

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Though 2010 did begin with some uncertainty there has been ongoing certainty about the arrival of humanitarian (refugee) entrants to this region so that well over 100 people have been settled in Townsville in the last financial year.

Of course, one certainty we knew would greet us at the beginning of 2010 was the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) calling for tenders for the next IHSS contract. Thus for about 10 weeks until the end of May many many hours were given to hard thinking, deep reflection and discussion on how TMSG can really give of its very best professional, caring service to refugees, laborious writing, painstaking, exacting calculating of the numerous costs to be considered and continuous editing as the final document slowly grew to more than 100 pages with about 15 pages of costings before being submitted 23 hours before closing time! The Manager and Management Committee are very thankful to Marion Hawken, Community Secretarial Services, Dr Elsa Germain and TMSG staff who assisted with this mammoth task. The present contract has been extended until 31st January, 2011. Of course, we are hopeful that another contract for Humanitarian Settlement Strategies, for a possible seven years, will be offered to TMSG.

As in previous years there have been several farewells of highly valued TMSG personnel again this year. Katie and Fred Ogden relocated away from Townsville and, as expected, they have been missed very much. Fred, of course, was Vice President for some years and his readiness to respond to challenges, his insightfulness into the wider picture for the complexities of some of our issues of concern for our clients especially and his loyalty to TMSG will always be remembered and appreciated.

Cristina Martinez has not been able to continue with her very long standing commitment to coordinating the Multicultural Women's Group. Maria Aziz has filled that role this year.

We were pleased and not pleased to accept Case Worker Gabrielle (Gabe) Cairns resignation necessitated by the birth of her baby son, Thomas. Congratulations and best wishes to Gabe, Richard, Anna and Thomas.

More will be said in the Manager's report about funding cuts (yet again). One of TMSG's casualties was the Bi-Cultural Support worker in Child Care Centres. This meant the resignation of Eva Alcalde who gave very dedicated service to that position which we actually subcontracted from the Multicultural Development Agency (MDA) in Brisbane.

Geri Crouch has also resigned from TMSG staff after nearly three years coordinating the Cultural Outreach (to Schools) Project and very successfully organizing the Community Partnerships Programme Healthy Eating Project. This short term project addressed the nutritional and lifestyle needs of humanitarian entrants both newly arrived and longer term and migrants in Townsville by providing practical education sessions that were sensitive to their particular culture. The sessions were on nutrition, safe food handling and storage, hydration,

exercise, adequate rest, traditional foods, cooking and a super market tour for participants from Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, Fiji, Indonesia and Philippines.

Maria Concetta Garro who did a sterling job as Accommodation Officer for several months after assisting with the Skilling Queenslanders for Work programme, also resigned for family reasons. We wish all these people many blessings and thank them for their work for TMSG.

The weekly team meetings remain an important part of TMSG's infrastructure and, as we have said before, the agenda for these meetings is a comprehensive one to enable all team members to be well informed about the progress of the various programmes and to try to ensure the efficient management of responsibilities of individual members. An important aspect of the meetings is the opportunity they afford for open communication among the large staff for support, assistance and appropriate responses to challenges that arise quite frequently. It is essential for the organisation with numerous clients and a large staff that precious resources are maximized, duplication of services is avoided and workers' schedules are minimally taxing to them personally. Regular weekly team meetings are a very efficient tool to achieve these aims so attendance at them, as a general rule, is non negotiable. The Management Committee is usually represented at the team meetings.

The Management Committee met regularly once a month (except January) during the year.

The yearly Review Days were held in March at the House of Prayer when all staff participated in reflection, discussion and planning. The main focus for consideration was (TMSG) internal organisation of the IHSS Programme especially to have its own coordinator/manager as well as the other staff of Case Workers, etc.

In TMSG's earnest commitment to modeling a truly multicultural society, several of us were quite involved in the Government process of forming a comprehensive Multicultural Policy for Queensland. Meg was persistent and inspirational in her efforts for TMSG to make a valuable contribution to this process.

A microcosm but realistic example of joyful multicultural interaction was experienced by more than 100 people at our Harmony Day Cent Sale celebration. On that day many people from very diverse backgrounds and across a range of ages came together to share skills, talents, energies and other resources to create an event of relaxed social enjoyment, presenting lots of "specials", sharing food and, of course, participating in the cent sale with some very high quality prizes including a lawn mower, a wheelbarrow heavy with garden equipment, cash vouchers and numerous small prizes. We are very grateful to Carmel Cannon and the large band of workers and the many large and small donors whose contributions helped make this the enjoyable occasion it was.

Another very special event held at TMSG this year was the raising of the Tokelau flag ceremony on 22nd October. On the same day this flag was also flown for the first time at Parliament House in Wellington, New Zealand and, of course, in Tokelau itself. The flag in Townsville was "launched by members of the Tokelau community, elders and catechists, TMSG staff and members of the Blessed Mary MacKillop Parish."

Three issues of the Newsletter were published through the year highlighting events, printing relevant articles and speeches especially by TMSG clients to keep all the members and other readers informed of TMSG's activities. The editors are always looking for material to publish so they exhort members to keep this in mind and let the office know of any news, events or articles of appropriate interest, photos, and/or original literary works for publication in the Newsletter.

Congratulations to Rahila Talic and Kasma Hem on obtaining Social Housing Certificate IV.

In thanking the Manager (Meg Davis) for all she brings to the challenging Mission and Objectives of TMSG especially to be "ingeniously resourceful", the Management Committee publicly acknowledges her integrity and generous commitment which inspires and encourages all the staff. This level of professionalism contributes in no small measure to all the staff understanding that working in a spirit of friendship and collaboration with each other, clients and other service providers can really contribute to a better quality of life for all in our multicultural society. The Committee especially thanks Meg for the efficient and up to the minute communication she maintains with us. Our very sincere thanks, too, to all staff, volunteers, students and trainees in 2009-2010 for their dedication to compassionate professional service to clients in spite of the huge range of challenges they face on a daily basis. I would like it to be known that all staff and volunteers frequently go far beyond the call of duty with their time, patient listening and attempts to respond helpfully to the many requests for assistance. I make special mention of appreciation of the Welcoming Office personnel's commitment and maintenance of a peaceful pleasant environment to receive clients and other people who come to the office.

For nearly seven years TMSG has been operating quite satisfactorily from this location because of the generous cooperative assistance received from the staff of Blessed Mary MacKillop Parish to access the very convenient facilities in the Fr. Brookes Paterson Centre. This has enabled important activities such as the Friday English classes and Multicultural Women's Group to be held here at TMSG's own location. Thus sincere thanks to Lyn Horner, Pauline McGuire, John White and Fr. Peter Quilty especially. We are grateful, too, to St. Joseph's School for ready access to this undercover area of the school for the large events held during the year.

So at a very interesting time in Australia's Parliamentary history, TMSG continues to look forward very hopefully for the positive growth of harmonious multiculturalism in our country and especially that we receive another HSS Contract in 2011.

Sheila Hawthorn
President
18th September 2010