



wesley impact!

Spring 2016

Amazing faith

How God heard Veronica's
cry from the streets

Grace at hand

A family turns life's
toughest corner

Called to a city, speaking to a nation

Rev Keith Garner
reflects upon more than
a decade of leadership
at Wesley Mission



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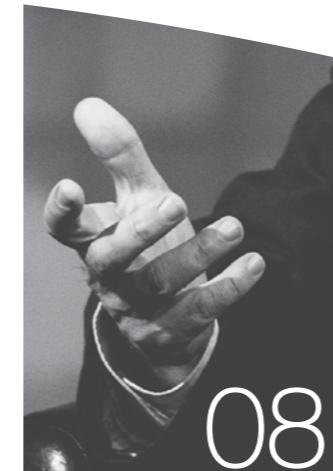
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"If a man owns 100 sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not go to look for the one that wandered off?"

Matthew 18:12



"Rejoice with me;
I have found my
lost sheep."
Luke 15:6

Wordwise



Homelessness continues to scar our beautiful nation. More than 105,000 people are homeless and the number of rough sleepers on Sydney streets is at a record level.

The task of caring for these people grows despite our relative prosperity. Sadly, people who are homeless are too easily forgotten and neglected by the community. From its earliest days, Wesley Mission has taken a very different and defining approach—it has sought to reach those on the margins with compassionate care and practical support. It is a community of Christian faith compelled to seek and save the lost, inspired by God's grace.

Grace shapes and gives purpose to everything we do: grace is unmerited and unearned. It is the love of God poured out for people. It is truly amazing in transforming lives.

In this edition of *Wesley Impact!* magazine you will discover this for yourself when you read the remarkable stories of Veronica and Julie.

Both women had successful careers but through illness and unemployment found their lives turned upside down. Veronica moved from rural New South Wales to Sydney and could not find work. She remembers the nights spent sleeping on the cold and gritty streets of Inner Sydney and the indignity that such a situation brings.

She felt her resilience was gone and no hope was left. In her grief she called out to God and asked for his help. Her cry was heard and the pieces of her shattered life were put back together by the committed staff at Wesley Edward Eagar Lodge.

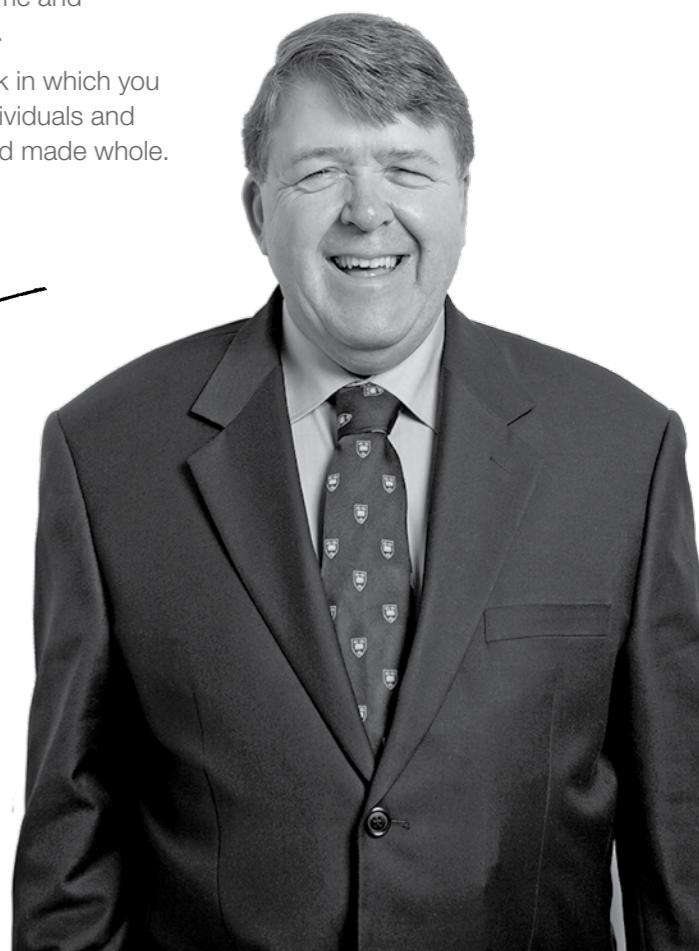
Julie and her family were forced to sleep in their car when illness and mounting debts overtook their lives. They parked their small vehicle behind a truck stop and used public toilets and showers. Their daughter missed school and her friends. A kind and wise volunteer who provided meals to the homeless guided them to the specialist support of Wesley Mission on the Central Coast. The step was life changing.

In God's kingdom everybody counts, everybody matters—there is no hierarchy of importance. There is no significance for some and insignificance for others.

It is this grace-filled work in which you share and rejoice as individuals and families are changed and made whole.

Keith Garner

Rev Keith V Garner, AM
Superintendent/CEO
Wesley Mission



"In God's kingdom everybody counts, everybody matters—there is no hierarchy of importance."

Amazing faith

How God heard Veronica's homeless cry



Homelessness, especially of older, capable people who have paid taxes and lived full lives, is set to explode during the next decade.

This is not the reckoning of someone reading the latest census results—it is the lived experience of Veronica. Once homeless, but now a strong and articulate woman, she warns that she is not 'one of a kind'.

Unemployment, soaring property prices and rents, and a lack of superannuation are going to make homelessness a reality for more older Australians, especially women.

"There is some emergency help for those people with obvious problems who have hit rock bottom," Veronica said. "But I was told by government services that I was capable and presentable so I didn't need help. I should just go and get a job. Look around you—it's not that simple."

A flooding Murray River destroyed Veronica's café business in Cohuna, Victoria. At age 50 she had lost everything except the strength to start again. She came to Sydney looking for work, but it wasn't the booming, welcoming city she remembered. Despite her mathematics degree, vet nurse qualification and experience as a cook, the response from more than 100 employers was a chorus: 'sorry, you're just not the dynamic we are looking for'.

Time out of the workforce as she cared for her aging parents did not enhance her work record. "But even when I wasn't working, I was volunteering at least three days. I'm just not the sort of person who can do nothing," she said. Her earnest efforts failed to count.

"I was almost relieved when someone just said it: we are looking for someone younger," she said.

The friend who gave Veronica a home when she first arrived in Sydney, moved on after her job was made redundant. Veronica soon discovered that single room rents in Sydney were exorbitant and even the rates of hotel rooms with no cooking facilities

"I'd had some tough times, but nothing like the nightmare that's homelessness."

were excessive. As her savings emptied out, she tried to draw on her superannuation only to learn that she couldn't because homelessness was not considered a 'crisis'. She resorted to selling her car for food.

Veronica kept praying that it would not take long to find somewhere affordable to rent. Her son was away in the navy and her daughter, a graphic designer, was living in a share home in Queensland, struggling to get by on irregular freelance wages. Veronica's husband had left them long ago.

Now her own tears flooded her life.

"I'd had some tough times, but nothing like the nightmare that's homelessness," Veronica said.

"When you've been working all your life, you just don't have a clue what to do—it's so frightening and confusing." She spent the first night wandering the cold inner city streets with her suitcase looking for well-lit areas to rest her weary head.

"I was so scared, everything became surreal," she said. "This couldn't be my life."

She showered daily at a crisis centre for more than 18 months. During the day, she walked the streets of Sydney looking for work, pleading with employers for a job. She was even happy to work for youth wages but found herself on the roundabout of rejection.

Veronica remembers the day she just "shattered". At the end of yet another day of waiting for hours at Housing NSW, she was told there was not even an appointment time available. They said "go home and come back tomorrow".

"It just hit me—there really was no home and maybe never would be," she said. "Suddenly I thought I was having a heart attack—I couldn't breathe and my chest seized up—I thought I was going to die."

A staff member encouraged her to go to Wesley Edward Eagar Lodge in Surry Hills. She was scared stiff.

"I was terrified—it was full of homeless people—but then the door opened, and a stranger smiled at me," she said. "She asked how I was and I just broke down. She handed me a tissue. Then I had my own room with a door between me and the world."

"It was a utopia for me, because the case workers cared. I felt that all the shattered pieces of me were held in safe hands, so I could start to rebuild myself. I felt that the workers there could see there was someone worthwhile inside of me."

"Wesley Mission's staff could see my candle of hope was down to a tiny flicker and they kept it alive so I could grow—and be me again."

"I just could never have gotten out of that 'no home—no job' cycle without them."

While her journey was exacting, her faith kept a glimmer of hope alive.

"I know if you trust in God, He will be there," she reflected. "But yes, there were days when I cried out—'why have you done this to me?'

"I understand He's busy, but He put me on this world, so maybe He could give me a bit of break!" she said with a laugh that soon turned suddenly serious, "but this journey has helped refine me."

For a start, she never wastes anything. Lights go off when she leaves a room and why have a car when public transport is available or why pay for the internet when the library link is free?

Two years after her ordeal, Veronica is busy preparing for a joyous milestone—her daughter's wedding. She is also delighted with her modest, subsidised one bedroom unit in Glebe and her

full time job in a Department of Health food services unit.

"Two years ago, I never imagined I'd be able to do all this now," she said. She is busy making her dress and putting all her financial skills into action to ensure the wedding matches her daughter's dream, but is kept affordable.

"Keep it simple and never use the word 'wedding'—saves you a heap!" she quipped.

Veronica said she has also learned that problems are not for God alone to fix.

She believes that the best way communities can help is to give financial support to Wesley Mission or other service providers, "they help the people who do really want to help themselves, and they know how to do it," she said.

Veronica said bigger and broader economic and social changes are needed, including the protection of Australian jobs.

"I keep meeting people with university degrees who can't even get permanent work anymore," she said. "There needs to be more low cost housing. Someone needs to help these people before who they are is destroyed. That's what happens to them on the street."

She now feels secure knowing that in social housing, she has confidence until her contract ends. This stability of tenure has given her a new lease on life in other ways too: she enjoys cooking fresh food for her friends in her own home, especially on a Sunday, when guests gather to play scrabble, monopoly and yatzee, delighting in being "somewhere comfortable and safe".

Veronica met her friends while on the streets—and in the library while accessing free wi-fi to look for work. "Any of us would lay down our lives for each other," she said with the bond of experience and the fellowship of the streets.

The pathways to homelessness



"There are people out there with amazing faith, hearts and souls, but because of totally different circumstances, they end up homeless."

are diverse. No one chooses to be homeless. Circumstances are thrust upon people, lives are complex and nuanced. Homelessness does not discriminate.

One of Veronica's friends spent her savings fighting cancer. Another was evicted; returning from her nursing shift to find all her belongings scattered down the street, but by the time Housing NSW realised she had actually paid all her rent—it was a paperwork error—her accommodation had been given to someone else. The experience led to a nervous breakdown.

One of Veronica's friends was a banker before he was made redundant at 50.

He is still looking for permanent work six years later. When he had work as a waiter, he lived in a room in a pub. When the job ended, he lived in doorways. The recent census will not count him as homeless, but all he wants is somewhere he can cook and sleep quietly.

"We have supported each other through this to try to get back to a normal life. We've made it, pretty much, but so many still need help," she said.

"I've seen more and more people in their 40s and 50s living in group homes or five or six people in a two bedroom unit just to keep a roof

over their heads.

"There are people out there with amazing faith, hearts and souls, but because of totally different circumstances, they end up homeless. Just a twist of fate can turn your life into a total nightmare—I know, I've been there. And there are so many people on the edge."

Many people who are homeless want to strive to be the best person they can be. They want support, connection and dignity. Some are overcome by their situation and need help to battle drugs and alcohol, but many just need a place to live—and someone to reach out and care.

For Veronica it came in the extended hand and open heart of a Wesley Mission staff member.

Grace and understanding abound in the harsh inner city streets. God heard Veronica's cry and a lost sheep was found. She was brought back to the fold, her life was renewed and her faith strengthened.

Wesley Mission's work among people who are homeless continues across Sydney, Newcastle and beyond. Veronica's first night at Wesley Edward Eagar Lodge was just one of more than 70,000 nights of accommodation Wesley Mission provides to people who are homeless each year.



Called to a city, speaking to a nation

It came as a call from the far side of the world 12 years ago: an invitation to the Rev Keith Garner to consider applying for the position of Superintendent of Wesley Mission was a bolt out of the Caribbean blue.

The email arrived while he was preaching on a mission in the Bahamas. A considered Keith Vincent Garner weighed the options. He knew there would be a cost if he and wife Carol moved to Sydney. His children were graduating from university, he held a major position with the Methodist Church in Britain, and his parents were advancing in years; but he felt called to the significant Word and deed ministry of Wesley Mission. It embraced his heart and mind. He has appreciated the support of the church and his family in taking up this uniquely-shaped role.

Keith responded "positively but tentatively" to the offer and what God was placing before him. He knew about some of the work and ministry of Wesley Mission. He had been inspired by the late Rev Sir Alan Walker at a mission he had shared with him back in the UK in 1982 and had read Alan's works and kept in contact with him and his wife, Win. He had met Gordon Moyes on a visit to Australia.

"I realised that the organisation was very large and had a significant role to play in the life of Australia," Keith said as he reflected upon 11 years leading one of Australia's largest church and community organisations.

Wesley Mission's resilient history, dynamic potential and pivotal standing attracted him to the position and continues to inform his leadership.

"It is a place of great mission and ministry," he said. "It gave me an opportunity to further develop a media presence that had already begun in Britain. It enabled me to exercise a Word and deed ministry combining my Christian vision with that of leading a large welfare and community organisation. The combination was unique and yet exciting to me."

The challenges were, and remain, numerous. Sydney is a multicultural city of five million people with diverse

communities facing a range of social and economic difficulties. It is a metropolis of tribes and towns, cultures and classes.

"We are facing a new kind of Australia of an ageing community in a country that has always been thought of as young and lucky and, added to this, are the complex social needs that are ongoing," he said.

"The difficulty of raising money remains something that I take seriously, as well as the fact that coming to another new country would involve huge challenges. We share approximately the same language and some of the same cultural nuances, but there were also very many things to learn."

While adapting to a new personal situation, he set about familiarising himself with the extensive work and ministries of Wesley Mission. He also came to appreciate the sheer size and complexity of the nation. To help Wesley Mission realise its potential, he did his homework and initially formed a small 'kitchen cabinet' of leading community and business advisers and then fashioned a vision for the organisation which is continuing to serve it well.

"One vision was that if we were going to continue to serve God in the many avenues of service, we would need to do it in a joined up manner and to discover ways in which we can develop a vision which unites our Christian vision and our compassionate support to those in need," he said. "This is how joined up thinking and practice originated and was developed by my talented colleagues. Our integrated approach to mission is both unique and compelling."

"I think our social context has helped to change us. We have had to become leaner in some areas and more adventurous in others. We are seeing the nature of the care of those in the community becoming more person-centred and this continues apace."

"When people come to us in need, it is not usually one issue that they have to deal with, and the wrap-around services of Wesley Mission are an example of how we can really meet people in the totality of their need in order to help them. It is

“Delivering caring and compassionate services and to be the organisation that knows what it is to embrace our values is the best possible measure of success.”



also of huge encouragement to our staff to know that they do not operate independently, but as a team. The Wesley Community Services Board is a wonderful group of men and women fully committed to our values.”

During the past decade Wesley Mission has grown to be among the largest charities in Australia. This has come at a time when the community services and aged care sectors have become more competitive and nuanced. To help Wesley Mission achieve its goals, Keith oversaw and managed the complex process of incorporation.

“One of the things that became increasingly clear to me was that we had to be prepared to take the step of becoming an incorporated body,” he said. “One of my challenges was to hold together the unity of Wesley Mission as the largest Uniting Church parish in the country and the close to \$200 million community services organisation.

“As our community services were incorporated, we joined many others that are much more vibrantly connected to the community and able

to operate in the ‘for purpose’ space. It became increasingly necessary to be incorporated, but in a way that retained our core Christian values.”

While incorporation is helping Wesley Mission to stand alone and deliver sound financial results, a collegial management team has enabled the effective delivery of a large suite of community services that continues to grow. New service hubs have sprung up across greater Sydney and beyond, providing a one-stop shop for clients. The Wesley Centre in Sydney’s CBD has been renovated and refurbished to enhance outreach to a modern, secular and multi-cultural inner city population.

“My own contribution has been to draw together a closer leadership team which now has just six direct reports and a dozen Executive Managers of the highest quality,” he said. “This is by far the strongest team I have led in my 11 years as leader of Wesley Mission.”

Wesley Mission has a long history of prophetic advocacy. In the 1960s Wesley Mission changed dramatically, moving from an emphasis on philanthropic care to a much more

vibrant gospel-centred social justice message. While Keith has continued this tradition he has also overseen new developments which have enhanced and strengthened Wesley Mission’s voice in the public space.

Governments, the media and the sector demand quality primary based empirical research. Research on issues like homelessness, mental health and financial stress has helped Wesley Mission speak in the social space and create a public conversation about issues close to its heart. The strategy has been employed in a non-partisan way by letting the evidence and the experience of Wesley Mission rise astutely above party politics. Quality research has also earned Wesley Mission the right to speak and to distinguish itself in the marketplace of ideas.

“Wesley Mission has gained a particular reputation of being able to be true to its Christian message but presented in a way that shows we understand that this message has not only to be real, but actually applicable to its context,” he said.

“As Wesley Mission is seeking to

influence public policy it seemed to me that we needed to look very carefully at this element of research and our Wesley Reports have become widely acknowledged and enormously important, having been quoted in Parliament in both New South Wales and Canberra.

“It also gives us confidence when we are tendering for work, in addition to helping us understand some of the practical aspects of human need. The impact of our first report on financial stress in November 2006 was remarkable in media take up on TV, radio and in print.”

Media invitations to provide commentary on social issues arrive regularly. Wesley Mission now receives thousands of stories and mentions in the media each year. Governments have noticed the evident contribution too, with Keith receiving and accepting offers to be on the Community Council of Australia and on the Premier’s Council on Homelessness, where he has served for seven years.

“It was an honour to be elected by my peers to be the Deputy Co-Chair and then appointed by two succeeding Premiers to that post,” he said. “We are currently wrestling with the whole issue of homelessness and how we can make a significant difference in this area. It remains a challenging issue for 105,000 people in Australia who are homeless.”

His recognition in the Queen’s Birthday Honours list in 2015 was significant for Keith, but also for Carol and the Wesley Mission family. “I value the partnership in leadership with Carol and the support of a huge number of our people in the Parish Mission, our employees and volunteers,” he said.

In 2012 Wesley Mission looked back to its Methodist foundations—the 200th anniversary of the beginnings of the Methodist work in the then colony. Hundreds of Wesley Mission congregation members and supporters marched through the streets of Sydney and then several thousand joined together in worship at the State

Theatre. The Rev Samuel Leigh arrived in Australia in 1815.

“Our original roots with Samuel Leigh took us back very close to the ministry of John Wesley,” Keith said. “I found it fascinating how many people were genuinely interested in capturing the Wesleyan message. The words of John Wesley’s rule in our entrance to the Wesley Centre and his vision expressed in his words – “I look at all the world as my parish”–are inspirational to me.”

The Easter Mission continues to reach millions of people throughout Australia and the world via live web and television broadcasts and media coverage. From the re-enactment of Christ’s triumphal entry to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to the sentencing and crucifixion march on Good Friday, and to the dynamic Sunrise Service at the Sydney Opera House on Easter Sunday, the good news of the Gospel continues to be heard in the public square.

While there has been much to celebrate and rejoice about during the past decade, achievements must be the right kind of success: “Delivering caring and compassionate services and to be the organisation that knows what it is to embrace our values is the best possible measure of success,” he said.

The Wesley Mission Community Services Board last year set a goal of 50 per cent growth over the next five years for both community services and the church. “I would want to stress that growth is much more than money and programs,” he said. “It relates to influence in the community and the number of people we actually reach out to.”

“Our core values—Christlike servanthood; unfailing integrity; courageous commitment—will sustain us into the future and in God’s name give us the ability and strength to continue to be a vibrant and living church.”

- Graeme Cole.

Rev Keith Garner being interviewed by George Roberts (ABC News) and other journalists in 2008.



Early days...Rev Keith Garner meets with folk from Wesley Edward Eagar Lodge.



Wesley Mission’s Journey to the Cross procession, Easter 2015.



It's always worth searching for the One

with the Rev Keith V Garner, AM



Luke 15:3-7 and Matthew 18:12-14

Recently I was invited to speak at one of the services we hold annually in inner-city Sydney, when we remember those who have died while experiencing homelessness and living on the margins of our city life.

I always consider it a privilege to speak at such occasions and, as I prepared what I should say, I was told that because local school children were taking part in the service, there would be a puppet presentation on the Lost Sheep. It struck me that this was a worthy theme for everyone. The service was attended by many who are involved in public life, including politicians from Canberra and Sydney, service providers and, most important of all, many of the homeless themselves.

The primary account of the Lost Sheep comes in a series of parables in the fifteenth chapter of Luke. There is the account of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the compelling story of the two Lost Sons. The parable in Matthew's Gospel has something

of the same focus, but seems to be addressed much more clearly at the Christian community rather than the religious leaders mentioned in Luke 15:2.

Bearing in mind that I was speaking into the context of homelessness, it seemed to me that this passage had so much to say to us. I want to write from the heart and offer three thoughts which I hope carry a message for all of us.

It can happen to anyone

The theme of our winter appeal for homelessness had a similar title – *Homelessness can happen to anyone*.

We pictured a young woman with a daughter who knew what it was to sleep in the back of her small car. Just as sheep go astray, so it can happen to people. In his commentary on Luke, Fred Craddock draws attention to the leaving of the 99 to search for the one that was lost: "So strong is the love for the lost sheep that the ninety-nine are left in the wilderness while the search goes on."¹

When Carol and I had our home in North Wales, we lived in a holiday resort that was situated between two

mountains called the Great Orme and Little Orme. On Little Orme there were rocky ledges that jutted out from the hillside. Invariably there would be a sheep walking precariously along a ledge, which often led me to ask myself the question – how did it get there? It is a similar question that we often ask ourselves when we are seeking to help people whose lives have gone astray. Those of my team who work most closely with those at risk of homelessness will often talk about the fact that people are only one pay packet away from homelessness or, if they are outside of work, a short step away from the painful experience of being without anywhere to live.

The love of God is full of joy

In the Lukan account, Jesus is addressing those who were his enemies and ready to trap him at every opportunity. Luke presents several stories under one theme: "The arrangement—the seeking shepherd, the weeping woman, the loving father—possibly may be drawn from the picture of God's love for Israel in Jeremiah 31:10-20."²

Joy is one of the great themes of this gospel with the parallel reference to 'joy in heaven' (Luke 15:7). The shepherd shares the mutual sense of rejoicing at a happy outcome of one who is found.

There was a sense of scandal that Jesus received outcasts, shared meals with them and even played host to them. "The God who showed mercy to the apostate Israelites in the wilderness rejoices over the salvation of every lost person like a shepherd who rejoices over the recovery of a lost sheep or a woman who rejoices over finding a lost coin."³ I suppose the real question is whether we can share in the celebration and the joy of God in reaching out with a loving hand of friendship to those who are lost in any way.

We are called to look out for one another

Whenever I read of the ministry of Jesus in the gospels, there are two important factors that I consider. The first relates to the life setting of the teaching, miracle or parable—and the other is to reflect upon where we are sitting while we receive the

message contained in the scripture. In Old Testament times, it was taken for granted that those who were to be considered God's people would not consort with sinners (Psalm 1). But, as some writers have reminded us, the Pharisees took this point far beyond its biblical intent. Jeremias saw the link between our ministry and compassion and that of God's, when he wrote, "Jesus makes the claim for himself that he is acting in God's stead, that he is God's representative."⁴

Jesus opens his parable with the words, "Suppose one of you ..." (verse 4) suggesting that the situation described was a common one. The shepherd would count his sheep nightly. Just recently we had the count of those in the city centre of Sydney who are sleeping rough and, once again, we were shocked to see the number increase to close to 500. I am drawn in the parable to the fact that "the frightened, confused, and perhaps injured sheep would have to be carried."⁵

It is Jesus Christ who takes the initiative, not only with sheep but also with people—and he calls us to be part of his compassionate, peace-

loving army, who are ready to search for those who are lost. But, far more importantly, we are called to be a community that looks out for one another well before sheep go astray. For me, the life of Wesley Mission can be summed up as a community of people fundamentally committed to look out for those who live on the margins of our community and yet are precious to God and to all of us.

It is little wonder that religious leaders were critical of Jesus because, in addition to going out to look for those who were lost, he also welcomed the lost to his table and into the kingdom that he offered to all.

Rev Keith V Garner, AM

1. Craddock, Fred B, *Interpretation Commentary—Luke*, John Knox Press, p.184.
2. Ellis, E Earle, *The New Century Bible Commentary—The Gospel of Luke*, Eerdmans, p.195.
3. Culpepper, R Alan, *New Interpreter's Bible—Luke*, Abingdon, p.295.
4. Jeremias, Joachim, *The Parables of Jesus*, SCM Press, p.132.
5. Liefeld, Walter L, *Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8, Luke*, Zondervan, p.981.

Grace at hand



In her thirties, Julie had all the things that made the future look busy, yet bright: a husband and five children, a degree and a developing career as an artist and marketer. She had a lively hobby as a Sun State Roller Girl and a restored relationship with her father after a tough childhood.

Yet less than 10 years later, divorce and illness had turned her life into a living nightmare. She was homeless and living on the streets. Home was her car and fear filled her life.

"I was used to being the life of the party and having business meetings and now here I was trying to bathe in a public toilet without anyone knowing," she said. "It was just so humiliating."

I never expected my life could turn into this.

"I was always 'cyclone Julie', the one madly trying to fix everyone's problems ... But I felt this was my fault ... I didn't even know where to start to get help."

Along with her 10 year old daughter Nikkia and her new husband Lee, Julie was desperately afraid not just for their safety, but anxious that at any time she

could lose them both to the tyranny of the streets and end up alone.

She had no fixed address, which made it hard to secure work and there was no 'local' school for Nikkia.

Nikkia experienced an unusual and challenging life as a child. Homelessness in early spring meant warm days but cold nights in the car.

"I slept in the boot," said Nikkia. "I know mum tried to make it fun. We had trips to the beach. She was teaching me stuff herself, she's really smart ... But it's hard to make friends without school."

The family had been living out of their trusty Toyota Corolla, parked covertly and conveniently behind a truck stop, for almost two months before some good advice and help was offered: a community volunteer handing out food told them about Wesley Mission.

Ironically, it was partly Julie's sense of family responsibility that led her into her desperate situation.

The Central Coast has its fair share of challenges including a growing number of people who are homeless. Julie sought out help from Wesley Mission

and met Grace Lim, a Wesley Mission community engagement team case worker in Gosford.

"Grace was a godsend" Julie said. "She understood we wanted to stay together. Yes, we needed help, but she still treated us with respect."

Grace quickly arranged emergency relief supplies and a hotel room. Within a fortnight she had found them a unit at The Entrance to call home. The newfound security provided more than a bed and a roof over their heads.

"It was great to feel human again," Julie said. "Nikkia started school and we could connect with the world around us again. I loved being able to shop—we had a fridge!—and to cook hot food again—we were so sick of sandwiches in the car."

We lived in New Zealand. As the eldest [of five children], it was my responsibility to look after everyone," she said.

Doctors discovered later that her mother's listlessness was due to thyroid issues. Julie remembers making an improvised breakfast for her family since the age of eight. "I worked out that you could serve Weet-Bix with melted butter when there wasn't any milk or other food in the house. It still tasted OK," she said.

After her Dad "had the guts" to move the family to Australia, Julie worked from the age of 16, including two jobs while she earned her Arts degree. At 20, she married the quiet guy she met at work—"he looked like he needed looking after and I was good at that!" but by the time they reached their 40s, "we had grown up—and apart".

Her Dad was back in New Zealand when he developed terminal cancer and she felt that she should be the one to take care of him. Her youngest, Nikkia, went with her. Life had more surprises and challenges.

Not long after, Julie discovered she had thyroid cancer and then her

father passed away.

Suddenly 'cyclone Julie' discovered she needed time to herself. She needed to replenish the deep well of love that had existed in her life but was now empty. "I handled my grief by cutting myself off from everyone, I didn't even tell them about my cancer," she said. "People didn't understand. They were hurt, but I just couldn't be that person anymore."

Julie poured her heart out to Lee, a Welsh friend she had met online and who had supported her during her cancer treatment. They married, but poor work opportunities and persistent family tension took its toll on the new family.

Julie, Lee and Nikkia moved in with an old friend of Julie's in Coffs Harbour. It was crowded, and with no work in the area, they decided to look further south. When their savings ran out, their car was the only option until the fortuitous meeting with the food van volunteer who pointed them to Wesley Mission.

"Julie is proof that a helping hand

at the right time can make all the difference," said case worker Grace Lim.

Less than a year later, Julie and Nikkia are now looking forward to a new life in a new country, Wales. Julie is planning to set up a Bed and Breakfast with Lee in Cardiff and they have enough money saved to pay for the airfares. Julie has reconciled with her older children, who are now living their own adult lives.

"I'm so glad we met Grace," said Julie. "Without Wesley Mission's help who knows where I'd be today. I came so close to losing everything, even Nikkia and Lee, because I couldn't have put them through that for much longer. Now we can start again together. Nikkia has even learned to sing the Welsh national anthem already!"

Julie admits she has learnt a lot about herself and life and thanks to Grace's help, she now has the strength and resilience to be not just the person she was before, but to be the best of that person.



Preston passes on skills and knowledge as communities tackle suicide prevention

Former NRL star and Dally M winner, Preston Campbell, has been taking the message of suicide prevention to communities throughout central and western Queensland in partnership with Wesley Mission's Suicide Prevention Networks.

From Blackall to Bedourie and from Longreach to Windorah, Preston has been getting communities talking about the often taboo subjects of mental health and suicide. The message was clear and direct: people don't have to struggle on their own and there are resources available to help.

Much of Queensland has been in the grip of drought, placing stresses on individuals and families. Preston made sure that those feeling isolated and alone felt supported in their anxiety and insecurity.

The Preston Campbell Foundation joined with Wesley LifeForce, Queensland Health's mental health unit and regional councils to visit Longreach, Barcaldine, Winton, Windorah, Ilfracombe, Blackall and ending up at the Bedourie 9s rugby league competition.

"People have been doing it tough and they have been through some hard times because of drought," Preston said. "They need to know where to get help and where to go to get the best advice—that's been my message."

"Local people are going to make the main difference in suicide prevention. We want to strengthen communities."

Earlier he had travelled to Cherbourg as part of the Deadly Day Out Festival. It was here he mixed with young people, shared meals and visited Cherbourg



Preston Campbell (centre) took the message of suicide prevention to communities and groups across western Queensland.

State School to kick footballs and yarn with youngsters about the challenges of life and rugby league.

He shared his own story of struggling with depression and suicide at the annual Blackall Woolscour Festival.

Wesley Suicide Prevention Networks are community based and it is important that people from across the service spectrum are embraced. At Barcaldine he met with nurses from the Barcaldine clinic and at Longreach he participated in a regional council workshop and yarning circle over a barbecue breakfast.

He also met with local Aboriginal artists in Barcaldine and dropped in for a chat with members of the Winton Men's Shed learning about local initiatives to keep men connected and supported.

At Winton Primary School a rugby league skills session was followed by a practical talk about mental wellbeing and looking out for your mates.

The Queensland networks are

some of the 66 local suicide prevention networks that Wesley Mission has helped establish across the nation. There are currently eight Indigenous Wesley Suicide Prevention networks in Indigenous communities.

"Wesley LifeForce are very passionate about suicide prevention but they share their passion with action," Preston said.

Wesley LifeForce has been working with regional and remote communities in Queensland to develop suicide prevention networks since June 2014.

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.

Wesley Mission CEO the Rev Keith Garner said, "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."

Art at heart of understanding and friendship

A mural jointly painted by residents of Frank Vickery Village and clients of Wesley LifeSkills Woolooware disability services program has been unveiled.

The mural entitled, 'Our Passion' is hanging in Frank Vickery Village. It is a visual representation of the abiding friendship between Wesley LifeSkills Centre and Frank Vickery Village. Another mural will hang at Wesley LifeSkills Woolooware.

Residents of the village and clients of Wesley LifeSkills Woolooware have come together in a new Wesley Mission program called 'Wesley Linked Up' which has drawn together older Australians and people with a disability to work



Joint effort, joint celebration: the unveiling of Our Passion at Wesley Frank Vickery Village, Sylvania.

on joint activities that promote acceptance, creativity, friendship and fun.

The CEO of Wesley Mission, the Rev Keith Garner said the Wesley

Linked Up program is enabling people with disabilities to venture into the community in a safe and accepting way.



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Helping mums and dads back to work

The challenges of returning to work after children go to school are being addressed through a new program run by Wesley Mission at Wyong and Bankstown.

The ParentsNext program will assist parents with young children in planning for future employment by connecting parents to local services and resources to prepare them for work by the time their children are at school.

It is being funded by the Commonwealth Department of Employment. The centres are two of 10 that are opening in areas of social and economic disadvantage across Australia.

The program also aims to break generational unemployment and welfare dependency by connecting parents with local organisations and services, such as TAFE colleges, secondary schools, training providers and employment service providers, so they can upgrade or learn new skills for the modern employment market.

Wesley Mission staff at each site includes a team leader and specialist staff in the areas of education, employment and community engagement.

"Most families reach a stage when a parent needs to return to work," said Wesley Mission CEO the Rev Keith Garner. "For anyone who has been out of the workforce the prospect of returning can be daunting."

"Wesley Mission will work with community organisations, culturally and linguistically diverse specialists, government agencies, employment services and education facilities to promote ParentsNext to eligible parents."

Wesley Mission has consulted widely with families and within communities to identify needs



Rev Keith Garner (right) with the ParentsNext Bankstown team.

and local resources giving staff the ability to connect parents into existing mainstream, community and specialist services.

Clients are developing program participation plans and staff are communicating regularly with parents, supporting them to attend workshops and group work activities outside of appointment times. They are also giving them flexibility to adapt their plans when personal circumstances change.

More care options for parents

The New South Wales Minister for Early Childhood Education, Leslie Williams, recently visited Wesley Mission's Out of School Hours Care (OOSH) service at Riverstone Public School to announce funding for the new program.

The program will give working parents in the area greater flexibility.

Mrs Williams said she understood that families need more care options for their children.

"These extra places will help parents better manage their working week and give them greater flexibility," she said.

State Member for Riverstone, Kevin Connolly, said it was a privilege to visit the school and witness the benefits of before and after school care.

"This expanded service will benefit many families in our local community," Mr Connolly said. "It will provide more places and enable Wesley Mission to assist in meeting this growing demand."

The CEO of Wesley Mission, the Rev Keith Garner said Wesley Mission was delighted with the support shown by the NSW Government.

"Wesley Mission identified a need

for out of school hours care after consulting widely with local families and Riverstone Public School," Dr Garner said.

"The area has undergone enormous change in the past decade, placing fresh demands on families. The time spent before or after school is critical to a child's day. It is important that children have suitable and appropriate care arrangements as well as opportunities to enjoy activities which promote mental and physical wellbeing."

The program will eventually cater for up to 70 students.

Sure foundations for young lives

A unique support program for young people leaving foster care has taken its first step in becoming a reality.

Representatives from Wesley Mission, the Property Industry Foundation and Lendlease recently turned the first sod at Wesley Mission's Dundas property—the site of the new program—to mark the start of the project.

Young people in the Wesley Take Charge of Your Life program will be committed to a journey of personal development and achievement. They will receive 24-hour support and ongoing case management as they study or seek work, and learn life skills like cooking and budgeting.

Two buildings, known as 'Wesley Herring House' and 'Wesley Lynford Lodge', are being renewed to accommodate up to 22 young people. The buildings were vacated several years ago and will undergo a major facelift with significant internal refurbishment, fitting out, painting and long overdue renovations. The buildings are not being demolished or expanded.

The renovation is a project of Wesley Mission supported by the Property Industry Foundation's PIF House Program. Wesley Mission CEO, the Rev Keith Garner, said the project had grown from a very significant need in the community.



Property Industry Foundation CEO Rosemary Smithson, Property Industry Foundation Board Member Ceinwen Kirk, Wesley Mission CEO the Rev Keith Garner and Alison Mirams, General Manager NSW/ACT, Building, Lendlease.

"As one of New South Wales' largest private providers of foster care, we are aware of the importance of the challenges facing young people leaving care and who are transitioning to independent living," Dr Garner said.

"Many have little or no family support. It comes as no surprise that young people leaving foster care are less likely to finish school or pursue higher education. Some end up homeless or become involved in crime. Others face financial difficulties and struggle into adult life. Few have extended family or community networks to fall back upon."

"We turn soil not only because we are about to embark on a new project but because we know tilled soil is rich in potential. It has the ability to grow and nourish new life. It is a symbol of what is to come."

Thanks to the Property Industry Foundation's PIF House Program and support from Lendlease, the new centre will become a warm and welcoming home. Builders, tradespeople and other industry supporters are donating their time and resources to the project during the renovation period.

Property Industry Foundation CEO, Rosemary Smithson, said the aim of the project was to make a positive, life-changing impact on at-risk young people. "The creation of this caring home, and the mentoring that will be provided, will really help rebuild young lives," she said.

Alison Mirams, General Manager NSW/ACT, Building, Lendlease, underlined her company's significant contribution to the project. "Lendlease Building is proud to work with Wesley Mission on an initiative that supports young people."

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