Congregation Connect

Helping older women in crisis

In last year's Spring edition of Congregation Connect, you may recall reading about Marrageil Baggarrook crisis accommodation for older women experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

This facility opened last May thanks to the hard work and commitment of the Mountview Uniting Church congregation.

Since then, 4 women have moved in and are in the process of finding long-term housing.

The women age from their late 40s to their early 70s.

Facility leader, Linda* says the move has made a positive difference for the women.

"Previously, older women have only had access to rooming and boarding houses, which are not suitable for them," says Linda.

"Here, they can move into their own space, make it their own and feel a lot safer.

"I remember when one of the women first moved in. She burst into tears when she walked in the door. She couldn't speak for a while. She was overcome with joy to have her own space.

"The women are happy to be here and we're working closely with them to find long-term housing solutions.

"I can't thank the Mountview Uniting Church congregation members enough for their tireless work to make sure older women in our community have safe and secure accommodation during tough times."

Name changed to respect the wishes of the person featured in this story.

Your Mission Team at Uniting Vic.Tas

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50 years of saving lives

Lifeline Ballarat recently celebrated its 50th anniversary with a special service and morning tea at the Ballarat Central Uniting Church.

The service was attended by one of Lifeline Ballarat's founders David Pratt OAM, one of the first volunteers, along with current staff and volunteers.

Since opening on 14 November 1971, Lifeline Ballarat has provided a reassuring voice at the end of the phone for many thousands of people.

But it wasn't easy to get the service up and running.

"When we started, we didn't have any money. We didn't know who would pay, how many people we might get ringing up and we had no staff," says David.

With the support of several church congregations across Ballarat, the service established itself.

The service has come a long way in the past 50 years.

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 3500 calls were being answered in the Ballarat service each day.

Now part of Uniting Vic.Tas, we are grateful to the 60 volunteers working 24 hours a day, 7 days a week as crisis supporters and providing mental health awareness training across the Ballarat region.

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

Uniting

Vital support for carers

Carer Gateway provides support services, free of charge, to unpaid carers to help them manage their role and improve their own wellbeing.

Uniting Vic.Tas is one of 7 service providers in Victoria supporting carers through support planning, counselling, peer support groups, carer coaching, young carer support, online courses and respite.

Any person who provides unpaid care to a family member, friend or neighbour with a mental illness, disability, chronic health issue or age-related condition is defined by Carer Gateway as a carer.

Carers can be any age and they can provide full-time, part-time or occasional help to others.

Wanda* and Barry* are in their late 80s.

Wanda has been caring for her husband, Barry since he was diagnosed with gastric cancer and depression.

Wanda had been feeling overwhelmed by her caring role, having to attend regular hospital appointments with Barry and also nurse him at home.

While still doing the cooking, she was struggling to clean her home.

A house-proud person, Wanda was becoming increasingly anxious that her home was unkempt and disorganised.

Our Carer Gateway team organised a weekly cleaning service to help around the house.

Wanda was thrilled with this service.

Her eyes lit up when the cleaner, Anne* arrived for the first time.

Our team also organised an over-the-phone counselling service, which Wanda says has been very helpful in discussing some of the underlying struggles she encounters in her carer's role.

For more information on Carer Gateway, visit **unitingvictas.org.au/carer**

Names have been changed to respect the wishes of the people featured in this story.

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A reflection from Rev Gavin Blakemore

On 1 March, Western Christian churches celebrated Shrove Tuesday, also known as Pancake Tuesday.

Shrove comes from the word "Shrive," meaning to confess and receive absolution in acts of repentance.

It has also become the last day for celebrating and feasting before the fasting required during Lent. This is the link to pancakes.

Even in these challenging pandemic circumstances in which we still find ourselves, I am thankful for those congregations and community groups who have or will hold a Pancake Day event to raise funds for Uniting Vic.Tas.

These funds allow us to expand our services in life-changing ways that I get to hear about when I talk with our staff and volunteers.

We now find ourselves in the 40-day season of Lent, which isn't a surprise when we remind ourselves that Lent in Latin is Quadragesima, meaning fortieth.

It follows Shrove/Pancake Tuesday from Ash Wednesday to Maundy Thursday (excluding Sundays).

It is traditionally a time for Christians to prepare for Easter in prayer, penance, repentance, almsgiving and self-denial - for example, what will I give up for Lent?

I give thanks to God for the way you continue to serve your communities in the face of significant challenges.

I am inspired by our God who continues to call us into mission and serve those at the edges of society.

My prayer this Lent is that together we may continue to discern Christ's invitation to serve humanity by creating an inclusive, connected and just world.