



wesley  
Christmas 2015  
**impact!**

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**“After me comes the one more powerful than I... he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.”**

**Mark 1:7, 8**



Multiplying love  
**04**

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A matter of trust  
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“The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”  
**Mark 1:14-15**

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Wesley News

**14**

A new mum with mental health problems and a family finding their way as they cope with a child with ADHD: the two may be many kilometres apart in a sprawling city but they are on the same painful, arduous journey. Reaching out for help and holding on to hope they struggle one day at a time, not knowing what will be around the corner.

As you read their stories in this Christmas edition of *Wesley Impact!* magazine you will begin to realise their accounts are like the chronicles of thousands of people who are supported by Wesley Mission each day. Their stories and that of Wesley Mission are at the heart of the Christmas message.

The Gospel account of a child born in a stable in poverty during insecure and uncertain times speaks strongly to us today: its simplicity and virtue stirs our hearts to action. The Christmas story gives us inner confidence and inspires us to reach out to others.

It also reminds us that we are not called to seal ourselves off from the world in some kind of protected compound. We have to face the challenge of living in the real world, but with the total assurance that the presence of Jesus Christ makes all the difference.

Christian joy is a deep-seated sense of wellbeing and has certainly been known to embrace sorrow, tears, anger and pain. We often view joy as though it were an experience or an emotion, when in fact it is a decision: it is a choice to follow Christ.

The joy we receive and continue to appreciate can never be gained from Christmas parties or presents but from the free gift we receive from Jesus Christ. It does not depend on our circumstances or background—it is for all who are willing to receive it.

It is the same message of good news that reached the shepherds in the field: “An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.’” (Luke 2:9-11)

May you and those you love know His joy this Christmas.

**Rev Keith V Garner, AM**  
Superintendent/CEO  
Wesley Mission

**For more visit**  
[Rev Dr Keith Garner's blog ▶](#)



# Multiplying LOVE

The town of Alstonville in far northern NSW has been known for its lush dairy farming land, macadamia plantations and sugar cane crops. It is one of those tranquil communities tucked away in the hills west of Ballina.

It is a place where crops can grow in rich fertile soil, watered by sub-tropical rains and nurtured by farmers who bring generations of experience to the land.

Although the Bruxner highway rumbles west to Lismore, Alstonville town life can be measured and unhurried. It would be easy to be consumed by the pace of life and forget those in need. Not so the Hay family who have been providing foster care to countless children through Wesley Dalmar since 2009.

Greg and Alison Hay have five biological children: Caleb, 20; Isaac, 19; Hannah, 17; Eliza, 12; and Samuel, now nearly nine. Since becoming foster carers, the Hay family have had four long-term foster care placements as well as numerous emergency and respite placements.

Much earlier in life, Alison developed a longing to become a foster carer when she spent time in India working in orphanages as a Registered Nurse. Although she started the process to become a foster carer after returning to Australia, a midwifery course, marriage to Greg (a high school teacher) and the growth of their biological family postponed the process until six years ago, when Samuel was three.

Currently, they have two long-term foster placements: Felicity, who came to them at six days old and is now four years old, and Beth, who also came to them at the age of six days and is 18 months.

Children are nurtured and love is never divided—just multiplied between their own children and those in their care, according to Alison. “With more kids, I don’t just divide my heart by five, the love is multiplied by however many kids we have,” she said.

The Hays view fostering as a family affair, and as such, it has had a deep and lasting impact on the entire family.

Samuel Hay was just seven when Jason, a 12-year-old child in out-of-home care came to live with his family. To Samuel, having Jason live with his family was like suddenly having another older brother.

Sibling relationships can be challenging at the best of times, but Jason had mental health issues that made it very difficult for Samuel to relate to him. Jason would engage in behaviours that Samuel knew were not acceptable in his family, like turning on the Xbox or the TV without asking, using bad language or leaving the house yard without asking. Often when a child feels that a sibling has done something wrong, they react by either fighting or trying to get the other in trouble. But Samuel chose a different path.

“Rather than clashing with Jason, Samuel would approach us and suggest that Jason needed help learning how to do things differently,” Alison said.

Samuel’s development of positive coping strategies when learning to relate to a child with special needs

is a glimpse into the Hay family’s approach to being foster carers.

“We don’t apologise for fostering,” explains Alison with a gentle voice but strong conviction, “because the benefits to our family outweigh any negative.”

**“We don’t apologise for fostering because the benefits to our family outweigh any negative.”**

Whenever there is an important decision to be made, Alison and Greg first talk it over with each other. Then they call a family meeting. For example, when Beth came to live with the Hay family, they expected that it would be a short term placement. When they realised that Beth would need longer term care, the Hay family was asked whether they could continue to look after her.

Alison and Greg called all the children together, including the two older children who came home from the Gold Coast where they were studying, so that everyone could have a say. Ultimately, every family member agreed to continue to provide long-term care for Beth.

Bringing foster children into their family has given the whole family a deeper social awareness. When tiny Felicity came to the family as a newborn, she was sick and drug-addicted, with symptoms that continued for two months. Even with Alison’s medical background, there was a steep learning curve.



The children would pitch in, holding the baby and rocking her as she struggled.

For a family that is very open and honest about what is going on, Alison reflected that the situation “gave the family a chance to open up about things.” They talked about the impact of drugs on society and the social challenges of people trapped in addiction. It is not surprising that Caleb is now studying social work, and Isaac is studying journalism, so that he can share what is going on in society in the wider world.

The family’s experience of caring has opened their eyes in other ways as well. For example, the Hays have cared for two Indigenous children. First they cared for a boy named Chris for six months and now Beth.

It is unusual for a non-Indigenous family to provide care for an Indigenous child. However, in rare cases, once all possible Aboriginal and kinship placements have been considered, and an extensive consultation process and assessment has taken place with the Aboriginal community and government agencies, Indigenous children can be placed in the care of non-Indigenous carers.

In these situations, a cultural care plan ensures that the children have continued connection to family and community. This intentional connection not only keeps the children linked to their community, but also has deepened the Hay’s appreciation of Aboriginal culture and people.

“Caring for the Indigenous children has been such a privilege,” Alison said. “I’ve learned a lot, but there is still so much I don’t know. While I would never have considered myself racist, I believe I probably did look at Indigenous people differently. But when I started caring for Chris, I loved him so much that I started seeing Indigenous people through his eyes. We now see them as children of the world, and we are all a family, no matter what our colour.”

As rewarding as fostering has been

for the family, there is no doubt that it is hard work. “Greg and I are hardwired to do it, not everyone can,” Alison said. “But you do have to work at it.” For Alison, that starts with being intentional about nurturing all the relationships in the family. “We keep it real and . . . we make sure we are well-informed by spending time together as a family and a couple. It is essential to make sure that your partner is completely in agreement (with fostering) because when it gets hard, you can stick together through it. I am not the mother of the year, and I do struggle, but my husband is so supportive...he balances me out.”

Alison knows that to be available for children who need love and care, she and her family need constant support.

“We believe in the saying that ‘it takes a village to raise a child,’” she said. The Hays are grateful for the dedication of Wesley Mission case workers who come alongside and support them. Alison said Wesley Mission case workers were like extended relatives who are available 24/7 to contact for support.

**Wesley Mission’s Out-of-Home Care** case manager, Cherie Casey, agrees.

“Everyone in the office is able to help them out—the family always comes to visit when they are in Ballina,” Cherie said. “They really seem to enjoy working with Wesley Mission.”

The Hay family’s extended ‘village’ also includes “safe people who have the same heart for children.”

“We have developed a trusted network of friends who care for them,” Alison said. Beyond the friendships, “we are also plugged into extra help in the community—forums, groups, speech therapists.”

The family’s church community is another important source of support, providing prayer, meals and helping in any way they can. Alison explains that their faith is a source of encouragement.

“We depend on God for the strength we need,” she said. “Our faith sustains us during the tough



times of caring.” Alison believes that God has placed it on her heart to care for children. “I do get really tired, but then I get my energy from doing what God wants me to be doing,” she said.

Cherie Casey says that the Hays have benefited as a family from foster caring and have educated their biological children through the process. “Challenging placements have opened them up to learning to manage challenging behaviours,” Cherie said.

The biological children of the Hay family echo this sentiment. Eliza says that as a foster family, it has been good to get the experience of dealing with different types of kids and brothers and sisters of all ages. Samuel says he is proud of his family because “it can deal with children who aren’t as patient and kind as other kids—that (we) can look after kids who aren’t so easy.”

Cherie says the foster children in the Hay family are treated no differently than the biological children. The family has a strong ethos, where each member of the family is expected to pitch in and help where needed. “We don’t believe that kids should be paid to do chores,” Alison said. “Foster children are expected to share work in the family unit, and biological siblings are expected to help care for their foster siblings.”

Eliza enjoys caring for the younger children. Alison joyfully notes that “the two bigger boys are just amazing with the little ones.”

Alison says the family believes that the foster children deserve everything that their biological

**“We always try to make sure that the foster children have a room of their own—a beautiful bedroom that they deserve”**

children get. “We always try to make sure that the foster children have a room of their own—a beautiful bedroom that they deserve,” she said. Her two older sons spent a day painting a bedroom a lovely new blue colour for Beth and Felicity.

This Christmas will be no different for the Hay family when it comes to multiplying love for their children and others. The family will begin with a family breakfast followed by church. After they open presents together, they will join their extended family for a Christmas meal at the local Anglican Church hall. Along with the Hay family and Alison’s parents, siblings and their families, they often invite people who may be alone at Christmas. Some years, the meal has included 30 or so people. During the past few years, they have also reached out to their extended foster family—the auntie of Beth and Chris has joined them for the gathering.

This Christmas, the Hay family will have even more love to share and celebrate. For nearly four years, the Hays have cared for Felicity, the baby who first came to them sick and drug-addicted at six days old. This past year, the Hays decided to permanently make Felicity a part of their family and have now begun the process to formally adopt her.



# A partnership of care and perseverance

Every morning, many parents face the emotional whirlwind of getting children organised and out the door, unpredictable traffic, and the pressure of the working day ahead. On top of this, Belinda carries the weight of her son Sean's struggle with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and the uncertainty of how this will play out in the classroom each day.

Throughout primary school Sean was good at his schoolwork and teachers praised his politeness and popularity with his classmates. Yet he was often in trouble for being restless, distracting others, and getting into arguments with other children and teachers.

"Ever since he was in kindergarten he would keep being moved around the classroom," Belinda recalled. "In the last six months of primary school I was petrified he was going to get kicked out."

Before and after school each day, Sean and his younger brother Jack went to Wesley Out of School Hours Care. Belinda

admits that at times, she was afraid Sean might lose his place there because of his behaviour. She was unsure how the family would make ends meet if she had to reduce her working hours or give up work completely to look after him before, and after school.

**Wesley Out of School Hours Care Program** Manager Leanne Gavellas admits Sean's behaviour posed some challenges for the team, yet they were determined not to give up.

"There were some really hard days with Sean—he was often sullen and withdrawn, but we tried to provide a sense of belonging so I knew he was accepted, and he did make friends here," Leanne said.

Only two per cent of the 195 children who attend Wesley Out of School Hours Care have been diagnosed with ADHD, yet Leanne says this figure has a broader impact.

Maintaining a safe and secure environment for all children can be challenging with some behaviours. "We have had children literally

climbing the walls, and when children act before they think, this can lead to aggressiveness," Leanne said.

"It's so sad to watch because, while it obviously affects other children, it really affects their own ability to make friends."

For Belinda, there were many hard days at home when she did not know how much more of Sean's behaviour she and her husband Steve could take. "It put a strain on every relationship in the family—if I didn't have the understanding from my work in childcare, I don't know how I would have coped," she said.

When the situation was most fraught, Belinda sought help from Wesley Counselling Services, who helped her "keep afloat".

Belinda first sensed there was a problem when Sean was two years old and he became distracted, restless and impulsive, and was not responding to discipline. "At three I was trying to get him to do time out, but it just wasn't working," she said. "By the age of five, he had become very oppositional."

made the road lonely and isolating.

"People don't believe you—they would say, 'You should just give him a smack' but they didn't understand he was so into what he was doing that he wouldn't respond to it," she said. "People can be critical and judgemental, but they don't understand the hours a parent puts into researching what might be wrong, and the helplessness you feel."

Belinda believes the support provided to her and Sean by Wesley Out of School Hours Care was above and beyond childcare. Sean's behaviour was recorded and monitored, staff were keen to listen and counsel, and deal effectively and sensitively with Sean when he needed to be disciplined.

"It kept me sane," Belinda said. "All the staff were such a supportive team, and so good working with Sean. You can't discipline him like any other child and they understood that—many people don't."

The centre is committed to ensuring staff are equipped to deal with children with ADHD. They attend fortnightly support groups in the local area, and consult with parents and experts in the field when discussing strategies for discipline and care.

Years of specialist appointments followed, along with several tests, chiropractic and massage, and adjustments to Sean's food intake. No answers came. "We paid almost six thousand dollars on specialists!" Belinda exclaimed.

Finally the diagnosis of ADHD was given when Sean was in Year Four.

Statistics vary relating to the number of Australian children and adolescents with ADHD. Some say it is 3 per cent, while others claim the figure could be as high as 11 per cent, with symptoms including difficulties with paying attention, being organised, thinking slowly, sitting still and managing impulsive reactions.

The fact that these figures are so diverse reflects the spectrum of opinions on ADHD, including the view that the condition does not exist. Belinda said this view, along with the constant well-meaning advice of family and friends who misunderstood Sean's condition as a sign of simple misbehaviour or low intelligence,

environment, a home away from home," Leanne said.

This also means walking alongside parents like Belinda as they face challenges with parenting.

"There have been quite a few parents who have come and let us know their story. They often cry on our shoulder, and because we look after their children they trust us," she said.

An agonising decision for Leanne was whether to place Sean on medication: a choice she shared with Belinda.

"I had a close friend warn me, 'You'll lose him if he goes on medication; you won't know him'," she recalled, as the tears flowed from a mother who both loves and laments.

For Belinda and Steve, the moment of truth came when Sean was in Year Five and his body began to change. "I could see the testosterone kicking in and his behaviour was elevating," she said. "It got to the point where he was in trouble at home, he was in trouble at school, and I thought 'we can't keep going on like this'."

After talking the issue through with Sean, Belinda and Steve decided to try medication.

"I always said I wouldn't put him on medication unless he was finding it hard academically. He was coping academically but not behaviourally. So I thought 'I have to help him'," she said.

The family's journey continues: Sean is now in high school, his younger brother Jack still attends Wesley Out of School Hours Care, and Belinda continues to ask Leanne for advice when difficulties arise.

While medication was a last resort, Belinda said life for Sean and the family has become easier since the medication began working.

"He now has a connection with everyone in my family—he and his younger brother have become friends and I haven't ever seen that before," Belinda said.

\*Names and models have been changed to protect privacy

# A matter of Trust



Brenda takes a breath as she tries to put her harrowing story into words. As birds sing freely outside, she begins to speak of a life seemingly worlds away, where she lived and breathed the misery of drug addiction. Her words disclose a journey of tremendous pain and anguish, a dark path lit only recently with a pure joy and steadfast hope.

The birth of her son Luke last year was the catalyst for this new beginning. Along with the joy of being a mum, it brought her into contact with **Wesley Mission's innovative Mums and Kids Matter program** and other services which have given her support and the impetus needed to turn her life around.

Having support is almost a new reality for Brenda. Raised by her grandparents, she recalls the stability and strong Christian influence of her early years. "My grandparents were strict Christians and we went to church from the time I was a baby," she said.

However when Brenda lost both her grandparents at the age of 13, the safety and love she had known was suddenly gone, and she ran away. "I didn't have anybody there for me, I didn't have my mum or my

dad, and I just went a bit crazy and lived a worldly life," she said.

For years, Brenda lived in a world where homelessness, addiction and abuse were the norm. A short-lived hope of a stable family life came with the birth of her daughter in her early twenties in rural New South Wales (NSW). "Ever since I was 18, I wanted to be married and be with the one man all my life, and I'm still chasing that," she reflected.

When her relationship broke down and she was separated from her daughter, Brenda was once again struggling to stay on track, and later became addicted to ice. Since 2000, Brenda has suffered from paranoid schizophrenia, a life she describes as "a miserable hell" that seems impossible to escape.

The discovery that she was pregnant in early 2014 was a shock. She struggled with the physical and emotional challenges that pregnancy added.

"I wasn't coping with the pregnancy, I wasn't coping with life at all, and I ended up in hospital for a few weeks," she said. "When I came out, I got involved with Family and Community Services and they started to help me."

Brenda was screened for drugs three times a week and was grateful for any kind of assistance that would break her addiction to ice, a drug which has been described as a national 'epidemic'.

Towards the end of her pregnancy, the NSW Department of Family and Community Services referred her to Wesley Mums and Kids Matter, a pilot program for mothers with severe and persistent mental illness, and their children under the age of five.

Team Leader Lydia McMillan says many of these mums have multiple support needs in addition to their struggle with mental illness including addiction issues, homelessness and domestic violence situations.

Some mothers who come through the program live on-site at the Mums and Kids Matter residential service in south-western Sydney, in an environment that enables them to take care of their children with 24-hour support on-hand, and assistance with parenting.

Only two hours after arriving at Mums and Kids Matter, Brenda went into labour and gave birth to her son, Luke. Having a staff

member from the program there during the labour, and having somewhere to stay with on-hand support and training in parenting was what she needed.

"There were times when I became unwell because of my mental illness and when I thought I couldn't cope with looking after Lukey, but the staff at Mums and Kids Matter helped to keep me going and gave me a sense of security—they also helped me to know how to take care of him because I only knew the basics and I needed help with settling him," she said.

Lydia believes mothers with mental illness suffer from a public perception that they cannot adequately care for their children. The program works hard to keep mum and child connected, preventing separation trauma and long-term anxiety and angst.

"The foundation of Mums and Kids Matter is that mums with mental health issues can parent well if they have the right support," Lydia said.

Without Mums and Kids Matter, Brenda feels her future would have been vastly, and tragically, so different.

"Lukey would have been taken

from me and I probably would have ended my life."

Lydia said it has been rewarding seeing the change in Brenda since she first came to Mums and Kids Matter. "I have seen a huge shift in Brenda's confidence as a person in her own self-worth and ability to be a good parent, and in her own ability to reflect on how she's going," Lydia said.

**"There were times when I became unwell because of my mental illness and when I thought I couldn't cope with looking after Lukey, but the staff at Mums and Kids Matter helped to keep me going and gave me a sense of security..."**

Through Mums and Kids Matter, Brenda received assistance and strategies for managing her urge to use drugs. She also began understanding the effects of her mental illness, reading the warning signs and employing

strategies when they arose. She sees Mums and Kids Matter as a gift from God at the time when she needed it most.

"I just believe that God saw how I was struggling with the drugs and he took us away from all the pain and suffering and hurt and brought us to a safe place," she said.

The God she learned about as a child never left her: today she is embracing the Christian faith afresh.

"Everything I do today, I do in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ," she said.

Throughout her time at Mums and Kids Matter and move to her new home, Brenda has met with Wesley Mission Chaplain Gail Kilby who encouraged her with pastoral and spiritual care.

"Brenda's prayers are heartfelt. The Lord has been a refuge of hope for Brenda, a listener to her fears in lonely, dark times," Gail said.

"I look forward to being there when Brenda fulfils her hope to be baptised with her precious little boy—it will be an outward expression of Brenda's inner, humble trust in God, of being 'changed' by Him."

\*Models have been changed to protect privacy



# Between times

with the Rev Keith V Garner AM  
Mark 1: 14-15

## Mark 1: 14-15

One of the most important and exciting things that Jesus Christ ever said came at the outset of his public ministry. It followed a time of testing and we are told that after John the Baptist was imprisoned, Jesus was thrust into Galilee, declaring the good news of God.

“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come

near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:14-15)

For the people who first heard these words, I wonder what understanding they had. Firstly, we need to recognise it was not something which was unfamiliar to them, because Jews were accustomed to the concept of addressing God as King of the

universe – a supreme being over all things and all people.

The season of Advent is an important period that declares the beginning of the Christian year, as the Christian community anticipates the coming of the Messiah. There is a danger of confusing Advent with Christmas. The two are uniquely bound but

Advent is not to be understood as a build up to Christmas; rather it is a season when we await the coming of Christ and anticipate his final coming. It is a ‘between times’ season.

### It marks a time of repentance

John the Baptist had offered ‘a baptism for the forgiveness of sins’ (Mark 1:4) and had proclaimed the coming of One who was greater than himself (v.v.7-8), so Jesus’ declaration calls people to a new beginning.

The link between one era ending and a new one beginning sits consistently with the Christian message of death and resurrection. Many Christians and others around the world are facing the same challenge of what it means to live ‘between times’. We acknowledge that repentance is not a small religious component in our prayers, but a complete change of circumstances.

Michael Frost, referring to what it means to live in such times, wrote, “Our sins are forgiven. The gulf that separates us from home with God has been closed. This is the good news of which Jesus spoke so liberally and demonstrated so powerfully in word, deed and symbol. Our exile from God is over. We have crossed the Jordan River and returned to where we belong.”<sup>1</sup>

On a visit to New York, while preaching in the United States of America, Carol and I visited the Riverside Church. One writer gathered together a series of articles about preachers in that great church: “In and through their sermons God has come to us in our times of need; we have been driven to our knees in repentance for our sin; visions of a world closer to God’s intention have danced before our eyes; and despair has again and again been replaced by a renewed hope.”<sup>2</sup>

The wonderful theme of Advent combines thoughts of penitence and joy. As we prepare for the summer holiday break, let us not

lose sight of this great theme which reaches a climax in the celebration of the coming of Jesus Christ.

### It marks a time of hope

One of the great Advent themes is that of hope. It was a hope that had never died among God’s people and a theme which was pronounced frequently by the prophets (Isaiah 40: 1-5).

Despite the fact that this hope was kept alive, there was a long period when the expectant hope seemed to be very far away. Therefore, when Jesus’ message was first heard, it startled people.

There is a powerful truth which the Christian church must embody. This is not only a time for personal discipleship, but also an opportunity for re-shaping who and what we are. New Zealand church leader, Michael Riddell, explored this question in his ground-breaking book *Threshold of the Future*. The writer distilled indicators and features of a church that had taken these issues seriously. They include an emphasis on relationship, honesty and reality, counter-cultural values and with little emphasis on buildings, size and structures.<sup>3</sup>

In our Wesley Mission context, we know that to offer hope involves far more than vibrant worship or meaningful social services; it will enable people to embrace the possibility of a new beginning for themselves and to experience the full sense of God’s acceptance through a people who are committed to an open door.

### It marks a time when hope joyfully interrupts

This hope was already being witnessed in Jesus’ preaching, teaching, healing, gathering men and women around him and making friends with the most unlikely of people while, at the same time, finding that enemies emerged among the highly-placed and respectable.

In the interim, some who had set their hopes upon the coming of the

Messiah lost hope and the nation had deteriorated into a place of humiliation under foreign rule.

As we observe the harsh political setting for many in our world who have become refugees and without a land to call their own, the Advent hope has much to say to all of us.

In the coming weeks, I shall be given the enormous privilege of speaking on television and radio about the significance of the coming of Jesus Christ. I shall seek to draw people’s attention to the importance of God’s interruption into the life of the world through Jesus Christ.

My hope this year is that it will be the kind of interruption that moves us to experience a break from the shopping season and the ever-growing frivolity that is clearly manifest, to become a new and compassionate people, reaching out to those in need and finding that the hope that has been offered to all in Jesus Christ can and will transform this world.

We live ‘between the times’. We acknowledge the hope of the coming of Jesus Christ, but we also anticipate the richness of his final coming in glory. One preacher powerfully concluded an article on this theme, “So amid the deepening gloom and impending disasters of our time, there is no reason either for panic, fear or unyielding despair, but a sure and certain ground for joyful hope: the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

#### Rev Keith V Garner, AM

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3. Riddell, Michael, *Threshold of the Future: Reforming the Church in the Post-Christian West*, London: SPCK, p.168-171.
4. Watson, Philip S, Article in the *Expository Times* November 1978, T & T Clark.

**NEWS**

## Young people taking charge after foster care

A new 12-month pilot program supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged young people as they leave foster care has been launched by Wesley Mission and The Rotary Club of Sydney.

**Wesley Take Charge of Your Life** will target up to 100 young people across Sydney by providing a range of support and counselling services as they move from foster care to independent living.

When young people exit foster care they also leave their foster parents and make an attempt to live independently as young adults. They experience little or no support during the transition.

Few have extended family or community networks to fall back upon. The ensuing years are marked by low levels of educational attainment and high rates of unemployment, mobility, homelessness, financial difficulty, loneliness and physical and mental health problems. Around 50 per cent of children in foster care do not finish high school.

“The transition to adulthood and self-sufficiency can be a challenge for any young person,” said Wesley Mission CEO the Rev Dr Keith Garner at the launch attended by 150 community leaders and Rotarians. “For young people leaving foster care the challenges are amplified.

“Wesley Take Charge of Your Life will keep young people engaged with education and employment while reducing the risk of homelessness and crime. Permanent, supportive relationships and connections are critical to a young adults’ well-being.”

Young people will be offered a package of support options, individually tailored to their unique situation, location and level of



**At the launch of Wesley Take Charge of Your Life:** (from left) Executive Manager of Wesley Dalmar, Nigel Lindsay, President of The Rotary Club of Sydney, Andrew Laurie, Wesley Mission CEO Rev Dr Keith Garner, former foster care client and now team leader of Wesley Mission’s Out of Home Care, Tuggerah, Jessica Wilson, and NSW Minister for Family and Community Services, Brad Hazzard.

need. The package will include mentoring, education and training, life skill development, accessing accommodation, support, and employment opportunities.

The NSW Minister for Family and Community Services Brad Hazzard, who helped launch the program, said the Baird Government has a focus on children and young people.

“I want young people in care or leaving care to have the same opportunities and benefits as my own children,” Mr Hazzard said. “The Wesley Take Charge of Your Life program provides an opportunity for young people to receive some practical help and guidance navigating life beyond care.”

President of The Rotary Club of Sydney, Andrew Laurie said assisting young people was a significant area of service for his club and its members. Wesley Mission’s track record of providing support to thousands of Australians in need made it a natural partner for Rotary.

“Each year thousands of young

Australians are leaving care and experiencing negative results,” Mr Laurie said. “The opportunity to provide these young people with support as they transition to independent living is a great privilege for us.

“The program will not only help them avoid those negative outcomes but also enable them to realise their potential.”

The shape of the 12-month pilot program was informed by feedback from focus groups run by Catalyst Research in August this year.

Stable and available housing in an area close to a young person’s original residence was a priority as was learning life skills like cooking, shopping, good hygiene and the development of social skills. Mentoring was a key element in helping to develop social and life skills.

Wesley Mission provides foster care services to more than 670 children in NSW across western Sydney, the Central Coast, the Hunter and the North Coast.

**NEWS**

## Wesley Mission CEO in birthday honours

A Queen’s Birthday Honour awarded in June to the Superintendent of Wesley Mission the Rev Dr Keith Garner, has had its sequel with his formal investiture to the Order of Australia (AM) by the Governor of New South Wales in September.

His Excellency General The Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Ret’d) formally presented the Superintendent with the award for “significant service to the community and being an advocate for people who are homeless and socially disadvantaged, and to pastoral care” at a state event at Government House in Sydney.

The Superintendent said the award was an honour to be shared with the broader Wesley Mission family.

“These are the people who are engaged in the important work of caring for the poor and vulnerable in Sydney and beyond,” he said.

Keith said he and Carol were honoured to be so meaningfully embraced in a new country.

“In our adopted country we have been supported by a marvellous team of people: this award belongs to everyone at Wesley Mission,” he said. Wesley Mission, as both a parish mission and an incorporated body, has a tradition of an extensive and strategic ministry for



The Rev Dr Keith Garner and Carol Garner with the Governor of NSW His Excellency General The Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Ret’d) at Government House.

its Superintendent.

“In 2005 I had arrived in a different culture and was adjusting to a new church and to a different model of community service delivery,” he said “from 2010 the focus has been upon developing a new strategy for growth and delivering even greater and significant work within the community.”

“In many ways, Wesley Mission has moved into a new era. We

look forward to seeing the lasting benefits of this strong foundation through to 2020.”

### Extension confirmed

Wesley Mission Council were delighted to confirm the extension of the Rev Keith Garner’s position as Superintendent until September 2020 at a meeting on 20 August. This will now be processed through Presbytery.

Please join us as we celebrate Christmas!

Christmas Day  
Friday 25 December

**9.30 am**  
Wesley International Congregation, City Wesley Theatre, 220 Pitt Street, Sydney

**10 am**  
Wesley International Congregation, Ryde Unit 5, 112 Talavera Road, Macquarie Park

**10.30 am**  
Wesley 10.30 am Congregation Wesley Church, 220 Pitt Street, Sydney

**6 pm**  
Praise, Prayer & Preaching Wesley Theatre, 220 Pitt Street, Sydney

Traditional Christmas Carols  
Sunday 20 December

**Visit [wesleymission.org.au](http://wesleymission.org.au) for details of all events this Christmas**

NEWS

NEWS

## Developing young healthy minds in Newcastle

A new program supporting children and young people who are showing early signs of, or are at risk of developing, mental illness has been launched in Newcastle.

**Wesley Young Healthy Minds** is aiming to improve the wellbeing of young people and children so they can better participate in their communities and reach their potential.

The Wesley Mission program is helping young people develop their capabilities, and increase their well-being and community participation. Flexible services like home visiting, advocacy, family support, individual support within the family setting, and school and sporting engagement are enabling this to happen.

“The flexibility of this program allows our caseworkers to be responsive to each family environment,” said Wesley Mission CEO the Rev Dr Keith Garner.

“The service is unique to Newcastle: it is the only youth funded early intervention program in the area which provides home visits and is flexible enough to fit with the needs of each family.”

Wesley Young Healthy Minds Service has been funded through the Australian Government’s Family Mental Health Support Services (FMHSS).

Research indicates that inadequate investment in prevention and early intervention services, particularly for children and young people, can lead to a lifetime of disadvantage associated with mental health problems.

Twenty five per cent of people with mental illness have their first episode before the age of 12. One in six young Australians is currently experiencing an anxiety condition—this is equivalent to 440,000 young people today.

Some 26.4 per cent of Australians



From left: Peter O'Brien, Maria Maxwell, Rev Keith Garner, Heather McIntyre, Wesley Young Healthy Minds Team Co-ordinator Amy Clark and Rene Acker – Sessions.

aged 16 to 24 currently have experienced a mental health disorder in the last 12 month which is 750,000 young people today.

“We know that the best time for delivering support to prevent mental disorders, or to provide early intervention to minimise the impact of mental illness across the lifetime, is during childhood and early adolescence,” Dr Garner said.

Wesley Mission has been providing family support services in Newcastle for more than 15 years and has built strong community and family networks.

The service saw its first client at the end of August and is now supporting five young people a week. Young people come via self-referral, referrals from other agencies, the community, the education system, a phone enquiry, or walk in off the street.

“Already our team has built strong relationships with medical practitioners, local primary and high schools, youth agencies, and other mental health providers,” Dr Garner said.

“At Wesley Mission we know the importance of working with the community: the success of any program relies upon the greater networks of support not just stand-alone services.”

The program is reaching out to the general community—childcare providers, out of school hours care, health departments and workers such as occupational therapists, speech therapists and general medical practitioners, family referral services, Police Youth Liaison Officers, and other services young people commonly use or engage.

## New face of Wesley Centre is warm entrée to central Sydney

The Wesley Centre in the heart of central Sydney is beating stronger and attracting more people following a major facelift, upgrade and refurbishment.

The Chair of the Wesley Community Services Board, Mark Scott told a large crowd at the official opening that the renovations reflected Wesley Mission’s history and continuing commitment to the city.

“It is because of our dedication to people that we have a centre right in the middle of the city for people to meet, seek help, study or simply grab a cup of coffee,” Mr Scott said.

Wesley Mission Superintendent the Rev Dr Keith Garner described the centre as “a green shoot on the edge of a concrete jungle.”

“We offer care in a city that can become so impersonal,” he said.

As part of the upgrade, the **Wesley Conference Centre** now has a contemporary feel and is more functional. The Upperroom Resto Café on the Ground Floor is drawing more CBD workers to the site.

**Wesley Counselling Services** are now located on Level Three bringing it closer to other Wesley Mission teams and reducing costs.



The Rev Dr Keith Garner officially opens that new-look Wesley Centre.

Wesley Information Services are for the first time located in one place on Level Three while the Dunbar Library has new space and resources on the Ground Floor. The Wesley Theatre and surrounding areas have also been refurbished.

“This building is very much the public face of Wesley Mission,” Dr Garner said. “When it was built in 1991 it was a state of the art but like all buildings it needed new life in a city that demanded modernity and new functionality.”

“During the past few months, a good deal of work has been undertaken in our Wesley Centre. The Centre is important to us and is a place where people spend quality time. It is a place of faith, it is a place of conversation and it is a place where people’s lives are enriched.”

The brief for the refurbishment was to make the centre more welcoming, attractive and functional. “The Upperroom Resto Café is staffed and run by Christian people,” Dr Garner said. “So it is not just a place for quality coffee but, much more than that, it has a strong spirit of welcome and a caring attitude to all customers.”

The new Greatorex Room in the Wesley Conference Centre was also officially opened at the event. It is named after former Wesley Mission officer David Greatorex, who was present, as a testament to all that he has contributed to Wesley Mission.

The Greatorex Room is a multi-function room and conference room which can open as a servery feeding up to 400 people.

## Downsize your cares not your lifestyle

Enjoy community living with daily social activities, care and comfort. Join people with similar interests and values at a Wesley Mission village:

- Alan Walker Village, Carlingford
- Wesley Taylor Village, Narrabeen
- Frank Vickery Village, Sylvania



For more information or to visit please call (02) 9857 2789 or visit [wesleymission.org.au](http://wesleymission.org.au)



NEWS

## Self-determination driver of new Indigenous suicide prevention program

An innovative program designed to support Indigenous communities in preventing suicide has been launched in Sydney as part of Wesley Mission's LifeForce program.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **Wesley LifeForce Suicide Prevention Program** is a culturally appropriate and tailored package to create discussion and to help the spread of information regarding suicide in Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities.

The new program was launched by the CEO of Wesley Mission the Rev Dr Keith Garner and Gayili Yunupingu, who is a senior traditional land owner and honorary chairperson of the Galupa Marn Garr Suicide Prevention group in Nhulunbuy, NT.

The launch coincided with the annual **Wesley LifeForce Suicide Prevention Networks conference** which drew more than 100 representatives from 60 local networks from across Australia.

Wesley LifeForce commissioned The Seedling Group (TSG), an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultancy, to undertake development of the program, appropriate for an Indigenous audience. The three TSG consultants have expertise in Indigenous mental health, suicide prevention and community capacity building.

Focus groups were initially held in three communities - Halls Creek in The Kimberley of Western Australia, Katherine in the Northern Territory and Thursday Island in the Torres Strait Islands in Queensland.

Input from these community discussions was used to modify the original program to render the training more acceptable, suitable and culturally appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island



Gayili Yunupingu, senior traditional land owner and honorary chairperson of the Galupa Marn Garr Suicide Prevention group in the Northern Territory, speaking at the launch of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wesley LifeForce Suicide Prevention Program.

peoples. Workshop materials have been developed for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences and feature artwork from local artists: *Storytelling after the Gathering* by Bronwyn Smith and Waru Danalaig' by Gessa Pilot.

Wesley LifeForce began in 1995 and has since delivered suicide prevention skills training to more than 30,000 people in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote Australia. The national program also establishes and supports the 60 suicide prevention community networks across Australia. These networks cover almost one-third of all Lower House seats in the Australian Parliament.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics an average of 5.2 per cent of Indigenous Australian deaths annually in 2009-2013 were from suicide. Indigenous suicide rates vary by state, with Western Australia and the Northern Territory having the highest rates.

Also attending the launch was NSW Mental Health Commissioner John Feneley and the CEO of the Community Council of Australia, David Crosbie.

"Community suicide prevention networks are ideally placed to

meet the needs of people living in regional and remote areas: they promote connectedness, social inclusion and participation, and reduce isolation," Dr Garner said, in launching the program.

"Each network represents a cross section of the community. Networks embrace service providers, regional hospitals and community based mental health services. Networks fill the gap of fractured services while building community capacity. Local people are invited to participate. Everyone is welcome to join a network."

National coordination by Wesley LifeForce has enabled the rapid dissemination of mental health resources such as Conversations Matter and suicide bereavement packs to its networks across the country.

Networks also help to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness and to promote help-seeking.

"Self-determination is a key tenant of the Wesley LifeForce networks program and this is a reason why community networks are also working well within Indigenous communities," he said.

## That's a golden look

Wesley Impact! magazine has the best layout of any Christian magazine in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific.

That was the judgment of the Australasian Religious Press Association (ARPA) which gave the magazine the gold award at its recent annual conference and awards in Brisbane. The judges were drawn from mainstream media and academia.

Wesley Impact! magazine editor Graeme Cole said the magazine had established a good marriage between form and function.

The judges noted: "Wesley Impact!

manages to create the visual impression of the values of Wesley Mission – care for the vulnerable of society done with empathy and understanding."

"The predominantly three column layout with large font is appealing. Distinct headlines, bold and larger font paragraphs have an impact and encourage further reading."

Wesley Mission has won more than 12 awards from ARPA during the past decade for writing, headlines, news releases and layout. ARPA covers 151 Christian publications in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific.



Wesley Impact! magazine editor, Graeme Cole, receiving the ARPA award for Best Layout of a Christian magazine.



## Great Christmas gift ideas

Available by emailing [communications@wesleymission.org.au](mailto:communications@wesleymission.org.au) or by phone on 1800 021 821



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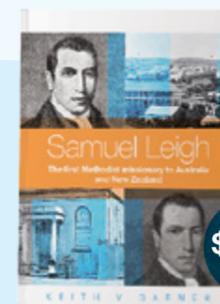


### Wesley Impact! TV

Perspectives on faith and leadership

This collection of interviews looks at a cross section of leadership styles and principles of Christian leaders who have brought positive social change

\$9.95 + p&h



### Samuel Leigh

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