

ST LAURENCE HOUSE REPORT FROM THE CHAIR FOR AGM NOVEMBER 2017

This is my first Annual Report for St Laurence House (SLH) as Chair of the Committee of Management. I can say with the greatest of confidence that it has been “full steam ahead” for SLH as we continue to work with homeless and vulnerable children and young people. As you know, in May 2016 we were able to confirm that the State Government (subject to us meeting core criteria) has committed to funding to June 2020. We recently signed an amended agreement with Family and Community Services (FACS) which indicated that the funding would not just stop in 2020 but that there would be ongoing negotiations which hopefully could be to our advantage. It should be noted however, that this funding covers only 70% of our costs for the House programs. As a result of the funding commitment we have been able to put all our energy into our programs and services. Our working relationship with Caretaker’s Cottage from which we rent our house has gone from strength to strength.

OUTREACH PROGRAMS

Our Executive Officer, Nigel Parker and the team at SLH have successfully managed to continue the two new outreach programs started last year. The first, in partnership with St George Community Housing, provides support to young people at risk of homelessness to help them mature and successfully move to independent living. The second is the Supported Transitional Accommodation for Youth (STAY) in partnership with Options Housing. This program provides much needed living skills and support to young people otherwise at risk of becoming homeless. Both these programs have continued to be entirely funded through private donors. The money given to SLH this year by the St James King St (SJKS) Outreach committee and the Coulson Trust from Christ Church St Laurence (CCSL) contributed towards the salary of the outreach worker who works with these young people. Nigel will give you more details in his report of these and other activities pertaining to our service. Nigel has continued to represent SLH and the sector, including the board of the peak body Y-Foundation, and he was also one of the directors of a state-wide youth housing company called My Foundations. I am very grateful to Nigel for his leadership, endless creativity, energy and sense of humour. Without him SLH would not be in the good position that it is.

We have had a new dilemma. We are delighted that we are helping more young people in need than ever before. However, there is no additional money to be had from the Government at this point. Whatever financial contribution supporters can give to SLH will go straight to continuing these new programs. Our challenge is to expand the programs to help more young people on our waiting list.

TRAUMA INFORMED CARE

Last year SLH was named by the former Minister for Family and Community Services, The Hon Brad Hazzard, as the benchmark for the way we work with homeless young people applying the Trauma Informed Model. Trauma Informed Care has been the foundation of SLH’s approach and methodology for a long time and is internationally recognised as the best approach to use with our clients, given their personal histories and complex needs.

FUNDRAISING

We have held several successful fundraising events this year. The first was on Shrove Tuesday where we had our customary pancake meal marking the start of Lent. The second was held at St Paul’s College, University of Sydney at which renowned journalist Geraldine Doogue was the guest speaker. The title of her talk was “Only Contact: a message for our times”. Geraldine talked about, and I quote, “the need for our communities to prioritise connections, above all, among each other, because the best researchers are realising that good old social connections are absolutely life-saving and aside from say, giving up smoking, the next single best thing that people can do to both extend their lives, prevent depression etc.” End of quote. Geraldine’s talk certainly rang true to the experience we are trying to give our children and young people. A young man, a resident of the house, was able to say a few words about his experience with us and how he has benefited from living in the house. Our young people supported the fundraising by allowing photographs they had taken to be framed and auctioned.

Meera Belle and her students, The Fabulous Jazz Babies, for the past couple of years have held four concerts a year and have dedicated their concerts to raise money for SLH. Because Meera is relocating to Richmond their last concert was in June. These concerts have raised over \$10,000 for SLH. We are grateful to Meera and to the Jazz Babies for their generosity and for such enjoyable evenings.

STRATEGIC PLANNING DAY

In June we had a strategic planning session ably facilitated by Joanna Kramer-Roberts of Blink Communications. Our strategic priorities from that day are

1. Build SLH Brand
2. Authenticate our performance and results. (SLH occupies a niche position in a sector that is complex and not particularly well understood financially, particularly in the comparative costs of providing care.)
3. Succession Planning
4. Efficient use of meeting times/committee time etc
5. Funding
6. Begin social enterprise

COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT

7. I am incredibly grateful to the Committee of Management who have supported me in my first year. Alan Cooling and Alan Soutar were elected to the Committee at the AGM last year and more recently Joanna Stevens Kramer and Edwina Chapel have also joined the Committee. We work hard and are very conscious of wanting to do the very best for our children and young people. Vincent Nguyen, our treasurer resigned during the year because of uncertainty of work changes. I would like to thank Vincent for his enthusiasm and for the new ideas and suggestions he made for the Committee's consideration. We are still looking for another treasurer. I am grateful to Alan Soutar who, in the interim, is overseeing the financials. Sandra Bright, our book keeper, continues to do excellent work for us and especially around the time of the event at St Paul's went above and beyond what was expected of her.

SUPPORT

We are grateful for the support that both Rectors and staff at SJKS and CCSL have given us. Also thank you to our very loyal and generous supporters without whose help and encouragement two and a half years ago would have seen us close our doors. Your faith in us and in SLH, which has now been operating for over 38 years, is life giving to this small committee of volunteers who continue to carry the baton for this joint charity of SJKS and CCSL. Please continue to support the important work of SLH. On several occasions recently when I have been at the house a couple of the boys have returned from school. I felt such a sense of gratitude when I looked at them and realised yet again that they are what we are all about. If you know of volunteers who would like to know more about us or who can offer a group who can for example do some gardening or paint a room, please let us know.

As Frederick Douglass the famous African-American social reformer, writer and statesman said in the C19th, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." I am confident if he were here today he would be happy for me to slightly change his words to "it is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men and women".

ANNE COLLIER (COGSWELL)
CHAIR OF MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
November 17, 2017