

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **PIF TO HELP KICK START LEARNING CENTRE**

Work will soon commence on a new Exodus Foundation learning centre in Sydney's Ashfield, thanks to a \$280,000 donation from the Property Industry Foundation (PIF).

PIF plans to raise some of the funds for its overall contribution through its annual property industry gala event, to be held on August 22, 2008.

The upcoming black-tie evening will be held at the Royal Racecourse's AJC Pavilion and replaces the foundation's winter ball.

This year's event is called Bazaar Street Party – An Olympic Journey, and will include a four-course menu starting with Australian cuisine before visiting the Olympic cities of Beijing, Athens and London.

The Exodus learning centre, called School-Wise, was developed 10 years ago for children with under-developed literacy skills and is run by The Uniting Church's Reverend Bill Crews.

The Exodus foundation was developed in 1986 when Rev. Bill Crews was ordained as the Uniting Church minister of the Ashfield Parish Mission.

The foundation aims to help disadvantaged and marginalised people through education and literacy programs to protect young Australians against unemployment and homelessness.

One of these programs, School-Wise, targets children aged from six to 12 who are falling behind in their reading skills and urgently require a more tailored and individual approach to learning.

Potential candidates for the program are referred to School-Wise by their teachers.

Whilst completing the 20 week program, children attend School-Wise in the morning for help with their reading, before returning to their regular schools for afternoon classes.

“We’ve had over 1000 kids through the program so far, and it’s had a very high success rate,” Reverend Crews said.

The new school, located on Liverpool Street in Ashfield, next to the Exodus Foundation and Uniting Church, is due for completion by Christmas.

School-Wise currently operates a tutorial centre behind the Uniting Church which accepts 72 students per year.

The new, larger building however, may offer the opportunity for more students to get the help they need, says Reverend Crews.

“Currently we take in what we aim to be a very even mix of students, such as an even distribution of boys and girls, as well as a mix of both good and troubled or disruptive students,” Reverend Crews said.

One of the program's success stories is 21 year old Hayssam Sleitini, who started the six month program as a 12 year old.

Sleitini is currently completing an Honours Degree in Physiology at Sydney University and may also go on to do a Masters Degree next year.

Hayssam said that the School-Wise program helped him immeasurably in surpassing his own expectations.

"It is a great program that really restored my confidence and helped me achieve what I have today," he said.

"The program is completed in four stages over a 20 week period, with particular focus on spelling and comprehension skills of students, as well as having them read aloud to volunteers."

Hayssam is now a volunteer at School-Wise, where he regularly participates in sessions with children to help them learn by reading aloud.

During a 2005 inquiry into the School-Wise program, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations found that between 2000 and 2003, students attending School-Wise made average gains (in just five months, or two school terms) of 16 months in reading accuracy.

They also gained 12 months in reading comprehension, 19 months in single word recognition, 11 months in spelling and were able to read 50 per cent more words correctly per minute than they could when they started.

PIF was formed in 1996 by property industry leaders who wanted to assist charitable organisations in providing services to youth at risk.

The foundation has grown to become the preeminent charity within the property industry and now raises in the vicinity of \$1.5 million per year.

Some of PIF's core fundraising activities include annual events such as the Yachting Regatta, National Hard Hat Day, Charity Car Rally Challenge and Charity Ball.

Tickets for the gala event are \$250 each and can be purchased through PIF on 02 9241 6000.

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