



As I write this first national TOS newsletter for 2011 and reflect on all that was achieved in 2010, I am reminded of the extent of our voluntary work. We are some of the more than 5 million Australians who volunteer, providing over 700 million hours of service to our communities.

**National Volunteer Week**, from 9 to 15 May 2011, provides us with a perfect opportunity to recognise the significant contribution that many TOS members make to our TOS projects and to their communities.

As TOS members, our voluntary service is of a special kind, for while we might appreciate recognition and thanks, it is not necessary to our egos for our sense of worth. We will happily serve altruistically as a natural outcome of our sense of compassion for all living things. And this type of service brings us great joy.

Bessie M. Rischbieth is an Australian theosophist whose life epitomises this ideal of service. Her story is featured in this issue.

**A thought to focus our service in 2011**  
**Teach this triple truth to all: A generous heart, kind speech, and a life of service and compassion are the things which renew humanity.**

*The Buddha*

May these words provide the energy behind our service activities. I look forward to working with you towards our shared goals throughout 2011.

### **Portrait of an inspirational woman: Bessie M. Rischbieth,**

**JP, OBE, Champion of the underprivileged**  
*Abridged from an article by Noel Duzevich, in Theosophy in Australia, June 1998, vol.62, no. 2*

When Bessie Mabel Rischbieth arrived in Perth as a young bride in 1899, the city was still quite young, having been chartered only in 1856. The Swan River colony, founded in 1829, had become self-governing in 1890. The status of women in the community was very depressed and Bessie was heard to say on many occasions: "Women, children and idiots have the same status!"

Bessie had been raised in Adelaide by her uncle William Rounsevell. He was a wealthy pastoralist and businessman and a long serving member of the South Australian Legislative Assembly. William was a dedicated theosophist and

### **Focusing on selfless service to all life**

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had decidedly liberal views on female suffrage and the education of women. Consequently Bessie received the best education available and was also politically educated by spirited family political debates and the many political visitors. It is certain that Bessie's lifelong commitment to Theosophy, which so influenced her future course, had its birth in the Rounsevell home.

At the age of twenty-three in 1898 she married Henry Wills Rischbieth and they moved to Western Australia (WA) the following year. Henry was a wealthy wool merchant. Bessie soon became an active member of the Karrakatta

Club, which was a group of well-educated and influential women involved in social welfare, some of whom were the wives of government officials and politicians. They constantly lobbied the Government for the enfranchisement of women, and were successful in 1899, when Western Australia became the second Australian state after South Australia (1893) to grant women the right to vote.

Bessie accompanied her husband on many overseas trips, including one to London, where she attended a suffrage meeting in 1908. On her return to Perth later that year she was to encounter the catalyst which was to influence her actions to the end of her life, and by which she became, without doubt, the most inspiring and dynamic leader of the women's movement in WA.

Many of the women in Perth who were involved in social welfare organisations were attracted to the theosophical movement with its high ideals of racial, sexual and religious equality and its concept of a classless society.

Prior to joining the Theosophical Society, Annie Besant had become well-known in England and the 'colonies' as a prominent and ardent socialist, dedicated to

effecting social reforms for the underprivileged. She was now in her second year as international President of the Theosophical Society, and had recently founded the Theosophical Order of Service, whose motto was: *A Union of Those who Love in the Service of All that Suffers*. She visited Perth in that year and gave an inspiring talk to this small group of theosophical women. This motivated them to form an organisation which would be broadly based, non-party political and which would

consist of women from all walks of life, willing to work together to further the interests of women and children.



Consequently a meeting was called and attended by Bessie, Edith Cowan (later first woman MP, JP, OBE), Muriel Chase (mother of Sandra Hodson), Alice Adair (then Secretary of Perth Lodge) and some thirty or forty prominent and influential Perth women. At least eighty per cent of the women were active and prominent theosophists. At that meeting the Women's Service Guild was formed, its motto, 'By Love We Serve' and its proposed platform being:

1. to support from the standpoint of women any movement to protect, defend and uplift humanity;
2. to be loyal citizens of State, Commonwealth and Empire;
3. to seek public good and not personal advantage.

The inaugural President of the Guild was Lady Gwennyfred James, the Vice-President Bessie M. Rischbieth. Subsequent meetings of the Guild affirmed their intention to lobby for equal pay to women and men for equal work; equal guardianship of children; women doctors in public service and women as lawyers. This was revolutionary action in those times.

Bessie very soon became President of the Guild, a position she held for many years due to her charisma, her leadership qualities and her capacity for hard work. In 1910 the Guild was affiliated with the TOS but in later years, as membership grew and included women who were not involved in the theosophical movement, the official relationship was discontinued.

The Guild had, from the beginning, quickly established contact and worked with other women's groups. Over the years Bessie and her band of loyal, compassionate and untiring workers, with strong support from their husbands, made headway. Some of their achievements were: equal marriage and divorce laws for men and women; the admittance of women to the Bar; improvements to the disgusting conditions of women prisoners in Fremantle Gaol; improvements to the squalid conditions of the Old Women's Home; the appointment of women police to work with delinquent girls and prostitutes; the construction of the first Women's Maternity Hospital (although a senior politician announced that no decent woman would give birth in a hospital!); the eligibility of women to sit in Parliament; the establishment of free kindergartens; the appointment of women as Justices of the Peace and as honorary officers of the Children's Court; the Child Welfare Bureau; the Women's Parliament (which educated women into Parliamentary procedure); and the Australian Federation of Women Voters (AFWV). Bessie was until her death President of Honour of the AFWV which formed a federal link with the International Alliance of Women (IAW). Bessie led delegations abroad to IAW congresses in Rome, Paris, Berlin, Istanbul, Copenhagen, Interlaken, Amsterdam, Naples and Colombo.

King George V presented her with the OBE at Buckingham Palace in 1935 and that same year she represented Australia at the League of Nations as alternate delegate for her country.

Bessie was in London shortly after the start of World War 2 and remained there to work for the Boomerang Club and the Aid to China Fund. After the war she returned to Perth to continue the fight for the

advancement of women's social, political and economic status. She lobbied for women to be included in jury service and turned her attention to Aboriginal welfare and environmental protection.

Bessie M. remained a staunch theosophist to the end and lifelong vegetarian. All her contemporaries affirmed her personal beauty and charisma, her exquisite dress sense and femininity, her unflinching compassion and her enthusiastic and untiring commitment to work for the underprivileged.

Her lifelong associate, Isabel Johnston, gave a funeral oration and ended by saying: "Bessie Rischbieth was not afraid to die. She believed on the other side of death there would be a glorious awakening of spiritual power, that the soul or spirit that was her real self was immortal. Her passing therefore is a joyful experience for her, but a very great sadness for us."

## Celebrating the International Year of Forests

Did you know that:

- forests cover 31% of our planet's land area
- primary forests account for 36% of the forest area
- forests are home to 80% of our terrestrial biodiversity
- the livelihoods of over 1.6 billion people depend on forests
- forests are home to 300 million people.

The International Year of Forests celebrates people's action to sustainably manage the world's forests and raises awareness of the need for conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.



Forests in Malaysia and Indonesia are disappearing fast and displacing threatened species including leopards, pygmy elephants and orangutans. The forests are replaced with extensive, sterile palm oil plantations.

Palm oil is a saturated fat used extensively in food and cosmetics manufacturing.

We can help by advocating for sustainable production of palm oil to avoid further logging and by reducing our consumption of food products containing palm oil.

## National TOS AGM 2011

As you are aware, because of the devastating floods in Brisbane this January, the 2011 Theosophical Society Convention was cancelled. As a result, the TOS in Australia was unable to hold its Annual General Meeting in the usual way. Instead, the National Management Committee (Janice Scarabotollo, Lynette Muller and myself) decided to hold our AGM by email.

We sent the AGM papers and an agenda/voting paper to all National Council members with a request to forward the papers and our email on to their group members. We also suggested that they might discuss the papers at their next group meeting and complete a voting paper for their TOS group. In addition, we sent the papers to people on the national TOS email list.



By the beginning of April, all but one TOS group had emailed us their AGM voting paper, via their national Council member. Several individual members had also returned voting papers.

All voting papers indicated approval of the minutes of the 2010 AGM, the National Coordinator's Annual Report, the Financial Report, the reports from TOS groups and the proposed continuation of the current National Management Committee.

Janice Scarabottolo, of the Canberra Group, continues as National Treasurer and Lynette Muller, of the Brisbane Group, continues as National Secretary. I am grateful for their continuing support and dedication to the ideals of the TOS.

Each local TOS Group is again invited to nominate a member to be their representative on the National Council. This group meets by email to work on national initiatives and enhance national communication and discussion. When these nominations are received, the brochure on the work of the TOS in Australia will be updated.

The national newsletter will continue to be used as a major vehicle for sharing ideas between TOS groups. It is available by email to all TOS & TS members across Australia. To register to receive an email copy, contact: [tos.australia@gmail.com](mailto:tos.australia@gmail.com)

## National TOS contact details in 2011

### Contact for donations

Ms Janice Scarabottolo  
National TOS Treasurer  
PO Box 7418  
FISHER ACT 2611

Please send donations to the National Projects and other activities of international TOS groups to the National Treasurer. By amalgamating our donations into one or two electronic funds transfers a year to each international project, we can save several hundred dollars annually. Each individual or group donor is recognised in the email we send to the international project group confirming the funds transfer. Please make cheques out to the Theosophical Order of Service in Australia.

**Please note: We will be transferring donations to international TOS groups in mid-August, so could you please send any donations your group is making to the National Treasurer by the end of July 2011.**

### Contact for newsletter

Ms Carolyn Harrod  
26 Lytham Street  
INDOOROPILLY QLD 4068  
[tos.australia@gmail.com](mailto:tos.australia@gmail.com)

**You are invited to send news items, photographs, ideas and comments that might be of interest to fellow TOS members. I would welcome your contributions to our national newsletter.**

## National projects in 2011

Via our email AGM, groups agreed to continue our three major national projects in 2011: support of the literacy home-schools in Pakistan, the SEE vision project in India, and the Heart Babies project in Tanzania.

## Heart Babies Project in Tanzania

The TOS in Tanzania is partnering with the Lions Club of Dar es Salaam and the Tanzanian Government's Ministry of Health in the **Heart Babies Project**. Groups of 20 to 30 children and babies travel together to India for heart surgery, where altruistic surgeons waive their fees.

The TOS in Dar es Salaam supports the Heart Babies Project by contributing towards the small essentials required by the children and their carers during their travel: suitcase, handbag, extra clothes, toiletries, biscuits, etc. Costs for this vary between US\$25 and \$50 per child.



When children are ready to travel to India for their surgery, the TOS group works prior to their departure to obtain a list of their personal requirements. The members make a point of interacting with the children and their escorts, speaking positively about their future and encouraging them to stay strong. Usually, a send-off ceremony is arranged at the main hospital or even at the airport, where members gather to lend their support in person. The same is done upon their return, so as to share the joy of their successful surgery.

## Literacy home-schools in Pakistan

Our collaboration with the TOS in Pakistan continues to flourish. Fareeda and Aman Amir have been working to ensure that the Pakistan TOS can sustain its educational and social welfare programs in today's difficult political climate. This year we are aiming to continue our support of four home-literacy schools which will require a donation of \$4400.

This Literacy Program enables children and young girls who have had no opportunity to pursue even a basic education, to attend classes. Reading, writing and arithmetic are taught by a teacher who holds classes at her own house which is in the same locality as the students.



The TOS provides teaching materials, a fan, water cooler, sitting rugs and a small salary to the teacher. A teachers' meeting is held every month. Problems encountered and suggestions for the improvement of the program are discussed. A representative of the TOS visits the schools regularly in order to monitor their progress. Our donations also contribute to the cost of this on-going professional support for the home-school teacher.

### The SEE Project in India

The SEE (Seeing Eyes for Everyone) Project is conducted by the TOS in Chennai, India. Screening for vision impairment is carried out in schools and slum areas to identify people whose vision could be corrected with spectacles or cataract removal. Our donations enable these to be provided free of charge.

The TOS in Chennai identifies deserving cases and institutions. Their member-volunteers make the non-medical arrangements and the Udhi Eye Hospitals send professionals to do the screening. If further treatment or glasses are required, the children and adults are sent to the hospital. Costs are minimal because of the Udhi Hospitals' generosity.



### International TOS news

If you didn't receive the April issue of the electronic newsletter - *in-touch.online* - and would like to be put on the email list, send a message to [tos.intouch@gmail.com](mailto:tos.intouch@gmail.com) with 'Subscribe TOS e-newsletter' in the subject line.

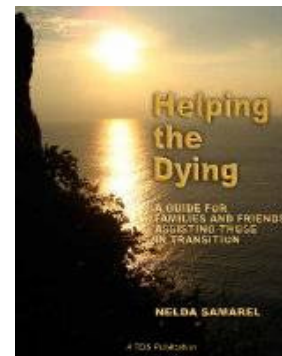


The electronic newsletter aims to keep you in touch with what is happening in the world-wide TOS family, to enable you to get to know TOS members outside your own country and to bring information to inspire your service work within or outside the TOS. It is published every two months from February and the international website is updated at the same time. The next issue will be published in June. You can find past newsletters on the International TOS website: <http://international.theoservice.org>

The international website currently features the educational and social programs of the TOS in Pakistan, one of which we support as an Australian national project. You'll also find an article by Joy Mills in which she invites us to participate in the 'Divine Lunacy' of a commitment to brotherhood. The *For Members* section has a new inspirational article, *Self-transformation: from egoism to altruism in service*, by Dorothy Bell.

### Helping the Dying

The international TOS has published a 40-page booklet, *Helping the Dying*, by Nelda Samarel. This Guide discusses how to meet the dying person's physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs through all phases of the dying process, offering not only an understanding of the experiences of the dying, but also practical suggestions to assist them through their final transition.



The Australian TOS has ordered copies for each TOS group and TS libraries. We anticipate being able to mail them to groups in June.

### What's on our Australian TOS web-site

Go to our national TOS website:

<http://australia.theoservice.org> for the full version of Noel Duzevich's article on Bessie M. Rischbieth. You'll also find information and a video to support a campaign against killing fur seals as well as International Year of Forests links and new quotations.

### News from our TOS groups

#### Hobart

Ro Dallow, Coordinator of the Hobart TOS group, reports that they invited a Uniting Church minister to talk at a regular TS meeting on *The Spirit of Song*. This well-received talk highlighted connections that song made between body, mind and soul. The TOS group has also been collecting stamps for the Red Cross and raising funds to donate to the Adyar Animal Welfare Centre and the literacy home-schools in Pakistan. At Christmas, they donated books for underprivileged children.

#### Melbourne

The members of the Melbourne TOS group have had a busy year supporting charitable projects. Their Coordinator, Georgina Fode, writes that they donated a large van full of clothes, blankets, and children's toys to the South African's Poor Children Project as well as fundraising to support the Olcott Memorial School, TOS projects in Kolkata and the work of several Australian social and animal welfare groups. Members also supported the Melbourne TS with catering, cleaning and providing fresh flowers.

The work of Dr. Annie Besant was celebrated at the Melbourne TS with a presentation by Georgina entitled, *Annie Besant: Work and Writings of a Theosophist*.

The yearly TOS Picnic in the Melbourne Botanical Garden was well attended and a Peace and Healing Meditation was held under the trees. This activity also raised awareness on the Australian Conservation Foundation which the TOS group supports.

### A thought to share

*Joy can be real only if people look upon their life as a service, and have a definite object in life outside themselves and their personal happiness.*

Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy

*Yours in service*  
Carolyn