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From: Mercy Foundation

Celebrating 30 years at the service of human dignity

On 24 September 2020, the Mercy Foundation celebrates 30 years at the service of human dignity.

For thirty years, the Mercy Foundation has helped communities across Australia respond to people in need. Following the closure of the Mater public hospital in 1990, the Sisters of Mercy North Sydney established the Mercy Foundation ensuring that the Congregation could continue their mission to alleviate poverty and address disadvantage, restoring dignity to people's lives.

The Sisters of Mercy North Sydney opened the Mater Hospital in 1906. It was a public hospital that was renowned for caring for all in the community, especially those in poverty. In the 1980's, the State government withdrew funding of the Mater as a public hospital so that a new hospital could be opened in Sydney's growing west. The Sisters were determined to continue to their mission to combat poverty and in 1990, the Mater was reborn as a private hospital and the Mercy Foundation was established. This innovation has enabled the transformation of the lives of thousands of people facing disadvantage across Australia

The Foundation continues to be committed to social justice and structural change that brings about greater social equity and inclusion in our world in 2020. At the heart of all projects and activities that the Foundation is involved in is the service of human dignity.

Since 2008 the Mercy Foundation has focused on ending people's homelessness using evidence-based practices. According to Sue Mowbray, CEO of the Mercy Foundation, "When the Foundation turned its attention to homelessness, not many people in our community

were working to solve it. Our approach has been to end people's homelessness, so that people aren't left trying to survive on the streets, relying on food vans or charity to get by in life. An affordable home and access to the right support will end people's homelessness, restore dignity and help them get on with their lives."

In 2014, the Mercy Foundation turned its attention to the issue of older women and homelessness. "Older women are now the fastest growing group in the community to experience homelessness. This is an injustice that must be addressed. It's shameful that the women who built our communities are now facing homelessness at a vulnerable point of their lives."

For ten years, the Mercy Foundation has helped communities run Registry Week, a data-driven project that is redefining how communities can rework local systems to end homelessness once and for all.

The Foundation runs a program called Home in a Box, that helps formerly homeless people set up their new home. "When you've been homeless for a long time and living on a low income, the emotions of moving into your own home can turn from elation to anxiety, when you have nothing to help make your house a home. Thanks to our supporters, we provide brand new towels, sheets, quilts, kitchen ware and other essential household items. Home in a Box makes an enormous difference to helping people lay down roots and re-start their lives".

More recently, the Mercy Foundation has added another area of focus, ending human trafficking and slavery. "It's hard to believe that there are people caught in slavery in our backyard. Forced marriage, forced labour and domestic servitude are just three types of slavery happening in Australia now."

Through its grants programs, the Mercy Foundation provides seed funding to community based projects, commissions research, educates and advocates to achieve its social justice agenda. For thirty years, the Foundation's small grants program has addressed social justice issues at the grass roots, building a more just and inclusive society for people seeking

asylum, older people, newly arrived migrants, young mothers and many more people facing isolation and disadvantage.

Each year, the Mercy Foundation runs the Mercy Youth Awards, to educate secondary students about social justice issues and inspire them to become young advocates for justice.

Donations to the Mercy Foundation are tax deductible. “Thanks to funding from the Sisters of Mercy North Sydney and other generous supporters, we ensure that 100% of every dollar donated to the Mercy Foundation funds additional projects or our Home in a Box project”.

The chair of the Mercy Foundation Board, Annabel Senior, said “We stand on the shoulders of compassionate, courageous and forward-thinking women. The Sisters of Mercy North Sydney have a long history of caring for the poor and disadvantaged in the community. The Mercy Foundation is their legacy to continue to alleviate poverty and disadvantage and return dignity to people’s lives.”

Find out more about the Mercy Foundation at www.mercyfoundation.com.au

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Left: Angela, Bayside Women's Shelter

Right: Sue Mowbray, Mercy Foundation