

Building Better Lives Together

A newsletter for our valued friends and supporters



Brotherhood
of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty



Give children a brighter^{!!!} start to life this holiday season

This time of year marks the last summer for many young children before they begin their school journey. It is one of the most exciting and important milestones for families.

But this holiday season, many families are facing intergenerational disadvantage due to reduced access to resources and services that prepare their children for school.

BSL understands that more needs to be done to prepare every child for school, and more importantly, to ensure that every family has the necessary resources to achieve this for their children. We are working within their communities to give them the best start to school and life.

BSL's Family and Community Centres deliver early childhood school readiness programs

designed to support kindergarten-aged children to develop social and emotional skills to prepare for school. We also work with parents one-on-one to help them understand the school system.

Through partnerships with local maternal and child health nurses and early childhood education providers, we offer a range of programs and initiatives that empower parents, foster

Continued over 

supportive communities, and help children – including those with specific needs – become confident and successful learners.

For more information: <https://www.bsl.org.au/services/service-centres/jindi-family-and-community-centre/>

We cannot achieve these outcomes alone. We rely on the kindness of donors like you to help us continue our mission.

With your generous gift this holiday season you will help us continue supporting families and giving children a brighter start in life.

Please donate today.

Your gift can help give kids a brighter start to life

Donate now at bsl.org.au/donation/donate-xmas23 or use the QR code



Executive Director Update

Welcome to the December issue of Building Better Lives Together, our final edition for 2023. It's been a busy year across BSL and I'm incredibly proud of our team's efforts towards making change that lasts. This simply would not have been possible without your support – thank you.

You can read about our impact and key achievements in the 2023 Annual Report, which is available on our website. It outlines key milestones in our programs and services, stories from participants about the change they've experienced, and details about our critical work in research, policy and advocacy.

Two important developments in recent months have been the release in late September of the Australian Government's White Paper on Full Employment, followed by the Workforce Australia Review report on 30 November. We were pleased to see a commitment to reforming Australia's broken employment services system in the White Paper and much of the advocacy from BSL and our partners reflected in the key recommendations of both reports.

In this issue I'm excited to introduce you to Dr Nicole Bieske, our new Director of BSL's Social Policy and Research Centre (SPARC). You will also meet two of our BSL Youth Advisers, Gabrielle and Nathan, along with Rosemary, who volunteers in our Clifton Hill Aged Care Residence.

This year BSL played a significant role in advocating for First Nations justice through a First Nations Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Constitution. I am proud of the support and involvement of our Board, staff, volunteers and supporters in these efforts. Although the Referendum was not successful, BSL remains committed to seeking justice, truth telling, treaty and self-determination for First Nations Peoples.

As we approach the holiday season, I would be grateful if you can consider donating to our Christmas appeal and help us continue to give each child, including those with specific needs, a brighter start to life.

Lastly, I want to thank and acknowledge our wonderful staff, volunteers, and our many partners and supporters for your hard work, generosity, and determination throughout 2023. I'm continually inspired by the passion and commitment all of you bring to achieving BSL's vision of an Australia free of poverty.

I wish you and your loved ones a happy and peaceful time together and look forward to the progress and positive change we will achieve together in 2024.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Travers McLeod'.

Travers McLeod

It's every child's right to thrive

We know early childhood is the launchpad for life – if you start well, you'll go well, and so will your family.

In November BSL's Executive Director Travers McLeod joined Minderoo Foundation's Thrive by Five and other partners in Canberra, calling on the Federal Government to enshrine an early childhood development guarantee in law and create a new body to coordinate the early years reform agenda with states and territories across the next decade.

The unfair paradox however is that children experiencing poverty are the least likely to access

critical early childhood services, but the most likely to benefit from a high-quality, universal system.

What is needed is a nationally consistent approach to early childhood development where no jurisdiction and no child is left behind. We've done this for schools and for our health system – now is the chance to do this for our kids and ensure Australia is the best place in the world to be and to raise a child.

For more information on the 'Every Child's Right to Thrive by Five – Make it Law' campaign, head to <https://thrivebyfive.org.au/>



Above: BSL Executive Director Travers McLeod speaking at the press conference in Canberra.

Meet BSL Youth Advisors Gabby and Nathan

Gabby is a 19-year-old university student and youth advocate from Melbourne's West, who migrated to Australia from the Philippines in 2013. In 2022 Gabby began her role as a Youth Advisor with the BSL Youth Transitions team. Since then, she has co-designed and facilitated activities and events for young people; participated in the YLab-led initiative to revitalise the City of Melton and improve youth community engagement; and worked with the National Youth Employment Body (NYEB), actively campaigning for improved employment services and conditions for young people. Gabby would like young people to have reasons for more hope about the future.

Nathan is a 23-year-old living in Frankston, southeast of Melbourne. His first association with BSL was as a participant in the Transition to Work program, and he has since taken up a role serving as a Youth Advisor, working with both BSL and the National Youth Employment Body (NYEB). After being invited to be a panellist at the 2022 Jobs and Skills Summit, Nathan has continued his work discussing and advising on issues that impact young people around Australia.

Nathan believes young people should be treated more equally and would like more young people to have the chance for their voices to be heard.

Hear from them on their experiences as Youth Advisors and hosts of both the 2023 Sambell Oration and 2023 BSL Donor Celebration events. Watch the interview here: youtube.com/watch?v=VayY14uX4QM



Dogs can be volunteers too! BSL's Aged Care therapy dogs

Meet Rosemary and her furry friends, Andy and Louis, who volunteer together at BSL's Clifton Hill Residential Aged Care. Together they spread happiness and warmth, proving that animals can be volunteers in their communities too!

BSL's Clifton Hill Aged Care is a purpose-built, aged care residence providing quality, personalised residential care and friendship in a welcoming and supportive environment.

Rosemary, a Clifton Hill local, became involved with the Aged Care centre after a chance encounter with BSL staff and residents in Darling Gardens which is directly across the road. The residents were interested in meeting the dogs, they got chatting, and Rosemary and her dogs were invited to visit on a regular basis.

The presence of therapy dogs like Andy and Louis can be transformative. In the often-serious atmosphere of a health setting, their gentle nature brings an element of fun and light relief for both staff and residents. The bond between humans and animals, especially in challenging times, is profound and speaks volumes about the power of therapy dogs. The tactile experience of petting them, feeling the softness of their fur, and interactions such as gazing into their eyes or watching their wagging tails create moments of happiness and connection.

These encounters often lead to conversations with residents about their own pets, fostering connections and encouraging discussions about life in general. For Rosemary, being a volunteer at Clifton Hill Aged Care is deeply meaningful.

"Volunteering with the dogs is very satisfying – seeing people enjoy the animals – it's nice to feel I can contribute positively to people's lives."

Not only does Rosemary's work contribute to positive outcomes in the community, but her dogs also get the chance to make a positive impact. Dogs, indeed, can be volunteers, leaving pawprints of joy wherever they go.

For more information about volunteering: <https://www.bsl.org.au/get-involved/volunteer/>

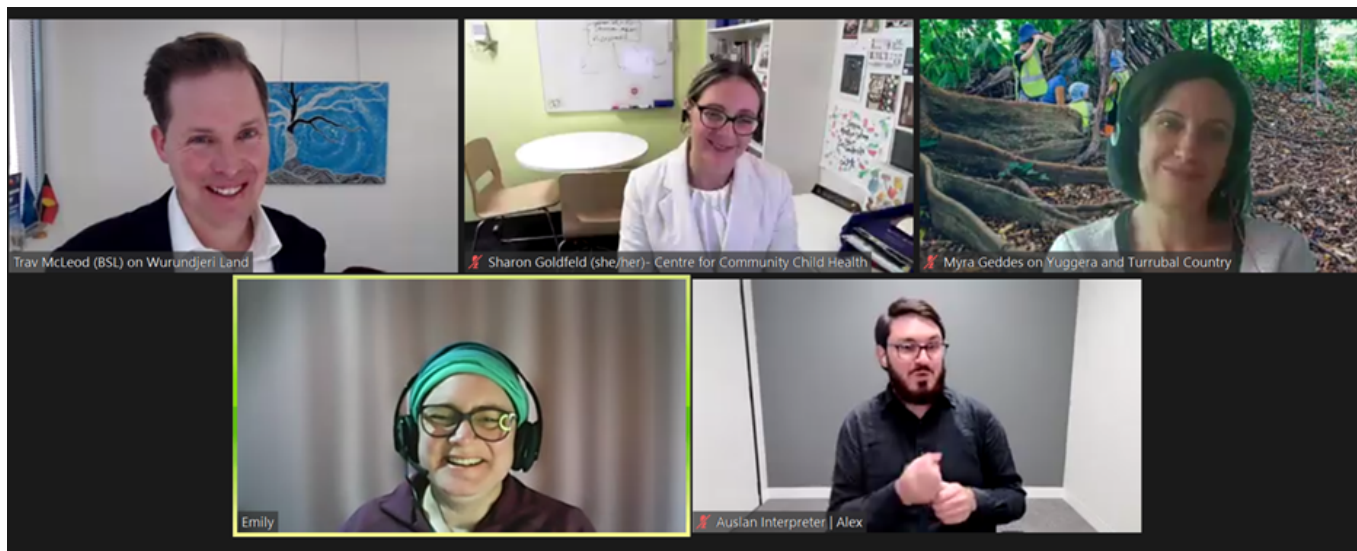


Why volunteer with us?

Grow and develop your skills while giving back to the community.

Visit [bsl.org.au/get-involved/volunteer/](https://www.bsl.org.au/get-involved/volunteer/) or scan the QR code





Anti-Poverty Week shines a light on child poverty in Australia

As part of Anti-Poverty Week, which ran over two weeks this year, we hosted a BSL Talks webinar on Ending Child Poverty.

In conversation with our Executive Director, Travers McLeod, the panellists included Professor Sharon Goldfeld from the Centre for Community Child Health at the Royal Children's Hospital, Myra Geddes from Goodstart (Australia's largest early learning provider), and Emily, a single parent, advocate and expert by experience.

A staggering 730,000 children, or one in six, currently live in poverty in Australia. The panel discussed the stubbornly high rates of child poverty in Australia and practical ways to combat this such as universal access to high quality and affordable early learning,

removing the child-care activity test, and lifting social security payments.

Emily, a single mum of a teenager, spoke about how hard it is to currently make ends meet and the effect it is having on her son.

My rent just went up by \$90 a week - which is not unusual in my region - and the housing situation is catastrophic. I'm behind in my utility bills and in a constant state of being hyper-vigilant about everything, as there's a domino effect of not having enough to cover basics. We have no buffer at all, it's all been used up. I'm most concerned about my 13-year-old son; his present and his future. He can't participate in any after-school sports. He's never seen the sea. All the things we took

for granted when we grew up. He will have to work as soon as he can leave school.

Both Sharon Goldfeld and Myra Geddes highlighted the economic benefits of ending child poverty. They also explained how the Federal Government's planned 'early years strategy' and other initiatives focused on the early years will address poverty.

Thank you to our wonderful panellists for sharing their expertise in this thought-provoking discussion.

You can watch the Webinar recording here: <https://youtu.be/jp0pdHIFneU>

Register to keep up to date on future BSL Talks webinars and other events at bsl.org.au/contact/subscribe/ or use the QR code.



BSL's reflection on the Voice Referendum

At the Referendum in October 2023, most Australians and all States voted against the proposal for Constitutional Recognition through a Voice to Parliament. BSL acknowledges the sorrow and grief many First Nations Peoples and allies have experienced and continue to experience from this outcome.

Having been supporters of a mechanism for Voice, Treaty and Truth since 2017 when it was outlined in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, we are disappointed that the generous offer extended to us by First Nations Peoples to walk with them on a journey for a better future was not accepted at the Referendum.

We are determined to continue to work toward justice for First Nations People and build on the passion and momentum generated by over 5.5 million Australians voting for change. The calibre of the debate leading up to the referendum highlighted the need for greater awareness and understanding of our history, institutional injustices, inherent racism and truth telling. These are issues that BSL will continue to address.

The leadership, resilience and integrity of First Nations leaders who campaigned for a voice to

Parliament was inspirational and we are in good hands going forward as we work towards other means of realising Voice Treaty Truth and the hope contained in the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

One exciting example of this is the new 'Unfinished Business' exhibition that we are supporting at Melbourne Museum's Birrarung Gallery from early December. This spectacular 3D photographic exhibition reveals the stories of 30 people with a disability from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, outlining the complex issues that impact their daily lives. It was first launched 10 years ago at the United Nations in Geneva and has since been on a world tour. BSL is incredibly proud of the work our Cultural Ambassador, Uncle John Baxter, has played in every stage of its development including bringing the exhibition back to Melbourne.

Please take some time over the summer to visit the Melbourne Museum and learn more about the incredible stories of success and resilience of the profiled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability.

Find out more about Unfinished Business here:
<https://museums victoria.com.au/bunjilaka/whats-on/unfinished-business/>



BSL welcomes new Director of the Social Policy and Research Centre (SPARC)

In October, BSL was thrilled to welcome Dr Nicole Bieske as our new Director of SPARC. Nicole brings extensive experience in social policy, advocacy and research to the role and has worked across government, community, business and academic sectors.

Most recently, Nicole was a Director at Homes Victoria, where she led work on a variety of key issues across social and affordable housing portfolios. These included the Big Housing Build, a program to deliver housing for people living with mental illness and monitoring and evaluation. She is also Board Vice Chair of GenWest, a family violence support service in Melbourne's west.

BSL has a long and proud 80-year history in research and social policy having appointed our first researcher to inform our work in 1943. Since then, we've grown this capacity into Australia's largest social policy research centre in a non-government welfare organisation.

I'm incredibly excited to lead a policy and research team within an organisation that has such a strong and impressive service delivery footprint," Nicole said of her new role.

I look forward to continuing to grow BSL's reputation for producing outstanding policy and research work that addresses the drivers of

poverty in Australia, informed by service delivery and driven by innovation.

Under Nicole's leadership, we'll continue to grow the impact of our policy and research to help achieve our Strategy 2030 and our vision for an Australia free of poverty.



Above: New SPARC Director, Dr Nicole Bieske

'Working Future' - a rare chance to reimagine our employment system

The Australian Government released their long-awaited White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities - 'Working Future' - in late September and their report on the inquiry into Workforce Australia on 30 November. BSL welcomes the ambition for sustained and inclusive full employment and commitment to reforming Australia's broken employment services system.

Both documents recognise that Australians who are disadvantaged in the labour market need a different deal and a different employment services system from that currently available.

The Government listened to people with lived experience throughout the drafting phases, through numerous written submissions and most

importantly, dozens of BSL program participants who bravely shared their experiences publicly.

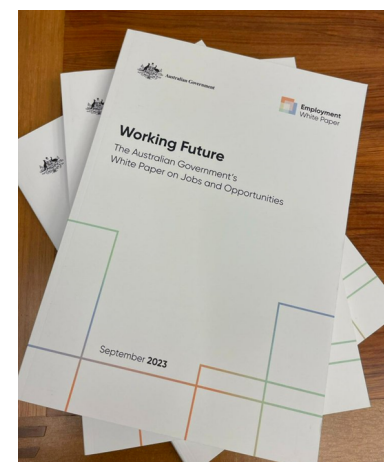
BSL Executive Director Travers McLeod said of the ambitious agenda:

We look forward to bold reform that addresses entrenched disadvantage in the labour market and champions collaborative, people-centred and place-based approaches to unemployment.

BSL will continue to work closely with the Australian Government to ensure our approach to better employment outcomes in Australia - starting from early childhood and continuing throughout the life course - delivers a system that lifts people up, leaves no one behind, and can bring greater social

and economic dividends for all Australians.

To read our full response to the White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities, visit www.bsl.org.au/news-events/media-releases/employment-white-paper-outlines-rare-chance-to-reimagine-employment-system/



2023 BSL Annual Report: Driving innovation, collaboration and impact to reshape Australia's future

On 28 November we launched our Annual Report at the BSL Annual General Meeting. In the report – available online and in print – you can learn more about BSL's work from July 2022 to June 2023 as we share our impact, achievements and a few stories from over 82,470 of our participants across our key focus areas:



Above: Image of Annual Report cover

Research, policy and advocacy

We've helped reshape the future by building the evidence base and driving big-picture, big-impact change that makes a difference in the lives of many.

- 30 policy submissions and research publications laying the groundwork for change
- 16,000+ households supported to cut energy bills with Power Saving Bonus

Children and youth

We've worked to set children and young people up for success through programs and initiatives that open opportunities, build resilience, grow connections and shape the course for a better life.

- 6148 families set up for a bright start to school through HIPPY (Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters)
- 3 Education First Youth Foyers delivered across the state, providing up to 120 young people with accommodation while they finish their studies or enter the workforce

Disability

We've worked towards full inclusion for people with disability, helping create a society where each person is valued and can take part.

- 58,072 people with disability supported to help reach their goals – representing 10% of all NDIS (National Disability Insurance Scheme) participants nationally
- 1148 engagement activities with co-location partners to promote inclusion and accessibility

Economic and social inclusion

We've continued to drive the change that's needed to improve economic systems and create pathways to jobs – knowing that secure, decent work is a passage out of poverty towards a better future.

- 75% of participants who set employment as a goal have found jobs through the Sustaining Economic Empowerment and Dignity (SEED) project
- 2897 job seekers supported through BSL Jobs Victoria program

Read the full report: <https://annual-report-2023.bsl.org.au/>



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Working for an Australia free of poverty

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