



Innovation Fund

Back ideas that work.
Shape the reforms that matter.

At the Brotherhood of St. Laurence (BSL), our vision is an Australia free of poverty. Our purpose is to advance a fair Australia through our leadership on policy reform, our partnerships with communities, and the quality of our services.

The Innovation Fund is central to this work and our commitment to demonstrate, deliver and spread best practice approaches that empower people to live the lives they aspire to.

Why this moment

One in seven people in Australia live in poverty, including more than 760,000 children. Poverty is not inevitable. It's something we can change – and must change – together. A common misconception is that poverty exists only in the margins of society. Today with rising housing costs, underemployment, shifting job markets, skills and training requirements and our social services system stretched thin – people can be a couple of setbacks away from experiencing serious disadvantage. And when that disadvantage multiplies, poverty grows.

- Women-led households face almost double the poverty rate of male-led households.

- More than a third of First Nations adults are in the lowest income bracket.
- Two-thirds of retired renters live in poverty, while first homeownership rates have halved since the 1970s.
- One in five retirees live in poverty, with two-thirds relying on government pension payments.

These figures point to systems that are not working for people when it matters most.

BSL exists to address the root causes of poverty, before it becomes a 'problem'. We do this by working with those experiencing it. Shaping systems around people – rather than responding to crisis. We meet life's challenges head on. With opportunity, building capability.



Brotherhood of St. Laurence
Working for an Australia free of poverty

**Let's make
change
that lasts**

Reducing poverty requires practical models, strong evidence and tailored services at scale.

BSL's Innovation Fund makes this possible.

The Innovation Fund is the next step in a 95-year tradition of experimentation and reform

1930s: BSL is established with a focus on linking practical support with social reform.

1940s: BSL's first social researcher is employed to examine the causes of poverty and established Coolibah Centre as Victoria's first senior citizens' club.

1950s-60s: Food for Peace campaign commences (and later becomes Oxfam Australia), developed Victoria's first family planning clinic and established Hanover Welfare Services (now Launch Housing).

1970s-80s: Established a Research and Policy Centre and pioneered the family day care trial.

2000s: Co-developed Saver Plus with ANZ, now the world's largest and longest running matched savings program, and establishes Goodstart Early Learning with partners.

2010s-20s: Commenced Education Youth First Foyers project, opened David Scott School and developed Given The Chance.



BSL is one of the few organisations that can design, test and inform new or improved service approaches to break the cycle of poverty.

BSL's capability for a major reform era

Australia is in a period of significant social policy and service reform – one that has the potential to improve the lives of everyone. Redesigning early years, disability, aged care and employment is happening today. Just like bulk billing, childcare and social housing – the decisions made today will change tomorrow for future generations.

BSL brings a practice-to-policy capability rarely found in one organisation:

- Deep community insight and culturally safe practice
- Strong evidence capability
- Proven policy influence and strong partnerships
- Cross-system expertise
- Place-based delivery
- Rapid design and iteration
- Frontline-to-policy feedback loops
- Workforce development capability
- Trusted national voice.

Backing this work ensures BSL is ready with credible solutions that drive service systems change.

How the Innovation Fund works

Our practice-to-policy approach turns promising ideas into evidence-backed options for reform. The Innovation Fund provides dedicated resources for this work.

1. Test with communities

We work with local partners, communities and families to understand the drivers of poverty and pinpoint the solutions to dismantle them.

2. Build the evidence

We evaluate outcomes, costs and delivery conditions to determine what works and what it takes to scale up solutions for national adoption.

3. Enable wider adoption

We turn tested insights into practical guidance, tools and frameworks that other service providers and governments can use and benefit from.



CURRENT SERVICE INNOVATION CASE STUDY: **Thrive Hubs**

What it is

- Brings together coaching, training, financial support and connections with employers for person-centred job pathways.
- Designed for people with multiple barriers who are poorly served by current systems.

Tests how

- Joined-up services reduce disengagement and improve outcomes for job-seekers and employers.
- Tailored pathways address barriers to work.
- Employer partnerships create stable, inclusive jobs.

Impact

- Demonstrates a service that is ready for scale when governments reform employment services. Thrive Hubs are currently part-funded by the Commonwealth Government, Victorian Government and philanthropy.
- Evidence that strengthens workforce participation policy.
- Better, clearer work pathways for people facing entrenched poverty.

CURRENT SERVICE INNOVATION CASE STUDY: **Early Years Integrated Approach**

What it is

- A program that supports families experiencing complex disadvantage to access the right early childhood supports, changing developmental trajectories for life.
- Provides parent coaching and support, community engagement and improves connections between local early childhood development services.

Tests how

- To remove barriers to participating in early childhood education and care and other essential early years services.
- Integrated outreach helps families access services early.
- Joined-up early years services respond to real family conditions.

Impact

- Children start school ready to learn.
- Parents have greater confidence in supporting their child's development.
- Evidence of how place-based integration improves early years outcomes in the national early years system.



Our invitation to you

Your support enables us to shift the dial on entrenched disadvantage.

We do this through new and best-practice approaches for national uptake by:

- Developing and testing new approaches in real settings
- Building actionable evidence
- Bringing lived experience into policy decisions
- Remaining agile to seize the moment for impact and reform.

You will make possible

When you make a one-off or multi-year contributions to BSL's Innovation Fund, you support:

- Early design
- Testing and evidence-building of priority approaches identified by BSL's research, policy and frontline teams.

This early-stage capital has uncommon leverage: **Help the person. Change the system.**



Our deep gratitude to the Planet Wheeler Foundation who supported us to establish the Innovation Fund.



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