

## Superintendent's report: Up close and personal

A life-altering Christian faith leads us to the lost, the sick, the poor and the marginalised. These are the people Jesus spent time with and for whom we must give our time and resources ... but more, to stand with them in their need. This is what it means to be 'up close and personal' at Wesley Mission. Moving closer to our bicentenary in 2012, we are conscious of the importance of strategic decision-making and actions. A long history shows how we have reached this point, and our future is certain providing we maintain the core principles of care, compassion and service inspired by faith.

You would have been living on another planet to be unaware of the financial crisis which has beset our world. The Global Economic Crisis (GEC) has bitten us all and requires meaningful decisions in leadership, shaping priorities to focus on the fundamental needs of those we serve. It would be easy to lose sight of those people, but that would mean lacking commitment, lacking courage. Wesley Mission has chosen to connect with people and to be courageous. This is the only appropriate response to God, who has shown us in Jesus Christ what it means to serve.

### Genuine commitment

In our services for the aged and the less able, families, young people, those who need housing or counselling services, and those who are seeking employment, Wesley Mission is up close and personally engaged in making life better.

Older Australians have been valued and protected in aged care facilities; home care programs and health-promotion services assist them to age well. Those living with disability and the selfless people who care for them were helped through residential and activity-based programs and given opportunity to shine in employment, rehabilitation and education.

Increased funding for Wesley Dalmar meant more children receiving foster care services, supported by 15 new staff. This work is set to grow even further. Alongside general foster care, Wesley now provides intensive foster care and clinical support services.

Our youth services around Sydney and Newcastle worked with more than 1000 young people last year, helping them deal with homelessness, abuse and problems at home or school. Family services throughout Sydney and NSW have assisted some families, and community development programs have benefited more than 11,000 individuals.

### The need for courage

Not everything during the year was about expansion. Naturally we were disappointed by the decision of the Government (DEEWR) to significantly reduce our provision of employment services. The impact was far-reaching: we closed Job Network offices across the State, while retaining work in Port Macquarie, Wauchope, Taree, Tuncurry, Batemans Bay and Moruya. A new office was added at Narooma.

I spent much time with staff, providing support in difficult times. Workload for our Human Resources department increased dramatically and impacted across the whole of Wesley Mission. Such experiences stretch our resources, but also help to build our resilience in handling tough situations. There is no doubt that we have emerged stronger as a result.

### Building financial robustness

Our financial position at the end of the year indicates the challenges we, like so many, have had to face. A deficit of \$11.7m reflects the reduced Wesley Uniting Employment contract and other key changes and we are seeking to build a strong platform for the future.

We are committed to careful monitoring and achievement of financial targets, building a better position for the longer term. Recent studies show the impact of global issues on the not for profit sector is sharpening awareness, driving stronger and more efficient performance. Despite a tougher operating environment for corporate partnerships, the majority of our personal supporters have remained loyal.

### Committed to succeed

In the current climate we are investing in our services to meet the effects of gambling, financial stress and subsequent family breakdown. Financial hardship is widespread and destructive, impacting people more than ever before, striking families that are ill-prepared. Wesley Mission is there to help them face seemingly hopeless situations.

People need to be heard. Lifeline Sydney and Sutherland continues to listen – a lifeline to people in despair – and its face-to-face counselling service is growing. LifeForce conducted suicide prevention training for 1395 people. Creditline received increased funding to provide counselling for those struggling with debt.

There is good news and reason to hope. A program in Carlingford is one of very few accommodating families consisting of couples with children, sole fathers and large families. This year we secured funding to run a Healthy Lifestyle program. We provide breakfast clubs, weekly walking opportunities for parents and pre-schoolers, and we received renewed funding from the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC) and Home and Community Care (HACC). This will help recruit an Aboriginal Access and Development Officer in the Hunter region.

So, despite all the challenges, there are many positive indicators.

### Words of appreciation

I thank Dr Jim Pendlebury OAM, who retired as Honorary Treasurer, after serving Wesley Mission faithfully for 40 years. I was delighted to welcome Mark Scott, Managing Director of the ABC. Mark Scott and David Greatorex work closely with me in setting the course for the future. We said farewell to Rev Robert Smith, who served Wesley Mission over many years, and welcomed Dr Keith Suter to the Board.

Finally, I thank my wonderful Senior Executive Leadership Team, our large staff, many volunteers and the partnerships we share with governments, corporates and individuals. John Wesley's words seem appropriate: The best is yet to be!

Keith Garner  
Superintendent/Chief Executive Officer

