HAND IN HAND WITH PRAHRAN MISSION
HELP US MAKE A DIFFERENCE THIS CHRISTMAS

Can you imagine being on your own every Christmas? Or being told you wouldn’t live beyond the age of 15? That happened to Sally, who has relied on Prahran Mission’s services for three years.

“At 11 I was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis, a genetic condition that has no cure. That was three years after my younger brother and sister were killed in a car accident. My mum and dad separated soon after. I’ve been in and out of hospitals ever since and lost my mum years ago.”

Sally undertook a sub-agent’s course and later worked at Cystic Fibrosis Victoria. But the physical barriers of her illness became too much. Economically and socially disadvantaged, her world is a shuffle between home and hospital. Her limited budget often runs short, meaning she’ll be without food. Friendships are fleeting. Her only real companion is her beloved Pomeranian dog, Roxy.

“My life revolves around doctors’ visits, taking many medications and frequent stints in hospital. I am unable to do much else, which is why places like Prahran Mission are vital for my survival. I rely on the support I get at the Emergency Relief service and the meals at Hartley’s, without which my health would suffer even further. They treat you like a friend there.”

Sally hopes to attend the Christmas Day Lunch hosted by Prahran Mission. Without any family, she spends every Christmas alone.

This year, if she’s physically able, she’ll join all the other 400 guests and finally get to celebrate the festive season. Despite so many hurdles, Sally remains upbeat about the future and is determined to carry on: “I’ve made it this far. I’d like to make it to 50. You have to stay strong.”

Your support enables us to maintain essential services that do so much for people like Sally. Not just through our Emergency Relief program, Hartley’s community dining and the Goodwill Shops, but more celebratory occasions like our Christmas toy service and lunch. They give hope and companionship to those who are in real need of some Christmas cheer. Thank you so much.
Thank you to staff, participants, Board members and local community representatives who attended our AGM. It was a great chance to reflect on an eventful year and our proud 70-year history.

Guest speaker Louisa Dent Pierce spoke beautifully about the wisdom of the lived experience and our strong local presence. She likened Prahran Mission to a soil in which people can grow, recover and regain the confidence to follow their passion and re-engage in the world.

Former Board chair Dick Carter observed that Prahran Mission remained strong because of a willingness to change in response to developing community needs. Originally a church organisation catering to a post-war impoverished inner city community, we adapted when deinstitutionalisation began in the late 1970s and then later developed a full complement of mental health services.

Another former chair, Daryl Hawkey, said such evolution has resulted in remarkable achievements over recent years. These included the move into social enterprises, the expansion of our ground breaking Hearing Voices program, our partnership with St Kilda Parish (resulting in the St Kilda 101 Engagement Hub), and the 2014 transition to Mental Health Community Services Sector.

Looking to the future, the new Uniting chair, Bronwyn Pike, explained the merger of 21 UnitingCare agencies and Wesley Mission Victoria into “Uniting”. The change coincided with the NDIS reforms and is part of Prahran Mission’s evolution. The government is changing community services funding, with a greater emphasis on user pays, the marketisation of community services and a highly competitive environment as the outcome. The merger positions us to remain viable and relevant while continuing to care for the most vulnerable who are often displaced when significant change occurs.

Christmas is nearly upon us and I am reminded that despite such change, the reason we are here remains the same. Outside my office, there is a team organising the Christmas Day Lunch, hampers are arriving, toys collected, local businesses donating food and volunteers are being mobilised. Everyone deserves the opportunity to be with others on Christmas Day and for 70 years Prahran Mission has made sure all members of the local community are included. It is our privilege to do it again this year, and we will be honoured to do so for many years to come.

Quinn Pawson
Chief Executive Officer

Words of advice from a participant to the incoming CEO back in 2005

We expect you to give your best and do it
Endeavour to try new things without fear
Leap into new horizons with confidence
 Cheerfully take on challenges, come what may
Commit negative thoughts, be positive
Muster courage when in doubt
Eendeavour to win affection

Sextus Slegers, May 2005
MENTAL HEALTH WEEK CELEBRATES JOURNEYS

National Mental Health Week is held every October each year to coincide with World Mental Health Day on 10 October. This year the week was officially launched at Federation Square with the theme of “where to from here?”

The week aims to raise community awareness about mental health issues, promote social and emotional wellbeing to the community and encourage people to maximise their health potential. At Prahran Mission we recognised and celebrated in many different ways, all of which reflected the depth and breadth of our program offerings and the diversity of our clients and staff:

- St Kilda 101 Engagement Hub participants shared a delicious cake and reflected on their mental health journeys and the positive outcomes
- Staff and participants from our South East office, which covers the municipalities of Casey, Greater Dandenong and Cardinia, undertook a walk of 750m, 1.5 km or 3km
- Our Cheltenham office held an information session on “Connection and Isolation – the Impact on Mental Health” in conjunction with the Cheltenham-Mentone Uniting Church
- Participants at the Cranbourne Drop In program (who are either socially isolated or live with a mental illness) put together an art show to coincide with Mental Health Week
- Sam Hibbins MP, Member for Prahran sat down with some of our diners at Hartley’s Café to talk about mental health and community issues.

THE BENEFITS OF BECOMING A FRIEND OF THE MISSION

Did you know that by becoming a Friend of the Mission, your regular monthly gifts enable us to plan, distribute and use funding far more efficiently? This means your gift goes directly to improving the lives of those who need it the most: people experiencing homelessness, social isolation, poverty and/or mental health issues.

Please call Shelley on 03 9692 9550 or visit our website and become a Friend of the Mission today.
HEAR, HEAR –
THE OUTSTANDING WORK OF VOICES VIC

It is hard to think of an experience that is more misunderstood or stigmatised than hearing voices.

In short, voice hearers hear things that others can’t. Clinically, these experiences might be referred to as “auditory hallucinations” and people may end up being diagnosed with schizophrenia or some other mental illness. Some will be confused or frightened by hearing voices and seek help. Others find them helpful or just a normal part of life. Most voice hearers live well with their voices.

Voices Vic – initiated by Prahran Mission in 2009 – is a statewide specialist program led by people with a lived experience. It utilises the “Hearing Voices Approach”, based on research which found that many people hear voices without distress or ever needing to seek mental health services. It is not about ridding people of their voices but changing the relationship people have with them – learning to deal with fear and shame, finding support and getting control.

The program’s achievements have been many and varied, including:

- A Gold Achievement Award from TheMHS (2012) (The Mental Health Services)
- A high profile international conference in 2013 – the largest consumer-led event in Australian history, and the largest Intervoice congress to date
- Initiating world-leading research and projects
- Strong awareness and support from across the mental health sector
- The Victorian Department of Health recognises work and seeks advice from Voices Vic
- A significant contribution to the recovery of many people who hear distressing voices

A hearing voices peer support group proudly demonstrates the Voices Vic sign.
SCHIZOPHRENIA – FACTS AND FIGURES

Approximately 23,000 Victorians are diagnosed with schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder or psychosis with voices. They are typically diagnosed as psychotic and given a poor prognosis.

The organisation will work in partnership with Wimmera UnitingCare to deliver the program in the west of Victoria, providing eight new supported hearing voices groups for people experiencing psychosis with voices as a specific therapeutic target.

It will have flow on benefits to the community members that voice hearers share their lives with, mental health workers, carers, and families in rural Victoria. It will also offer opportunities for voice hearers to learn new skills and potentially create meaningful paid work positions for people who would otherwise find employment opportunities limited.

What does our hearing voices peer support group do?

Peer support occurs when people provide knowledge, experience, emotional, social or practical help to each other. Prahran Mission’s hearing voices group is about giving people a voice and giving their voices a voice. It’s something participants look forward to, providing a sense of purpose and friendship. Groups normalise and break down the stigma voice hearers feel.

Janet, who is one of the group co-ordinators, says, “...recovery is not the absence of voices, but allowing people to live with them for a meaningful life.” Some participants want to better understand their experience, some want to learn how to manage their own voices. The meeting finishes in a coffee shop to help reduce isolation and build basic interaction skills.

The socio-economic outcomes* for Australians diagnosed with schizophrenia with voices include:

- 72% unemployment
- 42% unstable housing
- 39% no best friend
- 12% no friends at all
- 64% single
- Life expectancy 50-59 years
- 30% more likely to die from cancer
- 71% experience violence or crime

WHERE WERE ALL THE PEOPLE LIKE ME?
A tribute to Voices Vic, Prahran Mission and the Hearing Voices Movement

I felt so broken, crazy and shameful. It was torture to even get to a hearing voices group in the first place; I had to ignore the voices in my head that laughed and jeered at me as I walked along the street. She’s a crazy person, they would say. It was constant abuse in my head.

It was two or three months after the first psychosis. I was just a mess. Couldn’t look at anyone. Totally looked the part of someone with a severe mental illness. Up until that point there was the clinicians and the carers and they were all professional – but where were the people like me?

The people at Voices Vic somehow saw through the “mental illness” and into the goodness within me. Even though I felt like the “worst of me” was on display, in those groups I wasn’t judged.

That was in 2010. Nearly six years later, I am walking out of my role as peer support worker at Voices Vic with gratitude and much to reflect on. I feel like I’m blessed because I’m working in an environment where nearly all my colleagues have got diagnoses so it’s completely normal.

At Voices Vic I found emotional safety, along with little glimpses of confidence. I started to make friends, develop a support network, and take on some responsibilities. Eventually, with a lot of encouragement, I started working a tentative nine hours a week as a support worker.

Miracles happen when you do a job you love and are surrounded by a supportive organisation like Prahran Mission. You grow in confidence, start to believe you’ll be okay, feel like you are worthwhile, that there’s a point to living, and that maybe it’s better if you look after yourself, because you want to role model that to the people you work with.

Peer support is a very special kind of help. I know that feeling of relief when I am speaking to someone who has walked a similar path. When working with peers, recovery does not feel like an isolated venture but rather a kind of chain in which we are all important links.

I hope places like Prahran Mission and the Hearing Voices Network continue to challenge the hierarchical, cultural, political and economic systems that damage or oppress those who have experienced mental distress, and continue to give people hope and help, as they gave me.

by Louisa Dent Pearce

IT’S MORE THAN JUST A COMPUTER CLASS

Jane* is a participant who joined one of the classes we offer as part of our Learn Local program, Vocational Skills & Training. These are pre-accredited courses aiming to provide students with basic life skills, or further study, or help them find work. This is the story of her experience.

“I was referred to Prahran Mission by my mental health worker just two years ago. I wanted to learn new skills so joined Beginners Office Computers taught by Claire Hamilton. The thought of learning to use a computer was overwhelming; it provoked feelings of fear and anxiety.”

“But I now have a new sense of confidence and look forward to these classes every week. The classes are interesting and informative. Claire teaches according to individual skill level, she is patient and makes learning fun. The other people are lovely and I feel a sense of achievement.”

“It has also given me confidence in other areas. I do volunteering work now at MECWACare. It has been a pathway to social inclusion and a sense of connecting with community. I believe that if you are in a stress free environment, your capacity to learn and retain knowledge is heightened. It’s more than just a computer class; it really has made a difference.”

Please call our Training Coordinator, Karen McKnight, on 9692 9500 for further information or visit our website.

*Name changed for privacy reasons
Rod Kane (never Roderick or Rodney!) has lived at Scottsdale for 25 years, which is longer than anyone else. Rod has a sister, Judy, who kindly shared Rod’s story.

Rod was born on 7 March 1946 to Ray and Molly Kane. He has an older sister Judy and a younger sister Christine. As a boy Rod was “good looking, placid and very well behaved”. The family enjoyed happy times together, such as car trips to St Kilda beach with fish and chips for tea. They had pets and Rod patiently taught the family budgerigar to say, “I am Tweety Kane and I live at 340 Victoria Road, Thornbury.”

Rod has battled mental illness for most of his life. The onset of schizophrenia began when he was 12 years old and he later developed bi-polar disorder. “I am amazed at Rod’s capacity to accept without bitterness the difficulties he has encountered in life,” says Rev. Ian Savage, Prahran Mission’s chaplain.

Rod is a person of faith. Raised a Catholic, he regularly attends the weekly service at Scottsdale. Rod and Judy both paid tribute to Sister Rose of Sacred Heart Mission who was a great help to Rod. She nurtured Rod’s art and sold many of his paintings for him.

Rod’s ability to draw came from his father who was an accomplished sign writer. Visitors to Scottsdale will be familiar with Rod’s sketches and paintings. Many of these are portraits and they hang proudly in the lounge and dining room. Rod has the ability to capture the essence of the person he is drawing and his work is characterised by bold strokes of colour.

His art has been exhibited at various venues; he has won prizes at the Prahran Mission Easter art competition and in 2012 there was an exhibition of his work at St Kilda Baptist Church.

Join our weekly Community of Faith Service every Thursday from 12:30pm-1:30pm at Prahran Mission, 211 Chapel Street, Prahran.
WHY I HAVE CHOSEN TO LEAVE A BEQUEST

Our beautiful daughter Sophie died in 2003, finally giving up on the battle to be “normal”. Mental illness and escalating self-medication of horrific types had worn her out, mentally and physically.

So she ended her life. We, too, were worn out from trying to find distractions or interesting helpful things she could be involved in.

Years later, I heard someone speak about the work of Prahran Mission. I knew then that what they offered just may have helped Sophie fill the long days, use her many skills and creative talents, make some real friends, offer her some dignity and a way up and out of her sad existence. Just may have.

Instead of dwelling on “...if only Sophie had found Prahran Mission...” I decided on a better and longer-term approach for the future. It was time to get my Will redone, as we now only had one daughter left and it seemed appropriate to include Prahran Mission as a beneficiary of my Will.

BUT I need to say how important this step was to me. It is a small seed of hope, for the future of an organisation which is in the business of planting small seeds of hope in people, and watching them grow.

Sue Grant, Lorne.

If you wish to have a confidential discussion about your Will, please contact Melissa Carrozza on 9692 9500 or email Melissa.Carrozza@prahranmission.org.au

LEAVING A GIFT IN WILL TO PRAHRAN MISSION PROVIDES SERVICES TO THOSE WHO NEED THEM MOST

As featured earlier in this edition, the benefits of peer support groups are many and varied. One person who has participated in these groups is now in training to become a peer support volunteer, conducted by the Voices Vic program.

Mat has heard voices for most of his life. They started out as background noise but over time the voices became apparent and distinct.

Upon the recommendation of a support worker, Mat began attending peer support groups at Prahran Mission in mid-2016. He says the groups have been very helpful in reducing his fear of the voices.

“The groups are better than any therapy because these people understand,” says Mat. “They hear voices too. The voices are real.”

Significantly, he is now motivated to use his experience and share it. “I can see the way forward and I want to help others.”

If you wish to volunteer at Prahran Mission please call our Volunteer Coordinator, Christopher Vogt, on 9692 9500 or email Christopher@prahranmission.org.au

VOLUNTEER PROFILE – MAT FINDS HIS REAL VOICE

Leaving a gift in will to Prahran Mission provides services to those who need them most.