



“MY LIFE WAS NOT SUPPOSED TO BE LIKE THIS. HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?”

All I used to live for was drugs. I couldn't function without them and I would do almost anything to get them. As a child I was talented at sports, music and academia. It all came easy to me. I started to suffer from depression as a young teenager, but I was unaware of what was happening to me or where I was heading. I never expected to be 25 years old and sitting on the side of the road with a black eye, no belongings, no one to call, desperately alone and afraid.

My biggest concern was where I'd get my next heroin hit to ward off the debilitating withdrawals and the deadly and all consuming depression. All my hopes and dreams were gone and replaced with one purpose. All of my family's hopes and dreams for me were stolen too. I longed for a 'normal life', for my dreams and my life back. I did everything I could to get off the drugs. I started to wonder if I'd ever be free from it. "My life was not supposed to be like this. How did this happen?" Because of my lifestyle I inevitably got into trouble with the law and in 2008 ended up in prison. It was a very hard time and a very sobering reminder of what had become of me.

I began to go to Prison Network Ministries Christian Discussion Group. For months I went along. Even now I have no recollection of anything, I was so blinded, but the Lord faithfully dragged me along while he worked on my heart. It was about ten months before release that I read Jackie Pullinger's 'Chasing the Dragon'. I was excited and amazed and my eyes were suddenly opened to the power of Jesus.

I wanted this supernatural power, these miracles, and mostly, the freedom. I prayed the sinner's prayer and invited Jesus into my life. Slowly my eyes were opened more and more to God's truth in His word and Discussion Group was the highlight of my week. Those months though were also very hard, especially being in that spiritually dark place and Satan was not too happy to be losing me to the Lord. There was definitely a spiritual battle waging in and around me. As I pressed into the Lord with prayer I began to ask for things and miracles



began to happen. I feel the Lord was showing me His love and faithfulness and His power to answer prayers. I asked to be freed from the depression that has plagued me for years and, I was. I asked to be freed from my past. I was! I asked to be freed from my drug addiction. I was! His power, awesomeness and love amazed and overwhelmed me.

My life now is worlds apart from my past. I have a legitimate job for the first time in about ten years. I go to small group on Tuesdays and church on Sundays. I have great Christian friends who love me, support me and encourage me. Jesus has given me life. I was dead and now I am truly born again. Jesus freed me and I want to help others be freed by His power. Because of the years I was bound and tormented by the enemy, I understand how it feels to be controlled and oppressed by the kingdom of darkness. I believe He is able to use my past experiences for my future ministry. I know Jesus as my personal saviour, deliverer and redeemer. He is my rock, my fortress, my shield and my stronghold. Now I want to be a soldier for Him, to preach good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to heal the blind and set the captives free. And always, to give glory to the Lord.

Mia

A NOTE FROM THE CEO



Welcome to the September edition of Inside Outside.

I hope you will be as excited as we are when you read the articles in this Newsletter. Last time we were asking for prayer as we embarked on addressing the area of homelessness. God has answered in an amazing way. When our need of a Unit was shared, a family, who just happened to have a Unit that was vacant at the time, generously responded and offered to rent it to PNM. God literally 'opened the door.' Bree has settled into the Unit really well and I'm sure that her thank you card and letter will warm your hearts as it has ours. I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to everyone who contributed towards the setting up of the Unit. The generosity shown by so many was quite overwhelming. We hope to be able to house more

women in the near future and ask that you join us in praying that more Units become available, in His timing.

Mia and Kimberley have also taken the time to write very open and honest articles about what is happening in their lives.

On a management level, Jenny Di Stasio has resigned from the Board after 11 years of faithful service. Jenny has served PNM in various capacities and will continue to be involved as a 'side by side' mentor. We are very grateful for all that she has contributed.

Stuart Shepherd joined the Board in May this year and has already proven to be a valuable member. I trust you enjoy reading a bit about Stuart in his 'profile'.

Thanks for your continued support, prayers and encouragement.

Blessings,

Deb Redford

MY GOD SENT MIRACLE

Well my life had done a complete circle from being on drugs and in and out of prison. It's now a life without drugs, prison and all the turmoil, pain and hurt that comes with it. Don't get me wrong, there's still days where there is pain and hurt, but I'm able to get through it without any mind altering substances.

I've always had good supports from various workers in various organisations and I always thought they never helped or did anything for me. I have come to realise they can only do so much. It's got to come from within.

You've got to want to change. Help, guidance and faith play a very big part in it as well. Once again, I've had wonderful support from my Aunt and Uncle. Their trust, faith and acceptance of me for who I was helped show me that I wasn't a bad person and I was still worth loving. They helped guide and support me and show and teach me that you can live a normal life - clean and sober. I was shown a different way of normality rather than what my mind perceived to be normality.

My other big support, which has meant so much to me, has come from PNM. Chelsea has made it easy for me to be honest, to be able to talk to her about anything and everything without the usual "Is she judging me. What will she think of me"? She has made me feel free and has never said, "No that's wrong you must do it this way or that way". She has shown me there are choices one can make, right ones and wrong ones, but she let me make my own choice.

I've hit rock bottom before and I know I don't have another recovery from drugs left in me. Instead I turned to alcohol. Inevitably I was drinking too much because I was still learning to deal with emotions and life in general. I just wanted to escape! Fortunately my vast experience with drug addiction gave me insight. I could see the pattern of addiction I was falling into. I knew that merry-go-round wanted to start again, and I nearly gave in.

I chose to confide in a friend about my addiction. Before I knew it I received a text message back stating there was an AA meeting in my surrounding area and did I want to go? My thoughts were....I'm not like them, I'm not an alcoholic and I tried to ignore the text. But my friend was persistent and we did end up going.

That was February and now I'm doing five meetings a week to this day. It was the best gift anyone has ever given me. It saved me from a life of turmoil and pain. In these meetings they say the miracle God bestows upon us is a life of being sober and clean. God gave me a miracle, a Christian friend to introduce me to AA which saved me from a path of destruction of addiction.

I'm still learning, but I now know I'll get there with hope, faith and trust. I'm so thankful for all my supports and especially for PNM. Thank you so much for everything!

Kimberley

Bree's *Thank you*

To dear PNM,

Well where do I start? I thought that it was only fitting that I send a card especially to those who have faith in me. This is a really big deal for me (and I'm guessing you guys too). The one thing that keeps going over and over in my head is 'faith'. Not only the faith that PNM has in me, but that if you do have faith everything does turn out. That sounds really weird coming from me as you all know I have struggled in the past and it is one thing that I have constantly prayed for. It's amazing! I feel honoured, if that's the right word, to explain all this. This chance and opportunity that I have been given is truly one in a million. A miracle!

I have right now only a major 'THANK YOU' from the bottom of my heart.

Love always, Bree

Five weeks after Bree moved into the Unit she wrote this letter...

I CANNOT BELIEVE THE EXTRAORDINARY SUPPORT THAT I'VE BEEN GIVEN

I've experienced such joy and happiness in the five weeks since coming home. I could write a novel on everything I've done! I still wake sometimes and wonder if I am dreaming and if this is all going to end. I am amazed at how, by gaining the support of the PNM team, I've been able to stay focused on my goals.

I've named my little unit 'Melrose', my place, and it's beautiful. I am overwhelmed that it is my home. So much generosity. I am truly grateful for everything everyone has done for my new place. It means so much to me.

I've been able to have both my children come and visit me at my new home and they too are experiencing all this with me. I have been playing sports in my free time. I'm involved in a local team and I enjoy playing with both the men and women. My parole appointments are literally a short ten minute walk from my place. I also applied for a part-time job through the local newspaper and I was successful in gaining employment. I am now a working citizen that enjoys getting up in the morning and going to work.

Going to church and following my newfound faith is also another major part of my life. I have been welcomed completely by the church that I have been going to.

It's all very exciting to me. I feel that since I have been given this opportunity, A HOME, I have finally found complete peace within myself. I don't feel that life is a struggle anymore. I am gaining life skills that I feel I will treasure for eternity.

These five weeks feel like a life time, but it is only baby steps in the right direction.

Words can never express my gratitude and appreciation for everyone's support and prayers.

I wish that one day I would be able to thank you all individually, but in saying that, every appointment that I attend, every time I see my children, or the early mornings that I get up to go to work, that is my gratitude and appreciation, my thanks in return for now.

Bree



This is Bree's 'Melrose'

LEAVE A BEQUEST TO PRISON NETWORK MINISTRIES?

PNM's mission is to support women who are, or have been in the Victorian prison system; providing practical, emotional and spiritual support to the women and their families; bringing hope and encouragement to enable them to reach their full potential.

You can help us achieve this mission by leaving a bequest. Your generosity will become a living testament and continue to bring hope.

Go to our website <http://www.prisonnetwork.org.au> and click on the 'My Legacy' link on the donate page for more information.

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

BOARD MEMBER PROFILE

5 minutes with Stuart Shepherd



I celebrate my 20th wedding anniversary soon with my beautiful wife, Bronwyn. We have 4 daughters. One at Uni, one currently on exchange in France, one in secondary school and one in primary school. I feel privileged to have had 3 very different vocations

that I have loved so far, and have been working as an ambulance paramedic for 8 years.

We've been interested in and supported PNM for about 15 years and were volunteers with Laurel about 20 years ago going into Winlaton. We live in lovely rural St Andrews.

What's in your CD player at the moment, or alternatively, who is your favourite musician

In the age of digital music, we have the widest eclectic mix of music played at home. I love gospel, rock and roll, and jazz. Anything but the doof doof.

Most embarrassing moment

These happen regularly. When I was a teacher, in parent teacher interviews I congratulated (mistakenly) the mother of the student!

Last movie you saw

As I work rotating shifts it's a challenge to stay awake when I sit down at night. Combine that with a terrible memory and the result is a really hard question, but I think it was The Kings Speech.

Most adventurous thing you have ever done

Bronwyn, 9 month old Ally and I went to live in a remote area of PNG for two years. I taught in a high school. This was a fantastic experience.

Name 5 people you would invite to a dinner party

My Dad (passed away nearly seven years ago) and the rest of the family. Sorry not good at counting as that's more than 5. Dinner at our place normally ends up with lots more people than was first planned on. Keith Green would be interesting to entertain if he was still around.

What are some of your interests or hobbies

Time spent with family; pottering around our rural block; cutting firewood; renovating; social tennis; bike riding and wildlife rehabilitation.

Favourite holiday destination

I've had some fantastic holidays. I like something different each time. We had a sensational few days at the snow recently as a family.

Favourite bible verse or character

The "recipe for peace" - Phillipians 4:6-8

Why did you join the Board

I love what PNM does. It's real. Being part of the board is an opportunity for me to help keep it real and to hopefully contribute in some way.

What is your hope for PNM

I am really excited about what PNM is involved with especially recent developments. To keep being a real friend to the women and children. To be Jesus to them and to be able to help more women in new ways.

