

Spring 2022 Congregation Connect



Fighting poverty together

Unfortunately today more than three million Australians still live in poverty. Thankfully, there is something we can do about it.

This year Anti-Poverty Week, held from the 16 to 22 October, is focused on raising income support and a greater investment in social housing.

Uniting works across a range of community services, aiming to intervene early to help people avoid crisis, as well as support those living life at the margins.

For the third year running, Uniting Vic.Tas CEO Bronwyn Pike is the Victorian Co-Chair of Anti-Poverty Week. Jeremy Pettet, Uniting's Executive Officer for Tasmania, is the Co-Chair in Tasmania.

To support our community to have an increased understanding of poverty and take action, visit antipovertyweek.org.au

Coffee Cup Challenge

Have you signed your congregation up to participate in the Coffee Cup Challenge yet?

To register, visit unitingvictas.org.au/coffee-cup-challenge

Farewell

We bid farewell to one of Uniting's Mission and Ethos Partners, Rev Gavin Blakemore as he starts as the new chaplain at Aitken College this month.

We will miss his outstanding contribution to the mission of the Church through Wesley Mission and Uniting over almost 10 years. We wish him well.

Rev Garry Derkenne (details below) is acting in Gavin's role until a new placement is finalised.

Your Mission Team at Uniting Vic.Tas

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Bec's journey to stability

Bec spent three years living in her car with her two dogs after her family relationship broke down.

After experiencing violence in the family home, sleeping in her car seemed like the safer option.

"Probably the hardest times when you're rough sleeping is when you're sick," explained Bec.

"No clean clothes and everything is just dirty.

"You feel pretty low at those times."

Having two dogs made it almost impossible for Bec to find a place to stay.

"I was never going to give up my dogs because they never give up on you.

"They're your best friends.

"They loved me when I had no one else."

Bec was referred to Uniting's Street2Home service in Ballarat.

"They really were my last hope, and I eventually let them help me."

Uniting found Bec a unit and helped move her into her very first home.

"This is my safe place now," said Bec.

Since moving into her unit, Bec has started going to a lunch program once a week and building friendships with her neighbours.

"I'd say happiness is starting to take over now, instead of the trauma and sadness."



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

Uniting



In the last edition of Congregation Connect, we also shared the Uniting Heritage Newsletter.

Our Heritage Service supports past residents and their families who received out-of-home care in orphanages, children's homes and Family Group Homes provided by the Presbyterian, Methodist and Uniting Churches. The service helps people access vital records so they can piece together memories and better understand their past.

Gary* contacted Uniting's Heritage Service in April 2019, hoping to reconnect with two of the children he had lived with while at a Kildonan Family Group Home in the 1960s. He also spoke of wanting to find his father.

Five months later, the team were able to locate one of Gary's childhood friends and the pair eventually spoke on the phone in February 2020.

A year later, after conducting DNA tracing, Uniting received a call from Bruce, who was very likely to be Gary's paternal uncle. Bruce explained that his brother, Gary's father, had died.

Bruce was willing to have his DNA tested and finally after waiting until June 2021, their relationship as uncle and nephew was confirmed.

Gary was reconnected with his uncle on 24 June 2021.

Gary's wife had tears in her eyes as she explained that he had been trying to find his father for 50 years and she could not adequately express how important this was.

"I've never had an uncle before," said Gary.

"I have always had a hole in my gut. It feels like it has been filled."

Gary's relationship with his uncle continues to blossom.

"I grew up with a blank canvas," says Gary.

"Everybody else had their family portrait and I finally have something on my canvas."

**This is a true story about a real person. Some details such as names have been changed to respect the wishes of the person featured. The photo accompanying this story is for illustrative purposes only. It is not a photo of the person featured in this story.*

Contact Uniting

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Making homelessness a thing of the past

On any given night, there are 24,000 Victorians and 1,600 Tasmanians sleeping on the streets, in their cars or in emergency or temporary accommodation. Many are with their children and are fleeing family violence.

A shortage of affordable housing and available rentals means more and more people are being forced into poverty and homelessness.

For the first time Uniting Vic.Tas presented a justice-based proposal to the Synod meeting held in early July.

Synod agreed and resolved that affordable housing should never be a luxury. It is the foundation for all people to live healthy and dignified lives.

Following the presentation, Uniting was almost overwhelmed by the number of Synod and congregation members who came forward to offer up their homes or rental properties to those in need.

The Synod has long taken a strong position on homelessness and social housing, and Uniting is moved by the generosity and kindness of its members.

If you have a spare room or rental property and are interested in supporting those sleeping rough, please contact your local Mission and Ethos partner.

Together we can offer safety and security to those with uncertain futures.

**Image left to right - Newly appointed Moderator, Rev David Fotheringham, CEO Bronwyn Pike and Uniting Deputy Board Chair Alistair Macrae celebrating 5 years of Uniting at the Synod meeting.*