



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
VICTORIA

## **CHILDREN FIRST FOUNDATION 20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY**

**Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2019**

**Professor the Honourable David de Kretser AC**, Former Governor of Victoria **and Mrs Jan de Kretser**, Patrons Children First Foundation

**Mr Roger Langley**, Chairman, Children First Foundation

**Ms Elizabeth Lodge**, CEO, Children First Foundation

**Distinguished guests**

First, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their Elders past and present and to any Elders here with us this morning.

Tony and I are delighted to welcome you to Government House to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Children First Foundation.

That is, 20 years of facilitating lifesaving surgeries in Australia, for disadvantaged children from developing countries.

And, that is, some 350 children whose lives have been transformed.

Established in 1999, to expand on the work of Melbourne humanitarian, Moira Kelly AO, the Foundation is guided by the basic premise that every child has the right to a healthy and happy life, regardless of where they are born.

And so, Children First is the facilitator between children from across Australasia, Asia, Africa and the Middle-East, and our local medical experts with the skills to give them the lives they deserve.

A simple enough premise to state, but behind which lies an issue of complexities met and supported by an army of generous donors and supporters, staff, volunteers, hospital administrators, surgeons and all other medical and allied health professionals.

I know that each of those groups are represented here today, and we welcome the opportunity to thank you all.

It is due to your vision, drive, care, compassion and diligence that these children from across the world are able to return to and participate more fully in the life of their schools, families and communities.

You have tailored their care so as to meet not only their physical wellbeing, but also their emotional, cultural and educational needs.

Any parent understands that it is only such holistic care that can grow a child into the best possible health.

And certainly, in my professional career in the law, as a magistrate in the Children's Court in the past, and as a judge in the Family Court for many years, I am particularly impressed that Children First has always understood that need to care for the whole young person.

In that regard, I specifically acknowledge the contribution of Rotary District 9790, through which Miracle sMiles – the Retreat in Kilmore – was funded and built, to meet the needs of the children before and after surgery.

I also acknowledge Bernie Lamers AM – whom I believe is here - who project managed the initiative, and all those involved. And I note the nice connections that the building was officially opened in 2001 by my predecessor, Governor Landy AC MBE, that my predecessor Governor de Kretser and Mrs de Kretser are patrons, and that former Lieutenant Governor Southey is also a patron.

I am particularly conscious that the great care that the children receive at the Retreat would not be possible without the devoted staff, and in particular the volunteers, who include health professionals, teachers, drivers, gardeners and visitors, and those who help with the homely tasks of cooking, washing and cleaning. Thank you.

And if I am thanking volunteers, I must thank the Chair, Mr Roger Langley, and Board members. It is too easy to forget that they too are indeed volunteers, generously giving both their time and their considerable skills. That appreciation is of course extended to previous Board members as well, some of whom are with us today.

Thank you too to the generous philanthropists and donors, without whom there simply could not be a 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

And finally, may I thank you for the good news stories that you bring to us all.

When we see a child's family members and the medical teams rejoice at a child's progress to better health, we rejoice with them.

What better case in point than our young guests who join us here today. It is a pleasure to welcome Nima and Dawa from Bhutan, Jack from Vanuatu, Rachel from Zambia and Foyok from PNG.

The progress of these little ones has warmed all our hearts. And when we see them so happy and healthy, we are reminded of the great goodness and kindness that resides in our community.

And so, as your Patron in Chief, it gives me great pleasure to thank the Children First Foundation, to say 'Happy 20<sup>th</sup> Birthday' and to officially launch the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations.