

56TH NATIONAL VIEW CONVENTION
GEORGE FORBES ORATION
DELIVERED BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
HOTEL GRAND CHANCELLOR, HOBART
SATURDAY 9 SEPTEMBER 2023

Good morning and thank you for inviting me to join you for your National Convention. May I welcome you all, particularly the many interstate delegates. May I also acknowledge and thank you all for your wise choice of venue, here in Hobart.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community and recognise their enduring culture and continued connection to land, sea and waters.

May I acknowledge that the Smith Family is now in its second century. It remains one of our Nation's most significant and valued charities, which has supported many thousands of children over the last century.

May I refer to The *Sydney Mail* report of its 1922 founding in that city, and I quote:

“A Fine Institution. ... this particular [Smith] Family is one of 'Joy Spreaders' ...

“The objects of the family are to maintain throughout the year the spirit of True Charity...”¹ End of quote

As we are in Hobart, I should also quote from our local *Mercury* newspaper, which, in 1932 described the “Family”, in this way:

“A colourful Sydney organisation is now celebrating its tenth anniversary. It is known as the Smith Family, Joy Spreaders Unlimited. Ten years ago, a small

¹ Sydney Mail, Wednesday 7 May 1924, page 44.

group of business-men got together to furnish Christmas cheer to poor children whose parents were not in a position to provide adequately for them. Their effort was so successful and inspiring, and they received such support from well-wishers of their objective, that they made the movement permanent, established an office in the city, and developed and expanded their admirable work ...”²

One hundred years on, the purpose of The Smith Family remains to continue a “spirit of True Charity” for thousands of children and their families quote, “...to help them unlock better futures for themselves”³, and, “To overcome educational inequality caused by poverty.”⁴

From The Smith Family, VIEW – Voice, Interests, and Education of Women emerged in 1960. VIEW was founded by George Forbes, the General Secretary of the Smith Family, with the positive aim to make a difference to the lives of disadvantaged Australian children and young people. Your 14,000 plus VIEW members work to support this valued children’s education charity.

In contrast to this 56th National VIEW Convention, our Hobart VIEW Club celebrated their 10th birthday at Government House at the end of 2021.

Your VIEW focus on disadvantaged children and young people resonates with my community work.

Prior to being sworn in as the 29th Governor of Tasmania and as the second female in 2021, I was a lawyer and judge practising predominately in the family law area. In contrast, my work as Governor includes constitutional, ceremonial and community duties.

May I turn to my community role, which I hope may be relevant to your VIEW agenda. This role includes attending statewide events for local organisations and supporting as Patron over 130 charities and not for profit organisations. The community role is flexible and enables me to focus on various social and other community issues.

² *Mercury*, Friday 9 December 1932, page 8.

³ <https://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/about-us>

⁴ [About Us | Australian Children's Charity \(thesmithfamily.com.au\)](https://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/about-us), accessed 8 November 2022.

At the outset of my appointment, I said that I would like to prioritise raising awareness in our community about the devastating impacts of family violence on women and children. It is a sad reality that significant numbers of children in Australia experience family violence and abuse – physical, emotional and sexual. The rates of family violence remain, very simply, unacceptably high.

Research funded by Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS)⁵ confirms that impacts on children from family and domestic violence are severe, affecting their health, wellbeing, education, relationships and housing outcomes.

There is a national recognition of the pressing need for primary prevention of violence against women and children. Early intervention and working towards creating a gender equal society are pre-conditions for addressing violence against women and children. There is evidence that gender inequality is a driver of family violence. *Change the Story*,⁶ a significant ANROWS and Victoria Health report provides an evidence-based framework for action in prevention of violence against women and children, based on the awareness of how gender inequality contributes to violence against women.

The issue of protection of children has been highlighted in Tasmania where, over the past two years, there has been a Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government’s Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings. The Commission’s Report has been delivered last month to our Government and will be tabled in Parliament at the end of this month. The Commission has 191 recommendations in its Report about how we can better protect children against sexual abuse in institutional settings in the future.

This Tasmanian Report is another sad confirmation of how far we still have to travel to keep our children safe.

As a former judge, I heard numerous matters in which children had been exposed to family violence or were victims of abuse. So, in my current role,

⁵ Research Summary: The Impacts of domestic and family violence on children)(2nd ed; ANROWS Insights 11/2018.

⁶ Our Watch together with ANROWS, Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety, and Vic Health 2015.

where appropriate, not only do I raise and talk about family violence and gender inequality, I also aim to make modest differences in practice. An example is that Government House has given support to our Hobart Women's Shelter. This Shelter provides safe, emergency accommodation and support to women and children affected by family violence and/or those experiencing homelessness.

As elsewhere in Australia, there is a lack of available and affordable rental accommodation in Tasmania. Because families have to stay for long periods at the Shelter, due to the lack of accommodation, the Shelter turned away 2,678 women and children over the past three years.

The Shelter also delivers therapeutic programs for women and children and delivers mentors in violence prevention program workshops.

On behalf of Hobart Women's Shelter, Government House has hosted two working groups with stakeholders and interested members of our community. We have also hosted a Shelter fundraiser. The Shelter reported generously that our support has been invaluable to their mission, helping them to further their cause and strengthen stakeholder relations. These working meetings gathered national, state, and local stakeholders, and later resulted in the donation of around \$100,000 in pro bono services and discounted products for building their first two homes. The fundraiser not only raised funds, but also boosted staff morale and broadened their network in the Hobart community.

During my term as Governor, I have increasingly placed young people at the centre of my community role –with an emphasis, but not exclusively, on young people from lower socio-economic areas of Tasmania.

My support for schoolchildren has a focus on education, including food education, and also on food security. An initiative which aligns closely with these priorities is our establishment of a community garden at Government House. This garden provides produce to community groups, and also gives school students an opportunity to learn about fresh produce and to link to volunteering and food distribution.

This project has been a partnership with Eat Well Tasmania, of which I am Patron, and which is a charity educating Tasmanians about healthy eating.

We work with two other partners – the School Food Matters School Lunch Project, which provides over 6000 meals per week to Tasmanian students in 30 schools, and secondly with Loaves and Fishes Tasmania, which provides emergency food relief statewide, and with regard to this project collects the fresh produce from our community garden and cooks meals for School Food Matters.

The School Lunch Project is important because it is widely recognised that hungry children cannot learn effectively.⁷ Research recognises the benefits of school-based meal programs. I quote from *Education and Equity in Times of Crisis*⁸, a work of researchers associated with our Peter Underwood Centre at the University of Tasmania.

“The provision of school meal programs and participation of children and young people in these programs are associated with a wide range of benefits that can positively impact social, behavioural and educational outcomes for children.”⁹

I consider it is important to focus on young people and their education because, quoting a previous Tasmanian Governor, the late Peter Underwood, “education more than anything else, is a passport to a better life.” In Tasmania, on average, we have poorer literacy rates and educational outcomes than other States.¹⁰

My community role in regard to education is enhanced with formal school visits to Government House, usually Grades 5 and 6, who come as part of their civics program. I talk to students about the role of the Governor and encourage questions. Some are astute; some are funny, and some I simply cannot answer.

Government House also has a formal connection with our Peter Underwood Centre, which I have already mentioned. I have the privilege to chair the Centre’s Advisory Committee. The Centre aims to support children and young people to flourish through the power of learning. The Centre focuses on disadvantaged communities. It conducts research that provides practical

⁷ *Education and Equity in Times of Crisis* Palgrave Macmillan 2023 E.S Rudling, S Emery, B Shelley, K te Riele, J Woodroffe, N Brown at page 96.

⁸ Ibid at page 96.

⁹ Ibid at page 96.

¹⁰ Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, Summary Results, 2006, Catalogue Number 4228.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2008

evidence to support policy and practice for learning and engagement, to benefit children, young people and communities.

It recognises the importance of learning outside the classroom. Schools have joined the program which provides educational opportunities at a range of learning destinations including museums.

With the support of the Centre, Government House has initiated an art project for school students. And in a few weeks, I shall be participating in a webinar for the Centre's TV Alive for Kids. It is aimed at Year 5 and 6 Tasmanian students and is a Q and A session. It aims to show that learning is fun and to connect students to different topics.

In concluding, I hope that I have given you a small insight into how my community engagement role gives me an opportunity to support children and youth and resonates with your VIEW focus on disadvantaged children and young people.

Finally, this Convention gives me an official opportunity to thank each and every one of you for your work for VIEW clubs of Australia. Over 50 years on, I am sure George Forbes would be very satisfied that VIEW has also become a significant and influential voice for women and for our community.

Thank you.