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Kildare Ministries Newsletter

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Justice - Making the Needs of the Vulnerable Paramount

In this issue



Editorial



Thank you and farewell to Libby Saunders



Crossing New Seas Oration 2026



Presentation Sisters in Victoria since Vatican II



From our Mission Leader



St Joseph's College, Echuca



Star of the Sea College, Brighton



Reflection for Lent



2026 Calendar Dates



Editorial

Justice in Our Time: Seeing, Responding, and Leading with Hope

Across Australia, the rising cost of living continues to be felt in ways that are both visible and hidden. Recent increases in fuel prices and interest rates have added further pressure on households, stretching budgets and deepening financial strain for many families. For some, this means difficult choices - between food and heating, or medication and other essentials.

The recent Australian Catholic Bishops' Social Justice Statement, *The Cost of Our Living: Economic and Social Justice for the Common Good*, reminds us that these realities are not simply economic trends, but deeply human experiences - "not just economic statistics, but human stories of struggle and resilience."

The scale of this challenge is significant. In 2025, more than one in three Australian households experienced food insecurity, with many skipping meals or relying on emergency relief. At the same time, over 70% of people reported that the cost of goods and services had outpaced their income, forcing difficult decisions about everyday living.

This year, guided by our core value of *Justice – making the needs of the vulnerable paramount*, we are invited to reflect on what this means in our own context. The statement calls us not only to understand these challenges, but to respond personally, collectively and courageously.

In our schools and community works, this invitation is lived in real and immediate ways: in supporting families under pressure, in creating inclusive and compassionate communities, and in recognising that vulnerability is not always visible.

Grounded in Catholic social teaching, the statement reminds us of the dignity of every person and the importance of the common good, calling us to ensure that those who are most vulnerable are given priority in our thinking and decision-making.

This is expressed not only in the support we offer, but in how we shape our communities and form our students. When young people learn to recognise dignity, respond with compassion and act with courage, they become people of justice in their own right.

The statement concludes with a powerful invitation to become “prophets of hope” - not only in what we say, but in what we do and the way we do it.

In a time of growing pressure and uncertainty, we are called to notice what may otherwise go unseen, to respond with compassion and integrity, and to ensure that the needs of the vulnerable are never an afterthought, but always a priority.

In doing so, we continue the legacy entrusted to us and contribute to a more just and compassionate world.

As we enter Holy Week, we are invited to pause and reflect on the enduring message of hope, compassion and new life at the heart of the Easter story. May this Easter be a time of blessing and renewal for you and your communities, and may the term break offer rest, joy and time to reconnect.



Nicole Mangelsdorf
Executive Director



Thank you and farewell to Libby Saunders



We acknowledge with gratitude the extraordinary contribution of Libby Saunders, Co-CEO of the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP), who concludes her time with BASP after ten years of dedicated service.

Since joining BASP in 2015, Libby has been a tireless and courageous advocate for people seeking asylum. In an increasingly complex and challenging policy and social environment, she has remained steadfast in ensuring that those most vulnerable are not forgotten. Her work has been both deeply practical and profoundly human - securing housing for hundreds of individuals and families, coordinating essential support through BASP's volunteer network, and offering a compassionate and consistent presence to those navigating the uncertainty of life in a new country.

Libby's leadership has embodied the spirit of BASP as a truly community-based initiative. She has built strong and trusting relationships across parishes, donors, volunteers and those seeking asylum, fostering a model of support grounded not in transaction, but in shared humanity. In doing so, she has helped sustain BASP as a place where people are welcomed, known and supported as neighbours.

Her contribution has extended well beyond organisational leadership. Libby has given generously, responding to need with creativity, integrity and deep compassion. The impact of her work is reflected in the lives of many who now have the stability, dignity and opportunity to build a future. In 2024, Libby Saunders was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for contributing significantly to community health and, in particular, for her work with asylum seekers.

Libby's presence will be deeply missed at the Brigidine Ministry Centre and across the Kildare Ministries community. We thank her for the difference she has made each day, and for the countless ways she has brought compassion and hope to others.

We wish Libby every happiness and fulfilment as she begins this new chapter of retirement.





Crossing New Seas Oration 2026

Our recent *Crossing New Seas Oration*, held at Star of the Sea College, brought together Trustees, Members Council representatives, Board Directors, leaders, staff, alumni and friends, alongside members of our founding congregations - the Brigidine and Presentation Sisters.

We were honoured to welcome Kate Kennedy AM, a graduate of Star of the Sea College and an internationally respected leader in human rights. In her Oration, *"Seeking Justice: Slavery Is Closer Than We Think,"* Kate offered both a confronting and compelling insight into the reality of modern slavery today.

Drawing on global data and her extensive experience, Kate reminded us that modern slavery is not distant or historical, but a present and pervasive reality.

An estimated 50 million people worldwide are living in conditions of modern slavery, with women and girls disproportionately affected - comprising approximately 75 per cent of those impacted.

She highlighted the systemic and structural factors that allow exploitation to persist - including poverty, weak legal systems, corruption, conflict and environmental pressures. These conditions create vulnerability, enabling coercion, forced labour and exploitation to take root and endure.

Importantly, the Oration brought this reality closer to home. Kate noted that modern slavery exists within Australia, with an estimated 41,000 people affected, often in hidden and complex contexts. She also challenged us to consider how everyday systems - including global supply chains - can be linked to exploitation, identifying sectors such as electronics manufacturing as areas of heightened risk.

Kate was joined on the evening by Paul Flavel, Executive Director of Hagar Australia, who shared insights into Hagar's work supporting survivors of trafficking, slavery and abuse. His contribution brought a deeply human dimension to the discussion, highlighting both the lived realities of exploitation and the pathways to recovery, dignity and restoration.

At the heart of Kate's message was a call not only to awareness, but to responsibility. She invited us to recognise that addressing modern slavery requires more than individual concern - it calls for systemic change, ethical leadership and collective action across institutions, communities and sectors.

This call resonates deeply with the mission of Kildare Ministries. We are committed to responding to the needs of our world with courage and compassion - challenging unjust structures and working to uphold the dignity of every person.

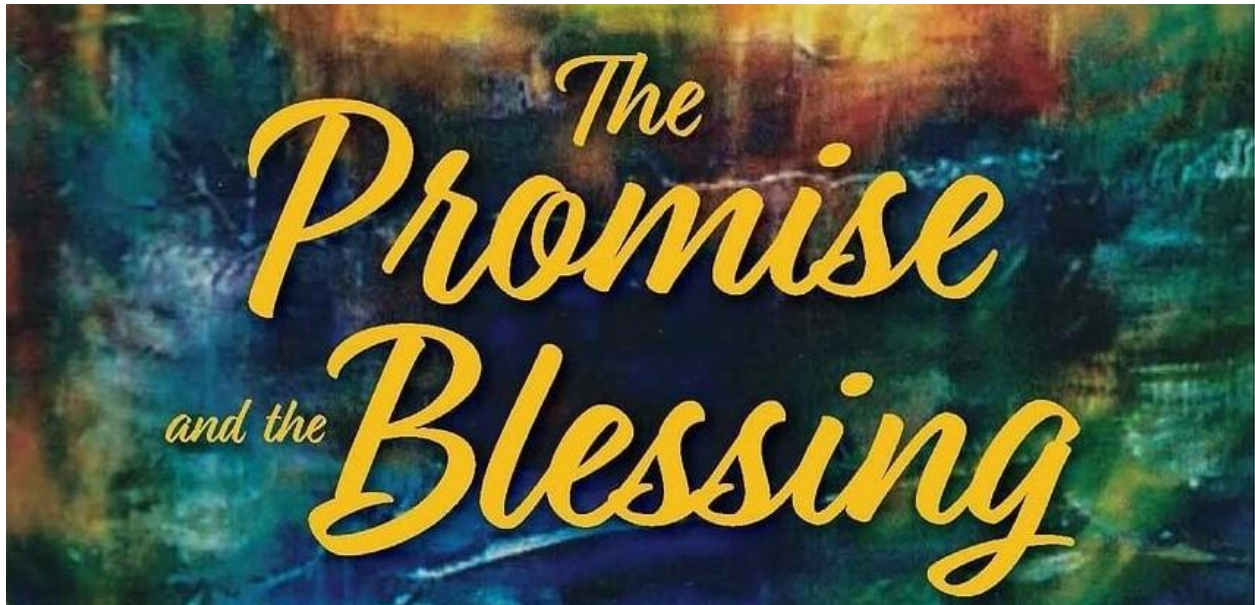
We extend our sincere thanks to Kate Kennedy, to Paul Flavel, and to Mary O'Connor, Principal of Star of the Sea College for her generous hospitality in hosting the evening.

Nicole Mangelsdorf
Executive Director









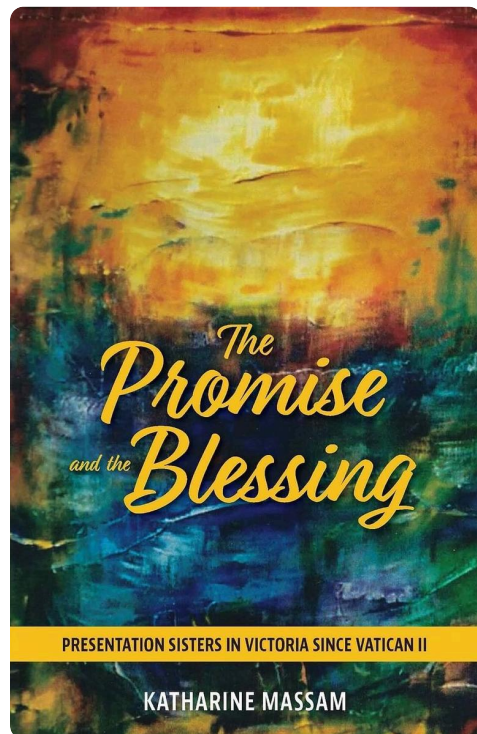
Presentation Sisters in Victoria since Vatican II

Autumn brings its own promise and blessing as it prepares us for winter; and on a warm and bright Saturday afternoon in March, the weather set the promise for a memorable event – the launch of “The Promise and the Blessing” (Katharine Massam, 2025, Garratt Publishing).

Guests were welcomed by Sr Helen Carboon, IBVM, Congregation Leader. Mr Michael McGirr, Mission Facilitator Caritas Australia, launched the book with humour and wisdom, and a vote of thanks was given by Sr Frances Duyndam PBVM.

Approximately 150 guests enjoyed each other’s company, and many memories were shared.

Congratulations to the leaders and guides of this project which charts the history, events and personnel since Vatican II and the ministries of the Presentation Sisters of Victoria – Star of the Sea College, Brighton, Wellsprings for Women, Dandenong, and Saltbush, Balnarring Beach (previously known as Presentation Family Centre) – joining Kildare Ministries in 2014.



“The fragile beginnings of Nano’s group inspire her confidence that the movement for justice and peace to which Kildare Ministries is committed has a bigger reference point than any one individual....The role of each person is more simply to play their part” (p.276).

Indeed, it is the mission that Jesus’ life and ministry inspire us for today and tomorrow.

Rosemary Copeland

Co-Chair

Trustees of Kildare Ministries

To read a review of the "The Promise and the Blessing" by Michael McGirr [click here](#).

From our Mission Leader



New Staff Induction Days

Throughout March we welcomed over fifty new staff who have started working in our community works and schools over the past twelve months. It was inspiring to hear why they chose a Catholic organisation to work in, and what they value about their new Kildare Ministries community:

As soon as I walked through the gates, I could feel this school was different.

The welcome and sense of belonging in this school is amazing – I'm so glad I decided to come here.

I feel so privileged to be able to work in a place where everyone can be themselves. I wanted to work somewhere where we treat people in need differently – with respect and compassion rather than "less-than"

I had a lot of difficulty in my life growing up, and I really want to be part of something that creates a place where everyone can belong. I'm so glad to be working here.

As a group we explored who we are as Kildare Ministries, sharing the story of our founders – Brigid, Nano and Daniel – and exploring the vision, mission and values of Kildare Ministries that has been inspired by the transformative vision of the Christian story and our rich traditions.

Focusing on our *Statement from the Trustees of Kildare Ministries on Justice and Peace for Palestine and Israel*, new staff commented on how courageous the Trustees have been to address this challenging topic, and to do so in a way that is so grounded in our vision, that "all creation is recognised as sacred and that hope, justice and courage are our hallmarks." It

is such an important statement to have coming into this 2026 year of Justice at Kildare Ministries, reminding us “that we stand with those who are marginalised and oppressed.”

Inspired by our vision, New Staff explored our Living Justice, Living Peace Charter and reflected on what they hope to contribute to the mission of Kildare Ministries through their particular community work or school.



Social Justice Student Program at Saltbush

Justice inspired students gathered from across our schools at Saltbush Balnarring Beach in Victoria to deepen their understanding of the drivers of injustice and strengthen their capacity to advocate for positive change.

Hana Assafiri joined us and shared her story of standing for women, who like her, have been oppressed by domestic violence.

Drawing on this inspiration, and the vision of Kildare Ministries, students shared their schools' current justice commitments, and identified how they can engage more of their communities to create justice in our world.



Stronger Together: Walk for Justice, Respect and Kindness

Staff and students from across Kildare Ministries joined the Walk for Justice, Respect and Kindness from Princess Bridge to Birrarung Marr in Melbourne. Our Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project staff and volunteers supported other members of the *Victorian Council of Churches* and *Speaking Up for Refugees* to create a wonderful event. Brigid Arthur spoke to the large crowd gathered about the importance of standing together to give voice to asylum seekers who deserve to be treated with respect and kindness so they can access basic needs for living.



Jane Collopy
Mission Leader





St Joseph's College, Echuca

Justice: Grounded in empathy, strengthened by action

As we enter our 140th year at St Joseph's College, Echuca, we find ourselves continually drawn back to the legacy gifted to us by our four foundresses. This legacy is beautifully captured in our simple yet profound motto, *'Strength and Kindliness'* a call to live with strength of conviction and a deep sense of justice, balanced with the kindness and compassion required to bring those convictions to life; a compassion that embraces all.

An anecdote from our archives offers a powerful illustration of the Brigidine spirit of justice in action. In the depths of the Great Depression, when hardship was felt across all communities and especially among families on the land many faced impossible decisions about how to provide for their families. With banks failing and uncertainty ever-present, the strain was immense. In response, the Brigidine Sisters quietly and compassionately enacted a simple yet profound gesture of support. It became known that for families unable to meet school fees, payment in kind would be accepted. Those experiencing financial hardship brought what they could produce, food, and essential items to the convent. Firewood, so vital to the daily running of the kitchens, was supplied by those who, despite losing employment, remained committed to supporting their children's education. This support continues today.

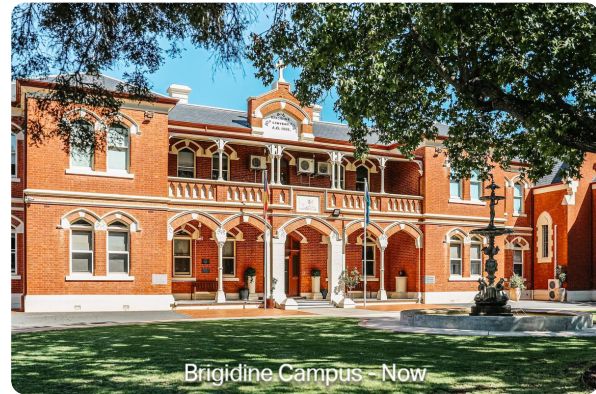
Even the students themselves embodied this spirit of service. Several of the older girls took on responsibilities within the junior school, offering their time and care to support the community. This call to action is not unique to St Joseph's, but what is unique is the quiet action and support that continues. That is providing support without acknowledgement or announcement- just doing and ultimately receiving the gift of giving.

The empathy shown by the Brigidine Sisters during this challenging period was not expressed through grand gestures or public declarations, but through quiet, thoughtful

actions. It is in these kind yet powerful responses that we see the true expression of the Brigidine charism justice grounded in empathy, and strengthened through action.



Brigidine Campus - 1886



Brigidine Campus - Now



Kildare Campus - Now



Star of the Sea College, Brighton



Justice: Connected voices - Collective Impact

Star of the Sea College stand proudly in the living tradition of faith and compassionate service which has shaped our story for generations. As a Catholic secondary College within the community of Kildare Ministries, we are inspired daily by a bold vision to educate young women who are grounded in the Gospel committed to justice and confident in their capacity to transform the world.

Our Catholic identity has not simply been expressed in words, but lived in action, in our prayer, our learning, our relationships and our service. At the heart of our mission lies the enduring legacy of Nano Nagle, whose fearless response to the needs of her time continues to illuminate our path. Nano's radical trust in Providence, her compassion for those on the margins and her unwavering belief in the transformative power of education remain the foundation stones of our College community.

We are guided throughout the year by our 2026 theme of Justice. At the conclusion of 2025 our College Captains and Leaders developed the theme to read '*Justice: Connected voices - Collective Impact.*' It brought renewed depth and clarity to this charism. More than a motto, it becomes a call to live Justice in visible and practical ways. Our staff live this value by ensuring that each student will continue to be treated justly and valued for who they are.

Liturgies are held during the year to mark key events in the liturgical calendar, as well as those in the school year. This term the celebrations include Ash Wednesday, Foundation Day and a Lenten/Easter Liturgy that act out "The Stations of the Cross".

Living Justice: Making the needs of the vulnerable paramount

The Living Justice program at Star continues to place justice, dignity and solidarity at the centre of school life. Through advocacy, service, education and fundraising, students will be encouraged to recognise injustice, respond compassionately and prioritise the needs of those most vulnerable in our community and beyond.

Living Justice Program: Project Compassion (Term 1)

During Lent and throughout Term 1, students supported Caritas Australia's Project Compassion through a range of justice-focused fundraising initiatives. Activities included: Pancakes for Project Compassion (raising \$630 this year), the annual Easter Egg Raffle, Nano's Walk, walking in solidarity with those in need on Foundation Day, and the student-led Cans for Caritas initiative. Through Cans for Caritas, soft drink was sold to raise funds for Project Compassion, while eligible containers were recycled through the Victorian Container Deposit Scheme, with proceeds supporting the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP).

Weekly Volunteering Activities

Students across the College participated in weekly volunteering opportunities that place them in direct relationship with communities experiencing disadvantage, strengthening their understanding of justice, dignity, and solidarity.

Friday Night School in Richmond provides students with opportunities to tutor children from migrant and refugee backgrounds through one-on-one learning support, promoting educational equity and meaningful connection. **Tony's Café in Carnegie** welcomes Year 9 student volunteers each week, where they assist in serving meals and engaging with community members experiencing homelessness and hardship. Year 10 students also volunteer weekly at **Little Mission St Kilda**, preparing meals and supporting outreach for socially isolated and vulnerable members of the local community.

Student Justice Partnerships

Across all year levels and senior House groups, students engage in sustained partnerships with organisations supporting people experiencing disadvantage, inequality, and social exclusion. Through fundraising, awareness campaigns, and hands-on service, students will be encouraged to place the needs of vulnerable communities at the centre of their actions.

Students will support organisations including the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project, Saltbush Balnarring, St Mary's House of Welcome, St Kilda Gatehouse, and Big Group Hug. Initiatives will include environmental restoration projects, preparation of meals for people experiencing homelessness, collection of essential goods, and the sorting and packing of clothing, toys, and care items for families in crisis.

These partnerships will provide opportunities for students to deepen their understanding of social justice issues and recognise their capacity to contribute to meaningful and lasting change.

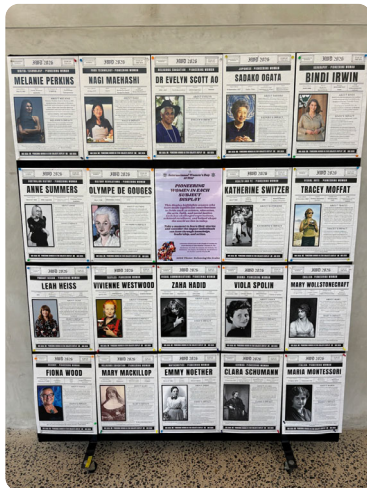
Important Weeks

Throughout the year, students participate in key justice awareness initiatives that deepen understanding of inequality and encourage action in support of vulnerable communities.

International Women's Day invited students to reflect on gender, justice and the dignity of women through activities such as school shout-outs celebrating kindness, subject displays highlighting pioneering women, and a student podcast featuring inspiring women from the Star community.

Engagement with The Big Issue

The Star Library continues to host Marion, our Big Issue vendor. Her onsite visits provide opportunities for students and staff to engage with the lived experiences of disadvantage, encouraging reflection on social inequality and dignity. Marion is a much loved member of our community, having developed a wonderful partnership with Star over several years.







Reflection for Lent

Lent: The fast I choose...

*Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?
Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter -
when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?
Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.
Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say, Here am I.
Isaiah 58:1-9*

When the chaos of this world feels overwhelming, let us pause.
Let us listen for wisdom and act from clarity rather than from fear.

May our hearts be anchored in the truth that we are one human family;
interwoven with each other, with Earth, and with all life.

May we recognise the dignity of every person,
the sacredness of every place.

May we strengthen our commitment to being people of justice,
especially where voices are silenced, where trust is fragile,
and where suffering is hidden from view.

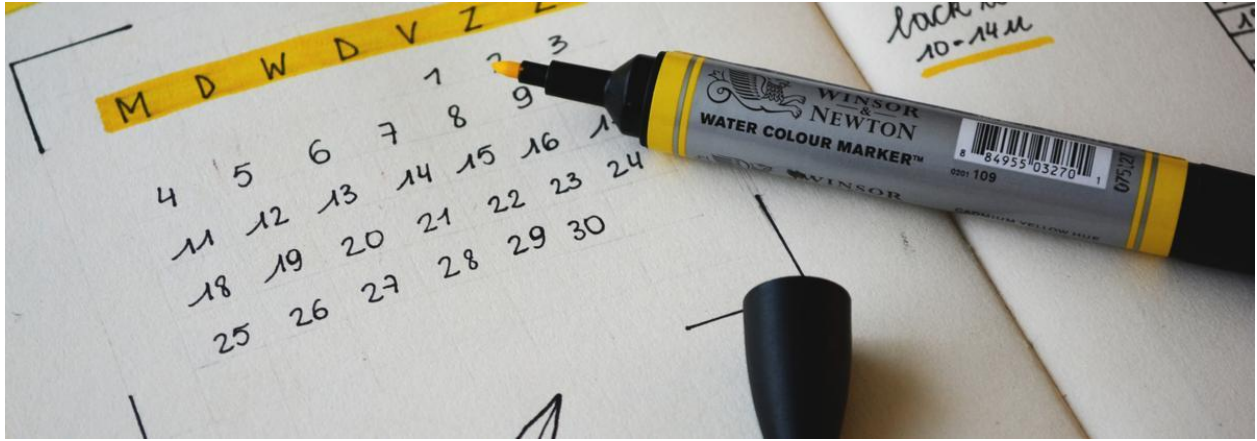
May our next steps be lit by Nano's lantern, guided by Brigid's lamp
and inspired by the Spirit of Jesus
Let us focus on each spark of compassion,
each courageous act towards justice,
each quiet offering of love.

And let these ground our hope
for a future that is more just for all,
especially the most vulnerable among us.

Jane Collopy



Sculpture by Timothy Schmalz timothypaulsmalz.com



2026 Calendar Dates

Network Meetings

KEM Business Managers

20 August

KEM Principals

21 May

13 August

KEM Risk Coordinators

21 August

KM Business Managers

14 May

6 November

KM Principals & Community Works Leaders

22 May

20 November

KM Risk Coordinators

6 May

29 October

Faith and Learning Leaders

12 May

1 September

Faith Leaders

17 November

First Nations Network

25 May

18 August

Staff Retreats & Immersions

Staff Integral Ecology Retreat

29 April to 1 May

Kildare Ministries Conference

26 to 28 August (St Joseph's College Echuca)

Induction

New Staff Induction (Part 2)

9 September (online)

Student Programs

Social Justice Seminar: First Nations Immersion

13 to 15 May (Araluen Camp)

Network Zero

6 to 7 August (Saltbush)

Senior Leadership Retreat

7 to 9 December