

ROTARY DISTRICT 9830 (TASMANIA) ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2024
OFFICIAL OPENING SPEECH BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
PRINCES WHARF 1, CASTRAY ESPLANADE, HOBART
SATURDAY 2 MARCH 2024

Thank you, Heather [Chong, introduced HE].

I begin by acknowledging the Muwinina people upon whose Country we gather, who flourished on Country as part of the South-East Nation of Aboriginal people. We honour them, and today's Tasmanian Aboriginal Community, as ongoing custodians of Country. I recognise their enduring culture and continued connection to land, sea, and waters.

Thank you also District Governor Mike Patten and colleagues for your kind invitation to open this 2024 Rotary Clubs Tasmania Annual Conference.

Tasmanian Governors have a long and close relationship with Rotary. As we know, Rotary in Australia was founded in 1921. However, during those early years, there was actually no Tasmanian Governor. There were disagreements over how much Governors should be paid. There was a four-year hiatus, until British Labour politician, Sir James O'Grady, agreed to become Tasmanian Governor at the end of 1924. He soon enough found himself in the company of these early Rotarians and was invited to a Rotary luncheon in Launceston in June 1925.

The President at that lunch expressed pleasure at Governor O'Grady's attendance, and that it was the first time they had been honoured with a Governor's presence. In reply, Sir James announced that, he had frequently visited the Leeds and Bristol clubs in the UK. He knew the great work Rotary was doing, and how businessmen, for a brief period every week, and I quote: "abandoned their commercial cares and devoted themselves to higher matters."¹

¹ *Examiner* (Launceston), Thursday 25 June 1925, page 4.

As you approach your one hundred years as Rotarians, you have certainly been attending to higher matters, focusing on improving the lives of others, and as succinctly expressed in your global motto: "Service before Self".

Your Conference theme is a most important one: "How can Rotary assist to address the issues of Domestic Violence and Homelessness."

It is a shocking reality that significant numbers of women and children in Australia experience family violence and abuse – physical, emotional and sexual. The rates of family violence remain, very simply, unacceptably high. 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 as Tasmania's 29th Governor, one of my aims has been to raise awareness in our community, about the impacts of family violence on women and children. I not only talk about family violence and gender inequality where appropriate, but also aim to make differences in practice, albeit modest.

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

Children exposed to domestic and family violence over a sustained period of time may experience trauma symptoms that can have long-lasting effects. *"These include depression; low self-esteem; anxiety; poor coping mechanisms; suicidal thought; eating disorders; self-harm; substance abuse; physical symptoms such as chronic pain."*²

The Australian Burden of Disease Study 2015 found that for women aged 15 and over, mental health conditions made the largest contribution to the disease burden due to domestic violence. Depressive disorders made up the largest

² Jaffe, P.G., Wolfe, D., & Campbell, M. (2012) Growing up with domestic violence: Assessment, intervention, and prevention strategies for children and adolescents. Cited by Campo M. at page 7.

proportion; followed by anxiety disorders and suicide and self-inflicted injuries.³ These three diseases were also linked to child abuse and neglect.⁴

Not surprisingly therefore, there is a national recognition of the pressing need for primary prevention of violence against women and children. *Change the Story*,⁵ 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. *Our Watch* recommends a multifaceted approach to reach everyone, challenging the gendered drivers in settings including education, sports, the arts, media and public places.⁶

In 2022, *Our Watch* entered into a 5-year partnership with the Tasmanian Government to continue work to increase Tasmania's primary prevention capacity and to collaborate across Government, local government, community, sporting and education sectors.

May I return to what I said about trying to make a modest practical difference to support victims of family violence. One example is that Government House has provided support to the Hobart Women's Shelter, by hosting workshops and holding a fundraiser. This Shelter provides safe, emergency accommodation and support to women and children affected by family violence and/or those experiencing homelessness. The Shelter also delivers therapeutic programs for women and children and provides mentors in violence prevention program workshops.

As elsewhere in Australia, there is a lack of available and affordable rental accommodation in Tasmania. Families have no choice but to stay for long periods at the Shelter, due to the lack of accommodation. I quote from a 2022 HWS Report.⁷

³ AIHW Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story 2019-In brief.Cat.no.FDV4. Canberra: at page 13

⁴ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/health-impacts> at 3, accessed 16/07/2021

⁵ *Our Watch* together with ANROWS, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, and Vic Health 2015.

⁶ <https://ourwatch.org.au/report/forum-outcomes-primary-prevention> accessed 23/02/2024.

⁷ Cate Sumner Safe Quality Homes for Tasmanian Women and Children Facing Homelessness 2022 page 2.

“From July 2020 – December 2021, over 800 women and almost 1000 accompanying children from across Tasmania sought crisis accommodation at the Hobart Women’s Shelter. Over 1351 women and children seeking accommodation at the Hobart Women’s Shelter were turned away ... Every day the Hobart Women’s Shelter listens to women say how they will attempt to survive by sleeping in cars, separating children and leaving them with different friends.” End quote.

I was very pleased when the Shelter reported that our support helped them to further their mission and strengthen their stakeholder relations. Our fundraiser not only raised funds, but also boosted staff morale and broadened their network in the Hobart community.

We continue to support the Shelter and our kitchen provides food and produce each fortnight for the residents. We also support the Sexual Assault Support Service by delivering food and produce for their clients, together with flowers from our garden, each fortnight.

Next week, I shall be hosting a fundraiser event, an inaugural International Women’s Day Lunch at Government House. All proceeds of the lunch will go to Women’s Legal Service Tasmania. This Service is a not-for-profit charity providing legal advice to women in Tasmania. Advice is provided on matters such as family law, family violence, emotional, physical, and financial abuse, restraint orders, and more. I am pleased to tell you that tickets sold out rapidly. The funds raised for the Women’s Legal Service are welcome, but it is also an indication of how people are willing to support organisations that help others.

Government House also makes modest contributions to organisations that assist homeless people, such as our Salvation Army, Hobart City Mission, and Foodbank. Our vegetable and fruit gardens provide produce throughout the year for our community. Our Executive Chef, Ainstie Wagner, and her Kitchen Team, largely using garden produce, also cook thousands of meals for Homelessness Week each year.

I have no doubt that Rotary will be able to find and support worthwhile projects to help address family violence and homelessness, particularly in the primary prevention of violence space, in settings such as community, sport or education.

May I conclude by returning to the past. I earlier mentioned Tasmanian Governor Sir James O'Grady. It was not until 1927 that Rotary districting came to Australia, with the formation of District 65 – titled the Commonwealth of Australia. This District comprised the then 17 Rotary clubs throughout Australia. The inaugural conference of that new body was held in the then Masonic Hall in Murray Street, Hobart – the building adjacent to the red awnings building.

That historic conference was opened by our Sir James O'Grady. Interestingly, he suggested that each new Governor should be invited to become a member of Rotary. That may possibly have been tongue in cheek. A Governor would be a useful member, Sir James said, because whenever he was present, "no speakers could refer to political matters." (Laughter.)⁸

Rotarians and partners, may I wish you a most enjoyable, productive and rewarding afternoon. I thank you again for inviting me to open your 2024 Rotary Clubs of Tasmania, District 9830, Annual Conference.

Thank you.

⁸ *Examiner* (Launceston), Wednesday 7 March 1928, page 7.