

August 2005

NEWSLETTER

CHRISTIAN BROTHERS EX-RESIDENTS AND STUDENTS SERVICES

C-BERS - Moving with the Times

As the number of former residents and students of Christian Brothers' residential and educational services seeking support to deal with issues from the past continues to dwindle, C-BERS Services (in consultation with our clients) has been working on how best to meet the changing needs of those who may still need and benefit from some form of continuing support.

The article below from C-BERS Chairperson Maria Harries provides a context for the changes that are being proposed to meet the ongoing support needs of Christian Brothers ex-residents and students.

Ten years ago, and during a very painful and highly sensitive time during which there was a growing awareness about child migrants and their experiences of child migration, the traumas of institutional life and the trials of settling in Australia, C-BERS opened.

We started small in a little house in Subiaco – two days per week.

Although there was clearly a need for a service to help with a range of matters including tracing of family, travel and counselling, we had no idea whether we would have many takers because it was a highly volatile time and, quite understandably, there was not a lot of trust around.

A Time & Place



Over the past ten years, C-BERS headquarters in Subiaco has welcomed and provided support to many hundreds of men seeking to heal the wounds of their past experiences. Now, as those who have sought support from C-BERS are ready to move on, we too have been challenged to rethink how we may best continue to provide support and from where such support should be provided. In the process we too have decided — it's time to move on — as we let go of the lease of our Subiaco premises and welcome the start of a new way of meeting the changing needs of our C-BERS clients.

As much as was possible, we consulted with, and were led by, the men (and some women) who had been child migrants as we carefully planned what seemed to be needed.

Soon the service grew as people realised that we could be trusted. Some people of course, chose not to use the service and that too was fine.

The men drove the service and the Christian Brothers' Province funded it.

We moved into bigger premises, took on more staff and for some years we operated a five day a week service.

Well over 500 people have walked through our doors over these years and many of you have been frequent visitors who have become our friends and colleagues.

Last year, however, the demands on the service reduced dramatically and we reduced to a



**WE'RE OPEN
FOR BUSINESS**

between 8.30 a.m.
and 4.30 p.m.
Monday to Thursday

ON STAFF

Clinical Supervisor
Dr Mark Sachmann
(Wednesdays)

Counsellors
Sjoukje Tarbox
(Mondays and Thursdays)
Pip White
(Wednesdays)

Administration
Lorraine Hipkins
(Mondays, Tuesdays)
Sue Fullerton
(Tuesdays, Wednesdays
and Thursdays)

**MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE**

Dr Maria Harries
(Chairperson)
Dr Debra Rosser
Mr George Horton

CONTACT

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Moving with the Times

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four day per week service with three very part-time counsellors.

This year, we realised that we would have to undertake more radical adjustments: as there are now very few new clients walking through our doors or ringing and the Province is spending a lot of money on renting the Subiaco premises and in employing staff.

Planning for the Future

In February of this year, the management and staff of C-BERS met with a group of people representing former child migrants, the Christian Brothers' Province and interested parties to think about how best to meet the needs of ex-residents and students into the future.

We formed a Reference Group consisting of Frank Marshall, Michael Hogan, Maureen Briggs Trewin, Gordon Grant, Laurie Humphreys, Melissa del Borello, David Plowman, Maria Harries, Br Kevin Ryan, Debra Rosser, Br Rod Ellyard, George Horton, Mark Sachmann, Philippa White, Dennis McNerney and Allan Tranter of 'Creating Communities'. Peter Bent and Brian Hoare joined this group in June.

Not all members could attend all of the meetings but we have now met on four occasions and there are small groups meeting around a range of issues.

We have slowly come to the understanding that we need to change the face of C-BERS completely – as someone said; "to 'morph' it into something else".

There are two prongs to the change.

First, there will continue to be a counsellor available (although at this stage we are not sure where he/ she will be operating from).

Secondly, the biggest need that remains evident is for social support and so we are working out ways to help this happen.

The Old Boys Networks and the Child Migrant Friendship Society are involved in all discussions – in fact they are leading them.

A wonderful organisation called 'Creating Communities' is helping us move through a planning process.

The lease on the building from which we currently operate finishes in December.

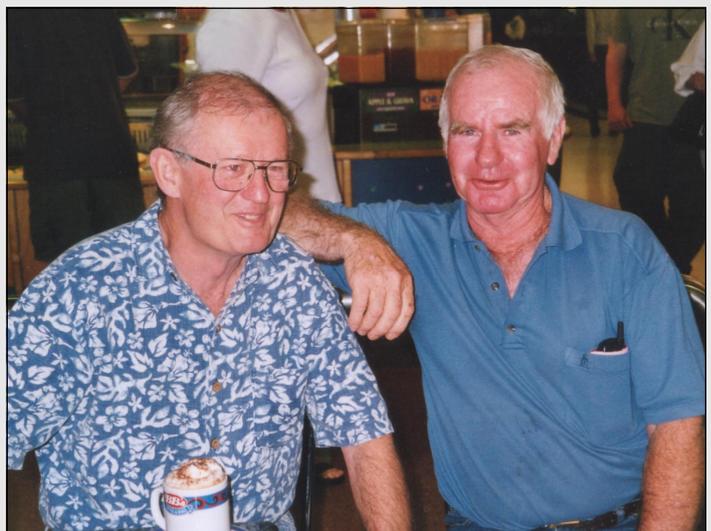
Before that happens, there is much to do to ensure that change is managed respectfully and thoughtfully. In other parts of the newsletter, you will read about various aspects of our planning and you are invited to comment and offer advice.

I look forward to hearing ideas and views and, at our gathering on the 24th of November, celebrating our successes with everyone who has shared this journey as we launch our plans for the future.

Maria Harries (C-BERS Chairperson)

A Final Meeting Between Old Friends

Frank McGourty (right) has sent us a photo of his last meeting with Peter Keating in Queensland. Peter and his wife were passing through Brisbane after visiting their family in 2004. It was the first time they had seen each other for 50 odd years, since they were childhood friends at Bindoon. Sadly, Peter died earlier this year, before they had a chance to meet up again.



An invitation to take part in...

Creating our Community for the Future

As former child migrants we believe the formation of C-BERS Services approximately ten years ago was one of the most successful initiatives undertaken for us. However, over time the needs of C-BERS clients have changed, and in response, C-BERS is changing too.

This seems like a good time for us to join collectively and use this change of direction to our mutual advantage.

We would like to consolidate the groups that already exist and form a network that organizes social functions and ensures a good flow of information. The new network will not affect the current structure of organisations – it will be a ‘linking’ group that joins us together and helps us stay in touch with each other.

Representatives from associations including the Friendship Society, Tardun Old Boys, Bindoon and others, have met to discuss this. There will be a get together prior to the year ending to further discuss our future plans and ideas.

We think it is time to work together to form alliances that will promote our own interests and that will strengthen the common bonds we share. We invite you to join us as we work together in making this a success.

C-BERS has contracted Creating Communities to help us develop the network and ensure that we remain a strong group that provides social support to former child migrants.

If you would like to know more about the individual groups or how you can be more involved please contact:

Laurie Humphreys (Bindoon, Friendship Society) 9337 4850

Frank Marshall (TOBA) 9457 7936

Sheila Pearce (Joey girls) 9535 4867

Jim Plowman (TOBA) 9472 8018

The contact person at Creating Communities is Allan Tranter who can be contacted on (08) 9284 0910.

MOVING ON

A personal story from Des McPolin about his experiences in reuniting and reconciling with his family in the UK as told to Sjoukje Tarbox, his C-BERS counsellor

As a former Child Migrant, I had always wanted to find out more about my family of origin. It was only in the 1990s that I started this process.

I have been married to Selma for 22 years and have two adult children. It became very important to me at this stage of my life and also for my family to find out something more about my background. My family was aware that I had been placed in an orphanage in Ireland, then sent to Australia as a seven year old to Subiaco, Castledare and Tardun.

I contacted a tracing Agency that I knew had successfully traced many families of former Child Migrants. After some time I was contacted by this Agency's Social worker telling me that they had been able to trace my mother who was now married and had four more children.

Unfortunately this news was not that easy as my mother had indicated to the Social Worker that she had never told her husband nor her children that she had given birth to me at a young age, had me adopted and that I was then placed in an Orphanage in Belfast. It was a secret she had kept all her life.

Nor did my mother feel too happy about me wanting to meet with her. However, eventually she consented to a meeting, nothing else, and only in the presence of a social worker at a hotel.

My need to meet with my mother was so great, to know that I had a family, that I belonged somewhere, was overwhelming.

In 1999 I travelled to the UK to finally take this step. It was a difficult meeting between us as my mother had never reconciled with the fact that she had me, having kept this secret all her life.

I felt disappointed and rejected once again and, on my return to Australia, had almost decided to give up any further searching for my siblings. It was on the insistence of my family that I decided once again to take up the search for them, even though I knew they did not know about me. I made contact with C-BERS in 2000 asking for further help to trace my brothers and sisters.

Joan Kerry, the Social Worker who worked in the UK on behalf of C-BERS was soon able to confirm and locate them. I was overjoyed with this news, particularly when Joan indicated that initially she would make contact with them. They were shocked, surprised, with the news of my existence in Australia. They, of course, also found it difficult to come to terms with this news about me. However, slowly we began to communicate, first with the exchange of photos of ourselves, our families then further contact by email, chatting about our lives in general. Our mother was aware throughout that this was happening and my brothers and sister fed back to her regularly so she was not threatened by the contact.

In 2004, through funding by the Australian Government, the opportunity arose for us to travel to the UK for the purpose of reunification with our families. Selma and I made plans to travel in 2005.

I indicated to my family my intentions to do so hoping that they were willing to meet with us. Although we had contact fairly regularly by email they at first were quite reluctant.

It seemed too soon for them. They also felt quite protective towards our mother as they were now aware of the difficulty she had about her past "secret" and that she had never really reconciled with this. I reassured them that I did not wish at any time to force the issue and impose myself on my family. I also assured them that if they did not want to meet with us I would respect their wishes. Joan offered to visit them prior to our arrival to try and break the ice, hoping that they would agree to meet with us, possibly at a neutral venue in London.

In April this year Selma and I boarded a plane for the UK and Ireland, spending our first week in London.

On April 9, with Joan as mediator, the family had agreed to meet at Nazareth house in London. Joan was there to make the initial introduction. It all went so well and, even when Joan went to make tea, none of us could stop talking, exchanging news about our families and talking about Mum. We talked for two hours then went to a local pub for lunch!

On parting that day we all agreed to see each other again two weeks later in London. We were able to get together this time with the rest of the family, nieces, nephews, wives and husbands. Even Mum came for a short visit to meet with Selma and me.

I left England elated, feeling so different from the past years wondering about who I belonged to. Now I felt accepted by my family as their brother.

We all agreed to keep in regular contact, which we now do through phone calls, letters and by email.

Finally there has been closure for me and I now feel that I can move on with my life with a lighter heart.

Having recently been a carer on a reunification trip I thought I would share some of my experiences of the two-week journey.

I travelled with Alan, a CBERS client, to the UK, where he was to meet six of his siblings and numerous cousins, nieces and nephews.

Without a doubt the prospect of meeting his birth relatives was a daunting experience for Alan. He expressed many doubts, anxieties and "what ifs" prior to leaving, and during, the trip to the UK. However, he was determined, and persisted with the trip regardless of these emotions and thoughts. This is in itself, so it seems, testimony to the importance of such reunifications.

After a long and tiring flight we arrived on the doorstep at the home of one of Alan's sisters. Joan Kerry had met us at the airport, and it was an amazing moment to be standing there, the three of us, waiting for this man to meet his sister for the first time.

We knocked, the door opened, and there she was - looking at him and him at her. This is an event that I will never forget for the rest of my days.

Reunification: from a carer's perspective

This story was sent to us by Tony White, who recently travelled to the UK with Alan Jones on an ISS funded reunification trip. Joan Kerry located Alan's family last year and had worked with them in preparation for this trip. Alan and Tony were met by Joan on their arrival in the UK, and she took them to meet the family members. Tony's story tells us what the reunification experience was like from the point of view of a carer.

A truly unique experience - brother and sister meeting in essence for the first time ever. It was a very emotional experience and you could have cut the air with a knife. What do you say? What do you do?

Alan and his sister greeted warmly with a hug, and smiles and tears. We all went inside and he met his sister and his niece. An unusual situation to say the least, but again, one which I felt very privileged to be part of.

After this, we all travelled to Alan's brother's home where we met three other siblings. Again Alan (and we all) went through the same process - the

knock at the door - the face to face meeting for the first time ever. A highly charged emotional experience.

Over the following days they talked a great deal and got to know each other. Fortunately the family were very welcoming and were kind enough to include me in many of their activities, and so I felt a part of their reunification - an extraordinary experience. I felt like I too established relationships of some strength with the family members. In essence I had been thrust into the heart and soul of this family and I felt honoured to share their experience.

Further meetings have been arranged and I have also arranged to meet with Alan's brother when he comes to Australia later this year.

Time will put the reunification and family relationships into perspective and the emotions will become less raw. Will the bonding and intimacy that was generated in the emotional environment of the initial meeting continue, only time will tell, but I will always feel happy to have been a part of one family's reunification.



Pictured above: Alan at left with his carer Tony White centre and nephew Colin at right



Pictured above: Alan right with his sister Eva and brother Colin

Private & Confidential—Your C-BERS Records

C-BERS maintains the strictest standards of confidentiality to protect the privacy of our clients. These standards will be maintained throughout the process of implementing the changes to C-BERS services that are outlined in this newsletter and will continue into the future.

What will happen to your files?

This article provides information on how we propose to manage the handling of your confidential files during this period of transition at C-BERS Services.

The files we keep on you contain documents that can be grouped into three categories:

- ◆ Our general contact with you
- ◆ Any records of counselling services we have provided to you
- ◆ Family tracing records, birth certificates and other family history information, including correspondence with family tracing agencies and travel itineraries.

At the moment, we are considering the following options.

The first two groups of records listed above will be destroyed seven years after the last time we have had contact with you. The destruction of these records is in line with our current policy. Any records of your contact within the last seven years will be moved with us to our new location, and the same strict levels of client confidentiality will be maintained.

We believe that the family tracing and other family history information is of great value and should be kept.

We are looking for suitable places where these records can be transferred and cared for, and where you or your descendants can get access to information on your family history, for example if you lose your own copies.

One place we are currently investigating is the Battye Library in Francis Street, Perth and we will keep you informed of the progress being made in our next newsletter. Procedures for access will be developed and current confidentiality guidelines will be followed for future storage of files.

We will be making every effort to contact you to get your permission before we move any records to another organisation.

If you have not heard from us by the end of August, please contact us.



DVD of Unveiling of Child Migrant Memorial, Fremantle.

An unedited DVD of the unveiling ceremony, including all of the speeches made on that occasion, is available from the Tardun Old Boys' Association at a cost of \$11.50 (inclusive of postage and GST).

Orders can be sent to:
TOBA, Box 3140, Broadway Shopping Centre, WA, 6009.

WANTING CONTACT

Dan Murray ex Nazareth Lodge Belfast

(1939-1949) writes... I am trying to trace boys from Nazareth Lodge Belfast who may be migrants of the Sisters of Nazareth, perhaps to Christian Brothers in Australia around the years of 1947 - 1950. I have a particular name of **Gerry McGrath**. Would be grateful for any information you may be able to send. Contact C-BERS if you can help.

REUNION

Clontarf Bus Accident: - a reunion is being planned in December for survivors of the 1955 bus accident. Contact Aussie Osborne, 9330 6854 or Des McDaid 9364 1897

CELEBRATION

An invitation to the
C-BERS CHRISTMAS PARTY
Thursday 24 November 4pm-8pm
The Maltese Club
1 May Holman Drive, Bassendean

As C-BERS changes with the times, please join us in a celebration of Christmas, change and renewal. Meet old friends, make new friends and offer thanks to those who have helped make life a little easier.

RSVP to Lorraine or Sue at C-BERS
Ph: (08) 9381 5422