

# Arena

## Stitching Together new skills, friendship and fun

**Helen is our office administrator in the Hunter region, and she has a great passion for sewing and craft.**

She had an idea on how to get more involved with our clients and the local community in Woodberry. She sourced sewing machines, material and thread, and soon, the 'You Sew and Sew' group was born.

Volunteering her own time, Helen taught a group of ten women embroidery and sewing techniques over a period of six weeks.

"At the beginning many of the women said to me 'I can't sew', but after a couple of weeks they realised that with patience, enthusiasm and encouragement, they were able to

create some colourful items for their home and their children, and they felt really great about what they had achieved", says Helen.

The sessions weren't just about embroidery and sewing. They also helped the women to build self-esteem and confidence, make new friends – and have fun!

"We also had a case manager there who was able to talk to the women one-on-one about any problems they might be dealing with at home, and provide advice, referrals or further support where needed."

Helen is planning to focus future sessions on hand sewing skills, so participants can work on their projects at home without needing access to a sewing machine.

Helen encourages anyone with a special skill to think outside the square and get involved. "You can make a big difference to someone's life", she says.



*Helen sharing tips and encouragement*



*'You Sew and Sew' women proudly holding the cushions they made*

***"The women shared an interest which drew them closer together, and in turn, created a safe place to talk about their individual challenges."*** Helen

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# Lithgow families get out and about

Moving to a new town can be very isolating, as new mum Catherine found when she moved to Lithgow in 2008. So she was delighted when our staff set up Bug-a-Lugs, a walking group for new parents in the area.

Through Bug-a-Lugs, local parents enjoy some gentle exercise with a walk around town. The walk is followed by a playgroup with our early childhood professional Bernadette, where the focus is on children's learning and development, and parenting skills. Young mum of two, Emily, said Bug-a-Lugs has helped her build up her parenting skills and meet other families in Lithgow.



It's playtime at the playgroup!

"I joined because it was a good opportunity to get some exercise. I really like the way Bernadette teaches us how to handle our children's behaviour, and the best ways to interact and help them learn", says Emily. "The best thing about the group is the new friendships I've made, and having time to bond with my children."



**"I use the skills that I've learned every day with my children."** Emily

Bug-a-Lugs mums enjoying a stroll in the park with their children

## Giving children around Australia a good start

The Benevolent Society recently joined forces with three other leading not-for-profit organisations to create GoodStart, the new company that will run many of the ABC Learning Centres across the country.

While GoodStart will run separately from The Benevolent Society, we are excited to be involved in this once-in-a-generation opportunity. This is a chance to transform child care in Australia and improve the quality of care and education provided to young children, which is so important for their future life.



## From the CEO

The last couple of years have been a period of change and growth for The Benevolent Society. Since 2008, we've expanded our reach from 82 to 124 programs. Much of this growth has taken place in regional and rural areas of New South Wales, and in Queensland.

From the Bankstown Pressure Cooks project to programs like Bug-A-Lugs in the Central West, 'You Sew and Sew' in the Hunter and 'Young, Black and Ready for School' on the Central Coast, we have been building links, often in culturally diverse communities, and finding ways for people and families to connect. These programs, which are often based on very simple but innovative ideas,

always aim to meet local needs in the most effective way.

I am proud that The Benevolent Society is now able to work with more people and deliver quality services in even more areas where people need support. We are particularly excited about the pace of our growth in Queensland, where we are helping to build strong, healthy and vibrant communities across the State.

All this would not be possible without your support, so I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your ongoing interest and commitment to the work we do.



Richard Spencer  
Chief Executive Officer

# Supporting more Australia

Over the past five years, The Benevolent Society has been on a journey to support more rural and regional reach, and focusing more on marginalised communities. The stories

## A brighter future for more in the Sunshine State



In 2008, The Benevolent Society launched its first program in Queensland – the North Gold Coast Early Years Centre, located in **Nerang**. Just two years later, we now have 54 staff delivering vital services to families and communities in various parts of the State.

Families in **Browns Plains** can now access a range of services through our new Early Years Centre which opened in December. From day care and playgroups to a toy library, the Centre will assist more than 700 local families with young children every month.

We are also helping families in the Moreton Bay area, through the Mother-Baby Hub in **Strathpine**.

**“We know that many parents feel they really need a bit of extra support right after the birth of a child, so the Mother-Baby Hub is great because they can access a range of high-quality services all under one roof, in a safe and friendly environment”**, says Michael Tizard, State Manager of The Benevolent Society in Queensland.

The Benevolent Society has also launched services for adults. In **Logan**, people who experience

mental illness can now access support and mentoring through the Personal Helpers and Mentors Service, while the newly launched Post Adoption Support Queensland provides advice and counselling for people affected by adoption throughout the State.

In the coming years, we hope to open more services across the Queensland region, including expanding our Saver Plus program helping families manage their budgets and save.



2 years after its opening, the North Gold Coast Early Years Centre is buzzing with activity!

## Growing stronger with support

Patricia lives in Nerang, and is a mum of four young children. She has depression, and just over a year ago, was going through a difficult period looking after her children as a single mum. One day she pushed open the door of our North Gold Coast Early Years Centre to get some help.



“I was in a stressful stage in my life and really needed an outlet, a counsellor to talk to”, she remembers. Things are now looking up for Patricia and her family, and she says counselling and support from her Family Support Worker Jo has been a huge help.

“She really does care about me and my family, I know I can go to her for guidance and for a shoulder to cry on if I need to”, says Patricia. Patricia’s depression had also deeply affected her 8-year-old daughter Mia. One-on-one counselling and play therapy through the Centre have been vital in helping Mia build up her self-esteem and confidence.

**“She definitely comes out stronger after each session, and has learned how to stick up for herself against bullies. She has really benefited in a big way”**, Patricia says.

Before our arrival in the North Gold Coast, there was nowhere like this that families like Patricia’s could turn to for help. Opening support centres outside of metropolitan areas is essential to offer vulnerable families the support they need.

# ans than ever before

re disadvantaged Australians. This has involved us expanding interstate, extending our  
s below illustrate some of the ways we are reaching out to more people in more places.

## Central Coast kids leap into school

Starting school can be a stressful experience for young children and their families. On the Central Coast, our 'Young, Black and Ready for School' program supports local Aboriginal families as their children make the big step to Kindy. It links families with their local school and ensures the children are healthy and ready to start their educational journey.

At Community Health Days, the children have a general health assessment, including hearing, speech and immunisation. Every participating child receives a backpack, lunch box, drink bottle, t-shirt and school hat, which makes them feel very special! Parents receive information about what to expect when their little one starts school. They also enjoy the chance to meet other parents in the area.

***"I loved meeting other Koori families on the day – I didn't think there were any on the Peninsula"***, said one parent who attended a Community Health Day with their child.



*A young boy holds his Certificate of Participation at the Community Health Screening Day*



*Aboriginal Community Workers Cassa Hinton (left) and Alison Preece (right), holding the placemats Alison designed*

The families also receive a set of placemats, featuring colourful artwork by a local Aboriginal artist and words in the local Darkinyung language. Through songs, counting games and everyday observations, they help parents turn meal time into a learning opportunity for their children.

Through programs like these, The Benevolent Society helps children get the best start at school.

## First family to graduate Brighter Futures Tamworth

When Joice and her family first came to our Brighter Futures program in Tamworth two years ago, they were facing some tough challenges at home. As well as mental illness in the family, Joice and her partner Les were struggling with their sons' behavioural problems.

Through Brighter Futures, Joice, Les and the boys (9 and 4 years old) took part in parenting courses, supported playgroups, budgeting and nutrition workshops and more, to help them better manage things at home.

***"We were on a rocky road before this, and now I can say that our behaviour towards the children has really changed, and their behaviour towards us and others has also changed for the better"***, says Joice.

*"The parenting and behavioural courses have helped us tremendously, and the staff were wonderful through it all."*

The family's case manager Christine said it was great to see how Brighter Futures had benefited the whole family.

*"It's great to see them enjoying a happier and more stable life at home, and we're pleased that they'll be the first family to graduate from Brighter Futures in Tamworth!"*

First opened in 2007, Tamworth's Brighter Futures program supports struggling families with young children, to prevent problems from turning into a crisis.



*Joice and Les with their two happy boys*

# Kitchen connections in Bankstown



In the last edition of Arena, you would have read about Bankstown Pressure Cooks, a cooking competition bringing together people from different cultural backgrounds. The final challenge took place in late November, when a large crowd gathered to watch the event unfold. The teams had one hour to cook a dish they created, inspired by a cultural cuisine they were unfamiliar with.

Cultural advisors from the community were on hand, providing cooking advice to the contestants. Pakistani cultural advisor and competition judge Shaista Khan said it was marvellous to see the participants' enthusiasm, and the friendships formed.

MasterChef's Justine Schofield led the panel of judges, who were impressed with the quality of the dishes they tasted. 'Hot and Spicy', a Chinese husband and wife team, were delighted to take out the top honours on the day, with their Thai salmon dish.

Bankstown Pressure Cooks is part of a wider project by The Benevolent Society, called Growing Communities Together, which aims to tackle social exclusion, discrimination and poverty in communities.



The winning Thai salmon dish



Shaista Khan (far left) with the team of cultural advisors



The 'Hot and Spicy' team getting ready to cook up a storm before the finale!

**"The project gave community members the opportunity to come out of their shell, and encouraged them to talk and share ideas in a fun and productive manner."**  
Shaista Khan

## Make a difference with monthly giving



Monthly donations are one of the most effective ways to help deliver our services over the long term.

Sharon Bent, one of our supporters, explains why she became a monthly donor, "I am humbled and grateful for the work The Benevolent Society and its wonderful people do and feel that a small monthly donation is the very least I can invest. It makes me feel great knowing my money is being used to make such truly positive and lasting social change."

Monthly donations also give the flexibility to spread your giving evenly over the year, with peace of mind that your donations are taken care of and working hard each month.

*If you would like to learn more, or make a monthly pledge, please fill in the coupon underneath and return it to us. Thank you for your support!*

**For just \$25 per month you can help more children reach their potential.**

## I want to help

Mail to: The Benevolent Society, PO Box 171, Paddington NSW 2021

### I'd like to donate

\$50  \$100  \$200  \$500 My choice \$

- I enclose a cheque/money order for the above amount.  
(Payable to The Benevolent Society) OR
- I authorise payment of the above amount from my credit card.

This is a  single donation  monthly gift (credit cards only)

**Credit card**  Mastercard  Visa  American Express

Card number	Exp
Cardholder's name	
Signature	

### Please send me more information on

- Leaving a bequest  Making a regular gift  Volunteering  Community fundraising  Becoming a foster carer

Mr  Mrs  Ms  Miss Other

First name

Surname

Address

Postcode

Contact number

Email address

Date of birth

- We respect your privacy
- If you would prefer not to receive occasional mail from The Benevolent Society please tick the box.
- To help our fundraising we may occasionally invite other like-minded organisations to write to our supporters. If you would prefer not to receive such communications, please tick the box.

# A Christmas treat

In December last year, 27 children from our Scarba service were treated to a very special Christmas present – a helicopter ride over Sydney!

The children were thrilled to go for a ride in the big red helicopter, and there were smiles all round on the day.

“It was fun, and it was fun when we turned. It was like falling out of the sky. It was also a bit scary. I’m going to tell my friends all about it!” said 7-year-old Karina.

Our huge thanks goes to Jim Norrie at United Aero, who very generously donated the flights.

“This is the second year Jim has done this, and the children talk about it all year. He has really made an impact on these kids and their life experience”, says Naomi Iliffe, Manager of Scarba in South West Sydney.

Through Scarba, The Benevolent Society works with struggling families, and provides care and support to vulnerable children.



Above: Excited families gather around the big red helicopter!



Right: Jim Norrie, ‘The helicopter man’, in good company with The Benevolent Society staff Naomi Iliffe, Poonka Tiburtius and Jannie Cheng



**“The best thing was when we were leaving the ground, and when we were going forwards and backwards. I want to go again.”** 5-year-old Gemma

## Nell Morgan, Meals on Wheels angel

Nell is 90 and has a visual impairment, but she won't let anything get in the way of her commitment to the Northern Beaches Food Service.

For the past 17 years, Nell has been a regular, reliable and committed ‘Meals on Wheels’ volunteer. She delivers more than just food on her rounds – she has a reputation for delivering smiles too! She takes a personal interest in all her clients, and knows them well enough to stay and have a chat.

“I enjoy delivering the meals to those who need them, and get a great deal of satisfaction out of volunteering with the Northern Beaches Food Service”, says Nell.

Nell is the 2009 recipient of our President’s Award. Every year the award goes to someone whose selfless

and generous contribution of time, skills, support and care has made a real difference to the lives of the people we work with.

Congratulations to Nell, and thank you to our 600 wonderful volunteers for your ongoing hard work!

The Northern Beaches Food Service and other programs are in need of more volunteers, so if you would like to join Nell and volunteer your time, please contact Juliet Burton on 02 9339 8070.



Nell receiving her award from The Benevolent Society’s President Sam Weiss

**Nell is an inspiration to us all, and we’re delighted to announce that she is the recipient of our 2009 President’s Award.**