

Schools AIDS Day is an event that originated in 1999, as the brainchild of Melbourne ABCTV journalist, Brian Haill, the founder of the Catholic AIDS-care charity known as The Australian AIDS Fund Incorporated.

He also deliberately chose mid-July as the best time for the event to be slotted into the schools' calendar.

Why? The simple answer was that up to that time most people in Australia would have thought that HIV and AIDS were horrors that only lived in far-away Africa, a dreadful disease that so ravaged the body that Africans themselves called it the 'slims' disease.

The disease, as a killer of millions (up to August 2007, it had killed over 25 million people throughout the world; is continuing to kill 3 million every year and is infecting 5 million every year..so that now about 40 million altogether are now infected).....and the fear of it is such that it breeds stigma and discrimination which helps to turbo-charge the global infection rate.

So?

But, suddenly, things changed in Australia.....a young girl, a pre-schooler in New South Wales..became a household word....her local community panicking because she was HIV positive....the first Australian child to be HIV infected via a blood transfusion. (Ironically, born prematurely, she was given some 11 blood transfusions and the last one...which saved her life...eventually killed it because it was later found to have been polluted by HIV).

The girl was Eve van Grafhorst...and her bravery in the face of a sickening discrimination....that drove the family right out of the country and into the welcoming arms of New Zealand...inspired journalist Brian Haill to establish The Australian AIDS Fund Incorporated as an HIV care organisation.

Subsequently, in 1999, he decided that Eve would be a much better focus for Australian schoolchildren rather than distant Africans. Australians, by pondering her short but courageous life, could see that stigma and discrimination was just as ugly in Australia as anywhere else. For that reason, the Schools AIDS Day, was celebrated on the nearest School day to July 17...her birthday. What could be a more appropriate date?

And so...he encouraged the Catholic Education Office in Melbourne to promote it in Melbourne's Catholic schools...a request readily embraced by then Director, Fr Tom Doyle. The Australian AIDS Fund Incorporated was the beneficiary of gold coin collections taken up in the schools to help it in its works.

The event was in danger of being lost in 2001 when Brian Haill briefly stepped aside from his leadership of The Australian AIDS Fund (before being re-elected and returning in 2002) and Brian asked the CEO to continue the event.

Now the event financially benefits "Catholic AIDS Ministry" an agency of Catholic Social Services Victoria . Catholic Social Services Victoria is the same peak body that had welcomed The Australian AIDS Fund into its ranks via Fr Norden many years before.

But, sadly and inexplicably, Eve no longer has her face or her place in the event any more.

Without advancing any reasons for it, the Catholic Education Office has also shifted the staging of the day from July to August.

Given that the event was originally designed to ward off the threat of hurt by stigma and discrimination....The Australian AIDS Fund Incorporated can only hope that Eve's vital place in the battle against HIV/AIDS in Australia will be full restored.

If it doesn't, it'll be a contradiction in terms.

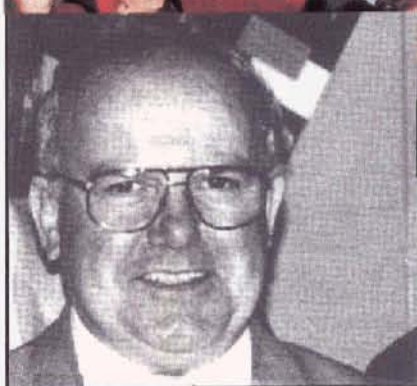
**Fr Tom Doyle:**

Photo by Kairos

SUPPORT SCHOOLS AIDS DAY 2000

Catholic Education Office Director, Fr Tom Doyle, urged Catholic primary and secondary schools to support Schools AIDS Day 2000 on 14 July. "It is important to remember how lucky most of us are compared to some in the community, including those people who have illnesses like HIV/AIDS," he said. "In wearing casual clothes, 14 July can be a fun day for students but also a day that carries an important message."

July 14 has been selected as Schools AIDS Day because it is the nearest school day to the birthday of one of Australia's most well-known AIDS patients, Eve van Grafhorst. Eve died at the tender age of 11 in 1993 but her brave fight against the deadly disease gained national and international media attention in the 1980s. Eve contracted AIDS after being given AIDS contaminated blood when she was a baby. She was banned from pre-school in Gosford, NSW, because of community ignorance and prejudice at the time. The family eventually moved to New Zealand to escape the media spotlight and community harassment. The Australian AIDS Fund was established 14 years ago in response to Eve's plight.

The inaugural Schools AIDS day, which was held last year, was a resounding success and organizers are hoping for a similar response this year. Money raised will be earmarked for the San Michel, Rosehaven and Camp Seaside programs. Any additional funding will be distributed to AIDS care projects in Thailand and Africa. Rosehaven in Melbourne is the only supportive accommodation for women and children with HIV in Australia, while San Michel caters for men with the disease.

The event will be launched at Melbourne High School by the Opposition Health spokesman Robert Doyle and Secretary of the Department of education, Employment and Training, Peter Allen.