

A Special Christmas note from the CEO

A couple of months ago, I was startled by several displays of Christmas chocolates and bonbons near the checkouts and store exits. The Christmas season had begun and it wasn't even October! Is it just me? Or are the years getting shorter?

It's said that retailers typically make more than half of their yearly sales during these few short weeks. Shopping has become a pretty substantial part of our Christmas tradition. Yet Christmas is and should be so much more than what we buy. Gifts are fun, both to give and receive, and let's not even talk about the amount spent on food purchased, but as Christians, these are only symbolic of a much greater gift:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16)."

The love of God given to the world - now that is a gift worth celebrating!

What if this year, each one of us did Christmas a little differently? What if instead of focusing on our own celebrations, we also focused on making the most of the opportunity to share the good news with others?

My family has a few traditions:

A Saviour Has Been Born to You

At my family's Christmas Eve celebrations, we make a special birthday cake for Jesus, complete with candles and everyone joining in to sing Happy Birthday Jesus! This can be particularly meaningful for younger children and those who do not believe yet, as it puts Christ's birth in a context they can relate to.

No Room in the Inn

All the children gather together and we quietly raid the host's closets to make our own costumes and then we re-enact the Christmas story for all the adults. It is wonderful to watch each person - particularly the little ones - begin to explore what the character they are playing might have been like; Joseph, Mary, shepherds, sheep, cattle, 3 kings and there is always a fight for who will be the 'star'. Reading from God's Word, the storyline reminds each of us of the true meaning of our celebration.

Glory to God in the Highest

I come from a musical family, so music has always been a big part of our Christmas celebrations. My twin brother would lead on keyboard or with his accordion and we'd all sing carols together while the littlest members fell asleep in our laps. One year, we took it to the road and walked up and down our street, singing carols to our neighbours, handing out candy canes and getting unexpected hot chocolates and Christmas biscuits from a neighbour who was spending the night alone. She was then invited to come back to our house with us!

Why not gather your friends and family and go carolling in a wing at your local hospital or seniors' residence? Check with your church or other local churches to see if there are any folks who can't get out of their homes during the holidays and take your carolling and some biscuits to them. Music is a great way to begin the conversations about the real meaning of Christmas and to bring God's love to those who may be lonely.

Good Will Toward Men

When we give of our time and gifts to those in need, we reflect God's love. When we refresh others we too are refreshed. Why not volunteer (include the grandkids) to pack toys and food into hampers that will be delivered to needy families before Christmas or serve Christmas dinner to the homeless at a local mission? Or forgo traditional Christmas gifts and make a donation in someone's name rather than giving that person a gift.

Don't forget to save the fronts of all your Christmas cards and send them to our PO Box - we'll reuse them for our Craft program.

Good News of Great Joy...

For all people - Christ-mas (more of Christ) is a time of unusual openness to spiritual things. There is no greater gift you can give those who have not yet met the Lord than to share with them the good news of the gospel.

So, step out this year. Do something different. Be bold. And enjoy all the good things Christmas has to offer as you celebrate the reason for the season: **"Today in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord"** (Luke 2:11). May He bless you, your family and all your loved ones.

Merry Christmas!

Diane and the Prison Network family of staff and volunteers

OUR PROGRAMS

Tuesdays:
Craft & Cooking; Visits; Christian Discussion Group

Wednesdays:
Talk It Out; Outside Discussion Group

Thursdays:
Fitness/Sport & Visits

Fridays fortnightly:
Tarrengower Craft & Christian Discussion Group

Saturday:
'Game On Day' - every 4-5 weeks

1st & 3rd Sunday of the month:
Fun with Mum

Last Sunday of the month:
'Sunday Live'

Incarcerated women are among the most marginalized members in our society. Research continues to show incarcerated women are often trapped by intergenerational disadvantage and poverty, meaning the women we work with are typically poor, unskilled, and unemployed. The last decade has seen a disproportionate growth in the number of women in Australian prisons, including a 48% increase between 2002 and 2012 (ABS, 2012). In 2012 alone the number of female prisoners in Australia increased at a rate 21 times that of male prisoners.

Incarcerated women are also children, mothers, siblings and kin to others in the community, and their arrest, incarceration and release profoundly affects many members of society. Given incarcerated women are often the primary carers for children and are mostly single parents, many children face separation from the most significant person in their lives. For children with a parent in prison, the impact of intergenerational poverty means they are six times more likely to go to prison than other children. Female offending is often less violent, which means many women receive short sentences of under six months (Corrections Victoria, 2011). However given an increase in the most serious offences for female prisoners in Victoria being drug-related between

2007 and 2011, the damage done by short sentences is often disproportionate to the crimes committed - mothers lose homes, jobs, and their children.

Prisoners continue to experience significant challenges even after release from prison. Challenges can be compounded by social disadvantage and complex needs related to drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness, acquired brain injury, homelessness and unemployment. Women are more likely to suffer from mental health problems and more likely to have histories of substance abuse (AIHW, 2010). On release most women are friendless, with nowhere to go and often lack direction. Prison Network is working to offer hope, compassion and support to these women. A reminder by Marshal Thurgood, Associate Justice of the US Supreme Court encourages us to consistently honour the dignity of the women we meet in our work:

"When the prison gates slam behind an inmate, she does not lose her human quality. Her mind does not become closed to ideas; her intellect does not cease to feed on a free and open interchange of opinions; her yearning for self-respect does not end; nor is her quest for self-realisation concluded. If anything, the needs for identity and self-respect are more compelling in the de-humanising prison environment"

YES! I will help women and their families rebuild their lives.

I will donate: \$25 \$50 \$100 \$_____

Sponsor child/camp \$300 (full cost) or \$_____

Frequency of donation: Once Monthly Quarterly

Please print your details

Name _____

Address _____

Suburb/Town _____ Postcode _____

Telephone _____

Email _____

I require a tax deductible receipt
(All donations over \$2 are tax deductible).

Method of payment

Cheque or Money order (made payable to Prison Network Ministries)

Direct Debit:

BSB: 013250 Account: 298345342
Account Name: Prison Network Ministries

Credit Card: Visa MasterCard Amex

Name on card _____

Card no.

Expiry date

Signature _____

Please return this form to:

Prison Network Ministries
PO Box 46
Kerrimuir Vic 3129



PRISON NETWORK | PO Box 46, KERRIMUIR VIC. 3129

Phone: (03) 9873 4190 | Email: office@prisonnetwork.org.au

Website: www.prisonnetwork.org.au

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INSIDE OUTSIDE



EVERY DAY SEEMED SO LONG AND HARD. I DIDN'T THINK I'D MAKE IT THROUGH.

My life was amazing. I was married to a beautiful man and we had three wonderful children. My husband was at home with the children while I was an executive for a huge pharmaceutical company. We lived a very nice life having everything we could ever want. Most importantly we were happy.

One Saturday, being our family time together, we took our boat out into the bay. The day ended in tragedy when another boat collided with our boat and our 5-year-old son died in my arms.

Over the next year my marriage broke down and I lost my job. My life was spiralling out of control. I was grieving and just didn't know how to be happy again. I was living two lives. On one hand I was trying to be a mother to my two children and give them everything they needed. Emotionally I thought I was there for my children, but the truth was I was "self-medicating" and developed an ice addiction which took all real emotions away. I was in a relationship with a man who was younger than me who also had an ice problem. He became my everything even though our relationship was volatile. There was a lot of domestic violence going on to the point that I was calling the police every second day in fear of my life. At the time I didn't even understand what domestic violence was. As crazy as it sounds I didn't understand until it was too late.

One day my partner was angry with me for rolling my eyes at him. He attacked me and was trying to choke me and just kept hitting and kicking me. I can remember him holding a pillow over my face to the point that I couldn't breathe. I was fighting back, fighting for my life when I grabbed a piece of glass tubing that had broken when he had thrown it at me. I had it in my hand and pushed him out of the way with it. What I didn't realise was just how sharp the piece of glass was and when I pushed him away it pierced his skin and hit a major artery. After this occurred he was still chasing me around the house. I had no idea he was so badly hurt and neither did he. Was this because we were on drugs? I don't know. I just remember him saying, "it's ok it was an accident call an ambulance". I still didn't understand but yelled out to a friend to call an ambulance. I then went and hid from my partner in my daughter's room, scared that he was going to come and continue to hurt me.

After about ten minutes I heard someone opening the cupboards in my daughter's room and thought it was him looking for me. Next thing I see two police officers with a gun pointed at my head. They were screaming at me to get up and threw me on the bed, hand cuffed me and placed me into a divvy wagon. Seven hours later I was told that my partner was dead and that I was being charged with murder. My life and my world had changed, and from that day on it would never be the same. I would never be the same.



I couldn't get over the shock of all that had happened and when I went to jail I was a mess...a broken, shattered mess. It all felt like such a nightmare, and I was petrified. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't stop crying. I was hysterical. How could this be happening? I wasn't a violent person. I would never intentionally hurt anyone! It was a terrible accident. How could the police not see that? Why am I in jail?

Eventually Lyndel from Prison Network talked with me and took me up to the psych nurse to try to get me some help. It was so nice to connect with someone who cared. Every day seemed so long and hard. I didn't think I'd make it through.

A couple of months later it was Christmas. This was usually such a very special time for my children and me. I used to do everything, including decorating the house. We had the biggest Christmas tree with the most beautiful Christmas decorations. I would always spoil my children with gifts as well as family. Now in jail, my Christmas was far from happy and had become a day full of sadness. I remember waking up Christmas morning and just wanting to wish my kids a merry Christmas. The phones in the jail have long lines of people wanting to do the same. Finally, it was my turn. I call the kids knowing I only have 12 minutes to talk to them and then the phone will disconnect. Having two children that's six minutes each that I will get to talk to them. This is nothing short of a living hell for me. Questioning myself asking why, why, I'm a good person. I have never been in trouble before not ever and now I'm in jail. I was scared, lonely and so very sad and there was absolutely nothing I could do about it.

I was told about a lady by the name of Laurel, who worked for an organisation called Prison Network Ministries. I wanted to know what she did and get to know her as she looked so normal to me. She was always happy and seemed to care.

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I was invited to go to Christian Discussion Group by another inmate but I didn't know anything about it. She told me to go along and see. So I did go along and I felt so accepted I can't even explain it. Every Tuesday, off I would go to the group, not saying a lot just listening. This woman made so much sense, she gave me back what I had lost and that was HOPE. Laurel would talk about God, talk about how He is with us, how He will take care of us and how He's got our backs. We just need to ask and everything will be ok. So every day I would pray "Please, dear God, help me. Please help me get back my life. I'll do whatever it takes."

Eighteen months went by, so very slowly. Now my friend, Laurel asks, "Would you like me to come and support you at court? "I'm like, really? You would do that?" "Absolutely, I will do that " she says. I'm blown away. At this point I have one friend on the outside coming to court to support me.

I feel so alone and so terrified I can barely breathe... my anxiety is unbearable. Laurel would turn out to be my biggest support. The judge has read all the evidence and grants me bail for 6 weeks, that then turns into 8 weeks. Sentencing will happen in 8 weeks' time. I'm classified as homeless and I'm sleeping on the floor in my friend's lounge room. I have nothing.

My home has been ransacked over and over again. They have stolen everything from furniture to makeup and all my clothing. My home is like a tip, with rubbish everywhere. You can't even see the floors, so again I am devastated. Every day I cry unable to I work it out. I'm free, and I'm out of jail, yet I'm still so very sad. Laurel says to me "We will support you with everything and anything you need. If we can make your life easier, if we can take away the anxiety for you please tell me, we are here for you". To be honest, I thought sure that will last a few weeks and that will be that. Well how very wrong I was. Laurel and the ladies from Prison Network Ministries are calling me, meeting with me, helping me to clean up the house, paying for things I could not afford.

My feelings were so overwhelming for the most part of everyday. I didn't want to die but I didn't want to live either. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to live anymore. I was ashamed of my past and I never wanted to go back there. I can honestly say that it is not the case today. The 8 weeks went by and then the judge gave me a 2 year Community Corrections Order with time served. No more prison.

My children are back in my life and we are loving being back together. I have my immediate family back in my life and my real friends. I associate with nobody from the drug world as Laurel and Prison Network told me that was what I had to do to make it out here. Without them I would not be here today. I know I wouldn't be but they have been with me every step of the way; never judging me, just working with me to build my life back up again. This year will be my first Christmas at home in three years. How very blessed I am to have so many people who care. I am forever grateful to Prison Network and so are my children and family.

Lisa

A note from the CEO



It's been a fruitful year and I've been in awe of the effort and loyalty our staff and volunteers exert so that the women and children we support benefit.

In this edition, I want to highlight just a few of our recent activities and honour those who give above and beyond to provide for this organisation. It is such a joy to serve alongside you. It's obvious that although we are focused on helping women prisoners and their families, others, in the process, are also being impacted.

Diane Spicer

Thank You

Prison Network is committed to supporting the diverse needs of women who experience incarceration in Victoria's prisons. To do so Prison Network also works closely with, and has the support of numerous philanthropic individuals, organisations, businesses and churches.

We are incredibly grateful to our partners for assistance in funding, for their specialist advice and in-kind assistance that contributes to strengthening the work of our organisation.

As one woman after release from prison wrote in a text to a staff member, "You and your amazing team just leave me speechless. TRUE! You're the most incredible people I have ever met". Prison Network acknowledges that responses like this are made possible because of ongoing support from our partnering individuals, organisations and businesses who contribute to our work financially, in-kind or otherwise.

Save the Date

Saturday, February 25, 2017
Prison Network is turning 70 and we are going to celebrate. Write it in your diaries now so you can attend.

EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

MOTHERS DAY

Armed with boxes of assorted toiletries and smelling divine, several staff members underwent prison security checks before stacking the humbly packaged items on a giant wheeled trolley. Mother's Day provided the perfect opportunity to shower women at DPFC with personal care items. The women at DPFC are not only daughters – but most of the women are mothers themselves. The majority of women prisoners are also the primary carers of children, and on days of cultural celebration including Mother's Day, separation from children is keenly felt.

As we pushed the trolley around the compound women stopped to look on, but more often approached us asking what it was for. When told we had gifts for every woman in the prison, they found it hard to believe. The simple gesture of soap, shampoo, and body lotion immediately changed the atmosphere. One unit block at a time, and as we informed officers we had gifts for every woman, the joy and tears began!

As disbelief in receiving goods without charge and without conditions attached gave way to recognition this was not a prank, women quickly and excitedly called out to other women. "Do you realise how expensive this stuff is?" exclaimed one woman. When we assured her she was of infinite more value, she choked back tears and said if she could, she would give me a big hug. Since physical contact is not allowed we settled on "air-hugs" instead! Watching the expressions on women's faces while we conveyed the message "they are worth it!" and there are people who really do care about them was emotional. The buzz of the day extended to unit officers who were also very helpful and appreciative of the "free aromatherapy". THANKS AGAIN to the PINCHAPOO TEAM!! A little gesture really does make a HUGE difference!

With the continued generosity and support of Pinchapoo, who are now preparing another 450 gift packs to be donated to us, we will be distributing these again as gifts to the women at Christmas. We are so grateful for their ongoing support!

BEST OF THE WEST GARAGE SALE

Blessed with the best of the west in weather - a perfect May day of a sunny twenty-degrees, Prison Network volunteers hosted a garage sale. As one of multiple fundraising events throughout the year, the day included donations from near and far, and was supported by an incredible team who drove the event.

After an early start to set out the wares, the sale was opened, and the team enjoyed a steady flow of garage sale customers throughout the day. Loads of fun was had practising our haggling skills and everyone was happy to pick up some fabulous bargains. A very enjoyable day was had by all involved, spent with wonderful people raising over \$1,000 for a very worthy cause.

CARD PARTIES

Card Parties provide a space for individuals who may have never heard of Prison Network to learn about our work, while getting creative!

Card Party participants design and create a selection of greeting cards, which in turn are sold at Prison Network functions to further support our work. Parties are held in both eastern & western suburbs of Melbourne. To find out when and where the next party is, or if you would be interested in hosting a party, contact our office! Anyone can get creative and become a hashtag #card-maker!

Sylvie Paladino Afternoon Tea

While Melbourne's weather was still touch and go, Sylvie Paladino was pitch perfect at the Afternoon Tea held at One Community Church in Melbourne's eastern suburb of Blackburn. With a full house of guests in attendance, the audience was captured and swept away on an hour-long musical journey.

Showcasing the musical prowess of the veteran singer, the afternoon was also insight into Sylvie's life, traversing memories and lessons from childhood, marriage, family and her professional career between well placed renditions of contemporary songs. A lady sitting next to me began weeping during a song toward the end of the day. When asked if she was ok, she simply referred to her sister who had passed, and her connection with the song. The ability of music to refresh and strike the soul is a great and wondrous gift! Aply finished with a wonderful afternoon tea, the day was full of conversation and significantly provided needed funding.

CAMPS

(Written by one of the many children you help sponsor)

There are so many things that I like about CYC camps. I love that when you come back from camp you feel like you want more and more of God. You want to continue to read the bible and keep praying. I like the people at camp, they are all really nice and kind.

All the leaders are amazing and they make you feel that you belong. I also like the food, it is so tasty and the cooks always have a meal for people with any diet. I love all the fun stuff and the activities that we get to do, like the giant swing, the flying fox, the messy games and much more. Overall, I love camp and I am looking forward to the next one!

TALK IT OUT (TIO)

Living in close proximity with numerous other women in prison can be a daily challenge. In the Protection Unit even more so, where interpersonal difficulties can be magnified given women in this unit are isolated from the main compound and have limited engagement with others outside their unit. Most recently TIO ran in the Protection unit with a small group of women. Explained aptly by a past TIO participant,

"Talk It Out is a six-week course run by the Prison Network in conflict resolution and communication. Each week in a closed group in the unit, we would discuss different ways of communicating with others, stress management and coping skills".

designed and facilitated by Prison Network's remand worker Lyndel Baldwin, and supported by the Victorian Government, the six-week program engages women in learning about themselves, by identifying feelings and discovering strategies for their empowerment that can make their time in the unit less chaotic. One woman, a graduate of a past TIO course sums the benefits of her experience nicely by highlighting the importance of creating safety in groups and the power of recognising an individual's ability to make choices.

"The group helped me be able to communicate better with others without resorting to aggression. It helped me to understand that there are other ways to get my point across in a difficult situation and that I do have other choices. In my opinion, the group was worthwhile and I was glad to be involved."

"The group was a confidential closed group and all participants respected each other's stories, issues and contributions to the group"

Second Chance Fashion Show

The stage was truly set for a wonderful fundraising matinee at the Second Chance Fashion show in early October. With a last minute surge in ticket sales bringing the venue to capacity, weeks of planning culminated in a dazzling Fashion Show finale` at House of The Rock Church in picturesque Gisborne.

The opportunity to strut down a runway appeared too good to pass up, with a half dozen women volunteering in advance to be pampered and primed as the days' models. And what an incredible job they did! Supported by the in-kind work of professional Arbonne consultant, Ronece and her assistant, modelling women enjoyed the bustle, excitement and nerves of last minute wardrobe additions, final hair checks and applying a last layer of lipply, adding to the tangible excitement building amongst guests in the auditorium.

No doubt host matrons of the day, Marisa Coster, Jane Frawley and Diane Spicer, had much to do with building excitement, doing a fabulous job creating a relaxed and fun-filled atmosphere for guests. Their encouraging banter and spruiking of items as models sauntered past had guests enjoying themselves. The Fashion Show itself included a showcase of Fashion through numerous categories – including "vintage summer fun", "street", "vintage classics" and "evening" wear. However much more than a fashion show, the day provided opportunity to share with the wider community and supporters about the meaningful work Prison Network engages in, and the lasting impact ongoing support has on women experiencing incarceration in our prison system.

With the fashion show drawing to a close, appetite for the post-show shopping was heating up. The shopping opened with a BANG – and a constant flow of eager shoppers on the hunt for a bargain lasted well into the afternoon.

The joy on guest's faces was made easy by the plethora of individual volunteers from House of The Rock Church. Volunteers cooked and catered, decorated, as well as sourced organised and priced the generous amounts of clothing. Bargain buys were a key feature of the post-show shop, with \$10 fill-your-bag being the biggest seller with guests.

Two people attending were totally impressed – neither of them Christians – "but what was shared about Christ making a huge difference in people's lives was so genuine and just part of life, that they were very touched. Who knows where that will lead?" wrote the friend that had invited them to the event. "They said they attended a similar event three weeks prior. After ours, both said they enjoyed themselves so much more than their "stuffy, over the top, professionally catered and decked out event." They had a professional event organising team, but "there wasn't the overwhelming atmosphere of friendliness and love that yours exuded."

A HUGE thank-you to guests and our amazing volunteers!