



## “SAYING GOODBYE TO MY KIDS AT VISITS AND LOOKING AT THE TEARS IN THEIR EYES WAS UNBEARABLE”



**I was born into a good Christian family, my father being a minister. Who would have thought that his youngest daughter, the girl who played the piano for the church every Sunday, the teenager who made the personal decision to be baptised because she wanted to be closer to God, would end up serving time in jail for drug trafficking?**

There are several instances in my life that have affected me, to the point that “feeling” wasn’t an option because the pain was too intense. We sometimes make bad decisions. I made my worst one when the love of my life left me, completely penniless and unbelievably heart broken. I decided to take up an offer, one that bought in much needed money and at the same time masked my pain. Slowly I cut off from friends and family and was well into the crazy world of drugs.

I have been blessed with three beautiful children, all privately educated, all well mannered good hearted children. The pain alone that I caused them whilst I was incarcerated is enough to make me mend my ways.

Jail was a real shock to the system. I thought I was invincible. At the end of the day I’ve always believed in

trying to turn a negative into a positive, so I felt my time inside would be best used to work on myself.

Birthdays, Christmas and weekends were the hardest to bear. I thought I’d felt heartache before, but saying goodbye to my kids at visits and looking at the tears in their eyes was unbearable. There weren’t any drugs to help cope, yet I did cope. I felt myself grow as a person knowing that I had strengths and so I built on them.

There was still part of the puzzle to the bigger picture missing and I really felt that I needed support. Some one who wouldn’t judge me, but encourage me. Some one who would instil confidence in me to be able to do what’s right.

I’d often pass the chapel whilst in jail and see people inside who I knew, but I felt ‘that was for them not me’. One day I decided to go along with a friend. More lessons to learn... doing things alone without good support got me into the situation I was in. So I quietly watched and started to see that there really are some very good people in this world.

I was released 6 weeks ago and it’s so incredibly good to be back with my children. I have reconnected with my family and their support has been great, but they worry. At times I mistake the worry for a lack of confidence in me... but I do understand. It’s been challenging being out. Starting again from scratch is difficult and at times overwhelming. I’m so glad I walked into the chapel that day, because without the support from genuine people like the women at PNM, I don’t believe I’d be able to be as positive about my future as I am.

When I think that it’s all becoming too much, they are only a phone call away. Never once have I felt like I’m being judged. Encouragement goes a long way when you’re feeling shaky. I’ve been shown that there isn’t a problem too big to overcome and with faith, everything is possible.

I feel so much love and respect for these women and having them in my life has made a huge difference.

Happy Christmas to all.

Love Penelope



## A NOTE FROM THE CEO



Welcome to the December edition of Inside Outside.

Having recently written my annual report it's been encouraging to look back over the year. We commenced 2011 with two new staff members, one being appointed in the new role of Remand Worker.

Additional volunteers have joined the team as have two new board members. In September, we were excited to partner with One Community Church and rent a unit to house a woman when released, that was provided just at the right time by a generous family. Recently, a number of us witnessed Mia being baptised and rejoiced at what God has done in her life.

Throughout the year PNM have supported 63 women

in one way or another, and often time family members as well; 47 women were supported during a time of crisis including the death of a father, the death of a partner, housing/homelessness issues etc; we sent more than 30 children to camp; over 400 children attended the Fun with Mum program and literally thousands of women have gone through the sport and craft programs. For a small team of staff and volunteers this is significant.

PNM aims to reach greater heights of excellence, care, support and service to the women and families we have the privilege of coming in contact with. THANK YOU to all of our supporters for the part you play in helping us to achieve that.

Christmas blessings,

Deb Redford

## THERE IS NO EASY ANSWER FOR THESE CHILDREN

When I was about 8 years old, my mother left me, my younger brother and older sister for 3 weeks. It was horrible! We missed her SO much and couldn't wait until she returned. They were the longest 3 weeks of my short life. If you're beginning to feel sorry for this small abandoned child, I should probably let you know that Mum had gone on tour as a singer to Central and Northern Australia with a missions group and had left us in the capable hands of our father.

Looking back on it, I realize it was no big deal and that I was just being a sook, but we had never been without our mum before. Over the years I've had dealings with hundreds of children whose mums and/or dads have gone away to prison. I often try to get my mind around how they must feel. When my mum went away I wasn't fearful for her safety, I understood where she was going and why she went and I knew exactly when she was coming home. I was able to stay in my own home, continue to go to my own school and my dad was able to care for us. How overwhelming it must be for children whose mum and/or dad is suddenly whisked away to who knows where....and so are you. Many children go to distant relatives or to strangers in foster care. If they do end up in the foster care system they are likely to move several times. I knew one little girl who moved 8 times in 3 years and threatened to kill herself.

When both parents go to jail the impact can be enormous. For those who are able to visit on weekends, going to 2 different prisons takes up the bulk of their whole weekend. Some children are traumatized by the whole jail experience. Some long so much to be in the arms of their parents that

they scream in distress as soon as they read the cues that the visit is about to finish. I have transported many children over the years who have sobbed uncontrollably all the way home or until they fall asleep with exhaustion. For a number of the children we know, their carer (be that Dad, Grandma, Grandpa or Aunt) has passed away whilst mum is in prison. In many other cases mum and/or dads imprisonment brings many years of trauma for the children to a head. Imprisonment rarely comes suddenly. More often than not the family has had many problems over many years.

There is no easy answer for these children. Many struggle with learning difficulties, have social and emotional issues and may display challenging behaviours as they react to all that has gone on in their lives. A small thing we like to do at PNM is send them to camp during the school holidays. The children who go often drive the carers crazy as camp approaches because they are so excited. The carers are often also very happy to have a break. Camps start in December and we need your help to get them there. Camp costs vary from \$200 to \$300. If you would like to assist with any amount to make this possible, we...and the kids would be very grateful.

Laurel Gore



## KIDZ MATTA

**"I am the waaay; I am the truuth; I am the liife; the way to go home baby ah ah ah"**

This is the old Sunday school classic that my ears had the pleasure of listening to whilst driving a group of kids home from a recent school holiday camp. Two young girls sat in the back seat of my car and sung this the WHOLE way home.

I'm not kidding... the whole way home and it was not a short drive mind you!

They then asked me how they sounded and whether it sounded better with the both of them singing or just one of them, as they wanted to sing it to their families when they got home. I found out later that the girls sung the same song to their CRE class at school and wanted to sing it at their school assembly, but didn't get the chance.

Over the past year, we have been able to send thirty kids from the families that PNM support, some still in prison and others who have been released, to Christian school holiday camps. They attend camps at different locations including CYC/Phillip Island, Forest Edge/Neerim South and Mill Valley Ranch/Tynong North. Beforehand, the kids are absolutely pumped to be going to camp. They have the best time and are often so excited they don't want to leave when it is time to go. The camps run for a week and the kids get a chance to be "normal" kids and leave the troubles of their home life behind. They are immersed in an environment that is full of fun, learning and sometimes for the first time, they experience GOD.

There is a 10 year old boy from a fairly troubled family that we have been sending on camp for the last two years. He recently said to me that he looks forward to these camps so much because he has so much fun. I can clearly notice the difference in him when I pick him up after his week there. His father said that his son is constantly asking him, "when is it time for the next camp?"

This is all possible thanks to the wonderful support we receive for our Kidz Matta program. Without this we would not be able to send kids on camp or take kids on outings throughout the year. This year we took a couple of kids to the Royal Melbourne Show where they enjoyed rides, seeing the animals, eating fairy floss, having their face painted and most of all...show bags! Most of the kids that PNM is involved with have very difficult home lives, some with a parent in jail, some with no

parents and others living with their relatives. The camps and outings that we take them on give them a chance to be in a positive environment with positive people around them. Best of all they get a chance to be just what they are... kids!

Alex Cuss



## "IN PRISON WE WERE ALL THE SAME.."

Christmas for me was my children, grandchildren, work, mortgage and the stress of trying to manage everything. I wanted to be able to buy appropriate gifts that would make the day fulfilling. This was stressful as the world we live in is very materialistic. So to go out with \$100 and buy something that expresses the value and love that you feel for the ones you care so much about is almost impossible. More times than not debt was a result as my family only had me to do the things that validated love. No aunts, uncles or grandparents to share the day as a broken marriage divided the time. I felt I had to be everything to my children and they came to expect this of me -

'Until I went to prison in 2008'.

In prison we were all the same and we all had the same resources available to us. On special occasions we made cakes, wrote letters, bought cards and small treats (only as much as we could afford) from the canteen. It was Christmas '08 and despite being a very hard time, it was the most powerful experience I've felt in a very long time.

A group of us gathered together Christmas morning (in the prison we were locked down at 3pm for the whole afternoon until Boxing Day). We exchanged well wishes and small tokens. One of the women had made a trinket box from ice-cream sticks painted with nail polish and decorations. The receiver was so overwhelmed she cried. She couldn't believe how much effort and love had been put into her gift. We all felt the power of that moment. We were there for each other no matter what and we got to experience something much more powerful than receiving an expensive present. We were there to give one another care and compassion. It wasn't about how much was spent, who got what or how good it is or isn't. We were there for each other and the only motive was sharing from the heart and not the pocket. It was a very powerful Christmas day and one I will never forget.

Debbie





## OUR REGULAR PROGRAMS

### Tuesday:

Christian discussion group, sports/craft programs, visits

### Thursday:

Sports program and visits

### Friday (three weekly):

Tarra craft program

### Saturday (five/six weekly):

Sports event - 'Game on Day'

### 1st & 3rd Sunday of the month:

Fun with Mum

### 4th Sunday of the month:

Sunday Live

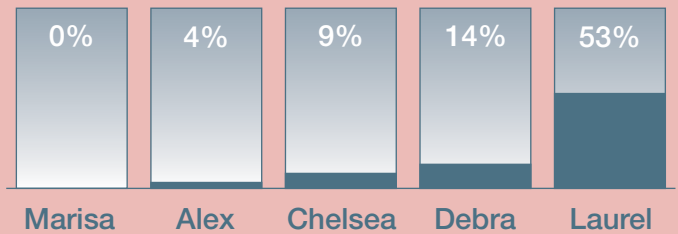
## WE NEED YOUR HELP

A substantial portion of Prison Network Ministries' costs relate to staffing as well as the cost of running and maintaining vehicles. These costs represent 75% of our total expenditure for the year. Another interesting percentage is that 34% of income comes from grants

We are very thankful for the financial support received from many individuals and churches during the year, but due to the global economic crisis there has been a reduction in funds from charitable trusts/foundations.

For the sustainability of PNM and also for its growth, we are seeking to raise the financial support for each of our staff. Please pray about this and if you feel that you are able to help, we would love to hear from you.

Currently, the level of support for individual staff stands at:



Lyndel's salary has been covered this year by a Trust, but this will not be the case next year.

For those of you who contribute to our general fund... fantastic! We appreciate it very much.

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

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

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

**Credit Card:**  Visa  MasterCard  Amex

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

Name on card \_\_\_\_\_

Card no.

Expiry date

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

### Please return this form to:

Prison Network Ministries  
PO Box 46  
Kerrimuir Vic 3129



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