

# Lazarus Centre Chaplaincy Newsletter

Volume 6 Issue 3

## Welcoming New Volunteers



Anglicare Victoria staff member Pete Burns (left) and long-time volunteer John Collins (right) welcome Colin and Judith McCraith as volunteers at the Lazarus Centre Friday Barbeque.

The Lazarus Centre could hardly function without the generous giving of our volunteers. However, without exception they comment how much they receive in return. An article from the University of Sydney notes seven benefits of volunteering:

1. Volunteers seem to be more satisfied with life.
2. People who give to others report greater happiness
3. Volunteers report feeling in better mental and physical health
4. Helping others releases "feel-good" neurotransmitters such as oxytocin and vasopressin
5. Volunteering engenders a sense of belonging
6. Helpers share in the positive emotions of others
7. Feeling passionate about a cause adds meaning to life

<https://sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2017/05/03/7-surprising-benefits-of-volunteering-.html>

**A young student working on an assignment on homelessness asked me some questions that really made me think. I thought it was worth sharing a couple of my responses:**

### **Do you know what it is like to be in poverty?**

I have not experienced poverty in the sense of those who seek help at St Peter's do (though I have had my time as an "impoverished" student). I have listened to many homeless people over the years and while this gives some insight into what they must endure I could never say that I know what they are going through. Once I greeted someone at the Breakfast Program and we started talking about the rain that had fallen the night before. He said the rain woke him up. I thought to myself, yes rain on the roof in the middle of the night can wake you up, but he was talking about the rain that fell on his face as he was sleeping "rough" – outside, not in a comfortable bed!

### **Do you know what they do for their normal day?**

One thing that took me a while to realise is that homeless people have a "rhythm of life" that is different from those who have a home. First, their sleep patterns are often patchy at best. They have to worry about their personal safety at night and it is almost impossible to get comfortable. During the day they can be very tired and their capacity to be "presentable" and do things like work or even look for work is severely diminished. They start the day from a place of disadvantage.

I know that as well as providing food it is important to provide place of community and safety where people experiencing homelessness can find friendship and a non-judgemental atmosphere. Somewhere they can regroup and begin to rebuild their lives. Often people must seek out places where they can be warm in winter and cool in summer. Public libraries are popular and welcoming. There are community drop in centres such as St Mark's Community Centre in Fitzroy offering lunch, social connection and interaction with other helping professions.

One person I met when he was a participant at the Breakfast Program told me he recently drove past a house he used to own. The experience aroused many emotions for him. Through complex circumstances his business failed and his family broke up. He became depressed and homeless. He is recovering now and is working again, but that recovery has taken seven years. All during those years he was thankful he has been able to find support at St Peter's.

Fr Philip Gill

## People Matter

Lord, help us to remember that people matter,  
that your shoulder is always there for each of us.  
We lose ourselves so easily in our possessions,  
desire for dominance, our daily unthinking matters.  
We often play people as objects like chess –  
a knight carelessly tips aside the rook,  
a sneaky pawn puts the queen in a fix  
or a startled bishop checkmates the king.

Lord, you are our king already checkmated and  
toppled-over over into resurrection.

Help us remember.

People matter.

A homeless woman weeps  
quietly before shelves of books about God  
because she has no money to purchase.  
Inside a tram perverse remarks are made  
toward a man who knows only the deep, intimate  
timelessness of the land we blithely roll across.

People matter: the closeness, the summer  
laughter, friends, strangers,  
that shared extraordinary moment.

Lord, forgive our forgetfulness,  
offer again the loving, gentle warmth of Your  
shoulder to each of us.

Day 18 from *Twenty Summer Day Poems* by Carol O'Connor.



Checking out the Coffee Van – Anglicare Staff member Sam, team leader Chris, Chaplain Fr Philip with Coffee Van customers

## Finding Solace at the Library



Following initiatives in San Francisco and Denver, Melbourne City Council is embedding social workers at city libraries to work with the substantial number of homeless people who spend time at our libraries. The social workers will build rapport with library users who are homeless, couch surfing or in unstable accommodation and will help connect them with community services. Those who feel unsafe cannot sleep easily at night and their days are often spent looking for safe places to rest and recuperate.

The idea stuck a chord with me. I am a frequent local library user and cannot help notice the wide variety of people using the library to browse books, but also to study, to use the wifi or computers, to talk quietly, or to take an education course. Sometimes lively children's groups dispel the myth that libraries are stuffy places for "old fogies".

Over the years I have heard many people speak of the solace they find at the library. There they find intellectual stimulation, but they also find warmth in winter and a cool sanctuary in summer and a place to escape inclement weather.

While there is no substitute for secure and comfortable accommodation, wherever vulnerable people can find a safe place to rest and recuperate is a blessing. More information on this initiative can be found at:

<https://www.governmentnews.com.au/library-hires-full-time-social-worker/>

<https://www.booksandpublishing.com.au/articles/2019/09/04/138585/melbournes-city-library-becomes-first-australian-library-to-hire-social-worker/>