

 **wesley**

Christmas 2018

**impact!** 

A **fresh stream** flows  
in Brooke's life  
**this Christmas**

The greatest  
gift is **love**

Australia's  
**loneliness  
epidemic**



# wesley Christmas 2018 Impact!

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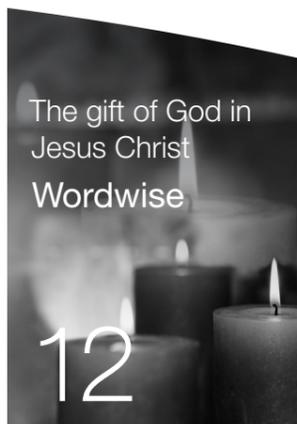
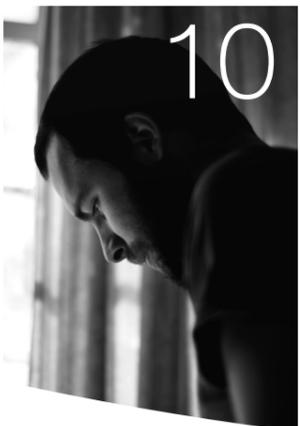
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**"It is the gift above all things"**

**John 1:1-2**



## Hello

**At Christmas, many of us are able to share gifts with friends and family. We see God's love for the world in Jesus' birth and Christmas presents are a way for the individual to share their own love with others in the spirit of community which reflects God's love and presence in humanity.**

But not everyone is in a position to give or receive presents. Love can be shared at Christmas in many ways, other than merely the material. At Wesley Mission we share that gift not only at Christmas but throughout the year.

In this edition of Wesley Impact! you will read about Brooke and the changes that have come about in her life and within her family as a result of the SafeCare program. SafeCare is part of the Wesley Brighter Futures program and is helping to support families struggling with a range of issues. It is a parenting program which any family could use but it is being trialled by the Government across NSW with particular families.

You may have seen Brooke and our SafeCare workers in a recent ABC Four Corners episode. The program has been a positive experience for Brooke and her children. It has helped her interaction with her children, developed important skills and enriched her well-being and faith in God. It will be a very different Christmas for her and her family this year.

Our Wesley Aunties & Uncles program continues to provide mentoring and support to children and young people and their families. At its heart is the giving of the gift of love and service. Helen and Alan have been mentoring Rebecca for the past few years. They were linked with the young girl when her mother was diagnosed with cancer and underwent treatment. It was a tough time for Rebecca but with the support of Helen and Alan she has grown to be a delightful young woman. Helen and Alan described themselves as 'God's hands and feet' and the entire experience as a 'blessing and privilege.'

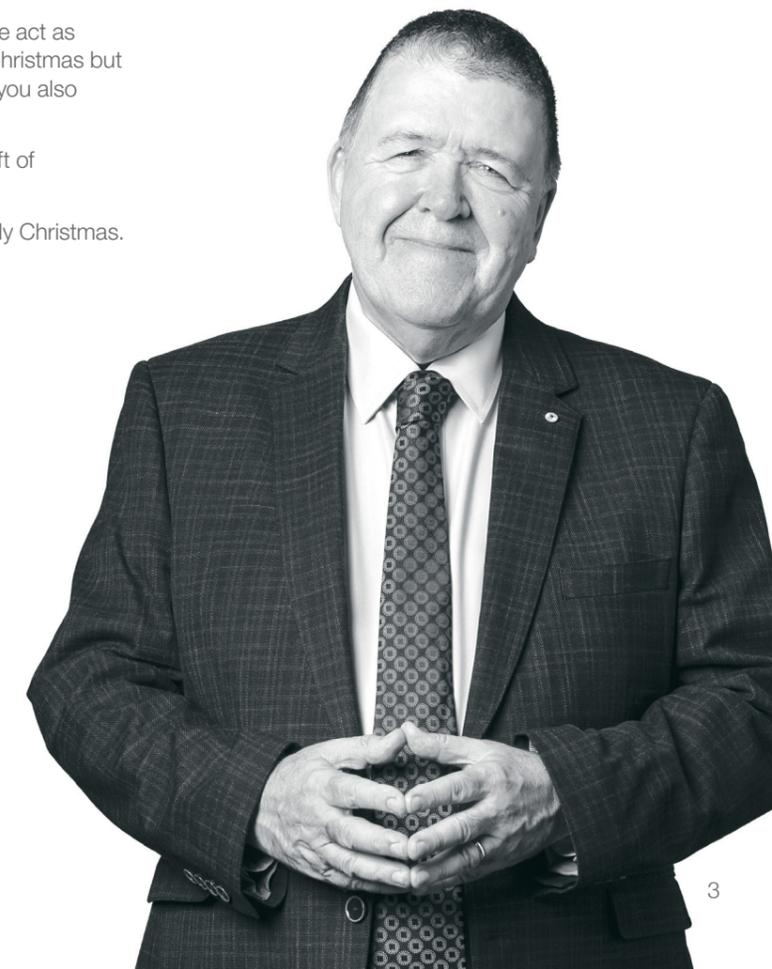
As we prepare for Christmas, we also remind ourselves that we act as God's hands and feet, bringing support to others not only at Christmas but every day of the year. It is indeed a blessing and privilege that you also share in this Word and deed ministry of Wesley Mission.

May you and those you love and know share in the greatest gift of Christmas – Jesus Christ.

I send you my warmest personal greetings for a happy and holy Christmas.

Rev Keith V Garner AM  
Superintendent/CEO  
Wesley Mission

**"As we prepare for Christmas, we also remind ourselves that we act as God's hands and feet, bringing support to others not only at Christmas but every day of the year."**



# A **fresh stream** flows in Brooke's life **this Christmas**

In a quiet cul-de-sac at Penrith in Sydney's west, a mother of two young children ponders what may have been a very different Christmas if a kindly knock on her front door had not been answered more than a year ago.

**Brooke sits in her newly renovated home which belies the cracks that appeared in her own life in 2017 and shook both her life and faith to their foundations.**

Feeling alone and isolated while raising her children, Brooke now speaks openly and confidently about her journey and the impact of a Wesley Mission run program – SafeCare - which has helped to restore her life.

To outsiders the former model seemed to have it all: a loving husband and two beautiful daughters. She embraced a deep and abiding faith in God and enjoyed a supportive church family: all seemed in place.

Yet for several years, Brooke struggled with the demands of parenting. Her husband worked in the inner-city and travelled more than 100 kilometres each day by car. Her sense of isolation grew.

A church friend became concerned. A doctor's appointment was made. She was admitted to hospital, struggling with depression and anxiety. For three days there was no mobile phone or distractions, "just lots of tears."

"I felt really alone," Brooke said of parenting. "Even confused at times as there is so much information out there...how does that fit into you and how does that fit into your particular child? It was very overwhelming. You just had to wing it and keep it to yourself."

She admitted to 'putting on a front' and did not want people to know about her condition and difficulties. "And that was my biggest downfall," she said. "I became really overwhelmed. I was overloading to my husband too much. My husband didn't really know either. We were two young people raising kids. It's a clash of information. I struggled with what worked for us."



Her eldest child had special needs and Brooke often felt out of her depth and burdened.

"I asked people but no one had a child with similar needs to Peyton (her daughter)," Brooke said. "So I couldn't really compare. It was really hard and challenging. I had days when I felt really guilty about that. Guilt for me was getting angry, losing it and then thinking I'm a horrible mum."

**"I kind of hit a bit of a brick wall in terms of my emotions."**

It was after her time in Hospital that she was linked with SafeCare, a NSW Government pilot program which is part of Wesley Brighter Futures program at Penrith.

The program is designed for vulnerable families with children aged 0-5 years. It runs for between 18 and

20 weeks with a trained SafeCare worker visiting families at home. Parents learn skills from three modules: health, safety and parent-child relationships. Parents get 'homework' and one-on-one feedback and counsel from the Safe Care worker.

Brooke's story was featured on the ABC's Four Corners program in August along two other mums who were trialling the program.

"I kind of hit a bit of a brick wall in terms of my emotions," Brooke told Four Corners.

"I was definitely in a dark place and even my thoughts. I think when my thoughts started to get a lot worse, that's when I knew that there was an issue."

Brooke said it was the first time she shared her struggles publicly. She feared that people would judge her but she has only received positive support from the public.

"I kept my depression and anxiety very secret," she said. "It was like a double life."

Brooke had only just returned from a refreshing inter-state holiday when she received an unannounced knock on her front door. It was Louise Vincin from Wesley Mission.

An enduring relationship developed between Louise and Brooke based upon trust, acceptance and grace. Her children also embraced Louise and have grown to enjoy her compassionate and wise company.

"Having Louise in my home was a vulnerable state for me," Brooke said. "You have that insecurity but it was the best thing ever. Don't be ever afraid to share your issues. We all make mistakes. It's ok to make mistakes and days when you are frustrated, tired and angry."

Through home visits and completing the SafeCare program, Brooke said she has learned "to interact more with her kids" and provide specific positive feedback.

"I think that was my biggest struggle," Brooke said. "It's not just the compliments but having that personal time with them but also allowing



Brooke with her children and Wesley Mission SafeCare coach, Louise Vincin (right).

yourself to see the good things they do.

"Safe Care refreshed my whole concept of parenting and understanding my kids a lot more in terms of play and communication.

"Louise came in and said 'look we have this time, spend 10 minutes with them, sit with them, play with them, give them good encouragement, and compliment them.' That just didn't boost their play but it boosted our relationship. It made them feel confident. That was one thing that I had to learn.

"Louise has given me tips on things like sleep. I was about routine but it was more about what works for them."

Louise said many parents did not know how to give positive feedback to their children underlining SafeCare's value to all parents.

"It's tuning into their emotions rather than just reacting," Louise said. "And that's hard to do in the moment. If you are praising them when they are doing well they are still getting mum's time and attention for positive things."

Brooke was open to the SafeCare program from the start. "She wanted

help from the start, she wanted change and she wanted to be a better mum and do things differently," Louise said.

As SafeCare is an in-home program, it gives parents the confidence to step outside into the community. Knowing that you have the skills and knowledge to manage your children in public builds confidence and well-being.

Brooke believes her children have flourished and their personalities have grown.

"They have been bright good kids," Brooke said. "I want people to know that. When Louise came the girls were not in a bad environment but I needed that attention and support to get myself healthy.

**"They are my little guardians."**

She has seen her daughters become 'little helpers'.

"They show me love," she quipped on the day she formally left the completed program. "They are my little guardians."

Brooke now knows she is a more confident mum. She is delighted that she is expecting a third child.

"I would not have thought I could have raised two kids and just knowing that you could overcome things," Brooke said. "I never knew I could be stable enough to continue and prepare for a third kid. If you had asked me a year ago I would have laughed it off or probably cried."

During her darkest hours even her faith was challenged but now through the loving support of Louise and others from Wesley Mission her faith has strengthened as her wellbeing has grown.

"There were times when I questioned what God was doing and why he was putting you in those situations," Brooke said. "They say 'have faith and persevere'...for me when you're so consumed by your environment it was hard for me to sit there and say 'Hey God I'm going to trust you.'

"Be open to God, allow Him to do what he has to do. For me it was like he was making me into a new person. He was pulling back all the gunk that was within me. Sometimes it is ugly and you have to go along a very dark path to find the light." ■



Brooke has learnt new skills for interacting with her children she calls her "guardians and little helpers".



# The greatest gift is love

## On open sand on Sydney's northern beaches a young girl runs at liberty as the sea breeze touches her face.

The air is thick with salt. It sticks to her skin as a reminder of a carefree day spent with new found friends.

Helen and Alan watch as a seven year-old Rebecca dives into the bubbly shoreline as wind-swept breakers wash over her head. Her mind is at liberty to enjoy the best of God's creation, far from the stresses of the events she recently endured.

Rebecca's mum Alana had previously been diagnosed with breast cancer. Chemotherapy, radiotherapy and strong medication followed. The medication made her drowsy and anxious about her lethargy.

It was a lot for a young girl. Rebecca's nights were full of anxiety worrying about her mum while at school she experienced bullying.

Alana knew that her daughter needed a little extra support to get her through this tough time.

Alana and Rebecca were introduced to Wesley Mission's Aunties & Uncles program and Rebecca was matched with a couple whose "children were off their hands" but who also sought to extend to others the love and care they had given their own children.

"The more people that can extend love to children the better," Helen said. "If we could support and love a single mum with a child all the better. We prayed about it and we made an application to Aunties & Uncles."

Helen first met with Alana and Rebecca in March 2015, a year after Alana had been diagnosed with cancer. After meeting with Helen several times, Alana was delighted that her daughter could be linked with Helen.

Rebecca and her mother met with Helen over coffee at a shopping centre in Sydney's west.

"I thought that both Alana and Rebecca were delightful," Helen said. "It was important that Alana felt comfortable where Rebecca was going. We had a few meetings over a few months. There was lot of liaising and we had wonderful support from Case Manager Margaret McGann, who managed the whole link.

"When Rebecca felt comfortable with us that's when we had a one on one meeting. It was also important for her to have a positive male figure in her life – Alan."

As a committed Christian, Helen always included a Bible reading as part of the activities that she did with Rebecca when she took her out.

Alana was happy with this approach as Scripture was Rebecca's favourite subject at school.

Helen took Rebecca to the city in December 2015 to enjoy the Christmas displays and gave Christmas gifts to her and her mum.

Showing love and kindness were the keys to building trust.

"It's about the whole person, talk in love, act in love," Helen said. "We encouraged Rebecca to talk and participate. Everything was done in kindness: it was about expressing unconditional love."

Helen also gently shared her faith in Jesus through Bible study and occasional attendance at church.

"For me it was important to be able to talk about the love of God with the child," Helen said. "Not all mums are happy with that. Alana was very open for us to talk about Jesus."

Helen also helped Rebecca with her reading and teaching her how to swim. "She loves the water," Helen said.

After talking with Helen, Alana began to see the importance of faith and started taking Rebecca to church.

Whenever Rebecca was anxious at night and could not sleep, Helen suggested that she pray instead of waking up her mum. Rebecca embraced this idea.

When Rebecca was being bullied at school, Helen tried to support her by giving her positive affirmation skills.

Since visiting Helen and Alan's home Rebecca has met their adult children and their grandson on several occasions. "My children think it's a wonderful program," Helen said.

There have been visits to the Sydney Opera House, the Manly Aquarium, the park or the cinema to see the latest release.

Alana and Rebecca have moved to the Lower Hunter where they have secured more affordable accommodation. Rebecca is settled and happy in her new school.

Despite the distance between Sydney's northern beaches and the Hunter Valley, Helen and Alan have continued to take Rebecca on outings in Sydney or have driven north to join Alana and Rebecca.

Although Alana's mother is still alive, Alana describes Helen as "like the mother she didn't have". Helen thinks Alana has a "beautiful mother's heart" and Rebecca as "absolutely delightful and who is always enthusiastic."

**"It's about the whole person, talk in love, act in love."**

After more than three years in the Wesley Aunties & Uncles program, Helen and Alan, and Alana and Rebecca will graduate from the program later this year. All are confident that this loving relationship, where Rebecca and Alana feel part of Helen and Alan's family, will continue. Helen hopes they may be able to catch up this Christmas and have a

'little celebration' halfway between the Hunter and Sydney.

"The link is strong and we have moved beyond Wesley Mission's support," said Helen. "We keep in contact on the phone and we pray for them every day.

"It's been a marvellous experience. It helps you look outward. It is a blessing and privilege. God called us to love him and our neighbours. We are God's hands and feet."

Wesley Aunties & Uncles offers children up to 12 years old from disadvantaged homes an extra family environment through 'aunties' and 'uncles' who invest in their lives and provide mentoring, care, and guidance.

To become an Auntie or Uncle call (02) 9638 2480 or register online at Wesley Aunties & Uncles on the Wesley Mission website. ■



# Australia's Loneliness epidemic

**Each year in a number of our major capital and regional cities, people from all walks of life come together at our Wesley LifeForce Memorial Services to remember loved ones and friends lost to suicide.**

The services are a time to reflect, share our grief and gain mutual support. At our recent well-attended services in Darwin, Sydney, Lake Macquarie and Airlie Beach in Queensland some folk shared their significant experiences of losing a loved one to suicide.

Of all the funeral services I have conducted during my ministry, there are two kinds that stand out as being particularly painful. One is following the death of young children and the obvious unreasonableness that is present on such an occasion – and the other is when standing before and alongside families who are sharing the loss that comes as a result of people who bring their own life to a premature end.

The suicide of someone you care about is a devastating tragedy. It happens in the best of families and to the best of people – and leaves the shattered lives of shocked survivors.

I am convinced that in so many ways suicide is one of the most difficult deaths to face. There can be all kinds of mixed emotions present in someone's loss.

The experience of loss can be devastating. Suddenly you learn to speak a new language and become a member of a club that you did not want to join. The world moves on and suddenly you are alone with your grief.

That is why we let people who attend the services know that they are not alone in their sorrow. Wesley Mission counsellors and chaplains are present to listen and support those who grieve. A remembrance wall offers people the opportunity to post photos of loved ones and write memories and tributes.

Yet loneliness itself is not confined to the experience of losing a loved one to death. It goes to the very heart of our need to belong and feel loved.

Loneliness is different from merely being alone or seeking solitude to find peace and grow. There are times in all our lives when we need to be alone and some people find their own company more helpful than others.

**“One in three Australians reported that they often felt isolated.”**

It is quite extraordinary in a world where we have claimed for ourselves a joined-up technology and brought internet connection across the world that loneliness appears to be on the increase. As you sit on one of our trains or buses, or as you walk down the street, note how many people are reading or sending texts or emails to each other.

There must still be places, communities, families, where people still talk to each other every day, care about each other, drop by and visit one another. Whether we live in the heart of a city like Sydney or one of the smaller towns in rural or regional

Australia, the issue of loneliness is a very real one.

Relationships Australia recently released its findings of a national survey of 1,980 people which found that one in three Australians reported that they often felt isolated and a further 43 per cent said they felt isolated some of the time. One in 10 people lack social support, and one in six people are experiencing emotional loneliness.

Widowed women and men under the age of 65 experienced the highest levels of loneliness. The study also found that emotional loneliness negatively impacted upon the health and mental well-being of people, particularly among younger men.

The Report stated that: “socially isolated or lonely are at risk of premature mortality at rates comparable with other well-established risk factors, including lack of physical activity, obesity, substance abuse, poor mental health, injury and violence (Holt-Lunstad, 2015). The research literature also identifies relationships between loneliness and poor mental health, including depression.”

The report also noted that “single parents were most likely to experience a lack of social support. This was particularly the case for single fathers, with almost 40 per cent of younger fathers reporting a lack of social support and more than 40 per cent reporting emotional loneliness.” Men rely more on their spouses for support but women have wider networks of support and “a greater number of emotionally intimate relationships than men”, helping them cope when there is death or separation.

In the light of the findings, Relationships Australia asked whether our nation was facing a “loneliness epidemic”.

This suggestion would come as no surprise to our Wesley Lifeline Sydney & Sutherland volunteers who answer almost 40,000 calls a year from many

people experiencing loneliness and isolation.

Loneliness can also be experienced by seniors, children and young people who have been separated from their birth family through no fault of their own, among people experiencing homelessness, or a single mother caring for children on her own, and even within marriages.

**“Loneliness is the anxiety that you do not matter at all.”**

That is why the theme of our Wesley LifeForce services “you are not alone” resonates across all we do at Wesley Mission as our staff and volunteers come alongside those who are suffering by offering compassionate care and understanding.

William Barclay, the Scottish writer, addressed the fact that our circumstances do not give simple answers to this issue.

On the matter of joy, he wrote: “Joy has nothing to do with material things, or with a person's outward circumstance ... a person living in the lap of luxury can be wretched, and a person in the depths of poverty can overflow with joy.”

Joyce Huggett, writing in a pastoral context, concluded: “Loneliness is the anxiety that you do not matter at all.”

At Wesley Mission we believe that “every life matters.” Our ministry and service of Word and deed is relational, founded in the knowledge that God's love expressed in compassionate care can bring a deep measure of healing and peace, unconditional acceptance and love and a very real experience that “you are not alone.”

**Rev Keith V Garner AM** ■

# Wordwise:

## The gift of God in Jesus Christ

with the **Rev Keith V Garner AM**



### John 1:1-18

Over the years, I have found it interesting to observe the different ways people celebrate the Advent and Christmas seasons. It was a rather salutary reminder when I once walked around a cold north of England town just three days after Christmas and saw an abandoned Christmas tree on the lawn of someone's front garden. It seemed to say it all. Christmas was over and what lay there in the dirty snow and slush was a small Christmas tragedy, representing a world that too easily discards its greatest gifts.

Gone were the colourful little ornaments that had made it look like fairyland just a week earlier. Now all that remained were a few strands of tangled tinsel, clinging dejectedly to the old Christmas tree.

Christmas is not to be abandoned; it is God's great gift of love, offered to us so that our lives may be changed for all time. In what we know as the Prologue of St John, we read of how the Word was made flesh. Even when the world was at its beginning, the Word was present. However, at a point in time, the wonderful gift of God was made clear and plain to us – and what a gift it was!

"In him was life, and that life was the light of all people." (John 1:4)

### It is the gift above all things (v.v.1-2)

John's Gospel has been described as being like a stream in which children can wade and elephants can swim. There is both simplicity and clarity in the way John introduces us to the gift of God in Jesus Christ – and yet, at the same time, there is something unique and powerful as he helps us to understand that gift in the context of the huge environment of creation. We are constantly amazed when we listen to scientists explain to us that our

universe consists of over a hundred million galaxies and each one of them contains a hundred billion stars. When I sing the words of Graham Kendrick, it puts things into a new perspective as he offers us the thought that it was the hands of Jesus that "flung stars into space".<sup>1</sup>

There are very many family traditions that surround gift giving and various times when it takes place at Christmas. In some countries, gifts are exchanged on Christmas Eve. Others hold them back until later on Christmas Day. Whatever tradition people follow, and no matter what gifts we receive, there is no gift that will ever replace the gift of Jesus Christ. It is a gift that resides in the person who offers it to us. F.F. Bruce in his famous commentary on John's Gospel, referring to the thought that Jesus is the life of God given to us, wrote, "... what the Evangelist has in mind here is the spiritual illumination that dispels the darkness of sin and unbelief."<sup>2</sup>

In our mixed up world, where we are obsessed with material gifts, it is good to know that the gift that God has given to us stands head and shoulders above the value of any other gift.

### It is the gift that never can be overcome (v.v. 4-5)

You cannot read the Prologue of St John in its fullest understanding without some reference to the first Book of the Old Testament, where we read in Genesis how in the first creation God called light into being. We read that "darkness was upon the face of the deep." (Genesis 1:2)

However, darkness was not merely over creation at a point in time. We recognise that there is darkness in so many ways in our community today. On Christmas Day, I am caused to think deeply about those people who are suffering in the world around us. This year it is all too painfully close to us as we think of earthquakes and disasters of various kinds.

One writer, reflecting upon the gift of God's glory and how it can never be overcome, wrote, "But when that light and life came amongst us as a human being, the darkness did not grasp, or master, the light; it neither comprehended it nor overcame it."<sup>3</sup>

This truth takes me back not only to the Christmas tree lying on the lawn, but also to the many examples in the world around us of how we so easily abandon things. One of the reasons why we live in what is described as a throw-away society is because we think there is something better around the corner. There is nothing that can overcome the gift which God gives us in Jesus Christ.

### It is the gift that is able to transform us (v.12)

In a very important sense, the opening of the Gospel of John declares that the new beginning is as much about a new beginning for people as ever it is about the origins of Jesus Christ. Gerard Sloyan put it this way: "The Word's coming as Jesus is important in our regard; it is not an isolated marvel touching the man Jesus alone. The purpose was to come to his own place and his own people (v.11) – those prepared for such an event by centuries of God's loving self-disclosure."<sup>4</sup>

When I read verse 12, I see something of the whole purpose of God's coming to us when we know what it is to receive him. You cannot buy this gift and you cannot earn this gift, for it is God's wonderful gift of grace. It was Billy Graham who said, "Grace is not sought or bought or wrought. It is a free gift of Almighty God to needy mankind." And from a very different source, it was Paul Tillich who referred to us being unable to "... bridge the gap between God and ourselves through even the most intensive and frequent prayers; the gap between God and ourselves can only be bridged by God."

This gift actually changes us. When observing children receiving gifts or the many who we at Wesley Mission reach out to in the wider community, we can see that gifts have the ability to change people. However, when accepting God's gift, the transformation is total. When you receive the gift of Jesus Christ, you will never be the same again.

### It is a gift that will turn us into givers (v.16)

What is the nature of this gift's power? We often talk about how we feel or how others might see us, but the greatest truth is that once we have received the love of God in Jesus Christ, we shall become givers ourselves. This gift releases a new energy within us that reaches out to other people. It is no wonder that John Stott writes about grace in this way, "Grace is love that cares and stoops and rescues."<sup>5</sup>

Many shops and businesses will close for Christmas and, if it is a hot day, large numbers of people will head for the beach. However, we must never forget the fact that Christians see God's love for the world embodied in Jesus' birth and our gifts at Christmas are one of the ways in which we see the individual and the community as a context for expressing the love which God has offered to us. The Christian community will never close down for Christmas and what we discover at Christmas is not for a day, but for life – and for all people!

**Rev Keith V Garner AM** ■

1. Kendrick, Graham, From heaven you came, Sing the Faith, The Methodist Church, No. 272, v.3.
2. Bruce, FF, *The Gospel of John*, Eerdmans, p.33.
3. Whitacre, Rodney A, *John*, IVP Academic, p.53.
4. Sloyan, Gerard, John, *An Interpretation Commentary*, John Knox Press, p.14.
5. Stott, John RW, *Christ in Conflict: Lessons from Jesus and His Controversies*, InterVarsity Press, p.97.

## Wesley Mission brings services together under one roof at Bowraville

**Bowraville now has two community services in one location following the official opening of Wesley Mission offices in the town centre.**

Wesley Mission's Youth Accommodation Service and the new ParentsNext program are co-located at 106 High Street, Bowraville.

In opening the offices, Wesley Mission CEO the Rev Keith Garner said it was timely that both services were brought together in the heart of the community.

"This will not only strengthen families but build capacity to meet the many complex challenges facing the community," Mr Garner said.

"Bringing together these two services under one roof will signal a new chapter in integrated support: it will strengthen community infrastructure and allow participants in each program access to other Wesley services."

Wesley Mission has provided homelessness and youth services in the Nambucca Valley region for many years, and has previously delivered employment services.

"During this time we have learnt much from the people of Bowraville," Mr Garner said.

Wesley Youth Accommodation Services has been operating in the Coffs Harbour, Bellingen and Nambucca Valley areas for four years and for two years in Bowraville. During the past year it has supported more than 100 young people from the region.

ParentsNext is a free Commonwealth Government funded program,

designed to equip parents for future employment by the time their youngest child goes to school.

Wesley Mission has been successfully operating the program at two locations in Sydney and on the Central Coast with encouraging results. The Commonwealth Department of Jobs and Small Business funds the ParentsNext program. Wesley Mission was successful in tendering for the delivery of the ParentsNext program at 29 locations across NSW including Bowraville and Coffs Harbour.

The program operates from Bowraville two days per week making it accessible to parents living in the Nambucca Valley and surrounding areas.

So far referrals have come from Bowraville, Barraganyatti, Macksville and Talarm. Wesley Mission also has a ParentsNext office in Coffs Harbour.

"We are already seeing parents taking steps towards their employment and education goals," Mr Garner said. "These are measured through an online work readiness tool, and

participants completing accredited training courses and 12 weeks of continuous employment.

"It is a great encouragement when we see participants feeling confident and empowered to take positive steps towards completing further education and achieving significant employment."

The Federal Member for Cowper, The Hon Luke Hartsuyker, said both services were important to the community.

"There's nothing more important than a job," Mr Hartsuyker said. "I commend the work of Wesley Mission in providing accommodation for young people because if they don't have a place to stay, if they don't have a stable base they are never going to hold down a job or go to school."

In opening the offices Aunty Ann Edwards welcomed guests to country while and Deputy Mayor of Nambucca Shire Cr Martin Ballangary led the official smoking and cleansing ceremony. ■



Wesley Mission CEO Rev Keith Garner, Deputy Mayor of Nambucca Shire Council Martin Balangary and Federal Member for Cowper Luke Hartsuyker at the official opening.

## Sunflowers on grey waters: the grieving gather at Lake Macquarie to remember those lost to suicide



**Beside the tranquil shores of Lake Macquarie they came: friends and relatives of those who had been lost to suicide gathered to grieve and remember.**

While the Wesley LifeForce Suicide Memorial Day was held in The Heritage Shed at Speers Point Park under leaden skies, the hearts of those who attended were warmed by a message of hope – allowing tears to flow but strengthened by a shared experience of loss.

The service, which has now become a regular event in the Hunter, allowed people touched by suicide to come together in a spirit of comfort and hope.

Charmaine du Plessis who lost her eldest daughter Chani to suicide in 2016 shared her story of grief and hope. Charmaine, who is a mental health therapist, has helped others impacted by suicide and mental health issues.

"We are a special type of community," Charmaine said to those who gathered. "Grief and loss

are a desolate place. I died with my daughter and nothing had the same meaning anymore.

"If we want to touch others, we must allow compassion to touch others. The footprints of love left by my daughter are way bigger than the grief we experience."

The CEO of Wesley Mission, the Rev Keith Garner, said many people had experienced loss by suicide but had limited opportunity to fully grieve and come to terms with what had happened. He described dealing with grief as a journey and "not a destination".

"Everybody's stories are different but there is a consensus in loss," Mr Garner said.

"There are no two stories alike. God is here to give us strength. God doesn't give us easy answers."

Dozens of sunflowers were gently tossed into Lake Macquarie as people remembered their loved ones and friends; the bright yellow carried by the breeze on grey waters. ■



## Christmas 2018 church services

Please join us as we celebrate the birth of Jesus and the real meaning of the season.

**Sunday 23 December**

Multiple locations and languages - For details see [www.wesleymission.org.au](http://www.wesleymission.org.au)

**10am Christmas Day  
Tuesday 25 December**

Wesley Theatre  
220 Pitt Street, Sydney



Do all the good you can  
because every life matters

## Wesley Mission to deliver mental health first aid for older Australians

**Wesley Mission will deliver Older Persons Mental Health First Aid (OPMFHA) training across Sydney and regional NSW following the announcement of funding by Minister for Mental Health Tanya Davies.**

Minister Davies visited Wesley Mission's School for Seniors program in Sydney to make the announcement.

Wesley Mission will receive \$75,000 as part of \$200,000 NSW Government funding package for mental health first aid training for seniors and those working with older people.

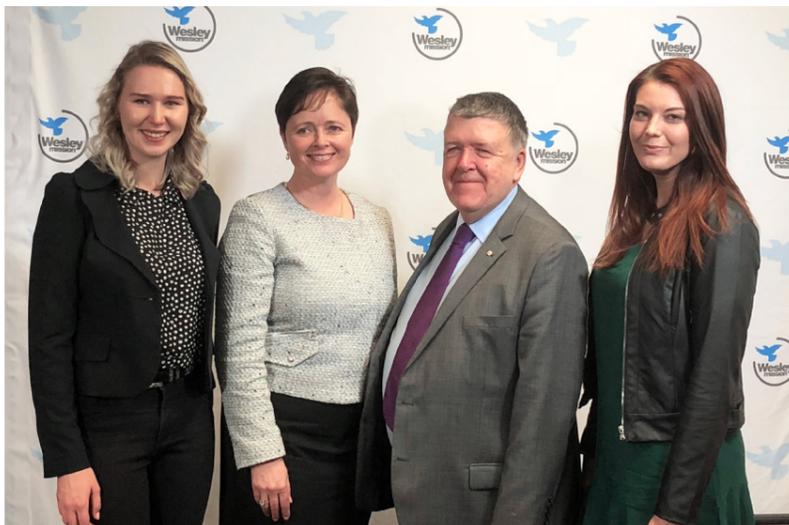
The training aims to help identify and lead people to mental health support earlier.

"Often mental health issues experienced by older people can go undetected," Mrs Davies said. "These workshops will mean problems can be detected earlier and help reached sooner.

"Those who receive the training will be able to give initial assistance and then advice about where to go for help, if needed.

"The NSW Government is committed to improving the wellbeing of seniors and this initiative is just one piece of the puzzle."

Wesley Mission will deliver OPMHFA training in Sydney, South Eastern Sydney (including St Vincent's Health Network), Northern Sydney, Southern NSW, Murrumbidgee and Far West Local Health Districts. It is one of several organisations which will deliver training.



From left: Wesley Mission Provisional Psychologist, Jasmin Cox, NSW Minister for Mental Health, Tanya Davies, Wesley Mission CEO the Rev Keith Garner and Wesley Mission Trainer/Assessor, Emma Burton at the launch.

All successful organisations have identified experienced trainers to complete instructor training with Mental Health First Aid Australia, with a further \$100,000 project funding provided to cover the costs of instructor training.

The CEO of Wesley Mission, the Rev Keith Garner said Wesley Mission was delighted with the opportunity to provide Older Persons Mental Health First Aid training.

"The mental health challenges facing older Australians are growing and becoming more complex," Mr Garner said.

"Mental Health First Aid training is important for early intervention, maintaining the dignity and wellbeing of individuals and building our community's capacity to care."

In 2018-19 the NSW Government will invest \$100 million as part of the Government's 10-year vision for mental health reform in NSW,

recognising that improving mental health outcomes for the people of NSW involves a whole of government reform agenda.

The Older Persons Mental Health First Aid training workshops will build on the successful Youth Mental Health First Aid training workshops funded by the NSW Government and delivered by Wesley Mission in 2016-17.

Older Person Mental Health First Aid training is expected to begin across NSW from October this year, with successful organisations promoting the training and taking registrations in their delivery regions.

If you or someone you know needs crisis support please phone Lifeline on 13 11 14. For more information on where to find mental health services in your community contact the NSW Mental Health Line on 1800 011 511. ■

## The debt toll on our roads

**Wesley Mission financial counsellors at Bella Vista have seen a spike in the number of people swamped by massive road toll debts.**

As toll ways spread across Sydney so do the debts with Bella Vista clients carrying arrears from \$1,000 to \$24,000.

Much of the debt relates to administration charges that toll companies saddle users with even if they fail to pay a small toll. A three dollar toll can quickly become a \$13 debt which compounds.

"North-west Sydney has a toll problem," said Wesley Mission financial counsellor Sandra Burke.

"New estates are opening up and young families are using the toll roads because local roads are gridlocked. Every client I see says they will pay the toll debt if the toll company can get rid of the administration charge."

Elderly clients living on the aged pension are also a growing

group seeking counsel in north-west Sydney.

According to Sue Gunning these clients have an average of one or two credit cards and alarmingly have had a good payment history with their banks.

"Some of these clients have been business people who had run large companies in the past but are now retired and struggling to make payments on their credit cards due to increased living expenses," Sue said.

"The interest and fees incurred on these cards are also stopping clients from getting on top of their payments. Most of the clients take responsibility for card payments but are now forced to obtain assistance from financial counsellors as they are unsure about their present and future financial situation."

These credit cards have average outstanding sums under \$10,000. Requests to credit providers for waivers have been submitted and accepted for these older clients.

Wesley Mission's Bella Vista financial counselling centre has also seen a rise in cases of people dealing with small business debts, including increases in unpaid businesses taxes, and debt management relating mainly to overdraft accounts.

Counsellors have been asking the Australian Tax Office (ATO) for debt release and/or non-pursuit of tax debts but this has been blocked by some clients' failures to submit business activity statements or recent tax returns.

"Until clients have completed these documents the ATO can choose not to review their cases and any pending requests," said Wesley Financial Counsellor Cora Cardenas.

"The key issue impacting the non-submission is usually their inability to pay their accountants, who hold most of their financial records. In most cases, accountants will no longer liaise with the client due to non-payment of outstanding fees." ■



Spend your  
**Christmas**  
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Tune into Channel Nine 5.30 am on  
**Tuesday 25th December 2018, to watch the Wesley Samoan Congregation perform in a special Wesley Impact! TV Christmas episode.**

**A great Christmas Gift!**



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The Man of Galilee is also available at Koorong Bookshop.

## Wesley Hospital psychiatrist warns of link between obsessive exercise and eating disorders

**Regular exercise is healthy – but obsessive-compulsive exercise is frequently driven by an underlying eating disorder, requiring specific mental health interventions and treatments such as cognitive behavioural therapy.**

The warning comes from a prominent Australian psychiatrist who has co-authored 15 published peer-reviewed papers on the topic and has been part of an international team leading new approaches in the treatment of compulsive exercise.

Dr Phillipa Hay, a renowned eating disorders academic and psychiatrist, and Director of Wesley Eating Disorders Centre, claims a compulsive drive to exercise excessively may, in a minority of people, stem from underlying weight- or food-related issues. Together, they can be detrimental to physical and psychological health.

According to Dr Hay, studies have shown that compulsive exercise is common in 80 per cent of anorexia patients and up to 57 per cent of patients with bulimia.

“The combination of the two disorders is associated with poorer outcomes and longer hospitalisations, and is a predictor of relapse” Dr Hay said. “Obsessive-compulsive exercise also causes higher levels of psychological distress, including depression and anxiety, in people with an eating

disorder, and in some studies it has also been related to increased rates of suicide and self-harm.

“For this reason, it’s important to get help if you or a loved one is showing symptoms, which often include increased anxiety and mood changes if unable to exercise, rigid and unrealistic exercise rules or goals and the drive to exercise even when ill or injured.”

To treat obsessive-compulsive exercise symptoms and establish a



healthy relationship with physical activity, body image and diet, Dr Hay recommends cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

“CBT can help change a person’s attitude, beliefs and behaviours towards a difficult-to-manage behaviour such as physical activity, to promote exercise that is ‘healthy,’” Dr Hay said.

Dr Phillipa Hay’s six signs and symptoms of obsessive-compulsive exercise:

- Mood changes. Exercise becomes ‘unhealthy’ when the inability to exercise causes mood

changes. Feelings of guilt, anger or irritability may arise when a person is unable to engage in physical activity.

- Fear of stopping or reducing exercise. People may have an overwhelming fear of the negative consequences that may result if they stop or reduce exercise; such as becoming fat, or a feeling as of an inability to cope. Not being able to exercise may cause heightened levels of anxiety.

- Strict exercise rules. A common sign of obsessive-compulsive exercise is following rigid exercise rules to avoid negative consequences.

- Setting difficult exercise goals. A fitness goal such as losing excess weight, training for a race or gaining muscle is healthy. Exercise goals become unhealthy when they are unrealistic and inflexible. Failure to meet high standards often leads to self-criticism, heightened anxiety and negative feelings. ■

Call Wesley Hospital on 1300 924 522

## Aboriginal and Indigenous suicide prevention network focus for new Rotary President

**Wesley Mission Superintendent and CEO the Rev Keith Garner was inducted as the President of the Rotary Club of Sydney in July this year.**

The club is one of four clubs that began Rotary in Australasia, alongside Melbourne, Auckland and Wellington.

The Presidential role lasts for a year. Mr Garner is currently Chair of the Rotary Board. He follows past Wesley Mission Superintendents who have held this office.

Each year the Rotary Club of Sydney asks its President to elect a project for his year of office. The Club then raises funds and engages with the issue concerned. The Rotary Club has shown considerable interest in the area of mental wellbeing.

This year’s project is focusing upon suicide prevention and raising funds to support the establishment of a Sydney-based Aboriginal and Indigenous Network through Wesley LifeForce.

“If you are an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander you are more likely to die by suicide than non-Indigenous people,” Mr Garner said.

Wesley LifeForce began in 1995 and has since trained more than 40,000 Australians in suicide prevention skills in metropolitan, regional and remote Australia. It has also helped in the development and ongoing support of 94 community-based suicide prevention networks – many of them Indigenous - across the nation with the number expected to reach more than 120 in the next few years.

The networks are helping to reduce the stigma associated with suicide and are encouraging people to seek help from crisis support, community and mental health services. They represent almost 900 network members who live or work in their local communities.

Rotary Club of Sydney meetings, chaired by the President, are informative and stimulating events with guest speakers drawn from a wide range of backgrounds and interests.

Among guests already this year have been former Australian Rugby World Cup winning captain Nick Farr-Jones, former NSW Premier Mike Baird, former TV news journalist and broadcaster Leigh Hatcher, Executive Chair of Carnival Cruises Ann Sherry, ABC Radio Weekend presenter Simon Marnie, Director of the St James Ethics Centre Simon Longstaff, and Ian Pollard, son of the late Alf Pollard, a senior officer of Wesley Mission. ■



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[lifelinesydney.org](http://lifelinesydney.org)



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