

Community in Mission

Waring – Guling | Ordinary time

(02)

The land is moving into the season of Wombats (Waring) and Orchids (Guling); the Christian calendar is now simply counting 'ordinal' time. This season invites us to see the orchids in the fields, free of worry. And it asks us how we give life and form to the work of justice and peace in the simple rhythms of our everyday lives.

One of the ways we do this is through sharing power and centring the voices of those in need. In the Bible, the Apostle Paul recasts the Graeco-Roman metaphor of the body from one of hierarchy, to one of inter-dependent community. For Paul, the body shares power; each part has its role within the whole and none are useless.

This metaphor can be helpful for thinking about Uniting's work. Our work is at its best when we recognise everyone's place within the whole, particularly Uniting consumers*. Uniting's committed to empowering the voices of the people we support through our Consumer Partnership Framework. You can read more about this framework overleaf.

As Uniting works towards a more inclusive, connected and just future, it's these values themselves which will help us along the way.

Peace,

Matt Julius

Church Engagement Worker

E matt.julius@unitingvictas.org.au



In June I celebrated Refugee Week with the Asylum Seeker Welcome Centre Refugee team at the Brunswick Uniting Church.

**We use the word consumers to refer to all those that use the services we offer. We use this particular word because it was recommended to us by representatives of people using services as a way of highlighting their central place and a degree of autonomy in service delivery.*



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

Uniting

Working with Consumer Partners.

*By Lizzy Yu Coordinator Consumer Partnerships
and David Buller Consumer Partner*



Consumers are people with unique lived experiences, strengths and needs who are eligible for, or who access our services.

At Uniting, Consumer Partners are people who share their lived experience and expertise to advocate for others and to influence the organisation's decision-making.

The Consumer Partnerships Framework (the Framework) provides guidance on how staff and Consumer Partners best work together to share voice, power and action. This collaborative way of working towards change not only strengthens Uniting's services and its consumer and community outcomes, but it forms part of human rights-based practice.

David is a Consumer Partner and resident at Uniting social housing. David was involved in the development of the Framework and has collaborated with Uniting on activities including being a member of our staff recruitment panels and helping us refresh our Code of Conduct.

"The Framework offers an invitation, direction and possible goals, enabling the implementation of policy and practice alignment. The Framework challenges us to live our values and to be open to new possibilities."

David notes that there is a learning curve involved in this way of working together.

"Power sharing, one of the principles of the Framework, can be challenging, especially when we're used to hierarchical structures.

"The Framework promotes greater transparency about the reasons for decisions and the eventual outcomes. It can also be engaged in welcoming conversations to explore experimental and traditional ways of being in community.

“We can work for justice alongside each other, for a better and sustainable future. We can decide to explore reconciliation and the wisdom of First Peoples and become allies with the people on whose land we gather and live.”



“We will find welcome, or sometimes more difficult and challenging, even resistant responses. Let us walk alongside each other, listen and act with intention and kindness.”

David highlighted that confronting injustice and reconciliation with First Peoples are personal missions that drive him towards this work, which are also central to Uniting’s mission and way forward.

“Moving to a different way of being requires both profound learning and unlearning as we grapple with our complex history and current reality. The stranger is our neighbour. The stranger can become my friend.

“We can work for justice alongside each other, for a better and sustainable future. We can decide to explore reconciliation and the wisdom of First Peoples and become allies with the people on whose land we gather and live.”

David reflected on a community engagement project he was involved in 20 years ago with the Richmond Uniting Church during the Ministry of Rev. Dr Robert Hoskin. This involved engaging marginalised communities and recording the stories and lived experiences of City of Yarra residents.

These stories were shared in Sunday morning worship, accompanied by relevant gospel readings, to which the communities were invited to join. This initiative strengthened community relationships and helped to establish an on-site gallery, exhibitions and a self-published book of people’s stories.

David says the need for people to connect remains.

“Today we have a different social and cultural landscape, but the need for people to connect and participate remains the same. Mutual respect is still essential. There is a frequent tendency to ‘other’ people who are different. We need to celebrate our diversity. We are all human together.”

Learn more about our purpose and values

unitingvictas.org.au/about-uniting/our-purpose-and-values

Church Engagement Worker

Matt Julius

E matt.julius@unitingvictas.org.au

Senior Manager, Mission, Ethos, and Engagement

Cheryl Lawrie

E cheryl.lawrie@unitingvictas.org.au



Local Winter Appeal.

Help share the warmth with those who need it most. This winter we're inviting congregations to take part in our Local Winter Appeal by donating new or very good-quality winter items to help bring comfort to those who need it most.

We're especially seeking:

- Blankets, jackets, jumpers, scarves, beanies, gloves
- Tents, sleeping bags and swag backpacks for those sleeping rough.

Winter woollies will go directly to people accessing our emergency relief services across Victoria and Tasmania. Donations are also welcome and help provide practical support to individuals and families facing crisis.

Find out more
unitingvictas.org.au/local-winter

45 years of volunteering.

For Jill and Alan, both in their mid-80s, volunteering has become even more important as they grow older. A way to stay active, maintain social connections, and continue contributing to their community in meaningful ways.

"It makes you feel good, it gets you out of the house. It gets you meeting new people and broadens your outlook," says Alan.

"We're in a multicultural community and that's extremely important, particularly in this day and age. We really need to be inclusive. We need to be able to meet the needs of all Australians, all people."

Over the years Jill and Alan have built strong connections with the many students who complete placement at the centre. Often coming from international backgrounds, these students find not only a supportive colleague but sometimes even someone with whom to share their love of piano accordion.

Read more
unitingvictas.org.au/45-years-of-volunteering