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## SUZIE TAKES THE LEAD!

If you've ever walked past our Thornbury office, you might have been lucky enough to hear a stirring rendition of "Let It Be" or "Livin' on a Prayer" streaming out of the building. Inside, the neighbourhood's best cover band meet every Wednesday afternoon to practice. Each member of this band has something more than a love of good music in common – they are all living with an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI).

Callum, an experienced musician at our Compass Program for people living with ABIs, started the band up in 2018 after noticing the group's potential. Since then, they haven't stopped growing, **"Sometimes there's up to 30 of us, jamming away and playing songs. I might**

**be biased, but I can tell you we're seriously good!"**

They call themselves 'The Forget Me Nots', a playful nod to their shared experiences. **"We have people who are non-verbal, or who have poor memory retention, so learning songs and repeating the songs and standing up in front of people is just such a great way to break down those barriers. It's quite nuts how far we've come!"**

A few months back, Compass member Suzie asked to speak with Callum privately, who feared she had some bad news to tell him. Instead, she surprised him with the news that she had been taking private singing lessons! When Suzie first started in the band she was very self-conscious

about her voice and singing in front of everyone. As time has gone on, she's become more confident, and her voice stronger. **"She's a rock star"**, says Callum. Suzie loves the **"oomph"** she feels being up on stage. The band regularly puts on concerts for the staff, friends and family.

As Suzie puts it so eloquently, Compass is a program for people living with an ABI, run by people living with an ABI. The group offers practical support and connection with other people who know what it's like to live with an ABI. Since joining Compass and the Forget Me Nots, Suzie has become more confident, not just as a singer, but as a person, **"Coming here made me realise I'm not as bad as I thought I was, there are people worse off, so I'm lucky".**





## WELCOME TO 2020!

Entering a new year (never mind a new decade!) is always exciting. It holds such promise of what's ahead and here at MCM, we can't wait to get stuck in. But before we do, we thought we'd take this opportunity to reflect on all the incredible things you helped us achieve recently. **Thank you** so much for all your support and we hope you enjoy the newsletter. We can't wait to see you at Sleep At The 'G this year — it's going to be bigger and better than ever!



**Vicki Sutton**  
CEO  
MCM

## A WELL-DESERVED AWARD

We're so proud of the hardworking team at Vicky's Place, one of our refuges in northern Melbourne, for winning the Excellence in Ending Homelessness - Children and Families award at the 2019 Victorian Homelessness Achievement Awards. Vicky's Place supports young women and their children with housing and personal needs, and uses activities based around music and animals to provide child-led therapeutic practice. **Congrats team!**



## THANK YOU, SOUTH PACIFIC LAUNDRY

Our friends at South Pacific Laundry are helping to provide opportunities for young people experiencing homelessness. **"As a large employer, we have a unique opportunity to help young people break the cycle of homelessness"**, says Brian Neylon, HR Manager.

As a partner in MCM's Youth Employment Program, they see the responsibility as much more than helping a young person earn an income. It's about getting up every day to head into work, building a routine, having a purpose to their day. For many of the young people Brian meets, this is also the first time they've attended a job interview. The whole process helps them to build confidence, and teaches them how to present themselves in a professional setting and write a CV.

What would Brian say to other employers looking to take part in MCM's Employment Program? **"Every business wants the best people. But it's also important to give young people, particularly those who have a history of trauma, the opportunity to become the best person"**.

## "BUT THEY'RE NOT REALLY HOMELESS, ARE THEY?"

We play devil's advocate with Wayne Merritt, General Manager of Homelessness and Justice at MCM, in order to better understand the misconceptions and myths surrounding youth homelessness in our community.

### A YOUNG PERSON SLEEPING ON THEIR FRIEND'S COUCH ISN'T HOMELESS - THEY'VE GOT A ROOF OVER THEIR HEAD!

Ahh, yes! This is a common misconception and brings to mind a quote from the Australian Human Rights Commission: "Homelessness is so much more than 'Houselessness'." This means that people don't have to be sleeping on the street to be homeless — they could be couch surfing, sleeping in a car, or staying at a caravan park, for example. Homelessness basically means being without the comfort or safety of your own home, and sadly we know there's more than 6,000 young people in our state who experience that feeling every night.

### WHY CAN'T THEY JUST FIND SOMEWHERE ELSE TO LIVE?

There are so many circumstances where a young person can find themselves without a safe place to go that are completely out of their control. Family violence or



breakdown is one. The death of a parent or guardian. Mental health issues. Abuse. The list goes on, and really, it can affect anyone, suddenly and unexpectedly. Then when you consider the fact that 99% of rental properties in Melbourne are unaffordable to a person on welfare, it's no surprise that so many young people who experience hardships aren't able to find somewhere to live.

### CAN'T THEY JUST GET A JOB THEN?

The assumption that people experiencing homelessness are too lazy to get a job has never proved accurate in my experience. Rather, they are often too busy simply trying to survive to think much about their future. And even when they have enough of a reprieve to job seek, there are still many barriers in place that prevent them from finding employment: a lack of training or qualifications, large gaps in their CVs, discrimination, no access to clean and appropriate clothing — again, the list goes on. Plus, most of these young people live with

trauma and struggle with low self-esteem, so being able to confidently apply for a job and go to interviews without support isn't easy!

## WE'RE NEVER GOING TO END HOMELESSNESS IN MELBOURNE, ARE WE?

Yes, we absolutely can! But it's an issue that needs support from the whole community in order to incite real and long-lasting change. The good news is that by supporting MCM, you're already a part of that change!

You're helping us to enhance support in our five youth refuges across Melbourne that provide emergency accommodation for young people for around 6 to 8 weeks, as well as our Frontyard Youth Service, a first-of-its-kind drop-in centre where we seek to understand the deeper issues that put young people at risk of homelessness and treat these causes, rather than just the effects. We focus on their health and wellbeing; we provide them with employment skills and training; we get them prepared for independent living by teaching them how to cook, manage a budget and practice basic hygiene. Our programs are working — but we need your support more than ever before, to help us truly end homelessness in Melbourne. Thank you so much for your support.

**Wayne Merritt**  
GM of Homelessness  
and Justice at MCM





## MUSIC THERAPY HITS THE RIGHT NOTE

We're sure it comes as no surprise to you that music has the power to soothe and lift your mood. Don't we all have that one song that we can't help but smile when it comes on? Music has long been used to express feelings or emotions, when the right words just aren't available. Which is why it's such a powerful tool to help young people experiencing homelessness work through their past traumas and improve their wellbeing.

Rose Evans is a Registered Music Therapist and has been working with young people across MCM's five youth refuges over the past year: **'Music is an exceptional healer and mood regulator. When working with the young people my goals are to improve social connections and positive interactions, strengthen positive self-identities, encourage emotional regulation, reduce stress and increase self-expression and self-esteem'.**

Sessions involve activities such as listening, singing, sharing, discussion, improvisation and jamming, therapeutic music lessons, instrument playing and song writing. And it's safe to say that the young people love it:

**"I love music with Rosel! It always makes me feel better and I look forward to it all week! It's the best part of my day and it makes me and my heart feel happy!"**



## THE GREATEST GIFT

We spoke with our much-adored members of our Circle of Friends group, Norm and Margaret about why they've chosen to leave a gift in their Will to MCM.

**"We have supported Melbourne City Mission for a number of years and are continually impressed with the services provided and by the dedication and enthusiasm of staff. MCM cares for a wide range of people through a number of diverse programs offering practical support of people in need. We are particularly impressed with the education programs offered to the homeless or disadvantaged youth of our city. We were fortunate enough to have a loving and stable home life and we have tried to provide the same for our children. Others are much less fortunate and MCM steps in to fill some of these gaps. We are pleased that our financial assistance, through donations and bequests, can help this work to continue."**

## SONGS, SKILLS & SUPPORT

**We received some lovely feedback by the mothers in our Parent Child Mother Goose program that we wanted to share with you.**

Many of these mums and their babies come to us due to factors such as post-natal depression, disability, low confidence or coming from a non-English speaking background. At Parent Child Mother Goose, they are able to learn rhymes, stories and songs to engage their babies and share their experiences in a safe and judgement-free zone. Here's what they had to say:



**"This program makes child and mother more confident. The providers make me aware how to deal with my kids when they are not listening. My child is learning many new words. The most beautiful thing of this group is, no one is ever being discriminated."**

**"The Mother Goose program nurtured my confidence as a parent and allowed me to express my feelings and understand better my child's needs with support from everyone in the program."**

**"It is very good for first time parents and for their kids. The staff are very enthusiastic, and this helps parents and the children also get excited."**

## A SPECIAL DAY WITH DAD

Shane has been in prison for just over 5 years and his daughter Olivia was born a month after he first came into custody. He is a regular participant in MCM's Day with Dad program – an initiative encouraging men to maintain positive family relationships with their children whilst incarcerated.

**"We are able to strengthen our relationship by bonding**

**through play. She has a blast and I'm left with some beautiful memories I hold close to my heart"**.

The program is run monthly, with a new theme each session (last month was Under the Sea!) and facilitates a range of fun activities to give both fathers and children the opportunity to have one on one contact.

**"The most recent Day with Dad was fantastic! We started with colouring, played in the playground,**

**drew some pictures on the floor with chalk, played a few games of bowling, a couple games of twister and then we ended the day with more colouring."**





MAY 21



## HELP PUT HOMELESSNESS TO BED

Last year, our annual flagship event Sleep At The 'G was a huge success, raising awareness and vital funds towards ending youth homelessness. This year, we're aiming to raise even more — but we need you! Whether you're a first-time Sleeper or someone who comes along every year, registrations are now open for this year's Sleep At The 'G, to be held on Thursday 21 May.

On the night you'll hear firsthand of what it's like to be homeless from people who have lived through it. You'll gain a deeper appreciation

of the core issues that cause homelessness and experience what it's like for people who have no choice but to sleep rough or in unsafe, temporary accommodation. You'll also have heaps of fun, with live music, sporting competitions, prizes and games — hey, you may even win the famous pyjama fashion show!

By spending one cold night sleeping in one of the world's most iconic stadiums, the mighty MCG, you could change a whole lifetime for a young person.

MCM works with young people to provide early intervention support at a time when they're finding their place in the world. We seek to offer access and opportunities that foster their independence. Together we can break the cycle of homelessness in Victoria and support young people to lead positive lives, their way. With your help, MCM can continue to create innovative solutions to providing pathways away from homelessness.

Want to join us?  
Register at  
[sleepattheg.com.au](http://sleepattheg.com.au) and  
use code **COUNTONME**  
to receive 10% off your  
registration fee.



## A HELPING HAND

For the past four decades, Don and Heather have generously volunteered their time to a range of community organisations, cooking countless sausages for the Lions Club and even presenting on 96.5 Inner FM local radio for 10 years! But after a long history of giving, it's now time for others in the community to give back to these lovely people in the same way.

Since October, MCM's Palliative Care volunteer, Pam, has been visiting Don and Heather every Wednesday in their Reservoir home as Don is no longer able to leave the house and Heather doesn't drive. "We talk a lot, we get on really well conversation-wise," says Don. **"Lately I've been bringing out my photo albums from our trips away and I try to entertain Pam about Mongolia and Russia and all the places I've been and she always seems interested!"**

MCM's Palliative care program provides in-home nursing, medical, allied health and consulting services to support people experiencing a life-limiting illness to have the best possible quality of life. The volunteer program plays an important role in the offering,

providing companionship and time out for carers.

Pam has been a Palliative Care volunteer at MCM for the last 15 years, signing up after one of her friends told her about the program. **"I just feel it's right to help others. I love being able to meet such wonderful people, and to hear their stories. Everybody has a story to tell, and I feel privileged to be welcomed into their home, and that they trust me enough to share it with me. I've learnt so much!"**

Heather is grateful that she can use the time that Pam is around to pop down the street to run errands, or to simply take some time to herself and get a coffee and know that there is someone sitting at home with Don.

**"I think it's tremendous that volunteers give up their special time when they perhaps could be doing something else, to just come by and talk to us and give us a bit of a company. It makes our day!"**

**If you are interested in learning more about volunteering in our Palliative Care program, please get in touch on [volunteerspc@mcm.org.au](mailto:volunteerspc@mcm.org.au) or call 03 9977 0026.**



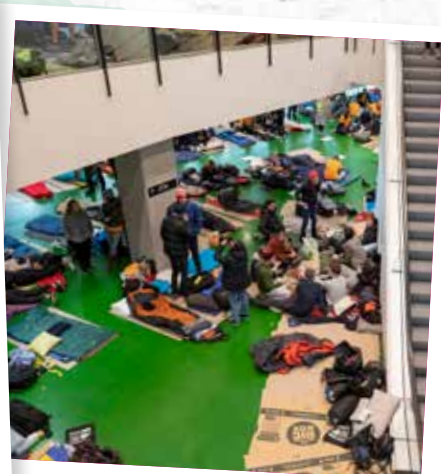
## HEARTS IN FULL BLOOM

In December, our Palliative Care clients were delighted to receive beautiful bouquets courtesy of the team at Floral Acts of Kindness, a charity who rescue and up-cycle unsold flowers from farmers and wholesalers to give to people who are ill, injured or socially isolated. Our Palliative Care staff in North Fitzroy took the flower arrangements to clients' homes to show care during what is generally a very difficult time and it absolutely brightened their day. Thank you so much to Liz and her lovely team at Floral Acts of Kindness — we look forward to seeing more of your beautiful arrangements in future!

## YOUR CHRISTMAS JOKES WERE TREE-MENDOUS!

Ok, that pun was terrible. But the jokes you sent us in response to our Christmas appeal weren't (well some of them maybe) — in fact, many were hilarious!

**Thank you** so much to everyone who shared their favourite joke with the young people who enjoyed a delicious Christmas lunch at our refuges.





### HESTER HORN BROOK ACADEMY WELCOMES NEW PRINCIPAL

The Hester Hornbrook Academy (HHA) is no ordinary school and therefore deserves an extraordinary leader. We are delighted to announce that Sally Lasslett has been appointed the new Principal of HHA, after we sadly said farewell to our incredible former Principal, Tim Knowles, who has since relocated to NSW. Thanks Tim, for your energy, dedication and commitment to improving the lives of so many young people.

As you may know, HHA is an independent school run by MCM that promotes flexible learning for young people outside the traditional schooling model. We combine education and wellbeing into everything we do and support students in all aspects of life to ensure they learn at their own pace, their way. It's a fantastic school and we are so excited to see it thrive under Sally's leadership.



**Sally Lasslett**  
Principal  
Hester Hornbrook Academy

### THREE CHEERS FOR OUR GRADUATES!

**Speaking of this fantastic school, we want to give a massive shout out to the 16 students who graduated at VCAL certificate level from Hester Hornbrook Academy on 12 December!**

Many of these young people said that before coming to HHA, they didn't think they'd ever receive their VCAL, so the ceremony was an incredibly special moment for everyone. We are so proud of our students' determination and tenacity in pursuing their education on their own terms.

### ALEXI GOES TO RMIT

**One such student is Alexi, who we are thrilled to announce was accepted at RMIT to study Visual Arts in 2020!**

We are so proud of Alexi for all her hard work; she is a brilliant example of how a tailored, flexible education program can change a person's life and help set them up for their future. We also want to give a shout out to the HHA staff who helped Alexi pursue her dreams. Good luck at uni Alexi; we can't wait to see what you do next!



## Thank you for your ongoing support.

Donate online at [mcm.org.au/makeanimpact](https://mcm.org.au/makeanimpact)  
or call 1300 364 507