

Together we
~~can do more.~~
achieve



Standing together against injustice

In standing with people living life at the margins and **raising our collective voice for change**, together we create opportunities for people to thrive.

By working with the Victorian and Tasmanian governments during state elections, we increased awareness about improving public policy and investment in underfunded public services. (Continued on page 4).

Photo: Michelle, pictured above with her daughters Madison and Abbey, Early Learning family at St Andrews Sunbury, enjoying a story.

Learn more

1800 668 426
vt.uniting.org

Uniting



Together in partnership

It's often said the whole is greater than the sum of its parts and reflecting on 2018 this has certainly been true for us.

Through your continued support, you partner with us to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice.

Partnerships improve the quality and reach of many services, impacting individuals, families and communities.

Gandel Philanthropy generously supported the development of our Mother and Baby Residential Withdrawal Service, expanding our specialist Alcohol and Other Drug services. The innovative residential service helps new mothers rehabilitate and recover while staying connected and bonded to their babies.

Other services such as the CareRing program for crisis support, and the Meals for Change initiative providing meals and community connection for young people at risk, need continued support from partners in order to flourish.

By dedicating time and resources to government advocacy we have influenced key improvements across four areas of underfunded public services, including housing affordability, early learning, out-of-home care and community mental health care.

I look forward to the year ahead and what can be achieved together. It's you, our wonderful supporters and committed partners, that make the difference. Together we will stand beside more people across Victoria and Tasmania, when they need it most.

Paul Linossier
Chief Executive Officer

Winter breakfast launch approaching



You're invited to the launch of our 2019 Winter Breakfast Program, which provides people in crisis a free hot meal during the cold months.

The event is an opportunity to hear from a panel of experts providing commentary on the interconnectedness of mental health, social isolation and financial exclusion.

Date: 9 May 2019

Time: 7.30am

Location: Malvern Town Hall, 1251 High Street

Register your interest

Places are limited

Email: advocacy@vt.uniting.org

Phone: 1800 668 426



CareRing aims to recognise and address issues faced by people experiencing financial stress, with a focus on early recognition and support.

Community partnership eases financial burden

Accessing the right support can be challenging for people facing financial hardship, family violence, health concerns, housing or employment issues.

To ease the burden, we've partnered with community agencies, government, utilities, and financial service providers to develop the CareRing program.

CareRing supports the customers of Yarra Valley Water, NAB, ANZ, Suncorp, Jemena, Energy Australia, and Origin Energy. Our partners refer eligible customers to CareRing to better assess and respond to their needs. Issues often come to light when a customer is struggling to pay a bill or make repayments due to financial hardship.

Since its inception in 2014, CareRing has helped over 8,000 people across Australia, like Leo.

Leo was unemployed and living in his car, when he was referred to CareRing by one of his service providers.

Leo owned his own business and had never been in financial hardship. He unexpectedly experienced a downturn in work and was ultimately forced to close his business, leaving him without an income.

Leo sold his investment property to improve his cashflow, but nine months later and still without work, used the last of his savings to pay for family funerals. Leo was then forced to sell his home to stay afloat.

One year after his business closed, when referred to CareRing, Leo was unemployed

and living in his car. One of our client support team organised emergency relief, liaised with a Centrelink social worker to provide payments and arranged a financial counselling appointment for Leo. We also liaised with a partner agency regarding housing options for Leo.

The CareRing team remained in contact with Leo and the other supporting agencies until his life had stabilised. Leo found housing and secured employment, which enabled him to start rebuilding his life.

Together against injustice

Our advocacy efforts in 2018 focused on four key areas, all of which have seen **significant announcements from State Governments:**

Housing affordability

Healthy and prosperous communities need affordable, safe and long-term housing to thrive. With housing availability and affordability a growing concern, the Victorian government introduced changes to the Residential Tenancies Act to ensure fairer renting for all.

Out-of-home care for young people up to 21

Whilst many young people stay at home beyond the age of 18, young people in out-of-home-care are required to live independently from that age. This increases their vulnerability to homelessness, unemployment, and prison. The Home Stretch campaign, which we supported, led both the Victorian and Tasmanian governments to announce that they will now make available support for young people in out-of-home-care until they are 21.

Minister brings life to story time

At Scots Early Learning Centre, the **children look forward to story time** with wide-eyed anticipation.

Bringing some of the children's favourite stories to life with his little box of props is Scots-Memorial Uniting Church Minister, Graham Sturdy, who visits the centre each month.

Since moving to Hobart from the UK three years ago, Minister Sturdy has formed a close bond with the staff and the children at the centre.

"When I arrive with the story box, there is always a sense of excitement from the children as they try to guess what is in there," Minister Sturdy said.



Children at the Scots Early Learning Centre, Hobart.

"It's wonderful to see how engaged the children are during story time."

"I look forward to it as much as the children do."

Scots Early Learning service coordinator, Meegan Hodgson, said story time with Minister Sturdy is a fantastic highlight for the children.

"Graham is able to spark the children's imagination and stimulate their curiosity," Meegan said.

"The children start to learn the value of books and stories while developing early literacy skills, language, words, and sounds."

New funding will give children a better start

Michelle is one of the 93% of Victorian parents who believe **early learning is crucial to a child's development.**

Last year, the mother-of-four received 15 hours per week of subsidised early learning for her four-year-old daughter, Indiana.

But she didn't receive support for her youngest child, Abbey, to attend three-year-old early learning for five hours a week. Michelle wanted Abbey to socialise with other children and learn how to take instructions from teachers. She admits sending Abbey to three-year-old early learning had a significant impact on the family budget.

"We spent \$3,600 on early learning fees last year for Indiana and Abbey. It definitely put a strain on our budget," Michelle said.

We know that early learning works. Children who have enjoyed two years of early learning before they go to school will experience better outcomes over the course of their lives.

They get a better start at school, they are more likely to complete high school, and more likely to go on to further education.

As adults, they are more likely to be employed, they will have higher earning potential and they are less likely to have a criminal record.



Ringwood Early Learning Centre.

Despite missing out on subsidised three-year-old early learning for Abbey, Michelle is happy to see new early learning funding introduced.

"I'm just glad that all families will have better access to three-year-old early learning now," she said.

"We all want to do what we can to see our kids succeed, and I think this funding will give our children the best start possible."

Keeping families together during recovery

New mothers can now stay with their babies whilst **undergoing drug and alcohol withdrawal** through an innovative recovery program.

Established in 2016, our Mother and Baby Residential Withdrawal Service is the first program in Victoria to keep babies with their mothers while undergoing substance withdrawal.

This means they remain together during the most important time of a baby's emotional development.

We know from research that being separated from their babies or children stops women from seeking help, according to Laurence Alvis, Executive Officer of Uniting ReGen, our specialist Alcohol and Other Drug services.

"Separating mothers from their babies elevates stress levels and leaves women feeling isolated and fearful of engaging with health services,"

Mr Alvis said.

"They fear losing their children as a result of making contact with services or being stigmatised as a drug-user."

To ensure mothers get the treatment they need, babies are cared for by accredited child-care workers during program hours. The service welcomes women with children from birth up to when they start walking.

The program, made possible through a generous grant from Gandel Philanthropy, was recently named the winner of the Excellence in women's health award at the 2018 Victorian Public Healthcare Awards.

Lendlease partnership builds new opportunities

Creating **meaningful and long-term employment opportunities** enables people like Dennis to realise their potential.

Building his dream career in stonemasonry, Dennis is proud of his apprenticeship with Heritage Stone Restorations (HSR).

HSR is a contractor hired by construction company, Lendlease, to build the Wesley Place precinct on Lonsdale Street in Melbourne. This work will include restoring and conserving the historically significant Wesley Church.

The Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania has been working in partnership with property group, Charter Hall, to manage the heritage project, alongside the new development.

As part of its successful tender, Lendlease committed to creating five apprenticeships.

“Before I started my apprenticeship, I spent 10 years working at the airport in customer service and as a dispatcher, meeting aircraft as they arrived. It was good, but I wanted something more fulfilling.” Dennis said.



Dennis, on the job with HSR.

“It’s been challenging at times, but there are lots of opportunities to use my initiative, and everyone has been really helpful and willing to teach me.”

Our employment services work to connect people of all backgrounds and abilities to employers who value and invest in people.

Going digital - support for people experiencing mental health challenges

A digital health program could provide a new way for Wimmera residents to **access mental health support** thanks to our partnership with Federation University.

MonitorMe is a digital health program which can help people keep track of their mood and daily lifestyle.

The program reacts to information provided by the user, to offer guidance when they experience increasing stress, anxiety or mood changes.

People accessing our services in the Wimmera are being encouraged to trial the program to investigate the impact it may have on their wellbeing by reducing their stress levels. If effective, it could

be made available to more people in the community who need support.

Josh Koenig, our Executive Officer in the Wimmera Region said, if successful, MonitorMe could provide important interim support to people unable to access other services due to distance, wait lists or anxiety about traditional face-to-face support services.

“One of the major challenges we face in supporting our community is access to funding for traditional, early intervention mental health services,” he said.

“With the roll-out of the NDIS, many people in our region are either not getting approved for a plan or don’t have the required funding to pay for the services they need.

“MonitorMe, if successful, could provide an important stop gap for people who don’t require specialist medical support, but need some help to manage their mental health.”

Sharing a meal is togetherness

Young people at risk of, or experiencing crisis and instability can **remain connected to their community and enjoy a good meal** through the Meals for Change program in Ballarat.

Made possible through our partnership with more than 20 community agencies, and nine cafés in the local area, Meals for Change enables members to purchase nutritious meals at a subsidised price.

The program is available to people like Dan, who has experienced homelessness on and off for a number of years. Dan says the program has made a big difference to his life.

Dan uses his membership card during times of hardship and chooses wholesome meal options from a range of cafés, with staff who welcome him and ensure he feels comfortable. It’s not unusual for a Meals for Change meal to be the only substantial food he eats all day. He can also offer the same deal to a friend or family member, which helps to keep him connected to the people who matter most to him.

Meals for Change coordinator, Jen Pollard, said the program is about more than just providing affordable meals to those in crisis.

Meals for Change receives no government funding, relying solely on grants and the generosity of the local community. Over the last three years, donations in partner cafés have raised close to \$15,000. These funds go towards providing more than 400 meals.

Young people can access the program through referral by their support worker.

“Most importantly, we give them a sense of community and belonging. They know they are safe and welcome, which is something we often take for granted,” Jen said.

Partner cafés proudly display the Meals for Change logo in their windows to show their support for some of Ballarat’s most vulnerable young people.



“People in the program can also get support to pursue education and training opportunities that help them find work and stability,” Jen said.

Part of the solution - ending family violence

Family violence is a growing social issue that is fostered by a culture of inequality between men and women.

While men also experience family violence, family violence is a gendered crime.

Women are affected by family violence in a number of ways — their physical and mental health are likely to suffer, and they are much more likely to end up homeless or living in poverty.

Our Men’s Behavioural Change Program provides individual and group counselling for men who have perpetrated violence in their family. Through weekly

group sessions, our support workers help these men to acknowledge their behaviour and take responsibility. The program also works to support children, partners, ex-partners, and other family members directly affected.

From November 25 to December 10 last year, we raised awareness of and took action against gender-based violence as part of the global campaign 16 Days of Activism.



Find out more
vt.uniting.org/community-issues

Christmas wrapped up

The great success of our 2018 Christmas appeals was thanks to you, our **generous and compassionate supporters**, and the wider community.



Close to 50 tonnes of non-perishable food and essentials were donated to Food For Families in the lead up to Christmas, and our Christmas Share Appeal raised over \$300,000 to help people in crisis, well above our goal.

More children were able to enjoy Christmas with 2,500 gifts donated across Victoria and Tasmania through the Target UnitingCare Christmas Appeal. The purchase of our charity Christmas cards also provided significant support. A new card catalogue will be available this year, so look out for details in our 2019 spring newsletter.

As government funding is limited compared to the demand we face every day, we rely on your kindness and heartfelt giving to support people experiencing crisis in our community.

We'd once again like to extend a sincere thank you to everyone who supported us in 2018.

Thank you from Sandra

Thank you to everyone who reached out to Sandra and her granddaughters over the festive season to wish them well. Sandra kindly shared her story to support our Christmas fundraising activities. It was uplifting for Sandra and her granddaughters to know that people were thinking of them. We have passed on your letters to Sandra.

"I can't thank people enough for their support," Sandra said.

"The help I received over Christmas meant I could put food on the table and buy some small gifts for the girls. To everyone who donated, thank you. You are so kind and it means a lot to us."

Get involved

Make a donation

Your generosity will help us continue to provide essential services that are not covered by government funding. A gift today or a bequest for the future will make a positive and lasting difference to individuals, families and communities.

1800 668 426

Fundraise for us

Host an event at your school, workplace or community group and get together to raise funds for vulnerable people in your community.

1800 060 543

Volunteer with us

Our 3500 volunteers are a vital and much loved part of our organisation. They give their precious time to help deliver our services. We rely on their support – and we're always on the lookout for more enthusiastic people.

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A small act can sometimes be enough. A helping hand can halve a burden. One kind word can calm the nerves. Together we can do even more and there are many ways you can get involved.



Uniting

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

