

# brotherhood action

Brotherhood of St Laurence

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## A Lifetime of Practical Commitment

In 1951, Jessica Millott offered to spend one day a week at the Brotherhood's village settlement at Carrum Downs as a volunteer chiropodist because her father was a resident there. In 1981, Jess is once again a volunteer, following her retirement after 30 years with the Brotherhood.

'I was at Carrum Downs for two years, then Father Tucker asked me to come to the Coolibah Club for pensioners in Fitzroy because there was a greater need. And there certainly was. The Club was rough then, just bare boards, but it was home for those men. It was men only in those days,' said Jess.

'You had to be able to cope with all kinds of things that happened then. I had so many trips to the morgue. There was no such thing as a home help — we'd do all of that, cleaning and washing, often in our own time. On Saturdays I'd take four or five 'oldies' in the car with me while I went around doing feet.

'But there's been lots of fun too. One lady said she should pay entertainment tax when she came to get her feet done. And Dorothy Dix had nothing on me!'

Jess, known as 'Mum' to many of her pensioner friends, has been cook, hairdresser, chiropodist, dressmaker and Christmas pudding maker supreme to the



Jessica Millott (standing) pictured with Canon Peter Hollingworth and guests at the Coolibah Centre's 1980 Christmas dinner.

thousands of lonely people who have come to the Club. Her 1500th pudding was made for Christmas dinner last year. 'The oldies have already worked it out that I could make two puddings a night in my flat,' she said.

In 1962 Jess was appointed manageress of the Club. Since then, it has been rebuilt and its services extended, incorporating a Day Care Centre for patients referred from hospitals and doctors.

'Of course the Centre has changed and that's good,' she said. 'There's a lot more help available now and more is done for people who need it.

'I've been bowing out for a long time now. I think people should give up their work responsibilities when they retire, and then make more for themselves in other areas.'

One man said to her in the Club, years ago, 'I've been retired, I'm finished and that's the end of me'. 'Not if you're with me', said Jess, and promptly asked him to take charge of the Club when she was out visiting. He'd driven the first Yellow Cab, before they had number plates and he ended up staying about 15 years.

There has been a continual stream of letters of congratulations and farewell parties for Jess. Canon Peter Hollingworth, Executive Director of the Brotherhood, said on her retirement, 'She is a remarkable, unforgettable character, a person who has helped to make the Brotherhood what it is, and who has lived her life in service to others.'

When Jess was a child she wanted to be a nurse. 'I'd roll up bandages and follow people around to practise on them. But you had to have money to train then and we were too poor.' In her years at the Brotherhood, Jess has shown many student nurses what caring for, and about, people really means.

'I started with one day a week at Carrum Downs and now I'm back to square one again, doing the things I like to do. I'm spending one day sewing in the Coolibah Centre; I love sewing for people and making second-hand clothes nice for them. And on Thursdays I visit pensioners in their rooms to do their feet.

'Just making people happy has been my whole life,' says Jess. A lifetime of practical commitment to low income people.