

## *A letter from the Coordinator...*

On the 13<sup>th</sup> February, our Prime Minister Kevin Rudd offered a formal apology to the Indigenous People of Australia in these words:

*"We apologise for the laws and policies of successive parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians."* The apology was a long time coming – over two hundred years.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> November 2009, Mr Rudd and the Opposition Leader Malcolm Turnbull apologised to 500,000 'forgotten Australians' and former child migrants who grew up facing deprivation and exploitation in orphanages and homes. The child migrant scheme ran from the 1920s until the late 1960s, and saw white working class children sent away from Britain to help populate her former colonies, such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

Many were taken from their families with the promise of a better life, only to end up in orphanages and institutions, where many of them were physically and sexually abused, or made to work as farm labourers.

The apology by Mr Rudd and Mr Turnbull was not only commendable but also a long time coming.

As I begin to write what will be my last editorial as Coordinator of the *House of Welcome* my question is: *How long will it take for an official apology to be offered to those refugees or asylum seekers who have come to Australia in recent years, risking their lives on fragile boats, seeking a safe haven from persecution, only to be further traumatised on arrival?*

Many were locked up in desert camps or on isolated Pacific islands or forced into a life of uncertainty on Temporary Protection Visas (TPV), some for as long as six or seven years.

I believe the answer to that question will also be a long time coming if it is ever offered. So as I say goodbye. I want to do three things:

Firstly, I wish to say sorry. Sorry to all those who spent many months, even years in Australia's detention camps, especially the children who witnessed terrible acts of self-harm and in some cases, imitated those acts. In 2002, I had the opportunity of visiting most of the camps including Christmas Island, Nauru and Woomera. I stayed three days on each of the islands and found that to be too long – I can only imagine what it must have been like to live on these desolate relentlessly hot and humid islands, not knowing who or if another country would offer asylum.

The long term psychological damage to those kept in these camps for more than six months has been well documented by independent and highly respected psycharists. For many, the damage will be for life.

As I write these words, I think of one long time friend and client of the *House of Welcome* who, as one example, explains all that was bad and mean about the treatment of many asylum seekers by Australia.

Mr Z, as we will call him, was born in Iraq of Afghan parents and raised in Syria. He arrived in Australia in 1999 aged 23. He was a man without a country – a stateless person. So we punished him for something he was not responsible for.

He was held in detention for four



years, first in Woomera and then in Villawood. In April 2003, he along with a few others, was released from detention by a High Court order. However he remained an unlawful non-citizen with no work rights, no access to Centrelink, no Medicare, no nothing and had to report to the Department of Immigration or the Police, in person on weekdays and electronically on weekends.

In April 2004, he was given a certificate of identity. On that day, he began to exist! The following year, he was given a TPV and in 2007, he received a Pemanent Protection Visa. In June this year, he received a letter to inform him that his application for citizenship was approved. Finally after all those years of waiting and with quiet dignity, he became a citizen of Australia in September 2009. He is now 33, ten years of the most productive years of his life lost. He hopes to see his family soon for the first time after such a long separation.

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So as an Australian citizen, I apologise for the profound suffering and loss we as a nation have inflicted on Mr Z and all those who sought safety here and were punished for doing so by being detained in camps or forced to wait in the limbo of TPVs. The sad irony of this is that most are now Australian citizens.

Secondly, I wish to express my thanks to all those who have come to the *House of Welcome* during my seven and a half years as Coordinator. It has been both a privilege and a blessing to work with you and for you and become friends.

I have been deeply moved and often deeply saddened by the stories of loss, suffering, torture and separation that many of you have experienced, and shared with such trust, disarming honesty and extraordinary resignation. I have also been heartened by your resilience and your capacity to begin a new life in a foreign land as you struggle to learn a new language and understand life as it is lived 'Down Under'.

From 1979 to 1985, I was responsible for a Vietnamese Refugee Camp in Japan. Like many of you, they were former 'boat people' and I learnt so much from them as I have from you. I promised my Vietnamese friends that once it was safe to travel to Vietnam, I would do so in the hope of gaining a better understanding of their culture and their way of life. Since then, I have been able to visit Vietnam three times and I treasure those visits and the meetings with relatives and friends of those who had lived in my camp.

It is my hope that when peace comes to your country, I will be able to do the same and learn about your culture and way of life. There is no substitute for a personal lived experience and to meet people in their own land. For this wish to come true, peace will need to arrive soon, otherwise I will be too old to travel.

Thirdly, I wish to offer on your behalf heartfelt gratitude to all those

who have made the *House of Welcome* what it is today – a place of welcome, a place of trust, a place of sharing, a place of support and a place of hope.

The *House of Welcome* was the initiative of a small group of Christians who, conscious of the needs of refugees being released on Temporary Protection Visas in 2002, responded to the Gospel invitation to "welcome the stranger".

Since that time, the *House of Welcome* has been brilliantly served by a group of quite extraordinary volunteers who are described as the 'heart of the enterprise'. Sharing the same passion, the volunteers have provided practical and encouraging support to our clients and our dedicated staff.

Speaking of staff, I offer to all those who since the very beginning have worked here on staff, my gratitude for their untiring commitment to the mission of the *House of Welcome* and for their skills and competence. I offer my abiding admiration for their willingness to walk the extra mile in times of special circumstances and unexpected crises.

There is another group most of you have never met but whose help has been critical for our survival. They are our donors. This group includes a wide range of people: charitable foundations, parishes, religious groups, elderly pensioners, Bishops, friends and the famous Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation led by the irrepressible, dynamic and indomitable Virginia Walker and her committee.

For more than eight years, the generous donations of these groups and individuals have made it possible for the *House of Welcome* to offer a wide range of assistance, services and transitional housing. We hope and pray that their generosity will continue next year and for as long as there is a need for the ministry of the *House of Welcome*.

Finally, I would like to

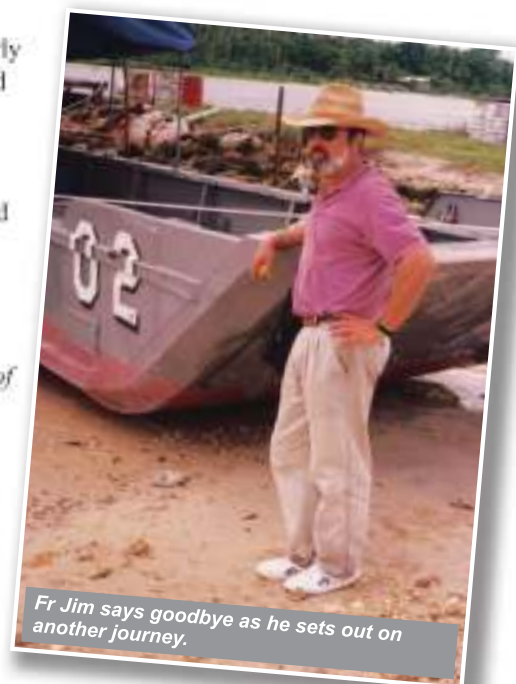
formally introduce to you our new Assistant Manager. Her name is Catherine Rothery. She started in September 2009 and has been on a fast learning track ever since and is eager to make your acquaintance. The new manager has not yet been chosen. As soon as we know who the person is, we will inform you.

And so with fond memories and sadness, I bid you farewell and blessings.

With warm regards,

*Jim Carthy*  
Coordinator

PS. The Annual Premier's Spelling Bee was held on the 18th November. The winner in the senior's division was Elizabeth Hsu. Her parents are from Taiwan and her first language is Mandarin; the winner of the junior's division was Lian Yang, also a Southeast Asian name. The names tell the story: with hard work and diligence, all things are possible in Australia – no matter where you came from. So in spite of all the obstacles and difficulties you have faced since arriving here, my last request to you is: grasp all the opportunities offered you in your new country in order to achieve your full potential as a person and as an Australian citizen. (Also, please note that both winners were girls!!)



Fr Jim says goodbye as he sets out on another journey.

## Farewell Message from Sr Grace

I have been working at the *House of Welcome* for six years and over that time I have got to know many of you. As I leave the *House of Welcome*, I would like to thank you all. The time I have spent at the *House of Welcome* has been a very happy time for me and I feel privileged to have able to journey with you. I will be moving to the Philippines early next year, but I will not forget you and I will continue to pray for you all. I wish you every blessing as you continue in your efforts to build a new life in Australia.

## Fr Jim's nomination for the Justice Medal

In October, Father Jim was nominated for the NSW Law Foundation's Justice Medal. The Justice Medal is the pre-eminent Award for outstanding individual achievement in improving access to justice especially for socially and economically disadvantaged people. It is awarded once a year and Fr Jim was one of 12 outstanding people nominated. Fr Jim did not win the award but we congratulate him on the nomination which was a well deserved acknowledgement of the great work he has done at the *House of Welcome* over many years.

## What is Super?

Superannuation, commonly called super, is the Government's way of making you save money for when you:

- retire;
- get sick and you cannot work; or
- die and your dependants need money

If you are over 18 years of age (and under 70) and you are paid at least \$450 (before tax) in a calendar month by the one employer, then that employer has to pay 9% of your earnings (for ordinary hours of work) into your super account every three months.

You can choose the super fund you want the contributions paid into provided the fund you choose is a 'complying super fund' (ie. it meets the government's rules about how your money is invested).

One advantage of super is that there is less tax paid on money contributed to super than tax paid on money invested in other forms of personal investment (such as personal bank accounts and shareholdings).

Generally, you cannot receive benefits from your super fund until you

retire and reach 'preservation age' (between 55 and 60, depending on when you were born) or you are too sick to continue working.

It's important to keep track of your super. Even if you won't retire for many years:

- if you don't know, ask your employer for details of the super fund you belong to;
- your fund should send you annual statements that show how much your employer is paying into your account, how your money is invested and how the fund has performed that year;
- make sure your fund has your current contact details – they can't send you a statement if you haven't told them where you have moved to, and
- read your statement. If you don't understand it you can ring the fund and ask questions.

If you have had more than one job, you may have money in more than one super fund. You can find your lost or forgotten super online at [www.ato.gov.au/super](http://www.ato.gov.au/super)

## Are you having problems with debt?

- ? Do you run out of money and find you cannot pay all your bills?
- ? Do you have a debt that you don't think you legally have to pay?
- ? Do you have a debt collector sending you letters of demand or threatening to take legal action against you?
- ? Do you have an unexpected large expense and you don't know where you'll get the money from to pay it?

Financial counsellors can help people in financial difficulty. They can help you manage a money crisis and they can help you plan so that you do not have a money crisis in the future.

Financial counsellors can:

- help you organise your money so that you can pay your bills when they fall due;
- assist you to write and live within a budget so that you don't spend more than you can afford;
- negotiate with your creditors;
- explain debt recovery proceedings and discuss bankruptcy and other alternatives

You can get free financial counselling and assistance from: the Wesley Mission's credit and debt hotline – **1800 808 488**, Lifeline's financial counselling service – **9891 6212** and The Salvation Army's Moneycare service – **9266 9587**.

Some businesses also provide a service to help people with debt but they charge a fee for this service. Make sure you know what service you are to get and how much it will cost before you get advice from a paid financial counsellor.

## Washing clothes in cold water

Clothes and linen don't need to be washed in hot water. Using hot water to wash clothes is very expensive. Cold water is just as good and much cheaper. Here are some tips on how to wash successfully in cold water:

- ◆ Use a powder made for washing in cold water
- ◆ Use the quickest cycle on your machine (less electricity and less water)
- ◆ If the clothes are very dirty – fill the machine with water, add the powder and soak the clothes in the soapy water for at least an hour before running the wash cycle

When the clothes are washed – hang them out to dry. Clothes dryers use lots of electricity so don't use them if you can hang the clothes instead.



# Water, gas and electricity keep going up, up, up

All our energy costs – electricity, water and gas – are going up and our bills are getting bigger. Here are some ways to save energy around the house and keep those bills smaller:

## Living areas

In winter:

- ❖ Capture the sun's warmth by opening curtains during the day and closing them before it gets dark;
- ❖ Rather than turn on the heater, put on extra warm clothing
- ❖ Keep doors, curtains and blinds closed in the room you're heating and place heaters away from windows;
- ❖ Block off unused fireplaces and cover gaps under doors and windows
- ❖ Once the room is warm, turn the heater off;
- ❖ Don't heat rooms you're not using.

In summer:

- ❖ If the day is very hot, keep the windows shut and the curtains closed. Only open the windows in the cool of the early morning or evening;
- ❖ If you have air conditioning, make sure you run it at temperatures no higher than 24°C in winter and no lower than 22°C in summer. If your air conditioner is heating or cooling to other temperatures, it will be using too much energy to reach those temperatures and your electricity bill will be big too;
- ❖ Unplug unused appliances or switch them off at the wall. Even standby mode uses energy. A Playstation 2 uses \$260 a year in electricity if it is used every day. If it is not used but left on standby, it uses \$248 a year in electricity! So turn off all TVs, computers, DVD players, air conditioners, microwave ovens, music players when you are not using them.

## Bedrooms

- ❖ In winter, use a hot water bottle, wear

warm pyjamas to bed and put an extra blanket on the bed instead of using your electric blanket or heater.

## Bathroom

- ❖ Take short showers – no more than 3 minutes;
- ❖ Don't leave the water running when brushing your teeth.

## Laundry

- ❖ Only wash when the washing machine is full & use cold water (see the box about "Washing in Cold Water");
- ❖ If you can, choose a front loading washing machine ;
- ❖ Use short wash cycles;
- ❖ Dry your clothes in the sun;
- ❖ If you use a clothes dryer, fill it – it's more efficient to dry a full load
- ❖ Clean the clothes dryer lint filter after use;
- ❖ Use the low heat setting on your dryer whenever you can.

## Kitchen

- ❖ Defrost food naturally instead of using the microwave;
- ❖ When using the oven, don't open the door too often – each time you do, the temperature drops by up to 15°C;
- ❖ Fridges and freezers operate most efficiently when they're full but not overloaded. Once gain, don't open the door too often;
- ❖ Set your freezer at -18°C and your fridge between 2°C - 5°C for greater efficiency,
- ❖ Leave space around the back of your fridge or freezer for air to circulate
- ❖ Avoid placing your fridge or freezer next to your oven, stove or in direct sunlight;
- ❖ Use cold water for the kettle;
- ❖ Don't wash the dishes under a running tap – fill the sink and wash the dishes in the one sink of water;
- ❖ Only switch on a full dishwasher and use the economy cycle.

The House of Welcome  
will be CLOSED from 21st December  
until 4th January 2010.

## Free things to do in Sydney... The Sydney Festival

All these Sydney Festival events are **FREE**:

**9 January** The Sydney Festival opens with lots of free parties across the city – at 2 pm an afternoon for families in Hyde Park with lots of free things for kids to do followed at dusk by big party in Hyde Park with Indian music and dancing. At concert in the Domain featuring the Black Arm Band with Jimmy Little, Archie Roach and Al Green. A big band in Martin Place and urban sounds in Chiefly Square.

**January 16** at 8pm in the Domain, the Toumani Diabaté Symmetric Orchestra from Mali is performing a concert, playing a mix of west African instruments and the Orchestra will be joined by Vieux Farka Touré.

**16 January** at 7:30pm at Parramatta Park, Sydney will be transformed into Bollywood when Indian superstar A.R. Rahman takes to the stage for this free outdoor spectacular. With more than 40 musicians and Bollywood dancers on stage, this will be an energy charged night of colour, dancing and the music of modern India.

**23 January** at 8pm in the Domain the Sydney Symphony Orchestra is performing a 'concert under the stars'.

**26 January** it's Australia Day and there is an indigenous morning ceremony at dawn at Farm Cove, the Great Aussie BBQ in Hyde Park and the tall ship and ferry races on the harbour.

**30 January** at 8pm in the Domain, the Australian Opera is performing Leonard Bernstein's Candide.

## *A Big Thank You and Farewell to Father Jim and Sister Grace*

Fr Jim and Sr Grace are leaving the House of Welcome. This is very sad news for the House of Welcome as Fr Jim and Sr Grace have been working here for many years. Sr Grace is leaving at the end of November and she will be working in the Phillipines for the next 2 years. Fr Jim is retiring in the New Year and he will be assisting in Catholic parishes. We wish them both all the best and thank them very much for the wonderful work they have done at the House of Welcome over the last 8 years.