



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

FRIDAY, 19 MARCH 1982

LAUNCHING OF THE SYDNEY CITY MISSION'S 120TH ANNIVERSARY APPEAL

I am delighted and honoured to be here today because the Sydney City Mission provides a living, dynamic example of how to help the people in our community who really need help. This Mission was founded by volunteers who saw the reality of other people's need and suffering staring them in the face, and these founders got straight on with the job of helping in a practical way.

As we have been told, it was Benjamin Short, the AMP Society's first insurance salesman, who founded this Mission, with the help of businessmen, clergymen and Members of Parliament. To take the initiative and do something about the problems which they saw in their community in a purely voluntary way was impressive at the time, and it is reassuring that there are so many people today who are willing to follow their example. The continuity of concern about poverty and other problems which members of this Mission have been expressing for the past 120 years shows real dedication. When we look at the activities of the Sydney Mission in 1982, we can be confident that the same kind of concern is going to continue to exist for years to come.

I wish it was possible to look ahead realistically to a time when the kind of problems which the Mission takes in hand so effectively would have been overcome completely to circumstances in which this kind of suffering would be eliminated entirely, but while that is probably not possible, our response must be to strive even harder to achieve as much as we can. There will continue to be a job to be done, a task in which all sections of the community have a role to play and responsibilities to fulfil.

And I must say that it is impressive to be associated with an organisation such as this, where there is a dedicated staff of 250 solidly backed up by more than 500 volunteers from all parts of Sydney, all working to reduce suffering and create a brighter future for people who are currently experiencing difficulty or hardship. This Mission helps in opening up lines of communication with many who can do little to help themselves, the homeless, young people in crisis, the aged, drug dependants, alcoholics and needy children.

Through this work, the Mission is more than a vehicle for helping such people, it is an investment for the future of us all. The care and assistance which the Mission provides has given countless people a firmer and more secure base from which to begin their lives again, and make a useful and rewarding contribution to the society in which they live. The task of giving people confidence and restoring their self-respect is vastly important in this kind of work, and no person or institution working in the field can afford to overlook it.

In recent decades governments have become increasingly committed and involved in trying to help solve many of these kinds of problems. I believe that the community wants governments to take a leading part, and there is indeed a great deal that governments can do. One of the great challenges which governments face in this area is to make sure that the help they can offer goes to the people who really need help and this obviously means that governments must keep in touch with needs and problems as they exist in the real world.

We must at all costs avoid falling into the trap of thinking that governments could ever replace the kind of work done by voluntary agencies in a community in which people care about each other. Governments plainly need to be able to take advice from those most closely associated with the needs of the underprivileged, and at the same time be able to make their own sound judgements about needs and priorities.

In coming to terms with the real problems in the most productive way, there is obviously need for maximum co-operation between all levels of government and between the many providers of community welfare and support services throughout our society. It is probably inevitable that there will be differences of emphasis in the approaches taken by different groups or agencies, but plainly every effort must be made to avoid any situation in which different views are pursued to the extent where those in need lose out.

Over the last decade or so, the Commonwealth Government has been moving into some areas where it previously had no funding involvement, and dramatically increasing its level of funding in others where Commonwealth funds pass either directly or indirectly to voluntary organisations. These areas include payments to or for state governments to support such services as senior citizens centres or home care for the elderly, direct subsidies to assist organisations in providing services like accommodation for the aged, or sheltered workshop facilities for disabled people. Total payments of this kind in the social security and welfare area totalled some \$24 million in 1971-72. In this financial year it is estimated that they will be more than \$220 million.

Commonwealth support for the Mission comes through funding from programs as diverse as the Children's Services Program, the Handicapped Persons Assistance Act, the Aged or Disabled

Persons Homes Act, the Emergency Relief Program and the Homeless Persons Assistance Act. Under this latter program, I understand the Minister for Social Security has recently approved a capital grant of \$540,000 towards the purchase of the three buildings making up "The Opposition" youth crisis centre in Kings Cross. This is an important initiative in an area of present great concern, and it is perhaps one area for which your founder, Benjamin Short, may not have even contemplated a need.

But in attempting to find solutions to the unfortunate problem of youth homelessness, the Sydney City Mission has demonstrated its relevance today just as much as it did 120 years ago. Youth homelessness and drug abuse, although certainly not new problems in themselves, have increased in recent years and are among today's most significant social problems. That the Sydney City Mission as an organisation has been able to adapt its services to meet modern day need is, to my mind, a strong argument for the community to continue its support for the work of the Mission. In your letter of invitation to me I noted that the Mission itself raises around \$1.6 million annually through self help, and that the support from the people of Sydney amounts to \$800,000 a year.

I understand that this year's 120th anniversary appeal is for \$1,200,000, for an impressively wide range of youth programs and projects. I can think of no better demonstration of appreciation by the people of Sydney for the work of the Mission than to contribute this amount for this year's appeal.

I appreciate the opportunity you have given me today to pay tribute to the work of the Sydney City Mission. I want particularly to congratulate the Mission on its work and its humanitarian services to the people of Sydney. I commend the 120th Anniversary Appeal to them all, and I would urge them to contribute to the Mission's appeal to ensure that its excellent work may continue for another 120 years.

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