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Wills Update

News & stories from The Salvation Army Wills & Bequests team

Stabilising homeless families



Photo: Bev Lacey/APN

The Salvation Army's Stan Gittins and Lana Luxford outside the new Toowoomba offices.

“It is so sad that our service is just growing and growing. It would be lovely if we weren't needed any longer!” - Lana Luxford

While incredibly thankful for the opportunity to move into a new office building, The Salvation Army's Toowoomba (Qld) Crisis Accommodation service manager Lana Luxford says she would be very happy to close the service down, because that would mean that somehow the issue of local homelessness had been solved.

However, Lana says, the reality is the numbers of single men, families with children or single mums and dads presenting to the service continually grow.

The Toowoomba service had completely outgrown the old building, which was purchased many years ago by a bequest, and will be sold to cover the purchase of the new building.

The new offices act as an administration hub for 17 crisis houses, as well as case managers and a wide range of services.

She says: “My office was like a shoe box. We had one interview room for family crisis accommodation, men's crisis accommodation, the outreach worker, the budget counsellor – and it was so bad we actually converted one of the linen cupboards into a very, very small room for two support workers.

“We now have beautiful interview rooms and offices. Then we have a whole new section upstairs, with our new expanded Moneycare financial counselling service.”

As well as providing crisis accommodation, the service works intensively to support clients to deal with the issues that brought about their homelessness.

She says: “One lovely guy Greg* arrived after sleeping rough for some

time. His belongings were in a garbage bag and he was pushing a shopping trolley. Greg had a wild woolly hairdo down around his shoulders and a big full-faced beard.

“We put him into single men's accommodation and staff worked with him for two to three months.

“Greg moved on from us and somehow he managed to get two of the children back into his care.”

Lana says that the men's service manager Stan Gittins was distressed to hear Greg was living in a caravan park with the kids, so a team organised entry into The Salvation Army family crisis accommodation in Toowoomba.

She says: “Greg progressed beautifully.

“We got him into the base hospital into one of their drug and alcohol programs. He started coming to church and the kids got involved in our holiday programs.

“He ended up moving into his own rental home and we continued to work hard with him.”

He later got his third and fourth child back.

“He now runs his home so well for himself and his four children, cooks them lovely meals and the kids are just beautiful.

“Seeing this wild guy wandering in with his stuff in a garbage bag – I could never have imagined how things could change in a few short years,” she says.

*name changed

Help and hope for men in crisis

“To see the emotional condition of some of the guys who come in here, I’m sure if we weren’t there to help, the suicide rate would be much higher.

“We try to make a genuine difference in their lives, offering one-on-one counselling and looking at where they’re coming from, where they want to go and what steps are needed to take to get there.”

- Peter Woodward

They seek short term refuge for a variety of reasons, and many just need a hand up in a dark time to stop them spiralling into homelessness, dangerous depression or anger.

Many of the men who find refuge at the Griffith (NSW) Salvation Army Men’s Crisis Centre find themselves homeless after a relationship break up. Others are seasonal farm workers, whose jobs have dried up over recent years.

Some present with mental health issues, or issues from a dysfunctional past.

One section of the men’s service (which exists on two sites, with units in the community purchased several years ago with the generous assistance of bequest funding) recently underwent nine months of desperately needed refurbishment.

The refurbished crisis centre, originally built by volunteers from Griffith Lions Club around 40 years ago, was re-opened in August.

The bright, clean new rooms help to lift moods and expectations, says Peter Woodward who manages the centre.

Peter says: “I believe it makes a difference to have clean, pleasant surroundings, especially coming from a dark, drab situation at home, or out of jail where everything’s a grey colour. We’ve got the rooms painted brightly, not dark and dingy as they were.”

Peter says the greatest joy that he experiences is seeing lives transformed.

He says: “It is a joy just to see the broken guys coming through, and spending time with them, watching them heal and get their lives back on track.

“You take them as they are. If they need help, you give it to them.”



Photo: Lauren Jenkins

Residents enjoying the refurbished Griffith men’s crisis accommodation.

New building, new possibilities

The Salvation Army recently built 23 new units in the inner city suburb of Narrabundah (ACT), for (public) Housing ACT tenants, who are ageing and who were renting houses that had become too large for them.

Territorial Consultant Homelessness and Social Support Programs, Rhonda Gregory says: “This has not only provided a number of older people with a secure and beautiful new home but also freed up the larger houses for families who were desperately in need of stable accommodation.”

The new apartments, which are located in the same street as The Salvation Army’s Karringal Court Aged Care Plus centre, feature a 6-star energy rating to help tenants keep living costs down. Staff are also able to link any tenants in need into the wider support and counselling services of The Salvation Army.

“Narrabundah is a quiet inner city suburb. The new building faces a park and on the other side is a community garden. It is very peaceful and the tenants I’ve met say they’re really happy to be there,” Rhonda says.

Funding for the building was supplied through the Federal Government’s Nation Building Stimulus Plan, (with some additional funding from bequests to complete the project). Built on existing Salvation Army land, The Salvation Army managed the construction.

Rhonda says: “It is important that we pool resources with other organisations to get good outcomes for more marginalised people in our community.

“The building will be a great addition to our plans to increase the availability of community housing across The Salvation Army’s Eastern Territory. This is a key strategy in our future plans to help homeless and disadvantaged Australians.”

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Published by The Salvation Army Australia Eastern Territory Communications and Public Relations Department PO Box A229, Sydney South NSW 1232
Editor: Communications and Public Relations Secretary Phone: (02) 9266 9631 ©The Salvation Army 2012
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