

# Embracing the future together.

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1800 668 426

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## Supporter Newsletter Spring 2020

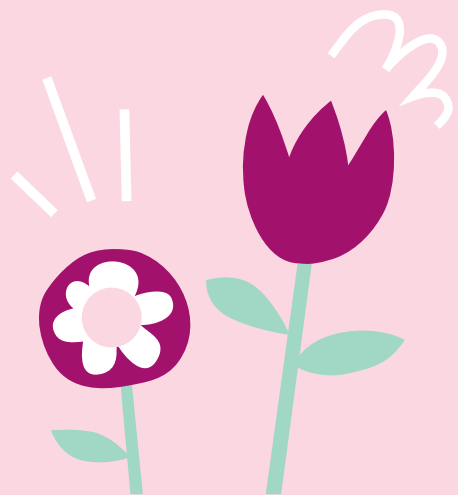
**In standing with people living life at the margins and raising our collective voice for change, together we create opportunities for people to thrive.**

When over 20 of our early learning centres were at risk of closing due to COVID-19, we successfully lobbied for amendments to the JobKeeper initiative. This was a big win for the children and families who use our services. **See the full story on page 3.**

**Uniting**



# Welcome to Spring.



Much has happened since our last newsletter update in March. Your support has been greatly felt during the fallout from bushfires and COVID-19, as demand for our work increases significantly.

**The face of vulnerability has changed. Thousands of Victorians and Tasmanians who were previously getting by now find themselves unemployed for the first time. These events have made it harder to reach those in need.**

I am incredibly proud of teams across Victoria and Tasmania who have quickly adapted under challenging circumstances. Our people have found innovative ways to offer vital support to the people we work alongside.

I have been overwhelmed by your continued support during these trying times. We simply couldn't do it without you.

**For your compassion and generosity, I want to say thank you.**

Thank you to everyone who responded to our 2020 Supporter Survey. Your responses are vital in helping improve our services and the way we communicate with you. I received many personal messages of support and feedback – thank you.

I'm proud to be the Victorian co-chair of Anti-Poverty Week, which will take place from 11-17 October. This year we are advocating for 'Affordable Housing for All' – a key solution in reducing poverty and a priority for the Uniting Church.

Embracing a positive future can be challenging when you're struggling to keep food on the table and a roof over your head. That's why we continue to support the Raise the Rate campaign to ensure that welfare payments never go back to \$40 a day.

We welcome the federal government's increase to these payments through JobSeeker. The COVID-19 crisis means more than 2 million people now rely on these unemployment payments, and will for some time.

Keep an eye on our website for how you can get involved in Anti-Poverty Week this year: [unitingvictas.org.au](http://unitingvictas.org.au)

There will be more challenging times ahead. But with your continued support and commitment, we will stand with people of all ages and stages of life – and recover together from the devastation of recent months.

Your support will make an immediate impact, empowering people in need to embrace a brighter future.

Bronwyn Pike  
**Chief Executive Officer**



## Advocating for people big and small.

With a collective voice, we achieve more. Rallying together, we've made some bold moves.

### Early learning gets bold

**It was a big win for Victorian families when free childcare was announced in April. But at the same time, we received news of a 50% cut to our early learning funding.**

This cut was supposed to be supplemented by the introduction of JobKeeper. However, government funding across Uniting meant we were ineligible for the scheme – putting over 20 centres at risk.

Joining forces with Uniting NSW.ACT and UnitingCare Australia, we lobbied for amendments to JobKeeper.

In addition to advocating to the ATO, early learning managers contacted Members of Parliament in their local areas.

"The frontline managers did a great job," said Uniting External Relations Advisor, Jesse Dean. "It can be confronting to make those phone calls."

This collective effort resulted in changes that allowed non-profits to exclude government income from revenue loss calculations.

Uniting qualified for JobKeeper, saving over 20 centres and keeping doors open to families.

*At our Rupert Street Early Learning service are (left to right) Kitty, Jesse, Nina, Eli and Salma.*

### Speaking up about Centrelink

**Over 370,000 vulnerable Australians have felt the devastating effects of Centrelink's Robodebt fiasco.**

In 2016, Centrelink introduced a system that attempted to prevent people from under-reporting their income and being overpaid welfare.

But the system used an unlawful method to raise debts, with harmful results for vulnerable people. Financial security, wellbeing and mental health was impacted for people struggling to live on Centrelink payments.

Uniting made a submission and gave evidence in a hearing to the Senate Inquiry into Centrelink's Compliance Program. Our submission and evidence detailed just how overwhelming, disempowering and intimidating it can feel to be hit with unexpected Centrelink debt.

"I felt like a criminal," said one person who shared their story. "It grinds you down until you give up. It left me feeling so anxious and mistrustful of the process – I felt physically sick."

In May, we welcomed news that the federal government will refund 470,000 unlawful Centrelink debts worth \$721 million.

There is more to do to improve the system – and we will continue to speak out. We have called on the government to adopt our recommendation to establish a formal and independent complaint process for Centrelink.





## Cliff's story

After the breakdown of his marriage, Cliff (pictured left) became one of the growing number of people to find himself homeless.

When his savings dried up, he could no longer afford fees on the caravan he rented near Ballarat. Trying to sign up for Centrelink payments, the 65-year-old was told he had to apply online.

"I struggled, because I'm not very good at using computers," he says. "It was really daunting."

"I'm lucky I found Uniting. I don't know what I would have done without them."

Cliff now receives Centrelink payments and recently secured long-term housing.

"A big thank you to everyone who donated to the winter appeal," said Adam Liversage who heads up Uniting's housing and homelessness services in Ballarat.

"For someone sleeping rough, it can make the world of difference."

## Update on Matt

Matt\* shared his story in our recent Winter Share Appeal. The young Tassie dad was devastated when he was made redundant at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Matt is in a much better mental health space than he was in April when he first reached out for emergency relief. He's more comfortable accepting support from our team and has been approved for government benefits while he looks for work.

"Matt cares for his young daughter and elderly mother," said program coordinator, Charlotte Ryan. "The little one has recently been diagnosed with epilepsy, which has been emotional."

"Matt's welfare payments aren't quite enough to cover the bills so we are supporting the family with the basics they need to get by."

**Thanks to your generosity, over \$775,000 has been raised for the Winter Share Appeal.**

*\*This is a true story about a real person. Some details such as names have been changed to respect the wishes of the person featured.*

# Warming hearts.

The reality of being 'left out in the cold' can be all too real for those experiencing homelessness.

This year's Spread the Warmth appeal saw hundreds of swags, blankets and winter woollies donated to families in crisis and people sleeping rough.



**In Tasmania it's a similar story, where people have been sleeping on the doorstep of our NoBucks community meals building.** "We can't keep up with demand at the moment," said Charlotte Ryan. "It's a very bleak picture. Having a swag, blankets, gloves and beanies can mean the difference between shivering through the night and getting a decent sleep."



## You're making a difference

Almost \$60,000 worth of goods were donated to emergency essentials to people who had to evacuate.

These included:

- Food, clothing, fuel vouchers
- Toiletries and medication
- Swags and air mattresses
- Trauma therapy kits for children.

Your generosity has helped us source more than \$435,000 worth of goods and Domayne furniture (through our partnership with Good360) for people living in temporary accommodation who lost everything.

We're also partnering with the Uniting Church to fund ongoing pastoral care for people who request it.

Finally, we're working with Plan International – a charity experienced in providing disaster relief. Plan are working pro-bono to develop a long-term strategy to support families that Uniting are working with in bushfire-affected communities.

Your donations, combined with government and corporate funding, will finance the delivery of our long-term recovery plan.

*Uniting staff (left to right) Jeremy and Paul unload a delivery of goods for bushfire-affected communities in Gippsland.*

# Rebuilding after the bushfires.

It's been a challenging year. Back in January, we asked you – our generous supporters – to get behind communities impacted by bushfires.

Since then, through your overwhelming kindness, we have raised \$430,000

Thank you for your support.

## Showing kindness in a crisis

In the thick smoke of Victoria's bushfires, a couple in their nineties were evacuated by air from Mallacoota to a motel in Sale.

With no time to pack, Philip and Marge\* left home with just the clothes on their backs. Phil didn't even have his trusty walking stick.

Our team in Gippsland were contacted by the motel the couple had been evacuated to, seeking assistance on their behalf.

"We were able to arrange medication for them at the local pharmacy," says Di Fisher who heads up Uniting's services in Gippsland.

"While their prescriptions were being filled, they were driven to the Uniting op shop and fitted with spare clothes. The team there shared a cuppa with the couple, listening to their story with care and compassion."

They were also given a personal care package with toiletries and food supplies.

In a follow-up call, Phil and Marge assured us they were safe with family, where they stayed until they could return home. They were extremely grateful for the comfort, care and assistance we provided during a very stressful time.

*\*This is a true story about real people. Some details such as names have been changed to respect the wishes of the people featured.*





# Your generosity helps us plan for the future.

It's thanks to our generous supporters that we can plan our programs and embrace the future.

If you give regularly, thank you for sustaining our services. Because of you, people who reach out to us for support can trust that we will be here when they need us most.

## Meet the Wallaces

**Howard and Bronwyn Wallace (pictured above) have been giving to Uniting since 1988 and became regular supporters in 2018.**

A retired professor with the Uniting Church's Centre for Theology and Ministry, Rev Wallace says careful consideration went into the decision.

"We receive a lot of requests from charitable organisations doing good work, deciding whom to support can be overwhelming."

"We wanted to consolidate our giving with an organisation that has similar values to us and with whom we feel confident.

"Uniting does wonderful work in helping people when they need it most. We want to make sure that work is being supported in the long-term."

The Wallaces found that their choice to have a regular contribution automatically deducted each month has made life that bit simpler.

"It's the easiest way to go about donating," said Rev Wallace. "It means our charitable giving isn't reliant on sorting through the many requests we receive."

## Give regularly. Change lives.

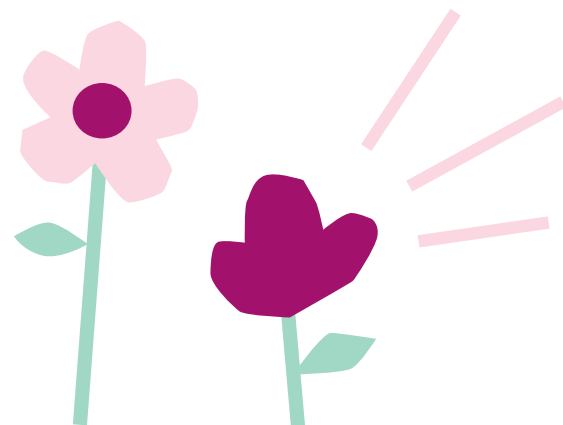
**A regular monthly donation is simple to set up and can be paused any time.**

You'll receive one consolidated tax-deductible receipt at the end of the financial year, minimising paper and postage.

For more information about becoming a regular supporter, get in touch with our team.

**T** 1800 668 426

**E** fundraising@unitingvictas.org.au



# Your feedback is helping us shape the future.

Our recent 2020 Supporter Survey asked a random sample of 3500 loyal supporters to tell us what matters to you most.

## The results so far

**Thank you to everyone who has taken the time to have your say. Your feedback is so valuable to us. You are helping improve our programs and services - making a real difference to the vulnerable and marginalised people we support, together.**

To those who provided personal feedback to our CEO, Bronwyn Pike – thank you.

The number of responses have exceeded our expectations. We're still receiving responses, but we can already share some preliminary findings with you.

55% of respondents said they wanted us to make even more of a difference by working together.

**You felt most passionate about Uniting's work in:**

**28%**   
**Homeless Crisis Support Services**

**11%**   
**Mental Health Services**

**19%**   
**Aged and Carer Services**

**18%**   
**Child, Youth and Families**

**Ensuring your legacy lives on:**



## In your words

**Here's what some of you had to say.**

"I appreciate the work you do to help vulnerable people, the homeless and unemployed – especially older women..."

"The Uniting Church is moderate and broad-minded... prepared to support causes that other churches ignore."

"The work of Uniting must be made more apparent to the wider community. Many are totally unaware of the diverse and wonderful work you do."

## It's not too late

**If you received a survey and haven't had a chance to respond, there's still time to provide us with your feedback and let your voice be heard.**

For people who didn't receive a survey, we are keen to hear from you too. We will endeavour to contact you in the coming months.

**T** 1800 668 426

**E** fundraising@unitingvictas.org.au

We appreciate your feedback and would love to hear from you.

## Leave a Gift in your Will

If you would like more information about leaving a Gift in your Will to Uniting, please contact:

**T** 1800 668 426

**E** melissa.carrozza@unitingvictas.org.au

If you expressed interest in finding out more, thank you. We will be in touch soon.

# Changing lives.

Your support has the power to change lives.  
**Here's how you can get involved.**

## Send Christmas cheer

**Uniting Christmas cards are now available with 4 new additions to the range.**

Each design has been thoughtfully selected by members of the Uniting Church to reflect the joy and message of Christmas.

Proceeds from card sales will support people in crisis this Christmas. To order your Christmas card pack visit:

[unitingvictas.org.au/christmas-cards](http://unitingvictas.org.au/christmas-cards)

## Food For Families. All year round. Thanks to you.

**For the past 28 years, Food For Families has collected food to share with families and individuals doing it tough at Christmas.**

Right now, it's difficult for us to know what we will be able to do by Christmas. We know the need is there – in fact data from our services shows that demand for food relief is growing.

If you want to support families this Christmas and beyond, please consider becoming a regular supporter by giving a monthly gift. \$30 a month – just \$1 a day – allows us to provide a shopping bag of groceries to families in crisis. You can set up a regular gift by ticking the box on the coupon, going to our website [foodforfamilies.org.au](http://foodforfamilies.org.au) or by calling the number below.

We will resume collection of your donated foods and toiletries when it's safe to do so. If you would be interested in finding out more, please register your interest on the Food For Families website [foodforfamilies.org.au](http://foodforfamilies.org.au) and we will send you more information.

**T 1800 668 426**

[foodforfamilies.org.au](http://foodforfamilies.org.au)

## Flip for a good cause

**Pancake Day – or Shrove Tuesday – is the date to finish the luxury foods in the pantry before the start of Lent. Traditionally, this includes flour, eggs and dairy – which, when combined, make delicious pancakes!**



Since 2002, congregations, community groups, schools and workplaces have come together to host Uniting Pancake Day events that have made a difference to those in need.

This year we need to get creative and find new ways to mark Pancake Day 2021 on Tuesday 16 February.

Please register your interest now for Pancake Day and we'll be in touch soon with further details.

**T 1800 668 426**

**E [pancakeday@unitingvictas.org.au](mailto:pancakeday@unitingvictas.org.au)**

Even the smallest  
**act of kindness**  
can brighten  
someone's day.

### Make a donation

Your generosity will help us provide essential services that are not covered by government funding. A gift today or a bequest for the future will make a positive and lasting difference to individuals, families and communities.

**T 1800 668 426**

[unitingvictas.org.au/donate](http://unitingvictas.org.au/donate)

### Fundraise for us

There are so many new, safe and creative ways to stay in touch and raise funds for your local community. If you have found innovative ways to stay connected with friends and family we'd love to hear from you.

**T 1800 060 543**

[fundraising@unitingvictas.org.au](mailto:fundraising@unitingvictas.org.au)

### Volunteer with us

Our 2400 volunteers are a vital and much loved part of our organisation. They give their precious time to help deliver our services. We rely on their support – and we're always on the lookout for more enthusiastic people.

[unitingvictas.org.au/volunteer](http://unitingvictas.org.au/volunteer)

