

INSIDE OUTSIDE



Prison Network Ministries

March 2009

A note from the CEO



As I sat and pondered what to write, it was difficult to look beyond the tragedy of the bush fires and that the beginning of 2009 will be remembered as one of the most tragic in history.

Through the devastation, pain and loss, many people question, "Where is God in all this"? and the honest response is, "right there in the midst of it". I have heard many people on radio and

television talk about rebuilding their lives and how difficult that will be, but at the same time voicing the courage and desire to start over and indeed rebuild. Although I would never compare their circumstances to the women we support, the "rebuilding" process is certainly something they can relate to.

When everything you once thought to be stable and dependable is threatened and shaken to the core – you will be where you have always been – in the strong and loving arms of God; the One who is "found to be a mighty help in troubles" (Ps 46:1)

Blessings,

Deb

"I was an emotional wreck"

I never thought that having my mum in prison would be so hard. The day she went to court was one of the hardest. I was trying to stay positive but deep down inside I knew that she was going to have to leave me. For how long, I didn't know. That unfortunately came true and she got sentenced for five months. As I was saying goodbye I was totally shattered, my world had just been crushed and no matter what anyone said my brain just wasn't functioning - all I wanted was MY MUM! Several months before, I discovered I was pregnant. Mum and I had had some struggles



in our relationship over the years, but when I broke the news to her she was amazingly supportive and we developed a bond and closeness like never before. But now she was gone.

I was an emotional wreck as this was the one time I really truly needed my mum. I felt like she had let me down, knowing how much I couldn't bear to be alone - especially through the birth of my daughter. The first couple of weeks after my mum went to prison, was both physically and emotionally draining.

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The days all rolled into one and I started to go downhill very fast. My life was becoming a mess because I couldn't deal with mum in prison.

I felt like I had a right to be selfish. I needed her and she let me down. She just wasn't around. I felt so alone and confused and had no one to take care of me as mum is my only family. I then slowly started to realise that I needed to be strong regardless.

It just didn't help playing the guilt trip while mum was in prison. It's not good for either of us. As time passed, it slowly made life just a little easier, but I needed to realise that I had to live one day at a time if I was going to survive the months ahead.

The most difficult time of all was the time I spent in hospital when I had my baby. It was one of the loneliest times of my life. Seeing everyone else surrounded by family only rubbed in my face that I was all alone. There was no one around to make a fuss and be overjoyed about the arrival of my new baby. I felt like I had achieved something unique by delivering my little girl but there was no one to congratulate me. No one to ask about the time she was born, how much she weighed, discuss her name or comment on her hair colour. I received no flowers and no gifts filled the room.

However..... weeks before I had my baby, my mum met Laurel whilst at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre. I didn't realise the help that was out there for prisoners and their families. I am so grateful for the help of Prison Network Ministries. Through the past months I have held onto Laurel and the girls for the strength I have needed. They have played such an important part in my life. Laurel has been like a God send, she was there for me when I had my little girl and has been there everyday since. Whether I needed to talk, needed company, a shoulder to cry on, but most of all she kept me sane. If it wasn't for PNM I don't believe I could've been strong enough for my mum and my daughter, but most of all myself. After this experience, even though it's been tough and takes its toll, I believe it happened for a reason. It's made my mum and I realise that there is nothing more important than family. But at the same time I owe so much to Laurel and the other women from PNM, for the support

and love I needed whilst mum is in prison. This experience has changed me and has made me more positive, and I've realised that bad experiences sometimes happen for a reason. Always take the good and the bad together. God has a plan for us all, but we may not always understand, but need to trust in Him knowing that everything will be alright.

Emily

Fun with Mum

As I planned the 2009 program for Fun With Mum, I smiled inside as I pictured the mums and children I had come to know during 2008. There is no doubt that they are in my heart. When I think about them I picture happy, smiling children and warm-hearted, loving mums. I see mums, not prisoners; I look into their eyes, not at their prison clothes; and I talk to their hearts, not their circumstances.



I will give an outline of how the children's visit program works. Every Sunday afternoon from 1.00 to 4.30 visits are designated for mums and children (up to the age of 16 years). Children can visit with carers at other times, but Sunday afternoons are specifically for mums and children and so whoever brings the children, is required to drop them at the visit centre and then collect them again later. The mum and her child/ren are allocated a table and their visit begins.

As you can imagine, after a short period of time conversation can dwindle and for children, boredom can set in. Complicating the dynamics of their interactions can be the pain and brokenness attached to the circumstances which led to the mum's incarceration. In addition, children may be trying to cope with life without mum; some may have had to move to live with other carers, they may have had to change schools, and they are living with the stigma of their mum being in prison.

The aim of the Fun With Mum program is to provide enjoyable and meaningful visiting experiences for mums and their children. We endeavour to do this by: creating a friendly environment where they feel comfortable relating to each other; facilitating opportunities for active and interactive experiences; providing activities which will enhance their ability to maintain positive relationships and role modelling effective parenting interactions, pastimes and playtimes. This helps to foster the mums' bonding and connectedness with their children with the understanding that some of these mums have never been 'mothered' themselves.

While praying on the morning of our very first session, Sunday March 2nd 2008, I had a vision of colour and activity, of mums and children interacting and involved. The scene zoomed in on a mum and child sitting side-by-side with heads down working on a craft activity. The outline was of a heart with God's love radiating from it so that the prison walls disappeared leaving just the mums and children— there was no past, no pain and no separation, only connectedness and love.

I have no doubt that this is what God wants, that the mums and children will connect within a loving bond that will transcend the boundaries of prison walls, visiting times and brokenness. The vehicle for this bond is, first of all, God. Because we are God's hearts and hands on earth, we serve Him through the Fun With Mum program by outpouring His love on these mums and children, while providing them with activities that are bright, enjoyable and easy to achieve, that engender loving memories.

Our job is to love them; God's job is to save them.

Maggie

Introducing Chelsea

Hi! My name is Chelsea. I came on board with PNM in December 2008 as a Support Worker. I've been volunteering with PNM for around 18 months, helping out with the craft program and discussion group. I love spending time with the women, building friendships and supporting them in any way I can. I believe God has been shaping and equipping me in many ways to prepare me for the journey that lies ahead.



I can't recall when my passion to work with women in prison began, because it has always been there in a subtle but consistent way. I remember my first day at Ridley Bible College when a lecturer asked me what I wanted to do with my degree and I replied without hesitation, "to become a prison chaplain." At this point I had never heard of PNM and had no idea how to get into prisons, so I continued working with youth groups at my church which I thoroughly enjoyed.

After studying God's word for two years I decided I wanted to devote more time to working with marginalised and disenfranchised people in society. I decided to undertake a Bachelor of Social Work at Monash University. This degree taught me how to put into practice what I had learnt at Bible College about love and social justice. It also provided me with skills to work with those who come into contact with the legal and justice system.

Although what I have learnt at University has been beneficial to my skill base, I believe the greatest and most important thing to offer the women is genuine friendship and unconditional love. Therefore I'm excited to start work with PNM, an organisation that addresses the spiritual and practical needs of some of the most disadvantaged women in society. Thank you for your ongoing prayers and support for the staff, volunteers and the women.

**Blessings!
Chelsea.**

Camp News

A huge thankyou to those who responded to our last newsletter and contributed to sending a child to camp.

Please know what a fantastic difference camps make to these children's lives in so many ways. Many of the children have had quite traumatic lives and the chance to get away and enjoy some special activities is just brilliant for them. All children that we sent on camp are from broken families, most only having contact with one parent. The majority of children have had a parent die, most commonly due to an overdose or murder. Some have been orphaned at a young age and live with other family members. Each of the children has had at least one parent go to prison and in other cases both parents.

One little boy we sent to camp has since been sent interstate with his siblings to live, because mum just can't cope. He is very upset about the situation. At camp the children had the opportunity to ride in a speed boat, go surfing, canoeing, horse riding, trampolining, dress up and participate in concerts, make friends and just get a little extra TLC.

One of the children when asked how they liked camp said "I love Mill Valley Ranch cos it's the most amazing feeling doing something that you've never done before."

"I want to go back because it's a good place to meet new friends and grow with God."
12 year old "Helen"

However, it was some of the comments by the mums that I thought were most interesting. One said..."The days leading up to camp, my 11 year old was like a 5 year old counting the sleeps until Santa comes!

The morning of camp she woke up so excited, she said "I can't believe today is the day I get to go to camp!"

At the end of camp, I went with one of the PNM ladies to pick her up and she told us about all the "cool things" she'd been doing. Horse riding, canoeing and going on the flying fox, but the favourite thing I like to hear about is all the songs she's learnt. I'd like to thank everyone who's helped give my little girl this amazing opportunity.

Mum of 11 year old "Chloe"

"Although we don't go to church, going to camp gives "Tom" the good word of God. He's around good people and he gets a different outlook on life. It teaches him better values and about making good choices in life. He needs that and it gives him something to believe in. He learns about caring and kindness. Although he can be a little terror at times, I know what he learns really makes an impact on him and he enjoys learning about God. Camp breaks up the monotony of holidays too and gives him something to look forward to. He is so lucky to be able to go on these camps."

Mum of 12 year old "Tom"

The various camps we send the children to operate every school holidays, so if at any time you would like to sponsor a child to go to camp, please do so, and mark your gift to "Kidz Matta" which is the new name for our children's programs. Have no doubt your donation will make a difference to children's lives.

Camps cost on average \$200 to \$255 however, any gift towards a sponsorship will be gratefully accepted and there is no obligation to give the full amount. To those who have ever helped in this way on behalf of the children and their mums, again we say a huge "THANKYOU!"



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