

# On the Scene

SUMMER 2010 NEWS AND STORIES FROM THE SALVATION ARMY AUSTRALIA EASTERN TERRITORY

## Singing with soul

“Alcohol was my master and what it said, I did. In the end I was a derelict in my own home. I’ve spent my last cent on alcohol – forget food! And the things I’ve said and done in active alcoholism, I would never have entertained in sobriety.

“The choir has given me a new belief in myself that I can lead. It’s given me a sense of responsibility. I care really deeply about all the women here ... It’s so uplifting and it’s my way of praising God – it’s better than any drug!” GALE

In December 2009, in the bustling foyer of the Downing Centre Courts (Sydney NSW), ten nervous women began to sing their small repertoire of Christmas carols.

Choir leader, Central Coast Recovery Services Centre (Selah) graduate and legal secretary, Gale says of the choir’s first performance: “While we sang, one lady (passing by) knelt and made the sign of the cross. **Salvation Army** Major Evelyn Sneller, Court Chaplain, spotted the lady and spoke to her. The lady told the Major some of her story of addiction.

“Major Sneller pointed to us and told her that the choir is a group of women in recovery from addiction and ... offered to help her too.

“It was lovely to know straight away we’d had an impact on another life – that was unbelievable.”

This Christmas many of the same women, and many new faces, will be

singing at the Downing Centre again. This time, however, they will be singing as the ‘Selah Soul Sisters’ and have a markedly expanded repertoire and a greater sense of confidence.

Gale says that the choir has given her and the other participants an extraordinary sense of hope, taught them self discipline and enabled them to bring a sense of joy to others they could never have imagined.

Talking of her addiction, Gale says: “The psychiatric registrar at the hospital was sick and tired of seeing me being delivered there by ambulance so he finally said ‘you’re not going home’. I thank God because I would pray, ‘please help me’, because I could not do it myself. I just could not stop drinking.”

Having seen such positive results with other patients, Gale’s doctor sent her to The Salvation Army’s Central Coast Recovery Services Centre (Selah), for ten months of residential rehabilitation that also includes living skills and

vocational training.

Gale says, as soon as she arrived, she knew this was where she was meant to be: “It was like a huge weight off my shoulders. The staff have an amazing level of compassion but they also challenged many behaviours.

“They are phenomenally clever – there are 36 women in Selah at the moment – the staff would know exactly where each woman is at in her recovery.

“And the choir is now such an integral part of everyone’s recovery.”



SHARION PATTERSON

ABOVE: CHOIR LEADER GALE LAMONT SAYS LIVES ARE BEING CHANGED THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF THE SELAH SOUL SISTERS.

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## Christmas wishes

From all at The Salvation Army, as we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, we wish you a happy, holy and safe Christmas!

For information about Salvation Army community Christmas lunches, carols and church service times, reflections on the meaning of Christmas, and ways to support The Salvation Army at this special time, visit [salvos.org.au/christmas](http://salvos.org.au/christmas). To donate you can also call **13 SALVOS (13 72 58)**.

## Disaster update

Following the earthquake that devastated large areas of the Christchurch region in September, The Salvation Army in New Zealand distributed care packages containing food, confectionery, personal hygiene and cleaning products and Salvation Army contact details, to around 4000 people in the hardest-hit areas. Salvation Army counsellors, including 15 from Australia, also worked in high-need areas.

The Salvation Army in Pakistan also continues to provide aid to thousands of people affected by floods. 600 tents have been distributed in one refugee camp alone and there are plans underway to distribute a further 6000 sets of cooking and bedding packs and a further 2000 tents. Visit [salvos.org.au](http://salvos.org.au) for more info.

## Think before you drink

To mark Alcohol Awareness Week 2010 The Salvation Army released new Roy Morgan research in September that revealed 12% of Australians (2.1 million people) sometimes drink simply because they want to get drunk.

The Salvation Army's Major Peter Sutcliffe says: "A key part of this initiative is to get people to stop and ask, 'Do we need to have alcohol all the time when we celebrate?'" More information at [salvos.org.au/alcohol](http://salvos.org.au/alcohol)

# Expanding the 'heart' of the outback

**"During the floods a couple running one remote property had been marooned there for four months. They were new to the job and they were finding it very difficult. No one could get in and no one could get out – so we took food out to them and stayed for a time and they were overjoyed."** SIMON STEELE, SALVATION ARMY 'FLYING PADRE'

Few people can begin to imagine the hardships and, at times, intense loneliness of life on many outback properties, according to Salvation Army Outback Flying Service 'Flying Padre' Simon Steele.

Earlier this year, Queensland Governor Her Excellency Ms Penelope Wensley AO officially launched the new Salvation Army Outback Flying Service Robinson 44 helicopter, saying: "... for the most personal and difficult issues in our lives – the joys and the sorrows – there is no substitute for the human face ... That is the core of what the Flying Padre offers – that personal touch, the individual care and concern ..."

The helicopter (made possible through a bequest from late Queensland pastoralist Keith 'Wild Horse' Dawson) replaces a

fixed-wing Salvation Army Outback Flying Service plane, which was effective, but could not be used when needed most – in wet seasons and floods when property airstrips are covered in water.

The work of Simon and wife Natalie stretches over an 800,000 square kilometre area throughout western Queensland and includes working with State Emergency Services as counsellors; helping to physically clean-up after natural disasters; assisting with emergency food and medical drops; providing welfare support and referrals; organising sports workshops for some of the most isolated school kids in the country; praying with grieving families; and often simply sitting and sharing a 'cuppa' or a lending a hand on around 15 different remote properties each week.

Simon says: "The fact that we go out and they know someone cares – that makes the biggest difference."

While at Mt Isa, Governor Wensley also opened an upgraded Salvation Army Serenity House Women's Shelter. The service offers crisis accommodation to women and women with children, who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. ○



ABOVE: VISITING FARMERS ON A REMOTE PROPERTY IN OUTBACK QLD. & INSET: ENVOYS SIMON AND NATALIE STEELE OPERATE THE OUTBACK FLYING SERVICE.

# An emotional rescue

As commander of the Illawarra Police Rescue Squad since the early 1990s, Sgt Manii Verzosa was used to playing the role of saviour. So after his partner and son died in childbirth, where could he turn? William Verity, writing for the *Illawarra Mercury* discovered that life's darkest moments can produce the strongest bonds.

It was not until mother and baby had died that the diary was discovered.

Hidden in the baby's room was the diary Karen Thorn had kept throughout her pregnancy. On the first page was a message from mother to her unborn son, Keoki: "To my 'Little Cashew' – as your daddy [Manii Verzosa] named you after the first ultrasound ... You were so cute, and as big as a cashew nut.

"I'm keeping this journal so you can read it when you are old enough ... I loved you from the moment I knew you were growing inside me and I will continue to love you until I die and beyond ..."

It was dated Boxing Day, the day the family planned to start their new life together after Karen's planned induced labour. But, after serving Christmas lunch to the needy at the Wesley Uniting Church, and 12 hours after booking into the maternity unit, Karen and Keoki were dead.

Telling the story today, Manii sits next to his dear friend Jayne Wilson who, since 1996, has run a range of successful community programs for **The Salvation Army** in Wollongong (NSW). The programs specialise in helping families grappling with mental illness and addiction. Jayne also works as a police chaplain.

Manii has to pause several times as he talks, fighting back the emotion that threatens to overcome him. He's been on sick leave from his job for a year now, diagnosed with post-traumatic stress after removing the body of a man who had killed himself in a local caravan park. He says, "I had come to the limits of how much I could take."

Losing Karen was losing the love of his life, according to Manii, who says it was love at first sight when he met her at Jamberoo Public School after

arriving to show the police rescue truck to her kindergarten class: "I have nothing but fun ... and sacred memories of her ... To tell the truth, I am at a loss now because anyone who comes along won't compare," he says.

Following Karen and Keoki's deaths, Jayne was called in as The Salvation Army police chaplain to support Manii. She had met Karen once at the local swimming baths and Manii once – briefly – at a home in Stanwell Tops where she was comforting a family whose son had gone missing after writing a suicide note. Manii was one of the officers searching for the son.

Jayne says, "When I received a call from the hospital and they told me his name, I felt a really deep sadness."

It was a call that sparked a deep friendship between the two, as Jayne went to Manii's house almost every day for a month in the indescribably sad time between the death and the funeral.

Jayne was also privileged to read Karen's diary, and says: "I read through the whole story and used that for part of the funeral [Jayne officiated at the funeral]."

And the friendship continued.

Manii would paddle his canoe or

swim off Wollongong Harbour and then drop by the Salvos where he would have coffee and conversation with Jayne.

Soon enough, the pair decided to widen the conversation to include any police officer who needed support. They called the group Ohana Inc. (Ohana means "family" in Hawaiian), as Manii is of Hawaiian background.

So now, a group goes paddling on the ocean one Thursday, the next they train at a boxing gym. This is always followed by coffee and conversation.

Jayne is a passionate supporter of police and their work and – unusually for a police chaplain – insists on joining patrols regularly for a 12-hour shift.

"If you could go out there and see some of the things police do on a night shift, it rocks your socks," she says. "Ohana is about encouraging community to be in community with police."

When asked where he would be without Jayne, Manii is uncharacteristically lost for words, then says: "I couldn't even imagine how things would have been different without Jayne. I am just so lucky that Jayne popped into my path ... as are hundreds of other people who come across her." 

Story and photo courtesy the *Illawarra Mercury*.



ABOVE: JAYNE AND MANII HAVE BECOME FIRM FRIENDS.

