

Connect

A newsletter for supporters of CatholicCare

There's no place like home

- Eltham Project wrap up - The value of stories -



From the CEO

As spring turns towards summer, we prepare ourselves for the annual round of activities and events that are a part of this time of the year. We tidy the house ready for the onslaught of parties and barbeques with family and friends. Dusting off the outdoor furniture and testing the fairy lights to make sure they still work. We enjoy making our house feel like home away from home for our guests.

I was lucky enough to spend a few weeks with family and friends travelling to Norway recently. Where the 'summer' featured top temperatures of 12 degrees centigrade and daylight that lasted for around 20 hours a day. While the scenery was breathtaking and my time off was certainly rejuvenating, I also enjoyed the feeling of coming home.

There is something about the emotional connection to the place we call home, that both relaxes and energises you for whatever is to come. A home isn't just a place with four walls. It is the place that we feel our most safe and loved and where our most treasured memories are stored. I, like many of my friends, have a door frame that has pencil marks and dates where I marked my children's heights as they grew. I love knowing that under the layers of paint of the laundry door frame at my parents' house in England, I will find the same markings of time and memories of my own childhood.

When we experience tough times in life, we can feel unanchored and can become lost in the darkness. Having a safe and loving place to call home can be the shining light in the darkness guiding us to safety that keeps us going.

Sadly not everyone in society has a place to call home. In this edition of Connect we explore the themes of home and the reality of homelessness that so many face in our society. A cause that is close to my heart.

I was very honoured to be invited to speak in Sydney recently, at the launch of the Annual Social Justice Statement of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. This year the statement addresses homelessness and housing insecurity and is titled "A Place to Call Home: Making a home for everyone in our land." My fellow speakers included Jack de Groot, CEO of Vinnies in NSW, and



Bishop Vincent Long from the Diocese of Parramatta, and I am now keen to work with the Bishops and others involved to understand how the statement can most positively impact on alleviating homelessness across Australia, and how CatholicCare can play a part in helping people get back on their feet.

I hope that you enjoy reading about the work you have helped support through this edition. Make sure you read the feature on the refugee families that found home through our Eltham Project that has recently wrapped up. This was one of the many programs funded by you, our wonderful supporters.

As the whirlwind of summer picks us up and carries us towards Christmas, I would like to take this opportunity to thank each of you for your support this past year. Together you are the messengers bringing good news to those less fortunate in our community.

Wishing you and your families a blessed and memorable Christmas season.

Blessings

Netty Horton
Chief Executive Officer

About us

Relationships are at the heart of why CatholicCare exists. We help people to build positive relationships, and repair connections when needed.

CatholicCare is the social service agency of the Archdiocese of Melbourne and the Diocese of Sale. We provide a range of counselling, education, community and pastoral services. We support all people regardless of their religious belief or background. Our vision is for a stronger, more resilient and inclusive society - where everyone can reach their potential and enjoy 'life to the full'.

Child safety is paramount

CatholicCare actively works to listen to, empower and protect children, and has zero tolerance for child abuse and neglect.



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CatholicCare acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands and waters of Victoria, and pays respect to Elders past and present.

A pastoral reflection on Christmas

Way back in a past life working in the high country of southern Peru, the long journeys on the back of a mule, reaching out to isolated indigenous rural communities, provided ample time to ponder the meaning of relationships and connectedness. Sometimes the journey was made at night; the bright southern sky filled with stars provided reassurance.

I recall one such journey. It was Christmas Eve. The sky was unusually dark, the moon and stars nowhere to be seen.

I felt disoriented and lost. Disconnected. I cried out for help hoping against all hope that I might be heard. Almost at the point of desperation, a faintly lit lantern suddenly appeared in the darkness and a barely audible, far away but familiar voice responded, "What a silly thing to do, to be wandering around. Stay where you are, I will find you and take you home." The light of the lantern grew brighter, the voice clearer and reassuring. It was Juan, a village elder.

He took me home.

The memory of that at first faint but then gradually brightening light of the lantern has always stayed with me. In some random and illogical way it speaks to me of Christmas and connection and meaning. In those moments, that do from time to time come to us in life, those moments of quiet desperation, when we ask what life is all about. How do we connect with that "light" that gently enfolds us and leads us home?

The Christmas story is actually an ensemble of many, many smaller, parallel stories. The "meta narrative", or the bigger story, is about the divine becoming one of us, so that we in turn can give

expression to a humanity that is inherently good and beautiful. Around the birth of Jesus, are other stories that take place.

One of these is the appearance of the star in the night sky that guides the three royal visitors from the far corners of the earth. They search for something greater than themselves, for a meaning and a connectedness. Somehow, in this "star of Bethlehem", there is a sense that they will find their way. How is it that a star can become such a powerful metaphor for humanity's search for meaning and connection? On so many levels, light overcoming darkness possesses a profoundly universal appeal for it taps into the human yearning for transcendence. At a symbolic level, the star stretches our imagination and invites us to reflect on the larger community of life out of which we have evolved and of which we are part.

What can all this mean for us at CatholicCare? Our reason for our existence is grounded in the words of Jesus, "I have come that you may have life, life to the full" (John 10.10). And this is lived out in our passionate commitment to building relationships. We journey alongside people in building positive, transformative relationships that seek to heal the points of disconnection.

In the end, the Christmas story is in some way or other, our story. One that invites us to reflect on what it means to be human.

Paul Zammit
Senior Manager, Pastoral Services



CHRISTMAS POEM

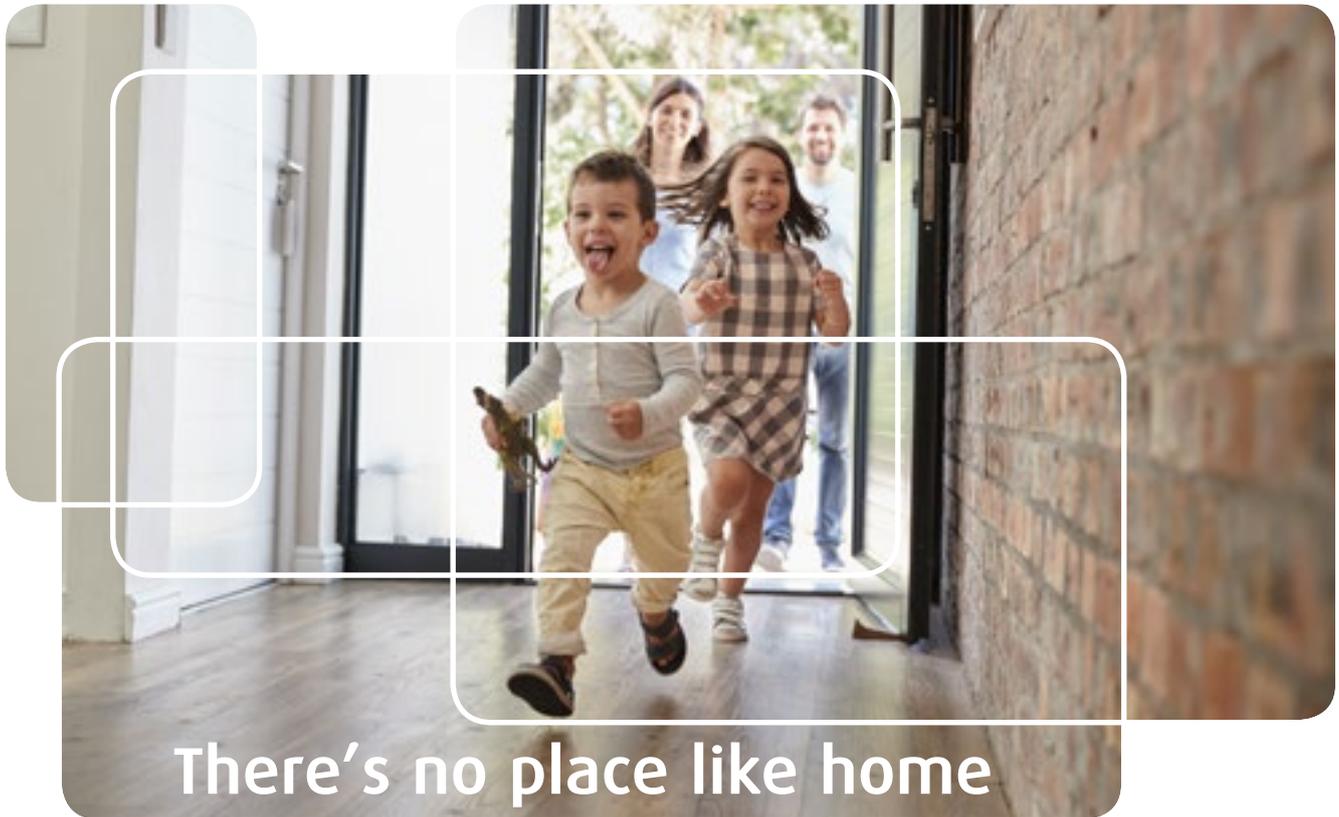
Life is very big and fast
But I am small and slow.
Many things go whizzing past
That I will never know.

"What will I do with this life of mine?"
I asked the sky of blue.

"Your life is fine" said a voice divine
"And what will it do with you?"

Leunig

Image courtesy of Michael Leunig.



There's no place like home

Every night around 25,000 Victorians have no place to call home. They are part of the ever increasing number of Australians who are turning to homeless services each year. The affordable housing crisis is a major contributing factor to homelessness, but CatholicCare staff are aware that this is only the tip of the iceberg for why so many people have no place to call home.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Social Justice Statement for 2018-2019 released in September, titled 'A Place to Call Home', talks about this growing number of homeless people and the need for everyone to band together to be part of the solution. From governments, to the church community and to individuals, we are reminded to do what we can to help the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community.

So what causes homelessness?

Each individual has their own unique, and often complex history of events which has led them to a life of couch surfing, unsuitable accommodation or sleeping on the streets. Those who are on the streets often carry a stigma on their shoulders, as passers-by step around them, avoiding any form of engagement. The assumption is that they are responsible for their homelessness; that they chose this life through the abuse of drugs or alcohol, and were shunned by their family and friends. This is far from the reality.

Homelessness can be caused by a number of complex issues. Domestic violence and relationship breakdowns have become a pathway into homelessness for many women and children, with over a third of cases reported to homeless service providers during 2016-2017 citing this as a significant factor for seeking assistance.

'Domestic violence and relationship breakdowns have become a pathway into homelessness for many women and children, with over a third of cases reported to homeless service providers during 2016-2017'

Other major reasons include the housing crisis (rental increases, evictions, or no suitable housing available) and financial difficulties (poverty, unemployment, low income, debt, housing affordability) which account for around 30% of cases.

Research by Launch Housing undertaken this year shows that the jump in homeless cases is an outcome of the housing market trends. Housing prices have increased by 80% in the last decade while the average household income has only risen by 40% during that time, creating an environment of housing stress that hasn't been seen before. The statistics are staggering and it seems no generation is immune to the possibility of homelessness – with two out of five under the age of 25 and one in six over the age of 55 years old. Something has to change.

Having a place to call home is essential for personal security and stability. For an individual or family to flourish, the feeling of safety provided by a stable home is paramount. Home is the place

where friends are welcomed and where the memories and stories of generations are created, fostered and relived. When your basic needs are met; food, water, security and warmth, you can then focus on meeting your psychological needs of belonging, love, social networks and accomplishment.

CatholicCare was founded in 1935 on the commitment to helping and supporting societies who are most vulnerable. Norma Parker and Connie Moffit understood that keeping a family together and providing emotional assistance as well as providing their basic needs was paramount to building a stronger family that stayed together.

With one in four homeless people experiencing mental illness, medical or substance abuse issues, there is a need to provide the

emotional support once the immediate safety concerns of finding a place to stay are met. Without this multi layered approach, many find they end up back in the cycle that caused them to become homeless in the first place, even after being provided housing.

The direct relationship between mental illness and homelessness is real: for many, mental illness is exacerbated by homelessness and the lack of secure housing is exacerbated by mental illness, creating a vicious cycle that can only be solved when both issues are attended to.

Having a place to call home is essential for personal security and stability. For an individual or family to flourish, the feeling of safety provided by a stable home is paramount.

Intervention and support programs that focus on building and rebuilding positive relationships with those closest to them can provide a support network that can be leaned on in times of need. It is this support network that we all rely on when times are tough that can prove to be our saving grace.

‘Many of the over 12,000 clients seen in the last 12 months by CatholicCare counselling staff find themselves feeling isolated and alone with their problems,’ says Lisa Foley, Senior Manager of CatholicCare’s programs based in the east, and south of Melbourne.

‘They may be battling anxiety or depression that sees them retreating from their family and friends to cope with other problems alone. It is this that can start the snowball of events and circumstances that can lead to such things as homelessness.’

CatholicCare staff see many clients where a relationship breakdown has resulted in substance abuse to cope, along with withdrawal from other family and friends that can lead to unemployment and homelessness.

‘We work with many clients with complex problems and find that these are often interconnected,’ Lisa says. ‘With clients who are homeless or facing housing insecurity, their immediate needs may require us to work with other service providers to get them accommodation before we can start working on the problem they sought help for. The sense of stability, and security offered by having a home is powerful and goes a long way to helping resolve their problems.’

‘Many of the over 12,000 clients seen in the last 12 months by CatholicCare counselling staff find themselves feeling isolated and alone with their problems’

‘A key driver for the success of any treatment plan is that the client feels safe and has the support they need to continue on the path of getting their life back on track.’

Recent Australian research undertaken by Launch Housing has confirmed that across every measure, homelessness is higher among respondents who have contact with the criminal justice system. The report also stated there was a need for properly



designed resources and post-release programs to break the link between homelessness and reoffending. Many prisoners are released with no idea where they will sleep or how they will support themselves going forward - leading them to continue the cycle of crime without any hope for a brighter future.

Finding a permanent, safe, and affordable home is one step towards solving the homeless crisis. But it can’t be a step taken in isolation. Treatment, support and the individual’s social and family network also need to be included, if we really want to ensure that everyone has a place to call home.

It is great to see that many social service agencies are working towards ending homelessness. Organisations such as Vinnies and The Salvation Army are providing much needed tangible support. The core of CatholicCare’s mission is to break the barriers of social inclusion and support those who find themselves on the fringes of society, and so all of our services, in particular our counselling programs and prison chaplaincy are helping to heal the emotional wounds along their journey.

CatholicCare is also investigating new program opportunities that will see counsellors working alongside other support agencies to provide services directly to those in shelters and other emergency accommodation, as well as assisting ex-prisoners to transition back into society.

Because there is no place like home.

If you, or someone you know, needs assistance in dealing with life’s challenges, please contact us on 03 9287 5555 or visit our website www.ccam.org.au

Want to help? If you would like to find out more about how you can support CatholicCare’s counselling and other services, please contact our Donor Relations team on 03 9287 5517 or donate using the donation form on the back of this newsletter or online at www.ccam.org.au/homeless



The Eltham Project

Three years ago CatholicCare partnered with St Vincent's Health Australia to offer housing and support for refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria and Iraq and looking to start a new life in Victoria.

Since that time, over 60 refugees have been housed and supported, building community links and a rental history. In October this year, the two-year Eltham project drew to a close and most of the refugees have now transitioned to private rental arrangements. Fifteen of the residents aged over 55 remain at the facility which has transitioned to affordable housing for seniors.

When it was announced that Eltham would be the home to newly-arrived refugees, there were strong reactions from all over Melbourne. There were protests from far-right groups, debates and media coverage. There was also the Eltham community, who stood in solidarity and welcomed their new neighbours.

As the dust settled, the residents began to move in. Celebrations with food, dance and laughter were held to welcome them, and many members of the community signed up for volunteering roles to offer their support and help the refugee families feel at home.

Schools, parishes and community groups banded together along with CatholicCare and St Vincent's Health Australia to provide wrap-around support with a range of programs and services, helping the refugees learn about their new home and gain new skills.

The provision of these services by CatholicCare would not have been possible without the generous support from St Vincent's Health Australia, the Swan family, the Order of Malta, the Gill Family Foundation and other donors.

'The generosity and acceptance shown by all who have stood up in solidarity with our newest neighbours is perhaps this project's greatest legacy: people working together, side by side, to build a strong and healthy and inclusive community,' said Netty Horton, CEO of CatholicCare.

'For the refugee families, this project provided a roof over their heads and a warm welcome from the local community as they took their first steps in their journey to good settlement. But it is the sense of belonging and connectedness that will endure for these families, and for all who shared in the journey.'

'For the refugee families, this project provided a roof over their heads and a warm welcome from the local community as they took their first steps in their journey to good settlement'

To celebrate the success of the Eltham Project, a wrap-up celebration was held in August with thanks to the Nillumbik Shire Council. Speakers acknowledged the individuals and groups who helped make the project a success and also discussed their involvement throughout the project. We heard the journey of a volunteer, and

one from a refugee, and the remainder of the evening was spent dancing and reminiscing on our time together.

The following stories have appeared on our website throughout the final months of the Eltham Project, and have been included for those who may not have been able to access them.



A special bond an Eltham Story

'... there is no stereotype of the ideal family, but rather a challenging mosaic made up of many different realities, with all their joys, hopes and problems.' ~ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*

Venus Makhoul is a 26-year-old woman who was raised in a small, quiet village in Syria. She lived with her parents and two brothers and worked as a primary school teacher where she was much loved by her students. After the war began, her older brother fled to Lebanon. In time, Venus would also flee the conflict.

Venus met her future husband, Karmo, when they were just children. They became close friends and love eventually blossomed. Two years ago they married among friends and family in Venus' village before travelling to Iraq where they lived for a year. They applied for Australia's Humanitarian Program and were approved as part of the special intake of Syrian and Iraqi refugees. They arrived in Australia in June 2017 and immediately moved into the Eltham Project.

'When I arrived we didn't have anyone, just two friends but they lived far away,' says Venus, who was seven months pregnant when they moved into their one-room unit. One week later, local Eltham resident Janet Jindasa appeared at their door; wasting no time in offering her support when she learned of the newly-arrived refugees.

'I've always wanted to volunteer and help refugees,' says Janet. 'I was thrilled to be matched to a young couple. I have a blended family; we have 13 children and 10 grandchildren and I was amazed Venus was going to have a baby soon and I had so much knowledge about children and having babies. They were just so lovely and I felt really happy that I had so much to give and share with them.'

Venus was also happy with the match and, from the beginning, a strong friendship developed.

'When I first met Janet, I felt happy because someone came to visit me. Since I saw her from the first time, I felt very comfortable. Day after day, Janet became my family here in Australia. I'm so lucky and so happy to have had Janet as my volunteer. I tell her, "you are my family here in Australia; my father, my mother and everything else."'

And baby makes three

One month after the young couple's arrival in Eltham, Janet and her daughter-in-law were visiting when Venus started going into labour, despite not being due for another month. They took her to hospital and stayed with her throughout the birth.

'At the birth I helped to make sure Venus understood everything,' said Janet. 'I explained to her what they were saying and to Karmo what was happening through each step and each stage of the labour.' Several months later when Venus underwent surgery to remove an inflamed gall bladder, Janet would again accompany her to hospital, staying by her side the whole time.



A future in Australia

As the Eltham Project was nearing its end, Venus and Karmo applied for more than 40 properties but were repeatedly knocked back in favour of tenants who had employment. Eventually they were offered a property in Thomastown, through an acquaintance in the Syrian community.

While Venus enjoys having more space for her son Veken, the move has brought added financial strain from paying market rent. Karmo is keen to find work, and is also doing an online bookkeeping course along with English language classes while Venus volunteers one day a week at the local op shop to gain retail experience.

Venus' hopes for the future are simple: 'We feel like we are in our country; we feel very relaxed and comfortable here. Better for us. I hope we will have jobs; my son will grow up here and he will learn to be a peaceful man and a gentle man.'

Venus and Karmo are also hoping that some of Karmo's family may soon be able to join them in Australia. Karmo's mother, sister and her family fled Syria and are living in Iraq. After hearing from Karmo that life in Australia was good, they applied to Australia's Immigration Department. So far, they've made it to the interview stage. For now, Janet is the only 'family' they have here.

Both Janet and Venus are determined that the family's move from Eltham will not affect their friendship.

'She's like my daughter now and Veken is like my grandson,' says Janet. 'We will be in touch because that bond is there and the love that has grown...' '... and everyday we'll become closer,' Venus says, finishing her sentence.

Janet agrees. 'We've become very close. She confers with me a lot and it's enriched my life. Having someone who is so hungry to learn, made me feel so appreciated and made every day seem so wonderful to be able to help.'

'They're such a lovely couple, so caring and loving. Being like a mother to them has made me feel so fulfilled and I thank God every day for it.'

For Venus, the support that Janet has provided has been nothing short of a miracle: 'I believe that God sent Janet to help me.'

A new beginning an Eltham Story

'I have come so that you may have life and have it to the full.' ~ John 10:10

Najwa Marsheh, 38 and her husband Issa Alchadaydah, 50 are quite possibly the most cheerful couple I have ever met. Najwa's laughter regularly punctuates our conversation; her smile is broad and her eyes twinkle with happiness. Issa is a little more reserved, but happy and charming all the same. The couple recently moved to private rental accommodation in Lalor, but on this occasion they have come back to revisit Unit 109 at the Eltham Project which had been their home for seven months.

Najwa and Issa were living in Syria's capital, Damascus where they both had jobs that they loved: Issa was a Sales Manager for an import company and Najwa worked as a teacher in the Arabic language. For five years they lived close to the firefight between Free Syrian Army rebels and forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad.

'That was a lot of pressure for us,' says Issa. 'The whole situation is not good - a lot of bombs, you are not safe. We stayed for five years and that was enough for us.'

They made the difficult decision to leave their family, friends and jobs, and fled to Iraq.

'We encouraged each other to leave,' says Issa. 'The first thing is to be safe. If we aren't safe, we can't do anything. This is our aim: to be in a safe area so we can start our family.'

Najwa agrees: 'We want our children to be in a safe country, a safe environment. We don't want them to live in a war situation; to see what we have seen. So it was our choice to come here, even if we have to start again from scratch.'

They stayed in Iraq for eight months before arriving in Australia in October 2017. In January 2018, they signed a lease to stay at the Eltham Project where they felt at home almost immediately.

'It helped us from the beginning,' said Najwa. 'We had friends, we had a community, services helping us. Also the price was good - affordable for us. Everything was nice and friendly - the people living here were very friendly and very helpful.'

Issa is also positive about the Eltham Project: 'It works very well for couples. This can help them to start - maybe some of us can save some money because the rent is not too expensive. And this place is enough for a couple. We don't need more than this space. It's good for one year maybe, to start a new life, to search for a new place. It's good.'

Issa and Najwa have visited Canberra and Sydney and both agree that Melbourne is best.

'We love Melbourne; the nature is really good and the people are very nice,' says Najwa, though adding with a laugh that 'the weather is not very good!'

Najwa has started a course in Medical Administration and hopes to find work in this field, while Issa is enrolled in a course that will help him to prepare his resume and find a job. Both are also attending English lessons.

For those of us who have grown up in Australia, it is almost impossible to imagine what it is like to live in a war zone. Daily bombings and explosions reducing your city to a crumbling ruin while the community around you is decimated by death and displacement. How many of us know what it feels like to abandon everything you have built and loved to start all over again in a foreign land?

Exiled from their homeland, Najwa and Issa know. They lost everything and yet they have so much joy and hope. As they face their future with optimism, determined to build a new home in Australia, you can't help but believe that theirs will be a life that is lived to the full.



Our own refugee experience an Eltham Story

At CatholicCare we are proud to say that we are a culturally diverse bunch, with our staff representing over 57 different cultural backgrounds and 67 recorded countries of birth. On top of that, over half of our staff can speak a language other than English! Our Manager for Refugee and Settlement Services, Tomasa Ruiz, is one of those born overseas; her journey to Australia is a remarkable story.

Tomasa has been a refugee twice in her lifetime, and from a young age she has been dedicated to advocating for the human rights of refugees. She currently spends her time helping refugee families in Dandenong and was responsible for coordinating CatholicCare's efforts in the Eltham Project.

Tomasa was born in a small village in Los Pozos, El Salvador, where her parents were farmers. At the time, workers were treated badly and salaries were low, and so they started asking for improved working conditions across the country. This led to the beginning of the Salvadoran Civil war in 1980.

To combat this uprising, parliamentary organisation ORDEN (which was decommissioned in 1979 due to repeated human rights' violations) was unofficially reactivated, and began searching for selected people who were leading the cause.

'That's how everything started,' Tomasa recalled. 'You had soldiers coming to the village looking for different people. My dad was one of those people.' For years, Tomasa's father and older sister had to hide in the mountains at night.

On Tomasa's 14th birthday, a year after the civil war began, there was a massacre in her village.

'We ran and hid, but the people that couldn't run or hide were killed. There were over 60 people killed on that day. We could see from the hills where they were killing people and where they were burning houses. And from that day, we never went back to our village.'

Tomasa, together with her family of 10 and 100 other villagers, spent the next three years hiding and traveling through the mountains to avoid the soldiers, who were never far behind. They then reached a refugee camp in San Antonio, Honduras, and spent 18 months there.

'From the refugee camps we could hear everything that was happening in El Salvador. We could hear the planes throwing bombs, we could hear the news on the radio; there was a need to go back.' Not yet 18 years old, Tomasa made her way to the nation's capital and joined CRIPDES as a social activist and humanitarian, where she spent the next 10 years.

In 1992 when the war officially ended and Tomasa was pregnant with her second son, she was fearing for her life as she received death threats, and there were unexplained disappearances and deaths of several of her work colleagues. It was then that her family decided to leave and come to Australia.

As a second-time refugee, Tomasa arrived in Australia knowing not a word of English. Through time, she learned to speak English, did



Above: Lisa Foley (left) with Tomasa Ruiz.

further study at TAFE and found employment to support her family.

Tomasa's lived experience of trauma, displacement and settlement issues has made her well-equipped to support the newly-arrived refugees we are in contact with here at CatholicCare.

Together with Lisa Foley, CatholicCare's Senior Manager of our Schools Unit and South and East regions, Tomasa helped to manage the Eltham Project by coordinating staff and volunteers, and collaborating with organisations, parishes and community groups to ensure that the refugees had a great network of support around them.

Tomasa spent much of her time at Eltham in the communal room at the units, where she would chat with the refugees and they would share food and coffee with her. She made close friends with three of the refugee women, bonding over shared experiences.

'When you tell people you understand and believe what they tell you - because you've had similar experiences - they trust you. I speak slow and use a lot of body language [to combat the language barrier], and they know it's okay to talk in broken English with me, because I won't judge them.'

Tomasa shared that the language barrier is one of the many challenges for refugees arriving in a new and foreign land. This often leads to miscommunication and misunderstandings with service providers, making it difficult to attend to their needs.

For the refugees who are required to find employment, low-skill jobs are often forced upon them with no regard for their past experience, tertiary education and specific needs. All the while, these refugees are faced with the uncertainty of starting a new life, the trauma of their previous life and the difficulties navigating Australia's complex systems.

Over seven years ago, before Tomasa started working at CatholicCare, she was a volunteer helping to collect food and clothing donations for asylum seekers in Dandenong. Her manager informed her of the new employment opportunity at CatholicCare to support refugees, and she has never looked back.

'I became aware of the issues refugees were facing, and knew that I had so much to offer. I saw they were facing the same issues I did so many years ago.'



The value of stories

'Grandma, tell us a story!' 'Dad, what about the time that ...?'

The family gathers in the shade, out of the summer's heat. Christmas wrapping paper and streamers cover tree, chairs, floor. Children snuggle down with parents, ready to listen. The teenager puts down the smartphone and lifts a head out of interest to hear this year's story. This is part of the Christmas tradition.

Stories are core to our sense of identity and belonging. The stories that we choose to share are a reflection of the way we see ourselves and an invitation to explore our identity more deeply. Shared stories create and re-create our family and community. They centre and anchor us as individuals, providing a sense of legacy for future generations and a sense of home that very few other things can bring.

What about the Christmas story? For centuries the accounts in Matthew's and Luke's Gospels have fed our imaginations and feelings. They are foundations for our understanding of ourselves as Christians. In these stories we find glory amid humble surroundings, the overturning of powerful forces, forecasts of the rejection to come, and the wonder of the Word made Flesh. We are inspired and sustained by the Good News within these stories.

CatholicCare has its own origin story. It is of two brave women, Constance (Connie) Moffit and Norma Parker, who travelled to the USA to develop their skills and became Australia's first professionally qualified social workers in the mid-1930's. Upon their return they proposed a new, family-centred approach to the care of children instead of institutionalising them.

Thanks to Norma and Connie, families were offered a new kind of support. With the right assistance and safety nets from the Catholic Social Service Bureau (our original name), children remained with their parents and siblings, and families stayed intact where they would have once been torn apart. Their courage and compassion shaped the organisation we are and still motivates us today.

Christmas is a time for celebrating family, and for sharing family stories. Our family stories reflect our values, our struggles and triumphs, and our origins. Successive Christmases are often the key points in the stories that are told in the future. We are not just remembering the past, but creating the future.

This Christmas, choose to listen to someone whose story you haven't heard before. This may be a family member, or someone who is part of your wider community. By listening to their stories, you will learn about who they are, and help validate them and their experiences so their legacy can continue.

This Christmas, be conscious of the stories you are creating. Remember that feelings linger in our memories long after the facts or events have become vague. May the memories you create, with care this Christmas, nourish you and your families for many Christmases to come.

Sharing a different perspective

It is a sad fact of life that not all families stay together. Sometimes families are actually better off apart and living in different homes. But what happens to the children in those families during the separation and into the future? A separation can start a battle between parents that sometimes see the children caught in the middle. Mediators, counsellors, family lawyers and Child Protection workers can all become involved in the process. With so many professionals each trying to do their best, what happens with the family and the children caught in between?

The Family Law Pathways Network (Pathways) was created by the Attorney General's Department in 2006 with the goal of improving collaboration between organisations and individuals within the family law system. Activities are focused around educating and creating dialogue and opportunities for professionals working in family law to understand more about each other's role and how they can work together to create a better experience for their clients. There are 30 Pathways Networks across Australia with six in Victoria. The Greater Melbourne Pathways is managed by CatholicCare in East Melbourne and works closely with all of the counselling staff.

'The core of our focus is to remind professionals that they are dealing with actual families at one of the worst times of their lives,' says Pathways Project Officer Adam Chetcuti.

'If we can educate professionals to think holistically about what the family will be going through, we believe we can provide a smoother and easier family centered approach during this time. Something that should see less conflict and better outcomes for all involved, especially the children who tend to suffer the most during separation.'

'We work with lawyers to think about counselling techniques and the emotional side of the process that families are going through. We also work with counsellors to understand the legal framework the families are working within as well. This sharing of knowledge allows the professionals to be on the same page when working with clients.'

This has proved positive for many professionals over the years; an example is articulated in the feedback from one participant:

'I really saw the value in what was covered, and learned a great deal. One personal thing that I took from the day is that without a doubt, there is a need for young men (and prospective lawyers) like myself to take an active role in addressing and speaking up on family violence and the many risk factors associated with it. I believe it is an important part of breaking down the systemic inequality that exists. I'll be recommending this training to others.' – Ben Hall, Pathways Kiosk Attendant.

By bringing different perspectives and experiences together, Pathways are creating a more inclusive and collaborative space for professionals to work together - something that ultimately creates more harmonious environments for families during these times of conflict. This can only help create the feeling of safety and security for families in their new home situation; a win for creating stronger families.



... building brighter futures

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SUNDAY
APPEAL**

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