



Stories of Impact

“Presentation People in Australia Partner to End Modern Slavery and Forced Marriage”

The International Presentation Association is committed to the elimination of violence against women and children in all its forms, including human trafficking and forced marriages. This mission is demonstrated on all levels of the IPA, from our UN Advocacy Focus, to the local engagement of Presentation Sisters and friends of Ven. Nano Nagle. In Australia, Presentation People are deeply engaged in support of ACRATH, the [Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans](#), which focuses its efforts to bring an end to human trafficking and forced marriage. This partnership illuminates the impact made when people of faith contribute to specialized organizations which further this work on national and local levels.

ACRATH has a vision of a world free of slavery and acts to eliminate all forms of modern slavery and the harm that they cause in Australia, the Pacific Region and around the world. ACRATH is represented at Federal Government level to plan and advocate for a variety of mechanisms aimed at ensuring that the dignity of victim/survivors of Forced

Marriage will be honoured and upheld. It has also adopted as one of its goals, to "eliminate forced marriage" by raising awareness, leading actions regionally and nationally, advocating with government, working for systemic change at all scales and collaborating with counter trafficking networks widely.

Megan Bourke, an ACRATH staff member of Melbourne, Australia, shared with us a detailed description of ACRATH's Forced Marriage Project.



The IPA gives its appreciation Gemma Thomson and Megan Bourke for submitting this Story of Impact. We also extend our appreciation to all the Presentation Sisters who have supported this partnership.

Of the 40.3 million people enslaved globally in 2018, 15.4 million of these were victims of a forced marriage. ACRATH's Forced Marriage Project also offers a range of awareness-raising and advocacy initiatives to draw attention to the prolific nature of Forced Marriage in Australia. The Project is undertaken across Australia, in schools and hospitals, places where community gathers, in parishes and parks. Supporters have and continue to raise-awareness about the undignified practice wherever and wherever asked, in small and large groups, via meetings, lectures, Zoom, community radio, print media, social media. Those who support the initiative are further inspired to answer our "why" by contributing to the fulfilment of our national responsibilities to Sustainable Development Goal 5.3 which states that by 2030 the world aims to "Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation."

We are all encouraged to advocate to politicians and decision makers at all levels to ensure that victims/survivors can access wide-ranging support to leave their situation; to increase the opportunity for federal funding to ACRATH so that we can expand our voice and reach; to improve the national and international community's understanding of Modern Slavery in all its forms, including forced marriage; and to continue strong relationships with other civil organisations in the Modern Slavery and Forced Marriage space, including the Red Cross, Anti-Slavery Australia and with colleagues in federal and state government departments. This partnership should also be extended to include Presentation People, who take actions every day to contribute to this mission.

Sr Lucy van Kessel PBVM (Congregation Leader of the Presentation Sisters WA) and **Gemma Thomson** (IPA Justice Contact; Dean of Mission and Catholic Identity at Iona Presentation College) are members of the Western Australia (WA) Committee of ACRATH. Each year the committee organises an event that has a twofold focus - fund-raising (as the organisation receives no government funding to support its work) and awareness raising (to further educate people about the

"...I choose to work knowing that we are making a difference to the lives of a person whom we may never meet."

"... we bring our head and hearts to this project because it is the right thing to do and because we are firm in our belief that all humans deserve to 'have life and have it to the full.' John 10:10."

"When ACRATH Companions share some news of a woman released from a FM and making a go of life for herself and her children, we see clearly the difference made by our ministry." –

Megan Bourke

reality and issues pertaining to human trafficking and modern slavery, particularly amongst women and children).

In September, 2022, ACRATH held a **Fundraising and Awareness High Tea Project** in Perth, Western Australia.¹ A committee of 12 individuals participated in the organisation of the event and 110 people attended the event. ACRATH WA is comprised of religious sisters and lay women and many Religious Orders are represented as a Committee Members in ACRATH (e.g. Dominican Sisters, Sisters of Mercy, Presentation Sisters etc.) further demonstrating the importance and impact of partnerships throughout the field. This event aimed to fulfill a critical need for funding to continue the mission of ACRATH and the missions of its volunteers.

“You often need money to be able to make a change, but you also need awareness, education and understanding [...] This is especially important for organisations who receive no government funding and who have no corporate salaries [...] key drivers are needed to keep action happening.”

– Gemma Thomson

These stories demonstrate the commitment of Presentation People to charitable giving, advocacy, and direct action to eliminate violence against women and children everywhere, including the survivors of human trafficking and forced marriage. These actions clearly support the commitments of the International Presentation Association to the Rights of Women and Children. They also contribute to humanity’s greater commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals, most notably supporting Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 5 (Gender Equality), Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and Goal 17 (Partnerships) in our own communities.



¹ <https://therecord.com.au/news/local/modern-slavery-brings-acrath-members-and-supporters-together/>