

For immediate release

MEDIA RELEASE

Speaking up for families in National Families Week 2006 (14-20 May)

What do former Australian of the Year Sir Gus Nossal, TV morning show host David Koch, entertainers Leah Purcell and Jimmy Little, child advocate Barbara Holborow, celebrity chef Jason Roberts, and many of the members of a peak youth advisory body have in common?

The answer: They all value their families and have signed up to help spread the word about National Families Week 2006 (NFW 2006) to be held from 14-20 May.

National Families Week (NFW) is run by Australia's peak not-for-profit body promoting the needs and interests of families, Families Australia. It celebrates and highlights the critical role of families in Australian society and coincides with the UN International Day of Families on 15 May. Community groups, businesses and government departments around the country have registered more than 380 local events to reach over 90,000 people.

This year will focus on families with children aged 12 to 18 years and the important role of parenting. However, the CEO of Families Australia, Mr Brian Babington said that the slogan '*This National Families Week, take time for TLC – talking, listening, connecting*' was aimed at encouraging all Australians to take action – to really hear and connect within their families, and make special effort to do one or two new or different things to improve relationships.

"Australian families are diverse and each has a different way of connecting and relating. They're all worthy of respect and encouragement," Mr Babington said.

"All of the prominent Australians who've agreed to be ambassadors for NFW 2006 know from personal experience – whether as parents, grandparents, or young people – that good communication and listening skills are crucial to strong families."

"Families are stronger if they share time together, discuss commonalities and find ways to accommodate differences."

Mr Babington said research suggested that a strong, supportive family was a major priority for young people.

"Three big issues for young people are suicide, violence and substance abuse – these deserve special attention by the community," he said. "Young people face particular challenges as they experience transitions, including going from primary to secondary school and from secondary school to work or tertiary studies. The need for strong, supportive families at those times is especially vital."

Highlights of National Families Week 2006 will include a national launch at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney on Wednesday, 17 May; unveiling of a new Australian parenting website, www.raisingchildren.net.au; and the release of results of a survey commissioned by Families Australia to explore the attitudes of about 400 respondents towards family wellbeing, young people and parenting.

To arrange interviews with Brian Babington or NFW 2006 ambassadors (biogs overleaf), please contact Kirstie Parker on 0412-646 926 or Families Australia on (02) 6273 4885. For more information on NFW 2006 (including a list of registered public events) or to download the NFW 2006 logo, go to www.familiesaustralia.org.au.

Disclaimer: Families Australia cannot be held responsible for the personal opinions or views of NFW 2006 ambassadors.

11 May 2006

Ambassadors for National Families Week 2006

Sir Gus Nossal AC CBE FAA FRS is a distinguished research scientist whose work in modern immunology helped shape the scientific affairs of Australia for three decades. He received a knighthood in 1977, was made a Companion of the Order of Australia in 1989, and was named Australian of the Year in 2000. Now retired, Sir Gus is heavily involved in charitable work. He chairs the Strategic Advisory Council of the Bill and Melinda Gates Children's Vaccine Program which helps children in developing countries.

David Koch is co-anchor of *Sunrise* on Channel Seven and one of Australia's foremost and influential business and finance commentators. He is a committed family man. He and wife Libby have four children aged between 17 and 26 years. David is currently on the council of his daughter's school and is passionate about education. He has been involved in the Youth Off the Streets (YOTS) Scholarship Program helping young people realise their dreams for a positive future.

Singing legend **Jimmy Little** began his recording career in 1956 at the tender age of 19 years. Fifty years later, he's still touring – often supported by his grandson James Henry, an accomplished musician in his own right. In 2004, Jimmy was voted as a "National Living Treasure" and received an Order of Australia (AO) for his life in the entertainment industry and his ongoing work with indigenous education and health.

AFI-nominated **Leah Purcell**, 35, is a successful TV, film and stage actress, singer, dancer and writer. Her hit one-woman play 'Box the Pony' shared with national and international audiences how she grew up in a sleepy QLD town, the daughter of an Aboriginal mother and a white father. Her grandmother was a member of the stolen generation. Leah's mum died when Leah was just 18 years, only a month after the birth of Leah's own daughter Amanda now aged 18 years.

Outspoken social activist and former children's court magistrate, **Barbara Holborow OAM** raised her own daughter and eight foster children. Barbara retired in 1992 after 12 years on the bench and became the Patron of the Hope for Children Foundation, continuing to fight for children's rights. Barbara helped to establish free legal aid for children in NSW, a care court that deals with cases of neglect, and a special jail for first-time offenders aged 18-25 years.

Celebrity chef **Jason Roberts** drew inspiration from his grandparents who were caterers and ran a restaurant. After working in renowned Australian restaurants, he presented *Fresh* on the Nine Network for four years before pursuing his career in the USA appearing on such shows as *Good Morning America*, culminating in Jason hosting his cooking show *Jason Roberts Taste* which won two Accolade Awards in 2005. Jason will release his 2nd cookbook *Elements* worldwide in July this year. Jason has a 15-month-old son named Hunter.

The National Youth Roundtable brings together young people, aged 15-24 years, to discuss issues that have an impact on youth. It is managed by the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA).

NEW SOUTH WALES

Tania Tu Phuong Huynh, aged 17, is in Year 12 at Hurlstone Agricultural High School. She was named 2006 Young Vietnamese Australian of the Year by the Vietnamese community. Previously, Tania was a finalist in Girlfriend magazine's Girlfriend of the Year Competition. Her interests are youth suicide, peer, family and societal pressure, and youth involvement in politics, local community, entertainment and sport.

Serena Kent, aged 19, is studying Community Services and Business at Albury TAFE. She also works as a youth worker for Anglicare Youth and Family Services in Wagga Wagga and is a member of the NSW Youth Advisory Council. Serena's interests are youth disadvantage especially in rural areas, driver safety, and drug and alcohol issues.

James Orchiston, aged 19, is studying a Bachelor of Arts in Communications degree at the University of Technology Sydney. He is

majoring in political and sociological studies. James is interested in education, youth identification, patriotism, and homophobia.

Sarsha Woolnough, aged 20, works in real estate as a Marketing Manager, Accounts and Admin Coordinator. She is interested in education and employment in rural towns, equality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and encouraging youth to be active.

Sarah Joy, aged 24, has honours degrees in Arts and Social Work. She was Co-Chair of the National Rural Health Network and now works as a social worker for an early intervention mental health unit in Western Sydney. Sarah is interested in rural health, mental health and youth leadership.

VICTORIA

Susan Harch, aged 21, is studying Medicine at Monash University. She is interested in public health, healthcare for Indigenous Australians, health promotion, empowerment of disadvantaged individuals, and healthcare access for rural and homeless youth.

Violeta Matijevic, aged 17, is in Year 12 at St Francis Xavier College. She was a participant in the Greater Dandenong Youth Participation and Leadership Program in 2004. Violeta's interests are comparisons between public and private education, youth participation, and how cultural and racial issues impact upon young people.

Jamie Byron, aged 17, is in Year 12 at Sunbury Downs College. He is a member of the Youth Advisory Committee in his Local Government Council. He is interested in youth leadership, youth suicide, mental health, and employment and education for rural youth.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Lauren Jew, aged 18, works in a residential care unit for children in care. She is involved in a project called *Strong Culture, Strong Future* which seeks to divert Indigenous young people away from the negative influences of alcohol and substance misuse and domestic violence towards sport, recreation and other activities.

Ogy Simic, aged 17, is in Year 12 at University Senior College. He has been an active participant of the UN Youth Association (UNYA) of Australia and a dynamic member of his local Youth Advisory Committee. He is interested in the contribution of young people to the decision making process of government and issues that affect culturally and linguistically diverse young people.

Kate Wheldrake, aged 18, is studying Law and Arts at Flinders University. She is passionate and pro-active in environmental issues. Kate is interested in how Australia as a nation can live more sustainably, ensuring all young people have a voice in government/community and education, and helping and supporting young people living with cancer.

QLD

Ryan Barrett, aged 23, is studying Law and International Business at the Queensland University of Technology while working part-time in the roving 'street team' of a Brisbane radio station. Ryan was a police officer in the western suburbs of Sydney. He is passionate about the issues of youth crime, crime prevention, suicide, youth affairs and post school options.

Matthew Crossley, aged 18, is currently studying Public Policy at James Cook University in Townsville. Matthew comes from a large family with one brother and three sisters. He grew up on a cane farm in Proserpine and is interested in issues affecting young people in rural and regional areas. Matthew is a member of the QLD Youth Council.

ACT

Aidan Devitt, aged 20, is studying commerce at the Australian National University in Canberra. He is interested in the education of young Indigenous Australians, and improving dialogue between governments and young Australians.