



“WITH MY HEAD IN MY HANDS I CRIED AND WONDERED IF I WAS TRULY INSANE...”

There's a special place here at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, Victoria's maximum security prison for women. It's sometimes a place where warm spring breezes lightly blow and gently tussle your hair and you take big deep breaths and think, "What a beautiful day." Sometimes the tears won't come because you can't pinpoint your sadness, so deep that it's hard to understand. Then you just feel sad and think, "I am grateful that I feel sad. I am glad that I'm alive and I have hope. Now that I'm here I'm safe and clean and sober."

I came to prison after too many years and so many chances. The courts had been kind to me and after 70 convictions and many, many dark years of drug and alcohol abuse, I was charged with a fairly serious offence. I was so tired. I was defeated. Coming to prison was the only alternative to death (that's how it felt to me at the time). I felt like dying and was exhausted from my lifestyle.

When I got here I was frightened, that's for sure. I was alone without the comfort of getting any more chances. Fear and promises to get better had kept me from jail for a long time. Not any more...

I cried and cried for myself, for the loss of opportunity, unable to see my only child, my beautiful innocent daughter grow into a woman. I was ashamed. I felt weak and incompetent. I had been given such a gift of life and felt I'd thrown it away.

After the initial shock of being in prison and the settling in process, I started to sleep and sleep. I grew healthy and strong. My family had forgiven me and after 20 months I was released. I wasn't free yet. I had moved to the country and after having so many people around me I felt alone.

Good people reached out, but my soul was still empty and my heart was heavy. My only comfort was heroin and alcohol. I slipped back into my dark, dark madness again.

One more time I was standing before the judge, more serious now. I had been given a chance, but would I ever learn? With my head in my hands I cried and wondered if I was truly insane. Why can't I just live? The judge looked down his glasses at me. I sensed he thought me hopeless. I hated hearing my life sound so worthless in a summary of my previous convictions. He said, "You are 45 years old and your future looks grim. Use this time as a circuit breaker."

I came back to the prison with those words reeling around in my mind...use this time! Could this be the opportunity for healing, a time to rest and redeem myself? I was surrounded by women who were less fortunate than even I was. To see so much in them that I had seen in myself, could I learn from them?

Time stands still here. I opened my mind and heart to all that was good for me, to my ability. So beautiful to have time to wonder at the simple, most simple joys. A blue sky or the selfless hope generated by the warm and wonderful women who have dedicated so much of themselves to share hope and forgiveness.

I have been introduced to people who are dedicated and generous, whether through programs, education or the staff in the Leisure Centre. The women from Prison Network Ministries have shown me through gentle interaction, whether it be through sports and fitness, patience with arts and crafts, bringing children in to the prison who could otherwise not visit mum and getting them home safely, or to share bible stories and introduce faith and religion into those lives that are so damaged and empty. In my case, to stand up in court and tell the judge that there is more to these women than the charge sheet before us.

Kind words and faith that you are worthy of this life, that you are a loving mother or daughter. Women who I've had the utmost joy and pleasure in knowing, both inside these fences and out. I thank them and they know who they are. I would also like to take this most privileged opportunity to write something for the newsletter, to thank the ladies from PNM for believing in us. I could only wish that if I give half as much love, kindness and acceptance of others as they have shown me, I would be on the road to recovery and to becoming a better person.

Belinda



A NOTE FROM THE CEO



Welcome to the November edition of Inside Outside.

In the last edition we shared the blessing it was to finally have a 'Van'. It has been used so much we're wondering how we ever managed without it. I'm delighted to share that the expenses for the purchase of the Van have now been fully covered!

This provision has been amazing, and on behalf of PNM I would like to express our sincere thanks for those who have contributed both big and small.

We have recently been the recipients of the 'Give Back' campaign, receiving a \$5,000 grant from Mission Travel

Group for our Kidz Matta program. When our donations begin to slow, a grant we have applied for always seems to come through. Sometimes I am surprised at God's timing, but I'm learning to trust more and not be surprised. Every day we experience the goodness of God. He is good because He is morally perfect, gloriously generous and the standard of excellence and righteousness. Every attribute and every action of God is good.

As you read through this Newsletter I trust that you are filled with awe at the goodness of God, as He continues to touch the lives of so many women and children through the ministry of PNM.

Blessings,

Deb Redford

"I TRIED GETTING MY LIFE BACK ON TRACK, BUT COULDN'T SEEM TO 'FIND MYSELF'"

My name is Emma and I grew up in Gippsland with my parents, a brother and two sisters. Things were good at home although no-one ever really spoke much about feelings or anything personal. I had different types of friends throughout school, but I never had any close friends to talk to. I liked to play sport but preferred being on my own, which is when I started to play guitar at around the age of 15.

I was quite depressed as a teenager and never really spoke a word about it to anyone. I finished school at 17 and moved to Melbourne to start a career in the music industry. I was happy to finally feel some freedom. Again, I found it hard to form any kind of relationship with people and by the end of my first year, missed the home environment, so moved back down to Gippsland intending on travelling to Melbourne for my classes. As I started to dabble in the drug scene, I was introduced to someone who had recently got out of prison and he spent the next three months trying to get my attention, and eventually won. It felt nice to have someone next to me while I had the "f#!@ the world" attitude. I didn't feel so lonely anymore. Shortly afterwards, he introduced me to hard drugs and we started to live very dangerously. I continued to go to school, but didn't give it much attention.

In a short period of time, through drugs, mental and physical abuse, I become dependant on him and for the next two and half years our relationship was one big rollercoaster ride. I gave birth to a daughter and then developed post natal depression. I tried getting my life back on track, but couldn't seem to 'find myself' and didn't trust anyone to talk to. Trying to do it without any support didn't get me very far and following an overdose and domestic turmoil, I was jailed at the age of 21 for the death of my daughter's father.

Jail wasn't something I was prepared for. I completely disconnected myself from my situation as I couldn't face the fact that I was in prison for somebody's death, plus the separation from my daughter, although I was happy that she went to live with my parents.

Jail wasn't the best environment for me or anyone to be trying to 'find themselves'... but I did what I could. My first year was quite up and down especially not knowing what my future held. I would often speak to the ladies from Prison Network Ministries as they tried to involve me in their activities which were a lot of fun. They attended all my court dates, including my trial. This was a very big support as I had spent a lot of time with them over the past year so they knew my situation. My family did go, but it was hard to explain to them what jail was really like and I didn't want them getting upset if I ever told them I had a bad day. Soon after that, I started having visits with my daughter without my family. PNM would often help out with picking her up, dropping her off and also holding all different activities on these days. Spending time with my daughter is the one thing I look forward to and I'm so glad and thankful that our bond was not broken.

I slowly started feeling like myself again through playing various PNM's sports with Laurel and managing to get my hands on a guitar.

It has now been almost 4 years since I came to prison and I have 2 years left. In that time I have dealt with a lot of my personal issues, found my love of sport again and reconnected with God who I had denied all of those years. I now write my own songs which I plan to record one day and most importantly kept the connection I have with my daughter.

I am looking forward to the next chapter of my life as I look towards getting out and being a mum. One day I will look back on this journey in my life and not have this experience define who I am as a person. The thing that has gotten me through this far is hope for the future and that I believe I am here for a reason. That will lead me to my calling.

Emma



“WE’RE GOING TODAY, WE’RE GOING TODAY!”



Jumping up and down on the spot, these were the words Stephanie yelled out when she opened the front door. The Royal Melbourne Show was on during the September school holidays and I had arranged to take Stephanie. Her excitement was infectious as she swung my hand and

skipped along anticipating the fun behind the entrance gates. We headed to Stephanie’s favourite ride, the Ferris Wheel, but not before grabbing a hessian bag and enjoying a slide ride first. Eventually the queue for the Ferris Wheel got shorter and we enjoyed great views giving us a good sense of where everything was. Lots to explore so off we went to visit the animal nursery where Stephanie feed one of the lambs, patted a calf and enjoyed the piglets. Various rides and fun parlours took her interest so we moved from one to the other deciding on which ones to try.

Unfortunately, the weather deteriorated and the rest of the time we spent walking around in the rain, but this didn’t seem to faze Stephanie, in fact she seemed to enjoy it! After stopping briefly for something to eat, having her face painted and collecting a showbag, it was time to head for home. This sounds easy, but going past other rides on the way out proved tempting and we stopped for one more, or was that two?

As I left Stephanie at home chatting about her day, I reflected on my drive home. Through PNM’s Kidz Matta fund we have the joy and privilege of providing children with an unforgettable experience, one their families could not afford. Whether that’s a day at the Show, going to camp, attending a sports event or music production, they are times that bring joy into troubled and often, very neglected lives. Recently, Laurel, Alex and I shared in Stephanie’s 8th Birthday celebration. It was the only party she’s ever had, in fact, the only party she’s ever been to. It was wonderful to see her so happy. Again, through PNM’s Kidz Matta fund we were able to contribute to the cost. All I can say is...Thank You!

Deb

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

We are seeking board members.

We are seeking to employ a part-time Volunteer Coordinator to replace Katharine, who sadly, will be leaving us at the end of the year.

We are also seeking a full-time Remand/Support Worker.

If you would like any information concerning either of these positions, please **contact Deb on 0413 708 382** or view them on **www.christianjobs.com.au**

BOARD MEMBER PROFILE

5 minutes with Jenny Di Stasio



What’s in your CD player at the moment?

Third Day

Most embarrassing moment

When I walked into a window at a petrol station thinking it was a door. I was so convinced it should open there were 3 head marks on the window. When I realised what I had done I started laughing but no one else laughed with me.

Last movie you saw

Can’t remember! I’ve tried a couple of times to go as a side-by-side activity but haven’t made it. Things happen that always prevent it.

Most adventurous thing you have ever done

Parasailing in Bali. It was an amazing feeling flying like I was in a dream.

Name 5 people you would invite to a dinner party

It would have to be my brothers & sisters (unfortunately mum would have to miss out then so I’d have to sneak her in too somehow). It’s always entertaining when we get together. We are spread around throughout Victoria and I have a brother living in Japan, so it’s rare for all of us to be together. We’re finally starting to grow up so it’s mostly nice when we do get together. Family is very important to me.

What are some of your interests or hobbies

I love sudoku & card games. I enjoy dancing and going out for dinner.

Favourite holiday destination

I loved Israel and all of its history. Walking where Jesus and all the others in the Bible had been. Seeing how it was back then and having so much of the Bible come alive in a new way. I’m craving to go back and see & learn more.

Favourite bible verse or character

The verse I use for myself all the time is Romans 12:2 ‘Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.’ It helps me to get a new perspective when it all seems too hard.

Why did you join the Board

Because I had been involved with the volunteer work for a number of years and I am very passionate about what we do and how we make a difference in the women’s lives. I was asked to join the board 10 years ago and thought it would be a good way to support the ministry.

What is your hope for PNM?

That PNM would be able to help the women in areas such as housing & employment. I would love to see churches getting behind us so that the women could be brought into a community, where they can be loved & nurtured and be a part of a Christian family.



Christmas Appeal

Christmas is a time that we enjoy being with those who are precious to us. It's also a time where we miss those who for whatever reason we can't be with. For many of the children we know it is a time of heartache, when they wish more than anything that they could have their mum at home with them. This Christmas will be the first time that some children have ever had Christmas without their mum. Alternatively, for others whose mum's are doing long sentences, they cannot remember spending a Christmas with her. "Jacob" is 8 years old and his mum has been in jail since he was born. He ponders at times what it would be like to have his mum home to celebrate with him. For 10 year old "Josh" who has had to move interstate, Christmas will be particularly painful. Both his mum and his dad are in jail...and will be for many years. On the rare occasion that he sees his parents, there are many tears.

For the mothers on the other hand, who are often missing several children at Christmas, there is shame, guilt and often very deep depression. Some mothers will never forgive themselves and spend their time in jail worrying about their children. For the lucky ones who have been released, there is often an overwhelming feeling of guilt that causes them to want to spoil their children at Christmas to make up for the suffering they've put them through.....but with what? By the time they pay rent, food and bills there is very little left to meet even the basics that are on the Christmas list for Santa. PNM will be seeking to help out wherever we can, to make Christmas that little bit more enjoyable for many families who are doing it hard.

Furthermore, Christmas time is camp time! We will be sending a load of kids to camp to have some summer fun. "Ella" commented to us recently "camp is the best! All my friends want to come to camp with me cos I tell them how great it is. I love horse riding, learning more about God, I love everything about it. When both my parents went to jail a few years ago it was a pretty hard time, but it meant I got to go on camp. Going to camp helped me deepen my relationship with God and become more serious about him in my life. I don't know where I'd be if Laurel hadn't offered me the opportunity to go on camp all those years ago."

Camp fees are between \$200-\$300 per child. If you would like to contribute to this or to help us meet the many needs we have at this time of the year, please contribute to the PNM Christmas Appeal. It will certainly go to someone in real need this Christmas and could help to change a life!

Laurel

OUR REGULAR PROGRAMS

- Tuesday:** Christian discussion group, sports/craft programs, visits
- Thursday:** Sports program and visits
- Friday (three weekly):** Tarra craft program
- Saturday (four weekly):** Sports event -'Game on Day'
- 1st & 3rd Sunday of the month:** Fun with Mum
- 4th Sunday of the month:** Sunday Live

What a Day



Hula hoops, hats and hilarity. That's what we got when world renowned motivational speaker and Patron of PNM, Lisa McInnes-Smith, came to present at our "Sunday Live" time at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre. More than 50 women and a handful of interested staff were entertained, challenged, encouraged and inspired as they listened to Lisa's words of wisdom. In her own vibrant and creative way, Lisa communicated practical advice and encouraged the women to forgive and let things go, to practice things in their lives that they want to do better and to stay positive.

One woman commented, "We've been SO looking forward to this. I've been looking at my watch all morning".

Another commented, "She had everyone intrigued and what she said really rang true".

And yet another said, "Thank you so much, that was just amazing. It was just what we needed to hear. Could you please come again.....soon?"

We are all very much hoping that Lisa, despite her very busy schedule, can bless us with a return visit in the not too distant future.

Laurel

