

# On the Scene

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

## A bright and shiny future

**“I’ve turned a punishment into a pleasure, and a pleasure into a business... It gives me great pleasure now to see people walk away with their shiny shoes!”**

**NEILL, SHINY SHOES SHOE SHINE**

As a broken young teenager at a boys home in WA, made to polish shoes in the hundreds as punishment for bad behaviour, Neill never imagined the task he loathed would one day help him embrace the life of his dreams.

“I did shoe shining as a punishment, 360 pairs every Sunday. I hated it,” says Neill.

In fact, there was little for Neill to like about his life from the time he was a child through to his late 30s.

Neill was first taken into care aged 10, already – incredibly – with a substantial alcohol problem and the accompanying negative behaviours. “I was considered a pest to society,” he says.

The system soon helped ensure Neill became more than a young ‘pest’. Not only was he exposed in the boys homes to children with far more serious problems than he, but Neill became the victim of repeated, horrific sexual abuse.

On one occasion Neill lashed out and seriously attacked the perpetrator. He was moved to a maximum security juvenile detention centre, the judge telling him he was “a waste of a person” who would “never amount to anything.” A school report supported this verdict with the words: “This kid won’t make it to (the age of) 40.”



**ABOVE:** NEILL CHATS WITH MAJOR SIMON PICKENS OF THE SALVATION ARMY IN MELBOURNE.

And to appearances, Neill seemed to fulfil their predictions. His life as a young adult was a messy mixture of drugs, violence, trouble with the law and broken relationships – as Neill says, “smoking dope, doing needles and drink, just to numb myself.”

Neill desperately wanted to stop his out-of-control behaviour and a meeting with a Salvation Army officer in Bendigo provided a glimmer of hope. Given a referral to a Salvation Army men’s

shelter and a ticket to get there, Neill grasped the opportunity.

When Neill arrived at **The Salvation Army** Flagstaff crisis centre in Melbourne, he looked like a wild man. With hair well below his waist, and a beard to his stomach, he hadn’t showered in months. He had been drinking methylated spirits, sleeping on the streets or in a paddock surrounded by cows, and had reached the point where even his own children were scared of him. **CONTINUED PAGE 3**

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Oasis Youth Support Network is providing practical workplace training for homeless and severely disadvantaged youth. See page 3.

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The Youth Outreach Service in Brisbane is drumming up self-esteem.

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Joel was about to be expelled from primary school, but a Salvation Army camp turned his life around.

## Red Shield Appeal

The Salvation Army is aiming to raise \$64 million nationally through the Red Shield Appeal. The appeal concludes on 30 June, with the Doorknock Appeal held on 19-20 May. To donate to the appeal or volunteer as a doorknock collector, call **13 SALVOS (13 72 58)** or visit [salvos.org.au](http://salvos.org.au)



## RED SHIELD APPEAL

### Aged Care expansion

The Salvation Army is extending its Gill Waminda aged care facility in Goulburn. In mid-2007, a new 103-bed purpose-built Residential Aged Care Centre will be opened next door to the original building, and will provide high care, low care and respite accommodation.

Construction of the new facilities is part of an ongoing refurbishment and rebuilding program aiming to help meet the needs of Australia's ageing population.

### Suicide Prevention

This year marks the 100-year anniversary of the world's first suicide prevention programs, which were commenced by The Salvation Army in 1907. The Salvation Army will be participating in a national conference during 24-26 May that will examine suicide and related issues.

# Remembering Australia's worst train disaster

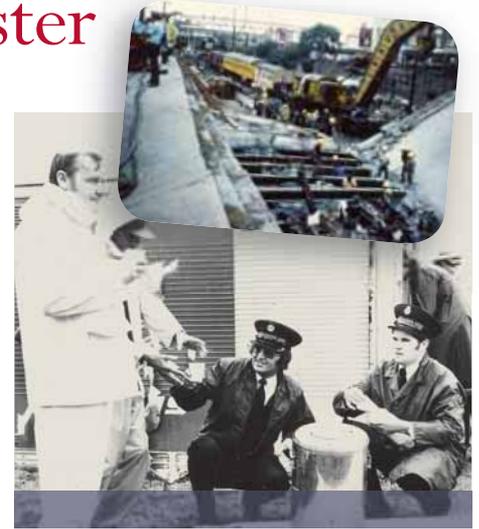
January 18, 2007 marked the 30th anniversary of the Granville train disaster, in which 83 lives were lost and over 210 people were badly injured. The accident still remains Australia's worst-ever railway disaster. The following report has been compiled from articles written shortly after the tragedy in 1977.

*Seven hours in the cramped space of a dangerously perched railway carriage was how one **Salvation Army** officer spent Tuesday, January 18, following the disastrous train accident in the Sydney suburb of Granville.*

*At the scene of the tragedy, the welcome sight of The Salvation Army uniform opened the way for anxious people to approach officers for the warmth and security they needed at that moment.*

*A team of 200 (Salvation Army) officers and soldiers, averaging about 50 per shift, responded to the various needs of anxious relatives and fatigued (but unwavering) rescue workers. Over 11,000 drink cups were used and 7,000 meals supplied.*

*Back at the hospitals where the injured were receiving appropriate*



*treatment, officers continued their ministry of support and counselling.*

*The Minister for Youth and Community Services in NSW states: "Despite the tragic circumstances... This situation truly demonstrates that The Salvation Army was the right organisation to accept leadership and responsibility for the provision of emergency food in the state's emergency welfare plan. It is indeed comforting to know that this function is in such competent hands."*

— ASSORTED ARTICLES FROM *THE WAR CRY*, 1977

# Beating the streets

'Beat the Streets' is a drumming program that is building positive opportunities for homeless youth in Brisbane, while helping them connect with local police and The Salvation Army Youth Outreach Service (YOS).

Established by Queensland Police and YOS, the program enables homeless young people to learn, play and regularly perform a variety of drumming styles alongside members of the Police Service and **The Salvation Army**.

"Many of our chronically homeless street kids, who haven't had anything to be proud or excited about, are now being celebrated, encored and cheered on by applauding crowds!" says YOS manager, Captain Chris Cohen.

This has been instrumental in building



confidence, self-esteem and a sense of hope. "The drumming has become a launch pad for many of our young people into a more positive future," says Chris. "Most of the original drummers have moved on to renew links with their family, stable accommodation, education, even employment. We're now working with our third generation of emerging musicians."

# New pathways for disadvantaged youth

The Salvation Army's Oasis Youth Support Network in Sydney is extending its existing training programs to create a college-style vocational training centre specifically for homeless and severely disadvantaged young people.

"Oasis Training, as it will be known, will offer accredited courses in information technology, horticulture, commercial cleaning and radio broadcasting," says Oasis Network Director, Captain Paul Moulds.

"Alongside we plan to offer lifestyle-related courses that are non-accredited but look at developing the whole person," says Paul. These include such courses as outdoor adventure, driver training, personal financial management, personal health and fitness, and drug and alcohol awareness.

The Oasis Training courses will be offered in a learning environment designed to support disadvantaged young people. The personal issues they face can include such things as homelessness, substance abuse, mental illness, extremely poor literacy levels, long-term unemployment, domestic violence, and personality, mood or anxiety disorders.

"Many of these kids are really great kids who have just had a terrible start in life. The problem is that many of these issues would normally exclude them from the labour market. They don't have a good 'CV', so an average employer won't employ them," says Paul.

"Our aim is to help them surmount difficult, and often tragic,

**Twenty-year-old Ella is one of the many young people helped through The Salvation Army Oasis Youth Support Network to find their potential.**

**Told to leave home when she was just 16, Ella lived on the streets and slept on trains before she came to Oasis with a crystal methamphetamine addiction.**

**Ella was helped into rehabilitation and stable accommodation, and because she has a passion for music and skating, she became involved in Oasis's Streetradio.net, which allows disadvantaged young people to gain skills in radio production.**

**Ella now hosts a weekly Oasis skateboarding and music program, has completed a Foxtel media course**



**and a three-month paid stint at a commercial radio station in Sydney, and was recently offered a full-time job in commercial broadcasting.**

personal circumstances and reconnect to the economic and social life of the community."

Paul cites the example of a young man they were recently able to place in a supported employment training program. "He is a terrific young guy, with great potential, but he'd been bashed, sexually abused and psychologically scarred early on in life. He has significant emotional and psychological problems as a result.

"There's no way he would ever get a job because his CV simply doesn't look good to the average employer, and he faces some real challenges adjusting to

the work environment. But we know he's full of heart and has a great desire to overcome his past. We were able to place this young man in a supported position in Woolworths. He's over the moon and, according to Woolworths, is someone they regard as having management potential."

"These kids each have great potential. If we give them an employment pathway, then that potential can be unleashed and they can become contributing members of the community, rather than living a life of crime and drugs on the margins of society." ○

## Life becomes brighter for 'Shiny Shoes' Neill

**FROM PAGE 1** At Flagstaff, Neill was given food, clean clothes, a bed and, most importantly, access to a network of support services that would help him on the road to change. "Monday morning I found myself at an AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] meeting held at a Salvation Army church," says Neill. "That's where my life turned around."

One of The Salvation Army services that supported Neill through his recovery was The Life Centre. Manager Kris Halliday says: "Services like ours are vital for people like Neill who have lost all

hope. It seems that everybody in the world who gets on in life has a 'rock' to lean on, usually a best friend or family member. The people we work with, around 200 clients a day, often don't have that rock, so that's what we try to be – a consistent presence for them to lean on and then launch from."

Today, cheerful and clean-shaven, Neill is seeing a dream fulfilled running his own shoe shine business at the "Paris end" of Melbourne's Collins Street, named "Shiny Shoes Shoe Shine" after his childhood nickname "Shiny Shoes".

He says, "I never thought, when I walked into The Salvation Army that day, that four years later this is where I'd be.

"Now, because I'm sober, I'm able to spend every weekend with my children, and my ex-wife is on good terms too. I run AA meetings to help others. Thanks to John and Theo Poulakis of Harrolds Shoes, I have my own business and there's a chance I might have a shop-front to work from soon. My dreams are happening!

"Today I have hope because the Salvos helped and said things could be better." ○

# Experience of a lifetime

## helps heal young hearts

Every year, more than 350 children who've never had a holiday descend upon The Salvation Army's Collaroy Centre in Sydney. Many come from families who are struggling financially, some have experienced serious abuse and neglect, but they all leave with one thing in common – they've just experienced the holiday of a lifetime.

Over the course of a week, the children go abseiling, spend plenty of time at the beach and make special outings to the movies, Taronga Park Zoo and Sydney Aquarium. Best of all, there's a large team of dedicated volunteers who speak as much love and encouragement to the kids as they possibly can.

For many children, the experience is life-changing.



THE CHILD PICTURED IS NOT THE SUBJECT OF THE STORY

ABOVE: A SOFTBALL GAME DURING RED SHIELD KIDS CAMP AT COLLAROY.

**Can one special week really change the direction of a child's life? Ken Heffernan, director of The Salvation Army Red Shield Children's Camps, passionately believes it can, because he has seen it happen many times.**

Joel\* was 10 years old and about to be expelled from school. His behavioural problems were extreme and included repeatedly urinating on his teachers. In a last ditch effort, Joel's School Principal phoned Ken Heffernan to see if attending one of the Red Shield Children's Camps could make a difference in Joel's life.

His words to Ken were: "Think of the worst behaviour imaginable and you have Joel."

Camp arrived and so did Joel. Even among 200 other kids, he stood out. Ken Heffernan explains: "Over the first few days of camp, Joel filled beds with everything from sand to toothpaste. He scrawled graffiti on the cabin walls, pulled a heater off the wall and smashed a door." At the same time, some of the belongings

of other children began to go missing. One boy 'lost' his watch, another his trainers.

After each incident, Joel's counsellor would quietly take him to one side and discuss his behaviour and consequences, but always away from the other children and always with love and respect. By the third day, Joel marched up to his counsellor, demanding to know why he never yelled or put him down.

The counsellor gently explained, "Because we care about you and we can see that you are unique. We can see that you want to be a good kid and we want to help you." Joel looked shocked and was quiet for the remainder of the day.

The next morning Joel waited for his counsellor to start breakfast before he started his own. "Would you like a juice?" Joel offered the counsellor. A whole day then followed without incident and the next morning the stolen items reappeared under the other children's beds. Joel owned up and apologised.

Ken Heffernan says: "As the other kids

in his group saw the positive changes, they began to respond. By the final day, Joel was a standout good guy with heaps of new friends.

"Now that he wasn't being destructive, he showed himself to be funny, intelligent and full of compassion. He was a very special little boy and his potential was beginning to be realised."

The change was quite dramatic and after camp Ken pleaded with the School Principal to give Joel one more chance. He did, and was not disappointed. At the end of that year, Joel took out the Citizenship of the Year Award at his school speech night. "The exciting thing about this story is that it began at camp and continued into the rest of Joel's life," explains Ken. "It reminds us that lives really do change!"

\* THIS IS A TRUE STORY BUT THE BOY'S NAME HAS BEEN CHANGED TO PROTECT IDENTITY. A PORTION OF THIS ARTICLE HAS BEEN REPRINTED FROM *THAT'S LIFE!* MAGAZINE, ISSUE 11, 2002, WITH PERMISSION.

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.**

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- Community services
- How I may become a member of the Red Shield Club (our donor association)
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*Letters & feedback welcome!*