

Community in Mission

Garrawang - Biderap | Christmas – Epiphany



I recently visited Bendigo, where I preached at the Bendigo South Cluster at Chum Street Uniting Church, and joined in the induction service at Eaglehawk of their new minister Rev Deacon Janet Munro (former school chaplain at Penleigh and Essendon Grammar School).

Hi there!

I've now been in my role as Church Engagement Worker at Uniting for just more than a year. I want to take this opportunity to share what I've seen as I've been out and about across Uniting and the wider Synod.

During the past year I've connected with Uniting services and congregations in every Presbytery across the Synod – I haven't been everywhere, but I've covered as much ground as I could.

I've visited congregations and offices in Gippsland (including Bairnsdale, Paynesville and Sale), in the Wimmera (Horsham & District), Albury-Wodonga, Wangaratta, Bendigo, Tasmania (including Hobart, Launceston, and Devonport), and across metro-Melbourne (from South Melbourne to Hampton Park, and Brunswick to Croydon North).

I've also had the opportunity to connect with some Uniting Church associated schools through events on leadership and sustainability.

Everywhere I go, I find incredible people working towards the "new order of justice and love" which Jesus embodied. And I've met longstanding volunteers from congregations who generously serve their communities.

I've met social workers, housing officers, early learning educators, alcohol and other drug specialists, justice advocates, policy makers, archivists, communications and information technology professionals, finance and other support office staff, all of whom have chosen to unite together to work toward a better world.



Uniting is the community services organisation of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania.

Uniting

As someone deeply embedded in the life of the Uniting Church, my year at Uniting has made me incredibly proud of our church.

I'm proud of the countless faithful people in congregations witnessing to the good news that reconciliation and renewal is the end in view for the world, not isolation and despair.

And I'm proud of the passion and professionalism of Uniting's paid and unpaid workforce who are uniting for a more inclusive, connected and just future for all.

We reflect this vision of the future through our practices of hope in the present. At Uniting, our embrace and celebration of all people as part of our work is an important way in which we remain faithful to our founding vision.

Our common vision commits us to the work of truth-telling and reconciliation with First Peoples. Our work is made possible by the contributions of people from diverse faith traditions and none, people with visible and hidden disabilities, people who identify as part of diverse rainbow communities, and people who are culturally and racially marginalised.

This is what mission is all about: the unfolding story of life and love at work in an often-difficult world – a big story in which each of us has a part to play. Jesus showed us what this life and love looks like by proclaiming justice, serving those in need, and living and dying in solidarity with the suffering of the world.

As we look forward to the Christmas season, and the joy and hope of the new year, my invitation is to keep telling the stories of justice, service and solidarity that are given life and form across the Uniting Church. It is my hope that all of us find our place in the big story of God's life and love at work in the world.

Justice, service and solidarity are values I see throughout all our work at Uniting. In particular, through some of the programs we deliver despite a lack of secure funding. Highlighted over the following page, these programs are deeply valued by Uniting because they deeply reflect our values.

**May the blessing of God,
dwelling love birthed among us
fragile child in human care
breath of life filling fresh lungs
be with you in this Christmas season.
Amen.**



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matt Julius', enclosed within a circular scribble.

Matt Julius
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The Asylum Seeker Welcome Centre

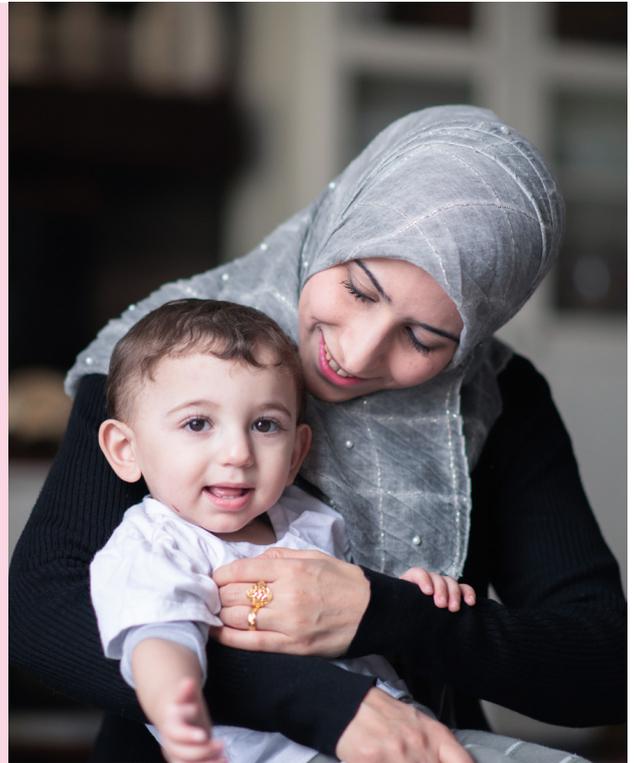
Newly re-opened next to the Brunswick Uniting Church after a fire in 2024, the Asylum Seeker Welcome Centre provides support for people who often have no access to other supports.

As we look towards Christmas and hear again the story of Jesus' own family experiencing forced displacement, we're invited to respond in compassion to those who share the experience of having to flee their homes.

Many congregations have a deep heart for asylum seekers and refugees – how might we work together to expand the impact of our support? If you'd like to explore how you can support this important work reach out to me and let's start a conversation.



Find out more about our services for new arrivals.



Consumer partnerships

Uniting's consumer partnerships work seeks to embed solidarity with our consumers in how we deliver services.

“Consumer partnerships are the way consumers and carers influence, direct or decide who we are, what we do and how we do it.

“Consumer partners are people who have used services in the past, or currently use a service, and now share their expertise and lived experience to create change with Uniting.

“A core principle of consumer partnerships is power sharing – moving from ‘doing to’ people, to ‘doing with’ people – strengthening the relevance, accessibility and responsiveness of Uniting's services.

“There's an exchange that occurs for us all when we partner in this way – our sense of purpose, confidence and social connection grows as we create change together.”

– **Lizzy Yu and Bryn Williams, Consumer Partnerships Team**

Examples of partnerships include consumers leading working groups, co-developing programs, participating on workforce interview panels, shaping and co-facilitating training, contributing to policy and communications, and providing leadership in governance, steering or advisory groups that guide the organisation.

Recently, consumer partners have contributed to:

- Forming the goals and initiatives in the Uniting 2030 Strategy
- Improved the rent review process for residents in Uniting housing
- Evaluated consumer survey data from the Family Preservation and Reunification Response program, so that lived experience is embedded
- Made Uniting's Alcohol and Other Drugs web pages clearer, more accessible and more useful for people seeking support
- Supported the recruitment of 63 Uniting workforce members.



Learn more about our consumer partnerships.

Emergency relief and community meals

Emergency relief offered across Victoria and Tasmania, and community meals programs (No Bucks in Hobart, Hartley's in Prahran and Breezeway in Ballarat) offer direct support when people need it most.

These programs are offered in ways which honour the inherent dignity of each person, and their agency in receiving support. This year these programs were impacted by significant funding reductions, and now – more than ever – your support is needed to continue this work to serve those in need.

Your congregation can help by collecting food as part of Food For Families, which provides donations for all our emergency relief programs.



Find out more at
foodforfamilies.org.au

Uniting's Heritage Service

Uniting's Heritage Service shows what restorative justice looks like. Supporting people to make sense of their own story and reflecting a commitment from Uniting to take responsibility for history shared with the Uniting Church.

“Uniting's Heritage Service is a free service which supports people and their families affected by adoption, or who lived in different forms of out-of-home care.

“These childhood experiences can have long-lasting effects on people as they deal with memories, emotions and questions from that time. Sometimes, children did not receive the care that they needed while in our care and this service works with people to find ways to acknowledge past injustices.

“If you, or someone you know, is curious to find answers about the past, our service welcomes you. Our caring staff will listen to your story and then find and provide you with copies of your records.”

– **Chris Wade, Manager, Uniting Heritage Service**

The Heritage Service team also manages the historical records created by the Presbyterian, Methodist and Uniting agencies who ran out-of-home care and adoption services. If you have any questions about this service, or become aware of any out-of-home care records or memorabilia at a Uniting Church site, please contact Chris Wade via **0402 969 621** or christopher.wade@vt.uniting.org.



Learn more about
our Heritage Service.

Pancake Day

Flip for a good cause. Since 2002, Pancake Day has raised over \$2.4 million for local communities across Victoria and Tasmania.

Pancake Day is a great chance to get together, have some fun and make a difference. Funds raised are used by Uniting to help some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in our communities.

These range from emergency relief for families facing food crisis, to supporting homeless people into permanent accommodation; from finding work for people with disability to supporting those newly arrived, needing safety and a welcoming community.



Find out more.
unitingvictas.org.au/pancake-day

