

On the Scene

SUMMER 2007 NEWS AND STORIES FROM THE SALVATION ARMY AUSTRALIA EASTERN TERRITORY

Bringing Christmas spirit to inner-city streets

“Last Christmas I took my piano accordion out with me. When I came to groups of homeless people on the streets, I would play Christmas carols and we would all sing. “One fellow went to his bag and pulled out a coffee mug he’d been given and said, ‘Here you are Major, I’d like you to accept this for Christmas from me please.’ It was the only thing on earth that he owned. That was absolutely beautiful and I treasure it.”

—RETIRED SALVATION ARMY MAJOR
HILTON HARMER.

It is a typical Friday evening on Sydney’s busy Pitt Street. Commuters in suits are rushing to catch public transport or walking to nearby parking stations, keen to get home. Others are gathering in cafés and restaurants to celebrate the end of their working week, or starting some early Christmas shopping.

Many throw curious glances towards the man in **Salvation Army** uniform kneeling on the street.

He though, is oblivious to the crowds. He is totally focused – kneeling at the feet of a young homeless man, laughing and talking, as he washes the young man’s gnarled and dirty feet. Then tenderly he puts a pair of soft new socks on the man’s feet, chats for a while and hands the young man his card.

The man in the uniform is recently-retired Salvation Army officer Major Hilton Harmer who, together with wife Joyce,



ADAM HOLLINGWORTH

ABOVE: MAJOR HILTON HARMER MINISTERING TO INNER SYDNEY’S HOMELESS.

spent the last ten years of his working life with The Salvation Army as a court chaplain.

In retirement, Hilton and Joyce have remained highly active. Among many other volunteer roles, Hilton has become Inner-City Chaplain for The Salvation Army Sydney Congress Hall (church) where he and Joyce worship. This involves ministering to inner Sydney’s homeless, many of whom suffer complex mental health and addiction issues.

On most Friday nights, Hilton walks around the inner city with a backpack and suitcase giving out clean socks, shaving gear, deodorant and snacks, and offering his card to around 50-100 people each night. If called or asked, he will then help those on the streets, wherever possible, to obtain accommodation, furniture,

clean clothes, a meal, or even just a wash.

Each year on Christmas day, he and Joyce also hand out chocolates to the homeless after the church service at Sydney Congress Hall.

Hilton says of his work: “It’s just one of those things that evolved. It’s a way I can communicate the love of Jesus. I hope after I’ve gone, some guy will be lying there thinking, ‘that guy actually washed my feet and put a pair of socks on me’. It’s that human touch and care that is so important to all of us.”

At the same time, Hilton says that he receives a great deal of love and friendship in return. “A few people have even invited me to move in with them any time I want – even though they were living under bridges at the time,” he says with a smile. ○

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Visit The Salvation Army Christmas website – salvos.org.au/christmas – for information about community Christmas day lunches, Salvation Army carol singing events and church meetings, tips for avoiding stress at Christmas, and ideas about how to support The Salvation Army at Christmas. To give to The Salvation Army Christmas Appeal call **13 SALVOS (13 72 58)** or visit salvos.org.au

Southport court chaplain

In response to the rising number of people making court appearances at the Southport court complex on Queensland's Gold Coast, The Salvation Army has created the new role of Southport Court chaplain.

Salvation Army Captain Kay Nelson was appointed to the role which includes providing chaplaincy support to victims of crime as well as the accused, their families, court staff and police. All 17 district and supreme courts are covered as well as the local Police Watch House.

USA wildfires

The Salvation Army in the USA was involved in serving meals and beverages, offering emotional and spiritual support, and dispensing hygiene items during the emergency response phase of the 2007 San Diego wildfires. Ongoing recovery efforts involve providing survivors with gift cards to help replace lost belongings. Roving Salvation Army canteens also drive through burned-out neighborhoods to offer comfort, snacks, drinks and tools to help survivors sift through what's left of their homes.

As at the end of October, around 140,000 hot meals, 10,000 sandwiches, 20,000 snacks and 170,000 drinks had been distributed by 950 Salvation Army volunteers.

Bringing Christmas joy to the bush

Around Pilliga and Bourke in northern NSW there were flashes of hope earlier this year when, after years of drought, some long-awaited rain finally arrived. However, the rain was short-lived and much of the area again looks like what Salvation Army Rural Chaplain Major Peter Ridley describes as “a dry and barren moonscape”. To make matters worse, the cost of a tanker of water has tripled since the beginning of the year.

To help bring joy to those struggling to survive in these communities (many of whom cannot afford Christmas presents for the kids when food, animal fodder and water are desperate necessities), Majors Peter and Jean Ridley are inviting more than one thousand locals to two weekends of bush Christmas gatherings. They have



ROBERT CHAPPEL

ABOVE: MAJORS PETER AND JEAN RIDLEY MAKE PREPARATIONS FOR CHRISTMAS.

organised music, sausage sizzles, gifts for the kids and pamper packs for the mums.

Peter and Jean believe the gatherings will help bush people know they are not forgotten, and will help the team of largely city-based **Salvation Army** helpers and volunteers to understand more of what life in the bush is like. ○

Behind the scenes of this year's Christmas Appeal

The story of Petra and her daughters' struggle for survival forms the basis of this year's Salvation Army Christmas Appeal. And for good reason. It's a wonderful tale of a mother's love for her children winning out over all sorts of terrible problems. It's also the tale of a very special friendship that has developed between Petra and Maggie Ingham from The Salvation Army Moneycare.

Petra's story came to our notice several years ago through Maggie. And we recognised it as a heart warming example of how people are helped in all sorts of ways by the Salvos. Through our Christmas Appeal letters, we wanted to tell our donors and supporters about Petra, her struggle for survival against desperate odds and the role the Salvos played in helping get her life back on track.

It is very important when telling a story like this that we carefully protect and respect the privacy of the people involved. Part of the process we go through before we send out our letters is an evaluation of the ethical issues involved and how publicity might adversely affect the people in the story. In the case of



ADAPARNERS

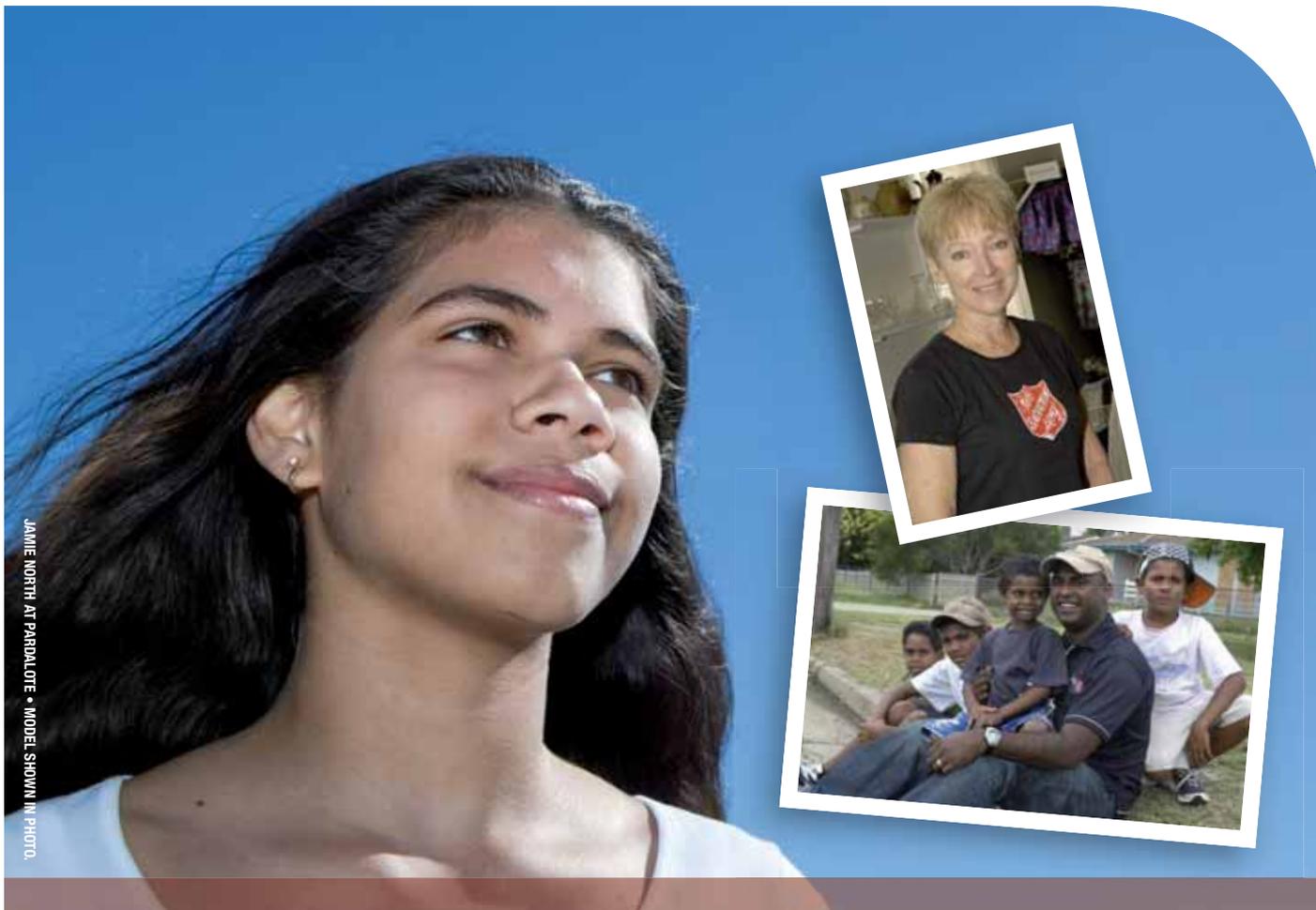
Petra, she never hesitated to allow us into her life and embraced the idea of having us tell her story because she hoped it would be of some help to others.

Before we wrote the story, we interviewed both Petra and Maggie and were greatly humbled when talking to these amazing women. Petra and Maggie left us personally inspired and deeply committed to doing justice to their story.

It isn't every day you have the privilege of meeting two such generous, selfless people. Our sincere hope this Christmas is that you too have come to know both Petra and Maggie a little and to understand the incredible difficulties some people in our community, like Petra, are facing. Your support of **The Salvation Army** makes such an enormous difference to real people, like Petra and her daughters, every day.

You may wish to view Petra's story online at salvos.org.au/petra ○

Daring to dream



JAMIE NORTH AT PARADILITE • MODEL SHOWN IN PHOTO.

INSET ABOVE: LIEUTENANT LINDA WOODBRIDGE OF THE SALVATION ARMY MOREE; INSET BELOW: ADRIAN KISTAN AND SOME OF THE LOCAL MOREE KIDS.

Ask most children their dreams for the future and their eyes light up.

For 13-year-old Jess, surrounded by a community in crisis, there were no dreams for a positive future. She never dared to hope for anything but survival.

In her neighbourhood, drug dealing and alcohol abuse are rife and the sounds of violent fighting into the night are all too common.

Jess was recently chosen to be part of a 'young community leader' mentoring scheme, established by **The Salvation Army's** Adrian and Natalie Kistan. Her whole outlook has changed.

"When I'm with the Salvos I feel good, happy ... hopeful," says Jess. "I want to be a teacher and show by how I live that it can be better... Now when I close my eyes and dream of the future, I see myself teaching ... I've got this big smile on my

face. And I'm helping other kids ..."

The Kistans relocated The Salvation Army's Sports Ministry from Sydney to Moree in late 2006 to work alongside local Salvation Army officer Lieutenant Linda Woodbridge with disadvantaged Indigenous youth. They believe that sport is one very effective way to build bridges into communities such as Jess's.

Two-thirds of Indigenous children do not finish secondary school and Indigenous youth between 10-17 years of age are detained by police at 10 times the rate of non-Indigenous young Australians. With this understanding, the Kistans have established study assistance and positive lifestyle programs in Moree, as well as the mentoring program for young people who show leadership capacity among other youth in their communities.

Adrian says: "Jess is one of our young leaders and has something really special about her. She has wonderful parents

who really want the best for her, but she lives in a wider community environment of enormous despair, domestic violence, unemployment and addiction.

"When we asked our young leaders about their dreams and ambitions, most had no dreams or hope for a future," he explains. "However, when we asked them what they *didn't* want to be they were all quick to say, 'I don't want to be a drug addict and a no-hoper like we see all around us'."

One of the great things Jess wrote was: "Before Natalie and Adrian came, I had no dreams, but they've helped me to have a dream. I want to be a teacher or work in a bank." She also wrote: "I want to be a salvation leader." Adrian realised she probably meant Salvation Army leader, but when reflecting on those words he thought: "Yeah ... I want you to be a salvation leader too – for your community. That would be just amazing!" 

From city squats to red carpet

A few years ago, country-born Jason Fletcher was living on the streets of Sydney – feeling cold, frightened and alone. By late 2007, thanks to a unique training partnership between The Salvation Army and Foxtel, Jason and five of his peers were attending their own film premieres.

Jason was chosen earlier this year as one of six homeless young people being supported by The Salvation Army Oasis Youth Support Network to undertake a specially designed six-week Foxtel 'Street TV' course.

The course introduces the disadvantaged young people to all facets of television production. They are mentored by dedicated Foxtel staff who help each student complete a short film which is screened on Foxtel.

Anna Rudd of The Salvation Army Oasis Dream Films says: "This year, the films were of an exceptional quality and Foxtel arranged an official opening night at the NSW Parliament Theatre. It was an awards evening with parliamentarians and [TV] industry personalities in attendance.

"The kids felt really special – it was very much their night. It was so moving to see these kids – who have been so damaged by the world – dressed up in their best gear, with their mates from Oasis there to cheer them on, taking to the stage to receive their awards."

Jason Fletcher says: "Street TV has helped me see, for the first time in my life, that I have options."

He explains: "I had a junkie mother who left me and I never met my dad, and I was raised by my nan and pop," explains Jason. "They looked after me until they couldn't look after me anymore, so I had to make my own decisions. I made the rash decision to come to Sydney, and I ended up there with nothing."



ABOVE: JASON REVISITS HIS FORMER SQUAT.
RIGHT: AT THE STREET TV GRADUATION.

In fact, Jason's wallet was stolen almost as soon as he stepped off the train at Sydney's Central Station, leaving him with absolutely no money and nowhere to go, sleeping on park benches or in squats.

"I got to the stage where I felt like I should just die in the gutter. I felt like no one in the world cared about me," says Jason.

Eventually Jason was approached by another young man who said: "I know a safe place where you can go, a place where they help street kids." Jason was unsure but took a risk and followed him. "He took me to Oasis," says Jason, "where I worked on getting my life back on track. I found friends who are now like family, and people who could help guide me on the right path."

Now, aged 21, Jason works for The Salvation Army Oasis Property Plus Group as a landscaper and for The Salvation Army



Oasis Dream Films as a volunteer.

As Anna says: "The whole experience stretches the imaginations of our young people to realise things are possible that they never thought possible. It lifts them out of the 'homeless/welfare' mindset to suddenly see, 'I'm not just the kid of a junkie whose parents left him. There are great possibilities for my life.'" *o*



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 become a member of The Red Shield Club (our donor association)
- Wills and bequests

My contact details

Title Mr / Mrs / Miss / Ms / Dr _____

Given name _____

Surname _____

Address _____

Suburb _____

State _____ **Postcode** _____

Phone () _____

Email _____

I would like to donate \$ _____ by

- Cheque/ money order** payable to The Salvation Army
- Credit card** Visa Mastercard
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No

Name on card _____

Expiry / _____ Signature _____

Please be assured your details remain confidential. Donations are tax deductible. Donate by credit card by phoning **13 SALVOS (13 72 58)** or log onto **salvos.org.au/ots**

Letters & feedback welcome!