

Winter 2014

# Transformations



## A place to call home

From uncertainty  
to stability

## A father's final wish

## The gift of giving

**MISSION**  
**AUSTRALIA** | together  
we stand

# CEO welcome **Winter newsletter**



**At this time of year, it seems as if the cold weather and long nights will go on forever. But for people experiencing homelessness, the winter months can be particularly challenging.**

Homelessness is mercifully unknown to most of us. What we do know is that homelessness could happen to anyone: family breakdown, unemployment, illness, poverty, and drug and alcohol dependency are just some of the reasons why people can lose the security of their own home.

We have become increasingly accustomed to seeing homeless people on our streets: the pile of blankets in a

shop doorway; a supermarket trolley containing all someone's worldly goods. What is less visible or widely known is that people sleeping rough on the streets are only a small proportion of Australia's homeless. Thousands more people, including many families waiting for social housing, don't know where they'll stay from one night to the next. Many people find it difficult to believe that there are homeless families in our communities. The reality is that more and more people are living on a knife-edge, just a pay slip away from repossession, eviction and possible homelessness.

In 2013, Mission Australia helped 11,993 families to get back on their feet and secure a brighter future. But there are still 17,845 children who are currently homeless. We also know that 67 per cent of families are likely to be turned away when seeking immediate accommodation for the first time.

In this edition of Transformations, you will read about families with young children who, despite their best efforts, have fallen on hard times. What shines through in these stories is the sheer determination of people to survive. It takes courage of an order that most of us will never have to display.

Your ongoing support enables us to give shelter to homeless families and provide parents and children with the

practical and emotional support they need to make a fresh start in life.

Mission Australia has a long history of standing with people in need, until they can stand for themselves. And as the demand for our work becomes greater, we are ever more dependent on your generosity. Without your help we couldn't reach out to people in genuine, urgent need.

Winter is the season when loneliness and homelessness seem all the more unbearable. Yet people come to our services with the certainty that they will be welcomed and accepted. Thanks to the generosity of people like you, they know that help and comfort are at hand.

**Thank you for digging deep this winter and helping Australian families in need. Whatever you choose to contribute, we are extremely grateful for your support because it will help us to change someone's life for the better.**

**Catherine Yeomans**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Mission Australia

**Founding Purpose** Inspired by Jesus Christ, Mission Australia exists to meet human need and to spread the knowledge of the love of God.

**Our Values** Compassion, Integrity, Respect, Perseverance, Celebration.

**Our Vision** is to see a fairer Australia by enabling people in need to find pathways to a better life.

## Connect with us

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# A father's final wish

**The Bowens\* never expected to find themselves without a roof over their heads.**

**Allen, a kind man and a hard worker, ran his own small business and regularly put money aside into a savings account. His sons, 14 year-old Alex and 11 year-old Connor, were both very bright boys.**

The Bowen family's happy home life took a devastating turn for the worse when Allen was diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer and was forced to start treatment immediately.

Because he had savings, Allen was initially able to pay for his treatment and keep up with the mortgage payments. But he knew the money wouldn't last forever.

In September 2013, further tests revealed that Allen's cancer was terminal. The doctors thought it unlikely that Allen would live past February 2014.

His dying wish was to see Connor accepted into selective high school.

**He desperately wanted to be well enough to drop Connor off at school on his first day there.**

With rising medical expenses and a mortgage to cover, Allen rapidly went through his savings until he was unable to meet his mortgage repayments.

Sadly, the Bowens were evicted from their home.

Royal North Shore Hospital Oncology Unit contacted Mission Australia to inform them of the family's circumstances. On hearing about their plight, we were determined to do everything in our power to ensure that this family remained together.

ACCOR, one of our corporate partners offered to provide free accommodation in one of their hotels until more permanent accommodation could be secured.

NSW Housing helped the Bowen family, providing a secure rental property for them, which is located close to the boys' schools. Mission Australia continues to support the family through counselling and will ensure that the boys receive suitable care and support when Allen passes away.

Allen continues to receive palliative treatment but his prognosis remains the same. Mr Bowen's youngest son won a place at the selective high school and much to Allen's delight he was able to drop him off on his first day there.

As we head into the cold winter months, it's more important than ever to support families like the Bowens. Serious illness can happen to anyone and the effect on families is devastating.

\* Names and image have been changed to protect the identity of our clients.

# Spirit matters

## I love a rainy night



I love the sound of rain at night. And as I write these words, I can hear it pounding on the roof and slapping against windowpanes while lightning flashes

across the sky and thunder booms deep in the distance. There is nothing better than being able to climb into a warm bed and hear the storm outside rage while all inside is peace.

But what if we had no bed? What if our bed was a doorway, a park bench or a railway station? What if we had no peace and the storm for us raged on with no respite? Have you ever stopped to imagine what that would be like?

I have, so one night a few years ago I decided to take part in the Mission Australia Winter Sleepout. Along with Mission Australia staff from south-east New South Wales, I spent a cold winter's night sleeping on the ground in a park in Goulburn. It was unpleasant, freezing and uncomfortable. But fortunately for me it was also temporary. However, for thousands of Australians this winter that will not be the case.

The world can be cruel and every day ordinary people face extraordinary hardship. Often I'm asked why God doesn't do something to help the homeless and the marginalised, and my answer is always the same: He does do something. He uses people – people like you and me. He uses us to reach out to others in their pain and hurt, to offer hope, love and a second chance.

We are God's hands and feet in what can be a cold and harsh world, and in this very practical way, together we can spread the knowledge of the love of God.

**'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'** – Jesus

Matthew 25:40, New International Version

**Karen Mulvey**  
State Chaplain NSW/ACT



**With your help, Mission Australia can provide stable housing, family services and ongoing support to families in need this winter.**

# A place to call home

## From uncertainty to stability

**Homes in Australia are among the most unaffordable in the English-speaking world and we all feel the strain of ever-increasing living costs. As rent continues to rise in major urban areas – where most of the services needed by families are located – disadvantaged Australian families have become even more vulnerable to homelessness.**

Faced with an affordable housing shortage and a growing population, many Australian families are just a pay packet away from becoming homeless.

The uncertainty and anxiety felt by anyone experiencing homelessness for even a short period of time causes untold stress. It can intensify existing issues like substance abuse, poverty and relationship difficulties as people struggle to meet their daily needs.

Being homeless is an even more complex situation for families as they juggle parenting with meeting the most basic needs – like having enough to eat, offering stability and keeping their children warm and safe.

### A story told by numbers

The number of homeless families is on the rise with demand for homeless services increasing. On any given night, 105,000 Australians are homeless and 80% of families are turned away from homeless services. One way some desperate parents in Western Sydney are dealing with the housing shortage and tight rental market is by living in cheap motels.

They typically share a tiny and cluttered living space; with possessions stuffed in garbage bags in a corner of the room; and a tiny bar fridge to store food.

**It is awful picking up my child from school and having him ask where we are staying tonight and not knowing which motel we'll be going to, or if there's even going to be one available, says Jeremy, a father of two who has been moving from motel to motel for the past 14 months. You have to take each day as it comes. We make sure the kids eat before we do. Some days we go without so the kids can get something in their bellies he says.**

### Housing for homeless families

Everyone has a right to secure accommodation and a place to call home. For some Australians, it is a daily struggle to access safe, affordable and permanent housing.

Mission Australia's Fairfax House aims to ease homelessness in Western Sydney with its unique family service. While most crisis accommodation services offer short-term assistance for individuals, Fairfax House was established specifically to meet the needs of homeless families for six to nine months – giving them the time to truly get back on their feet.

Fairfax House offers families appropriate accommodation while giving them time and support to recover from the turmoil of being homeless.

Families – whether they are couples, single parents or carers with children – are offered independent living on medium-term leases while we help them to find a suitable and permanent home. Leases are often extended until suitable accommodation is found.

There are 16 furnished and fully equipped townhouses available at Fairfax House and the service functions on the generous support of Mission Australia donors. Fairfax House also assists families with securing childcare, enrolling children into local schools, relationship building, developing financial skills and seeking employment opportunities.



## The reality for the Greens



When five-year-old Amelia Green\* and her family first came to Mission Australia, they had been homeless for eight months. Amelia's dad, Dave, suffered a stroke and was no longer able to work. Unable to pay the rent, life became extremely difficult for the family of four.

The Greens lost everything. Amelia's mum Julie had to quit her job to care for Dave and, with no income, they were evicted. The family shuffled from motel to motel for months, stretching their meagre finances until they were referred to Mission Australia's Fairfax House.

Amelia and her brother Jack missed many days of school and each day was more worrying and unstable than the day before. Basic tasks like putting dinner on the table became daunting challenges for Julie and Dave.

But their worry and uncertainty began to ease when they settled into one of the Fairfax House townhouses. Amelia and Jack were enrolled into local schools and soon adjusted to their new routine knowing that they would come home to the same place each afternoon and that dinner would be on the table that night.

Julie initially found it very hard to cope with the idea of accepting help: "I felt embarrassed, like we were taking up space that another family with greater need could be using"

**In the motel there was no kitchen so we had to eat out for every meal or just make do. It was so expensive and chewed up our money so quickly. Here at Fairfax House we have everything we need – enough chairs, a kitchen table, a toaster, a stove, plates, tea towels, even knives and forks!**

Dave and Julie have worked hard to get their lives back on track. Together they attended financial counselling to ensure they will never end up in the same position again. Julie has enrolled in a book-keeping course to increase her chance of securing a job while Dave has received counselling to come to terms with his medical condition.

After three months at Fairfax House, with Mission Australia's help, Amelia and her family have been offered a 12-month lease on a house in the local area. Julie and Dave are pleased the children will still be able to attend the same schools and be close enough to Fairfax House to keep in contact with their case worker for ongoing support.

**I would love the opportunity to thank the people that have made this possible says Julie. The generosity and kindness that everyday Australians have shown us makes us feel so strong again. I hope that I can become an 'everyday Australian' again so I can one day be in a position to help others.**

Fairfax House enables families like Amelia's to stabilise and spend some much-needed time together in a stress-free environment. Importantly, it allows children to settle into a regular school routine, while guiding parents as they work out their financial situation and address relationship issues.

Every child deserves the very best start in life as well as ongoing support throughout their childhood. But families experiencing homelessness and financial hardship can find it difficult to provide a safe and nurturing environment in which their children have a solid foundation for success. This is the strength of Fairfax House – it takes a long-term care approach to help families like the Greens find their feet again.

## A solution to the spiral

For Australians like Dave and Julie, becoming homeless is not something they can necessarily control. Sleeping rough or being without a home is not a choice anyone consciously makes. People may find themselves homeless for a number of reasons, ranging from domestic violence, family breakdown

and mental illness to financial difficulty or lack of education.

Once a person becomes homeless, it can seem impossible to escape the spiral.

If you don't have a job and you're homeless it's awfully difficult to find another one. Your kids won't be going to school and it's going to be incredibly hard to do anything but try to search for somewhere to live. That repeated day in and day out takes people into a spiral.

Practical and emotional support for those experiencing homelessness is invaluable.

The relentless worry of where the next meal or bed will come from, especially for families, makes it difficult for people in Dave and Julie's situation to look to the future and see a better future.

Hope for a positive change and for a way out of the spiral is crucial for people experiencing disadvantage and homelessness. And this is exactly what we offer those who come through our doors, coupled with practical, long-term solutions.

With support from services like Fairfax House, Australians will be better equipped to break the grip of the homelessness, or even avoid becoming homeless. Thanks to the support of our donors, we can help both families and individuals address barriers like mental health issues, financial difficulties or relationship breakdown that contribute to homelessness.

For as long as there are Australians in need of secure accommodation, we will continue to work hand-in-hand with our supporters and Australians in need to achieve a fairer Australia.

\*Names and image have been changed to protect the identity of our clients.

To transform the lives of homeless families, please support our Winter Appeal by calling **1800 88 88 68** or visiting **[www.missionaustralia.com.au](http://www.missionaustralia.com.au)**

## The gift of giving

**During a visit to our new aged care centre, Annie Green Court, Mission Australia supporter Lynette met a gentleman who told her a story that really resonated with her. He said that one year someone had given him a small gift on his birthday. He was touched and grateful that someone had even remembered that it was his birthday.**

This gentleman's story inspired Lynette to do something thoughtful and amazing too. She decided to buy birthday presents for all 72 residents of Annie Green Court. Lynette attended the



birthday morning tea and was moved by two residents in particular. One was an elderly woman who had no lower limbs and was confined to a wheelchair. The other was a gentleman who didn't get to spend much time outdoors because he struggled to walk even short distances.

Lynette told her son about their mobility issues and he generously donated a

mobility scooter to Annie Green Court for the residents to use. This amazing gift has given freedom and a level of independence to those residents who were previously unable to visit the local park or shop by themselves.

Lynette says, "I pray that God keeps each and every one of Annie Green Court's residents safe and well. Thank you Mission Australia for allowing me to become involved in a small way."

Lynette was so touched by the residents of Annie Green Court that she has since donated gifts to all 65 residents of Charles Chamber Court as well.

We can't thank Lynette and her son enough for this wonderful contribution that will help enrich resident's lives.

**The joy of being able to bring a little surprise to these lovely people on their special day is very overwhelming to me.**

**MISSION AUSTRALIA WINTER SLEEPOUT 31 MAY 2014**

## Join the Mission Australia Winter Sleepout – we need your help!

**As winter approaches it's a bleak outlook for individuals and families who don't have a place to call home. More than 100,000 Australians are homeless on any given night; including thousands of families.**

**Sign up today to host your own Winter Sleepout.**

Whether it is in your backyard, your office, your school hall or even on your living room floor, Winter Sleepout is about getting your friends, family, colleagues and community to raise vital funds towards Australians having a safe place to sleep this winter.

**When Saturday 31 May** or another night that suits you this winter  
**How Register at [wintersleepout.gofundraise.com.au](http://wintersleepout.gofundraise.com.au)**



## Ruth's story



**Ruth Rack was born in 1928 in Leipzig in Germany, home to famous composers like Bach, Wagner, Goethe and Mendelssohn.**

Before Kristallnacht, Leipzig had a population of over 13,000 Jews, including Ruth and her extended family. **This is Ruth's story.**

"On the morning of 9 November 1938 aged 10, I went to school. There was nobody there. The doors were open and books were lying in the street outside. I hurried home. Father decided we must leave urgently and seek shelter in the Polish Consulate. This was the end of our family life together.

We went past the Synagogue where my father was Cantor. It was on fire. Jewish shops were smashed and people were being beaten in the street. Our neighbours, whom we'd considered friends, were yelling obscenities at us. It was horrible. When we arrived at the consulate, I fainted. My mind has blanked out the next six months – it's too painful to remember.

That day is now known as Kristallnacht. It was followed by the Holocaust – 6 million Jews were murdered, including 1.5 million children.

I'm one of the lucky ones. I escaped on a Kindertransport from Leipzig to

London, a train full of unaccompanied children escaping Nazi Germany, via Holland, to England. I never saw my parents or family again. Not knowing what happened to them, not having closure was terrible.

In London, I was proud to represent my school at a concert under the baton of Sir Thomas Beecham. I loved singing with select choirs. I still perform today, at 86 years of age.

When the war broke out in 1939, I was evacuated from London to Devon. I was an unwelcome evacuee in an area where people had never met a Jewish person before. I was moved six or seven times.

When I was 16 years old, I was billeted with a mother and daughter, while studying for my high school certificate. My ambition was to go to Cambridge University. The mother wanted to adopt me. That Christmas I attended midnight mass with the family as a respectful observer. As we tramped back from church through the snow, the mother expressed her hatred of Jews. Affronted, I told her that I was Jewish!

The next day, I arrived home from town to find my suitcase and precious books scattered in the snow. Night fell. I walked back through woods and fell asleep under a tree: cold, lonely and frightened. Next day, the billeting officer took me in temporarily until another billet could be found.

After the war, I returned to London. I became an actress in the theatre where I met Peter. He'd served in the Royal Air Force. We were married and immigrated to Australia in 1950.

We worked hard, built a house and had two children. I auditioned for the Conservatorium of Music. I've always enjoyed singing but feel like I never reached my potential.

**I qualified for Cambridge University but couldn't go because I had nowhere to live and nobody to guide me.**

One rainy winter night many years later, I was walking home from choir rehearsal when I saw a man lying in the doorway of a restaurant. He wasn't dirty, old or drunk. He was homeless. It reminded me of that night in England, when I slept under a tree in the snow. I know what it's like. I went home to my cosy house and two children sleeping in warm beds while this poor man was lying in the rain. It really affected me.

I rang the police who directed me to Mission Australia. I've been supporting them ever since. I used to donate \$100 every year but in 1978, I redid my will. I put in a bequest to Mission Australia because I think what they're doing for these young people is wonderful. I think the work they do is very important."

Ruth still lives in Sydney and has recently become a great-grandmother. We are incredibly grateful for her support and we are delighted that she has decided to become a Mission Australia benefactor. With her generous donations we will be able to continue our work helping people in need, just like the homeless man Ruth encountered that rainy winter evening.



**If you would like further information on bequests at Mission Australia please contact Pat Brennan on 02 9217 1064.**



# There's no place like home

But this winter more than  
**62,287 families\*** just  
like yours are homeless.

\*11,972 two parent families + 50,315 single parent families, AIHW 2013.

**Don't leave any family  
out in the cold this winter**  
Please donate today!

**MISSION  
AUSTRALIA**

 Complete the enclosed coupon

 1800 88 88 68

 [missionaustralia.com.au/winterappeal](http://missionaustralia.com.au/winterappeal)