



Helen Cross, MLA, "in jail" yesterday, receives a donation from Killion Banda, manager of the ACT Migrant Resource Centre. **Picture: MARTIN JONES**

Locals lock themselves into charitable action

By Marie Skelton

Prison has never been so inviting, with prominent Canberrans volunteering to be locked away for the Smith Family's annual Charity Gaol fundraiser at P. J. O'Reilly's Pub in the city yesterday.

Canberra's business leaders, politicians and sporting and media identities were put away while they tried to raise their bail, and funds for the Smith Family.

While sitting in the warm sun, drinking lattes and eating fine food is not most people's idea of hard time, Bill Morris, regional general manager of the Smith Family said the volunteers showed great community spirit.

"We try to make it as comfortable as possible so they can keep up their strength and keep calling [people for donations]." And he added, "No-one ever tries to run."

Independent MLA Helen Cross was aiming to beat her record from last year of about \$8000, and said she had a lot of support from people and businesses.

"Canberra businesses are great," she said. "And it's not just the big businesses,

it's the mum-and-dad businesses too."

Optus state manager George Nicola said he was waiting for a few people to get back to him.

He said people had been very receptive to the fundraiser, but he had received mixed reactions when he told people he was in jail.

"A few of them said it's about time, and there are a few who'd like me to never get out."

The Smith Family aims to raise more than \$50,000 from the two-day event to support its work in the Canberra region, and in particular the Learning for Life program.

Mr Morris said the program helped financially disadvantaged children to fit in at school.

"With the support from financial scholarships and the Learning for Life program, their confidence and self-esteem increases, they get better results, a better education, better jobs and a better life," he said.

"We're offering the opportunity to break the cycle of poverty, and education's the key to breaking that. It's a program that's changing young lives."