

Speech to Bathurst Legacy Change Over Dinner 16 July 2010

It is an honour and privilege for me to be asked to speak at the changeover dinner of Legacy, in my home town of Bathurst.

Legacy had its origins in the aftermath of the Great War of 1914-18. In 1923, General Sir John Gellibrand founded the Remembrance Club in Hobart to assist returned service men in business. Stanley Savige, a former colleague of Gellibrand, visited him in Hobart. Gellibrand urged Savige to set up a similar club in Melbourne.

After several informal meetings, an inaugural meeting was held in ANZAC House in Melbourne. For the next 26 years Savige became inseparable from the Club and the movement that became Legacy across Australia. In 1925 Legacy took on the role of caring for the children of deceased servicemen. In so doing Legacy found its soul.

Today, Legacy is dedicated to caring for the families of deceased veterans, comprising 115,000 widows and 1900 children and dependants with disabilities. The work of Legacy will go on for the foreseeable future. The tragic recent loss of young soldiers in Afghanistan has created new war widows and children who will need all the caring and assistance Legacy can give them to get them through their initial period of loss and grieving and then support them in the years ahead. The change in demographics, particularly as we lose more and more of our WWII veterans and their widows will create its own issues, with the need for Legacy's services to adapt and change to meet to the requirements of a younger client base.

As a community, we need to become more aware that we now have in our midst war widows who are aged in their 20's and who have children as young as 1 year of age. This lack of community awareness has in some led to younger Gold Card recipients' being challenged as to their entitlement to use such a card. It has been reported that one young veteran was told he could not use his Grandfathers' gold card to get a free prescription. Another young widow was reportedly challenged by rail inspectors as to her entitlement to a concession fare. I am sure that in a supportive and caring community such as Bathurst this type of thing would not occur.

For the children of these recently deceased veterans we, as a community, have a special responsibility. That responsibility includes ensuring they have access to the best possible education available. Education is, to my mind, the key to a happy and productive life. It opens up all the possibilities life has to offer. A good education provides choice in your career path. It opens the doors to the wonders of literature, drama, history, music and the arts. It gives you the tools to adapt and use changing technology to your own benefit rather than being a captive of it. A good initial education provides the tools for life long learning.

One of the benefits of middle age is the capacity to reflect on how fortunate one has been in life's lottery. I was fortunate enough to be educated at Bathurst High School by a band of dedicated and inspiring teachers. They gave me the academic tools and perhaps more importantly the passion and desire to work hard and do as well as I could at university and beyond. They also provided a set of values which, although I perhaps did not know it at the time, has enabled me to choose the best option or at least not the worst option when presented with alternative courses of action. It

equipped me with the self confidence and knowledge to walk away from situations that could have only ended up in problems. Too many times I have represented young people in the criminal courts who did not have a set of values they could fall back on to make good decisions. They succumbed to peer or other pressure and did stupid, dangerous and criminal acts. They also lacked the capacity to take responsibility for their own actions when things did go wrong. Typically it was always someone else's fault rather than their own.

My challenge then to Legacy is to take care of these new young legatees. To do everything you can, and more, to allow them to have a good education. An education that their father's would have wanted them to have.

So in proposing a toast to the work of legacy, let us acknowledge the ideals of Legacy's founding father Savige, its wonderful work since 1923 supporting so many in need, the work of those here tonight, who keep the ideal alive and challenge of continuing the work into the future.