



Downs & West Community Support

Continuing the mission of the Sisters of Charity

Newsletter No. 4
December 2010



Christmas is

A time to love

A time to care

A time to share

If I extended my vocations to produce a soundtrack (something that reflected my life) it would be a mix of tunes including *On the road again*, *All things bright and beautiful*, *Carol of the birds* and, for good measure, a recitation of Dorothea Mackellar's *I love a sunburnt country*. How many times those words have come to mind as I've travelled from Brisbane, approaching the Great Divide and the plains beyond.

As I journeyed out west this year, in a new 4WD kindly donated by St Vincent's Health & Aged Care Ltd, I witnessed the transformation of the land brought about by rain. I also saw the heartbreak of families just beyond the fence who had missed out. When Premier Anna Bligh announced "the drought is over" she went on to say "in south-east Queensland". At the beginning of December, Toowoomba Regional Council and parts of Goondiwindi and Banana shires remain drought-declared while stretches of the inland (and north) have been in flood again. Mother Nature is fickle.

And as farm business consultant Rod Saal says "it hasn't rained dollars". It will take time for families to get back on their feet. Clearly we still have a real job ahead and as we walk with these people we give thanks for the continued generosity of many people. With this support, the team

have been busy providing support, distributing household and Christmas hampers, vouchers and other goods to rural communities. We have also helped to facilitate country to city children's holiday, back to school needs and country girls' days out and organised a retreat weekend for women who've weathered truly tough times.

Our new name Downs & West Community Support (DWCS) more accurately reflects the service provided in the current situation and indicates we have a legitimate place in supporting the wellbeing of rural families. For as long as there's a family in need, a community requiring practical support, the Sisters of Charity will be there if at all possible.

Wishing you and your families a very Happy Christmas and a New Year filled with hope, peace and magical surprises.

Christine rsc

Sr. Christine Henry rsc
Downs & West Community Support Coordinator



The Downs and West Community Support has grown from an initial response to a crisis caused by drought to become an ongoing part of life in the community of families in need in rural Queensland.

"When you saw that I was isolated and alone you came and sat with me; I was struggling and you extended a helping hand, I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink;..

....as you did it to the least of mine, you did it to me."

(Matthew 25:36, 40)

Words in Action

Message from the Chairperson of the Advisory Committee



The Advisory Committee for the Downs and West Community Support (DWCS) exists to provide advice, support, and scrutiny of the operations of DWCS. While our numbers are small, each member of the advisory committee brings a wealth of experience and talent to support the work of the coordinator, Sr Christine Henry.

Thank-you to:

- Denis McMahon who shares his understanding of the challenges rural people face, on the land and in towns, along with legal expertise
- Madelyn Priddle who brings a youthful perspective and marketing knowledge
- Terri Hillenberg, our newest member, who analyses the financial data and will prepare the books for the upcoming financial audit.

Our sincere thanks and best wishes go to Craig Doyle who provided outstanding advice and financial accountability over the past four years.

The highlight of our regular meetings is when Sr Christine provides us with a full summary of her work since the previous meeting. By doing so, Sr Christine brings the pastoral perspective of the very real people she connects with in this vital outreach of the Sisters of Charity. It is through such sharing that the committee members discuss and plan for a way forward in coming months.

Our prayers and best wishes are with you this Christmas.

Cate Mapstone AM



All is sweetness and light, right? Farm business management consultant Rod Saal tells:



After many years of beating the drum to try to get assistance for farmers, I was looking forward to a period of grace, allowing some consolidation and recovery. But whilst acknowledging record cotton prices, good soil moisture, irrigation dams approaching capacity and reasonable prices for most commodities, the bush

still has some real 'burrs in the blanket' to contend with.

Many producers are telling me they feel disenfranchised, ignored, exploited, taken for granted and are facing being legislated out of existence. We don't need to look far for causes of such angst: the current Murray-Darling debate; talk of removing graziers from forest leases and turning their farms and homes into national parks; and the encroachment of mining and energy companies onto high quality farming land without meaningful dialogue to allow

both the coexist. Add to this, interest rates. Yes it's rained—but it didn't rain dollars! Most farmers are now out of savings and have to access more borrowings to plant or restock. Unfortunately banks and Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority (QRAA) are looking at previous financial returns and commenting that 8-10 years of drought-induced losses may mean there is a lack of long-term viability. My experience tells me that most lenders are giving support but no extra funds. QRAA is running a very tough ruler over applications.

Often the recovery years can be tougher psychologically than the drought. For most farming and grazing families, it could take three to six years to 'recover'.

No wonder many primary producers are experiencing mixed emotions at the moment. Unfortunately it is too late for some who are or will be forced to leave the land but this nation has a responsibility to support the remaining small number of experienced and efficient wealth producers whose food and fibre a much larger group of wealth consumers demand.



Downs and West Community Support received...

- 📖 **\$36,980.25** in cash donations from individuals, schools and organisations; a significant result given that we do not have tax deductibility status
- 📖 **\$115,466.00** in-kind donations of goods (see, below, what we distributed)
- 📖 **\$3,190.00** raised at a charity fair in collaboration with the manager and resident of St. John the Baptist Retirement Community at Enoggera
- 📖 **\$600.00** raised at the Toowoomba Heritage Agricultural Show
- 📖 **\$13,944.00** awarded in grants from Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal and Sylvia & Charles Viertel Charitable Foundation (\$4,000); Catholic Religious Australia Queensland (\$4,944); Sisters of Charity Foundation (\$5,000).



As a result, this is what we did and achieved:

- 📖 More than 800 women attended the 13 Wellness Days for Country Girls we helped organise, providing health checks and pampering, companionship, inspiration and fun.
- 📖 DWCS hosted our first live-in weekend retreat, attended by 30 women (see Dragonfly Health and Wellness retreat report).
- 📖 Sr Christine clocked up 22,365 kilometres visiting families on the land, offering pastoral support, a listening ear and household hampers.
- 📖 Thanks to in-kind donations, DWCS distributed 472 household hampers, 540 dozen cartons of fresh eggs, 444 Better Homes & Gardens magazines, 220 Easter eggs, 30 Christmas hampers, 162 Christmas gifts for children, 160 Christmas gifts for adults, 200 meal vouchers and 75 gift packs.
- 📖 Awareness was raised of the need to support our rural cousins post-drought and the services provided through DWCS using contacts with schools, parishes and organisations and newspaper articles in *Catholic Leader*, *Queensland Country Life* and *The Chronicle* (Toowoomba).



The Downs and West Community Support is a ministry of the Sisters of Charity of Australia.

It offers encouragement and practical assistance to our neighbours in rural and remote Queensland who are severely affected by climatic changes and other matters outside of their control.



Inaugural Dragonfly Health and Wellness Retreat



The next time you see a dragonfly hovering just above water, its iridescent wings glinting, stop and think...of rural women. The two have a lot in common.

They may look delicate, but they're strong, graceful, adaptable and poised.

The dragonfly symbolises change — an awareness or maturing of life. It also has immense capacity to live 'in' the moment. Our first Dragonfly Health and Wellness Retreat at Highfields was made possible by a Catholic Religious Australia Queensland grant. It was, in many ways, an extended version of the 13 Wellness Days that DWCS helped organise during 2010, attended by 803 country women.

Over a June weekend, 30 country women (*pictured on page 8*) who live and work the land, and who had experienced loss of a loved one or the impact of drought or other destructive climatic conditions, shed their many hats (wife, mother, daughter, farm hand, counsellor, accountant, first aid officer and vet) and allowed themselves to learn, be pampered and cared for.

Facials, foot soaks, pedicures, manicures and massage went down a treat. So did calming activities like yoga, meditation, reflexology and Tai Chi. They lapped up the health information sessions — on topics as diverse as breast care, relationships, and food labelling. Blood pressure, blood sugar, pap smear and mini mental health checks were all available and welcomed. As one participant later said: "What a way to go. It was in an environment of love, caring and compassion".

For two days, these women revelled in each other's company. There was certainly no shortage of laughter particularly during Saturday night's Wearable Art parade modelling outfits fashioned from recycled farm materials; and no shortage of inspiration and reflection following guest speaker, cancer survivor Debra Howe's dinner talk.



As they packed to go home, participants shared reflections like these of their weekend away:

I felt very spoilt and have not laughed so much in ages.

This weekend has been a real eye opener for me. It has given me the chance to make some positive changes in my life.

What a wonderful experience. I made new friends and leave the retreat feeling refreshed and alive.

This has been a real privilege to be here. You have gifted us with knowledge, pampered us with wonderful relaxation methods and cared for ALL our needs.

I have loved every minute of the retreat. It was truly inspirational and the quality of presentations could not have been better. World class!



Dragonfly Health and Wellness



We also welcomed the help of Kaitlin De Souza, Bethany Nally and Marlena De Souza, students from Mt St Michael's College in Brisbane.

Bethany later reflected: "One woman was almost reduced to tears that I was going to carry a bag for her and walk her to her room. If a simple act of kindness has that effect, imagine if more people got involved."



Kaitlin added: "It was a real eye-opener and introduced us to people we would not normally meet. It was interesting to hear how much the women still loved their farming life. One of the ladies told me she wouldn't change it despite their struggles and shortage of money."

Marlena said : "The retreat inspired me, taught me, changed me as an individual, daughter and friend. As I listened to the women speak of their experiences of loss, despair and wondering, I could also hear of their strength, compassion and desire to move forward. We all have big challenges to face from time to time and we aren't to be embarrassed to share with others how it is for us. This can be the very thing what gives us the strength to look ahead. Let each of us dance on the spectacular wings of the dragonfly as we explore, discover and embrace the harmony and gift of life.'

Special thanks must also go to GP Connections, Toowoomba, for providing the medical and nursing personnel, Catholic Education Office Toowoomba Diocese, Queensland Rural Women's Network, HESTA Superannuation Fund and St Vincent's Hospital, Toowoomba and all the health professionals.



Wearable Art created by Marg Enkelmann

*Clockwise from top left:
Mt St Michael's College students lend a hand;
Stretch and grow, it feels so good;
Friendships are formed;
All frocked up for the wearable art fashion
parade featuring recycled farm products.*





On 30 August, Sr Christine and I arrived at the Clive Berghoffer Pavilion to set up our stall among exhibitors at Queensland's largest agricultural show. Following last year's success, we had twice the display space this year. After five hours, we thought we were ready: bring on the three-day show!

Our free daily draw for a \$200 voucher was a real drawcard as were our freebies – an everlasting sugar-free lolly supply, and moisturiser and sun care product samples that were there for the taking. Free books and flyers from Beyond Blue were also appreciated.

The real value of being at the Ag Show is the witness value. Our presence says we really care about the

people on the land. It was wonderful to catch up with a number of ladies who had made the Dragonfly Wellness weekend at Highfields in June. The shrieks of delight could be heard all over the pavilion.

The effects of the economic crisis could be seen at the Ag Show. Crowd numbers were down. While some stallholders questioned the economics of returning next year, we have no doubts: patrons were looking out for us and came with Christmas lists in hand to spend their money supporting us so that we could go on supporting the bush.

I love being at the Ag Show and being a representative of the Downs and West Community Support team. I am so proud of the invaluable work that this Ministry does. Just to hear the stories and see the genuine joy and relief on the faces of those who approach us for help or whom we have helped makes it worthwhile.

Hopefully, we will return to the Ag Show next year. It won't be the drought that troubles farmers next year but issues like the loss of valuable agricultural land to the coal gas seam exploration teams. Our presence and support will be greater than ever.

Sr Jeannie Johnston rsc

Photo above left: Srs Christine and Jeannie

A special request

Dear friends,

After years of struggling without rain, many of our country men, women and children face the end of 2010 washed out, literally. Our work continues in supporting rural families through their struggles.

Please help us continue. Here's how your gift may help another:

- ☐ A single gift of **\$20** buys a Christmas gift for a child.
- ☐ A single gift of **\$50** provides a petrol voucher, clothing or a child's ticket to a theme park.
- ☐ A single gift of **\$100** provides a grocery voucher or back-to-school supplies or funds for a school camp for a student.

You support is also welcome through:

- ☐ donated quality handcraft items for sale at our fund raising craft stalls
- ☐ volunteering to wrap gifts and pack hampers from time to time

Please note: Downs and West Community Support does not have Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) tax status. Your gift will however help those in need. All funds raised are directed to assisting farming families and people in small rural and remote areas.

All cheques are to be made payable to **"Downs & West Community Support"** and post to address as listed on page 8.

Out of the blue: a farmer's wife reflects



The hay was down. The baler was ready, greased and tensioned. The tractor driver was excited at the prospect of a few hundred bales off our first crop in five years — but worried about the weather forecast: rain. It was all in the timing. Our decision was to do a round and see how it baled up. After years of praying for rain, we were silently hoping it would hold off, just for a few hours.

The grandchildren and I went to town for more fuel while Grandad took to the paddock. It felt so good he got carried away and did four rounds.

The storm was two hours away. That hay needed to get in undercover or it'd be ruined. The grandkids and I used the Patrol and horse float to help cart.

The lightning in the distance, a clap of thunder overhead and the occasional drop of cold heavy rain; we were sweating, tense and bugged. The dog

barked as a ute and trailer pulled in beside us. It was our neighbour. He'd seen us from up on the hill and knew that, on our own, we were up against it. . "Where do you want us to start?" he called.

With our neighbour and his wife we rescued another load each, laughing at ourselves — "Silly buggers trying to beat the rain" —as it arrived. That was it for the day but we had 1002 glorious bales off 6.3 acres. That was feed for the next season but the real goodness was that extended hand when we really needed it.

It was noted that a few weeks later, the neighbours were in the same situation. No prize for guessing how they got out of their predicament. 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you' is alive and well in the bush.

Happy



Christmas

Giving thanks



We are sincerely grateful to those who donated money, goods, time and energy to make this service possible in 2010.

Sisters of Charity
St. Vincent's Health & Aged Care Ltd
Sisters of Charity Foundation
Catholic Religious Australia, Queensland
Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal
Sylvia & Charles Viertel Charitable Foundation
St Vincent's Hospital, Brisbane
Caritas Care
St John the Baptist Retirement Community,
Enoggera
St Vincent's Hospital, Toowoomba
Catholic Health Australia

Mt St Michael's College, Ashgrove
St John Vianney's Primary School, Manly

Sunny Queen Eggs Queensland
Red Rooster
Catholic Church Insurances
Inovoke Pty Ltd
Shadforths Civil Contractors
Ag Show administration

Craft working bee members
Quilters social groups
Members of the St Vincent de Paul Society

Those who wish to remain anonymous, for their financial donations or their tireless work from home in preparation for our craft sales



Sr Christine Henry rsc, coordinator
Mt. Olivet Convent, 411 Main Street, Kangaroo Point, Qld 4169
Tel: (07) 3891 9431 **Mobile:** 0414 324 682
Email: christine.henry@mtolivet.org.au
www.sistersofcharity.org.au

