



# A brighter future

The cycle of violence threatened to haunt Natalie and her son, Jason, for the rest of their lives. Thanks to the support of Wimmera UnitingCare, they can now live in peace.

**T**hroughout her teenage life, Natalie's father was extremely violent. The only place she could find solace was on the street, where she began taking drugs. Before long she had dropped out of high school and was selling her body.

Now Natalie has her own teenager, Jason, and a very violent ex-partner. She wants to give her son the opportunity she never had and is trying to clean up her life. But the

violent ex-partner bashed her so badly that she has almost totally lost her sight. When Wimmera UnitingCare was called in – Natalie was desperate.

The program workers spent many months with Natalie working through problems. It was a slow process as she had been dealing with deep-seated psychological issues.

The ex-partner also assaulted Jason so Child Protection and Family Services

became involved. To begin addressing their concerns, Natalie moved away with Jason to live out of town. Family Services assisted Natalie and Jason to get back on their feet and reconnect with their local community. Staff at Wimmera worked closely with Child Protective Services providing strong advocacy for the family to be kept together.

They provided the support of Wimmera's financial counselling service, and

also made it possible for Jason to return to school by providing his uniform and assisting with school grants to keep him engaged.

Today Natalie is much better. Jason is in school. They both have three meals a day and Natalie sees a counsellor every week. The future for this family is looking brighter.

*The names of the clients have been changed as requested by Wimmera UnitingCare.*



# Horses bring healing



The experience had a profound impact on Kane's self esteem. This was reinforced during the discussion he had with the program workers following the session. When he left the horse ring that day, his shoulders were square and his back absolutely straight and he was able to thank the trainers by looking directly at them.

Kane's Mum Cleo\* has given us permission to print this letter of thanks....

**“His slight frame was so stooped and his head so bowed that he couldn't look at them.”**

*My son Kane has been going to Horses for Hope since November 2008. Prior to going I couldn't take him out in public because*

*Kane would abuse and be racist to anyone that looked at him. I thought my son was a very nasty person, full of hate and anger (because of his past). I wasn't sure what he was capable of, hurting someone or something.*

*I didn't think there was much goodness in his heart. The day we went to 'Horses for Hope' this all changed, my son does better at school, is not as angry or abusive and has learnt life skills in confidence and being strong. He and I also learnt that underneath, Kane has a really soft heart. The horses love him; he has learnt how to be calm, to reflect on how he actually feels. Going to 'Horses for Hope' has given us hope for the future. It is like my son relieves his anger or is healed by the horses. I'm not sure how it works, I just know it does.*

*Yours Sincerely*

*Cleo*

*\*The names of the clients have been changed as requested by UnitingCare Cutting Edge.*

*Horses for Hope is a special program run by UnitingCare Cutting Edge using natural horsemanship techniques to communicate with and train horses. This in turn provides participants with unique opportunities for learning, healing and personal growth.*

**W**hen nine year old Kane\* arrived at Horses for Hope, the staff thought he had a physical disability.

His slight frame was so stooped and his head so bowed that he couldn't look at them. As it turned out this was not a physical disability but an extreme psychological one. Kane had been beaten so badly by his father that his posture was one of complete submission – he was too afraid to look anyone in the eyes.

Kane had no previous experience with horses so was understandably fearful to begin with but quickly grasped the concepts of equine communication. Kane was calm, honest and bold and, with the assistance of the trainer, he gained the horse's trust. By the end of the first session the horse saw Kane as his leader.



# Ali's story

Ali arrived at the Hotham Mission Asylum Seeker project badly traumatised. Suffering from psychological trauma, he had been sleeping in a park for almost a month. He was missing his family terribly and struggling to comprehend the massive upheaval he was experiencing.

Hotham helped Ali get back on his feet. They provided a Basic Living Allowance –\$33 a week – and a flat, with utilities paid. Their caseworker and tenancy worker supported Ali to regain his own strength.

Thanks to Hotham, Ali's life was turned around within two weeks. He reported that the distress he had experienced was "no longer there", and attributed this to having a safe place to live. Regaining his own capacities, he got work in a factory, and took on the lease and utilities in his own name. Hotham helped him find the other assistance he required, including free legal help to complete his claim for permanent residency. Sometimes the complexities of bureaucracy are very confronting for people with limited English and experience of our country's systems.

Ali no longer needs Hotham's help. He has a regular income and is enjoying the other benefits of working – a

sense of purpose, routine and relationships with colleagues. He has vacated the flat so it can be assigned to someone else, and finished with his case worker. He said life in Australia was now "better".



*SHARE's grant towards Hotham's Basic Living Assistance (BLA) program helps Hotham to avert destitution for more than 300 asylum seekers each year. The BLA program provides \$33 per person each week to asylum seekers who have no income. The most vulnerable have little hope of getting employment or housing. They are often people with complex needs flowing from the trauma they have suffered.*

*In some cases, referral to the Hotham ASP for BLA and casework support enables a person to turn back from the doorstep of destitution and quickly regain control of their lives. Ali's story illustrates this.*

Alan Stafford, the coordinator of the Uniting Church Fencing Team that rebuilt fences destroyed in the Black Saturday bushfires has been awarded a Paul Harris Fellowship for his work.

A Paul Harris Fellowship is a top award from Rotary International, given in recognition and appreciation of a substantial contribution to humanitarian and educational programs.

A volunteer fencer from Benalla, Alan has coordinated hundreds of volunteers from a range of different backgrounds.

Led by Alan, the Benalla Uniting Church crew were at

# Volunteer Honoured



the forefront of the various volunteer organisations who brought practical assistance, psychological support, humanitarian succor and, best of all, humour back into communities which had been devastated by

the bushfires. "The fencing has only been part of the process," Alan said. "Helping people has been the main aspect. We have had a lot of fun, and I am thrilled to have been awarded a Paul Harris

Fellowship." The work of the Fire Fencing Team, which was funded by the Uniting Church Bushfire Disaster Appeal, also helped to reunite once close-knit small neighbourhoods and communities who had previously – in the true rural Australian tradition of fierce independence – kept to themselves and stoically fought their own battles silently and without complaint.

Not only did they mend fences, but more importantly Alan and his crew mended lives, hearts, minds and spirits. To so many, the volunteers brought hope, renewed impetus, rejuvenated willpower and ambition to rebuild and carry on.



# No place like home



Ballarat UnitingCare's 'Youth Foyer'

**O**n 2 February 2011 a group of SHARE donors were fortunate to spend a day touring some of Ballarat UnitingCare programs with Executive Director Cliff Barclay. The objective of the day was to see first hand, how Ballarat UnitingCare services are delivered to some of the most disadvantaged individuals, families and groups from the Ballarat and Central Highlands districts.

We asked donors Joan and Neil Wilkinson to describe their day:

Recently we had the opportunity to join an excursion organised by SHARE to see for ourselves where some of their money is being spent.

**“I learned of the power of respect for individuals; that people make small and big steps on the road back to independence after a setback or shaky start”.**

The excursion was to Ballarat UnitingCare projects with particular focus on housing. It was an eye-opener. Of course human needs are all around us, you don't need to look far to see them. But rarely are those needs tackled with understanding, energy, determination, compassion tempered with a down-to-earth realism and a good dollop of business acumen.

The nerve centre of the activity is in a renovated assortment of church buildings clustered below the old worship centre in Lydiard St. As you wander through this maze of activity knowing that from humble beginnings a multi-million dollar enterprise has sprung to life in the last dozen or more years, you may be forgiven for thinking that it must have grown overnight.

Far from it! Every project is carefully thought through before it is commenced, and great creativity and skill is used to identify business opportunities, appropriate partnerships with government and non-government sources of funding, and engagement with the wider Ballarat community — far beyond the usual 'church-going' folk.



Some of the highlights included:

- Implementation of a ground-breaking initiative. This targets 10 key areas of life skills that young people generally fail to develop if they are homeless between the ages of 15-25 years. A brand new 'Youth Foyer' complex has just been completed and will provide housing and mentoring for these youth. They will be able to move out into 'normal' housing once they are assessed as having mastered these key living skills. It is hoped that this will break the circuit of failure for these young people and give them the chance to live a normal life.
- An ambitious project called 'Reid's Guest House' which was made possible by a charitable trust and UnitingCare Ballarat's purchase of a decaying old mansion in a prime position near the railway station. It is gradually being adapted into a supervised rooming house, as well as offering some modestly-priced 'motel rooms' for the general public.
- UnitingCare Ballarat is a major provider of housing for the disadvantaged, operating as landlord for 150 houses and another two rooming houses. These include housing for temporary and crisis accommodation.
- We lunched well at UnitingCare's 'BreezeWay' café that operates seven days a week to provide hot meals for those who need them. Even in that short time, it was possible to pick up the caring atmosphere that aims to provide nutrition, friendship and dignity.
- We visited the storeroom for the food bank that provides parcels of food for those in need. A notable recent donation was a large quantity of chocolate products from a local manufacturer, to be given to flood victims in the nearby Victorian towns of Beaufort and Creswick.
- Our final visit was to Tabor House, a rural drug and alcohol withdrawal centre at a rural property on the outskirts of Ballarat. This project is an initiative of Ballarat UnitingCare which provides a safe and supportive environment where young people aged 12-21 can withdraw from drugs and alcohol.

**“We were introduced to some of the most enthusiastic, energetic and entrepreneurial people - both staff and volunteers - that I have ever met, running an amazing range of projects and programs for the community of Ballarat and beyond. I would encourage all donors to take up any future opportunities to see for themselves what their money is doing ‘on the ground’. You will be inspired!”**

If you ever get the opportunity, we would highly recommend that you take a tour of Ballarat UnitingCare operations, to see what can be achieved through talent, imagination, generosity, compassion and faith.

To SHARE is human! Not to SHARE is inhumane! Neighbours come to us in various guises, and we, and they, are the losers if we don't grasp the opportunities the Spirit gives.

Joan & Neil Wilkinson





# A model Christmas gift



In December 2010, SHARE received a surprise phone call from one of its major donors.

He said he had about 20 1:25 scale diecast model cars ranging from vintage 1930s racing cars to modern cars of the 1990s that he would like to give to children or teenagers in need.

The collection had belonged to his late father, and rather than keep them on display, he wanted them given to a number of children who would really enjoy them.

The timing was perfect as Christmas was upon us. Hasty phone calls

and emails to a number of UnitingCare agencies elicited, "Yes please, we certainly do have kids who'd love to receive such a gift". They were repackaged, boxed and delivered to the agencies just in time to be included in Operation Santa.

**"...her brother had been through a very emotional and traumatic time recently and this gift would help restore his faith in humanity".**

Agencies set up rooms with toys sorted into gender and age groups, from which parents could come and select toys to wrap for their children who may

otherwise receive nothing. And so, all the model toys found new homes.

One mother from UnitingCare Sunshine who has a 12-year-old son with special needs, told us he was "absolutely thrilled" to get his car on Christmas

day. The car is proudly displayed on the top shelf of a cabinet in the lounge room and he gazes at it "with amazement". The older sister of

another young boy from Broadmeadows UnitingCare said he was "really rapt and appreciated the sentiment behind the donor's generosity". She said her brother had been through a very emotional and traumatic time recently and "this gift would help restore his faith in humanity".

On behalf of all the children who received model cars, SHARE would like to extend our sincere thanks to this donor and to acknowledge that while these cars were gifted anonymously, a number of children in need are now treasuring them.



# More than a soup kitchen



to assist with the cooking, clean-up and setting up. It's much more of a community thing," Rev Barker said.

"The style we can offer provides an environment beyond food that people find helpful."

Some comments from people having lunch:

*"It makes me feel better. It feels better to be helping and giving back to the community. Other places have soup kitchens but the Uniting Church is dedicated to helping people and it makes you want to be part of it."*

*"The lunch is a valuable thing for me. I haven't got anybody at home to talk to so it's a good social outlet as well as providing a good healthy meal."*

*"I really look forward to Wednesdays. This is a place that I can come to where I can feel safe and happy. And the food's pretty good too. Once, when I hadn't had a meal for a while, we had meatloaf and it was the best meal I've ever had."*

*"I enjoy it and I am meeting new people. It helps me to see people coming in for food, people that perhaps wouldn't normally eat such a good meal. It gives me something to do and I look forward to it."*

**W**arrnambool Uniting Church's Community Lunch provides food, friendship and support to between 25 and 40 people each week.

The SHARE-funded program gives people the opportunity to help prepare and share a free healthy meal with others in a welcoming environment.

Rev Geoff Barker says the lunch is open to everyone and is a safe place for people who are lonely, have a low income or mental health issues to go to. It helps people develop a sense of community.

"The philosophy is it is a community lunch not a soup kitchen...The people are involved. We encourage them

## SHARE Community Appeal



**Yes!** I want to **SHARE** with others

*Donations of \$2 and over are tax deductible*

130 Little Collins Street, Melbourne VIC, 3000  
GPO BOX 4355, MELBOURNE VIC, 3001  
Ph: (03) 9251 5251 Fax: (03) 9251 5491  
Email: [shareinfo@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:shareinfo@victas.uca.org.au)  
Web: <http://www.shareappeal.org.au>

**Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss/Dr/Rev** (circle)

First Name ..... Surname .....

Address .....Suburb.....State.....Postcode.....

I wish to make a single donation of \$.....

Cheque  Money Order  Visa  Mastercard  Amex

I wish to make a regular donation of \$ ..... each

month  3 months  6 months  12 months

Credit card details

Expiry date: \_\_ / \_\_

Card holder name .....

Signature .....

Email .....



# A lasting legacy

In 2007, John, then in his late 70s, met Tom, a shy and quiet 15-year-old student. They “immediately hit it off,” as John put it, and this became the start of a lasting friendship as John became an adopted member of Tom’s family.

Tom and John were participants in a multi-media storytelling project called the Positive Ageing Digital Storytelling Intergenerational Project (PADSIP).

It brings together students from Hawthorn Secondary College and the Elgin Street Centre, a nearby day activity program for older adults run by Uniting Aged Care.

The students and older people meet together, exchange stories and develop a short story using photographs, video, narrative, music and art work. Tom and John made a five-minute digital story together entitled “Comparing Lives” which highlighted their commonalities and differences and included John singing, “Melancholy Baby”.

Over the next few years their friendship grew closer and in October 2010, in celebration of a special community award for the program, Tom and John were invited to be guest speakers. Tom was completing his final

year at school and John, despite greater frailty, was still involved in the program.

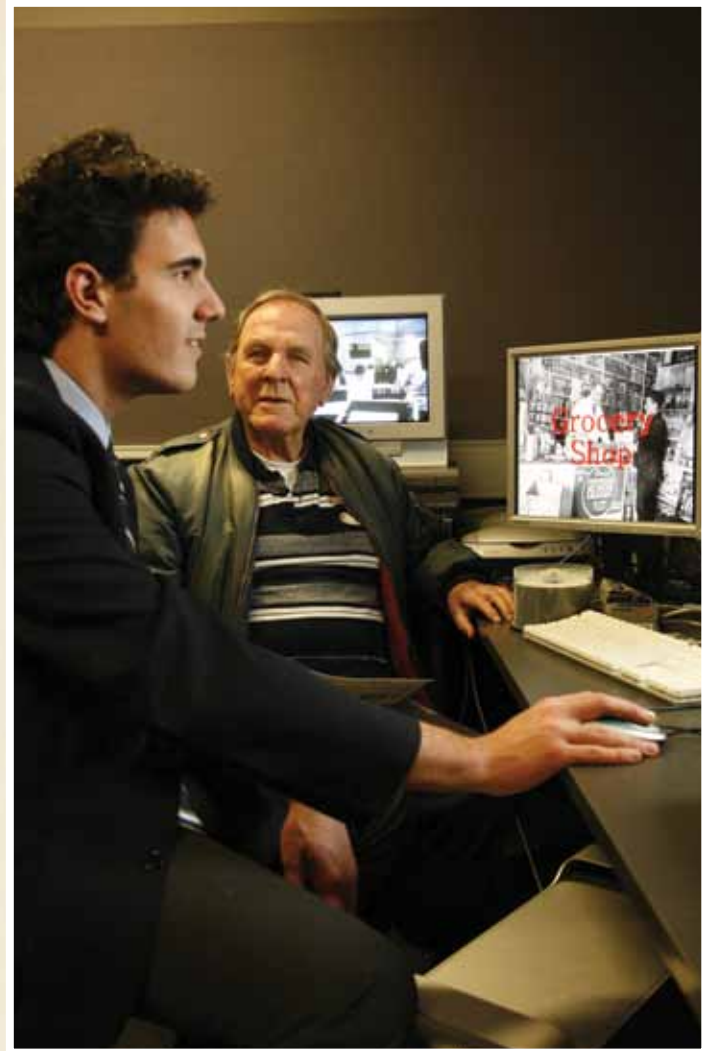
John said he had been “a drifter most of his life” and was “in a hell of a mess” with his increasing visual loss, mounting health concerns and his sadness about being seriously ill. John had long lost contact with his family and felt quite alone.

But then John’s voice grew louder as he remarked that when he met Tom, he “warmed to his family’s warmth”. He spoke about the great pride he had watching Tom grow from a shy reserved boy, blossoming into a young man of independence and being able to give expression to his impressive intelligence and capabilities.

John said if he had had a son he would have wanted him to be like Tom. John took great joy in being a mentor. He became a mentor for several other students too.

**“John said if he had had a son he would have wanted him to be like Tom.”**

When John became terminally ill, Tom was there by his bedside, supported by his parents and family. For Tom it was a natural thing for him to do. “Of course



that is just what you do,” Tom said. “You would sit there all day, play John’s favourite music and put headphones on him so that he could be soothed by songs he loved like

“Danny Boy” and “Autumn Leaves”.

John died peacefully with his good friend by his side. In delivering John’s eulogy, Tom expressed his gratitude for having John introduced into his life and for being able to

give John some sense of family and belonging.

How proud and at peace John would have been to hear such things from a young boy turned man.

John has left a legacy of everlasting gifts. John’s humanity, his love and the importance that he placed on connection and friendship not only have passed to Tom but also to all of us.

To find out how you can support the work of Uniting Aged Care visit [www.uacvt.org.au](http://www.uacvt.org.au)