



SHARE snapshots

Spring 2011



Shakespeare's finest

Regular visitors at the St Kilda Drop-in Centre were able to channel their personal setbacks into an impressive performance of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* thanks to Melbourne theatre company, Inotrope.

St Kilda's busy strip of shops in Carlisle Street is known for its eclectic mix of young professionals, buskers and hipsters — set amongst the more tempered milieu of the homeless.

The vibrant community hub has found a way to combine these unique characteristics into a creative partnership.

Melbourne theatre company, Inotrope, collaborated with the St Kilda Drop In Centre in creating an acclaimed production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

The collaboration of the drop-in centre's amateur drama group, many of whom suffer significant mental health problems, and a professional theatre company, may at first glance appear mismatched.

"I'm not really sure who came up with the idea, but someone

suggested the drop-in centre's drama group collaborate with Inotrope's production of Maxim Gorky's *The Lower Depths* in 2009," St Kilda UnitingCare CEO Shane Lawlor said.

It was thought regular visitors to the drop-in centre who suffer from an array of drug, alcohol, physical and mental health problems would add some grit to Gorky's classic play depicting the most impoverished and marginalised in society.

"Since then it's been a story of collaboration from start to finish," Sharon Kirschner, who established the drop-in centre's drama group three years ago, said.

"From the outset of putting this production together both groups workshopped and discussed the themes of journey and reality and the idea of a good society," Ms Kirschner said.

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From the Director



With floods in both Queensland and Victoria and earthquakes in Christchurch and Japan, disasters have been top of mind for many of us this year.

When news broke about each disaster, every Australian was shocked by the damage. Homes demolished in a matter of seconds. Entire families instantly made homeless.

Businesses damaged beyond repair. The scale of disruption to life as we know it was enormous and the magnitude of the recovery effort difficult to comprehend.

Thanks to the generosity of donors, SHARE has now raised over \$1.3 million for the disaster recovery efforts. \$153,597 has been forwarded to New Zealand partner churches and \$27,936 to UnitingWorld's Japan Earthquake Appeal. The Queensland Flood and Cyclone Appeals received \$511,403 which is being distributed through the UCA National Disaster Relief Fund. SHARE is managing the Victorian Flood Appeal which has raised \$610,837. To date \$402,250 has been distributed to emergency relief and back to school expenses, the work of chaplains and community workers in flood affected regions and the training of Lifeline volunteers coping with extra demand as a result of the floods.

The Uniting Church recognises that the rebuilding and recovery process from both floods is an ongoing task. We are committed to working closely with local groups to ensure the appropriate allocation of the remaining funds to best meet the long-term needs of effected individuals and communities.

Closer to home there are people in our communities whose sole focus has been on daily survival for themselves and their families. This year SHARE received 95 grant applications totalling \$1.5 million. In a year in which disasters have been constant, your generosity has made it possible for us to distribute \$927,934, helping people in crisis in our communities. Please see page six for a full grants listing. I am overwhelmed by the spirit of generosity from each of you.

Many thanks and kind regards,

David W Hickey
Director, SHARE



A welcoming meal

Food is a simple thing that transcends cultural and socio-economic barriers. It brings people together, provides a hobby for cooking enthusiasts and most importantly gives essential sustenance to the body.

All these elements are the reason people gather each week at the Chelsea Community Breakfast to share in the most important meal of the day.

What started as merely an idea of some of the local churches as a way to reach out to the community, came to fruition when a cook with a "heart for the people" offered her skills. This led Neil Peters of Chelsea Uniting Church and Steve Rose of Chelsea CareWorks to partner together and organise, with church and community support, what is now attended by people from varied walks of life. "We didn't want to just attract homeless people, but everyone in the community," Mr Peters said.

Funded by SHARE, one of the aims of the breakfast has been to encourage marginalised members of society to improve their social skills by mingling with new faces – which has been proven to increase confidence and employability skills.

Among the guests that attend the weekly event are local business people, eager to share their advice about the work place.

Now in its second year, the popularity of the Wednesday morning breakfast led organisers to introduce a Thursday lunch.

Mr Peters said up to 80 people attended the breakfast which included bacon, eggs and sausages and around 30 have started attending the Thursday lunch which has only been running a few months.

"Some of the people who attend are homeless, some have mental illness issues – and some people just don't want to eat alone. We attract a number of people with disabilities because of the loneliness factor," Mr Peters said.

Meals are served between 8am and 10am every Wednesday morning at 3-5 Blantyre Ave Chelsea and Thursdays between 11.30am and 1.00pm.

Shakespeare's finest

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Not surprisingly the close knit community amongst visitors and staff at the drop-in centre has fostered an environment that encourages all involved to flourish despite difficult circumstances.

"Participants are given an opportunity to move away from seeing themselves as patients towards someone who can contribute and give something back," Mr Lawlor said.

"I've seen people who when first met were unable to string a sentence together – let alone be up on stage performing in a professional production."

"The audience can't tell the amateurs from the professionals. It has been a transformation that takes people out of their daily lives and gives them an opportunity to be recognised in a different light," Mr Lawlor said.

For long stretches of time Mark, a regular visitor to the drop-in centre, found it simply unbearable to face the outside world. Struggling with serious health problems, being a part of the drama group has given him a much needed link to mainstream society.

"It was a reason to get out of bed and makes you feel important. Even just getting you active in that fun and laughing environment. There is always lots of laughter when we get together," Mark said.



"Participants are given an opportunity to move away from seeing themselves as patients towards someone who can contribute and give something back"

"Opening night was outstanding and so emotional, it was a feeling I've never felt before," Mark said.

The production received national media exposure and a string of acclaimed sell-out performances were held at Theatre Works in Melbourne. "The performances have allowed people to redefine themselves as actors and not patients," Ms Kirschner said.

In many ways this unlikely partnership embodies much of SHARE's work in its ability to partner with an array of seemingly disparate groups to achieve something special where it is needed most.

"All the work we do is heavily dependant on funding, whether it be private donations or funding from our supporters," Mr Lawlor said.

"And given the success we've had to date we defiantly hope to continue this program."

Originally established by parishioners in the adjacent Uniting Church, the St Kilda UnitingCare Drop In Centre, offers a range of activities and support programs for its regular visitors and is heavily reliant upon the generosity of supporters such as SHARE.

Images by Paul Dunn



It does get better

On a cold, drizzly winter day in Healesville, it was hard to imagine the conditions people faced when the Black Saturday fires raced through the hills and destroyed so many lives.

The launch of author Kate Wilson's book, *Can we go home now?* was a time to reflect on the tragedy faced by many and celebrate the recovery that has happened since.

The sequel to *Black Saturday was my dad's birthday* takes readers on a painful, hopeful journey faced by those who lost everything in the summer fires of 2009.

Ms Wilson again narrates through the voice of her son, only this time she accompanies his observations with journal entries reflecting the reality of the adult world. This parallel narrative allows readers to view the recovery process through the naive and innocent eyes of a child, while also experiencing the situation from an adult's perspective.

For example, the 'big shop' Kirk writes about is in fact a relief centre, filled with goods donated for bushfire survivors. While the little boy is happy with his new rollerblades, we know his mother is confronted with feelings of shame for accepting help from others. "It was tough walking in there and accepting charity."

We also get some sense of the many stages of recovery. While 'mum' writes about her relief that all the family are safe – "we could have been a statistic" – she must deal with the reality of facing a tragedy of enormous proportions. It is an emotion common to many who survive a catastrophe that takes the lives of others, the grief and sadness is accompanied by guilt. After all, the survivors are the lucky ones.

For Kirk, the adventures of living in different houses is accompanied by a feeling of homesickness. He wants life to return to normal. The take-a-ways soon lose their appeal, as he longs for mum's home-made bolognese. When mum finally takes a pot for cooking, we know the recovery process has begun.

The pot also signifies the enormity of the loss suffered by those who lived through Black Saturday. Many families were left with just the clothes on their back. The family slowly begin to piece their life back, collecting the things they have lost. A donated fridge and washing machine, an old couch left out in the hard rubbish, all help as the family try to return to some semblance of normality.



Physically, the signs of recovery in the affected areas are easy to see. New houses have sprung up in bushland regenerated since the fires. As Ms Wilson said at the launch, it is the emotional regrowth that is harder to capture.

"Writing the book has been a cathartic experience for me," she said. "Not only has it allowed me to reflect on what we have been through, it has also made me consider how this experience has affected individuals in the family in different ways."

Ms Wilson has been encouraged by the feedback she has received from both books.

"People who have been through the fires have said it has really helped them to know they were not alone in how they dealt with things," she said. "And for others, I think it has given them some insight into what the survivors have been through."

Can we go home now? was produced with funds from the Uniting Church Bushfire Disaster Appeal. Five hundred copies will be distributed free of charge to schools and families in the bushfire affected areas.

To purchase Kate's books please visit <http://www.katewilsonauthor.com.au/books.html>



Responding to urgent needs

The people who walk through the doors at UnitingCare Werribee Support and Housing (UCWS&H) are experiencing all manner of harsh circumstances. Some struggle with unemployment or simply the rising costs of living, others face the stark realities of homelessness, mental illness and drug addiction.

As UCWS&H CEO Carol Muir reflects on her time at the agency, a recurring thread harkens back to those in the local congregation who simply sought to help where they saw a need.

"The congregation was really concerned about the issue of youth housing and some were even putting up young people in their own homes. Those volunteers established Werribee Youth Housing and the whole agency grew from there.

So it's very much a grassroots agency supported by the local community," Ms Muir said.

Now situated in one of the fastest growing municipalities in Australia, UCWS&H often faces the struggle of how to best manage its limited resources. "There are huge needs in Wyndham around the unaddressed issues concerning physical and human resource infrastructure," Ms Muir said.

"Ten years ago the population of Wyndham was about 70,000 now it is getting close to 200,000 and there is a growth of up to 400,000 expected by the year 2020. Support infrastructure is yet to catch up to the basic needs of the community."

The necessity to stretch the agency's services across the region has fostered an ethos of structuring support services that respond directly to the needs of those most vulnerable in the community.

The agency currently provides an array of youth, housing, support and emergency relief programs offering clients, some of the community's most vulnerable individuals, a holistic range of support services.

"There's no real easy system to distribute emergency relief. We have to keep reviewing it all the time and once funding runs out we have to rely on donations until the next lot of funding comes through," Ms Muir said.

"I think we need to be and have always been innovative in creating the ways of delivering services to the community. I have a philosophy if something doesn't work out something positive will happen down the track."

During the last financial year, more than 4,000 individual food vouchers and an additional 1,300 food parcels were provided to residents through UCWSH support programs. Despite this there are always increasing demands on services and a struggle to support those most vulnerable in the community.

"This past financial year there has been a much higher demand on our services," Ms Muir said. "More and more people were lining up for emergency food vouchers and becoming distressed about missing out. When we saw this happening we thought – if people didn't stand in a line

there'd be less stress, queue jumping and anxiety about missing out.

"It's sad we've got to do this because people are so financially vulnerable that they need to come in that early and we thought; what can we do to make it more bearable for them?," Ms Muir said. "So our staff and volunteers started doing a barbeque breakfast in the morning because it was so cold.

"People were really delighted and we found they would move around and socialise with one another making the whole experience less confronting," Ms Muir said. "That was one of the outcomes of us recognising the need of a particular group of vulnerable people."

Known throughout the region for its commitment to the community, the agency continually seeks to address the immediate and underlying problems as they are experienced in the community.

"We try to find out about people, how they feel about being in line, the issues in their lives and why they are standing in that line and what they think about our services," Ms Muir said. "Many of these people are homeless and people who are homeless are in crisis literally every day."

Commenting on the support the agency receives from the community, Ms Muir is quick to note SHARE's ongoing support as being critical to the day-to-day running of the agency and its support services.

SHARE recently provided funding for a staff volunteer coordinator to support and assist the agency's small army of 65 dedicated volunteers. "We really need and are grateful for all the support we receive," Ms Muir said.

"To be able to support our volunteer base through SHARE's grant has been so vital for us, it's hard to put a price on that sort of support really. It really has been a godsend."



SHARE Christmas Cards

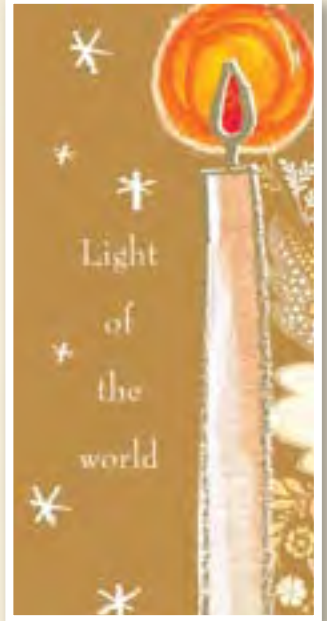


1. Shepherds in the field

Sentiment: May the joy and peace of Christmas be with you now and throughout the New Year

Bible verse: "Now when the angels had gone from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another 'Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us' " Luke 2:15

Size: 210mm X 99mm



4. Light of the World

Sentiment: May your Christmas be filled with love and light

Size: 90mm X 180mm



2. Dove of Peace

Sentiment: Wishing you peace and happiness at Christmas
Size: 127mm X 127mm



3. Bethlehem

Sentiment: Peace, goodwill and happiness to you at Christmas
Size: 127mm X 127mm



5. Three Kings

Sentiment: Wishing you all the joys of Christmas and happiness throughout the year
Size: 127mm X 127mm

All proceeds from the sale of these cards will support the work of SHARE.

Thank you for your support.



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

SHARE 2011 CHRISTMAS CARD ORDER FORM

Card (\$7.50 for a pack of 10 cards)	Quantity	Total \$
1. SHEPHERDS IN THE FIELD		
2. DOVE OF PEACE		
3. BETHELEHEM		
4. LIGHT OF THE WORLD		
5. THREE KINGS		
6. MIXED PACK Contains 2 cards of each design		
*Postage and handling charge Up to 3 packs = \$6.50, 4 or more packs = \$7.50		
All prices include GST		TOTAL \$

Name _____

Address _____

Post Code _____ Telephone _____

Cheque enclosed Money order enclosed

Please debit my: Visa Mastercard Amex

Credit card details:

□□□□ □□□□ □□□□ □□□□

Expiry Date _____ / _____

Cardholders name _____

Signature _____

* Note all cards are post office preferred sizes
Please return your completed order form to:
PO Box 24154, Melbourne VIC 3001