

MEDIA RELEASE
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Fr Chris Riley becomes the first Australian to receive prestigious international humanitarian award, joining previous recipients Mother Teresa and former President Jimmy Carter

On Friday 10 July 2009, Father Chris Riley AO, youth advocate, CEO and Founder of the charity Youth Off The Streets, will receive the 2009 Lions International Humanitarian Award. The Award will be presented in recognition of the humanitarian accomplishments he has achieved through 30 years of working with homeless and disadvantaged young people, both in Australia and overseas.

By receiving the award, Father Chris Riley joins a list of esteemed dignitaries including former US President Jimmy Carter, Mother Teresa and Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus. He is the first Australian to receive the award.

Fr Riley will be presented with this prestigious award at the 92nd Lions Clubs International Convention in Minneapolis, USA. The Lions International Humanitarian Award, the highest honour of the Association, includes a grant from the Lions Clubs International Foundation that will go towards continuing humanitarian activities through Youth Off The Streets.

"Father Chris Riley is an inspiration to all and a hero for disadvantaged youth," said Albert Brandel, president of Lions Clubs International. *"His efforts have made a tremendous difference in the lives of thousands of individuals and communities."*

Fr Riley is being recognised for his service to disadvantaged youth through the establishment of the Youth Off The Streets charity. The charity's mission is to provide all young people with the opportunity to achieve their greatest potential and to break the cycle of poverty, disadvantage and marginalisation. The organisation is achieving this mission through providing services that offer residential accommodation, education, early intervention and rehabilitation to young people in need.

Upon being invited to receive the Award, Father Riley commented:

"Lions Groups in Australia have always been great supporters of young people. This acknowledgement of the work we are doing at Youth Off The Streets is truly appreciated. Working with the greatest people in the world, the kids, is honour enough for me, but I appreciate the fact that Lions Clubs internationally have taken the opportunity to use this honour to highlight the humanitarian issues that are facing young people around the world," he said.

"It is especially pertinent to focus on youth issues in 2009, as it is children and young people who are the forgotten victims of this global financial crisis."

Financial difficulties put untold pressure on families who are already struggling to survive. In times of economic downturn we always see a corresponding increase in family breakdown, mental illness and homelessness. In Australia alone, conservative figures suggest a 10% increase in the incidence of recorded child abuse," he continued.

"No matter what the economy is doing, we must never close the door on a young person in need. This recognition will help Youth Off The Streets continue to increase our service provision and reach more young people in need over the difficult years ahead. For that, I am truly grateful. Thank you for this award," said Father Riley.

Since 1991, programs operated through Youth Off The Streets have helped over 70,000 young people. Youth Off The Streets now offers over 25 services including supported accommodation; counselling; detoxification; education; outreach; mentoring; and parenting programs for disadvantaged youth in Australia. Through the Youth Off The Streets Overseas Relief Fund, the organisation has also assisted hundreds of young people in need through supporting orphanages and partnering with aid agencies from Albania, East Timor, Indonesia, the Philippines and Tanzania.

Father Riley was recently appointed as a Member in the General Division of the Order of Australia (June 2006). He has previously been presented with the 2006 Human Rights Medal from the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2006 Austcare Humanitarian Award and the 2004 Prime Minister's Award for Excellence and Outstanding Contribution. He served as the NSW Australian of the Year in 2003.

To donate to Youth Off The Streets, please visit: www.youthoffthestreets.com.au

For any media request, please contact:

Youth Off The Streets: Email: lnam@youthoffthestreets.com.au / Ph: 9330 3543 / M: 0412 377 217

**Australian Child Protection Foundation Figures, 1 June 09*

Youth Off The Streets Mission:

Helping disconnected young people to discover greatness within, by engaging, supporting and providing opportunities to encourage and facilitate positive life choices.

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