

standing up for aboriginal children in need



Three of Djooraminda's dedicated professionals - making a real difference in the lives of Aboriginal children in WA.



Editors Note :

It is sad to note that for every child accepted by Djooraminda, another is deprived help due to a lack of resources and funds.

Djooraminda... a name the Yamaji people have for child's house or children's camping ground.

Djooraminda, a LifeLink funded agency, is dedicated to providing emergency and medium-term residential care for aboriginal children in a family environment - the only residential service specifically tailored for aboriginal children within WA.

Ms Lorraine Hart, Manager of Djooraminda said:

"We care for aboriginal children aged 0-12 years, who are removed from their own families by the Department of Community Development, Family & Children's Services for various reasons.

"The agency has four permanent homes caring for up to 24 children at a time, and an emergency crisis centre opened just last year, which offers immediate placements when care is needed over weekends or after hours.

"We have couples, as well as single carers, who 'live-in' with the children and provide a real family atmosphere.

"The children attend school, participate in recreation, go to movies and other outings and they also attend special camps and cultural activities throughout the year.

"Most of the children have learning difficulties, or have been

deprived the very basic needs of good food, shelter and clothing, or require counselling for abuse and abandonment issues.

"But basically, they all need to be loved and nurtured, as every child does.

"All our Staff are extremely dedicated and committed to the overall wellbeing of the children, and to providing as much normality, stability, and love as possible" said Ms Hart.

"Our ultimate goal is to give these children a positive outlook for their future, ensuring a successful transition to either foster care or a return to their own families".

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sisterly love shines through



"Lizzie is an original; nobody in the whole wide world is the same as her."

Lizzie & Rebecca McKerlie at home

Rebecca loves her little sister Lizzie very much, and so, when she had to write an assignment for school on "SURVIVAL", she could think of no greater story than that of her own sister.

You see Lizzie is intellectually disabled, and has been since birth.

Here is just a small part of Rebecca's wonderful assignment.

"Lizzie has what doctors call an undiagnosed metabolic disorder, which means there is an enzyme missing in her blood. There are about 2000 enzymes in the blood, but only 200 have been identified, and there are only 5 or 6 of these that can be corrected.

"Because of the disorder, and the drugs she has had to take over the years to stop the fits, Lizzie has not developed properly - she never learned to walk, to talk or to sit up. She even has to be fed through a tube.

"When she was only a few months old, the doctors said that she would not live past 2 years.

"She nearly did die when we went to England to visit relatives in 1995. We couldn't take her with us so she stayed in respite care, where our Grandma and other relatives visited daily. But she became very ill and was rushed to Princess Margaret Hospital.

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sisterly love shines through

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agency: Catholic Care

"We immediately flew back home to find Lizzie in intensive care. The hospital said Lizzie didn't have a good quality of life, but they kept her alive so we had the chance to say goodbye.

"However, within 3 days of having us back, Lizzie got much better and less than a week later, was back at home with us.

"Dad reckons she just started to fade away because she thought we had abandoned

her, she didn't understand we were coming back to her. So we can't ever leave her again.

"There are five people in our family - Mum, Dad, Michael, Lizzie and me. Lizzie loves dancing, and swimming. She loves going outside and feeling the air on her face. She absolutely loves shopping, just like me! We have a new van with a hoist, so now we can take Lizzie lots of places and she loves it - she feels like a Princess when she is in "her" van.

"Lizzie enjoys life, she smiles a lot and she is really bright. She still cannot walk, or talk or feed herself, but she is really happy. She has proved she wants to live and everybody just loves her, that's all."

"All disabled children are the same as you and me and we should all treat them the same way, disabled or not. I mean, how would you feel if someone treated you differently just because you couldn't do the same things as them?"



Rebecca's teacher gave her top marks for this assignment, and made the following notes...

"Reading this information had me on the verge of tears, not only because of the hardships and struggle Lizzie has had to face, but for the love and unselfish respect you have for your sister.

"Even though she can't tell you how much she loves you, I am sure she shows you through that famous smile of hers.

"A brilliant assignment Rebecca."

Pictured: Lizzie at home with her sister Rebecca and mother, Ann

Catholic Care, a LifeLink agency, has provided care and support for Lizzie and the McKerlie family over the past 9 years, since Lizzie was just 12 months old.

Staff from the "Family Care Service" often care for Lizzie at home, giving Ann and the family the chance for a break from their commitment to constant care.

Lizzie also stays for short periods of time at one of Catholic Care's two respite houses for children (which care for 130 children and families annually).

Lizzie's mother participates in the Family Counsellors/Pastoral Care

Worker groups run for parents.

There are also supportive programs for siblings, a group known as SIBS Specially Important Brothers and Sisters.

Executive Director of Catholic Care, Maureen Jewell, said.

"There is a community attitude that to have a person with an Intellectual Disability in the family is a disaster.

"At Catholic Care we know better.

"We understand and have shared both the stresses and the joys that come with loving and caring for a

child with an intellectual disability, and Rebecca's assignment illustrates both sides so very clearly.

"Rebecca and the McKerlie family love Lizzie, and she returns that love in full. If Catholic Care continues to offer families appropriate support - so that the stresses do not become overwhelming - then the family can grow and develop with their son or daughter who have a disability.

"Rebecca's caring and compassion, her maturity and confidence, shine through in her assignment.

"She is a remarkable young girl, much like her sister Lizzie" said Maureen Jewell.

Comment by

Tony Pietropiccolo
Director, Centrecare Marriage & Family Services and President, WACOSS



"The Divide Between Rich And Poor"

Poverty in our Australian community remains very real. There is an increasing group of Australians at or below the poverty line.

Poverty is one of those issues that tends to fall into the background. It disappears behind the veneer of a wealthy society and remains largely out of sight.

There is very little talk about the poor and what we can do to relieve their suffering. The emphasis is on those who are financially successful and who have the means to do those things that the poor can only dream about.

Our reality is that there is a growing divide between the rich and the poor.

Australia's wealth distribution is the sixth worst in the world. This seems out of sync with our perception of Australia as a fair country.

A place in which efforts are made to give everyone a fair go.

After all, we were the ones who first introduced the minimum wage and were quick to establish a social security system that looked after those in need. This is the country that welcomed post-war refugees and migrants in thousands. A nation concerned with the wellbeing of its citizens, regardless of status.

Something seems to have changed. The poor are increasingly being blamed for their poverty.

There is a lack of sensitivity towards the plight of pensioners. Aged care policies and practices often erode the dignity of the elderly. Harsh penalties are imposed on low-income people for minor breaches of social security rules. Refugees are treated with an amazing lack of respect.

These developments are ringing

alarm bells that we need to hear. There is a real danger that we Australians may lose our hearts in our attempts to act tough and uncompromising.

The Australian community has, in the past, sought to minimise poverty. It has done so with a genuine concern for those in need.

It has cared enough to seek not to blame the poor but to relieve their suffering. In discussing and responding to issues such as poverty we desperately need to balance hard-headedness with a genuine concern for one another.

The Australian ethos of *mateship* suggests the existence of a human relationship so caring and supportive that it looks beyond the immediate cost to the long term well-being of others. This vision remains as relevant today as ever. We all need to share in this dream and work to create a healthy and compassionate society.

Editor's Note:

Tony has recently been appointed by the government as Chairperson of the State Homelessness Taskforce. The Taskforce's role is to examine the experience of homelessness and report to government on how this issue can be addressed in the short and long term

Will Seminars a Success

Over 150 people accepted an invitation from Archbishop Hickey to attend a Free Wills Seminar, conducted for parishioners in the South Central Zone of Parishes held recently at the Willetton Parish Centre.

His Grace, Archbishop Hickey said:

"We are hosting these information evenings, conducted by Mr John Kenny from Blakiston & Crabb Solicitors, to answer the many questions many people have on 'Why A Will Is Important' and to provide access to competent legal advice."

Mr Greg Russo, Financial Administrator for the Archdiocese said:

"This is not a fundraising exercise for us, these wills seminars are absolutely free and are sponsored by LifeLink. It is a way to say 'Thank You' to all the parishes and parishioners who continue to support LifeLink. The seminars are a way to give something back to our Catholic community, and provide a much needed service."

The next Wills Seminar for Parishioners within the Central Zone of Parishes will be held on:

Date: Tuesday 18th September 2001 Time: 7.30 pm Venue: The Infant Jesus Parish Centre, Cnr Wellington Rd & Smith St, Morley

Should YOU wish to attend reservations can be made by calling Kim at LifeLink on 9223 1315 during office hours.