

Project

ESTHER
caring for women and families



Christmas Newsletter 2017

"Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world."

Bishop Tutu

If only our world could be overwhelmed with goodness responding to need. Justice and mercy, the original themes of Christmas, get swept aside in order for us to enter a mindset that all is well for everyone.



The ancient, Old Testament, pre-Christmas voices of hope in the wilderness are needed as much today as ever.

This year our election campaigners and media brought to our attention the prevalence of needs around housing, poverty, domestic violence, and the state of our rivers.

Recently Project Esther housed a young family. The police had connected the young married mother to the refuge network with her small children. An unexpected broken switch meant I visited with some repairmen to fix the oven. She wasn't home. I was moved by the simple domestic scene of small children's toys, a cell phone charging, and dishes stacked in the sink.

I was especially moved by their suitcases, one for each family member, stacked in a corner. Those suitcases were worn and showed signs of frequent use. I wondered how many times had they been packed and unpacked? In what state was the woman when she packed? Was she afraid? Probably. Was she crying? No doubt there had been many tears. Was she weary? How could she not be? Did she know what the next few weeks held? No. Did she speak English? I don't know. There was medication on the kitchen counter. Was that for her mental health or was she, or one of her children, sick, as well as all this other angst?

I left hopeful and prayerful that her world would be overwhelmed with goodness, at least for this season, in this place of safety. I prayed that this time of investment would see her make new plans and find hope.

Those prayers were answered for the previous woman who used the house. Housing New Zealand found her a house, and we were able to connect her to a kind neighbourhood community who would welcome and care about her and her children.

It's a little bit of the good Bishop Tutu invites us to apply, but undergirded by the ancient voices declaring the need and promise of Christ's new hope, beginnings, light and life.

Welcome to our Christmas newsletter and thank you for being part of our "little bits of good".

Daphne

The Heart of the Prison

Mother Teresa, speaking about joy said....

"Like Jesus, we belong to the whole world, living not for ourselves but for others. The joy of the Lord is our strength."

Carol Frost, our Chaplain at the Christchurch Women's Prison for 15 years, was indeed a joyful presence in the prison up until two months ago when she died of cancer.



Everything Project Esther does there was made possible by Carol: chapel services, providing equipment for the prison chapel, pastoral care, groups, craft, guitar lessons, book club, supplying knitting wool, underwear, accommodation and support post prison, and more. All of this was enabled by Carol's care of the women and her advocacy. Carol was a passionate voice for the voiceless. Her winsome, vibrant faith inspired, nurtured and empowered inmates, staff and volunteers.

We all miss her and count it a privilege to have served alongside Carol Frost.

Single Mums' Support

Established by single mums in April 2001, driven by their own experiences, the Single Mums' Support Service is aware of the importance of support, friendship and resources for women parenting alone. Our mission statement is Encouraging Healthy Relationships, Personal Growth, and Positive Parenting.



Two of our Mum's share from their experience:

Single Mums' Support was one of the main things that kept me going after the totally unexpected and devastating break-up of my marriage in 2010, and eased the isolation of living alone for the first time in my adult life. I did not have much support in my life at the time, having recently returned to Christchurch, and I will be forever grateful to have somewhere to go; for a chat, to make friends, and to find out more about how to make the most of life as a single mum.

Thank you for the spiritual strength you offer, for all you have done for me, and all you continue to do for the local community in Spreydon.

My Journey

For my first 21 years I grew up in a cult and with an unhealthy fear. In my childhood all the decisions concerning my schooling, social and home life were made by men. My parents grew up in fear too as the man in charge was a bully to us all. He had everyone in fear of doing the wrong thing. There was so much I wasn't allowed to do like simply reading a novel or having friends outside the cult. We had no freedom, we were all controlled.

In 2012 I came to Christchurch from the North Island to get away from a very controlling and abusive marriage relationship. I brought my young children with me.

I was battling with depression, was reserved and didn't get involved with social situations. Having been in Christchurch for a year I shifted into the area and discovered the Single Mums' Support Group.

I felt very shy at first, but kept coming regularly. It's one of the best things I have done.

With the help of Project Esther I have completed Xero and MYOB accounting courses. Project Esther helped pay for a babysitter so I could do the courses at night.

Project Esther has enabled me to have counselling which is how I learned new patterns of thinking, found freedom, peace of mind (still working on that), and how to stop the negative thoughts coming in.

Presently I am applying for jobs in office administration. I have had six interviews this year.

Project Esther has helped me get furniture for my house and I have made new friends. Evelyn has been a good listener; very generous, understanding, kind, and encouraging. I can always get advice and support at the group.

In coming to Christchurch I feel at home.

God has shown me kindness through others.

Hope is what keeps us going.

House of Kindness

Te Whare Atawhai

At Project Esther our most frequent request is for emergency accommodation. The use of a house was gifted to us at the beginning of 2006 and since then we have had the privilege of providing accommodation to women in desperate situations. Here is a glimpse of life from a recent resident.

I was very happy to be able to stay at the Project Esther house with my children.

I came to New Zealand with my husband of many years. Soon after that he did not want me anymore. He left me for another woman. He said he did not love me, he does not want to look at me and I bring him bad luck. He says I am a bad luck woman. I felt very hurt inside. The police came one day when I was injured and the hospital Social Worker helped me get refuge help. The Shakti Refuge helped me to find Project Esther.

It was good to stay at the house, I had everything I needed; furniture, beds and a sofa.

I have a lawyer now and we are waiting to know what will happen with our children. I am trying to get a job too.



Shakti Ethnic Women's Support Group and Project Esther staff

A recent letter extract...

I am the Assistant Principal of a school in South West Christchurch. We have built a strong relationship with Project Esther over the years and feel so fortunate for all the support we have received from them as a school community. This year in particular we are grateful for the assistance we have received in supporting families experiencing Domestic Violence.

When a parent confides in us about domestic abuse we are able to call Project Esther. They have networks and information about 'where to from here?' Being able to source safe, affordable, emergency accommodation with Social Worker support has been invaluable.

Recently Daphne came along to a staff and management meeting to speak on the subject of Domestic Violence; what it is, how it may look, signs to look out for, and how to respond. This was a valuable and informative time together.

Once again we are so thankful for the ongoing support, understanding and love we receive from the team at Project Esther. We are truly grateful to have you as part of our school community.

Music & Movement

It never gets easier saying "Goodbye" to one of our Music and Movement babies as they head off to school. What an absolute honour and privilege it is for us as a team to be a part of these precious preschool years with them and their family. To watch them grow, see their personalities develop and to earn their trust is priceless. As we farewell each child it isn't long until we are welcoming a new family and the journey begins again.



Christchurch Women's Prison

Recently we were thrilled to add more music to the mix with Pandemonium's Brett & Roanna bringing an evening of percussion performance and interaction to the Women's Prison. This was met with much enthusiasm from inmates and prison staff. The following feedback is a glimpse of a noisy, fun filled evening!



Tonight's performance from Brett and Roanna was really good, it was received well by the women in attendance, about 45 in total.

All the staff found it great!! Albeit loud – and my ears are still ringing...a real positive buzz after the event.

Brett & Roanna are very talented and very good at what they do. They engaged all the women by handing out improvised instruments, graters, rattles, shakers, and water bottle drums. The prisoners really enjoyed themselves!

Everyone is asking when they'll be back!! A few got up and danced.

The performance was a real hit - excuse the pun!

We want to thank you and Project Esther for sponsoring and arranging this event. It is much appreciated.

Parenting Week



Parenting Week is a city-wide event that occurs every second year, providing a number of presentations and workshops to inform, equip and educate families.

Project Esther has been involved with Parenting Week before and were happy to do so again by hosting an evening with Dr Lucy Hone. Lucy spoke on the subject, 'How to be a Good Friend in Tough Times.' Being a Doctor in Resilience and Wellbeing Psychology, and having lost her own daughter Abi just a few years ago, Lucy was able to present wonderfully on this subject. With the provision of funding we were able to sell copies of Lucy's book, "Resilient Grieving", at a discounted rate.

Below are some comments we received from people who attended the evening and appreciated the "safe, welcoming and helpful space."

"It was great to hear someone that has been studying resilience and across a wide range of vocations and ages.Well done for making the opportunity to hear her available."

"I found this subject incredibly helpful - particularly with regard to past experiences with friends. Thank you"

"The atmosphere was really warm and inviting. The flowers and soy melts were such a sweet touch. Great speaker with a really interesting talk."

"A citywide group of people represented - great to see."

"Keep up the great work, I look forward to hearing more about Project Esther initiatives."



Sign Language

One of our staff, Stacy, has been on a journey of learning Sign Language and has been inspiring us all along the way. We are overjoyed to see how this new skill has helped a local family transition from preschool to primary school. And now parents and staff at the school are learning to sign too.

Dear Project Esther

I want to thank you for the work you have done with one of our preschool families. Both parents in this family are deaf.

A year ago I introduced the Mum to Stacy at Project Esther knowing that she could help them transition from our Kindy to a local school.

You have been amazing! You have helped with the enrolment process, school visits and introducing them to the school community.

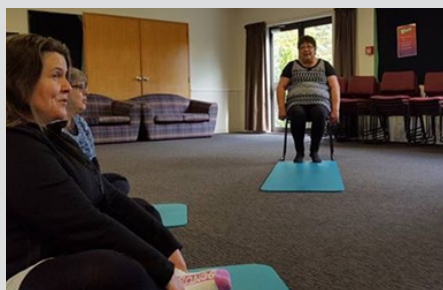
In term 3 Stacy and the Mum began teaching a group of parents at the school to sign. This is invaluable for the family's sense of belonging in their new learning community.

Thank you

Kate - Kindy Team Leader



Some other 2017 highlights



An opportunity for our Single Mums to try pilates



One of Hon Dr Megan Woods' visits to Project Esther. We appreciate her support & interest in our work



Visit from Hillmorton High School year 12/13 students exploring support services in the area



Some of our Single Mums have worked towards obtaining their driving licences this year



Some recent reads from the Women's Prison book club



Single Mums' retreat
- A reflection on Seasons of Life

Thank you!



Thank you for taking the time to read our Christmas newsletter. We hope and pray that you and those you love are enriched this season with the gifts of peace, joy and love.

From the team at Project Esther

We want to acknowledge those who have made it financially possible to continue doing the work we do

Christchurch Casino Charitable Trust
The Lion Foundation
First Sovereign Trust Ltd
Frimley Foundation
Rata Foundation
NZ Charitable Foundation
Baptist Children's Trust
Lottery
The Strathlachlan Fund
David Ellison Charitable Trust
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Farina Thompson Charitable Trust
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