. Yet Mrs Cooper invited him back to complete further work in the afternoon. Colin came back that afternoon as invited, but, affected by some medication he had taken, he took a kitchen knife and stabbed the

elderly woman several times.

His own mother, Joyce, had abandoned her three boys when Colin was just seven years old. This fact does not excuse in any way his violent and unlawful taking of the life of Mrs Cooper. However, it may explain something of his senseless action that day in September 1977.

Relocation to Cambridge St, Collingwood

After the completion of the two year demonstration project in 1977 and 1978, it was time for me to continue my theological studies in preparation for ordination to the priesthood, which took place in 1981. The independent evaluation interim reports of the program from Elery Hamilton-Smith had been positive, but the results would not be available for a further two years.

However, the Victorian Social Welfare Department was enthusiastic to see the project continue because it had begun to fill a need that had been obvious for so long. It had addressed the needs of some of their most institutionalised and damaged young people, who generally spent the next few decades of their lives moving in and out of the correctional or mental health institutions of the State.

Therefore, the Jesuits agreed that I could set up the program to continue under an independent management group, loosely affiliated as a ministry of the Catholic Church.

I recruited David Murray to take my place as manager of the half way house. David had just completed a two-year stint in a training capacity as an Assistant Director of Turana Youth Training Centre. He was most suited for the task. Many years later, he returned to take up the position of Policy Director of Jesuit Social Services during the dynamic period of growth and expansion. David's insightful and analytical mind was critical in that later period. It was a strong senior leadership team during those years.

After a further four years' operation at 56 Power Street, our internal reviews and the evaluation reports indicated that there would be greater benefit to move our residential model of operation in Hawthorn to a resource centre model. Such a new model would be able to provide outreach to the institutions and off-site supervision and support to a range of independent housing options, known as 'lead tenant' houses.

The project moved its central base to Cambridge Street in Collingwood, into a shop-front style operation and under David Murray's leadership increased the number of accommodation options in a range of inner subur-

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ban locations, including Richmond, Northcote, Coburg and Brunswick.

This change in model meant that the resources of the employed staff, now numbering seven or eight, were not overly focused on the young people residing in one particular residence. Instead, they could be extended to a larger number of young people in a much larger group of houses and apartments. It was a model that emphasised more independent living, while continuing to provide individual and group support. This important change represented a great improvement.

In these early years, the value of extensive pre-release engagement of the young people during the final six months of their sentence was maintained as an essential ingredient of the treatment program. Alienated young people who believed they had few prospects after release needed substantial reassurance and encouragement before they were released, if there was to be any serious attempt at resettlement once they returned to the community.

One or two interviews with a youth worker or social worker from out of the blue meant very little to the life of a young person locked up in a correctional institution. Many had passed through the welfare or child protection system and had experienced many different welfare staff passing through their lives. The goal of our program was to establish a rapport

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with such young people during the period of their incarceration. In that way, work that was undertaken after release could be fully implemented, because there was a relationship of trust and engagement with the worker from The Brosnan Centre.

The Youth Grow Garden, Abbotsford

It was during this time that our efforts to prepare young people for employment were enhanced by the establishment of a horticultural training program. It was funded under various government training schemes and substantially from the James Goold Trust, operated by the Good Shepherd Sisters, and The Myer Foundation and The Felton Bequest.

Another key supporter of our work from these early days was the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. Its inaugural Director, Rhonda Galbally AO, was a dynamo and energetic supporter of innovative approaches to public health, including for groups that were on the margins of society. Rhonda has continued to make substantial contributions to our Australian society through various roles, currently as a Board member of the Disability Insurance Scheme. She played a key role in getting this national program established and in ensuring that it is responsive and attentive to the voice of persons with disability today. She has remained a lifelong friend, and her personal support has been particularly appreciated during the last ten years!

In 1984, we were fortunate to obtain an unused property owned by the Good Shepherd Sisters in Abbotsford. The then Catholic prison chaplain, Father John Brosnan, had lived for the first fifteen years of his work at Pentridge on the very site. In addition to this site, the Sisters also provided us with use of a further three acres of garden space on the banks of the Yarra River, right next door to the Collingwood Children's Farm.

Paul Newland was the shaper and manager of this new initiative. Originally a New Zealander, Paul had professional training in horticulture. He also had the personal and social skills most suitable for working with troubled young men and women.

This program was extremely successful, over more than twenty years, mostly due to Paul Newland's and later Andrew Dodds' good management capacity. It engaged large numbers of young people in a Jobs Skills Training Program that prepared them for the workplace in later life.

I was pleased to see large numbers of young people involved in this employment training program, because there was always a risk that

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similar programs presented well to the public, but were less effective at engaging difficult young people on a longer-term basis. For example, in 1999, the program provided 3,000 training days for 60 young people who were all actively engaged.

The goal of this type of program is to assist young people become 'work ready', and their success is to be measured by the hard facts of how many young people move on to part-time or full-time employment. Much better funded programs that we conducted in later years, such as Gateway, had less success in engaging substantial numbers of young people and equipping them to make the transition into employment and the open job market.

The garden program later relocated to Burnley, where the City of Yarra made available a former council depot, a much larger space where we could continue the horticultural work as well as having space for training and remedial educational work.

I recall hosting the then Federal Minister for Employment and Training, Tony Abbott, to Burnley one morning. Tony had been educated by the Jesuits at St Ignatius College, Riverview, and knew of the initiatives of the Order in the field of social welfare and social justice.

He had planned to spend two hours with us and in the end stayed for almost three. The first hour I placed him in a group of several young men and women and left them alone as he sat on a bench and listened to their experiences of education, training and the difficulties they encountered in accessing the job market. The following hour, the Garden Manager, Andrew Dodds and I sat with the Minister and heard his reflections. He

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admitted that the Federal Government funded programs did nothing at that time to reach the needs of this group of young people. He was very honest and very much engaged in the morning's consultation.

Later that year, his Department began a new national initiative, the Personal Support Program, tailored to young people with more complex needs, long term unemployed with no work experience, whose circumstances were compounded by such factors as a criminal record, a mental health history or substance misuse.

Another example of how this training program aimed to bring about national policy change in relation to youth unemployment was illustrated in a meeting I had with Lindsay Fox, the trucking magnate. I had assisted Lindsay with a family matter the previous year, and I must admit that I had hoped that our meeting might result in his funding a further extension of our Garden Project.

In our discussion, he discovered that one of our difficulties was obtaining government subsidies for young people just released from prison who had never worked in their lives, but were not regarded as long term unemployed since they had only been released from prison for two or three weeks.

Lindsay called out to his personal assistant: 'Get Simon on the phone'. I had no idea whom he was calling. Then a minute later, his secretary sent a message 'Mr Fox, Simon Crean is now on the line'. Simon Crean was then the Federal Minister for Employment and Training. When I explained to the Minister on speakerphone what our difficulty was, he simply replied he would sort it out. The phone call concluded, Lindsay Fox and I continued our conversation. Five minutes later, his secretary came into the office carrying a faxed letter from the Federal Minister, changing the program criteria nationally to include those who had recently spent time in prison! It was a quick way of getting results, which affected not only our Garden Project, but employment programs right across the country.

Father John Brosnan OBE

John Brosnan served as Pentridge Prison chaplain for thirty years. He was ordained a priest in 1945 and after working for two years as chaplain to the Catholic orphanages in Geelong, he was posted to Saint Joseph's parish in Collingwood in 1948. He remained there for two years and then worked for a further six years at St John's parish in East Melbourne.

In January 1956, Archbishop Mannix appointed him as the first full-time Catholic chaplain to the Victorian prison system. He was then aged



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36 and Pentridge was 105 years old, the first prisoners arriving there in 1851. He remained in that job until March 1985, just under thirty years.

It is hard to describe Father John Brosnan's contribution to the Victorian community in a few pages. In 1985, the esteemed Herald Sun journalist, Tom Prior, wrote a book about Bros: 'A Knockabout Priest'. He died in 2003, aged 83.

When he arrived at Pentridge as chaplain in 1956, John Brosnan was both astonished and disturbed to find so many of his former junior football players from the inner city parishes and from the orphanages at Geelong now serving time. Before the psychologists had worked it out, he spoke about 'kids' futures being written on their faces before they were born'.

John Brosnan was a central player in the movement to prevent the execution of Ronald Ryan, the last man hanged in Australia. In fact, with Ryan's assent, he intervened the night before to prevent Ryan's associates from breaking him out of Pentridge Prison in the middle of the night.

Reflecting on the first 25 years of service as a prison chaplain he once said: 'Three things I have noted are needed by someone leaving prison: a place to live that is decent, a job that they can handle, and lastly, and the most important of all, friendship'. This saying quickly became the mantra for the mission of The Brosnan Centre.

However, there was another saying of Father Brosnan, less known than the above, one that reflected his wisdom and life experience: 'Nurse a mug long enough and he will die in your arms'. In other words, even working with people in desperate situations, there is a danger that our interventions, intended to help, can become counterproductive, if they do not leave open the opportunity for greater independence and some level of self-reliance.

These perspectives were reflected in the very first objectives of The Brosnan Centre, which I had articulated back in 1976:

- Reduction in the probability of recidivism
- Ability to live independently within society
- Reduction of human indignity and suffering

It was upon Father Brosnan's retirement from the prison in 1985, that I decided to rename the half way house known as Four Flats since its establishment in 1977 as The Brosnan Centre. It was a move well supported by the organisation and the wider community, as was evidenced by the success of the fundraising campaign to purchase a property in Sydney Road Brunswick as our new headquarters.



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From this time we engaged more closely with some of our major supporters and personal donors. It is difficult to mention all of these, but Glenda and Andrew Simpson, and Ann and Julie Kantor were outstanding examples of long term committed support. I wish to express my thanks to them all, but these individuals in particular.

Father Brosnan was the first Catholic priest in Victoria granted a State funeral. The two executors of his Will, lawyers Frank Moore and Ferdie Zito, argued hard against the idea of a State Funeral. They pointed out that his Will indicated that he wished to be buried in the Williamstown cemetery alongside his parents. As a non-lawyer, I had to draw their attention to the detail, that his desire to be buried at Williamstown did not eliminate or counter his verbal agreement a few weeks before his death to myself and Bernie Geary that he would not be opposed to the possibility of a State Funeral, should the State Government make such an offer. His sister and next of kin, Mary Wiltshire, agreed.

One of his executors, Frank Moore, also suggested that he had been out of the public eye for quite a while and that the local Williamstown church would be more suitable than St Patrick's Cathedral. Even the Archbishop took some convincing about the issue, but in the end, the offer of a State Funeral was well received both all concerned.

When he finally died at the age of 83 at Nazareth House in Camberwell in 2003, some eighteen years after he had finished working at Pentridge, his funeral was conducted at St Patrick's Cathedral, filled with more than 2,000 people wishing to give tribute to this generous man. The newspaper and television tributes at the time of his death and again on the day of the funeral were an equally moving public recognition across the country.

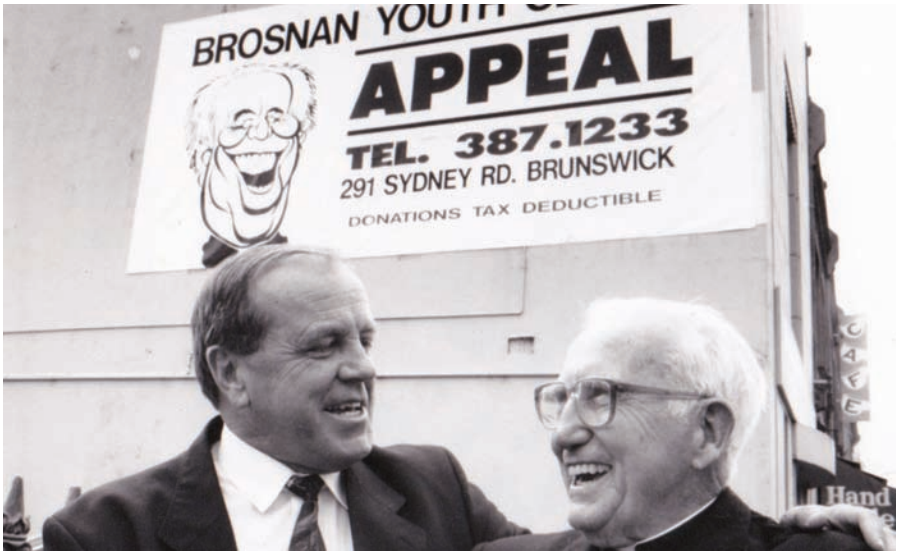
Relocation to Sydney Rd, Brunswick

The fundraising campaign to find a new home for the Brosnan Centre conducted during 1985 and 1986 was very successful. We then purchased a former funeral parlour, in Sydney Road Brunswick. That initial fundraising campaign established the connection with the key contributors and regular donors to the work of Jesuit Social Services in coming years.

Through this project, the Brosnan Centre developed a strong supporter base of over 2,000 individuals, many of whom had simply known of the work of Father Brosnan through the media. This group of individuals and family groups grew in number over the coming years and were very faithful



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in the support of the work. Many gave donations once or twice a year, providing whatever they could afford. The letters enclosed with many of those donations were very moving and I only wished that I had retained some of them. They came from all parts of Australia. Many had no connection with the Catholic Church, and represented people of all political persuasions. They often realised that something was wrong with our so-called 'correctional system' in Australia and had been convinced that an organisation named after Father Brosnan was worthy of their support.

Others of our donors were people of substantial means. They would anonymously donate large amounts of money, both in June and again in December of each year. Their generosity made it possible for us to develop programs that were adapted to the needs of the young people. This is so different from being largely dependent on government funding. When this happens it determines how the program should run and it controls such details as to how many hours each week could be spent with a particular individual, or how many months they were allowed to remain on the program. Our young people had complex needs and often the relationship with them, following their release, lasted for more than twelve months.

After this initial fundraising campaign 'To find a home for the Brosnan Centre' we were able to purchase a property at 291 Sydney Road, Brunswick.. The building was in need of repair and I called on one of Father Brosnan's old mates, Norm Gallagher, the head of the Builders'





Labourers Federation, a very militant and powerful union, to assist. Norm in turn asked a favour of some of the biggest building and construction firms in Melbourne and the place was suitably renovated in time for its official opening by the then Victorian Premier John Cain. Norm Gallagher, of course, was in the audience, right in front of the Premier, the two having been militant antagonists over previous years.

In his speech, Premier Cain quipped: 'Father Brosnan is someone who has worked with a terrible lot of people!'

Brunswick was a great location for the new Brosnan Centre, with Pentridge still in full operation just down Sydney Road, the Melbourne Juvenile Justice Centre just around the corner in Parkville, and the new Metropolitan Remand Centre opening in Spencer Street the following year.

Mark Griffiths was one of the Managers at Sydney Road, later to be replaced by Bernie Geary, and then by Peter Coghlan and Tony Hayes. More will be said of the contribution made by Mark and Bernie later on. The contribution made by Peter Coghlan and Tony Hayes over a number of years should be acknowledged.

Peter Coghlan had been the manager of the large Dandenong Office of the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau, dealing with counselling, adoptions and child protection. He had limited prior experience working with young offenders, but was a very good manager of staff. During his time, the strength of his leadership was particularly identified in the way in

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which he attracted social workers and youth workers adept at working with alienated youth. His management style was inclusive and it was a time of very effective work.

Tony Hayes was a person with extensive experience in the juvenile justice area, having worked in senior roles at Turana for many years. He was also a very good manager of staff and a very steady hand. The Brosnan Centre was fortunate in having a large number of outstanding youth workers during this period. One of these was Andy Walsh, who was a senior youth worker there for several years. Andy was of imposing height and build. I had first met him when he was just a little boy, growing up in Watsonia, where I began my studies towards the priesthood, at Loyola College.

The Brosnan Centre worked very closely during these years with the Youth Parole Board. From our beginnings, the Chair of the Youth Parole Board had been Judge Jim Forrest. During the 1980's, it was chaired by Judge Eugene Cullity, whose style of operation very much complemented the nature of the work of the Brosnan Centre. Judge Cullity had grown up in a family familiar with the criminal world! His father had been one of the most outstanding criminal barristers in Australia. As Chair of the Youth Parole Board, Eugene displayed extraordinary concern and commitment to the welfare of the young people under the Board's supervision. For example, he would sometimes receive a report of a young man who had been on parole having been arrested and who was being held in a police station, sometimes in metropolitan Melbourne, sometimes in country Victoria. Eugene would be so concerned about the welfare of

that young person that he would drive to the Police Station and interview him in the Police Cells, rather than wait for the young person to be remanded in Melbourne, and, perhaps, some weeks or months later, appear before the Board. He knew that it was important to intervene early, to maximum the lessons that could be learnt.

Judge Michael Bourke later became the Chair of the Youth Parole Board and he continued the great tradition set by his predecessor, in terms of intervening in a way, which held the welfare of the child as paramount, consistent with the objectives of the Children and Young Persons Act.

The establishment of Perry House

From our establishment in 1977, it was clear that many of the young people who had been incarcerated in Victoria not only had social disadvantages of one kind or another, but a significant percentage also had an intellectual disability. The young are vulnerable in adult correctional facilities but young people with an intellectual disability are doubly vulnerable.

We knew from the very early years that we needed to provide a specific arm of our support services to cater for this group. From my involvement in visiting the Youth Training Centres from 1970 and from visiting the adult prisons from 1976, I came across many young people who had special needs. Those with mental health needs were often more identifiable than those with a significant intellectual disability.

In recent years, I have been involved in teaching mental health assessment to RMIT students completing their Bachelor or Masters Degree in Social Work. The practical skills in identifying disability that I learnt from professional practice have been an important part of my teaching approach.

Within the juvenile justice institutions, and much more so with the adult prisons, young people with a disability are extremely vulnerable. Thankfully, there are programs within the juvenile justice institutions that respond to their protective needs. Within the adult prisons, whilst there have been improvements in recent times, they are still a very vulnerable group.

Someone who knew a lot about this area of work from his work at Turana Youth Training Centre over many years was Brian Perry. Brian was one of the key social workers who helped us develop this aspect of the post release program. Brian had worked at Turana for a very long time and was a person with broad knowledge and experience, amazing patience, and a big heart.



It was because of the extent of his work in supporting young offenders with particular disabilities that it was decided to name the main boarding house catering for this group 'Perry House'. Joan Kirner, who became Premier of Victoria immediately after John Cain, opened this facility in Nicholson Street Brunswick. It later moved to Reservoir, well led by Rob Ware for many years.

It was an important stage in the development of the Brosnan Centre program for this group of young people.

Threat from within

In 1995, the then Jesuit Provincial leader, Father Bill Uren, officially incorporated the organisation previously known as The Brosnan Centre, or Brosnan Youth Services, as Jesuit Social Services. By then it had grown to close to seventy employed staff. It had extended its services by developing a program to respond to young people with mental health and substance misuse

issues. That new program was called Connexions. Jesuit Social Services then also incorporated three pre-existing programs: Richmond Community Care, Big Brothers-Big Sisters and Parenting Australia. This increased the number of our employed staff to well over 100.

Some five years later, in late 1999 and early 2000 a serious challenge arose to the continuing operation of the whole organisation. The new Jesuit Provincial leader, Father Daven Day, had received legal advice suggesting that the nature of the work of Jesuit Social Services and its programs, working with vulnerable children and young people, was a potential liability for the Order. The lawyer, Mr Tony Mackin, suggested to Father Day that the Order should organisationally separate itself from the work completely, in order to protect the Order's interests. Tony Mackin had been educated at St Ignatius Riverview in the 1950's and had limited appreciation of the directions of the Jesuit Order since that time.

His conservative professional legal advice suggested that the nature of the work of Jesuit Social Services might lead to the possibility of serious problems arising in relation to liability and risk management. He did not direct similar legal advice about other social ministries of the Order in Australia, working with the homeless and aboriginal communities: just the works of Jesuit Social Services.

Father Day presented a proposal to the annual meeting of the Jesuits and their co-workers engaged in social ministries work within Australia. He suggested that it would be a good time for what had been developed as Jesuit Social Services over twenty years to now separate itself from the Order and be established as a completely independent entity. 'It could now stand on its own two feet', he suggested.

It was a tremendous shock to all involved, to say the least. It was interesting that the legal adviser did not suggest that the Order should also separate itself from other works where its members were engaged with young people, such as the Jesuit secondary schools and boarding colleges.

There was no specific threat or cause for this action to be taken in relation to the work of Jesuit Social Services. Rather it was seen as a 'preventative action'. In actuality it was an attack on the initiatives that emanated from the progressive changes that had occurred in the Church and in the Jesuit Order over the previous thirty years.

Much discussion followed among the members of the Jesuit Order, but largely those employed by the organisation remained ignorant of these developments.



Internationally, the works of the Jesuits involved in social action, advocacy and engagement with the poor and the disadvantaged were always under threat, compared to the more 'respectable' works of secondary and university education. Many Jesuits who worked in these ministries internationally left the Order, often marginalised and unsupported by their fellow priests and brothers. This was a major issue discussed at an international meeting of the Jesuit social

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ministries I had just attended in Naples in 1997.

In Australia, Jesuit Social Services as a social ministry was quite distinctive in that it was of a significant size, had been operating for over twenty years and had carefully incorporated the Jesuit philosophy, mission and ethos in its works and orientation of its employed staff. In other countries, the social ministry works of the Jesuits were limited in size and centred almost solely on the work of an individual priest.

In other parts of the world, many Jesuits had been murdered in the previous twenty years because of their stance for justice and human rights. However, here in Australia, the whole social justice organisation was seriously under threat, but from within the Order.

The details of the negotiations about this critical issue are not for general information. Put simply, the only way that the organisation survived was by a visit I facilitated by the Social Apostolate Assistant to Father General in Rome, Father Michael Czerny. He visited Australia at that time.

Father Czerny met with all interested parties and assessed the situation during a week's visit to Australia. The following month, Father Day, the Australian Provincial leader, announced that he had now decided that Jesuit Social Services would remain a ministry of the Australian Province and that the Jesuits would not dissociate themselves with the work.

His decision was a great relief. However, I knew that I still had to guard the organisation from those within the Order as much as the obvious political and factional enemies from without.

It was an early indication that the Australian Jesuits were uneasy with the more radical approach involved in advocacy and political action on behalf of the poor. They were much more comfortable with 'charitable works' or research that was more academically oriented than the type that had political and cultural implications. These changes were mirrored in other parts of the world as well, and the thrust of the Jesuit mission internationally of the 1970's and 1980's became more moderate from this time.

Pentridge Prison Unlocked

The other side of the coin to the task of working directly with younger people being released from prison was the equally challenging task of educating the community about the need for prison reform: developing alternatives to imprisonment, especially for the young.

This challenge was always a critical part of the work of The Brosnan Centre, especially in the first twenty years. The biggest single opportunity for



undertaking that task was the closure of Pentridge Prison in 1997.

I had been asked to speak at the official closing ceremony, marking 146 years of penal history. After the ceremony, I asked the Prisons Minister what was going to happen with the property. He indicated that it would be sold for redevelopment, but that the process would take several years. I said to him that I would like to reopen the prison.

He looked surprised. 'I thought you just said you were glad to see it closed', he remarked. I explained that instead I would like the opportunity of reopening the prison for public tours and as an opportunity of educating the community about the nature of the prison world.

Fortunately, he agreed and the key to the prison was handed over to Father John Brosnan by the then Premier, Jeff Kennett, at the beginning of the 'Pentridge Unlocked' program. In front of several television crews, as he received the big key of the prison (which was actually the key to the steeple of Saint Ignatius Church in Richmond), Father Bros quipped with an enormous smile: 'Some of my old mates would have loved to have got their hands on this over the years past!' The comment was broadcast throughout the country that evening and beyond to Ireland and through the BBC to England and the World Service.

Rob Ware, an experienced social worker from The Brosnan Centre, and a very good personnel manager, took on the responsibility for organising the tours. He was assisted by several Jesuit Social Services

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staff, including Andrew Dodds, and more than 120 volunteer tour guides. In total over a period three months, more than 350,000 visitors entered the Pentridge Prison Precinct. Fifty thousand school students took part in carefully planned and resourced school visits with programs developed for senior primary school students and for junior secondary school students from schools across the State. Julie Chamberlin, a very experienced teacher and then a senior policy officer with the Melbourne Catholic Education Office coordinated the development of these two distinct educational packages for the school visits.

The primary goal of the Pentridge Unlocked exercise was community education, but there were other benefits. There was an entry fee and the proceeds went to the work of The Brosnan Centre. In total, we spent close to \$1 million on the exercise, but made a profit of just over \$2 million.

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One very successful evening was 'The Lawyers Night at Pentridge'. Sir James Gobbo AC was our guest speaker and we held a cocktail party in the old Remand Section of the prison, where Ronald Ryan has been executed.

Sir James Gobbo was appointed patron of Jesuit Social Services in 1997. He had had a long association with the Jesuits over many years and he and Lady Gobbo were regular visitors to St Ignatius Church in Richmond. Sir James was the Governor of Victoria from 1997 until 2000. For six years Sir James and Lady Gobbo were generous in their direct involvement and support of the work of Jesuit Social Services.

It is a good opportunity to express my thanks to Sir James and Lady Gobbo for the active role they played from 1997 - 2002 in supporting the work of Jesuit Social Services. We spent almost \$400,000 in radio and print advertising, but probably got \$2-3 million free television advertising

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during the exercise. Every Thursday, I would think up some ‘news grab’ that would be good for the evening television news. One such example was the unveiling of a plaque marking the unmarked graves of the nine prisoners who had been executed at Pentridge, including Ronald Ryan. On another occasion, we did the same, marking the spot near where Prison Officer George Hodgson was shot dead, during the famous Peter Walker and Ronald Ryan escape. Then there would be a story about Jika Jika, or the D-Division gallows, or the indigenous mural artwork, or Paul Kelly singing prison songs, and so on. Watching the Thursday night television news, thousands of Victorian families would then determine their plans to visit the prison site the coming weekend.

The prison site was open from Tuesday through to Sunday, with school groups predominating during the week. On weekends the crowds were almost overwhelming, with around 7,000 visiting every Saturday and around 10,000 visiting every Sunday. Thanks to the coordinating work and good management skills of Rob Ware and Andrew Dodds, the whole exercise was a resounding success.

We almost had a disaster one Sunday. There were two security guards whom we employed stationed at the Urquhart Street gate, but they were unarmed. Late one Sunday two opportunists, perhaps old boys of the ‘College of Knowledge’ themselves, decided to make a grab for the ticket takings at the gate. They got away with nothing, except a few bruises. We



had a system that relayed the money from the gate every 20 minutes to a security safe hidden deep inside the former prison Governor's Office!

Relocation to Dawson Street Brunswick

With the money we raised because of the Pentridge Unlocked project, the organisation was then in a position to think about finding a more suitable location for the coming years. We did not want to move from the Brunswick area, and fortunately were presented with the opportunity to purchase the former community services site of the City of Moreland, just around the corner in Dawson Street, right next door to the Brunswick Baths. It was a perfect opportunity and just at the right time.

After some important renovations, the then Victorian Premier, Steve Bracks, opened the new centre with of course the Patron, Father Brosnan in attendance. It was another great opening and in a sense a continuation of the energy and vision of this extraordinary man: 'The Knockabout Priest'.

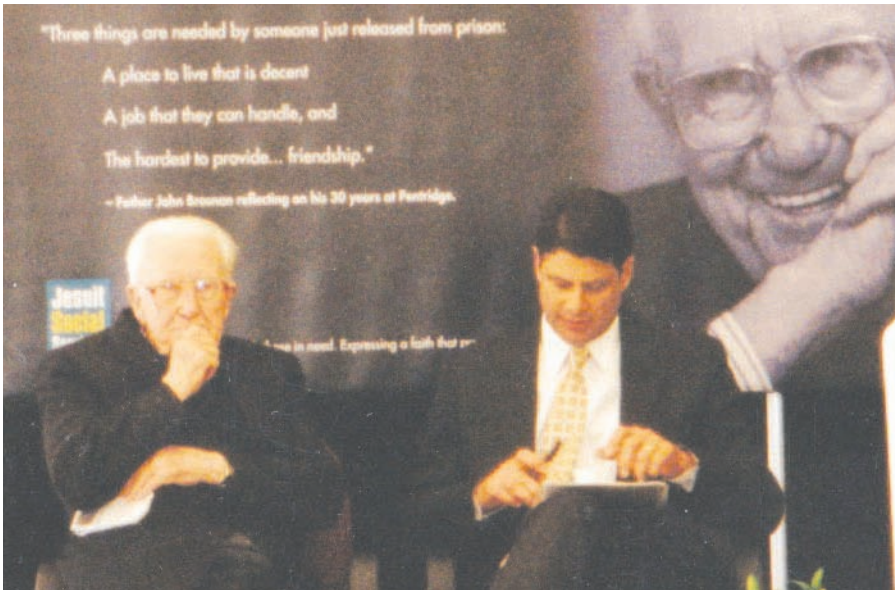
Whenever Father Bros would visit the Brosnan Centre during that time, it was clear that he was not moving as easily as in earlier years. However, the young people enjoyed shaking his hand and exchanging a few words, and, as a result, they had a direct link in their minds between the work of the Brosnan Centre and this person who was its Patron.

Nevertheless, it was clear to me that this opportunity would not last for-

The Brosnan Centre



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ever. Therefore, the solution came to me of making the image of Father Brosnan a lasting presence at the entrance of the centre in busy Dawson Street. If you have ever been to Treasury Place, in front of the Premier's office, you will see a number of bronze statues of former Premiers, those who have served the State of Victoria in that capacity for more than 3000 days. The artist/sculptor was Peter Corlett. We set about obtaining sufficient funds from a few of our most generous donors to enable Peter Corlett to shape a life size bronze statue of Father Brosnan. The work was completed over several months and it was a great likeness.

Once again, Premier Bracks agreed to attend the centre for an official unveiling of the statue. Unfortunately, by this time, Father Brosnan had passed away. His sister, Mary Wiltshire, represented his family.

Bernie Geary, one of our most valuable contributors to the work of The Brosnan Centre over many years, was suspicious of my plans, wondering about the value and the cost of the exercise. After some months watching the young clients of the centre arriving and departing through the Dawson Street entrance, pausing and shaking hands with the bronze statue of Father Bros, with outstretched hand, Bernie changed his mind!



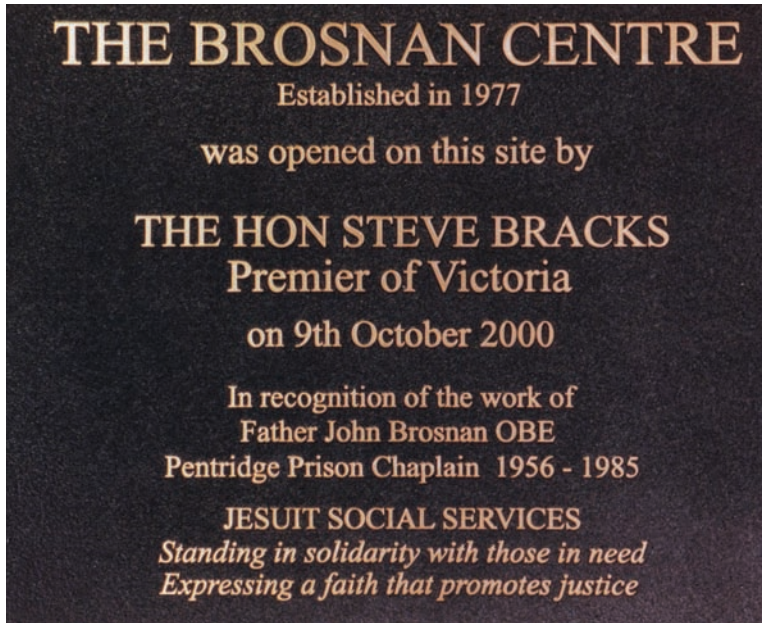
Key contributors

I now wish to speak about three significant individuals who made a great contribution to the work of The Brosnan Centre over the years.

One is Bernie Geary OAM who was the Manager at The Brosnan Centre from 1987 for several years. He became the Program Manager and eventually the Chief Executive Officer of Jesuit Social Services until his departure in 2003.

Bernie was a critical contributor to the growth and development of both The Brosnan Centre and Jesuit Social Services in the important second decade of its operation. In organisational analysis, the first decade is often referred to as the 'charismatic' period, but the second decade is usually regarded as critically important, because that is often the period where the organisational values and characteristics are stabilised and cemented into the culture of the organisation.

Bernie claims that he was the first outreach youth worker in Victoria. Perhaps he was! He worked in West Heidelberg in the very difficult days of the 1970's and then moved into the role of managing Community Health Centres before I recruited him to become the Manager of The Brosnan Centre late in 1987. He came under my notice when the Youth Parole Board



visited the centre, under the leadership of Judge Eugene Cullity.

Bernie was a standout and just the person needed to lead the post release service at the time. He had a big heart and solid humanitarian values, a little cynical at times about religious organisations that talked the talk, but often did not walk the walk. He was good for us, at both The Brosnan Centre, and later as the leader of Jesuit Social Services itself.

After he left our organisation, he became the Victorian Child Safety Commissioner for ten years, where he continued to combine compassion with energy for protecting the interests of vulnerable children.

As leader of The Brosnan Centre, Bernie in turn recruited some excellent staff to the organisation, one of whom was Bobby Dunne. Bobby had been a champion boxer, winning the Commonwealth Featherweight Championship in 1972, when he was still a young man growing up in West Heidelberg. He had been working at Turana as a Youth Officer, but the scope of work at The Brosnan Centre suited him, in a non-institutional setting. He knew many people who had moved into the criminal world, but had an incredible presence and skills of engagement with alienated youth. I often observed him in action relating to some of the heavier crims at Pentridge on his frequent outreach visits there.

The Brosnan Centre



A less high profile presence at The Brosnan Centre in Sydney Road was Sister Pauline Zammit, a Sister of the Good Shepherd. Pauline was the receptionist at the Centre and a very quiet welcoming presence at the front counter. I single out Sister Pauline because of her generosity, her compassion and her humility in a tough working situation. She was just



one of several Sisters of the Good Shepherd who worked closely with our organisation over the years, including several as Board Members. Their involvement dated right back to the days of Ronald Ryan and Father Brosnan's residence in their cottage in Abbotsford from 1956.

Some say that Father Brosnan did not sufficiently acknowledge the contribution of the Sisters. I think it is important to realise that he lived and worked in a male culture that was very different to that of today. He certainly was more comfortable in a 'man's world'.

The same was often said about the work of The Brosnan Centre that it was male dominated for many years. Keep in mind that in Victoria, as across the country, ninety per cent of those incarcerated were male and the number of women sentenced to terms of imprisonment were very low in Victoria, until the last ten years.

We were always on the lookout for good female workers and we were blessed with several, including Julie Wilson and Sarah Covill. However, the nature of prison work is that numerically, 90 per cent of prisoners are male.

During my time as prison chaplain the work of the Good Shepherd Sisters was vitally important to the effectiveness of the chaplaincy team. Sister Barbara Walsh and Sister Mary Carroll were outstanding, having worked in the old institutions of the Sisters in earlier years, then having had several years of street ministry experience in St Kilda, they were well



equipped, experienced and skilful in their chaplaincy work. In addition, Sister Joan McKenna, a Sister of Charity worked very effectively with those with mental illness or intellectual disability within Pentridge.

Restorative Justice

Generally, in the field of criminal law, crime is seen as an attack by an individual or a group upon the State. In restorative justice terms, it is instead seen as an offence by one person against another. Through this perspective, restorative justice recognises the humanity of both the offender and the victim. The goal of the process is to bring about healing of the wounds of each person impacted by the offence, including the wider community.

The restorative justice movement has ancient foundations, but in recent times, it gained momentum during the 1990's particularly in New Zealand. Since that time, our criminal justice system has expanded at a rapid rate. From a restorative justice perspective, the millions of dollars that we waste on building more and more new prisons and maintaining them is money wasted. Generally speaking, the outcome results in very little healing for any party involved.

The Brosnan Centre and Jesuit Social Services became more directly



involved in the restorative justice movement because of the work of Mark Griffiths, who during the early 1980's had been the Manager of The Brosnan Centre. Mark returned some fifteen years later, with a great deal of knowledge and experience to contribute to the restorative justice movement in Australia.

Mark brought with him an excellent network of personnel and organisations that were similarly committed to the restorative justice movement. In New Zealand, the juvenile justice system is modelled on these values, but in Australia, it has become established only in isolated programs, and is still largely contained within the juvenile justice area, not the adult court system.

Mark led the work of restorative justice and helped The Brosnan Centre become directly involved by running round table restorative justice programs, as an alternative to the formal court process for juvenile offenders. This entailed a conference between the victim and the offender, a police officer and a discussion facilitator. During this time, we lobbied heavily at the door of the Attorney General, Rob Hulls, to introduce this program into the adult jurisdiction, but there was a lot of hesitation, given the growing influence of the law and order lobby in Victoria.

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The Collingwood Community Justice Court is one example where restorative justice principles are currently operating within the adult Victorian jurisdiction.

Mark Griffith's contribution in this area was significant. Given that the model offers a substantial alternative to the present futile efforts of over-use of imprisonment for the most disadvantaged groups in our society, it is a shame it is not more widely established in the adult courts.

Overseas prison study tours

Some consideration of the lessons learnt in a number of overseas study tours is included in this coverage and personal reflection on the work of The Brosnan Centre over its first forty years because the organisation did learn a lot from what was happening around the world.

My first opportunity of this kind was in 1988 when I spent 15 weeks in the United States and six weeks in the United Kingdom examining developments within their criminal justice systems. During these study tours I made many visits to correctional institutions and programs. These tours also provided the opportunity to meet with prison reform groups, civil liberty groups and a wide range of organisations involved in human rights advocacy, particularly associated with the criminal justice system.

Much of what I observed in the prison systems of these two countries was not good. Nevertheless, it helped in understanding the foundations and history of our own prison system. It also alerted me to the mounting pressures and influences that were soon to impact on Australia, including a rapid expansion and overuse of imprisonment to deal with social conflict and community change. This was most notably displayed in the United States at that time.

On the other hand, contact with other non-government, religious affiliated and even Jesuit sponsored programs of social reform and community education sowed the seeds for the development of similar movements in Australia.

Two years later, in 1990, I had the opportunity of visiting two completely different countries, Holland and Sweden. The situation in the criminal justice systems of these two northern European countries stood in contrast to America and England in terms of their openness to change and successful interventions. In both countries, I met with their leading criminologists and those conducting the most innovative correctional programs.



In contrast to Australia, and also the United States and England, northern European countries like Holland and Sweden were far more rational in their approach to the issue of law and order. They rightfully interpreted it as a community issue rather than simply one of individual responsibility. Except for a small percentage of cases of very serious crime, community structures were seen to be the cause of most behaviour that led people to prison. Therefore, the community had to be the source of the solution too.

Generally, correctional staff who worked in the prisons I visited in Holland and Sweden were professionals trained in the behavioural sciences. They took seriously any unacceptable behaviour in their institutions and in that way contributed to community safety, as those imprisoned were eventually released. Recognising that connectedness was one of the significant factors in not re-offending, maintaining family relationships was seen as of high importance. Family ties were fostered by conjugal visiting rights and week-end leave from prison for the vast

The Brosnan Centre

majority of the prison population. The result was a low imprisonment rate and a very low rate of re-offending upon release from prison.

It was clear to me from that northern European study tour that we had much to learn from such countries. I also learnt over the years that there were many forms of resistance to such correctional reform in Australia.

In 1991, the Victorian Liberal Opposition was discussing their intention to introduce private prisons into Victoria. There was already a private prison planned in Queensland. There was no better way to contribute to this discussion than to head over to Florida and Texas to see at first hand. I invited Bernie Geary to accompany me on a three-week tour of some of the Southern States, which had commenced the privatisation of a small number of their correctional facilities.

Our hosts, fortunately, had not been informed that we were deeply suspicious of the private prison movement. They extended the legendary American hospitality and we were both given extremely good access to the leaders of the private prison industry and visited several facilities in both Florida and Texas. We spent the third week at Georgetown, the Jesuit run university in Washington DC, writing up our observations and reflections.

Unfortunately, our contribution to the debate about the introduction of private prisons in Victoria and other parts of Australia was not successful in that Victoria now leads the world in the percentage of its prison cells being managed by for profit private prison firms. In Victoria, close to 40 per cent of our prison cells are under private prison interests, more intent on doing well than doing good. This stands in contrast to less than 10 per cent of prison facilities having been privatised in the United States.

It is my belief that these commercial interests play an influential hidden role in fostering the law and order debate in Australia, at a time where there are enormous profits for these private security organisations to make. Such commercial enterprises are making more profits within Australia than any other part of their international organisations. As in the U.S. and the U.K., these profits come not only from the operation of our correctional institutions but also from the construction and from the operation of our refugee detention facilities onshore and offshore.

The Victorian Criminal Justice Coalition

The Brosnan Centre was founded in 1977 as a concrete expression of the international mission of the Jesuits 'the service of faith of which the



promotion of justice is an integral part'. As result, it always was and always should be part of that work to look at ways of bringing reform to unjust systems. It was important not just to do 'good works' but also to act as an agent of social change in the defence of human rights.

For that reason, it was consistent with its ethos for The Brosnan Centre to support, and at times host, the operation of the Victorian Criminal Justice Coalition when it was established in 1992.

The Victorian Criminal Justice Coalition was the network of more than sixty organisations, which I established when I retired from my role as Pentridge Prison chaplain in 1992. Its membership included legal groups, academic leaders, church justice organisations, and direct service organisations like The Brosnan Centre.

Private prisons were one of the first topics on the agenda, as was outlined in the previous section. Another pressing issue was the continuing and increasing number of citizens being shot dead in confrontations with members of Victoria Police.

It had been a difficult time during the 1980's with the bombing of the Russell Street police headquarters and then the killing of the two young police constables in South Yarra. Partly in response to these two serious crimes, a siege mentality began to develop within Victoria Police. Senior officers who had worked in the Major Crime Squad and Armed Robbery Squad now had influential positions at the Police Training Academy in Glen Waverley.

The Brosnan Centre

A new training program was introduced with the support of Force Command. When an individual with a weapon confronted a police member, the officer was to give one warning, and if the person did not comply and drop the weapon, the officer was authorised to empty his or her revolver to the central body of the person wielding the weapon. This practice continued for some years during which time the death toll mounted, more than ten times the level of deaths from police shootings in our neighbouring state of New South Wales.

The early deaths were those with a serious criminal record, such as Graham Jenson and Gary Abdullah, allegedly the driver involved with the Walsh Street killings, and Mark Militano, involved with armed robberies.

However, over time, those being killed were more often persons with a history of mental illness rather than those with a criminal record. Consequently, our private consultations with senior politicians and police command and our constant media criticism of the practice started to impact.

Finally, after the police shooting of a young indigenous woman, Colleen Richmond, outside a Hanover housing program in St Kilda in 1994, the tide turned. After completing the funeral service for this young woman, I joined several hundred people who marched down Fitzroy Street St Kilda in protest.

At that very time, the Deputy Premier and Police Minister, Pat McNamara, phoned my mobile to inform me that he had taken the decision to retrain the police force in the use of firearms, in a new program known as Project Beacon. The results were instantaneous, and have generally lasted for more than two decades. Now police in a confrontation secure the scene and negotiate a settlement. The new approach results in better protection of human life.

The Criminal Justice Coalition mounted a similar campaign in relation to high-speed police pursuits. I can recall from Power Street days some of our residents being involved in these pursuits. Fortunately, no one was killed at that time.

However, over the years, there were many deaths of drivers of stolen cars, their young passengers, and even innocent bystanders and drivers of other vehicles involved in accidents during a high-speed police pursuit. I was invited by Commissioner Ken Lay to undertake a consultation with those training officers at the Police Academy in 2014. In most cases, the police do not know the identity of the driver in a high-speed pursuit. Very rarely is it a matter of chasing a dangerous criminal. The danger to those involved and

innocent bystanders only arises when the pursuit commences.

Police command mounted a very similar defence as they had in relation to police shootings, until once again the death toll mounted. The Victorian Deputy Coroner, John Olle, began investigating a number of deaths which resulted from these pursuits and made strong recommendations that the policy needed reform.

Finally, only in the last five years, the policy has undergone a dramatic change in Victoria and in most other States around Australia, in favour of the number one priority being the protection of human life. Whilst the Police Association are not happy with the outcome, the benefit is the greater safety of the wider community.

This type of advocacy work challenging bad or ineffective policies in our prisons or police is confronting and seen by some as political. Yet, it is characteristic of the type of social ministry that has its identity in the Jesuit charism. It should remain as a necessary complementary element to direct service delivery.

Further, it was a great example of collaborative work with many other organisations intent on criminal justice reform and protection of human rights. The co-convenor of the Coalition during much of this time was Greg Connellan. Greg is now a Magistrate, but was then at Fitzroy Legal Service and at the Criminal Bar. He was one of the many young students from Xavier whom I took to play basketball in the early 1970's!

In retrospect, the work of the Victorian Criminal Justice System is probably exactly the type of social advocacy on behalf of the disadvantage that the new Jesuit leadership in Australia began feeling uncomfortable with. Certainly many of the politically and socially conservative supporters of the Australian Jesuits would have been highly critical of such advocacy work over the years and undoubtedly those expressed concerns eventually have an impact within a changed regime, like a religious order or congregation. It was certainly a different emphasis from the more confident days of the 1980's.

Change in age jurisdiction

From one of my first visits to the young offenders' section at Pentridge, as described in an earlier chapter, I was confronted by the serious mistreatment and sexual assault of a seventeen year old in custody. From that time, I had determined that it was not enough just to assist individuals, but critically important to affect policy and legislative change in

The Brosnan Centre

favour of the disadvantaged or oppressed.

Over the years, The Brosnan Centre worked with many young men and women who had experienced similar difficulties in correctional institutions. With the passage of time, we had determined to change the legislation in Victoria, to alter the jurisdiction of the adult criminal courts from the age of seventeen to what was the pattern in most other parts of Australia: the proper adult age being eighteen.

With the assistance of a research assistant, I discovered that every year in Victoria there were approximately 7,000 appearances in adult courts by persons who were only aged 17 at the time of the offence. That meant a large number of seventeen year olds were not provided the protection of the Children's Court, as should have been their right.

So about twenty years ago, having worked with young offenders for around twenty years at that stage, I determined to set about to change the age jurisdiction of the Victorian courts from 17 to 18.

The first step was to meet with the Victorian Attorney General, who at the time was Rob Hulls, the progressive chief law officer under the Bracks' government. I remember the conversation as if it was yesterday...

Hulls: I understand what you want to do, but I tell you, we are not going to make the change.

Norden: Why not?

Hulls: It's going to be too expensive. I would rather spend the money on legal aid.

Norden: Rob, it is not a choice between the two.

Hulls: I don't care, we are not doing it.

Norden: Well I am going to fight you on it.

Hulls: That's your job, I understand that.

Therefore, we then embarked on a selective leaking of stories to media outlets, including the Herald-Sun and The Age:

- 17 year old sexually assaulted at Fairlea Women's prison.
 - Boys exposed to moral harm at Her Majesty's Prisons.
 - Homeless young people under threat on remand in adult prisons.
- The critical occasion came when Premier Bracks came to unveil the bronze statue of Father Brosnan outside The Brosnan Centre, in 2004.

There were six television crews and numerous other media outlets present. Bernie Geary was the Director but I was asked to give the vote of thanks after the unveiling. In his speech, the Premier had emphasised that Father Brosnan was committed to the protection of the vulnerable

The Brosnan Centre



Premier of Victoria

- 7 JUL 2004

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2004/03882

Father Peter Norden S.J
Convenor
Victorian Criminal Justice Coalition
PO Box 271
RICHMOND VIC 3121

Dear Father Norden *Peter,*

AGE JURISDICTION CHANGE

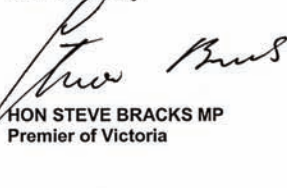
Thank you for your letter dated 5 April 2004 concerning the age jurisdiction for the criminal division of the Children's Court.

In May 2004, the Government released the Attorney General's Justice Statement, which announced that we would implement our commitment to increase the age limit of the Children's Court from 17 to 18 years so that young people are not caught up in the adult criminal justice system.

The Departments of Justice and Human Services are finalising the details of the proposal. The legislation necessary to implement the change will be introduced into the Spring Session of Parliament.

The Government shares the concern of those who come into contact with this group of young people. I am pleased that we have been able to announce the change in age jurisdiction as part of the new directions for Victoria's Justice System.

Yours sincerely



HON STEVE BRACKS MP
Premier of Victoria

Your details will be dealt with in accordance with the Public Records Act 1973 and the Information Privacy Act 2000. Should you have any queries or wish to gain access to your personal information held by this Department please contact our Privacy Officer at the above address.



and always spoke his mind. So repeating his statements in my vote of thanks, I raised the critical issue of the need to change the age jurisdiction of the criminal courts.

I am told that Bernie turned to Bracks and said 'He never misses an opportunity, does he?' The Premier grimaced.

The next Friday, the ABC 7:30 Report ran an exclusive on the issue and the need for the law to be changed in Victoria to bring it into harmony with the rest of the country. A good source tells me, that night Bracks rang his Attorney General, Halls, and told him to proceed with the change in the law!

It took more than twenty years, but eventually in 2004, the necessary legal changes were completed in new amendments to the Children and Young Person Act. Another victory for The Brosnan Centre!

Government relations

A few years back I was invited to be a speaker at a large international gathering of the Salvation Army, held at the Melbourne Convention Centre. The topic was about the role of non-government organisations and their relationship to government.

I had presented a rather carefully worded address. During question time, the chairperson, John Cleary from ABC radio Sunday evening program, asked 'Peter, you are being very measured in your comments. The people here really want to know how outsiders see the Salvos. So, I replied, something along these lines:

'Well I think they are very well known and are respected for their dedication and hard work, but there are some aspects about their operation that I have found disappointing.

For example, when working alongside Salvation Army prison chaplains, I knew that I could never depend on them, or the Anglican chaplains, when there was an issue related to the rights of prisoners. It was only the Uniting Church chaplain who could be relied upon for support.

Further, when I visit parliamentarians in Canberra or here in Melbourne, I often see representatives of the Salvation Army heading in or out to see the same Departmental Ministers. I wonder whether they were there to defend the rights of the disadvantaged in relation to social policy or whether they were there simply to seek further funding to extend their own services'.

Telling that story reminds me of something that Bernie Geary told

me, soon after he had left Jesuit Social Services to work as the Victorian Child Safety Commissioner. It speaks of how well we had worked together as a team and what a wonderful contribution he had made to the work of Jesuit Social Services.

Bernie revealed that senior public servants told him: *'When you and Peter Norden used to come in to see the Minister or the Secretary of the Department, we were all on our toes, fearing what issue it was you might be addressing or exposing'*.

An example illustrates this. Quite a few years ago, he told me that the conditions in the senior Classification section at the Melbourne Juvenile Justice Centre in Parkville were atrocious. It seems that kids were sleeping on floors, the toilets and the showers were not operating properly and the place was never cleaned.

So, I said to him 'Let's arrange a special inspection, just you and me'. He arranged the visit, we spent an hour inspecting the facility, and indeed, it was quite a disgrace.

As we left, we were met by an ABC television crew and an Age journalist, whom I had notified about our visit of inspection. It was the lead story on the ABC television news that night and a front page article in The Age the next morning. Within days, the Minister had allocated a substantial amount of money to have the place steam cleaned and the necessary repairs done, all within the week!

Sometimes, I believe that the relationship between non-government organisations and their major funding source, State or Federal government agencies, has become one of servant to master. I was always of the view that it was much better when our income source at Jesuit Social Services was closer to 50 per cent independent of government than closer to 100 per cent. Funding was not the only issue though; it was also the organisation's ability to speak and to act independently.

When signing government contracts, I would refuse to accept the condition of confidentiality or the clause about the government ownership of intellectual property. I would simply strike out those sections of the contract and sign on the last page. It was never questioned at the time.

Confidentiality, I believed, was to be seen as applying only to the information about individuals we were working with, not information gained from twenty or thirty years work in this field. This position also applied to the clause inserted with regard to intellectual property. Because we were only partially funded by government agencies on a one or two-year or three-



year period, we had ownership of the intellectual property we had gathered over a longer period of time. It was ours, not the government's.

The success in obtaining government funding contracts should always remain secondary to the formulation of good policy, good research or public advocacy that addresses the needs of the disadvantaged. The needs of the organisation itself should never be the primary interest.

Ray Cleary, the longtime head of Anglicare Victoria reflected on this issue in his recent book 'Reclaiming Welfare for Mission':

The role of advocacy and research alongside training for staff remain the number one priority today as increasingly the Community Sector appears to be becoming an arm of government with 'Managerialism' the order of the day.

Two other examples come to mind that illustrate the importance of maintaining independence from government control in this field.

On one occasion, Father Kevin Mogg and I were summoned as representatives of Catholic Social Services to a meeting with the Minister for Corrections, Mal Sandon, and the Director of Prisons, John Griffin. It would have been the early nineties. The Brosnan Centre had been active in issues relating to prisoner's rights or policies needing reform in the prisons.



We had recently asked for increased funding for The Brosnan Centre, because of the expansion of the prison system to Barwon, Loddon and Port Phillip. We were informed that despite our recent requests, Cabinet had decided that there would instead have to be a reduction in funding.

As we left, Father Mogg, my boss at that time, remarked ‘That’s really bad news, Peter’. I simply replied that I did not believe them. Kevin seemed shocked. What do you mean? I said ‘Minister Sandon said nothing. The Director of Prisons said it all. Let me arrange a meeting with the Treasurer to sort this out’.

Therefore, within the week we were in to see the State Treasurer, Tony Sheehan. As I told him the story, he simply retorted ‘Absolute bullshit. Leave it to me’.

Within a few days, we were again summoned to a meeting, this time just with the Director of Prisons, who told us that they had seen how disappointed we were as we left their meeting the previous week and they had done some homework and found a way of increasing the funding from the Department of Justice for the valuable work of The Brosnan Centre!

A similar story from about the same time occurred when two former clients of The Brosnan Centre were held in the maximum-security

The Brosnan Centre

section of Barwon Prison. They had previously attempted to escape from other prisons and had been convicted of serious offences.

Being held in isolation in the Acacia Unit, they were allowed one hour a day outside of the cell. When each person's time came around, he was placed in handcuffs and leg chains and allowed to 'exercise' in a tiny yard under the direct observation of two prison officers. I had unsuccessfully represented personally to the Barwon Prison Governor against this crude form of humiliation. It was unnecessary to maintain the good order of the prison but simply intended to crush the spirit of these two inmates.

Therefore, I penned a feature article in *The Herald Sun*, which was titled: 'One step from the chain gang'.

That day, the Prisons Commissioner, John Van Groningen (now a close associate at RMIT), rang Father Mogg at the office of Catholic Social Services and said: 'The Minister (Pat McNamara and Deputy Premier) is not happy with the article in this morning's paper and is considering withdrawing funding from The Brosnan Centre'.

With Father Mogg's approval, I faxed the Deputy Premier's office, reporting what the Head of Prisons had said, and requested a written denial of that threat within 24 hours or I would go public with the story. Later that day, the requested denial came from Mr McNamara's office, and a request to make things up over a dinner at a Spring Street restaurant!

I have given these different examples of how it is possible for a non-government organisation to retain its independence and freedom of speech, because I believe it is so important to the identity and the credibility of the non-government sector. Agencies contracted to undertake certain discrete functions by the government do not as a consequence lose their independence or become simply agents of the government.

I have always been of the view that the best policy is to establish and maintain good relationships with politicians and senior government administrators wherever possible. On every occasion, when in the past we undertook public action, which might be seen as critical of Government services or officials, there had always been a meeting or a consultation where our views were expressed honestly and directly to the responsible authority first. However, that was never the end of the story.

In the end, government funding is not government money. It is the community's money. If there are problems in the services provided by government the community has the right to know and to decide.



The Ignatius Centre for social policy and research

Soon after my return to the leadership of Jesuit Social Services in 1995, I decided to establish The Ignatius Centre for Social Policy and Research. This enabled the organisation to engage in research, policy and advocacy work with some degree of separateness from our social service program delivery, increasingly funded by State and Federal government agencies.

The major work undertaken during the following decade was the collaborative work with Professor Tony Vinson AM, now an Emeritus Professor at the University of Sydney. After having been the inaugural Director of the New South Wales Bureau of Crime and Statistics in the 1970s, he was, after the Nagle Royal Commission into prison brutality, made the Commissioner for Correctional Services in New South Wales. Tony had years of experience in social work education and a passion for engaging in practical research that could affect social change.

For more than twenty years, Jesuit Social Services had worked at the grass roots of the welfare services sector. This included work with offenders, with young people affected by mental illness and substance abuse, in employment training programs, in community development work in public housing areas, and with a range of ethnic communities. It was time to draw on the breadth of that experience and engage in some social research that could have a preventative effect on social policy at the State and Federal level.

The Brosnan Centre

Tony's work built on earlier research he had conducted in Newcastle decades earlier. However, this time he wanted to extend the work to cover Victoria and New South Wales and to map how the concentration of social disadvantage correlated with postcodes, using a wide range of social measurement factors.

My role was that of Project Manager for the three major research projects undertaken during that time:

- 1999 – *Unequal In Life*
- 2004 – *Community Adversity and Resilience*
- 2007 – *Dropping Off the Edge*

The ethos and 'modus operandi' of our work during that time was to spend an equal amount of time implementing the results of our investigations as we had invested in the actual research itself. By 2002, after having been the Director of Jesuit Social Services for eight years, I stepped down to enable Bernie Geary to take over the role, so that I could then devote my time to policy and advocacy work instead.

As the research reports were about to be completed, I began the media liaison in Sydney and Melbourne, some weeks ahead. The launch of the first two reports in 1999 and 2004 received substantial front-page coverage in *The Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the expected sensational coverage in the tabloid press. The final report I managed, *Dropping Off The Edge*, was launched in 2007 in The Great Hall in Parliament House, Canberra. Held in that location, it captured numerous political representatives and again widespread media coverage.

Working collaboratively with Tony Vinson, in my role of Policy Director of Jesuit Social Services, we were able to have a greater impact at both a State and Federal level of government.

For example, I remember arranging through John Thwaites, the Victorian Deputy Premier, for Tony to have a one to one working lunch with Premier Bracks. I followed up their meeting with a one to one meeting with the Victorian Treasurer, John Brumby. It was important to be speaking to more than the senior public servants.

I knew that it was also important to get to influence the key decision makers of Premier and Treasurer in Victoria.

In New South Wales, Tony arranged for he and I to address a large meeting of the Heads of all of the New South Wales government departments, not just Community Services, Health and Education, but also Treasury, Transport, Planning, Justice and so forth. It was a unique experience.

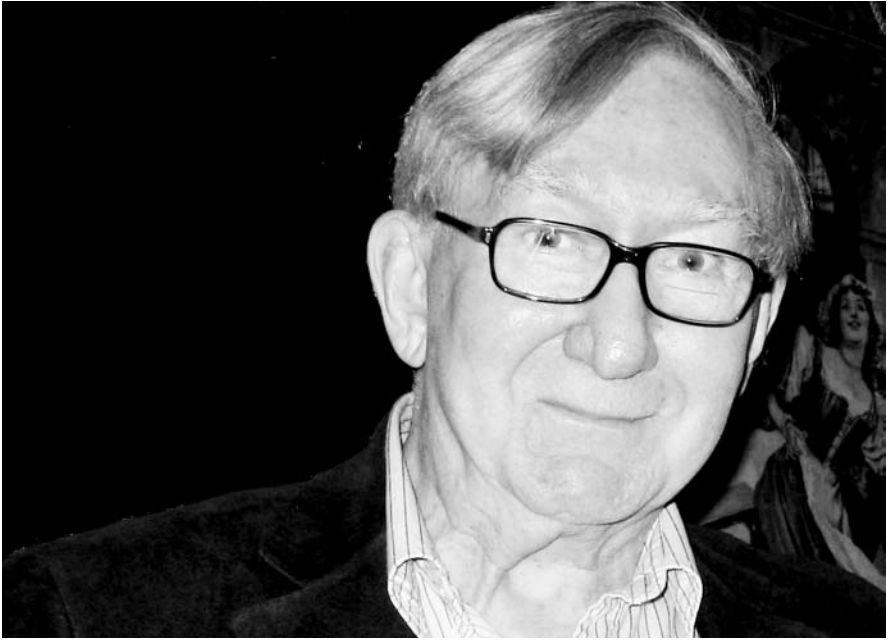


In Canberra, I had been working as a National Board Member of ACOSS, the Australian Council of Social Service, and the National Board of Catholic Social Services Australia, where I was the Chair of their Social Policy Working Group for some time.

In addition to the contacts from those two national peak bodies, there were a number of 'Jesuit' contacts in the Federal Parliament also. So not only did we meet with the likes of Kevin Rudd and Wayne Swan in Opposition, but also Brendan Nelson the Education Minister, Tony Abbott then Health Minister and Christopher Pyne, then Employment and Training Minister.

It was valuable to have direct access to a range of senior politicians in both the Government of the day and the Opposition, and in turn with their senior public servants. We could explain the findings of the postcode analysis of disadvantage directly and make concrete suggestions for practical implementation.

As with most governments these days, the solutions became clear but their capacity to implement integrated responses across different portfolios for an extended period beyond that of the next election meant that many opportunities for good social planning and prevention were lost.



On a memorable occasion in 2004, Tony Vinson and I were invited to address the annual meeting of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference on the findings of what by now was national research.

Tony is an excellent communicator and manages to convey the message with real insight and compassion, which meant that he had elicited a positive rapport with the 30 or 40 bishops sitting around a large conference room. He explained the wide range of social disadvantage factors that were included in the study: income, housing, health, education, low birth weight, child accident rates, mortality, criminal convictions and so.

In response to a question about what more could be done, I had floated a vision that Catholic Health Australia that operated more than 70 large public and private hospitals around the country could consider redirecting a substantial amount of its resources to addressing indigenous health. It was a visionary kind of suggestion, meant to challenge the thinking of the bishops.

Then followed a question directed to Professor Vinson from Cardinal Pell: *'Professor Vinson, have you considered including the impact of de facto relationships into your studies?'*

Around the conference tables, Tony and I noted the heads of many

of the Bishops drop at the narrowness and the lack of insight reflected in the Cardinal's question.

Other research work of the Ignatius Centre at that time focused on preventative work in the education sector. Our direct service work with young people had led us to understand that a key component of success with vulnerable youth was to keep them connected. This led to two national research projects I conducted with the very sizeable network of Catholic secondary schools around the country.

The first focused on how Catholic schools could best respond to incidents of illicit drug use by their students (*Keeping Them Connected*, 2005). The second study evolved from this first one and focused on how the national school network could best respond to the needs of same sex attracted students (*Not So Straight*, 2006).

As with the pattern with all of our social research projects during that time, I then embarked on an extensive program of running in-service training workshops for Catholic Secondary Principals right across the nation. What a great opportunity it was to influence change at the grass roots level, putting into practice what we had learnt from working with young people with complex needs over the previous decades!

Maintaining the ethos

I recall a gathering in 2007 to acknowledge 30 years of history since the foundation of The Brosnan Centre. The staff chaplain of Jesuit Social Services at the time, Father Ian Dillon, since deceased, mentioned in his speech that there were many things that had changed from the earlier days of The Brosnan Centre. Ian had been an amazing presence at Jesuit Social Services since I had suggested to the Jesuit Provincial that he would make a good 'staff chaplain'.

I had to speak next. Many of our key supporters were present. I clarified that all organisations change over time, and what might have been the strengths at one stage of an organisation's operation will be different at a later stage. Change is inevitable, especially as an organisation matures and especially if it grows in size.

What really is important, if an organisation is to be true to its foundations and its distinct identity, is that those changes should only be undertaken if they are in accord with the values and the philosophy of the organisation.

I have had little contact with the organisation over the last ten years,

so it would not be possible for me, even if I wanted to, to assess recent developments. However, when I was asked to write an article in the International Yearbook of the Jesuits in 2005, I outlined the mission of Jesuit Social Services in these terms:

Engagement in the lives of those who are disadvantaged is complemented by our efforts to bring about change, through social research, advocacy and the shaping of public policy. Since our beginning in 1977, working with young men and women after their release from prison, our efforts have diversified in response to the changing needs of Australian society.

An essential part of our ministry that is characteristic of the Jesuit social apostolate is our commitment to bringing about change through our involvement in research, advocacy and public policy debate.

That was published as the lead article in the 2005 Jesuit International Year Book, just five years after Jesuit Social Services survived 'the threat from within' described earlier. It was also in the context of criticism from within Australia that Jesuit Social Services should be limited to the provision of welfare services and not be engaged in policy and advocacy work - a challenge to the distinctively Jesuit ethos of the organisation.

However, the balance must always be retained, to ensure that the research, policy and advocacy work is solidly grounded in the exposure to the lives of the disadvantaged and the marginalised... that this engagement should never become secondary or peripheral to the activity of the organisation.

The prison industry

One thing that has changed dramatically in the last ten years is the growth of the Australian prison population. This is something that I have monitored closely in recent times, through my role as Adjunct Professor at RMIT University and my work with the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology.

While this is not the place for figures and statistics, let me simply say that over the last 20 years the Australian prison population has been increasing at three times the rate of the total Australian population. This dramatic expansion has occurred at a time when there has not been an equivalent increase in crime.

Most Australians recognise the over-representation of the indigenous



community in the country's correctional facilities. However, the research work of Professor Tony Vinson has shown that similar over-representation extends to the most disadvantaged postcodes in all parts of Australia.

Law and order policy, inflamed by the financial interests of private prison corporations, has ensured that rather than address social disadvantage we have simply warehoused it, just as has occurred in the U.S..

Organisations such as The Brosnan Centre and other much larger non-government organisations such as ACSO need to ensure that they do not implicitly assent to this prison expansion policy, by simply providing some form of assistance for those upon release.

Research of remand prison numbers and analysis of disadvantage is called for. However, the way in which an organisation invests time and resources in spreading the results of such studies and advocating for the critical changes required is equally important.

Concluding reflections

When I decided to resign from the Jesuits in 2008, the decision was not an easy one. Religious Orders have a long tradition of not supporting their members who decide to move in a different direction.

Fortunately, I was awarded a Vice Chancellor's Fellowship at the University of Melbourne. I was based in the Melbourne Law School for three years.

My further appointment as an Adjunct Professor at RMIT University enabled me to undertake extensive teaching in the following years in areas such as legal and justice studies, mental health education of social workers, and social policy and ethics.

The company 'Norden Directions' now provides the opportunity for me to contribute through consultation work with government and non-government organisations and expert witness work in the courts.

My resignation from the ministry reflected my increasing disengagement from the ways of the institutional Catholic Church, in particular its increased clericalism, continuing marginalisation of women, and the way it handled the child abuse scandals.

The Australian Jesuit leadership was usually less insular and more progressive or 'worldly' than its Diocesan equivalents. Yet within the ranks, there was an occasional Jesuit who had an arrogant, born to rule or hypercritical and judgemental approach to everyone else. I think such individuals were deeply threatened by the engagement of Jesuit Social Services in the Australian community and the national policy debates.

For more than a decade, from the mid 1990s, Jesuit Social Services led the field in comparison to its equivalents in the non-government social services sector. While largely restricted to Victoria and New South Wales, it had unparalleled public profile and access to State and Federal political representatives and senior public servants during this period.

Ironically, the steady control and leadership over several years of Julie Edwards, a non-Jesuit, at Jesuit Social Services has enabled the Australian Jesuits to incorporate that organisation more fully as an integral and valued part of its ministries. In addition, Julie has been adept at interpreting the Jesuit ethos and incorporating its values into the organisation.

I have little knowledge or information about how the work has developed in the last ten years. It is pleasing to see the relocation of its central offices into the former site of the St Ignatius Primary School on Richmond Hill. This had always been my intention, after the amalga-



tion of the two Catholic primary schools, during my time as Parish Priest in Richmond.

I am certainly very proud of the contribution that I was able to make as the Founder of The Brosnan Centre in the 1970s and the shaping and development of Jesuit Social Services during the 1990s.

So many others have played a vital role in the success of the work of Jesuit Social Services over the last 40 years, many of whom I have mentioned by name in these personal reflections.

I look forward to seeing its continued contribution to the wider community over the next forty years of its operation.

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Peter Norden is an Adjunct Professor in the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies at RMIT University and a member of the ABC Advisory Council.

He was the Director of Jesuit Social Services from 1996-2002 and their Policy Director from 2002-2008.

He was recently appointed a Fellow of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology.

In 2007, Peter was made an Officer in the Order of Australia 'for service to community development through social research and programs aimed at assisting marginalised young people and offenders, to the mental health sector, and to the Catholic Church in Australia'.

Through the company Norden Directions, Peter gives expression to his continuing passion for human rights and social justice issues.

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