

The Story of Presentation Family Centre

Time to tidy my study.

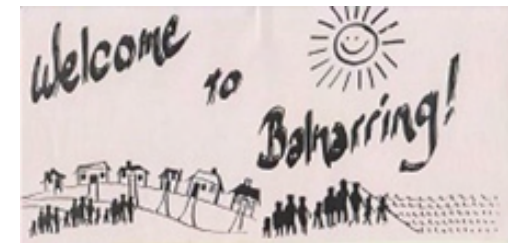
What's to be done with all these papers and records of my favourite charity?

These thoughts led me to explore the stories that have been shared by so many generous souls at Balnarring since the 1980s. When did this story begin? Well, the Presentation Sisters, who were teaching in Catholic Schools, decided to extend their support of families beyond the school gates.

Between 1984 and 1988, Sisters ran family camps at Lady Northcote Camp, Bacchus Marsh, owned by the Department of Sport and Recreation.

As many as eight Sisters ran these camps for families from their Parish Primary Schools. Over this time, student leaders from St John's Dandenong and from the Presentation College Myrtleford joined in the fun and games.

The seed had been planted.



1988

Pastoral Plan formulated by Presentation Sisters

Forty Sisters offered feedback

Objectives were:

To provide a caring response to families

To give families space and time

To encourage interaction between families

To help solo parents in their new beginnings

To follow up and maintain contact

To make available our resources, ourselves and our time

To provide referrals and lists of resources

To provide some facilities for the disabled

To investigate paying groups when facilities were vacant

To supervise maintenance and costs

To support and nurture faith

Harbour View Balnarring was purchased - vacant possession in November



First Logo 1989

"The dream of Balnarring - a country property where Sisters would grow vegetables and chickens would lay eggs and people would come and stay and be nourished in body, mind and spirit."

Genevieve (first Presentation Sister to reside at Balnarring)

1989

Genevieve moved into the farm house

Shirley arrived at Easter

Houses from Valley Homes arrive in two parts

Furniture from O'Neill College used for houses

Official opening

Family Ministry Team responsible for holiday programs

Three holiday programs conducted

Management Committee set up

"Gen and I have launched out into the deep on a little vessel called the Family Project. The sea looks wide, deep and exciting!"

Shirley McDonald (co-founding Sister)



Half House arriving 1989

1990

One hundred families applied for holiday program

Only fifty accommodated

Eight to ten leaders per week

Weekends and week days mainly free

All referrals were from primary schools and parishes

24 Sisters acted as leaders over the summer holidays

"Samuel, the resident dog, was loved by all. He proved to be friendly, kissable and an excellent fieldsmen for all the cricket games."

1990 Newsletter

Watching the Cricket 1990



1991

Family weekends conducted by Frances and Helen

Term holiday programs begin

Thirty-two youth leaders

Liturgies were held in the “barn”

"Nano would have been right into it.
Her idea was to meet the needs of the time."

Shirley McDonald

"An inflatable dinghy and a squadron of children were as profoundly
convincing as the storm on Lake Gethsemene!"

Newsletter

Sisters and Volunteers



"It was high energy and we loved it, but I needed a day off in between."

Frances Duyndam (Family Ministry Team)

1992

Three hundred and sixty families have come since the project began

Five hundred people have come during weekends and school term days

Fund-raising Committee set up by a group of families

First venture: Festival of Cultures - held at Star of the Sea

The young leaders were told that they were not allowed to fall in love
on the first night.

*"It was like families ministering to families. Not us doing it for them.
It was like we all belonged - a positive experience of church."*

Fran Duyndam

*"There were scraps of carpet on the
floor of the shed and we thought we
were Christmas."*

Helen Carboon (Family Ministry Team)

*"Thanks to our Presentation
Congregation without whom the
family project could not exist."*

Newsletter



Kings and Queens

"How many times did I hear - when will the shed be open?
And I'd throw open the door and welcome everyone in."

Helen Carboon (Family Ministry Team)

1993

Three different groups defined:

1. Balnarring Management Committee (Policy, Property, Maintenance and Finance)

2. Family Ministry Team (led school holidays, social fund-raising, newsletters)

3. Friends of Balnarring (fund-raising and volunteering)

Presentation Sisters combine with Brigidine Family

Ministry Groups to plan for the year of the Family

"Those days we had to get the families to clean the houses. This required a certain technique and some ra ra ra. We'd have the big inspection, but it was rare that we had to clean the houses ourselves."

Fran Duyndam

"I used to marvel that in that week you heard more stories of those families than you might in five years in a parish."

Fran Duyndam



Magpie on the rail

"One New Year's Eve the Country Fire Authority arrived because some of our boys had played with sparklers across the road and the grass caught fire. I said to the Fire Officer - You give them a good dressing down and he did just that."

Helen Carboon

1994

Festival of Cultures raised \$6,000

Shirley dies

Bernadette joins the community

Nano Nagle Weekend Stories told by Raphael

Volunteer group organized to give Sisters a day off

Hastings Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services helped with counselling of guests

Forty-eight Sisters had referred families at least once

Gen leaves

Review of Presentation Family Holidays

Recommendations:

**Refine communications between the
different groups who lead at different times**

Become a legal corporation

Review sources of funding

Clarify roles and responsibilities

**Clarify needs of the different groups:
school holidays, special groups, individuals**

Explore future scenarios

Integrate functions with Wellsprings

**Consider involvement of lay people in
Management Committee**

Draw up a Five Year Plan

"Spiritual values are assumed and
lived out rather than articulated.
Sisters comment on their pride in
their involvement."

1994 Review

Holiday Camp Leaders





Concert 1994

"Children loved the concerts. We had a number of ready-made routines which the children performed."

Helen Carboon

One child said, "It was the best day of my life."

Two parents of an autistic daughter said, "We were supported with our daughter. We think it saved us."

1995

Family Holidays Committee includes lay people

Group bookings in demand

Preference given to families and groups recommended by Sisters

Bernadette leaves

Frances Mongan, Mary Power and Verna Carroll in residence as new community

Houses were painted

Mary was at Balnarring on her own for two weeks.
She recalls being "run off her feet."

A parent reflected: "I realised that the most important thing is quality time with my daughter."

"Balnarring was the most significant ministry of my life. To hear visitors say that this has been the first holiday our family has ever had was very moving."

Bernadette Keating

1996

Children from Balnarring Primary helped planting trees and grass

Over 100 pine trees were replaced by natives to create a "koala corridor"

Annual Contacts Day initiated

"A bonfire in the paddock caused consternation, and the Shire Councillor needed to be soothed and pacified by cups of tea and apologetic mutterings so that jail could be avoided!"



Birthday

1997

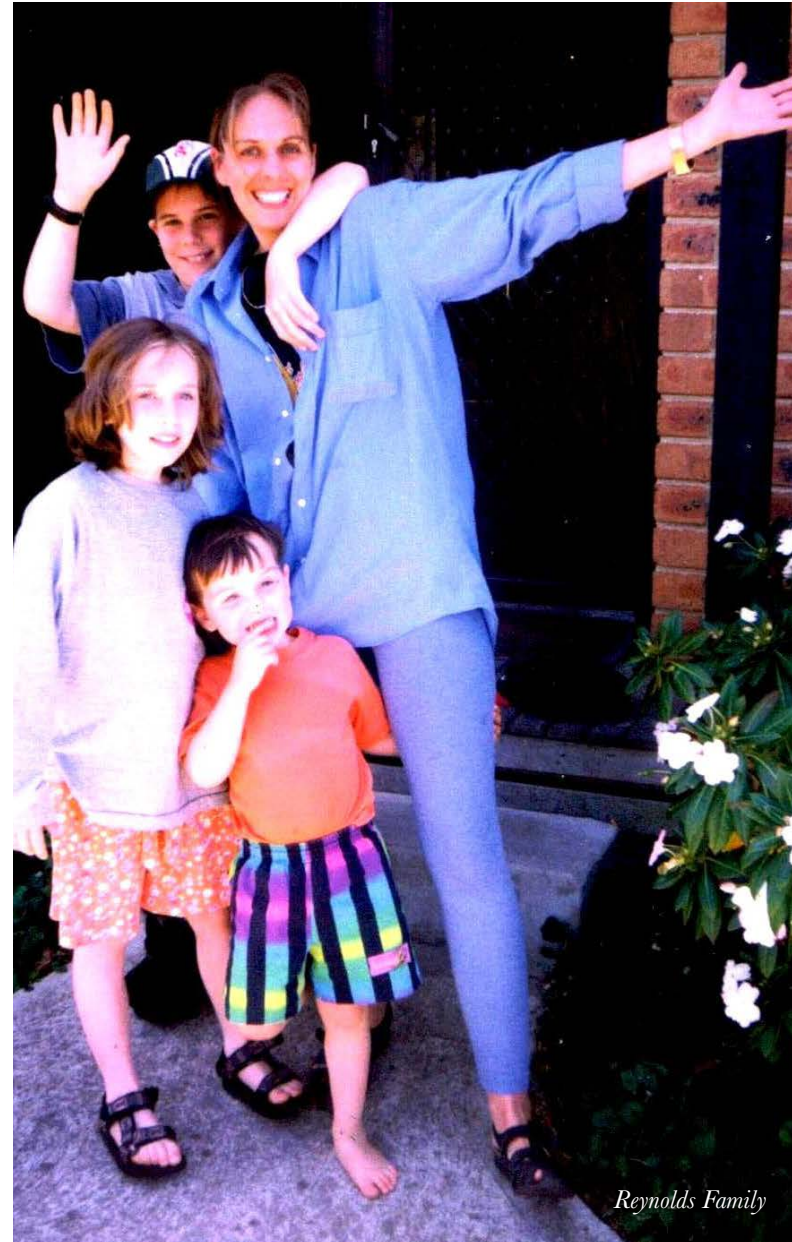
St John's College, Dandenong fundraised \$1,000

Barbara Daniel joins Balnarring Team

Frances moves to Dandenong

St Vincent de Paul sent Christmas stockings

Hastings Community Centre made toys available



One family went to the Op Shop and returned laden with things for the houses. Barbara Daniel recalls, "People were so good and I thought - O my God, what am I going to do with all this?"

1998

Open Day - 120 "Friends of Balnarring" attended. These were families that had previously stayed at Presentation Family Holidays

80 applications for Christmas holidays

Annual Fiesta at Star of the Sea

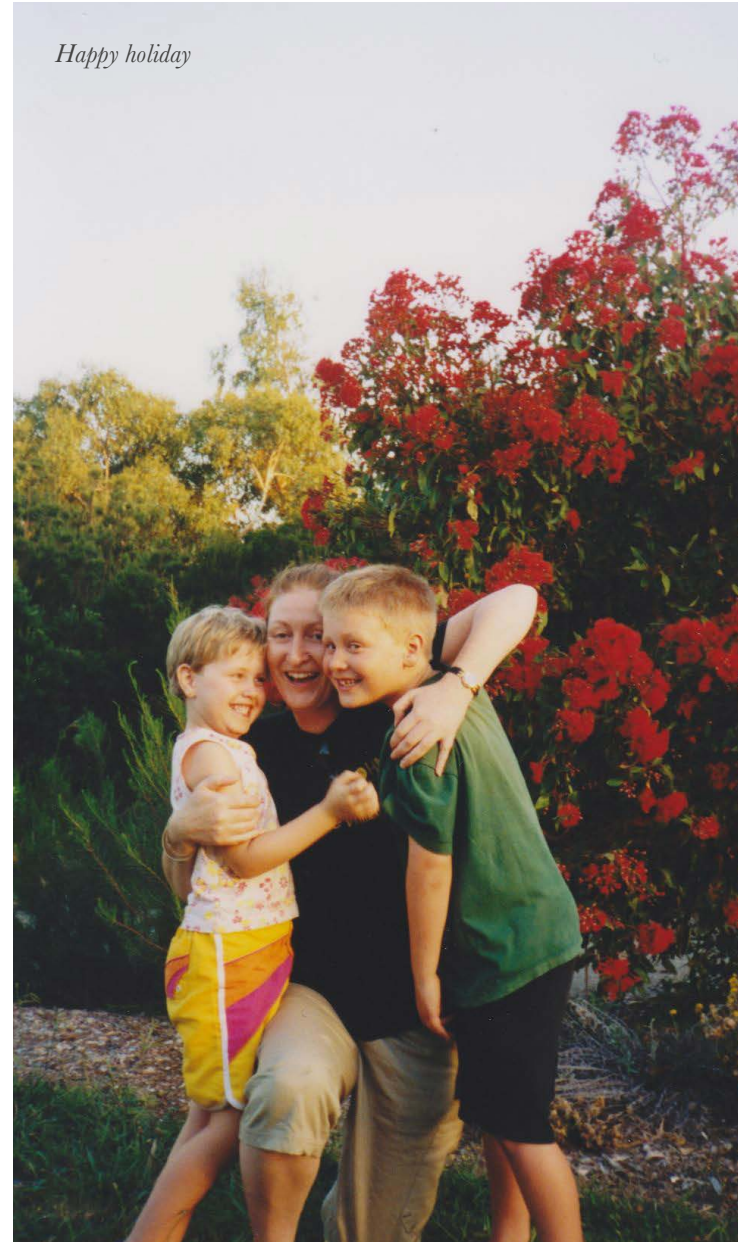
South East Water install sewerage

Extension to the Community House undertaken

"Hope you will always be around for struggling families."

Parent

Happy holiday



"That was a lovely day.
I remember a Greek family
doing the barbeque."

Mary Power (Resident Sister)

"It helped in our healing with
the loss of our daughter and
to regroup as a family."

Parent

1999

Nano Nagle icon placed in each house

Reconciliation plaque set up near the front of the house

Tenth birthday tree planted

Fair organized - raised \$3,000

Mary Power leaves

Anne Carey arrives

"We ... acknowledge
members of the Kulin nation as
the original habitants of the land
on which our houses are built."

Quote from the Reconciliation plaque

"The nuns did everything.
We cleaned the houses;
we had two houses each.
We also made the curtains."

Barbara Daniels

2000

Cup day celebration luncheon

Vegetable garden planted

Harbour View Balnarring rezoned as Balnarring Beach

New televisions installed

Sam died 10 March

Summer holiday program attended by 118 children over 5 holidays

24 Leaders assisted

A “fallow year” for fund raising

Leaflet for Young Leaders composed

Emergency Management document finalised

Records of families stored on cards

"The leaders looked after the children and us too."

"It was so sad. I cried."

(death of Sam the dog) Barbara Daniels



Wagon Ride

"We were able to do things together
without worrying about anything."

Parent

"The chance for contemplation
and appreciation of family life."

Parent

2001

\$2,000 grant from Commonwealth Government's
International Year of Volunteers Fund

Weekend of initiation into the world of being a leader -
24 young people attended

Contacts Day - 17 referrers attended

Presentation Family Holdidays becomes Incorporated
according to the Associations

Incorporation Act of 1981

Verna leaves the Community

"They (the young leaders) took over all the houses.
It was their house for the week. I think they had
more fun that way. It was quite a responsibility,
but it was a joy. They certainly kept us on our toes."

Mary Power

2002

6 Summer Holiday Programs from Dec 17 to Jan 29

24 young adult leaders - 2 leader families

Emphasis changing as more agencies refer families

New outdoor barbeque

First joint meeting of Presentation Board members
and the Leadership Team

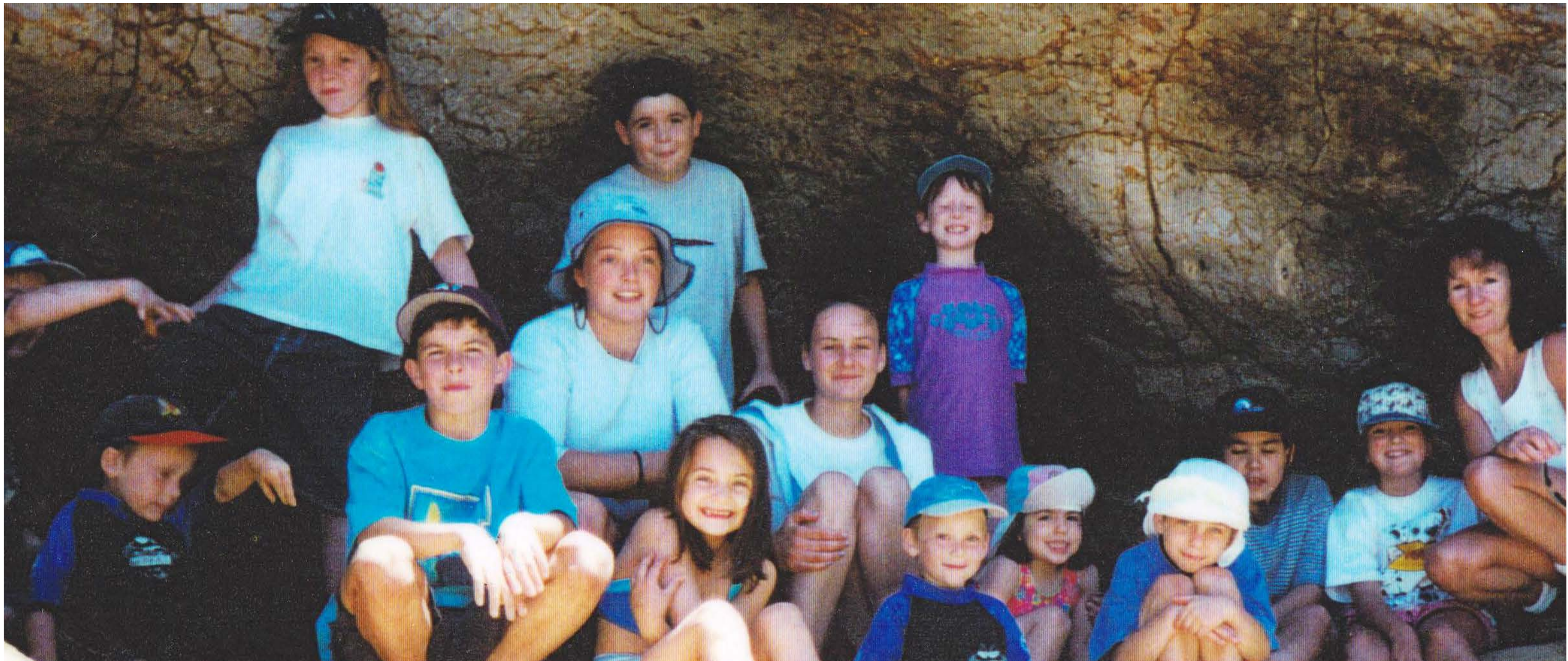
Personnel, Programs and Privacy Policies ratified

"We would have meetings every morning. We'd all sit down - a time of reflection. Then we would plan what we'd do for the day. The leaders had great fun decorating the plan. Then they took them around to the families."

Barbara Daniels

"We asked ourselves what we were going to do with all this land. Five Sisters came for the weekend, and that was the beginning of the Wilderness Project."

Joan Power (Resident Sister)



2003

Ann Carey leaves

Joan Kennedy arrives

New playground installed

3,000 new brochures produced

Cottages named after native flora: Grevillia, Acacia,
Ti-tree, Banksia, Bottlebrush and Gum Leaf

"We came home refreshed and ready to resume usual activities."

Parent

"I organized the new signs for the houses because I didn't feel it was personal. It was like a motel."

Rex Swindelhurst (former Chair of the Board)

"It was the strangest Board Meeting. She (Board member) had vases, candles, fabric. We had to look at the candles. There was something quite different about this."

Rex Swindelhurst (former Chair of the Board)

A parent said, "It broke down the isolation we felt."

Another parent noticed that families were friendly
towards each other.

"A sense of peace and refreshment. A springboard for many things."

Parent



*"The place and atmosphere were fantastic
- extremely well run."*

Parent

2004

Formal Review Conclusions:

Program highly valued

Pivotal to the mission of the congregation

Sisters praised for their helpful and considerate manner

**Careful planning required for the future, especially regarding
staffing and finances**

Formal structure needed for the Board of Management

Young Leaders weekend

Contacts Day

Nano Nagle Family Barbeque

"We all felt blessed and loved our stay. It was so clean and the Sisters were very engaging and wonderfully open and non-judgemental."

Participant

"General elation. We could now be seen as a 'normal Family'."

Parent

"One of the most loved and sought-after services."

Referrer

"Relaxation, bonding, belief in good in the world.
Renewed energy to face problems."

Referrer comment about the impact of Presentation Family Holidays

Busy at work



2005

Vision and Mission Workshop for Board of Management

Proposal to sell individual houses and build holiday units as a cost-neutral exercise

Future Committee established

Wellsprings conducts four weekends for South Sudanese women

Open Day - Nano Nagle's story dramatised "From Ballygriffin to Balnarring"

Sisters and Board Members re-enacted Nano's story. Joan Kennedy played the leading role.

Resident Sisters washed all the blankets and curtains.

May - First planting of trees on the farm property

"Writing the script for this story gave me the opportunity to really learn the history of the Presentation Sisters and Nano and the focus of their work - and somehow I do remember a light, a lantern. Presentation Family Holidays has the same vision of going to those in trouble."

Margaret Maher (Board Member and volunteer)

"The day was spectacularly not well attended."

Margaret Maher

New vision statement composed:

“We welcome all guests and make them feel at home as they regenerate their spirits.”



2006

Discussions with Centacare Family Services, Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services, and MacKillop Family Services, regarding possible future relationships

Name changed to Presentation Family Centre – facilitated endorsement as a tax deductible gift recipient

Clerical assistant appointed

Holiday Program Co-ordinator appointed

Weekend Open Garden at the Croft, Flinders, raised \$4,500 - over 500 visitors

New playground built

Facilitators employed for Holiday Program: Circus workshop, parent pampering

"At last the gift recipient status was granted. Barbara and Nola had worked on this issue for years!"

Marie Hall (Former Board Chair and volunteer)

"One of our guests told me that her husband had had a vasectomy, then had it reversed and she became pregnant. No one was more excited than Barbara - she became a surrogate grandmother!!"

Margaret Maher

"We had a bit of money from the Patricia Madigan Trust and we allocated \$45,000 towards a new playground. This was my first project at Presentation Family Centre."

Rex



Joan and Barbara at the Open Garden Fund Raiser

"We have reached a crisis point. I am told that crisis means opportunity."

Barbara Daniels

2007

Leadership Team and Board agree to undertake formal meetings with MacKillop Family Services

Document produced outlining options for relationship between MFS and PFC

2,900 trees planted since 2005 - local provenance trees chosen because of suitability to koalas

Board Fund created encouraging board members to complete 5 grant applications per year

A comprehensive Five Year Plan composed for the next five years

Cleaner employed

Joan Kennedy leaves project

Extensions to the Activity Shed planned

Board approached Mary Keogh regarding pastoral care





Masks

"She was still on cloud nine (after her holiday at Presentation Family Centre) and spoke with such enthusiasm about the wonderful quality time she had. She was glowing with happiness. It has given her a great boost after going through some hard times."

Family Support Worker

2008

Six options for the future discussed with Sisters and Board:

Continue in present format

Sell off houses incrementally to finance holiday units

Sell the Centre

Amalgamate with MacKillop Family Services

Explore links with other parties

Become an auspiced body of MFS

Office moved from Sisters' house to House No 6

Ten Year Maintenance Program proposed

Case for Support prepared for grant applications

Proposal for joining Presentation Family Centre and MacKillop Family Services published and disseminated.

"A lot of time was given by Board Members to exploring the options, and a clarity of purpose was achieved."

Margaret Maher

"In discussions with MacKillop Family Services we learnt how to branch out, moving from a Sisters model to a laity model. We needed a lot of ideas and to learn about fund-raising."

Margaret Maher

2009

Barbara leaves the project

Interim Co-ordinator appointed

Generous amount of house equipment donated This benefaction is on-going

Balnarring Foreshore Committee organized activities for the summer holidays

Mary Keogh in residence, adopting a pastoral care role

Talks between Presentation Family Centre and the Sisters' Wilderness Project (development of farmland towards native garden settings) to explore mutual benefits

Uncertainty regarding the future of Presentation Family Centre - Sisters consider options

Between 1997 and 2009, 1864 children and 3,366 adults attended Presentation Family Centre

Shade sails over the playground installed

"When I first came to Presentation Family Centre, I suppose it was the life and enthusiasm of the people here that struck me. The need for support for the Sisters was obvious. We wanted to keep this place going. It's unique in what it offers."

Mary Keogh (Resident Sister)

"I was very impressed that the Board was into our spirit of care for the disadvantaged, the less fortunate, which is the spirit of Nano Nagle. I was enthused by the fact that being here energised me, observing that this was a new time for me to put my energies into building and continuing the great work that began in 1989."

Mary Keogh

2010

Manager appointed

Website and data base updated

Open Garden held at the Croft Flinders - inclement weather - \$8,000 raised

New office building erected at the entrance to Presentation Family Centre resulting in one more house for guests

Fire Plan finalised

Students from Presentation College Windsor helped with gardening

New reservation system

Questionnaire for guests

Volunteering categorized:

Holiday Program

Gardening and upkeep

Special Events – open gardens, making jam, chutney, etc. labelled “Pressies Preserves”

"It rained and rained. We hummed and hared about continuing the Open Garden but the show had to go on."

Marie Hall

"We simply drove beside a construction site at Winchelsea and I noticed the curved roof. I said to my wife - that's it! That's our new office."
"Cranes came in to put the office on site. It was fantastic. Imagine a whole building set up like that!"

Rex Swindelhurst

"Once the office came, it was a focal point."

Marie Hall

"We were noted by an anonymous philanthropic person. He was intrigued by a photo of Mary Keogh and Joan Power in the local paper. He said: Tell me what this place is really about. He came with several others to a meeting with Board Members. I made an apple custard cake. ('We're really out to impress you', I said.) They said they were going to support us for two years. They have been with us for seven years and are everyone's best friends! Everyone had a hand in nurturing the relationship that grew and grew. It is interesting to see how Presentation Family Centre had to prove its stripes. They allowed our standard to improve. This has been such a boon."

Margaret Maher





Our guests were asked:

What was best ?

*"No one wants to go home", "Relaxing, peaceful", "Met brilliant people here",
"Going to the beach was magic".*

Problems?

"Ants in the bin", "Looking after 2 children, one inside, one outside".

How could we improve?

"More activities", "Age specific groups".

How important has the holiday been?

*"It has already made a change for us. I've learnt to live more simply -
less clothes".*

2011

Consultant engaged to undertake Organizational Review

Recommendations: More supervision of staff

Improve marketing and grant-writing procedures

Complete procedural manuals

Develop volunteer program

Manager role changed to Relationship Manager (part-time)

Ishti Griffiths appointed Operations Manager (part-time)

Sub-committee Structure established: Finance, Maintenance,
Programs and Policy, Publicity and Publications

Board agrees to extend the Activity Shed

Special Board Meeting: Strategic Business Plan formulated

Probus Club attend fund raiser at the Croft Flinders

In the aftermath of the earthquake New Zealand family is sponsored
for a holiday at Balnarring

Typical circumstances within families:

A child with a terminal illness

A family in transition housing

A mother with terminal cancer

A father, confined to a wheelchair, had suffered a stroke eight years previously.
His children were then toddlers.

A mother with mental illness

A mother who suffered such serious illness that the father is now the carer.

A family where one child is autistic and the other children difficult to manage.

Single parents

A family where the parents and children have a mild intellectual disorder

A family which is in financial need



"Mary had a friend in Christchurch who described how some families were suffering. I said - Let's do something about it. So I sponsored them. We met them at the airport, then on to the peninsula. I remember one child lying in a foetal position and being surprised that the earth didn't move. The child was able to sleep through that night."

Rex Swindelhurst

2012

Part-time Office Administrator appointed

Donor Fund set up to cover expenses of families unable to pay for a holiday.

Donors include Presentation Sisters and local philanthropists

\$50,000 Grant obtained for extension to Activity Shed

Kite flying open day organized with Balnarring Primary School.

PFC Volunteers visited the primary school to help children make the kites

Student Art Therapists volunteer during school holidays

Meeting with Wellsprings to develop closer relationship

"I felt that we had a community - we were working together."

Margaret Maher



*"I love it here.
Love it. Love it."*

Melinda Power (Office Administrator)

Happy holiday

2013

Relationship Manager leaves Presentation Family Centre

Operations Manager appointed as overall manager

Five-Year Plan defined by the Board

House Occupancy over 90%

Workshop for volunteers, staff and referrers on An Introduction to Autism Spectrum Disorder Workshop conducted by AMAZE (Autism Victoria) 20 attended

Fund raiser - "An Afternoon with Jane Austen" at the Swindelhurst home

OH&S Procedures in place

New team of Holiday Program Coordinators

Website updated

Volunteer Days from Lion's Club and Lend Lease

Presentation Family Centre registered with Balnarring Bridge periodical

"I used to work in a law office. Working here is like comparing strawberries to lemons. Here, the satisfaction of seeing people leave with a new outlook on life is great whether they have had a chat, watched the dolphins at the beach or sat by themselves."

Melinda Power

"Volunteering is an extremely rewarding experience because one gets first-hand appreciation of how much they are enjoying their stay."

Bill Grant - Board member and volunteer

One child wrote: "Thank you soooooo much. I really liked you guys."

One mother nominated the following personal life challenges: family break down, mental health issues, financial hardship and long term illness. She wrote: "You have a wonderful facility here and we thoroughly enjoyed a much-needed time away."

She also suggested that a fenced-off cottage would be a help for families with "wanderers".

2014

Cottage 3 updated enabling access for physically disabled

More families with disability issues

Fund Raiser Bowls and Trivial Pursuit at Balnarring Bowls Club

\$10,000 from Westernport Parish – ongoing support

Governance of Presentation Family Centre transferred to Kildare Ministries

"There was a sixteen-year old boy who was quadraplegic. The new disability facilities in one of our houses were so helpful for his parents. Both bathroom and laundry have been combined."

Melinda Power

"Over 90% of families using this house have a person in a wheel-chair. This extends our service."

Ishti Griffiths - Operations Manager

2015

Planning and arranging extensions to Activity Shed

"I like talking one on one with people. To start with, it's rejection, and then they melt a bit."

Rod Harding, Board Chair and Volunteer

"Our training contributes to the welfare of our guests. There's a lot more structure now - policies and procedures are in place. There's a good chance we have met the problem before."

Melinda Power

2016

Building of extension to the Activity Shed completed.

Pilot Program – Cooking and Nutrition Workshop - this will be included in the Holiday Program in summer.

Employment of Art Therapist planned

78% occupancy over past twelve months

93 % occupancy over summer holidays

"I went back there this week and I felt thrilled. The new Activity Centre honours our guests. I spoke to a guest and she was thrilled as well."

Margaret Maher

"The first time we called it a Cooking Workshop. Only one mother came. Next time we invited guests to a Baking Session: Make some stuff, take it home to share. That was more inviting. The atmosphere was so positive. There were four recipes made by our guests who were led by a chef and nutritionist."

Sandie Klose (Holiday Program Coordinator)

"I'm a Presentaion College Windsor girl. I was Kostka Captain."

Sandie



"The wet weather sporting surface is a natural gathering place for all ages, especially for teenagers. Everyone can see them, yet they've got their own space."

Ishti

"Reduced government funding to the agencies - that is a big challenge for us because they sponsor lots of our guests."

Rod Harding

"My mind is always on Presentation Family Centre. When you get people so needy all the time, they rely on your care."

Ishti

And so the story continues as
Genevieve and Shirley hoped it would:

*“and people would come and
stay and be nourished in body,
mind and spirit”*



**Presentation Resident Sisters
and Holiday Coordinators**

Shirley MacDonald PBVM
Genevieve Jeffrey PBVM
Helen Carboon PBVM
Frances Duyndan PVBM
Bernadette Keating PBVM
Anne Carey PBVM
Mary Power PBVM
Barbara Daniel PBVM
Verna Carroll PBVM
Joan Kennedy PBVM
Mary Keogh PBVM
Joan Power PBVM

Board Members over time

Barbara Daniel PBVM
Joan Kennedy PBVM
Mary Power PBVM
Marie Lazzaro PBVM
Nola Vanderfeen PBVM
Anthony and Suzanne Grimes
Sue and John Redman
Kate Mc Donogh
Sheila Howell
Marie Hall
Rex Swindelhurst
Bill Grant
Margaret Maher
Rod Harding
Kiniki Sterling
Rachel Connor
Christine Barren
Ian Urkhart

Staff

Bryan Williams
Sue Reeves
Pam Whitmore
Sandie Klose
Melinda Power
Ishti Griffiths
Mandy Nelson-Williams

Acknowledgements

My thanks to all those who have responded to the call for comments on their experiences at Presentation Family Centre. It has been a privilege to record your memories and reactions.

I also express my gratitude to the many wonderful families and friends who have anonymously commented on their time at Balnarring. I have appreciated the generous help of staff and resident Sisters, especially as I searched for photos.

I have been wonderfully helped by Shaelah Gringhuis who has assisted with design work and advice.

My final word of thanks goes to Peter, my husband, for the way he encourages me and for his editing eye.

Marie Hall
September 2016