

# Going to the wall for Salvador

BY BILL PHEASANT

Superimposed on the drab brick walls of a Melbourne community health centre are childhood memories of life in the colorful and often violent world of El Salvador.

A new cultural mural at the Kensington Community Health Centre features a vision of life by 11 Salvadoran children, including their recollection of villages, churches, soldiers and schools from the small Central American country.

The mural stands taller than the artists, aged between six and 12, who attend Kensington Primary School.

They are also part of a Melbourne community of almost 4000 Salvadorans who have been refugees from the war-torn country since 1981.

The mural is a common art form in Central America, but it was two Australian artists who were initially responsible for inspiring the Kensington effort.

The idea followed a trip to El Salvador's neighbor state, Nicaragua, by artists Michele Braid and Ben Laycock.

The pair spent three months painting an Australian mural — complete with kangaroos and koalas — on a church in the capital Managua.

Back in Australia, the two artists helped teach the young Salvadorans to draw, while negotiations to find a suitable wall were underway.

Painting was held every Saturday morning for two months.

Tomorrow the mural will be officially opened by Health Department representatives who provided the \$300 needed for materials.

Mr Laycock said that he designed the mural from stories of tragedy and trauma the children had told him about their country.

Next to the painting, an accompanying text states: "There has been a civil war in El Salvador since 1980. Tens of thousands of people have been killed. Hundreds of thousands left homeless ... some have come to live here in Australia."

The smallest, most densely populated country in Central America, El Salvador and its people has suffered from political unrest for the past seven years.

Salvadorans say they have come to Australia to build new lives, far from the reported death squad atrocities, and a government strongly



Children from El Salvador, now living in Melbourne, painted this mural depicting their memories of life in their old country on the walls of the Kensington Community Health Centre. PICTURE: DAVID JOHNS

The Kensington children belong to Comunidad Salvadorena Unificada en Victoria, a group helping new arrivals from El Salvador to adjust to the Melbourne lifestyle.

They promote social and cultural activities such as

areas such as improving job skills, arranging English classes and providing child-minding facilities.

Vice-president, Mr Pablo Hernandez, said that the group wanted to give young people options other than

vide more services in the future. "We (already) run soccer and netball classes, but we only had \$500 for the whole operation. The discos here on Saturdays have 300 to 400 Spanish-speaking high school students. What can we offer