

# Centre helps free the addicted

■ By Jamie O'Brien

Crossroads Community ended 2004 with a special celebration as a sign for the culture of life.

The agency, which is funded by the Archbishop's Lifelink Appeal, supports persons struggling with drug or alcohol addiction by offering support to the immediate family, counselling and various programs.

The centre was opened at the request of Fr Paul Baczynski in August 2000 with the blessing of Archbishop Hickey.

Crossroads Community Groups operate during school terms, covering 10 themes per term.

Each session consists of quiet reflection and group meetings with involvement from family and friends who have been affected according to each person's circumstances.

The centre was founded after Fr Paul, who had at the time recently returned from Rome, found himself immersed in supporting and praying for youth in the Bateman parish who had left the church and were involved in substance abuse.

A number of requests from parents of children with addiction problems convinced him to start a weekly prayer night.

This led to the house being opened in East Street, East Fremantle, where programs were run for the first two years. The



**Crossroads volunteer Conceicao Portinha with Archbishop Hickey recently. Mrs Portinha was recognised for her hard work and dedication to the centre.**

Crossroads Community is now run from Council Place, East Fremantle.

Fr Paul says his extensive knowledge of the fishing industry is what has helped him relate to the people of Fremantle.

He was a professional pearl diver and fisherman for 14 years.

"I was very aware of the subculture of alcohol and drugs," he said.

He decided to take steps to looking at ways to help people of this background.

"The centre is very much connected with helping people with

very little hope," Fr Paul said.

From models developed overseas, Fr Paul helped initiate a method of 'Body, Mind and Soul, that assists in the rehabilitation of people who come to Crossroads.

"It is about building a bridge between the culture of life and death," Fr Paul said.

"A person learns to build a rational plan for their life that is peaceful and productive, bearing in mind the psychology of Jesus Christ."

Himself an atheist for many years before entering in to the seminary, Fr Paul says he wanted

to deliver a message to the people suffering from this lifestyle that it is possible to pick themselves up with the help of Christ.

The method took 12 months to develop.

He says without the help of its many volunteers, Crossroads would never exist.

One such volunteer is Conceicao Portinha.

Mrs Portinha, who is known as Connie to family and friends, initially became involved in Crossroads once a week by going to the prayer group meetings that Fr Paul started.

One setback that Mrs Portinha says she has had to get used to is the fact that people automatically believe that because she has committed so much time to Crossroads, one of her children have had substance abuse problems.

This is not the case.

"I went to Crossroads not for others but to give life for other people," she said.

"I knew in my heart I had to help."

The mother of two sons, one an architect, the other a sports scientist, insists the experience at Crossroads has made her stronger.

"I had to give up a lot of my social time which many people didn't understand at first," she said.

"However it wasn't my plan."

Mrs Portinha started working at

Crossroads by cleaning and is now an integral part of the fundraising team.

She says it has been very much a spiritual and personal journey.

Mrs Portinha has also attended a Holyoak Facilitators course, which showed her different ways of handling situations.

"After a few years we became like a family," she said.

"We are a small team but we have become strong."

In addition to her natural skills of nurturing and caring, Mrs Portinha also speaks Portuguese.

Fr Paul says this is important as the services of translators at the centre can help a person's development in the Crossroads program immensely.

The centre is soon to open a retreat centre half an hour from the city to further develop the progress of its participants by offering time away from the hassles of day-to-day living.

The Centre will be having a fundraising day on Sunday January 23 at St Jerome's Parish, Spearwood.

Interested persons can contact Fr Paul at Crossroads Community on 9319 8344 or email [info@crossroadscommunity.com.au](mailto:info@crossroadscommunity.com.au).

**Crossroads Community can be contacted on (08) 9319 8344.**