

# On the Scene

SUMMER 2011 NEWS AND STORIES FROM THE SALVATION ARMY AUSTRALIA EASTERN TERRITORY

## Care through life and loss

“Minh’s story could be anyone’s. A few years ago, during the global financial crisis, it was really bad. We saw lots of new people ... someone had lost three houses. Anybody could be walking in those shoes.” GAYLENE, STREETLEVEL HOUSING ADVOCATE

As Minh went to step off the platform at Sydney’s Town Hall station, dazed after losing his home, and then his job, he had hit one of the darkest points of his life. Too slow to jump in front of the oncoming train, because of a limp following the effects of childhood polio, he says a woman on the platform apparently pulled him back.

Minh says of the time: “It was like I was living in a nightmare.”

Thirty-five years earlier, Minh, as a frightened nine-year-old Vietnamese orphan, had travelled to Australia aboard one of the first Hercules evacuation flights out of Saigon.

He had hoped he was coming to Australia for a better life, and, despite what was to turn into a life full of loss, against all the odds, he almost attained that better life.

For 21 years, Minh held down a steady government-sector job, as well as a successful small business as a DJ.

But when he entered into a property investment with a friend, it all went terribly wrong after his friend pulled out, leaving Minh with a large debt. Then,



SHARON PATERSON



LEFT: MINH, WHO UNEXPECTEDLY BECAME HOMELESS AND ALMOST TOOK HIS OWN LIFE, WITH MAJOR ROBIN PULLEN, WHO MANAGES SYDNEY STREETLEVEL MISSION.  
INSET: GAYLENE, STREETLEVEL HOUSING ADVOCATE, WHO HELPED MINH BACK ON HIS FEET.

in 2009, as the effects of the global financial crisis continued, Minh’s DJ business suffered.

When he could no longer pay his mortgage, his bank account became subject to a garnishee notice. So whatever money went in was then taken directly out to pay his creditors.

And so, Minh found himself in a unique position, holding down a well-paid job, but homeless and broke.

“It was such a crazy and stressful time. I just didn’t know where to go and I didn’t know what to do,” he says.

Finally, he lost his job and then tried to take his own life.

According to Gaylene, who supported Minh in her role as **Salvation Army** Streetlevel Housing Advocate, any one of us could potentially become homeless.

And for those who may also have mental health issues, no family support or erratic education, that lack of safety net can signal a much greater chance of spiraling into homelessness, if life’s circumstances go wrong.

Minh was an orphan from birth, and was later fostered after his arrival in Australia. However, four years later, when the couple fell pregnant with their fourth child, Minh was sent back and

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# Focus

## True meaning of Christmas

Wishing all our readers, your families and loved ones a peaceful, joyous, happy, healthy and holy Christmas.

For information about ways to share in the true meaning of Christmas, such as joining us for carol singing or church, reflecting on the meaning of Christmas, and giving to others via The Salvation Army Christmas Appeal, please visit [salvos.org.au/christmas](http://salvos.org.au/christmas). To donate, you may also call **13 SALVOS (13 72 58)**

## Help and hope for men in crisis

The Salvation Army Men's Crisis Centre in Griffith, NSW, was recently re-opened after a major nine month closure for refurbishment.

As well as offering short-term crisis accommodation to the homeless, the service assists residents deal with emotional issues and break unhealthy patterns, by offering one-to-one counselling and referrals to other services and programs.

## eftpos supports Aussies in need

This Christmas, eftpos will introduce its inaugural Giveback to help Australians in need through The Salvation Army. eftpos is run by Australians for the benefit of Australians, providing every Australian a fast, efficient and convenient payment option. With the call to action of Press CHQ or SAV and eftpos will donate to The Salvation Army\* the aim is to get all Australians involved in the campaign between 20 November and 17 December 2011. \*See [eftposaustralia.com.au](http://eftposaustralia.com.au) for details.



# Still standing

The Salvation Army has produced a new post-disaster recovery DVD, *Still Standing*, to help people impacted by natural disasters, in particular those affected by the severe floods and cyclone in Qld during early 2011.

The film tells the stories of three Australians who have lived through major natural disasters, experienced great loss and who talk about their journey to recovery. Bonus chapters provide further insights and advice by Dr Rob Gordon, a clinical psychologist and Australia's foremost expert in disaster trauma.

Research has shown that recovery from such disasters can take anywhere between two to three years. Dr Gordon explains in the film: "You don't feel the pain of a bruise straight away, you feel it afterwards, in the shower, when the adrenaline has faded away."

Producer of *Still Standing*, Anna Rudd, says: "People think that the rebuilding of the house is it. But the process of getting to that point has a huge cost attached to it. Hopefully by watching *Still Standing*, people who are hurting will think it is possible to recover over time. The stories we've heard demonstrate there is light at the end of the tunnel."

Staying together as a community is a big part of the recovery process for victims of disasters. To complement *Still Standing*

**FROM PAGE 1** passed around through a series of orphanages, foster homes and schools.

After losing it all, and getting medical support following his suicide attempt, Minh was referred to The Salvation Army's Sydney Streetlevel Mission.

With the help of the tenacious Gaylene, who worked day and night to fill in forms, write reports, and lobby agencies, Minh was able to access a portion of his superannuation, secure emergency accommodation and is now re-training and receiving counselling.

As well as helping Minh, Gaylene, who is known as "Big Mum" at Streetlevel (where she has been passionately volunteering for many years, including throughout two courses of chemotherapy) helps around 12 people at any one time.



SHARON PATTERSON

**ABOVE:** THE SALVATION ARMY IS COMMITTED TO HELPING GUIDE VICTIMS THROUGH THE ONGOING RECOVERY PROCESS AND EMOTIONAL TRAUMA, FOLLOWING THE FLOODS.

a website has been created (due to be live on December 5) – [stillstanding.org.au](http://stillstanding.org.au) – which invites people to connect and encourage one another.

The Salvation Army intends on delivering a copy of *Still Standing* to every affected household in Queensland. Alternatively it can be viewed at [stillstanding.org.au](http://stillstanding.org.au) ○

Gaylene says: "Many have explained that their families were evicted a lot when they were kids, and so they had to fend for themselves, and had little or no schooling.

"One lady, who we would meet weekly for a chat or coffee, was homeless for a long time and abused terribly as a child. She was always scared that if she owned something, someone would take it away from her.

"So, for 18 months she had no bed, no furniture and only newspaper on the windows. Finally, last Christmas, despite her protests, we ended up buying her a bed. Then she came back to me a few weeks later and said 'Oh look, I've seen this material, would you help me make curtains.' Now, hopefully next year she'll be going to TAFE.

"Lives can turn around slowly, and often they just need someone to take the time to care." ○

# Watching them grow

**“My boss went away for two weeks and I was left in charge of the nursery and I loved it. It has certainly changed my life. If I hadn’t done this, I don’t know where I’d be – at home, thinking I couldn’t accomplish anything. Before ... I had an existence just living, breathing and taking up space.” DAMIEN**

For Damien – who is working and undertaking an apprenticeship, while studying a Certificate 3 in Nursery Wholesaling at **The Salvation Army** ‘Watch Them Grow’ social enterprise nursery, Ipswich (Qld) – to say “I look in the mirror and kind of like myself now,” is an enormous understatement.

Damien is an eloquent young man, who first came to The Salvation Army, severely lacking confidence, on a program for the long-term unemployed. For many years he had lived an extremely isolated life and struggled with depression and apathy.

Almost blind in one eye, after being diagnosed with Keratoconus in his teens, and struggling with early abuse, Damien explains: “I did have aspirations and dreams growing up, but my home life made me feel like they were unattainable.”

Drug use, he says, contributed to the fact that his life became, as he describes it, a series of false starts, including starting university but failing to finish.

He says: “Later, not many employers were willing to take a chance on an almost 30-year-old man with no skill-set whatsoever. The Government project run by The Salvation Army was my foot in the door.

“I had an awesome supervisor,” he says. “We started with a lot of confidence and team building. We also completed our first aid certificate, chainsaw licence, and a licence for weed spraying and chemicals.”

Damien’s enthusiasm so impressed staff that he was offered employment to help set-up the new nursery, after equipment, plants and contracts with a local Big W supermarket were donated to The Salvation Army by a benefactor, to build a self-sustaining business which could offer work experience and accredited training.

Damien was then offered apprenticeship training.

The Salvation Army Canaan School for Training and Development (situated on the Riverview farm) runs a range of programs funded by the Australian Federal Government and the Queensland State Government, aiming to place those most disadvantaged in the community into the workforce.

The centre also features a campground, a function hall, and accommodation facilities.

Manager Brad Strong says: “On any given day we have between 60 and 75 people spread across those programs and then off-site we are supporting the same number again.

The major strength of The Salvation Army, Brad says, is the holistic approach which includes life-skills training coupled with the passion of staff. He says: “We know the economics of an individual are that they will always be better off if they work, their families will be better off and that has a flow-on effect to following generations. We absolutely see people blossom and grow.”

Like many who are helped by The Salvation Army, Damien is now passionate about helping others. Some days, he says, he still wrestles with ghosts of the past that tell him he is never going to be good enough, but he now has a deep faith in Jesus, and enthusiasm for the future.

He is excited about the possibility for further expansion of the nursery and says: “What we really want to see is the nursery built-up and expanded. We are trying to get more horticulture projects in so we can train even more people in a safe environment, including more people with disabilities.

“I feel so blessed working with people who can teach me and others so much, not only about horticulture, but about all the positive things in life,” he says. ○



SHARON PATERSON

ABOVE: DAMIEN, WHO IS PASSIONATE ABOUT HIS WORK AT THE SALVATION ARMY’S NURSERY AT RIVERVIEW FARM, IPSWICH (QLD).

# Christmas, kids and crisis

“If you want a true example of what it means to be the ‘salt and light of the earth’ just look at them, and be inspired and encouraged that God can use everyone in amazing ways ... if they are willing to place their lives in His hands.

“It is so beautiful to see that age is not a barrier for Doug and Ruby and the kids of these communities just love them. They have made lasting connections with the children, youth and their families.”

SALVATION ARMY MAJOR JULIE ALLEY

Last year, following the annual Christmas day lunch for 65 people, run by Salvation Army corps (church) leaders Doug and Ruby Smith, Doug still had the drive to visit and take a Christmas meal to a number of people he and Ruby had heard were living almost completely reclusive lives.

Doug says that discovering a range of needs of people isolated with mental health issues and social phobias, and being allowed into their lives, has been a real blessing – not in a proud way, but it’s a deep blessing to know he is serving those in need.

At the age of 62 and 72 respectfully, Doug and Ruby took over the role of leaders of the Temora and West Wyalong Corps (church) in January 2009, and will ‘retire’ at the end of 2011.

As well as running what have become two thriving churches, the indefatigable couple are also involved in Rotary, Quota, Open Minds Brighter Futures, the Mental Health Drug and Alcohol Advisory Board, street and hotel ministries, welfare support, The Salvos Family Store, a drop-in centre, kids club and a school breakfast club which feeds 150 kids.

Doug says the breakfast club helps them get to know the needs of many



ABOVE: CHILDREN FROM THE TEMORA KIDS CLUB, RUN BY THE SALVATION ARMY’S DOUG AND RUBY SMITH. & INSET: DOUG AND RUBY.

of the families in town, plus provides a meal for kids who travel long distances from remote properties.

As Christmas 2011 approaches, they say times are definitely getting tougher for many, and they are seeing an increasing number of working families struggling with the rising costs of living.

Whatever the need, the couple work to help clients reach independence, and not become reliant on welfare.

Doug laughs as he says their age means that they can get away with being tough when they need to be: “We have a beautiful story of a lass Sally\* who has two children who were taken off her because of drugs and alcohol.

“One day Ruby got a bit frustrated at the excuses and said, ‘Sally, you come in here and blame everyone else because you haven’t got your children – but whose fault is it really?’ This lass went home and reflected ... then went to rehab, and is now working part-time in our family store and has her kids.

“It is a true privilege to be allowed into the lives of some of the most isolated and hurting in this community,” he says. ○

\* NAME CHANGED

People featured in photographs in this newsletter (and past editions) are not necessarily the clients of the services.

If you would like further information, please tick the relevant boxes and return by mail to: **The Salvation Army, GPO Box 9888, Your Capital City.** Or fax to: **02 9266 9805.**

- Worship and church programs
- Community services
- How I may make regular donations to the Red Shield Appeal
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*Letters & feedback welcome!*