

January 2006

NEWSLETTER

CHRISTIAN BROTHERS EX-RESIDENTS AND STUDENTS SERVICES

## The END of an ERA...

**THIS is a very special edition of C-BERS EX-PRESS Newsletter (and the final one in this form) marking and celebrating the transition to a new way of C-BERS service provision for ex-residents who spent their early years in residential child care institutions operated by the Christian Brothers Congregation and also those ex-students who were educated at Christian Brothers Schools.**

**I**t's now more than 67 years since the first child migrants began arriving in Australia from the UK and 55 years since the first group came from Malta. The child migration schemes that saw more than a thousand young children relocated from their country of origin were phased out over the late 1950s through to the mid 1960s.

When C-BERS was established in early 1995, the enormity of the trauma that many of the former child migrants had suffered, both as a result of their disconnection from homeland families and due to their sometimes harsh treatment in Australian child care institutions was only just beginning to be publicly acknowledged. At the time, C-BERS was one of the only services available to offer personal and practical support to former child migrants and other ex-residents of child care institutions. Others have been established since.

Over the past decade more than 500 people have accessed the range of services that C-BERS has provided. But the numbers have declined dramatically in recent years and it became clear that a different form of service provision was required to better meet the changing needs of former child migrants and other Christian Brothers ex-residents and students.

### PLANNING for the FUTURE The C-BERS Reference Group



**Standing** — Br Rod Ellyard, Allan Tranter, Maria Harries, Philippa White, Debbi Rosser, Maureen Briggs-Trewin, Peter Bent, Gordon Grant, George Horton.

**Seated** — Mark Sachmann, Br Kevin Ryan, Laurie Humphreys

**Not pictured** — Frank Marshall, Dennis McNerney, Michael Hogan

Throughout 2005, a lengthy planning and consultation process has been undertaken to identify the most useful options for providing future services. In developing our plans for the future, C-BERS management and staff have worked with a reference group comprised of former child migrants, the Christian Brothers Province and other interested parties.

Our sincere thanks to the Reference Group (pictured above) for their invaluable input into the forward planning process.

Thus, after a decade in operation, C-BERS Services in Alvan St, Subiaco closed its doors for the last time on the 23rd December 2005.

The occasion was marked by a ritual of celebration, farewell and thanksgiving at the Alvan St premises which was attended by a small group of people who have played a key part in the C-BERS journey over the years.

At the end of the ceremony a candle (which has since been relocated to the new premises in Fremantle) was extinguished.

# FACTS and STATS

From the 1940s to the 1960s, child care institutions run by the Christian Brothers at Bindoon, Clontarf, Tardun and Castledare provided a home, school and work to almost 4,000 boys and young men. About one-quarter (1,100) were children sent to Australia under child migration schemes. Of that number, about two-thirds came from various parts of the UK, while around one-third came from Malta.

## Child Migration:

The first child migrants arrived in Australia aboard the Strathaird and Otranto in August 1938. A further group followed in 1939.

The child migration schemes were suspended during the war years and Clontarf was taken over by the RAAF for the war effort. Just over 100 boys were transferred from Clontarf to Tardun in 1942, where they were joined by others from Geraldton, swelling the number of residents from 27 to close to 200 almost overnight (supervised by only eight brothers and three nuns).

The child migration schemes resumed again in 1947 when the Asturias brought 150 migrant children to Western Australia (the largest number in any one year). In 1950, the first child migrants began arriving from Malta.

Over the next few years, a steady stream of children continued to arrive in ships from both Malta and the UK with the Maloja and Asturias arriving in 1952, the Oronsay and Sydney arriving in 1953, the Strathaird arriving in 1954 ... and others too many to mention individually.

In 1957, the Strathnaver brought another 13 boys from Ireland but, by then, the scheme was being scaled back in the UK. It continued in Malta until 1965.

## And Now ... for a New Beginning

Following an extensive consultation process, a new model of service has emerged, and is focused on two main areas.

**Firstly:** a new CBERS counselling service, co-ordinated by Ms Philippa (Pip) White, now operates at the Edmund Rice Centre in Fremantle.

**Secondly:** a new social club – lead by representatives of 'Old Boys' and 'Old Girls' networks – is planning ways for people to stay in touch, organize social functions and ensure a good flow of information. 'Creating Communities' has also been involved in the planning and development of the new social network, and intend to provide support with newsletters and mailouts. The proposed social club will not affect the current structure of organisations – it will be a 'linking' group that joins groups together and helps people stay in touch with each other. (Contact details on page 12)

The Coordinator of the new C-BERS Counselling Service **Philippa White** (better known of as **Pip**) joined C-BERS in early 2004 (although in 2003 she was also involved in preparing C-BERS' submission to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care). Pip is a qualified social worker and researcher who is in the final stages of completing her PhD.



## From the OLD ... to ... the NEW



When C-BERS was first established in 1995, it operated out of a much loved old home in Gloster St, Subiaco. But the service had to relocate due to zoning restrictions from where it moved to premises in Coghlan Road. In 1997, C-BERS relocated to 12 Alvan Street, Subiaco which provided a stable base for the next nine years. The new C-BERS Consultancy operates out of another beautiful old building, based in Fremantle.

### THE (New) C-BERS CONSULTANCY

is located at:  
The Edmund Rice Centre  
24 High Street  
Fremantle WA 6160

Freecall number:  
1800 621 805  
Phone number: (08) 9433-3644  
Fax: (08) 9382-4114  
Email: [welcome@cberss.org](mailto:welcome@cberss.org)

## and ... A Message from Maria

In each edition of C-BERS EX-PRESS thus far, Maria Harries (who has chaired the C-BERS Management Committee from the start) has penned a personal message to readers. Over the years, her messages have touched on themes ranging from hope, courage, renewal and reconciliation. In this, her last, message the theme is appreciation and acknowledgement.

This is the last time I will write for the C-BERS newsletter in its current form and the knowledge of this brings with it both sadness and joy. The sadness is due to the fact that change always brings with it some loss; joy comes with the understanding that there has been much growth in the changes we have witnessed and there is excitement about the way ahead.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> November we had the best celebration to mark the end of C-BERS as we have known it. We acknowledged all of the people who have been part of our journey, we joined with the Child Migrant Friendship Society and other representative groups of former child migrants and Creating Communities to acknowledge a different future - and we got in early to celebrate Christmas. What an evening!

What I said at this event is that it has been an honour to be involved in work that has seen such healing of hearts and minds and wounds even though the pain and bitterness for many will never be fully removed. Thank you to everyone who was part of this work and, in particular thanks to the men and women and their families who have been such heroes and to the Christian Brothers for their trust, faith, hope, patience, humility, and their generosity in funding C-BERS Services to operate in the way that was needed. Thank you to the Sisters of Mercy and the Nazareth Sisters for supporting us to work with the women who also came to us. We have all learned much from each other. It has been a deeply personal journey of discovery and rediscovery for all of us as we have found old friends and made new ones, a journey in which we have shared our common humanity, as frail as it is. For all of us, whatever our roles, there has been sadness, death and loss as well as achievement and reconciliation.

There are too many people to thank individually. They know who they are and I hope they feel appreciated. Senator Andrew Murray (himself a former child migrant) has been an ongoing inspiration to many of us and I would like to acknowledge his wisdom as we move on because, he has moved on, and because he fights at a level few of us do for a world that is more kind and compassionate. As he has always said, we must acknowledge the past and the injustices that were perpetrated, but if we can do nothing else, we must use our knowledge of the past to create a better future for the next generation. Our collective work continues as we find ways to realise a world in which, unlike that experienced by so many child migrants, children are respected and honoured as citizens with the right to be treated with respect and dignity at all times.

In other parts of this newsletter there will be details about who to contact about services that are being developed. I look forward to sharing time with so many people who have become friends over the last few years and to contributing in a different way to a new part of this journey we have shared.

## Over the C-BERS YEARS

The C-BERS journey over the past ten years reflects the changing needs of the 500 or so men and women who have sought our help to heal, and move on with, their lives. Listed below are some of the highlights of C-BERS services over this time.

**Finding Families:** The computerized Personal History Index (PHIND) was launched in early 1999 to make it easier for people to access information on their personal and migration details, WA residences and location of early records. From 2001-2004, C-BERS worked with Joan Kerry of the UK Australian Child Migrant Project. Joan was able to locate an additional 67 families.

**Reunifications:** By the end of 1999, C-BERS had supported 173 people to reunite with their family of origin. Travel Funds subsequently set up by the British Government (1999) and Australian Government (2002) have enabled many others to make a reunification trip. C-BERS made submissions to the Parliamentary Inquiries that led to the establishment of these Government supported travel funds.

**Counselling:** Several hundred people accessed C-BERS Counselling Services. Many reported dramatic improvements in their lives.

**Making Connections:** The launch of C-BERS EX-PRESS in December 1997 provided an opportunity for many ex-residents to connect with others through the promotion of reunions, meetings and other contact opportunities.

**Personal Histories:** Many shared their personal stories in our newsletter. In 2002, ten men from Malta had their oral histories recorded which were lodged with the WA Library as an enduring historical account of their experiences.

# CELEBRATING... the Spirit of C-BERS

**S**anta came early to the Maltese Community Centre as more than 200 people gathered to celebrate the achievements made by C-BERS during the past ten years and to welcome the new direction that is planned for the service.

In collaboration with the Child Migrant Friendship Society, a highly enjoyable Christmas social theme was organised - with MC Gerry Gannon, live band Kokomo and lots of singing, dancing and jolliness to enliven the formal proceedings.

The tables were beautifully decorated by Maureen Briggs-Trewin and her willing band of helpers and the function room looked splendid and suitably festive!

Speeches honouring the contribution of C-BERS staff and supporters were well-received by the audience. Br Kevin Ryan, Province Leader of the Christian Brothers in WA and SA, gave an emotional address which acknowledged the spirit of resilience and community demonstrated by both the former child migrants and the Australian-born residents and thanked them for their support of C-BERS.

Professor David Plowman, representing the Child Migrants of Malta, presented Mr George Horton (C-BERS Management Committee) with a certificate of appreciation for the support C-BERS had given the support group C-MOM in their quest to obtain a memorial in Malta.

Mr Laurie Humphreys (ex-Bindoon), Mr Jim Plowman (ex-Tardun) and Ms Sheilagh Pearce (ex-St Joseph's Subiaco) all thanked C-BERS for its support of people and their families, and paid tribute to the Christian Brothers and the Sisters of Mercy. Sheilagh presented a bottle of wine to each of the C-BERS staff and management, which was gratefully received!

....continued page 5

**Thanks to Dr Debbi Rosser (pictured in reindeer antlers below) for this colourful account of the C-BERS wind-up celebration held on the 24th of November 2005. Thanks are also due to Debbi for her long-term contribution to the C-BERS management committee and for her pivotal role in developing the computerised Personal History Index (PHIND). Since it was launched in early 1999, PHIND has provided an invaluable resource for people wanting to put together a comprehensive picture of the people and places who were part of their early lives. Because PHIND also includes information on where the various records are held, it can also be of enormous assistance in helping to trace family members.**



Laurie Humphreys with MC Gerry Gannon



Frankie White and Debbi Rosser



Maria Harries receives a certificate of appreciation from Professor David Plowman (on behalf of former child migrants from Malta)



Maureen Briggs-Trewin



Laurie Humphreys with Sheilagh Pearce

Mr Frank Marshall was honoured with the presentation of a pen in recognition of his tireless work advocating on behalf of former child migrants and their families. The engraving on the pen said, "You make a difference", which everyone agreed was true.

The following people were singled out for special mention as for helping C-BERS along the way: Marie Roberts (Professional Travel), Deirdre Croft (Newsletter) and Joan Kerry (UK Australian Child Migrant Project).

The professional services and support each has provided has greatly enhanced C-BERS' capacity to help its clients.

Ms Maureen Briggs-Trewin, a key organiser of the function, thanked the Nazareth Sisters and other C-BERS supporters, and encouraged the assembly to participate heartily in the social networks that were going to be developed in collaboration with 'Creating Communities'.

Senator Andrew Murray addressed the group about the Australian Government's response to "Lost Innocents – Righting the Record" – where the experiences of the men and women who came to Australia as child migrants was recounted. Senator Murray was full of praise C-BERS' role in supporting this group of people.

Dr Maria Harries AM, the Chair of the C-BERS Management Committee during its entire lifetime, acknowledged the commitment and courage shown by the Christian Brothers in setting up C-BERS because it showed they were prepared to recognise and do something about the legacy of the past. She also highlighted the courage shown by the former child migrants and Australian born residents who had come to take their own steps forward on a journey to reconciliation – which was not always an easy journey. Maria then thanked all the people who had helped and supported C-BERS, and agreed with all there that we had come a long way together.

The members of the C-BERS Management Committee were all presented with a very nice memorial collage, prepared by Mary Kearns our former Administration Manager who is also an Artist.

Ms Philippa (Pip) White was presented with a pot plant to signify a healthy start to the new service which will be located at the Edmund Rice Centre for Social Justice in Fremantle.

Following the speeches, the fun really began! Santa, ably assisted by his lovely elf (Pip's daughter Holly), handed out lolly bags along with Christmas wishes.

A fabulous sausage sizzle was organised by the Maltese Community Centre, there was a Christmas sing-a-long, lots of dancing and laughter, a fair bit of Christmas cheer in the form of liquid beverage and a great sharing of memories, impressions and plans for the future.

It was a wonderful night of community spirit, a beautiful 'farewell' to C-BERS as we've known it, and resounding support of the new directions.

**Thankyou to all who came and made the night so memorable!**



Br Kevin and Sue Lodge-Calvert



Br Peter Negus and Frank Marshall



And...just enjoying the fun



Senator Andrew Murray



Jim Plowman

## No Need for Any More Secrets As a Family Finally Reunites

**The story below tells of the efforts of former child migrant Dennis McNerney to reunite with his mother and brother and sisters over a period spanning more than 40 years. His dream was realized only in August last year when he obtained funding through the ISS Australian Travel Fund to reunite with his family in England. Dennis has been actively involved in the Clontarf Old Boys Network over many years and been a strong advocate for the needs and issues facing former child migrants. He has been a staunch supporter of C-BERS and is a member of the Reference Group which was set up to plan C-BERS future directions. He told his story to the editor of C-BERS EX-PRESS Deirdre Croft**

**F**or someone who has spent the entirety of their childhood in institutional care, it can come as a bit of a shock to the system to discover that, not only do you have a family but that, in the best Irish Catholic tradition, you actually have a very big, extended family.

For Dennis McNerney, that meant a family comprising five brothers and six sisters, not to mention their children, and their children's children. It all added up. "My mother actually lost another two children. I calculated once, she had been pregnant 14 times in 19 years".

But it wasn't until last year, at the age of 57, that Dennis was finally able to take his place alongside his siblings and other family members when he attended a celebration of his mother's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in England.

Dennis reports that he was placed in an orphanage in England under the care of the Sisters of Charity when he was only three weeks old after his, then unmarried, mother fled Ireland to give birth to him in secrecy. She would have been 22 at the time. And so it was that he spent the next seven years of his life exclusively under the care of women.

Originally it was thought that he would be placed for adoption but no offers were forthcoming and, in 1955, the young Dennis was one of a group of children selected to go to Australia under the child migration scheme. On arrival, he was placed at Castledare and subsequently transferred to Clontarf.

Dennis remembers a harsh disciplinary regime under the care of the Christian Brothers but, unlike many of the former child migrants, he was given the opportunity of an education and sent to Aquinas College for his schooling.

Despite knowing nothing about his mother, Dennis says he remembers starting to make preliminary enquiries as to her whereabouts when he was about 13 or 14.

On his file, he has since discovered the early letters he wrote, but believes they were never sent.

At 17, Dennis left school and the care of the Christian Brothers when he went to work as an office clerk at the Commonwealth Bank. The Brothers provided him with a suitcase, a suit to meet the bank's dress standards and arranged boarding accommodation with an elderly lady who, unfortunately, passed away soon after requiring Dennis to relocate again.

So he went to live with the family of a friend, before transferring with the bank to Bussleton.

Over the years, he worked long and hard at the bank and his efforts were recognized when he rose to the position of manager, in which capacity he worked for many years.

Marrying French-born Nicole in 1980, he resolved to renew his efforts to track down his mother, especially as he and his new bride were planning a trip to Europe to visit her family.

He made contact with Father Hudson's homes in England (where he had spent his early years under the care of nuns) and was eventually able to make contact via a local priest.

Contact established, the instructions were that they were to meet in secret at the Presbytery.

But, after 33 years, "it was like meeting a stranger". "My wife gave my mother a kiss on the cheek and my mother was apologetic about having given me up. I just said it was water under the bridge."

Dennis maintained contact with his mother over the next 25 years and visited England a couple more times after his own two sons were born.

But his mother insisted they always meet in secret because she had told neither her then husband nor her other children of his existence. Nor was he allowed to contact her at home or leave a message on her answer phone in case the secret was revealed.

"We just did touristy things together".

In conversations with his mother, Dennis was aware that he had a large number of brothers and sisters, but they continued to remain unaware of him.

It was through Joan Kerry and the UK-based Australian Child Migrant Project that Dennis sought to finally resolve the secrecy that had prevented him from having access to his wider family.

Dennis cannot speak highly enough of Joan's work, not only in locating all the documents on his early history but also in preparing the ground for the eventual family reunion. "She must have a file on me that is about 3-4" thick".

When his mother's husband (not Dennis's father) died in 2003, the prospects looked more promising as there was one less person who needed to be kept in the dark.

Eventually Joan contacted my mother and asked her which of her children it would be best to broach the subject of the existence of their brother in Australia. Joan then sent a letter to one of my sisters asking to meet "to discuss a confidential matter concerning the McNerney family". Whereupon, of course, my sister confronted my mother wanting to know what it was all about. The truth finally came out.

But there was another shock to follow for the McNerney family. "When my brothers and sisters saw the photos in the profile of me that Joan had supplied, they all remarked on how much I looked like, Uncle Oliver in Ireland".



"It turned out that, who they thought was their Uncle Oliver was in fact another brother, the oldest in the family, who my mother had given birth to, also in secret, but who had been brought up by her mother and step father as if he was their own."

Finally the jigsaw puzzle was complete and the extended family was finally reunited when they gathered in August 2005 for the celebration of the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of their mother, grandmother and, for a few, great grandmother.

Dennis later flew over to Ireland to find out more about the country in which he was conceived if not born and to spend some more time getting to know his newly discovered older brother. As a DJ and radio presenter, Oliver is somewhat of a celebrity in the district in which he lives. Their reunification story was featured in the local Longford Leader newspaper on 23 September under the headline "DJ re-united with long lost brother". The accompanying photo above shows Dennis centre, with Oliver and wife Nicolle on right.

## REUNIONS In the News

A reunion meeting between three Bindoon ex-residents (who haven't seen each other for 50 years) also captured the headlines in the "Gatton, Lockyer and Brisbane Valley Star" newspaper as reported on 29 September 2005.

As well as reporting on the get-together of the old boys (who all arrived in Australia from the UK in 1947), the story provided an account of the living conditions at Bindoon and what each has done since. It's the first time they have caught up with each other since they went their separate ways after leaving Bindoon in the 1950s (with many life experiences to share in the meantime).

**POSTSCRIPT:** Since returning to Australia Dennis has maintained regular contact with his family. But he not been in the best of health, in which respect, he also appreciates the caring concerns of his mother and other family members, something which, as a child, he had always longed for.

**PICTURED BELOW:** Bindoon mates from way back: Bernie Kerr now living in Gatton, Malcolm Head in Perth and Bob Taylor in North Queensland.



## Bindoon Revisited

# A Journey Back in Time

Yvonne Radzevicius was part of a group of 17 (men, women and couples) who made a bus trip back to Bindoon in late 2005. It's the second year that the trip has been organized by Sister Flo O'Sullivan of the Catholic Migrant Centre. At the request of Sister Flo, and on behalf of all the fellow travelers who enjoyed the trip so much, Yvonne has penned this rich account of the day's events for publication in C-BERS EX-PRESS.

To tell the truth I was not really anticipating much pleasure in an outing to a place 100km from Perth, which had such a dark and sinister side and of which so many sad tales had been told. So I was very pleasantly surprised at the enjoyment that I got from this Bindoon trip. Much of the success of the occasion was due to the great organization and many thanks should be accorded to: Sister Flo herself, plus Debbi Rosser, Carol Nenet, Sister Pep and Paola for helping to make it happen.

After introducing ourselves (in some cases renewing old acquaintances) we boarded our bus, which was kindly loaned to us for the day by Aranmore Catholic Primary School. Our driver was none other than Sister Pep who made the day a most memorable one with her cheerful banter and overall friendly outlook, not to mention her good voice in the sing-a-long. Everything was so well organised that all we had to do was sit back and anticipate the day ahead.

Doesn't time fly when you're having fun, and in no time at all it seemed, we have already arrived at Bindoon.

As a visit to the cemetery was of significance to some of the former Bindoon Boys, we made a detour, which enabled Gordon Grant to fill us in on a few very important facts about the people resting in what could only be described as a quiet and peaceful bush setting. Gordon

told us that any of the "Old Boys" could, if they wished, also be laid to rest there.

As there were flowers on the graves, Gordon pointed out that a Mass was celebrated annually at the stone altar on the "Feast of All Souls" i.e. 2 November.

Back on the bus, but it seemed that we were going nowhere fast as the accelerator pedal could not be depressed. (I must add that it was through no fault of our driver and with the help of Peter, ably assisted by lots of suggestions from fellow passengers, we were on our way again up to the main house). We were to find out later that the fault lay with the closure of the door—a security issue. On that point, I confess "Mea Culpa" as I was the person responsible for opening and closing the door. Never mind! Little mishaps all added to the enjoyment of the day.

So, on to the main house where we were greeted by Vureema Nizam and her hospitality students with morning tea of sandwiches, scones with jam and cream to die for, and tea and coffee. What a wonderful group! They treated us like royalty and are very deserving of our praise and thanks. I was now starting to relax and enjoy the excursion. The official welcome was extended to all by Bradley Hall (Principal of the College). Feeling refreshed, we were then given a tour of the farm and surrounding buildings by Ross Woods (Deputy Principal). I was very surprised at the vastness of the agricultural

college and the great opportunities afforded to the youth of the area at this mighty seat of learning in fields as diverse as equine studies, plant and animal husbandry, small business management and catering. These courses go hand-in-hand with general studies at a top level that one could expect from a smart Perth private school. We saw crops, cattle and shearing, the automotive shop, even an airstrip, on our guided tour. While very impressed with the facilities, by this stage, we were also hot and dusty, so we headed back for a welcome break and a wonderful barbecue.

After taking our fill of the sumptuous food, supplied by Sister Flo and her wonderful staff at Catholic Migrant Centre, Bradley Hall provided an insight into the current workings and aims of the College. This was a far cry from the sad history of "Bindoon as an Orphanage" and one that should be welcomed and, indeed applauded, by those who spent some time there in the past. It is heartening to see that the good work being done there for the youth of today is somewhat laying to rest those old ghosts. Inevitably there will be some who have yet to come to terms with the sad occasions of their childhood, but with God's Grace and counseling they may in time see that, from the evils of a few has come a better opportunity for humankind.

Gordon then shared a few more facts and memories with us, and all too soon it was time to take our leave.

So, with some brighter and lasting views of Bindoon, we set sail for home (no mishaps this time).

I, for one, now have a very different view of this Catholic Agricultural College of Bindoon and would happily recommend a visit to others, acknowledging, of course, that our journey, on this occasion, was made all the more pleasurable for the excellent company.

# Old Boys Rally for a Good Cause

Christmas may have been and gone for another year, but for Brother Tuppin and others who make wooden Christmas toys for disadvantaged children, the task of crafting the toys is a year round enterprise.

While the toys have been created over the course of the year, towards year's end, willing workers organized by the Tardun Old Boys' Association gather at Clontarf for the annual busy-bee to add the finishing touches.

A good turn-out was again reported for the 2005 event which, to all accounts, was as "busy" as ever, as the toys were each given a healthy dose of brightly coloured paint. The toys were subsequently distributed to needy families with young children, in plenty of time for Christmas.



**Above:** Organiser of the busy-bee at Clontarf, Frank Marshall (left) chats with Br Norbert Tuppin who, over many years, has been the principal "toy-maker"

**Below:** the Clontarf workshop in which hand-made toys are crafted and painted "the old fashioned way".



## MONUMENT in MALTA for former Child Migrants

**The Maltese Government has announced it will fund a monument recognizing the former child migrants sent to Australia from Malta.**

The government has not given definite details about the location of the monument or the timing of the unveiling. Consideration is being given to locating the monument at the site where most of the child migrants embarked from Malta to Australia. However, this is subject to negotiations with a private contractor who is restoring the Grand Harbour site.

The Maltese press has indicated that the unveiling will take place in June 2006. However, there has been no official correspondence to this effect.

Just over three hundred Maltese children were sent to Australia during the 1950s and 60s under the child migrant scheme. C-MOM (Child Migrants of Malta) was set up to promote the group's interests, and proposed the erection of a plaque in Valetta.

However, the Government has gone further than requested in promising the erection of a monument. C-MOM has been insistent that the church participate in any unveiling as it was an active party in the migration scheme. The Church has yet to state its position.

Investigations are underway to seek government funding to send a C-MOM delegation to the unveiling of the plaque. Congratulations to C-MOM on their achievement.

(Thanks to Professor David Plowman for providing much of the information above).

## On the Bindoon Bus Trip

Yvonne Radzevicius, who wrote the story on the 2005 Bindoon Bus Trip featured on page 8, advises us that the following people took part:

- ◆ Laurie Humphreys
- ◆ Pat Cannon
- ◆ Peter Bent
- ◆ Kevin Donaghy
- ◆ Gordon Grant
- ◆ Graham Galea
- ◆ Brian & Maureen Hoare
- ◆ Katherine Hutchings
- ◆ Joseph Spiteri
- ◆ Bob & Pam Baker
- ◆ Norman Yeates
- ◆ Brian Tennant
- ◆ Yvonne Radzevicius
- ◆ Anthony Brennan & Catherine

# 29 Newsletters Later...

**T**he first edition of C-BERS EX-PRESS was published in December 1997. Eight years and 29 editions later, we thought it might be appropriate if, in this last commemorative edition, we also included a summary of some of the reporting highlights over the years.

## Of Memories and Memorials

In December 1998, we reported on a proposal by Gordon Grant that a memorial be established to honour former child migrants. Peter Bent responded in the next edition calling for widespread input from other former child migrants. Three years later following the senate inquiry into child migration in Australia, the Commonwealth offered to contribute \$100,000 to child migrant memorials initiated by State Governments. The Department for Community Development took the running on the project, including undertaking widespread consultations. The memorial was finally unveiled at Fremantle in December 2005.



## Momentous Occasions

The biggest event staged over the life of C-BERS EX-PRESS would have had to be the 60th anniversary reunion of the first intake of former child migrants, who arrived in Western Australia in 1938. Held in August 1998 at the WACA, the event was attended by 300 former child migrants, their families and supporters. The Child Migrant Friendship Society has since staged a number of other regular, major social events.

## Stories of Hope and Healing

In a 1998 survey which we conducted to find out the types of stories our readers wanted us to cover in C-BERS EX-PRESS, 81% of those who responded said they were most interested in personal stories about ex-residents. Each edition of the newsletter has thus featured at least one personal story and sometimes more. The stories have invariably been inspirational and offered by those who hope that others may also be helped to heal in the same way they have. Some of the personal stories were as told to C-BERS counselors. Some were first hand accounts. As reported in our September 2004 edition, Lionel "Geordie" Welsh had even documented his story in a full length book "Georgie, an Incredible Story of the Human Spirit" which was launched by the Mayor of South Perth.

## Connections and Re-Connections

The C-BERS EXPRESS Notice Board has proved a popular avenue for people wanting to make contact with other former child migrants or ex-residents. Apart from dozens of reunions and smaller get togethers, over the years, 43 notices asking for leads on how to contact mates from the old days have been published. Our biggest Notice Board was in June 2001 when 7 reunions were advertised and three notices on people seeking contact were published. The most prolific number of reunions were most typically Tardun-based.

## Fond Farewells

With the passage of time, we sadly bade a last farewell to an increasing number of our clients who had passed away. We published our first obituary in September 1999. Over the next six years, we reported on a further 26 people who had died (and these were only those we had been informed of) including several people who had earlier told their stories on the pages of C-BERS EX-PRESS.



## With a Little Help from my Friends

As well as accessing the professional counseling services that C-BERS had to offer (as many hundreds did over the years), it is clear that former child migrants and ex-residents also derived a great deal of comfort and support from each other.

While some Old Boys Associations appear to have maintained regular and sustained contact with their members over time, others that seemed to have lapsed, have more recently sought to rekindle interest in starting up again.

As we reported in our very first newsletter, **Tardun Old Boys Association** was formed in 1982 with a function attended by 80 men, partners and children. The Association continues to hold bi-annual reunions at Tuppin House, Guilderton. **Bindoon Old Boys** also have regular get-togethers.

A support group for **Child Migrants of Malta (C-MOM)** was established in June 2002 and has since been active on behalf of members. In our September 2004 newsletter we published a notice promoting the proposed reformation of the **Clontarf Old Boys Association**.

In March 2001, we ran a story on the **Child Migrant Friendship Society** which was formed in 1982 and constituted in 1988 initially with the aim of providing mutual support to former child migrants including helping to locate families and raise funds for reunification purposes. Reconstituted in 1999, its main purpose now is to foster friendship amongst former child migrants.

**CLAN (Care Leavers Australia Network)** operates as a national self help and lobby group for people who grew up in care away from their families. Established in 2000, by 2003 it had 400 members.

## RIGHTING the WRONGS

Over the years, the pages of C-BERS EXPRESS have recorded the changing official response to the needs of former child migrants and residents of child care institutions as, little by little, churches, Governments and other agencies have sought to right the wrongs committed against these children in the past.

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**1993:** The Christian Brothers Congregation issues a formal, public apology to all those who suffered abuse while resident in their child care institutions.

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**1995:** The Christian Brothers Congregation establishes C-BERS to provide personal and practical help to former child migrants, other ex-residents and students of Christian Brothers Schools. Over the next ten years, the Christian Brothers allocate more than \$3.5 million to support the needs of C-BERS clients.

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**1997:** The Mercy and Nazareth House Congregations (with the assistance of the Australian Child Migrant Foundation) organize a "Sentimental Journey" to the UK. Accompanied by Maureen Colgan, 40 women and some partners, take part.

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**1998:** The British Parliament conducts an Inquiry into the Welfare of former Child Migrants.

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**1999:** The British Government responds to the Parliamentary Inquiry with the establishment of a \$3 million travel fund to support reunification trips by former child migrants. The Irish Government issues an apology to children who suffered in institutional care and sets up a compensation scheme. C-BERS takes part in a meeting of 13 agencies involved in Child Migration Schemes in the UK to develop better ways of working with former child migrants.

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**2000:** A Senate Inquiry is established to investigate the role and responsibility of Australian Governments in relation to child migrant schemes.

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**2001:** The Catholic Church issues a formal apology to former child migrants. The report of the Senate Inquiry into Child Migration "Lost Innocents: Righting the Record" is released with 33 recommendations. The Australian Former Child Migration Project is established in the UK with Joan Kerry as Manager.

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**2002:** In response to the Senate Inquiry into Child Migration, the Australian Government announces a new Child Migrant Travel Fund to support reunification trips over a three year period to 2005, and funding support for the establishment of Child Migrant Memorials.

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**2003:** The Australian Senate conducts an Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care.

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**2004:** The report of the Senate Committee Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care is released. The WA Child Migrant Memorial is unveiled in Fremantle.

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**2005:** The Maltese Government announces its intention to erect a monument in Malta for former child migrants sent to Australia in the 1950s and 60s.



## NEW SOCIAL CLUB

As reported on page 2, a new social club is being set up to maintain the connections between people who want to stay in touch, and to provide a way of keeping them informed on issues and events of mutual interest. The development of the social club is being lead by representatives of Old Boys and Old Girls networks (as listed below) who can also provide further information on the latest developments.

- ♦ **Frank Marshall** (Tardun Old Boys) Ph: 9457- 7936
- ♦ **Laurie Humphreys** (Bindoon Boys) Ph: 9337- 4850
- ♦ **Sheilagh Pearce** (Joey Girls) Ph: 9535- 4867
- ♦ **Maureen Briggs- Trewin**  
Friendship Society) Ph: 9298- 9254
- ♦ **Michael Hogan** (Clontarf) Ph: 9297- 3684
- ♦ **Brendan McCloat** (Clontarf) Ph: 9274- 1484

## TARDUN REUNION

The Next **TOBA Reunion**  
is on  
**11-12 FEBRUARY**

AT: TUPPIN HOUSE  
GUILDERTON (Moore River)

The AGM will be held at  
2pm on 11 February

ENQUIRIES: Jim Plowman  
Ph: 9472 8018

## WANTING CONTACT

**John Lawrence Perry**  
Castledare and Clontarf  
(1950- 66) seeks contact  
with other old boys.  
**Contact details:**  
PO Box 1783 Broome WA  
or  
Ph: 08 9192 4007

## TRAVEL FUND REPORT

A report been prepared on the outcomes of the three year ISS Australian Travel Fund established to support reunification trips for former child migrants. The report "Journey of Discovery" is available on the International Social Service Australian Branch website at [www.iss.org.au](http://www.iss.org.au) under the publications link. Dennis McNerney, whose story is featured in this newsletter, also made a submission to the report. See page 19.

## CLAN CONTACT

**CLAN** (Care Leavers Australia Network) supports people who grew up in care away from their families. CLAN now has a WA contact: **Daphne** Ph: 08 9498 2181. CLAN advises that members are not trained counselors "but they are there to listen if you need somebody to talk to who shares and understands your experiences."

### DISCLAIMER:

The facts and figures cited in this newsletter have been taken from previous issues of C-BERS EX-PRESS (which does not mean they are necessarily correct). Our apologies if any of the dates or historical details are wrong and hope that no-one is offended if our accuracy is less than 100%.

## A Personal Message from the Editor

**A**s the behind-the-scenes writer and editor of C-BERS EX-PRESS since December 1997, in this final edition, I too would like to take the opportunity of thanking all our contributors and our readers for making this newsletter such a lively, heartfelt and informative means of communication and connection over the years.

As I have read through your stories edition by edition (putting in the occasional comma or sub-heading here or there), I have never ceased to be moved, amazed and inspired by the extent to which we human beings have the capacity to come back from seemingly overwhelming adversity to reclaim a sense of purpose for our lives.

I have felt very honoured to be exposed to the many examples of the "triumph of the human spirit" as former child migrant Geordie Welsh so aptly sub-titled his recent book.

My own experience, as the mother of a 25 year old intellectually handi-capped son who suffered severe brain damage at birth, has also brought its share of heartache (and of great joy).

In the process, I have come to believe that life exists in balance and that: as bad as it may be or gets, it is matched is equal proportion, by the potential for good that can be, and often is. And by good, I mean the depth and opportunity for human understanding, compassion and, indeed, love that is available to those whose experience of life takes them into the very depths of their heart. (At least, this has been my experience). I have also come to understand that it can take time and perspective to appreciate these opportunities and that time unfolds at its own pace.

Thank you for entrusting me with your stories and long may we continue to share and celebrate our humanity with each other.

*Deirdre Croft*