

**ADDRESS TO THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES
GRADUATION CEREMONY,
SYDNEY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2010**

Chancellor, Faculty, Graduands, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure to be with you this morning. I wish to express my appreciation to the University of New South Wales and the Centre for Social Impact for appointing me to the position of Ethics Fellow for the Third Sector.

I also want to congratulate all of you as graduates and acknowledge the support of your proud parents and family members.

I have worked in the Third Sector, for a large part of my career, both as CEO of Mission Australia and also the Society of St Vincent de Paul. Mission Australia is a major not-for-profit organisation in Australia founded in 1860. It is also a large social business which has 3,000 staff providing employment, housing, youth and family services across the nation.

One of the major social policy issues we face in Australia is homelessness. It is a confronting ethical challenge that 100,000 Australians are homeless every night and 10,000 of them are children. The average age of a homeless male is 32 years and a homeless female is 28 years – not much older than many of you.

The causes of homelessness are complex and each individual has his or her own story. However there are common threads: abuse as a child, family violence, drug and alcohol addiction, mental illness, long term unemployment, and lack of affordable housing.

Traditionally welfare agencies tried to meet an individual's immediate needs by providing a temporary bed, shower and meals. Workers, committed as they were, often did not have the resources to address the long-term needs of the individual. As a result homelessness became a "revolving door" where individuals moved between agencies and nothing seemed to change.

When I was at Mission Australia we began to re-think our approach to homeless services. We wanted to use our limited resources in the most effective way. We researched international responses to homelessness and adapted the best aspects of these programs in order to develop a new model in the Sydney CBD.

Today the Mission Australia Centre in Surry Hills illustrates the benefits of collaboration and corporate responsibility: government, business, philanthropists and a community organisation working together to provide transformational change.

The cost of the project was \$7 million: Federal and State Governments provided \$2 million; Peter Hunt, Executive Chairman of Caliburn Partnership raised \$3 million from corporations and high-net-worth individuals; \$2 million came from a deceased estate; Baulderstone Hornibrook constructed the building on time and within budget. Mission Australia provided the research, staff and services.

The centre is also a good example of social innovation. It offers specialised care for young men who are newly homeless and provides accommodation and support services to enable them to integrate back into society.

There are 40 short-term accommodation rooms designed in a 5 story complex with 8 rooms on each floor. Each floor has a living room, kitchen and bathroom and a caseworker to support the eight young men.

The men are encouraged to live independently and are responsible for shopping, cooking and cleaning. Each individual is encouraged to participate in training and work experience. They are treated as individuals able to make their own decisions, with support and encouragement, rather than as dependent or helpless homeless people.

On site there is a dental clinic, GP and chiropractor; as well as legal aid and counselling. There are also courses in literacy, computers and “Catalyst” a university-education program in humanities designed for homeless people.

All of this has been made possible because individuals and corporations have recognized the need to behave in socially responsible, ethical and caring ways. All have recognized the need to give back.

I encourage all of you to develop your social awareness and become involved in addressing some of the social and environment challenges that confront our society and our world. Your job or vocation, no matter how interesting or financially rewarding, will never be enough.

Third Sector organisations provide you with the opportunity as a CEO, executive, staff, volunteer, donor or board member to become involved in a cause you feel passionately about whether it is homelessness, youth pathways, indigenous issues, the environment, the arts, animal welfare, micro-finance projects or social enterprise.

The Mission Australia Centre is also an example of Corporate Responsibility. This is the commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development, implement sound governance and management practices and work with the community to improve quality of life.

Companies are concerned today about their brand and reputation. They want to be perceived by the public and also shareholders as good corporate citizens. Many of them have foundations, work-place giving and volunteer programs.

They also want to be the employer of choice among graduates like you. There is a great opportunity for you in your interview for a job to question the company about its corporate responsibility programs and how you will be able to participate in them.

Corporate responsibility is linked to ethical conduct. Ethics relates to our personal and organisation behaviour and asks the question: “What ought I do in this situation?”

Simon Longstaff from the St James Ethics Centre describes it this way:

“Ethics is about relationships. It’s about struggling to develop a well informed conscience. It’s about being true to the idea of who we are and what we stand for. It’s about having the courage to explore difficult questions. It’s about accepting the cost.”

The behaviour of some financial institutions during the global recession and the recent example of a global corporation’s destruction of the marine environment and the livelihood of local fishing and tourism communities point to a failure of risk management, corporate responsibility and ethical conduct.

As future leaders you will face complex ethical dilemmas in your work environment where there is no clear right or wrong answer. You will need to be able to go back to values and principles that can guide your personal and corporate behaviour. There are also models of ethical decision-making available that can assist you in resolving ethical dilemmas.

In closing I leave you with the words of the late Robert Kennedy:

“Few of us will have the greatness to bend history itself, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation. Each time an individual stands up for

an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he or she sends forth a ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centres of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.

Few are willing to brave the disapproval of their fellows, the censure of their colleagues or the wrath of their society. Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence. Yet it is the one essential quality for those who seek to change a world that yields most painfully to change ...”

I congratulate all of you as graduates and wish you every success in your future careers.

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